

A Study of Advisory Committees Used by ATE Projects and Centers
Final Report (Part B)

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BACKGROUND

This report is a product of the evaluation of the Advanced Technological Education (ATE) program that is being conducted at Western Michigan University's Evaluation Center (WMU). The evaluation is a multifaceted study designed to assess the impact and effectiveness of the ATE program.

One part of the evaluation was to study the advisory committees used by ATE projects¹. There were two general tasks—to learn more about the advisory committee process in the ATE context and to develop procedures that can be used to improve the effectiveness of advisory committees.

The ATE projects use a variety of advisory committees. Many have local committees required by the college or by their funding agencies. Some have regional committees that may include members from the local community, but they also have members who represent various parts of the state or region. Finally, there are the National Visiting Committees (NVCs) required by the National Science Foundation (NSF) for their larger projects. These committees include members from outside the state boundaries.

As their name implies, these committees are to provide advice to the project leadership. Typically, they review progress, make recommendations, and sometimes, they provide other assistance to the project. For example, they might provide internships, donate equipment, or provide facilities. The NVCs are groups that work with specific projects and NSF to provide advice, assess progress, and provide assistance.

Although the NVCs are required to have national representation and report their recommendations to NSF, the way in which the various committees operate is quite similar. It would be difficult to tell by observing a committee in operation which kind it was unless one knew the backgrounds of the committee members (One clue would be the presence of an NSF representative. They often attend meetings of the NVCs.) However, with few exceptions, we will assume that the steps for effective committees are similar and proceed on that assumption.

This is the second of two reports. The first, Part A, described the use of advisory committees in the ATE context.² The current report addresses the second task, improving the use of advisory committees.

¹ In general, the term “project” is used to describe both centers and the larger funded “projects.”

² Welch, W. & Reineke, R. (July, 2002). A Study of Advisory Committees Used by ATE Projects and Centers: Part A. The Evaluation Center. Kalamazoo, MI. Western Michigan University.

METHODS

Several methods were used to gather information to address Task Two. These included a survey provided to ATE grantees, site visits to six advisory committee meetings, and a search of the literature on advisory committees, especially those used by community colleges. Details on these procedures are found in Part A³ of this report.

The information gathered during this process suggested assistance was needed to those who organize and implement advisory committees. We also concluded that it would be useful to have a second document for the advisors who serve on these committees.

After considering several approaches, we decided that a checklist would be an effective way to help projects improve the effectiveness of their advisory committees. Checklists are a useful way to plan an enterprise, monitor and guide its operation, and assess its outcomes (Stufflebeam, 2002)⁴.

The definition of a checklist in Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary is, "A list of things to be checked or done, e.g., a pilot's checklist before takeoff." The American Heritage Dictionary's definition is similar: "A list of items to be noted, checked, or consulted."

The Advisory Committee Checklist is a set of items (called checkpoints) to consider when planning and implementing a committee. It is based on our surveys, site visits, and literature reviews. We believe that projects that use the checkpoints will have effective and productive advisory committees.

The checklist consists of four sections:

- A. Organizing the Committee
- B. Planning a Committee Meeting
- C. Implementing the Meeting
- D. Following Through

³ Ibid.

⁴ Stufflebeam, D. (2002). Guidelines for developing evaluation checklists. The Evaluation Center. Kalamazoo, MI. Western Michigan University.

After some consideration⁵, we decided that a set of guidelines published in a small brochure would be the best way to help those who serve on advisory committees. This led to a guide called “Meeting Reminders for Advisory Committee Members.” It consists of three sections:

- A. Planning for Meetings
- B. During the Meeting
- C. After the Committee Meets

The initial versions of the checklist and advisor reminders were reviewed by the staff of the ATE Evaluation Project at WMU. Their suggestions were incorporated into a second draft of both documents.

These drafts were sent to six ATE project directors who were asked to review the two documents. Five of them provided suggestions⁶ that were considered in developing the final versions.

The checklist and advisor reminders are attached as part of this report. However, when they are distributed to committee organizers and advisors, they will be stand-alone documents.

There is a third document that will be useful for those involved in ATE advisory committees. It is called “National Visiting Committees for NSF/DUE Sponsored Projects.” It was developed for NSF by the Montana Systemic Teacher Education Program (NSF, undated). This brochure describes the roles and responsibilities of NVCs and answers several questions about the NVC process. It focuses on the work of the committee and its chair, and the relationships between the NVCs, the projects, and NSF. This brochure is available on the Web at www.ecept.net/documents/NVC.

