



---

## Problem Solving

---

The management of an association is not an easy task. This is true regardless of the size of the association, number of centers serviced, or any other variable. The fact is, every association is unique, and thus faces a unique set of challenges.

Those associations that are most successful in resolving problems tend to be organized, have written procedures and, most importantly, use the tools that have been provided to them.

### **Problems/Questions Relating to USBC Operations**

Individuals that operate state and local associations are not expected to face challenges alone. A myriad of tools are available to assist in solving problems, as well as answer questions associations may have.

Based on the type of question or problem, associations should refer to the Association page of BOWL.com under Forms and Manuals.

#### **Some of the tools available are:**

1. ***USBC Association Policy Manual*** and documents on the association page of BOWL.com under Forms and Manuals.  
Topics covered include USBC policies, removal and suspension procedures, legislative updates, duties of specific board positions, and many questions relating to the operation of an association (i.e., elections, taxes, programs, audits, etc.)
2. **Frequently Asked Questions.** The Frequently Asked Questions address many of the common questions association officials encounter. The questions are organized by topic and updated as needed. This tool allows for quick reference, and is accessible whenever it is convenient for the association.
3. **Association's Operations Manual.** A template for developing an association's operations manual is available on the Association Page of BOWL.com under Forms and Manuals. Once completed, this manual is maintained by the state/local association board. In essence, the association's operations manual outlines association policies, procedures, and day-to-day operations.

As the association experiences a challenging situation or problem, the association may want to consider adding a policy or procedure to the association's operations manual so it can be easily resolved if the matter arises in the future.

The association's operations manual may outline items such as: committee responsibilities, how the association championship site is chosen, the association manager salary (if any), and/or delegate reimbursement information (if any).

4. **Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised.** This book governs all meetings when a meeting procedure is not addressed in the association's Articles of Incorporation, USBC



Bylaws, or *USBC Association Policy Manual*. To curtail problems from occurring at meetings, there are a few actions the association can take:

**First**, become familiar with the meeting procedures in the association bylaws and *USBC Association Policy Manual*, as well as the meeting components document on the association page of BOWL.com under Forms and Manuals. Having this background will allow meetings to proceed smoothly as questions can be resolved quickly by informed members.

**Second**, a copy of the association's bylaws, the *USBC Association Policy Manual*, as well as *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, should be brought to every meeting in case they need to be referenced.

The association should also be aware of a few resources available at the Robert's Rules of Order Web site, [www.robertsrules.com](http://www.robertsrules.com). Specifically, the Web site has a Frequently Asked Questions section as well as a Question and Answer Forum. The Question and Answer Forum allows individuals to type in a question and receive a response from an individual with knowledge of parliamentary procedure.

5. ***WinLABS Support Manual***. The *WinLABS Support Manual* contains processing instructions on how to generate membership reports (membership lists), as well as information related to using the WinLABS software and its applications.
6. ***USBC Tournament Managers Manual***. Tournament managers can use this resource to find information regarding tournament related items. Also included are sample tournament rules, prize distribution information, and sample forms/letters related to tournament operations. This manual is available on the "Rules" page of BOWL.com.
7. ***USBC League Operations Handbook***. The *USBC League Operations Handbook* deals specifically with topics related to the operation of a successful league, from the league organizational meeting, to the prize disbursement. The manual is designed for use by the league secretary and president, and includes many tools this individual will use in relation to his/her position. This manual is available on the "Rules" page of BOWL.com.
8. ***USBC Playing Rules and Commonly Asked Questions***. This book is the reference point for anything related to the rules of the game, league operations, and tournament operations. It also provides a comprehensive list of commonly asked questions in relation to these topics. This book is included with an association's yearly supplies, and is available on the "Rules" page of BOWL.com. The online version has more Q&A's than the printed one and can also be found on the Rules page of BOWL.com.
9. ***USBC Center Inspections Manual***. This manual provides general guidance and instruction on the duties and responsibilities of inspectors when conducting center and lane dressing inspections, and filing inspection reports. In addition, the responsibilities of



the association manager as head of the inspection team are addressed. It is available on the Equipment Specifications page of BOWL.com.

