

What is an Advisory Council?

A program or nonprofit advisory group can be created for many reasons and in many shapes, but the key reason is to provide advice and support to your organization or program. The advisory group may have many names: council, board, group, team, task force, etc.

One critical common element is that advisory councils **connect you to a community**. That community may be local, national or global. It may include clients, constituents or contributors (or all of these).

Another feature in common is that advisory groups **have no formal governance authority**. They exert influence over decision-makers on boards, staffs or in public office through persuasion and moral authority, not directive.

What does an Advisory Council do for my organization or program?

Advisory Councils meet needs that the governing board is not able to meet. What do you need? To better understand your community? Specialized professional support? More influence at City Hall? Friends in business? Dedicated support for a program within a larger organization? More resources for programs? Help managing finances? Recruit and charge the advisory group you need.

How do we organize the Advisory Council?

Like any other team, an advisory council needs a clear purpose, some ground rules, responsible leadership and support. The more specific and clear the objective, the easier it will be for members to help you. Time spent setting internal decision-making rules and clarifying where final decision-making authority lies will save stress and possible conflict down the road. Like all volunteers, Council members will respond to clear expectations and limits on obligations, well-organized information, appreciation and recognition... and meetings that end on time.

Sources and further information:

Rethinking the Potential of Advisory Groups, synopses of research by Judith Saidel, www.nonprofitresearch.org/newsletter1525/newsletter_show.htm?doc_id=16336

Guidelines to Form an Advisory Group, Carter McNamara, PhD.; www.managementhelp.org/boards/advisory.htm

What is an Advisory Board and Should We Have One? Jan Masaoka, in Board Café 10-24-2002; www.compasspoint.org/boardcafe/details.php