Together, these three guides are intended to provide helpful information to all the players in the advisory committee process: the projects, the members of the committees, and the committee itself.

⁵ We initially developed a checklist for advisors but decided a set of reminders would be more effective.

⁶ We acknowledge the ATE projects that provided many helpful suggestions on the checklist and the advisor reminders.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE CHECKLIST (✓)

Wayne W. Welch

An advisory committee is a group of advisors that meets periodically to provide advice and support to an institution or a project. Advisory committees range from groups of volunteers that meet regularly on a long-term basis to project-specific boards convened to assist projects funded for two or three years.

This checklist is a guide for planning and using advisory committees. It is intended to help those who have the responsibility for organizing a committee, planning, conducting, and following up the committee meetings.

The checklist is designed primarily for projects funded by the Advanced Technological Education (ATE) program funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF), including their National Visiting Committees (NVCs). However, the reminders or checkpoints listed here should be helpful to anyone who wishes to make their advisory committees more effective.

A. Organizing the Committee

<input type="checkbox"/> Define the purposes of the advisory committee.	For example, provide advice on new technology, monitor progress, assist with program planning. Also, see the NSF brochure entitled “National Visiting Committees” for a description of NVC purposes. ⁷
<input type="checkbox"/> Decide the size of the committee.	Six to ten members are usually adequate. The number will depend somewhat on the skills/expertise needed on the committee.
<input type="checkbox"/> Consider advisors from business and industry, technology education, K-12 education, women, minorities, and students.	Consider the job/position level and competencies needed. Advisors who serve on NVCs must be cleared with your ATE program officer.
<input type="checkbox"/> Choose advisors who have the time and are committed to serve.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Make sure advisors know how much time will be required of them.	

⁷ A brochure describing the NVC purposes and procedures is available online at www.ecept.net/documents/NVC.

<input type="checkbox"/> Be aware of obvious conflicts of interest among the advisors.	Don't have too many from one organization. Avoid those who have their own agendas.
<input type="checkbox"/> Appoint advisors for a specified length of time—from 1 to 3 years depending on the frequency of meetings and length of the project.	Effective advisors can be reappointed. Those who don't have the time or lose interest can be replaced.
<input type="checkbox"/> Send letters of invitation to possible candidates and letters of confirmation to selected advisors.	This helps them feel needed and appreciated.
<input type="checkbox"/> Send advisors information on expense related matters.	Provide details on travel expenses, procedures for reimbursement and consultant fees, if applicable.
<input type="checkbox"/> Tell advisors the expected frequency of meetings and the likely date for the first meeting.	Schedule meetings on an "as needed" basis. For funded projects, once or twice a year is typical. NVCs usually meet once per year. Conference calls may be used for additional meetings.
<input type="checkbox"/> Provide adequate staff and financial support for the committee.	Consider secretarial support, travel costs, background publications, and consultant fees. ⁸
<input type="checkbox"/> Recognize or publicize your committee.	Some possibilities: place their photos and bios on your project's Web site, list names on letterheads.

B. Planning a Committee Meeting

<input type="checkbox"/> Decide the major purposes of the meeting.	These will determine the meeting agenda. Consider review of progress, issues encountered, decisions faced, and recommendations from previous meetings.
<input type="checkbox"/> Select a meeting time that will be helpful for your project and convenient for your advisors.	

⁸ Most advisors for ATE projects and centers are volunteers. Their time is provided by their host institution or organization. No research was found on whether paying advisors on committees increases their productivity and/or effectiveness.

<input type="checkbox"/> Determine time of day and length of meeting.	Local committees usually meet for part of a day. National meetings of a day or two should be adequate.
<input type="checkbox"/> Choose a site that is convenient or related to the topics to be addressed.	Some options are the project headquarters, a business or industrial site, or a hotel. Consider parking, access to airport, and meeting purposes.
<input type="checkbox"/> The meeting room should be comfortable and able to accommodate the meeting needs. ⁹	Consider such things as size, room layout, noise, temperature, food service, AV needs, etc. ¹⁰
<input type="checkbox"/> Arrange for meeting rooms and hotels, if necessary, well before the meeting.	Effective planners do this at least two to three months in advance.
<input type="checkbox"/> Notify advisors of meeting and travel arrangements when they are set.	Ask for an RSVP and send out a reminder as the meeting gets closer.
<input type="checkbox"/> Set a meeting agenda that includes a time schedule.	Usually the project leaders set the agenda for local or regional meetings. NVC chairs are expected to work with a project to set agendas.
<input type="checkbox"/> Send out the meeting agenda and background material one to two weeks before the meeting.	Include reports from project evaluators, if available. Hard copy is better than email copies. ¹¹
<input type="checkbox"/> Send information regarding hotels, travel arrangements, meeting rooms, etc. to advisors.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Consider having students available to meet with advisors, when appropriate.	