10. **USBC Equipment Specifications Manual.** Information regarding the technical specifications of specific equipment, as well as lane dressing information, can be found in this manual. It is available on the Equipment Specifications page of BOWL.com under Forms and Manuals.
11. **BOWL.com.** USBC's Web site, BOWL.com, has an array of information that is useful for associations.

The Association page has the latest news and information applicable to associations, as well as links to tools and resources the association may utilize. Of particular importance is the "Forms and Manuals" link. The Forms and Manuals page has an electronic version of nearly every form or manual an association may need, including those related to supply orders, lane certifications, etc.

12. **Educational Opportunities.** Numerous educational opportunities exist for association leaders, including WinLABS self-study programs, Regional Manager's web classes, and various workshops and seminars. To view the different educational opportunities offered by USBC Headquarters, contact your Regional Manager. Contact information is available on the Association page of BOWL.com.

### **Problem Solving by the Association**

State and local associations are an extension of USBC and expected to operate within the guidelines established by law, the delegates, and the national organization. Associations are organized in such a way, however, that each has a great deal of autonomy in their operations and decision making, and should operate with a high level of independence.

A wide variety of issues/problems can arise in an association. Association leaders are expected to work toward resolving these matters. The following are a number of problem solving considerations and strategies that may be useful for helping association leaders work toward an understanding/resolution of an issue or problem.

### **Identifying the Root of a Problem**

Too often, a symptom of a problem is mistakenly perceived as being the actual problem. Many times, the true root of a problem can only be found by going below the surface, and asking "why."

Take for example an association board that is debating a \$300 purchase of additional filing cabinets:

Q: Why do we need additional filing cabinets?

A: We have more papers/applications/business correspondence than room for filing.

Q: Why do we have to keep all of these documents in hard form?



A: We do not. We could also keep them electronically.

By going beyond the surface in this case, it is discovered that the actual root of the problem is not that more filing cabinets are needed. Rather, the problem is there is too much paper.

As a result of this exercise, the association purchased a scanner for \$150 and decided documents beyond five years old would be kept electronically. Thus, the association solved the root of the problem and saved money in the process.

### **Generating Solutions**

In working to solve a problem, it is important association leaders realize rarely is there only one solution. Consider using one of the following strategies in seeking a variety of potential solutions:

- **Silent brainstorming**. This is a group brainstorming technique that, because of anonymity, allows participants to express ideas without fear of rejection.
  1. State the topic/question to be brainstormed, as well as time frame for the exercise.
  2. Remind the group the goal in brainstorming is quantity, not necessarily quality. Encourage all ideas, even if they may seem a bit out of the ordinary.
  3. Distribute post-it notes to each member of the group. Instruct the group to list each of their ideas on a separate post-it note.
  4. Verify all group members understand the brainstorming topic, and allow a few minutes for silent reflection before writing.
  5. Begin brainstorming.
  6. Once time has elapsed, gather all post-it notes, and place them at random on the wall (include all duplicate ideas as well).
  7. Give time for each group member to view the ideas.
  8. Analyze the ideas to choose a solution.

In regard to this brainstorming technique, one of the advantages of using post-it notes aside from anonymity, is the ability for the group to create categories once the ideas have been hung on a wall. By placing ideas in categories, certain similarities could be noticed between ideas, which may in turn generate some new suggestions.

The group may also consider categorizing based on predetermined categories, such as “what we can control,” and “what we cannot control.” Predetermined categories such as these may assist the group in determining what the best solution is to the topic/question. If predetermined categories are used, however, it would be advantageous for the facilitator of the brainstorming session to not disclose the categories prior to the ideas being hung on the wall. Doing so may discourage group members from developing potentially valuable ideas.

- **Mitsubishi brainstorming** (Higgins, J. 1994. *101 Creative Problem Solving Techniques*). This is a group brainstorming technique excellent for curtailing those who

may dominate a group discussion.

1. Write down the topic/problem where the entire group can view it (chalk board, white board, etc.).
2. Instruct the group to brainstorm ideas individually, and write them down on their own sheet of paper.
3. The brainstorming session continues for a specified period of time. Once time has elapsed, each member reads (and explains if necessary) his/her ideas, one at a time, beginning with the idea they feel is the best.
4. As ideas are read, each member should write down new ideas that build on those they hear from others. Simultaneously, the facilitator lists each idea where all group members can see them.
5. Once suggestions have been exhausted, the facilitator asks for those supplementary ideas members had based on hearing the ideas of others. The facilitator lists these supplementary suggestions next to the original idea.
6. Analyze the ideas to choose a solution.

