Tips for How to Be a Good Committee Leader

Logistics and Planning

- Set realistic objectives for the committee, prioritizing quality over quantity, and keep them under regular review. Reassess objectives after one year to determine if any factors have changed that would necessitate their revision.

- For the two-year committee term, it is important to outline major objectives, but be mindful that within the term, additional projects may arise and it is a best practice to have the bandwidth to take action on unanticipated work that supports INTA’s Strategic Plan.

- Give clear expectations of involvement in committee work at the start of the committee term.

- Together with your staff liaison, audit committee participation and performance on a quarterly basis to assess meeting/call attendance, completion of assignments by committee members, as well as other contributions to the success of the committee.

- Set a call/meeting schedule at the beginning of the term, for at least the first year of the committee, keeping in mind public holidays and time zone differences, to provide ample notice of calls/meetings.

- Use Committee Record templates for every meeting/call to capture attendance, minutes, and progress against objectives.

- Ensure there is a minutes taker in advance of the calls. (The minutes taker should be someone other than the committee leader leading the call or meeting.) Ensure that the minutes are circulated promptly after the call or meeting and that they accurately reflect the discussion.

- Always set reasonable and realistic deadlines and, whenever necessary, send follow-ups/polite reminders/targeted messages to specific members. Devise a method to track deadlines and the progress of tasks/projects to ensure all members are held accountable.

- Have clear rules on how to send and respond to emails. Include in emails only those who are direct participants. Being included in unnecessary responses makes people stop paying attention to committee emails.

- Put extra thought and care into planning the committee meetings at the Annual Meeting and Leadership Meeting. These are the only opportunities during the year for committee members to meet face to face. Make those two hours worthwhile, relevant, engaging, and inspirational for your committee members.
Leadership and Mentoring

- Engage with other leaders of relevant committees at INTA to ensure that you are not duplicating work and can combine forces on projects. Identify ways to collaborate with other INTA committees to create a bigger impact within the Association. Use these meetings to exchange ideas, get inspiration, and benchmark how other committees are managed. Your staff liaison can help you with this.

- Stay apprised of organizational and/or industry developments that relate to your committee and share with fellow members.

- Try to ensure that the workload of the committee is spread among members as evenly as possible.

- When introducing a new task, try to address your call for volunteers to the entire committee or subcommittee, but it is always good to have some potential volunteers pre-selected (based on their jurisdiction, professional background, previous experiences, role in the committee, etc.). You may mention them by name in the same communication (that is very motivating!) or send an individual follow-up message (which may be even more motivating).

- Do your best to allow/encourage each member to be involved in at least one project/task during the term. If that cannot work for any reason (including the lack of opportunities), try to engage each member (including those silent) in discussions on other projects, during either committee or subcommittee calls, or in face-to-face meetings.

- Encourage committee members to consider leadership roles and identify candidates for future leadership.

- Treat all of your committee and subcommittee members equally and with respect (regardless of whether they are your actual or potential clients, junior lawyers or senior partners, professors, etc.).

- Do not be afraid of delegating competences to your co-chairs, task force/group/project leaders, etc., but keep in regular contact with them. Staff liaisons can also assist with the coordination of work.

- Encourage a safe space for people to share their ideas and opinions.

- Get to know as many of your committee members as you can (or by proxy through your subcommittee chairs). Learn the strengths, interests, and ideas of your committee members so they can maximize their committee experience. (Note: The onus of maximizing one’s committee experience shouldn’t be entirely on the committee leaders. Members should take responsibility for this too, but committee leaders should make an effort to do so.)
• Don’t be afraid to seek feedback on how you’re doing, how the committee is doing, etc. Feedback is a gift.

• Show care and appreciation for your committee members, and the value they bring to the committee and INTA as a whole.

Communications

• Make sure you regularly communicate with other members of the committee leadership and ensure (as a subcommittee leader) that the committee leadership is aware of all activity of the subcommittee.

• During your committee/subcommittee meetings (depending on the size), allow each participant to actively take part or at least to say something (it may be during a “tour the table,” a jurisdiction report, or an AOB (any other business), even if not directly connected with the committee work).

• Be responsive toward your members and immediately react to anything you receive from them (not only questions but also their inputs, comments, etc.) Sometimes a simple “thank you” is sufficient, but from time to time it is also good to add some words of praise or appreciation; when doing this, try to keep proper balance between “reply all” and personal communications.

• Keep the lines of communication open with all committee members. Share relevant announcements and important discussions between committee/INTA leadership so that committee members stay engaged and get a bigger picture or broader perspective of their work.
Tips for How to Be a Good Committee Member

Active Participation

• Calendar all committee calls/meetings and make every effort to join calls and attend meetings.

• Inform committee leaders and your staff liaison if you cannot join the call or attend the meeting. Not participating on calls or in meetings regularly without prior notice can be interpreted as lack of commitment.

• Volunteer to take the minutes of the call in advance of a call or meeting at least once a year (don’t wait for the committee leader to request a minutes taker).

• Sometimes a member may be accidentally deleted from email strings. If you do not hear anything for more than a month relating to the committee, check in with the leader to ensure you have not missed anything.

• Review the emails of other committee members and meeting minutes, and follow up with feedback or comments, or to volunteer for projects discussed. With larger committees, some members may feel a bit shy to speak up or uncomfortable speaking in front a large group. In this case, sending feedback by email is equally considered as active participation.

• Think “out of the box” not only by doing what is asked but by actively making suggestions.

Communication

• Stay apprised of organizational and/or industry developments that relate to your committee and share with fellow members.

• Complete all assignments by the agreed-upon deadline or provide advance notice to the committee leaders and staff liaison if you anticipate not meeting a deadline.

• Don’t be afraid to ask about changing subcommittees if you feel that you’re not making an impact. Don’t feel that you are tied to the subcommittee to which you were assigned. While your request may not be guaranteed, it will always be considered.

• Network with your fellow committee members. You may learn new things about your peers (for example, their interests, their strengths, and their ideas) and those could turn into collaborative volunteer opportunities.

• Update your committee leaders and staff liaison on any developments in your professional life or personal life (to the extent you feel comfortable) that will impact your committee participation, whether it is for a short or an extended period of time.
• Resign from the committee if, for whatever reason, you cannot participate in a meaningful way to fulfill your committee obligations. Resignation from a committee will not be held against you. In fact, to sit inactive without communicating to committee leadership or the staff liaison is the worst option.

Committee leaders and members should regularly review this document and share any suggestions with the Planning Committee.