⁹ Although this might seem obvious, it is too often ignored or forgotten.

¹⁰ One meeting we observed had two small arrangements of fresh flowers on the meeting table. That helped brighten an otherwise nondescript conference room.

¹¹ Advisors won't have to spend time printing materials. Also, last minute e-mailed information may be viewed as a sign of a disorganized project.

C. Implementing the Meeting

<input type="checkbox"/> Identify the person who will run the meeting.	It is usually more productive to have a trained facilitator or the chair run the meeting. ¹²
<input type="checkbox"/> Welcome the committee and make introductions.	Some kind of “break-the-ice” exercise might be an effective way to begin. ¹³
<input type="checkbox"/> Provide name tags or table place names for those in attendance.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Begin the meeting on time.	This will encourage the advisors to be prompt.
<input type="checkbox"/> Make sure refreshments are available.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Determine a decision making process and use it.	Some examples are majority rule, consensus reaching, or authoritarian (one member decides and the others agree).
<input type="checkbox"/> Keep minutes of the meeting.	Audio or videotapes are often used along with written notes.
<input type="checkbox"/> Make sure all advisors have opportunities to participate in the discussions.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Welcome suggestions, avoid being defensive.	Advisors are there to help you. Think of them as critical friends.
<input type="checkbox"/> Limit the material to be covered during a meeting.	Projects typically present too much information and don’t provide enough time for discussion between topics.
<input type="checkbox"/> Cover the items on the agenda.	Some flexibility may be necessary.
<input type="checkbox"/> Avoid the tendency for the project staff to dominate the meeting.	One project has a 50/50 rule. For each 10 minutes of staff presentations, 10 minutes are scheduled for advisory responses.

¹² Designated chairs or facilitators have less involvement in the success of the project and are usually more open to a full and open discussion of the issues, especially controversial ones.

¹³ One project we observed used a short quiz on the project to start the meeting. The participants were given a few written questions about the project, for example, “Who are the partner institutions on the grant?” This was followed by a discussion of the correct responses.

<input type="checkbox"/> Try to avoid evening meetings or excessively long day meetings.	Advisors, and staff, need time for rest and reflection.
<input type="checkbox"/> Provide breaks but put a firm limit on their duration.	A 10-minute break should last only 10 minutes.
<input type="checkbox"/> If a meal is to be served, try to do it in a different room.	A change in surroundings is a nice break. Besides, conference rooms usually don't have much ambiance.
<input type="checkbox"/> Distribute expense reimbursement forms and details on how and when to complete them.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Have participants schedule travel arrangements so they won't have to leave the meeting early.	The advisors should be expected to stay until the end to help draft the committee report.
<input type="checkbox"/> Provide time for the committee to meet in an executive session.	This is usually done at the end of the meeting to prepare the committee report. Some NVCs also meet in an executive session at the beginning.
<input type="checkbox"/> Present the report orally to the project leadership.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Describe what work you expect, if any, from advisors between meetings.	

D. After the Committee Meets

<input type="checkbox"/> Send thank you letters to meeting participants.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Designate a reporter to write up the minutes and distribute them to the advisors and appropriate staff.	Try to do this within two weeks of the meeting. Some projects distribute the minutes along with the committee recommendations.
<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that payments (fees and/or expense reimbursements) are timely.	

<input type="checkbox"/> Expect to receive a written report or letter from the committee.	The report should be an evaluation of progress and include recommendations.
<input type="checkbox"/> Provide feedback on the report to the committee. ¹⁴	Project leadership should explain how each recommendation was addressed. What actions were taken. If none, explain the reasons.
<input type="checkbox"/> Keep advisors informed of project activities between meetings, especially the chair.	Consider e-mail or newsletters of staff changes, new activities, project presentations, etc.
<input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate the meeting.	This can be done informally by the staff or, perhaps, with a post-meeting survey. ¹⁵
<input type="checkbox"/> Consider using advisors to help the project between committee meetings. ¹⁶	They can review materials, conduct site visits, write position statements, provide internships, etc.

