



## Opportunities for Participation

### Boards, Committees, Task Forces and Workgroups

September, 2002

Some parents and professionals have a desire to be involved and work with systems beyond or in a different way than they currently are. The opportunity to engage in that type of work often occurs by serving on a board or committee.

Serving on boards and committees is not for everyone, and a large portion of people will choose not to participate in this manner. People who choose to serve on boards, councils, committees, task forces or workgroups find that this approach gives them an opportunity to be active, effective and influence the activities, services and policies for themselves, their family and other families. While definitions of boards, councils, committees, task forces and workgroups may vary, it is helpful to have a general understanding about them and know how they differ.

**1. BOARDS and COUNCILS.** A *board* or *council* is a group people who are elected or appointed. They are authorized and charged with the responsibility to act on behalf of, or govern an organization or corporation that is for-profit or non-profit. The role and operation of a board is very specialized and its responsibility is to the stakeholders, that is everyone who is interested and/or can be effected or who may be served by that organization or corporation. Some common names for boards and councils are executive boards, the board of directors, the school board, the city council, park and recreation, the cabinet, the council, managers, trustees or governors. The members of boards are commonly called directors.

#### TYPES OF BOARDS

**Governing Boards.** This type of board has a great deal of formal responsibility and authority. They have ultimate accountability and are always at the top of the organizational structure. A governing board's authority is exceeded only by owners and the state.

The board usually:

- 1) Establishes the organization's policies and rules,
- 2) Has fiscal responsibility
- 3) Enhances the public image of the organization.

These formal boards typically require members to:

- Meet regularly
- Be well informed
- Oversee fiscal and policy decisions

**Advisory Boards and Councils.** Advisory boards exist to provide counsel, not to govern. Advisory boards can advise the governing board, the CEO or other staff. Advisory boards are optional and have only as much authority as is granted to them by the governing body.

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For the most part advisory groups do not have responsibility for planning activities, fund-raising or decision making for the organization. An advisory board or group is made up of individuals who bring unique knowledge, skills and perspectives that compliment the skills of those in more official roles.

Their role is to:

- Advise
- Study an issue
- Collect input from the members of the group and possibly the community
- Report back to the larger agency.

2. **COMMITTEES.** A *committee* is a small group of one or more persons appointed or elected by an organization. The purpose of a committee is to: 1) consider and/or investigate relevant matters, 2) report facts or findings to the organization or 3) take action. Committees are established when it is obvious that issues are too complex and/or numerous for the entire board or organization to handle. The activities of an organization are accomplished through committees. If committees are properly selected and oriented, they can relieve officials of many of the details of carrying on the activities of an organization.

Committees permit and provide:

- Wide participation of an organization's members
- Enhanced commitment to the organization
- Excellent training ground for new leaders

### TYPE OF COMMITTEES

**Standing committees.** This permanent type of committee is established for ongoing major activities and should be included in the by-laws of an organization. A standing committee studies and investigates a problem or issue in depth. Some examples of standing committees are; program, finance, recruitment, nominating, development, Interagency Early Intervention Committees (IEIC), Community Interagency Transition Committees (CTIC), Local Advisory Committees (LAC).

**Ad Hoc or Special Committees.** These committees address short term activities and are appointed or elected for a special purpose. When this committee has completed its task/activity and given its final report it is discharged and ceases to exist. Some examples an ad hoc committee are; a committee to track specific legislation, coordinate a special event or fund raiser.

**Subcommittees.** Created to deal with a special aspect of the committee's work, a subcommittee functions on behalf of the parent committee and is accountable to it. Subcommittees can be created by any committee and typically consists of it's own members. Subcommittees

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are often standing committees. Some examples of subcommittees are; family support, childfind and fundraising.

3. TASK FORCES and WORKGROUPS. *Task forces* and *workgroups* are groups of people and resources brought together to perform a task for a specific purpose. They are working to develop useful outcomes regarding a product, process or approach to address a specific problem or issue. The members of these groups bring knowledge, expertise and experience related to the area being addressed.

These groups usually are:

- Working on a common project
- Time limited
- Responsible for issuing a final report or making recommendations

If you are interested in becoming involved on a board, council or committee, recognize that you probably will not move into a highly influential role or position without proving yourself. Consider and work on the following to improve your circle of influence.

Demonstrate your willingness to:

- Commit to and believe in a goal or mission
- Learn and stay informed
- Listen, weigh and value input and opinions from others
- See efforts through to their completion
- Provide thoughtful input and feedback
- Think bigger than your individual and family needs
- Be honest and open without hurting and demeaning others
- Recognize your areas of expertise
- Believe in yourself and the value of what you have to offer

### References:

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*Boards That Make A Difference: A new design for leadership in nonprofit and public organization.* Carver, J., Published by Jossey-Bass Inc., Second Edition, 12 (1997)

*A Parents Guide: Serving on Boards and Committees.* Published by National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY), (1998)

