

# 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 and calls the meetings.
- A "**facilitator**" runs the meetings.
- 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.

### Many things make decision-making groups unique:

- their decision-making authority
- the issues they are working on
- the meeting structure they choose
- the data they use
- the input and feedback they collect
- the processes they use
- their membership
- their history
- the length of time since formation

### Each Group Is Unique

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

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

#### **Remember...**

***There are many tasks for a group's 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.***

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### What is an *advisory group*?

This group is usually concerned with a single issue. Membership is composed of individuals who are representative of a broader group of people affected by an issue and 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 corrective action plans.
- Develop and implement 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).

### ***Remember...***

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

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### What is a *leadership group*?

This group is unique because it can include any combination of family members, youth, community members, policymakers and professionals. 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.

### ***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 formed to deal with a specific issue, to develop a recommendation or a plan for a specific child. Usually it plans and carries out an activity directed by a more formal decision-making group.



### 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:** note taker, time keeper, stakeholder, family member, community member, business owner

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

### ***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:

- **Action planning**- explains the steps the group will use to collect, analyze, and report their evaluation results.
- **Collecting data**- information is gathered to measure something and may come from many sources including numbers, surveys, samples and interviews.
- **Displaying data**- graphics, pictures and stories may be used to help the data make sense.
- **Analyzing data**- sometimes called 'statistical analysis', is asking questions about data and looking for patterns.
- **Reporting results**- the group may write a report to explain what it learned, its conclusions and recommendations for change.
- **Focused monitoring**- sometimes called 'continuous improvement', is about paying 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

***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** (with a customized message) to invite those to the table who can advocate for and make change.
- **Create opportunities** for members to communicate and understand each other's needs and abilities and 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.
- **Sense emerging or systemic issues** and begin discussions to find common interests.
- **Develop an interactive process** for gathering stakeholder input at all levels and for considering this input in decision-making.
- **Seek and exchange information and solutions** with each other and all stakeholders.
- **Promote the spread of best practices.**
- **Implement solutions and report back** to the practice group on results.
- **Develop member's professional skills.**

**Examples:** a learning circle, a learning community, a practice group (as part of a larger community of practice.) A Community of Practice helps the practice group focus on the 'big picture'. For more information, visit [www.sharedwork.org](http://www.sharedwork.org)

**Leadership Roles:** practice group facilitator, conference planner, statewide meeting planner, meeting facilitator (usually rotates between members), broker (connector)

**Other Roles:** practice group member, non-member attending presentation hosted by a practice group (statewide conference or Community of Practice meetings), content expert who shares knowledge or resources, 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

### Remember...

**Everyone in a practice group is considered to be an expert in his or her own context (because of personal experience), including families who have experience interacting with service systems and professionals.**