While these two methods of generating solutions can prove very effective, there are a great deal more that can be found in literature related to problem solving or brainstorming.

- **Negotiation**. Negotiation is a process in which multiple parties attempt to reach agreement in the event there is some type of disagreement (Ivancevich, J., and Matteson, M. 2002. *Organizational Behavior and Management*.). Association leaders may find themselves in a negotiating situation in a variety of contexts, including business related matters such as purchasing yearbooks, or association related matters, such as working toward a merger or developing a reciprocal agreement with another association.

Especially when negotiating with other associations, an association should strive for win-win negotiating. In win-win negotiating, each party involved gains as a result of the negotiation. This does not necessarily mean each party gets everything they desired when the process began. Rather, it means an agreement is reached in which both parties are better off than prior to the agreement.

Win-win negotiating allows for the best possibility of resolving all issues at hand, while still maintaining relationships with the other negotiating parties.

For additional information on negotiation, a substantial number of books may be found at any bookstore or library.

- **Involving the Membership in Decision Making**. Decisions regarding the management and governance of the association are made by the association's board of directors. Members' interests are represented in decision making insomuch that board members are elected by these constituents.

This is not to say, however, the board may not take a decision to the membership. While the board is under no obligation to do so unless mandated by law or the bylaws, allowing the association membership to make a decision on a matter may be a good approach if the board has a good deal of division on an issue, or if the decision has a significant impact on the membership.

Take for example a situation in which the board cannot reach a decision on which events (doubles, team, etc.) to hold for the association's championship tournament. Because the board is undecided, and the decision has a direct impact on the membership, the board may decide that the best resolution is to let the members make the decision.

### **Conflict Management**

**Understanding Conflict.** One of the most common misconceptions regarding conflict is in all cases it is detrimental to an organization. In reality, conflict is not inherently good or bad. Rather, it is an inevitable part of any organization.

Any conflict is ultimately defined on the effects it has on an organization. Some conflict can lead to positive changes in the organization. Other conflict produces only negative results (Ivancevich, J., and Matteson, M. 2002. *Organizational Behavior and Management*).

Associations should realize, however, if certain considerations are observed when a conflict arises, the conflict may be steered toward having a positive effect. While impossible in every case, conflict can be managed in such a way the probability of a conflict leading to a positive change is increased.

**Managing Conflict.** Before conflict management can be attempted between any individuals or groups, there must first be a willingness on the part of each party to attempt resolution. Without this willingness, any attempt to manage and ultimately resolve the conflict is destined to fail.

In order to increase the chances that a conflict may have a positive result, an association should incorporate the following strategies:

1. Develop guidelines that allow the conflict to be addressed.
  - a. In a neutral, comfortable environment, in which all parties have the opportunity to meet face to face.
  - b. At a predetermined meeting time, so parties may be prepared for the meeting with information they wish to bring forward.
  - c. In a situation in which ground rules are established at the beginning of the meeting and enforced throughout. Ground rules could forbid interrupting, personal attacks, and maintaining a professional nature.
2. Identify the root problem, and work to generate solutions:
  - a. Focus on the problem itself, not the people involved.
  - b. Come to some agreement as to what the problem is before developing solutions.
  - c. Incorporate solution generating strategies, and explore multiple possible solutions, if necessary.



- d. Focus only on solutions that solve the root of the conflict or problem, not those that only address its symptoms.
3. Agree on a Plan of Action for the implementation of a solution. The Plan of Action should clearly identify:
  - a. What the solution is.
  - b. Who is responsible for carrying out each part of the Plan of Action?
  - c. The time frame in which the Plan of Action will be carried out.
4. Follow up on the success of the solution at a predetermined time.

Should an association find certain variations of the above strategies produce greater results; these variations may certainly be used. Successful conflict management takes modification, as each situation is comprised of a unique set of circumstances.

Regrettably, not every conflict that arises in a situation will lead to positive changes. The goal of any association should be to minimize dysfunctional conflicts.