Types of Groups

What are the different functions of groups and member roles?

Understanding the different types of decision-making groups is important because they all work a little differently.

At first glance

Groups look pretty much the same. They are made up of two or more people working together with a specific goal in mind. Some groups are more formal than others. Some groups meet for years and their membership changes over time. Other groups meet for an agreed upon amount of time or until their work together is complete.

Ad hoc groups form for a specific purpose and are usually temporary. *Standing committees* are permanent and usually study issues and report to or advise other groups on what they find out (sometimes called '*findings*').

Types of Member Roles

Although groups may differ, all have common roles that groups need members to fill for the group to be effective. The following are possible roles; not all groups have all these roles.

- A *leader* sets the agenda, letting members know of the date, time, and purpose of the meeting (otherwise known as "calls the meeting").
- A *facilitator* runs the meetings and makes sure all voices are heard.
- A *secretary* (also called a "recorder" or "note-taker") is assigned to take notes during the meeting.
- A *timekeeper* can help keep the group on task.
- If money is involved, a *treasurer* may keep track of the funds.

Every decision-making group is unique because of the:

- Decision-making authority they have
- Issues they are working on
- Meeting structure they choose
- Data they use
- Input and feedback they collect
- Processes they use
- Membership they have
- History of the group
- Length of time since formation

Each Group Is Unique

There are six unique functions of groups described on the following pages. Some groups serve more that one of these functions:

1. governing
2. advisory
3. leadership
4. planning
5. evaluation
6. practice

Remember…

There are many tasks for group members to match their talents and interests with so the group can accomplish its goals.

Types of Groups

What is a governing group?

Governing groups are a more formal group. Members are individuals from the community who are either appointed or elected to a position. They govern an organization and set policy. Members must be willing to oversee how funds are used.

Activities of a Governing Group:

- Establish by-laws that guide how the group operates.

- Determine long-range direction for an organization.

- Develop policies that direct programs and services.

- Establish goals that meet identified needs.

- Communicate with the public and funding sources.

- Employ and evaluate executives and administrators.

- Negotiate with employee groups to determine salaries or benefits.

- Allow for community participation in decision-making processes.

Examples: a school board, a non-profit board of directors, a corporation with shareholders, a council

Leadership Roles: president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer

Other Roles: board member, director, member-at-large, shareholder

Length of Service: typically long-standing with rotating memberships, usually 2-3 years. Most boards allow multiple terms. Elections for openings on a group usually happen once a year. If you are interested in serving on a governing group, contact the group leader and ask about the nomination process and for an application.

Consider this...

Because governing groups are long-standing and their membership rotates, it may take a while to learn the history and process of a group like this.

Putting It Into Action

In school districts across the state, the best known example of a governing group is the school board. The school board is an elected body which develops and adopts policies that align to state and federal laws, employs and evaluates administrators, negotiates staff contracts, and provides oversight on the budget. Board members are elected by the taxpayers and are accountable to everyone.

Types of Groups

What is an advisory group?

This group is usually concerned with a single issue. Membership is composed of individuals who represent a broader group of people affected by an issue or who have expertise in the specific issue the group is concerned about.

Activities of an Advisory Group:

- Seek out the views of those affected.

- Advise on how to meet needs.

- Bring awareness to current issues.

- Comment publicly on proposed rules and regulations.

- Provide advice to staff developing evaluations and reporting on data.

- Help develop action plans.

- Make recommendations on policies relating to the coordination of services.

- Serve as a resource to other groups and to the community.

- Elected state and local officials and staff liaisons may work with the chairperson to establish agendas and schedule meetings but are usually not considered members of the council or staff to the council.

Examples: council, committee, panel, focus group (usually meets once or twice to inform the advisory group)

Leadership Roles: chairperson or co-chairperson, vice-chairperson, executive member, secretary

Other Roles: appointed member, representative from the group receiving the recommendations, representative who brings the family perspective to the table

Length of Service: terms of 1-2 years; usually formal advisory group members are appointed by elected officials or staff of an agency. More informal groups may invite interested individuals and the public to attend meetings (depending on the topic to be discussed).

