

Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) Baseline Best Practices for Emergent/Developing PTAs

A Parent-Teacher Association, or PTA, is a school-based volunteer organization. Its members may include parents, teachers, and administrators. PTAs address the interests and needs of students and schools by harnessing the energy and talent of their membership to support school initiatives, advocate for school programs, and raise awareness (and sometimes money) to help schools improve their ability to educate children.

Some PTAs have been in existence for many years and are able to function well on their own. But other PTAs are newer and need guidance. This document is written with those “emergent/developing” PTAs in mind.

To assist emergent or developing PTAs and to be a reference for long-standing PTAs, the County Council of PTAs (CCPTA) has developed “best practices baselines” for PTA functions and a suggested PTA board structure based on State PTA requirements and informal surveys of Arlington County PTA experiences.

Organizing a successful PTA can seem overwhelming. To maintain focus, PTAs should consider developing goals for the organization backed by a plan to achieve those goals. The CCPTA can assist PTAs in this process and can identify other resources to help PTAs as appropriate. In general, emergent/developing PTAs should consider five activities:

- Identifying two or three goals for the year. Do not overreach. Build on goals each year. The CCPTA is happy to work with PTAs to identify appropriate goals.
 - Consider at least one goal that will generate excitement among the membership.
Example – The PTA will plant a butterfly garden to be used by the classroom teachers to further the teaching of their curriculum.
- Developing a short-term (current year) and long-term (multi-year) plan. Use the best practices baseline functions as a guide in developing your plans.
- Based on goals, partnering with established PTAs who have successfully achieved the same or similar goals. The CCPTA can assist you in identifying these PTAs.
- Facilitating peer to peer networking with other officers/committee chairs at other schools. The CCPTA can assist in identifying strong candidates for networking purposes. Make use of the officer lists previously circulated by CCPTA.
- Cultivating a “volunteer friendly” atmosphere. Everyone wants their children to attend a school that welcomes them and helps them grow. Thus, PTAs can appeal to parents and other members to volunteer. But volunteering for PTA means time not spent doing something else. Volunteers want to feel that their efforts on behalf of PTA are appreciated. Thus it is crucial to set aside some time during the school year where the PTA officially and publically celebrates the efforts of its volunteers in an appropriate and sincere manner.

Baseline PTA Functions

The following baseline functions are based on best practice discussions with established school based PTA representative. Emergent and developing PTAs should not expect to accomplish/achieve baseline functions immediately. These baseline functions include: Membership/Outreach; Programs; Fundraising; Communications; Orientation and Training; Meetings, Financial Matters; and Special Representatives to other Arlington Public School (APS) committees.

- Membership/Outreach - A successful membership campaign is defined by meeting a self imposed membership goal (e.g. "*our membership goal is 75% (?) of all school parents/guardians, teachers and administrators*" or 1 membership per family). Identify an achievable goal for the first year and increase it each year.
 - It's important to note that campaigns should strive for an inclusive and diverse membership including all parents/guardians, teachers and administrators. Including as many as possible means increasing the odds of success for all.
 - Provide membership information in Spanish (or another language that a majority of non-English speaking students use). Establish a school-based liaison, such as a teacher or parent, to follow up with non-English speaking families.
 - Work with the Principal to encourage at least one school teacher or staff member to attend PTA meetings.

- Programs - It is more important to strive for quality over quantity when it comes to programs. Quality programming will ensure sustainability from year to year. Incremental increases to the number of programs should be considered on an annual basis as appropriate. Consider the following when you are deciding on your programming:
 - Student activities supporting PTA vision/focus.
 - Parent Education program – a good resource among several is the Family Network.
 - Community-building activities (parent community, school community and larger community).
 - Programs that include teachers/staff.
 - Periodic evaluations to determine effectiveness of programs.

- Fundraising – A successful PTA is **not** measured by the amount of money raised. PTA fundraising requirements are based on the goals/needs of each PTA.
 - Important - PTAs should not compare themselves to other PTAs relative to fundraising efforts. Every school has a different set of goals that require different budgets. Additionally, there are often very different economic demographics from school to school to be considered.
 - Fundraising is not a primary focus of the PTA. Legally, a PTA is a 501c3 organization and as such does not exist to make a profit or carry a balance over from one year to the next. That means that if fundraising is to be done at all, it should be modest and focus on PTA goals to support the school in some obvious way.
 - PTAs should strive to have community building events that have no fundraising component.

