



Pocket Guide

How to be Involved in a Board or Council: *Roles & Responsibilities*

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It is important to have a voice and get involved!

One way to get involved is through groups that are making decisions about things you care about. There are many types of groups that work on and/or make decisions about issues you care about. Some examples of groups who work on issues you may care about are community organizations, state agencies, or your local government.



In an organization, there is a board of directors and sometimes a youth council or an advisory council. There are advisory councils for your city's mayor, the state governor and even advisory councils for the federal government. No matter how or what you choose to get involved in, there are some helpful tips you should know.



Why should I get involved?

By taking responsibility for advising organizations and projects, you can get involved in a real-life process of learning that will help you understand how decisions are made and how to share your thoughts and experiences. You then get to see how it plays out!

- * Learn about all you have to offer.
- * See the real power you have to make a difference in your community.
- * Learn valuable skills about how things work (organizational/program development) and make sure rules are followed or changed (management).
- * Be a leader in the community.
- * Learn about people different from you and what is important to them.

Questions to ask the board/council:

Here are some questions you might want to ask a board or council before you get involved. These questions can help you understand more about how they work and if you want to choose to get involved.

1. **Who is on the board/council now and how did they get there?**
2. **How long is a board/council member's term?** How long do they expect you to be on the board/council? You can ask about leaving the term early and what you would need to do if that happened.
3. **What committees does the board/council have?** Find out what work the board/council does.
4. **What are the responsibilities of a board/council member?** Find out the work everyone agrees to do as a member of the board/council.

5. **How does the board/council make a decision?** Is it by voting? How many people need to agree to something so it can happen? (Usually a board/council will talk about something as a group. This is the time to share thoughts and opinions. After all thoughts and opinions are heard, the leader will then ask people to vote. Sometimes a board/council has a “majority” rule, which means that if there are 10 board/council members, at least 6 need to vote one way for a decision to be made. If this is confusing, don’t worry. Just vote for what you agree with and you’ll see how things work.)



What skills and/or attitudes do I need to have to serve on a board/council?

You have decided to serve on a board/council because you care about an issue. The other people on the board/council care about it too. Leadership skills are helpful to have when serving on a board/council. Having leadership skills means:

- * Be responsible for your work.
- * Own up to what you need to do. Be reliable and let people know if you're having problems completing something.
- * Be willing to volunteer for things that need to be done (take initiative).
- * Be involved – share your thoughts and opinions.
- * Be willing to handle responsibilities.



- * Listen to others, even if you don't agree.
- * Have a positive and open attitude towards others and the work.
- * Be willing to work with others (cooperation).
- * Have knowledge of how to advocate. (This is something that can always be learned. You can learn about this at a training or just by practicing.)



**For more information on advocacy,
see KASA's "Advocacy Tip Sheet."**

What are some good ways I can learn about my new role and responsibilities?

- * Listen and pay attention to how things are done.
- * Be willing to get to know someone new. You can make a friend and ask them questions.
- * Work with others to learn – teamwork.
- * Attend trainings or workshops to help you learn new things.
- * Try new things; you can learn a lot from real experiences in life.
- * Practice; it's ok to make mistakes. Just keep trying!
- * Everyone learns differently, so good ways to learn will be different for everyone. Some ways to learn are by using visuals or audio, by yourself or working in a group.

What do I need to be prepared?

You don't have to jump in as the leader in a group. There are lots of ways to get involved slowly, and then as you learn more, you can get more involved.

- * In order to be prepared, read the notes from the last meeting (often called “minutes”) before the next meeting.
- * Make sure you have something ready to take notes with (ex: computer or pen and paper).



- * Come into a group/meeting with a positive attitude, and be willing to participate in group discussions.
- * Read the agenda for the meeting beforehand, and bring your thoughts and questions.
- * The structure of a group is a good thing to know. Know who to go to for help or who to go to if you have a question. Sometimes the person to ask is a “chair” - the leader of a board - or sometimes the best person to ask is a staff person.



What might be hard for me? Some thoughts from KASA Board Members

“Not knowing what to expect – trying to figure out how things worked.”

