

WORKING WITH ADVISORY COMMITTEES

STEP 1: DEFINING THE COMMITTEE'S PURPOSE

It is helpful to think about the role you want your Advisory Committee to take in your program. This discussion can happen at an Advisory Committee meeting, but it is important that staff offer guidance by sharing examples of common roles and clarifying needs for your program.

Common roles for Advisory Committees include:

- Suggesting ways to improve the delivery of services to your target audience.
- Identifying community needs and resources.
- Contributing to project planning and problem solving.
- Providing staff with background information on the community, including the informal leaders, past experiences with similar programs, and areas of sensitivity.
- Helping staff connect with key decision makers and community members.
- Talking with community members and other agencies about the program.
- Publicly advocating for the program. This could include testifying at government budget hearings, for example.

Advisory Committees generally are not responsible for (although they may make recommendations):

- Hiring staff.
- Setting policies for the program.
- Making decisions that have a large impact on funding.
- Getting involved in staff disagreements and negotiations.
- Taking responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the program. (Group members may choose to “sponsor” or volunteer for a project, however.)

What are the key roles that you would like your Advisory Committee to take on?

Are there any areas your Advisory Committee is involved in now that you need to re-negotiate?

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STEP 2: RECRUITING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

Based on what you need your group to do....

Identify the **populations** you want your Advisory Committee to represent. Put a star next to categories that must be present for your group to operate.

(Examples: students, non-English speaking parents, social service agencies, teachers)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Now identify the **skills and characteristics** you need in your group. Put a star next to categories that must be present for your group to operate.

(Examples: connections in the community, group facilitation skills, comfort with parent outreach, understanding of the school system, commitment to cross-cultural work)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Finally, identify the **gaps**. Look for categories of people and skills/characteristics that are starred but are not on your Advisory Committee now. Who can you recruit to fill those gaps? (You may want to use the Skills Matrix to help you.)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

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STEP 3: ONGOING SUPPORT AND TRAINING

A well-functioning Advisory Committee requires ongoing nurturing by staff. In particular, you'll want to think about:

KEEPING THEM "IN THE LOOP"

- Does each Advisory Committee member know your program's mission, goals and structure?
- Can group members accurately answer basic questions about your program for community members?
- Is there an orientation process for new committee members?
- Is there a regular forum for sharing program accomplishments and concerns with the Advisory Committee?
- What else does your group need to know to perform its functions well?

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

- Are there identified leaders who facilitate meetings, move the group's agenda forward, and provide staff with feedback and support?
- Are there people being groomed for leadership positions, so that you're prepared for turnover (or burnout) among your most committed volunteers?
- Does the group as a whole have questions that should be addressed in a group training?

PLANNING

- Does the Advisory Committee have a sense of what they will be doing during the year?
- Is the group actively involved in planning for the program as a whole?

(over)

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION

- Are you regularly thanking your Advisory Committee members for their participation?
- Are Advisory Committee members given public recognition in program publications and displays?
- Do program participants and decision-makers (such as the school Principal) know who the Advisory Committee members are?

EVALUATION

- Are Advisory Committee members asked for feedback on how the group operates?
- Are staff people receptive to suggestions from Advisory Committee members?

WHAT ELSE?

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NEXT STEPS

Here are three specific steps I can take to strengthen our Advisory Committee:

Your Name: _____



Site Manager Information:

School Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Phone Number: _____ Fax: _____

Email Address: _____

What additional support do you need to help you strengthen your Advisory Committee?
