

RECRUITING
**ADVISORY
GROUPS**

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CONSULTANT

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Hello, I'm Leila and I'm a business psychologist, consultant and coach.

I have over 20 years of cross industry experience, supporting people, teams and leaders to reach their potential.

Advisory boards are one way small businesses can enhance the decision making process. This guide is for Small Businesses and Non Profits that want to benefit from regular external advice.



WHY ADVISORY GROUPS?

ADVISORY GROUPS PROVIDE EXTERNAL SOUNDING BOARDS TO SUPPORT, TEST AND CONSOLIDATE IDEAS.

ON A PRACTICAL LEVEL THEY BRING IN EXPRTISE AN ORGANISATION MIGHT NOT HAVE ACCESS TO ON A DAY TO DAY BASIS IN A FLEXIBLE WAY.

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IT'S ABOUT THE NUANCE

Advisory groups support, test and consolidate your business questions and new ideas, often called Non Executive Directors or 'NEDS' these individuals are selected or recruited for their expertise

Your experts need a mission and space for debate. Your organisation wants their nuanced view of recommendations before making its own decision.

A focus group is different and may require a facilitated discussion, these groups are usually recruited to be representative of a client, customer or staff demographic

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RECRUITING INDIVIDUALS

For first time recruitment concentrate on quality of the first member, this builds the credibility of your group and makes it attractive to potential members.

Do you employ staff? Consider a short application or interview process, build on your current good processes and be transparent in your selection process

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The first recruit
sets the tone,
and helps to
attract good
quality members

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AGE

Challenge your own assumptions about what makes a good advisor, knowledge is often associated with age, don't miss out on younger talent and expertise.

SETTING UP VIRTUAL BOARDS

ONE. Let them bond

It is useful to develop the relationships one on one between your members. Set up a series of 'getting to know you' coffee calls. The group will work better together on problems and challenges if they can understand each others perspectives.

Individuals tend to come up with good ideas, groups reflect on those ideas better.
Encourage side chats!

This also reinforces the message that you are bringing and value different view points to enhance the company decision making as a continuous process.

TWO. Give them a juicy problem

You want this group to develop useful ways of discussing your business challenges.

Give them a juicy warm up question, it doesn't have to be a real life problem. You want to see this group in action, to get a feel for the strengths and limitations in thinking.

Reflect:

What perspectives are missing?

Is it a safe or inclusive space to speak up?

THREE: Let them set your expectations

Timing of meetings, commitment, agendas and scope are essential, do this before or just after the first group get together.

Do facilitate a discussion about members expectations of the group and it's aims.

You might want to ask 'what do you want to get from the experience of being a group member?'

FOUR: Acknowledge contributions in different ways

You won't always get a full group to attend scheduled meetings, and you won't get the best from your members in 60 minute windows, create ways in which the group can contribute before and afterwards.

The real benefit of an advisory group is that there is less pressure to reach consensus. The company takes their advice and makes the decision.

Try this: Instead of an agenda, publish a question for early consideration and comment.

MAKE SPACE FOR DEBATE

Do they disagree? the absence of vocal disagreement could be a sign that the group is uncomfortable with conflict resolution, and this is an essential skill and dynamic of any working group.

You can prepare the online space for useful debate by using diagrams, these provide the key structure of a problem or issues for the business. It is a helpful way to keep a group visually focused on the scope of a problem.

Argument diagrams can be created quickly, use a mind map, a process or place key words in for or against boxes

Use the digital tools in your online meeting software, e.g. whiteboards and sticky notes

“
diagrams improve
discussions, and
allow members to
structure their
views
”

GROWTH AND LIFECYCLE

Set a timescale of 2 or 4 years for initial involvement with the group, agree with the group if special interest advisors will be invited from time to time.

It's important to think about how you acknowledge the groups input during and after their contribution to the group.

Say thank you and invite feedback (praise, advice and evaluation).

PLAN TO REFRESH

Refresh your group often, bringing in new members every 6 or 12 months depending on the growth of your business.

Younger businesses will need more specific and nuanced advisors in the first few years, you may want to set up special advisory groups on one topic for example.

ASK

Make time to have one to one discussions with your group members and collect feedback. What are they getting from the group? What do they think works? What would they change? most importantly, who or what do they think is missing from the group?

TRAINING

Recruiting a diverse board outside of your current network brings its own challenges.

Don't assume that your advisors will understand the nuance of your business, your industry, regulation and standards.

Do provide an advisor pack with key terms, your business model (especially if it's evolving or unique), and a bio of each member and the special skills and knowledge they bring to the group.

Do ask your advisors if they want training or support through 1:2:1 sessions with key staff to understand any key areas.

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PAYING FOR ADVICE

Advisory groups provide a low or no cost flexible source of expertise

Be clear about your intentions to pay advisors upfront, arrangements vary significantly between businesses and groups.

Things you might want to consider:

- Can you access funding to pay for advisors?
- Are you paying yourself a wage?
- Have you asked the group what price they would put on their advice?

WHEN TO PAY

When your ask goes beyond advice, debate and expertise you need to think about paying or putting a price against the service. This is good business advice as you cannot always rely on getting it for free!

Many advisors will provide partial or fully discounted consultancy or services, do ask what the cost of that service would be if you were paying and be transparent about the value you get from the group.

Further resources

[How to run focus groups](#)

[Diverse Boards](#)