

Business Advisory Boards

In January 2010, in response to a member inquiry, we asked Alliance members about their use of Business Advisory Boards. Four member ASOs replied, ranging from small start-up to large, established organizations. Three of these ASOs have Advisory Boards and one serves on several such boards; all have found them to be a beneficial resource.

ASO Advisory Boards mainly serve to generate business referrals and networking opportunities. Advisory Board members also assist with marketing, including arranging presentations to business and civic groups to which they belong, and provide valuable information about local economic and labor market trends. Details about the Boards' size, composition and other characteristics are summarized below.

How many people serve on your Advisory Board?

Among the responding ASOs, the boards range in size from 3 to 5, 12 to 15 and 25 to 35 members.

What is the composition of your Advisory Board in terms of members' industry background, professional skills, position in the community, etc.?

One Board consists of business leaders as well as accountants and legal representatives. One has an equal mix of employers and social service organization representatives. One has a 2:1 mix of business and nonprofit representatives, plus a representative of the local workforce system.

How often does the Advisory Board meet?

Advisory Boards are convened once a month or once a quarter.

How do you handle confidential information shared with Advisory Board members?

One ASO has Board members sign a confidentiality agreement, and two do not share confidential or sensitive information, such as information about individual candidates.

Do Advisory Board members serve as volunteers or do you compensate them?

In all cases, Advisory Board members serve as volunteers, although their participation offers various intrinsic benefits. Business referral and networking opportunities are two-way, and their service can be a source of prestige. In some cases, Board members may simply seek the satisfaction of helping ASOs fulfill their social mission and/or contributing to the development of their business.

What advice or other general information can you share?

- Business Advisory Boards are beneficial, and having potential customers help drive the direction of an organization leads to sustainability.
- Networking with other professionals via Advisory Boards leads to greater understanding about the services you can provide to help your workers succeed.

- Recruit and surround yourself and your company with individuals in leadership roles, who are in the know about what is going on in local markets and are willing to be ambassadors for your ASO. These individuals must have an interest in the ASO's mission and be onboard to help accomplish it. Recruiting advisors from diverse business sectors ensures broad representation.
- Always have an agenda, and maintain strict time limits on meetings. If you have something important for which you are seeking support, meet individually with advisors first and feel them out, then bring it before the entire board.