

THE NUTS & BOLTS OF CLUB MANAGEMENT

A morning about the people, practices and little systems that help community organizations thrive

Wendy Plandowski | 2026

Every community organization has its own personality. Some have staff and offices. Some have a handful of volunteers and a key to the hall. Some manage significant budgets, facilities and programs; others simply bring people together around something they care about. But underneath all of them are the same practical questions: Who are we? Who is responsible for what? How do we make good decisions? How do we keep the work manageable - and how do we make sure someone still wants to do it five years from now?

The goal is not to make a club more complicated. It is to give good people enough structure to do good work.

Start With the Club You Actually Have

Good governance starts with reality, not a textbook. Before choosing policies, committees or reporting systems, understand the organization in front of you. Is it an informal unincorporated group? An incorporated membership non-profit? A charitable non-profit? Does it also have registered charity status with CRA? Those distinctions matter because they affect legal responsibilities, reporting and how the organization can operate.

Then comes a different question: how do we run it? A small club may need a working board whose directors also organize events, unlock the building and sell tickets. An organization with paid staff may need a board that spends more of its time on direction, policy, financial oversight and risk. Many organizations live somewhere in between. There is no prize for choosing the fanciest model - the model has to fit the people and the work.

STRUCTURE tells us what we are. Our MANAGEMENT APPROACH tells us how we operate.

Clear Roles Make Everything Easier

Once the structure is understood, the next question is wonderfully practical: who does what? Boards provide direction and accountability. Officers have specific responsibilities. Committees help research, prepare and carry out delegated work. Staff and volunteers turn plans into programs, services, events and day-to-day action.

In a small organization, one person may wear several hats. That is not automatically a problem. Trouble starts when nobody knows which hat they are wearing. Role descriptions, committee terms of reference and clear delegation are not bureaucracy for bureaucracy's sake - they prevent duplicated work, dropped balls and unnecessary conflict.

You can wear two hats. Just know which one you are wearing.

The Rulebook, the Playbook and the Manual

One of the simplest ways to make governance less intimidating is to separate three things that often get lumped together. Bylaws are the rulebook: they establish the organization's formal structure and decision-making rules. Policies are the playbook: they set principles and boundaries for recurring decisions. Procedures are the manual: they explain how the work is actually carried out.

A healthy organization does not need a policy for every imaginable situation. It needs enough current, useful guidance to protect people, money, information and the organization's reputation. Financial controls, signing authority, conflict of interest, records, conduct, privacy, risk and technology access are good places to think carefully.

Good Meetings Are a Form of Respect

Meetings are where governance becomes visible. Preparation matters. A useful agenda, good information in advance, clear decisions and accurate minutes allow a board to spend its time thinking rather than searching for information or revisiting old conversations. Fellowship matters too - community organizations are built on relationships - but so does respecting the time people have volunteered.

The goal is a BOARD meeting - not a BORED meeting.

Communication Is More Than Sending an Email

Strong clubs communicate intentionally. Start with a simple question: who needs to know what? Then choose the method that works for those people. Email may be perfect for one group, a phone call for another, and a printed notice, text, website or face-to-face conversation for someone else. Consistency matters: recurring information should be easy to find in the same place, in a familiar format, at a predictable time.

Communication also matters when people disagree. Healthy organizations do not avoid every difficult conversation; they create respectful ways to have them. Clear expectations, good

records and a code of conduct give people something to come back to when personalities or pressures begin to take over.

Volunteers Are Not an Unlimited Resource

Community organizations run on human energy. Recruitment matters, but retention matters just as much. People are more likely to stay when the role is clear, the workload is reasonable, their contribution matters and the culture feels good. That means thinking about the whole volunteer experience: what do we need, who might fit, how do we welcome them, how do we support them, how do we recognize them, and what do we need to change when something is not working?

People stay where they feel useful, respected and connected.

A Little Planning Changes the Conversation

Planning does not have to mean a three-day retreat and a 40-page strategic plan. Sometimes the most useful thing a club can do is stop once a year and look honestly at where it is. A simple SWOT - strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats - can help a group get out of the weeds, notice what is changing and agree on a few priorities.

SWOT ANALYSIS TEMPLATE

A simple look at where we are now – and where we can grow.

STRENGTHS

What are we doing well?

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-

WEAKNESSES

What could we improve?

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-
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OPPORTUNITIES

What opportunities are in front of us?

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-
-
-
-

THREATS

What challenges or risks could impact us?

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-
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-
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Courtesy of *Wendy Plandowski* – SWOT Geek ♥

A simple SWOT can turn a broad conversation into a few clear priorities.

Thriving Is About What Happens Next

Sustainability is not simply keeping the doors open. Thriving means looking ahead: developing new leaders, protecting finances and assets, keeping programs relevant, sharing knowledge and adapting when the community changes. The best organizations make it possible for the next person to step in without having to rediscover everything from scratch.

Seven Tools Worth Having

None of these tools needs to be elaborate. Their value is that they capture decisions, knowledge and recurring work so the organization does not depend entirely on whoever happens to remember how things were done last year.

MY RECOMMENDED TOOLS

for Every Club

Big or small – these tools make running your organization easier.



1

Policies & Procedures

A simple, current set of the rules and processes you actually use.



2

Excellent Minutes + Organized Storage

Good records. One reliable place to find them.



3

Code of Conduct

Clear expectations for board members, volunteers and staff.



4

SWOT

A simple annual check-in: What's working? What isn't? What's changing?



5

Job / Role Descriptions

Everyone should know what they own – board, staff and volunteers.



6

Annual Calendar

AGM • grant deadlines • events • reporting • renewals • key board decisions.



7

Funding Request Master Sheet

Keep your standard information, statistics, budgets and commonly requested documents together.



Good tools reduce work, protect knowledge and *make it easier* for the next person to step in.



A practical toolkit for organizations of every size.

The seven tools are simple: useful policies and procedures; excellent minutes with organized storage; a code of conduct; a regular SWOT; clear job or role descriptions; an annual calendar; and a funding request master sheet that keeps the organization's standard information, statistics, budgets and common attachments in one place.

The Big Idea

Strong community organizations are rarely built by perfect structures or perfect people. They are built by people who care enough to create clarity, protect what has been entrusted to them, communicate well, welcome others into the work and leave the organization a little stronger than they found it.

Run smoothly. Engage volunteers. Thrive for years to come.



Wendy Plandowski

FACILITATOR • CONNECTOR • COMMUNITY BUILDER



| wplandowski@outlook.com