

# Effective Advisory Committees

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## Effective Advisory Committees

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In career and technical education (CTE), advisory committees are groups of employers and community representatives who advise educators on the design, development, operation, evaluation, and revision of CTE programs (Smith, Payne, and Thornton 2001). The workplace knowledge and resources provided by committee members help ensure that all aspects of occupational education reflect the needs and current conditions of the workplace and that program graduates are capable of performing in the occupations for which they have trained (Edison Community College n.d.). Whether or not a program must follow Perkins Act mandates for committees (Backes 2000), both secondary and postsecondary CTE programs should find them indispensable to maintaining state-of-the-art, community-linked curricula in a time of rapid, continuous change and demands for accountability.

Only effective, fully used committees will serve this function, however, not "paper tigers" established merely to meet mandates (Gonzenbach, Morgan, and Sheets 1997). This In Brief addresses the following questions: What do advisory committees do? What are the indicators of an effective committee? What are some examples of the uses of advisory committees?

### What Do Advisory Committees Do?

A committee may oversee an entire program or institution, provide input to a specific department or technical area ("craft committee"), or advise an entire school district or state system (Backes 2000). Its duties may be statutory many states have legislative requirements for the activities of local committees (Colorado Community College and Occupational Education System 1997; South Carolina Department of Education 2000) or its functions may be determined by local needs. Most committees conduct activities in the following areas: curriculum and instruction, program review, recruitment and job placement, student organizations, staff development, community/public relations, resources, and legislation.

## Curriculum and Instruction

Identify and expand the use of new technologies

Compare content with occupational competencies and tasks

Analyze course content and sequence

Assist in developing and validating tests

Advise on labor market needs and trends

Review, recommend, and assist in obtaining instructional materials

Recommend safety policies and procedures

(Colorado 1997; Miller 1999; Tri-City 2001)

## Program Review

Review and recommend program goals and objectives

Participate in program evaluation and recommend evaluation criteria

Compare student performance standards to business/industry standards

Assess, recommend, and/or provide equipment and facilities

Evaluate the quality and quantity of graduates and job placement

Conduct community and occupational surveys

Identify new and emerging occupations

Recommend new programs or elimination of obsolete programs

Participate in long-term planning

(Colorado 1997; Edison Community College n.d.; Gonzenbach et al. 1997; Smith et al. 2001; Tri-City 2001)

## Recruitment and Job Placement

Assist in reviewing teacher selection criteria

Assist in recruiting new staff and potential students

Notify instructors of job openings

Provide or obtain cooperative work experiences, internships/externships, work/study, or work-based learning opportunities for students

Assist students in developing resumes and interviewing skills

Assist with career days/job fairs

Hire graduates/program completers

(Colorado 1997; Edison n.d.; Tri-City 2001)

## Student Organizations

Assist in developing and judging competitive skills events

Sponsor student organization activities and assist in fundraising

Conduct leadership development activities

Assist students with career development

Evaluate student performance

(Colorado 1997; South Carolina 2000; Tri-City 2001)

## Staff Development

Provide in-service activities for instructors

Provide instructors with retraining/back-to-industry and summer opportunities for technical upgrading

Review professional development plans

Support staff attendance at conferences

Conduct workplace tours

(Miller 1997; Smith et al. 2001; Tri-City 2001)

### Community/Public Relations

Interpret the CTE program to employers, community, and the media

Present programs to community groups

Establish programs to recognize outstanding students, teachers, and community leaders

Promote special school events

Assist in developing a marketing plan

(Colorado 1997; Edison n.d.; Tri-City 2001)

### Resources

Assist in budget development and review

Conduct fundraising activities and make or obtain donations

Establish scholarships and awards

Provide tours and field trips, job shadowing experiences, and speakers

Leverage community resources and broker community partnerships

(Miller 1999; South Carolina 2000; Tri-City 2001)

## Legislation

Advocate for programs with legislators

Arrange tours of programs for legislators

Involve legislators in program events

Update programs on legislative actions

(Colorado 1997; Tri-City 2001)

## What are the Indicators of an Effective Committee?

An effective advisory committee fulfills its primary purpose by providing ongoing evaluation, consultation, and research on programs and curriculum (Mercer and Dillon 1997). Indicators of effectiveness include the following. The committee:

develops and carries out a yearly plan of action/ program of work.

articulates long-term and short-term goals and objectives.

regularly reviews curricula to determine if they are meeting the needs of the students and the projected employment needs of business and industry.

promotes and publicizes the program.

reviews yearly outcome data from the program.

assesses the impact of recommendations yearly.

(Colorado 1997; Mercer and Dillon 1997; Smith et al. 2001; Tri-City 2001)

An effective committee has an appropriate structure (Mercer and Dillon 1997). Indicators of effectiveness include the following. The committee

has appropriate composition and number of members. The committee membership is representative of genders and minorities and is composed of individuals who represent the community, special populations, business, industry, students, parents, community agencies, labor, and other individuals having skills in and knowledge of the occupation. Selection criteria include occupational expertise, industry perspective, peer recognition, interest in students, commitment, and diversity.

establishes processes for member recruitment, selection, appointment, and retirement.

conducts member orientation, relationship building, development, and evaluation.

formally recognizes member contributions.

(Colorado 1997; Mercer and Dillon 1997; Smith et al. 2001)

An effective committee attends to group process and procedures.

Indicators of effectiveness include the following. The committee

operates under published, review policies and procedures including an up-to-date constitution and by laws.

elects officers on a regular, systematic basis.

meets often enough to establish working relationships and accomplish work plan.

conducts well-attended meetings with a clear purpose and agenda.

maintains a record of recommendations and/or actions that is distributed to the appropriate administrators and members.

has active participation from school/college staff.

uses effective group process-decision making and problem solving, group ownership, facilitation.

has adequate administrative and clerical support.

(Backes 2000; Colorado 1997; Smith et al. 2001)

### Examples

Developing and maintaining viable advisory committees are challenging tasks for CTE practitioners. Hudson County Schools of Technology in New Jersey infused new life into its committees by replacing 25 program-specific committees with 10 councils organized by career clusters (DeNoble 1998). "Council members no longer observe just one program; instead they're dealing with a big picture" (p.9). Cross-cluster communication has enriched curriculum review, updating, and other advisory activities. The cluster approach may better reflect the contemporary structure of CTE programs and encourage teaming and integration.

Giving committee members a handbook or guide conveys a program's recognition of the importance of the committee, willingness to communicate, and respect for committee members' role. A number of examples of handbooks are available on the Web: Cantrell (2000), Colorado (1997), Moraine Park (2001), and South Carolina (2000) include samples of committee structures, membership, responsibilities, program of work, welcome letters, agendas, minutes, and other materials.

A committee composed of knowledgeable, committed, and participating members who understand their role and use effective group processes is part of the puzzle. One other very important piece is this: the institution genuinely desires their input. Administrators and instructors should consider how much support or advice they want and actually can or will use (Teitel 1994). Striking the right power balance with an advisory committee is a matter of communication, trust, and understanding of the big picture serving the best interests of the students.

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