This document provides an example of guidance for forming advisory groups or committees. Although based on the work of ***Schools Uniting Neighborhoods***, the ideas are transferable First 10 School/Community Teams.

Schools Uniting Neighborhoods Advisory Group Models

There are many ways to organize a SUN School Advisory Group. This list describes three common models.

New groups are encouraged to use these descriptions as a starting point. As you read these descriptions think about what you want from your Advisory Group. Then design a model that will work for your school.

# SMALL ADVISORY GROUP

In this model, a core group of 5-7 people meets regularly throughout the year. Their role is to work closely with the SUN Manager to set priorities, plan activities, bring in new resources and evaluate the program.

In some schools, the School Site Council also serves as the SUN Advisory Group. At other schools, the Advisory Group may focus on one aspect of the SUN Program, such as community partnerships.

Additional people may serve as informal advisors to this group. These informal advisors may be called on by the SUN Manager, or be asked to join individual meetings to discuss specific topics.

*Advantages:*

* + Small group size allows for focused discussions.
	+ The group is often made up of people who are already actively involved, who know the program well, and who are willing to make a substantial time commitment.
	+ The group is easy to organize.

*Issues to Consider:*

* + Offers limited perspectives. Small groups often have more representation from one group (such as service providers); other voices may be missing.
	+ A small group may not have all the information needed to discuss issues in depth.

# TWO-LAYERED ADVISORY GROUP

This model has a core group of 5-7 meeting regularly, as in Model #1. In addition, a larger group of advisors comes together 2-3 times a year.

The larger group of advisors may be asked to focus on specific topics, such as evaluating the SUN Program at the end of the year, or brainstorming ideas for the future. The core group of advisors would then take those ideas to the next level and think about how to act on them.

*Advantages:*

* + Allows the core group to have focused planning discussions.
	+ Provides opportunities for a larger group of people to contribute ideas and feedback.
	+ Requires a smaller commitment from people who are less actively involved in the program or who are unable to meet regularly.

*Issues to Consider:*

* + More complicated to organize.
	+ Some partners may feel less involved in program planning.

# LARGE ADVISORY GROUP

The third model is a large Advisory Group that meets regularly throughout the year. These Advisory Groups have representation from a broad range of people involved in the SUN School, including: students, parents, teachers, building staff, service providers, business people, and others.

*Advantages:*

* + Brings all interested parties around the table.
	+ Offers diverse perspectives on program planning.
	+ People are able to build relationships between different groups (for example, between students and service providers).
	+ Is more representative of the school environment.
	+ A wide range of issues can be addressed.

*Issues to Consider:*

* + The size of the group can make focused conversations difficult.
	+ It can be hard to set priorities for the Advisory Group if each person has a separate agenda.
	+ Attendance tends to vary from meeting to meeting. There may be a lack of continuity and the group may end up repeating conversations.

# STEP 1: DEFINING THE COMMITTEE’S PURPOSE

It is helpful to think about the role you want your Advisory Committee to take in your program. This discussion can happen at an Advisory Committee meeting, but it is important that staff offer guidance by sharing examples of common roles and clarifying needs for your program.

## **Common roles for Advisory Committees include:**

* Suggesting ways to improve the delivery of services to your target audience.
* Identifying community needs and resources.
* Contributing to project planning and problem solving.
* Providing staff with background information on the community, including the informal leaders, past experiences with similar programs, and areas of sensitivity.
* Helping staff connect with key decision makers and community members.
* Talking with community members and other agencies about the program.
* Publicly advocating for the program. This could include testifying at government budget hearings, for example.

**Advisory Committees generally are not responsible for** (although they may make recommendations):

* Hiring staff.
* Setting policies for the program.
* Making decisions that have a large impact on funding.
* Getting involved in staff disagreements and negotiations.
* Taking responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the program. (Group members may choose to “sponsor” or volunteer for a project, however.)

What are the key roles that you would like your Advisory Committee to take on?

Are there any areas your Advisory Committee is involved in now that you need to re- negotiate?

# STEP 2: RECRUITING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

Based on what you need your group to do….

Identify the **populations** you want your Advisory Committee to represent. Put a star next to categories that must be present for your group to operate.

*(Examples: students, non-English speaking parents, social service agencies, teachers)*

Now identify the **skills and characteristics** you need in your group. Put a star next to categories that must be present for your group to operate.

*(Examples: connections in the community, group facilitation skills, comfort with parent outreach, understanding of the school system, commitment to cross-cultural work)*

Finally, identify the **gaps**. Look for categories of people and skills/characteristics that are starred but are not on your Advisory Committee now. Who can you recruit to fill those gaps? (You may want to use the Skills Matrix to help you.)

# SKILLS MATRIX

Write the skills, characteristics and populations you want represented on your Advisory Committee across the page in the top row of the matrix. Put a star next to those that are critical for your group.

Write the names of current (or prospective) members down the page in the first column.

For each person, check the skills, characteristics, and populations that individual represents. If you are doing this as a group exercise, have each member self-identify the skills, characteristics, and populations they represent first, then add that information into the matrix.

Watch for critical skills, characteristics, and populations that are not represented by any current members. These are the gaps you need to fill with future recruitment efforts.

Notice if there are any current members who do not represent any of the things you need. This may mean that there are important skills, characteristics or groups that you missed when you put your list together, *or* it may mean you have someone who isn’t a good fit for your Advisory Committee.

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| Skiils, etc. needed on Advisory Committee: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Members names: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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# STEP 3: ONGOING SUPPORT AND TRAINING

A well-functioning Advisory Committee requires ongoing nurturing by staff. In particular, think about:

### **KEEPING THEM “IN THE LOOP”**

* Does each Advisory Committee member know your program’s mission, goals and structure?
* Can group members accurately answer basic questions about your program for community members?
* Is there an orientation process for new committee members?
* Is there a regular forum for sharing program accomplishments and concerns with the Advisory Committee?
* What else does your group need to know to perform its functions well?

### **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING**

* Are there identified leaders who facilitate meetings, move the group’s agenda forward, and provide staff with feedback and support?
* Are there people being groomed for leadership positions, so that you’re prepared for turnover (or burnout) among your most committed volunteers?
* Does the group as a whole have questions that should be addressed in a group training?

### **PLANNING**

* Does the Advisory Committee have a sense of what they will be doing during the year?
* Is the group actively involved in planning for the program as a whole? (over)

### **VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION**

* Are you regularly thanking your Advisory Committee members for their participation?
* Are Advisory Committee members given public recognition in program publications and displays?
* Do program participants and decision-makers (such as the school Principal) know who the Advisory Committee members are?

### **EVALUATION**

* Are Advisory Committee members asked for feedback on how the group operates?
* Are staff people receptive to suggestions from Advisory Committee members?