- Communications – PTAs often become the primary source of communication, not just for the PTA, but often for school sponsored activities. There are number tools PTAs can use for communication purposes, including websites, newsletters, survey monkey, Google forms and listservs. Emergent and developing PTAs should focus on one or two of these tools. For example, start with a listserv and news letter or website, and add or change as appropriate from year to year. The CCPTA can provide peer information from schools with successful communication platforms.
 - Important – an effective translation procedure from English to other languages is a "must" in Arlington County in order to reach as many parents as possible. The CCPTA can provide peer information from schools with effective translation procedures.

- Officer and Committee Chair Orientation and Training - Successfully transitioning new officers and committee chairs from year to year is key to maintaining a sustainable PTA. To facilitate the transition, the CCPTA recommends the following:
 - Procedure book – Each school PTA should develop a “procedure book” that can be referred to by new officers and committee chairs. This book will contain information on annual programs including budget, number and assignment of volunteers, recommended vendors, etc. The book should be a “living document” that is updated after each event. Samples of procedure books and information gathering forms can be obtained from the CCPTA.
 - CCPTA officer orientation – Every summer the CCPTA hosts an officer orientation during which PTA officers have an opportunity to networking with and learn from other officers.
 - State/National Training Programs/kits. These are available online and/or from CCPTA.
 - During their tenure, officers and committee chairs should proactively seek out and train their replacements.

- Meetings – PTA meetings provide a forum in which the PTA board can communicate important information to and solicit feedback from its membership. They also provide an opportunity to further community building efforts. Additional thoughts on meetings:
 - Carefully consider agenda items. Be concise and stick to the agenda. No one likes meetings that drag on with no obvious purpose.
 - Solicit feedback from membership.
 - Make the meeting fun, interesting and relevant. Consider guest speakers that are relevant to your school and PTA goals (CCPTA can make recommendations).
 - Have a minimum of 5 meetings/year for general membership.
 - Consider holding separate Executive Board meetings.

- Financial Matters -- It is extremely important that PTA finances are transparent to PTA members. At a minimum, PTA should provide:
 - Monthly review/approval of budget.
 - Timely audit of books.
 - Established procedures for check signatories.
 - Dues payment/maintaining good standing.
 - Insurance.

- Special Representatives – There are several opportunities for school PTAs to learn about and provide input in county wide school and PTA related matters including:
 - CCPTA
 - Advisory Council on Instruction (ACI)
 - Family Network
 - And other APS committees

Suggested PTA Board Structures:

- One President*
- Vice-President(s), the number and title to be determined by local PTA and written into by-laws*
- One Recording Secretary*
- One Treasurer*

- One ACI representative. The ACI is an official APS-sanctioned organization that provides advice to APS leadership and the School Board.
- Other positions as desired by local PTA and written into Bylaws. Try not to have too many board positions as large PTA boards can become unwieldy. Also, many functions can be carried out by non- executive positions such as committee chairs. Remember, the point of a PTA is to support the school in a manner that makes the most sense for your school.

**VA State PTA requirement.*

Committee Chairs should be based on baseline functions and PTA long and short term plans/goals. The CCPTA suggests that Committee Chairs report up to the executive board through a Vice President (see attached example of one school's committee list and VP assignments. This list is only an example and each school should develop their committees and appropriate assignments.) WE CAN ADD OTHER EXAMPLES....

Example list of school committees and VP Assignments. This list is only an example from an established PTA. It took years of trial and error to develop this list and it continues to change from year to year. Each school should develop their committees and appropriate assignments based on their plans and goals. Emergent and developing PTAs schools should start with a small number of committees and then increase each year as participation grows. Don't try to create many committees; focus instead on creating only the ones that help the PTA and the school.

COMMUNICATIONS VP

Back-to-School Brochure

Directory

Newsletter

Translations

Website/Listserv/Blackboard

Bulletin Board

Summer Packet

SOCIAL/PROGRAMS VP

After-School Enrichment

Back-to-School Event

Fall Fun Fest

Family Movie Night

International Dinner

Parent-Teacher Social

Read Across America

Reflections

Science Fair

Screen Free Week & Health Fair

A Day in the Life

Homeroom Parent Coordinator/Hospitality

FUNDRAISING VP

Arm Chair Fundraiser

Book Fair at School

Book Fair at Barnes & Noble

Grant Writing

Membership

Recycling

Sally Foster

School Pictures

Silent Auction

Store Rebates and Box Tops/Labels

School Supplies

Green Fundraiser

Grocery Receipts program

RECORDING SECRETARY

Parents Helping Parents

T-Shirt Coordinator

Viva Verde & Green Kids

Outdoor Lab Representative

Arlington Food Assistance Center Representative

Volunteer Coordinator

PRESIDENT

Grounds and Building Capital Projects

Odyssey of the Mind

Teacher Grants

CCPTA

ACI Representative