

Creating an employee advisory committee

A representative employee advisory committee is a cornerstone of a successful effort to create a culture of health, regardless of the size of the organization.

Membership of your employee advisory committee

Aim for a committee of a manageable size (no more than 15 members, depending on your organization's size). Your committee should represent all employee groups (e.g., full-time and part-time employees, managers and front-line staff, salary and hourly workers, union representation, human resources, marketing or communications, legal, and occupational health/safety).

Here are some additional considerations:

- Committee members can be selected by leadership or can be selected from among volunteers.
- Determine in advance how long committee members will serve and how new members will be selected. Balance the need for continuity with the need to bring fresh ideas and energy to your organization's strategy for creating a culture of health.
- It's not necessary, or even desirable, to have your healthiest employees on the advisory committee. Ideal committee members are those who best can represent their peers, motivate others and support the implementation of a culture that promotes health.
- Consider offering an incentive or recognition to advisory committee members. It legitimizes their positions and encourages participation. Some organizations that have implemented stipends have generated enough employee interest that the selection of committee membership becomes a competitive process. The committee responsibilities become a formal part of the member's job accountabilities.

Role of your advisory committee

In some organizations the employee advisory committee is responsible for the implementation of the plan for creating a culture that promotes health. In other organizations, the committee plays an advisory role. In either case, the group members can be asked to:

- Attend regular meetings of the committee.
- Help establish a vision and name for the organization's commitment to a culture of health.
- Represent their peer group by sharing ideas, needs, concerns and feedback from their work areas and colleagues about proposed strategies, policies, and programs.
- Provide feedback on the possible barriers to proposed strategies and offer suggestions for addressing those barriers (e.g., how does a proposed policy fit with the schedules of employees?).
- Suggest effective communication strategies and solutions to challenges. For example, what is the best way to communicate with employees who work the third shift? How will employees react to a proposed message from leadership?
- Be a voice of support for a culture of health, carrying the message from the advisory committee to their work areas and colleagues.

Functioning of your advisory committee

Meet. Schedule regular advisory committee meetings on paid work time. Your committee may want to meet frequently at first, then slightly less often as your health improvement strategy is more established. If your advisory committee is new, it might be useful to ask members to provide information about themselves and their interests.

Communicate. Set up frequent and regular channels of communication with committee members so they are up to date and engaged. An email list is often the easiest way to do this. Encourage communication to flow both ways: from coordinator to members *and* from members to coordinator.

Check-in. At least once a year, assess how effectively the advisory committee is functioning. Is the committee serving its original purpose? Ask committee members for their feedback. Do they feel like their work is making a difference? Do they feel like their input is valued and taken into account when planning and implementing initiatives? Do they understand their expected roles and responsibilities? Are there members who want to rotate off of the committee? How will new members be selected?