¹⁴ This is usually done at the next committee meeting. Some projects also prepare a written response soon after the report is received.

¹⁵ One way to do this is to use this checklist as a rating scale. Each checkpoint is rated along some kind of scale. For example, "The meeting started on time." *Yes No. "The recommendations were helpful." Not helpful Somewhat Very helpful.*

¹⁶ Some projects appoint a sub-committee of the advisory committee to work with them between meetings.

Meeting Reminders for Advisory Committee Members

Robert A. Reineke

An advisory committee is a group of experts that meets periodically to provide advice and support to an institution or a project. You have been chosen and agreed to serve on an advisory committee for an Advanced Technological Education (ATE) project or center. The National Science Foundation (NSF) funds the ATE program.

Advisory committees do many things to help projects. As their name implies, these committees are to provide advice to the projects' leadership. Advisors are asked to review progress, make recommendations, and sometimes provide other assistance to projects. For example, they might review documents, conduct site visits, or offer their own institutions as sites for project activities such as internships.

These guidelines describe behaviors that characterize an effective committee member. The reminders listed here are intended to help improve the effectiveness of the advisory committee process. They also should help you have a rewarding and productive tenure on your ATE committee.

The reminders are divided into three sections; Meeting Preparation, Participating in Meetings, and After the Committee Meets. Please review them as you prepare for and participate in your committee meetings.

A. Meeting Preparation

Effective advisory committee meetings require some pre-meeting work. Advisors should come to the meetings well prepared. This allows more meeting time to address important issues, discuss alternative strategies, and contribute to the projects' success. Here are some things to consider before your committee meetings.

Familiarize yourself with the purposes of the advisory committee. Respond promptly to project staff contacts regarding attendance at the meeting and other matters. It makes planning difficult if your attendance is uncertain. Review project materials sent to you before the meeting.

If applicable, review the NSF brochure entitled "National Visiting Committees" for a description of NVC purposes. This brochure is available online at www.ecept.net/documents/NVC.

Identify contributions you can bring to the project and the committee. Consider what benefits committee membership has for you and your company or institution. Be cautious of any conflicts of interest that might exist.

Make travel reservations well before the meeting. Check with project staff about local travel at the site and overnight accommodations if this information is not provided.

B. Participating in the Meeting

In general, the effectiveness of advisory committee meetings depends on advisor cooperation and common pursuit of helping staff achieve project goals. Establishing a constructive and cooperative climate requires effort and appreciation of members' diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Common courtesies, such as turning off cell phones and pagers or not interrupting other discussants contribute to effective meetings. Other factors are listed below.

Be on time for meetings. "Late arrivals" can be disruptive—bringing them up to speed slows committee progress.

If purposes for the committee meeting are still not clear, ask the chair or project staff to clarify them.

Help project staff and the chair follow the meeting agenda. Avoid lengthy "off-topic" conversations. Be prompt in returning from "breaks."

Schedule your travel arrangements so you won't have to leave the meeting early. Some crucial discussions, including making report recommendations, occur at the later meeting stages.

Participate actively, but avoid dominating discussions. Phrase comments and suggestions in positive and constructive terms. Ask for additional project information as appropriate. Some examples are evaluation reports or project products.

Many advisors take notes during the meeting. The notes help you to remember important points and provide information for preparing the committee meeting report.

Limit the number of recommendations for project staff to a manageable number. It is helpful to the staff that the identified recommendations are prioritized. Remember that your major role is to provide advice. However, staff must consider constraints such as time, budget, and other factors.

C. After the Committee Meets

After the committee meeting, there are several important follow-up activities to complete. Attention to the following topics will assist the chair and project staff bring closure to the meeting and help maintain your ongoing readiness to contribute to the project.

Review the committee report as requested by the chair. Prompt attention to reviewing the committee report lessens memory lag and expedites its completion. Again, positive and constructive suggestions are most helpful.

Keep informed of project activities between meetings. Provide assistance to projects as requested by project staff and as your availability permits. Participate in evaluating meetings if requested. Complete necessary paperwork for stipends or reimbursable expenses and return to

project staff promptly. Inform the committee chair and the project staff of any change in your status as a committee member.

Maintain contacts with other committee members and project staff. Keeping abreast of project activities and staying in touch with fellow advisors can enhance committee effectiveness. However, information shared at meetings and other project related information, should remain confidential. Also, the committee chair may communicate with NSF program officers as appropriate, but individual committee members should not.