

USE OF SUBGROUPS

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Subgroups working with and on behalf of the full governing body contribute valuable work. This section explores the work of governance subgroups and how they can best be appointed and managed by your governing body.

THE CHALLENGE

You want to improve the success of your national malaria prevention and treatment program. The governing body wants to develop strategies to design, develop, finance, and implement program activities that eliminate malaria in all parts of the country. What types of groups should you form to help accomplish this goal? What are the competencies you need in these groups? How would you recruit, orient, and support these members to best achieve the goals of the staff and governing body?

TYPES OF SUBGROUPS

You know well that health services organizations in low- and middle-income countries face many challenges to accomplish the work of your governing body. The complexity and scale of your work make it very difficult for any small group of people to have all of the time, talents, resources, attitudes, and competencies needed for success. To overcome these barriers to your success, governing

bodies often form subgroups to perform certain work in a defined period for a specific result. These groups are most commonly known by names such as:

- Committees
- Task forces
- Councils
- Commissions
- Technical working groups
- Focus groups
- Advisory teams

WHY HAVE SUBGROUPS

Having too many groups can waste time, energy, political capital, and scarce resources. However, using two to three carefully organized subgroups can provide the following benefits:

- They can bring new information and experiences you need—but often cannot afford—to both define a problem and to develop practical and cost-effective solutions. (They can be “wisdom generators.”)
- They can volunteer time and labor to get the work done on time and on budget. (They can be “execution enablers.”)
- They can provide added resources to help implement a strategy or action plan. (They can be “resource mobilizers.”)
- They help generate public, provider, media, beneficiary, religious group, or other stakeholders’ interest in and support for your programming and plans—all of which can lead to higher levels of success. (They can be “boundary spanners” to key constituencies you need.)
- They can help remove political, financial, or psychological barriers to the successful implementation of your plans and budgets. (They can be “obstacle removers.”)

To gain these benefits, however, you need to carefully prepare to form and manage these groups using the actions listed below:

- Define a very clear role for the group. Specify exactly what you need them to accomplish or contribute, and clarify their terms of reference.
- Depending upon their individual role and responsibilities, explain the specific competencies, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and relationships they need to bring to their work in the subgroup.

- Provide a deadline by which advice or work is due, and have them submit a work plan to meet these expectations. (See the section below on charges and work plans.)
- Do not delegate in a way that weakens your own responsibilities for governance. You still have the ultimate obligation to do what is right to achieve your mission and plans.
- Do not launch a subgroup without providing staff support both to improve its chances of success and enable you to monitor the progress and the quality of their work.

NON-BOARD MEMBERS

Membership in these subgroups can—and often should—be people not currently serving in the governing body or organization. Make sure your governing body has policies and regulatory guidelines that make it possible to form subgroups and to recruit its members from outside the organization.

By inviting diverse people into these groups, you not only can achieve the benefits cited above but also observe whether these people may be suitable for future service in your governing body. Their engagement will also help them better know and appreciate the work of your organization. This, in turn, may lead to an expanded and ongoing investment of their knowledge, association, and resources in your programs and services.

To find these people and harness their talents for your mission, consider these sources to recruit people:

- local social groups affiliated with schools, businesses, government agencies
- local religious organizations
- public and nongovernmental food and water security organizations
- regional economic development organizations
- donor organizational staff

In your environment, what other groups could you approach for talented participants in your governing body's subgroups?

ANNUAL CHARGES AND WORK PLANS

Volunteers need and expect that their work is for a worthy cause and that it will be well focused, organized, managed, and supported by your organization. Do not allow a subgroup to disrupt its work. Poorly developed and managed subgroups can burn out members, alienate them from future work, waste your time, and confuse your beneficiaries. They need a clear sense of purpose and a well-designed work process with clear outputs and outcomes.

Boxes 3.1–3.3 illustrate a work plan for different types of subgroups: one is a task force to define ways to reduce preventable maternal and neonatal deaths in your district; and the other is to mobilize resources to build a new primary care center in your community.

BOX 3.1 Sample Committee Charter: Quality Committee— Freestanding Hospital Board

Purpose

The quality committee is responsible for assessing the delivery of quality patient care throughout the hospital. The committee shall assist in determining the need for policies and procedures that result in the achievement, through continuous quality improvement, of the maximum benefit to patients in the hospital in a customer-oriented and cost-effective manner.

Responsibilities

In fulfilling its charge, the quality committee is responsible for the following activities and functions:

- Recommend policies and procedures that enable the medical staff to process medical staff applications and reappointments and that expedite the board's decisions with respect to granting clinical privileges.
- Monitor the performance of the medical staff in carrying out its responsibilities for evaluating and improving patient care.
- Review sentinel events and root-cause analyses
- Review hospital performance on quality and patient safety standards
- Monitor the performance of all hospital programs in developing and implementing quality improvement responsibilities and review to assure that the organization remains nationally accredited and locally respected for its quality of care.
- Review periodic trend reports that reflect the overall performance of the hospital in providing quality care in a customer-focused, cost-effective manner.
- Ensure that the quality services and their quantification are a hospital-wide expectation of all operating units.
- Ensure that all operating programs develop a specific plan for implementing the concept of continuous quality improvement through individual and team initiative, including implementation, evaluation, and oversight processes within the appropriate medical/administrative/governance structures.