“When I first started on a board, it was hard to balance everything time-wise (school, working, family).”

“Trusting that you can speak up. There are no right or wrong answers! Offer your opinion and trust that they will listen and not rip your head off.”

“Figuring out new ways of interaction, like conference calls.”

“Needing to plan ahead and to make sure what you agree to do will fit into your schedule.”



Tips to deal with what might be hard:

- * Get a calendar, palm pilot, or some other way to keep track of meeting dates and deadlines for when things need to be done.
- * Feel free to call someone to discuss things after the meeting or to stay after meetings to talk to people.
- * Communicate with others – if you have a question, don't be afraid to ask it.
- * Be clear with others about what you can and can't do and what support/help you may need.



- * Be sure to find out the time commitment (how much time they expect you to spend working on items for the board/council a week).
- * Don't panic! Don't get overwhelmed. People will be working **with you**, and it is a team process. It is not like a job or school where you have to do what they say.
- * Take responsibility for what you say you will do, and do it the best you can.
- * Get involved as often as you can, read as much as you can, and take advantage of opportunities to share what you are doing with others.
- * Get help if you need it. If there is an issue that comes up, ask for information on trainings from organizations that can help.

Working with adults:

Sometimes it's difficult to express your thoughts with adults, and this can be frustrating. They sometimes do things like not telling you everything about what is going on because they don't think you need to know, but you do. Here are some tips on working with adults:

- * Compromise with adults when you don't see eye to eye. Don't be afraid to talk with them. Try to be real with the person and tell him or her how you feel. You may be surprised at what you can work out. You can ask the person to keep what you talk about just between the two of you - the whole group does not need to know.



- * Ask questions! Sometimes the language used in meetings is not accessible or easy to understand. Don't be afraid to ask what something means.
- * Groups can use lots of acronyms. Acronyms are abbreviations for names of groups. For example, KASA is an acronym for "Kids As Self Advocates." During meetings people will often use acronyms instead of saying the entire name. For example, they could say something like, "KASA is a youth-run project." This can be really frustrating for any new member to the group. You can ask what an acronym means during a meeting. Many times there are other people in the group who also do not know what an acronym means and will appreciate your asking.
- * <http://www.tnoys.org/TNOYSServices/PromotingYouthDev/Youth-AdultPartnerships.htm>
This website has some great tips for working with adults. (Scroll half way down the page to find "Tips for Working with Adults".)

Resources and training for groups, boards and councils:

<http://www.utextension.utk.edu/4H/ythgov/youth.htm>

This website has tips for figuring out what issues you are interested in, what you want to help with, what organizations you can work with, and how to get involved and be prepared. Go to this website to discover five simple steps and a checklist to help you on your journey to youth in governance.

<http://www.youthonboard.org/>

Youth on Board helps young people and adults think differently about each other so that they can work together to change their communities and schools. We don't just build skills; we build mutually respectful relationships between young people and adults that allow young people to move from the margins of their communities into the center.

<http://www.youthempowerment.com/yob.htm>

Youth Empowerment Project's Youth on Board program trains and places teens ages 16 to 18 in voting seats on nonprofit organization (NPO) boards and advisory committees.

<http://www.fvkasa.org>

KASA has trainings for youth-run boards on facilitation, leading a meeting, strategic planning (creating a plan for the future of the organization) and evaluation (how to see if the organization is doing the work it says it's doing). We also have material for youth, written by youth, on our website! KASA has written a manual for adult organizations to give them advice on how to include youth on boards/councils. The manual is, ***Youth As Leaders. A "How-To" Manual on including youth as leaders in your organization, agency or project.*** It can be ordered from KASA's website.

More About KASA:

Mission:

Kids As Self Advocates (KASA) is created by youth with disabilities for youth to educate society about issues concerning us. KASA believes in self-determination, creating support networks and self-advocacy for all youth with disabilities in our society.

KASA's Theory of Change:

KASA is working toward a day when young people with disabilities will have control over their own lives and futures. We will do this through informing youth about their rights, providing peer support/training and changing systems to include us.

www.fvkasa.org