Putting It Into Action

In school districts across the state, advisory groups are formed to provide guidance and perspective on topics like gifted and talented education, special education, and parenting. One example: The district's Special Education Advisory Group is comprised of parent and teacher representatives from each school in the district. The Special Education Director and a parent co-facilitate the group's meetings. The focus of the group's work is to discuss current initiatives and provide feedback on how those initiatives affect students with IEPs. The group provides input on the needs of families and may help assist with coordination of activities and events for families in the school district.

Remember...

Decision-makers will not know how families feel about an issue unless families tell them. Find ways for families to advise decision-makers.

Types of Groups

What is a leadership group?

This group is unique because it can include any combination of family members, youth, community members, policymakers and professionals. Some leadership groups provide important direction for state lawmakers that affect funding for education, health, and human services.

Activities of a Leadership Group:

- Initiate awareness of an emerging or systemic issue.

- Focus on targeted issues.

- Collectively work on issues.

- Conduct 'listening sessions' and public forums to collect input and feedback.

- Actively plan and implement strategies for making change or meeting a need.

- Attract a collective voice on an emerging issue.

- Informally engage in monitoring publicly funded entities (*watchdog*).

- Sometimes called a 'community organizing' or 'grassroots organizing' group.

Examples: associations, organizations, coalitions, initiatives, grants/mini-grants, community organizing, school improvement teams, health-related leadership groups

Leadership Roles: leader that is group appointed or may be the founder of a new group, administrator, lead staff

Other Roles: Change agent, advocate, grant funder, family member

Length of Service: usually voluntary, membership may be determined by yearly signup, may require payment of annual dues.

Putting It Into Action

A school's Response to Intervention (RtI) and Positive Behavior Intervention & Supports (PBIS) Leadership Team is an example of a leadership group. This group is comprised of various staff members and families and/or community members. The leadership team looks at systemic issues such as student learning and outcomes. In this case, the school's RtI and PBIS Leadership team would look at academic data as well as behavior data in the form of in-school suspensions and office referrals. The team looks at data and creates plans to implement strategies for addressing an identified need. They meet on a regular basis to monitor progress and suggest necessary changes if needed.

Consider this...

If you feel passionate enough about an issue and there isn't an existing group to join, there may be a need to start a new group.

Types of Groups

What is a planning group?

A planning group is usually formed to deal with a specific issue. It also can plan and carry out activities directed by a more formal decision-making group. In education, it often develops a recommendation or plan for a specific child.
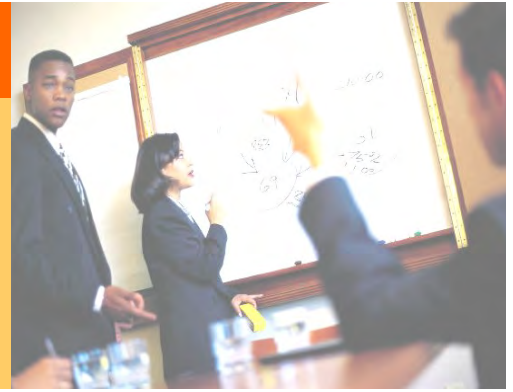
Activities of a Planning Group:

- Research and study a specific topic or issue.

- Assess needs and develop priorities.

- Make recommendations on the development of a program.

- Design information and conduct training about relevant topics.

- Develop or select curriculum.

- Maintain a resource library and sponsor an annual resource fair.

- Serve as a channel for communication and feedback between stakeholders.

- Plan opportunities for families to connect, network, mentor and have fun.

- Arrange annual awards ceremony, staff appreciation and share success stories.

