



TIP SHEET: Setting Up and Managing Advisory Groups

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Purpose of Resource

The purpose of this resource is to provide learners with guidelines and information on setting up and managing advisory groups to support effective planning, development and implementation of population health initiatives and programs.

Units of Competency

This resource supports learning and completion of assessments for the following units of competency:

- HLTPOP502C Work with the community to identify health needs
- HLTPOP503C Plan a population health project
- CHCORG506D Coordinate the Work Environment
- CHCAD603B Provide Systems Advocacy Services

Acknowledgement

This tip sheet has been adapted from from Techniques for Effective Public Participation Manual, International Association for Public Participation, 2006.

What is an advisory group?

An advisory group is a body of a fixed number of members to provide advice to a decision maker for a project, event or task.

Advisory groups may do one or more of the following:

- Provide advice to a decision maker about a particular issue or project.
- Supervise the implementation of a plan or action.
- Provide input to assist with a decision process.
- Serve as an important link to the community.
- Report back to relevant agencies and/or organisations on progress of group and project.

Advisory groups meet regularly over time until their task or the project is complete.

Membership varies however advisory groups generally consist of a small number of representatives of different interest groups, organisations or perspectives on a particular issue or population group.

Tips for Setting Up an Advisory Group

Planning needs to commence several months before the initial meeting and the following should be considered to ensure an effective advisory group:

- Clarification of the advisory group's role for any decision process.
- Membership should be carefully selected and members' roles and responsibilities should be clear at the outset. It is important to ensure that members are representing their sector as a whole and are not influenced or motivated by personal agendas.
- Allow significant lead time for membership selection and invitation as they may need to seek permission from their organisation to participate.
- Development and group endorsement of a Terms of Reference before the advisory group commences work. A Terms of Reference should outline the following:
 - Purpose of the group
 - Composition and size of the group
 - Leadership, secretariat, term limitations, turnover recruitment and selection
 - Decision-making process
 - Meeting frequency and duration
 - Roles and responsibilities of members
- A process to measure effectiveness of the group.
- Plan and announce meetings well in advance.
- Distribute materials and agendas in advance of each meeting.

Tips for Managing Advisory Groups

- The facilitator may use various facilitation techniques to support the groups processes including brainstorming, polling,
- Minutes are necessary to document all activities and these should be completed and circulated in a timely manner by the appointed secretariat.
- All correspondence with and presentations to the advisory group should be documented.
- Official advice or recommendations from the advisory group should be formally transmitted to relevant organisations and community groups.

Advisory Groups Facilitation Techniques

There is no magic method to facilitate to meeting to ensure it is a success. There are however a number of facilitation techniques that can assist groups to meet both effectively and productively.

Most people can learn how to facilitate a good meeting, but it does take some time and attention. The more people within a group who are aware of good group process skills, the easier the task of the facilitator and the more satisfactory the meeting.

A facilitator makes no decisions for the group, but suggests ways that will help the group to move forward.

Participatory approaches are just one of the many meeting facilitation techniques that can be used. Participatory approaches are based on shared ownership of decision-making. Some examples of participatory techniques include:

- Learning Circles
- Focus Groups
- Card Storming Techniques
- Deliberative Polling
- Citizens Panels
- Fishbowls
- Collective Learning Technique e.g. World Café

Detailed information on these and many more participatory techniques are available in the Department of Communities. *Engaging Queenslanders - A guide to community engagement methods and techniques*. Queensland Health via <http://www.qld.gov.au/web/community-engagement/guides-factsheets/documents/engaging-queenslanders-methods-and-techniques.pdf> and Art of Hosting website via <http://www.artofhosting.org/>

There are many advantages to participatory process for both the facilitation of meetings and also for planning and developing community interventions. Benefits of a participatory process include:

- Creates ownership and builds a strong base for the intervention in the community.
- Ensures the intervention will have more credibility in all segments of the community.
- Brings a broader range of people to the planning process and provides a broader range of perspectives.
- Involves important players from the outset.
- Provides an opportunity for often disenfranchised groups to be heard.
- Establishes ties among community members who might normally have no contact.

Evaluation and Quality Improvement

- It is important to conduct periodic assessments of the effectiveness of the group and how well the group's work is aligned with its mission, ground rules and planned processes.
- A simple survey or a more comprehensive evaluation tool can be used to assess the group's effectiveness such as the Victorian Partnership Assessment Tool. This tool can be accessed via <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/VicHealth-General-Publications/Partnerships-Analysis-Tool.aspx>

Additional Reading and Links

Change Agency. *Powerful Action Group Facilitation Guide*. World Vision Australia. March 2010. http://www.thechangeagency.org/dbase_upl/tCA_WV_FacilitationGuide2.pdf

Department of Communities. *Engaging Queenslanders - A guide to community engagement methods and techniques*. Queensland Health. <http://www.qld.gov.au/web/community-engagement/guides-factsheets/documents/engaging-queenslanders-methods-and-techniques.pdf>

VSO. *Participatory Approaches: A Facilitator Guide*. http://community.eldis.org/.59c6ec19/VSO_Facilitator_Guide_to_Participatory_Approaches_Principles.pdf

Community Toolbox. *Analyzing Community Problems and Designing and Adapting Community Interventions: Participatory Approaches to Planning Community Interventions*. <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/analyze/where-to-start/participatory-approaches/main>