Composition

The committee shall consist of three directors from the hospital board and at least three physicians, including the president of the medical staff.

Meeting Schedule

The committee shall meet at least six to ten times per year.

BOX 3.2 Sample Committee Charter: Strategic Planning Committee— Freestanding Hospital Board

Purpose

The principal purpose of this committee is to make recommendations to the hospital board of trustees relating to overall business policy, long-range strategic plans, and urgent strategic issues. Two corollary purposes are to recommend specific policies relating to expansion as a regional system and to exercise oversight regarding information systems planning and technology to support an integrated system.

Responsibilities

In fulfilling its charge, the strategic planning committee is responsible for the following activities and functions:

- Provide advice to the hospital board of trustees and counsel the president of the hospital regarding corporate policy, strategic issues management, long-range plans and, in general, the overall strategic direction of the organization and its subsidiaries/affiliates.
- Review proposals for and make recommendations regarding new business ventures, including affiliation/collaboration proposals, new technology for the organization, and proposals for discontinuing services.
- Review and make recommendations relating to the hospital's annual update of the strategic plan.
- Keep abreast of major state and national issues relating to healthcare and make recommendations to the board, as appropriate, regarding advocacy efforts.
- Address other matters that relate to corporate strategy as may be referred to the committee by the board of trustees.
- Review present information systems in view of current technology and make recommendations regarding systems to more fully integrate clinical, financial, and managerial functions in support of the organization's further development of an integrated regional healthcare delivery system.
- Review and periodically revise the information systems plan to ensure that present and planned systems fully support the strategic business objectives and operational needs of the organization.
- Review significant information systems capital expenditure proposals in view of the information systems plan and make recommendations. Address and make recommendations regarding such information systems issues as may be brought before the committee by the board of trustees or executive management.
- Monitor implementation of the strategic plan and major strategic initiatives.
- Ensure that the strategic plan reflects and furthers the organization's mission, vision, and values.
- Ensure that physicians and other key stakeholders are included in the strategic planning process.

Composition

Committee members are appointed in accordance with hospital bylaws by the chairperson of the hospital board. The board chairperson also appoints the committee chair. The committee will consist of not fewer than three or more than seven members.

Meeting Schedule

Quarterly or as needed

BOX 3.3 Sample Committee Charter: Governance Effectiveness Committee

Purpose

The governance effectiveness committee (also called board development committee or governance and nominating committee) will be responsible for developing and monitoring the effectiveness of existing members of the board. The committee will establish and maintain an orientation and continuing education program for the board of directors.

Responsibilities

In fulfilling its charge, the governance effectiveness committee is responsible for the following activities and functions:

- Develop and review with the full board an individual board member job description detailing responsibilities and expectations.
- Plan board members' development, including recruitment, orientation, education, and evaluation of their effectiveness.
- Review and update board policies and procedures.
- Review the performance of board members prior to reappointment.
- Identify and select candidates for committees of the board using criteria for board service as a guide.
- Lead the succession planning process for the board chair and other board leaders.
- Maintain an awareness of the needs of the board and/or its affiliate organizations for executive and board talents.
- Plan for orientation and education of board members and non-board members of board committees.
- Conduct an annual board self-evaluation.
- Confirm compliance with the system's/hospital's conflict-of-interest policy.
- Set goals and objectives of the board of directors annually.
- Provide an orientation program conducted by management for new board members.
- Periodically conduct an assessment to determine educational needs. The president of the system/hospital will be responsible for researching and updating the committee on educational opportunities.
- Obtain education through a variety of formats, including meetings, conferences, workshop participation, review of printed material, and video and oral presentations.
- Provide educational opportunities outside the hospital.
- Provide funding, as part of the operating budget of the institution, to support educational programs for the board of directors.

Composition

The committee shall be appointed by the board chairperson and ratified by the system/hospital board of directors. The committee shall consist of at least five persons, including the board chairperson, the president/CEO of the organization, and at least two other board members. One of the board members may also be a member of the medical staff. The chairperson of the committee shall be a member of the board of directors.

Meeting Schedule

Quarterly or as needed

How would you refine these work plans?

How would you recruit experienced people to volunteer to serve in each subgroup?

How would you define indicators of the success of each subgroup?

How would you recognize the progress of each group to optimize their willingness to keep working in the group, and to be willing to serve in future groups?

CONTINUOUS RENEWAL MATTERS

Just as the overall governing body needs to continuously review and improve its decision-making processes and results, so should your subgroups embrace an attitude of continuous renewal and improvement.

Ask the leaders and members of each of your subgroups to answer these four questions at the midpoint and at the end of their work experiences:

1. How can we make the results we are trying to achieve in this subgroup more specific?
2. What do we expect will be the obstacles for our success?
3. How can we best remove, reduce, or work around these obstacles?
4. What changes can we make to improve the effectiveness of our work and people in the future?

After each subgroup completes its work and delivers its reports and results, you should join with them to define future strategies, styles of work, and process management, so similar work will be as effective and satisfying for the volunteers as possible. Achieving your organization's mission is an ongoing journey. You will want many people to support your journey with their ideas, time, and labor. This requires your constant attention and search for innovative people, processes, and initiatives.