Examples: committee, workgroup, action team, IEP team, community of practice

Leadership Roles: chairperson, facilitator, liaison, parent representative, staff member

Other Roles: recorder, time keeper, stakeholder, family member, community member, business owner

Length of Service: voluntary, could be permanent, or only until their work is complete

Putting It Into Action

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) team is an example of a planning group. John's daughter's IEP team is comprised of John and his wife, the English teacher, her special education teacher, the speech therapist, occupational therapist, school guidance counselor, psychologist, and the principal. John's daughter was invited to the IEP meeting too. The IEP team will review how well John's daughter did this last year in working toward her IEP goals. The team will take into account her strengths, interests, and challenges, parent concerns, and baseline data on academic achievement and functional performance. Based on the data and information in the present level, annual goals are created, and services and supports will be determined. The team meets on an annual basis to review the plan and revise it for the next year as long as the student still qualifies.

Remember...

Sometimes there are laws that require families be involved on groups that are planning or evaluating services for a specific child or a group of children.

Types of Groups

What is an evaluation group?

Although all groups should spend time evaluating their work together, some groups exist primarily to evaluate the work of others. These groups usually measure the work of large organizations, publicly funded agencies, or large projects.

Activities of an Evaluation Group:

- Create an action plan to explain the steps the group will use to collect, analyze, and report their evaluation results.

- Collect data to measure something and may come from many sources including numbers, surveys, samples and interviews.

- Display data like graphics, pictures and stories to help the data make sense.

- Analyze data, sometimes called '**statistical analysis'**, by asking questions about data and looking for patterns.

- Report results by writing a report to explain what was learned, its conclusions and its recommendations for change.

- **Focus monitoring**, sometimes called '**continuous improvement'**, to pay attention to the quality of services for families and children.

Examples: formal stakeholder groups, service improvement teams, focused monitoring

Leadership Roles: usually led by a paid staff person or professional

Other Roles: interviewer, assessor, evaluator, family member, consumer or community representative

Length of Service: voluntary or paid staff, could be permanent, or only until their work is complete

Putting It Into Action

The school district implemented a new high school class schedule one year ago. The school board appointed a group of people to evaluate the implementation of the new schedule. The group was made up of administrators, school staff, parents, and students. Some of the activities the High School Schedule Review Group did were to survey teachers, parents, and students, conduct focus groups, and review data on overall student achievement. They analyzed the results, compiled a report, and presented their findings to the school board for their information and to consider is there's a reason to change or modify the schedule.

Remember…
Data can be useful when groups want to measure activities or show results.

Types of Groups

What is a practice group?

Practice groups provide a structure for communication, learning, and action. Members agree to meet regularly to promote interagency and stakeholder connections and 'shared work'.

Activities of a Practice Group:

- Continually reach out to invite those to the table who can advocate for and make change.
- Create opportunities for members to understand each other's needs and abilities and to build trust with each other.
- Enhance participation and connections between members who have influence and members who have authority (brokering) to make ongoing work more meaningful.
- Discuss emerging or systemic issues to find common interests.
- Develop an interactive process for gathering stakeholder input at all levels and for considering this input in decision-making.
- Share information and solutions with each other and all stakeholders.
- Promote the spread of best practices.

Examples: a learning circle, a learning community, a practice group, a community of practice. For more information, visit www.sharedwork.org

Leadership Roles: practice group facilitator, conference planner, statewide meeting planner, meeting facilitator, broker (connector)

Other Roles: practice group member, content expert, member who represents the views of stakeholders such as families, educators, health providers, or consumers

Length of Service: voluntary, some groups exist only long enough to accomplish their work.

Putting It Into Action

John and Laura live in Wilson County. The Wilson County Community on Transition (C-CoT) meets each month during the school year. The C-CoT membership includes school district staff, adult service agency staff, families, and students. The team learns together, shares information, and discusses issues and concerns around transitioning students with disabilities from high school to the adult world. They share experiences on best practices, work together on creating solutions, and schedule learning opportunities for students and their families.

Each year the C-CoT plans a student conference on preparing for college and living on your own. This is just one of the ways the C-CoT expands their learning community by engaging more people in a transition activity.

Remember...

Everyone in a practice group is considered to be an expert because of personal or professional experience, including families who have experience interacting with service systems and professionals.

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