12 Tips
to Successfully
Form & Lead a Task Force

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RamCard Office
Colorado State University
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# Leading Committees and Task Forces

## Types of Working Groups Commonly Used in Universities

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<th>Advantages</th>
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<td><strong>Standing Committee</strong></td>
<td>To address a recurring need within an organization</td>
<td>Give advice, make decisions or recommendations</td>
<td>Curriculum committee, admissions committee, technology committee</td>
<td>Organizational memory, development of expertise</td>
<td>Can lead to entrenched power; people can burn out</td>
<td>Needs chair who understands role in system</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ad Hoc Committee</strong></td>
<td>To address short-term, non-recurring tasks or needs</td>
<td>Make a recommendation or accomplish an objective</td>
<td>Plan and host a conference, Decide who receives a special award</td>
<td>Flexible use, short-term commitment</td>
<td>Can lose its way if charge is not clear and deadlines not set</td>
<td>Leader needs good facilitation skills because no procedures are in place</td>
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<td><strong>Task Force</strong></td>
<td>To address a major, complex issue or project</td>
<td>Make complex and consequential recommendations</td>
<td>Redesign the curriculum</td>
<td>Temporary but of major importance</td>
<td>Can get bogged down; overload, poor commitment possible; can go astray.</td>
<td>Need to keep in mind final decision-makers and their requirements</td>
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TOP 5 CHALLENGES FACING TASK FORCES AND COMMITTEES:

- Creating the time for people to serve: 71%
- Politics driving decisions: 56%
- Ineffective group process (communication, decision making, etc.): 53%
- The committee has no real influence: 52%
- Selecting the right team members: 43%

8 Keys to Improving Task Forces and Committees in Higher Education – Academic Impressions
1. **Know the question/problem/issue (here forward referred to as topic) you are to address**

- Research to understand how the topic is presenting/impacting the local community.
- Research and relate the topic beyond what may be happening in your local environment/community.
- Identify stakeholders who have input on the topic the task force will address – spend time with them individually and in person.
- Seek context and understanding about the topic through the perspective of others/other communities – historical and current.
  - Identify experts and their work related to the topic – draw on their work and experiences.
- Draft a description, in talking points format, about how the topic is presenting in and/or having impact on the local community. This will serve as a key communication resource.
2. **Confirm objectivity in your role as task force leader**

- Know your limits and biases. Be open to working on them to provide the best, most objective leadership.
- Call on colleagues and experts to help you with this self-exploration.
- Seek context and understanding about the topic through the perspective of others/other communities – historical and current.
3. **Cultivate leadership & sponsors for the initiative**

- **Executive Leaders:** Identify executive sponsor(s); define and document their expectations – charge, deliverables, timeline, flexibility, available funding, and perspective on task force membership.

- **Community/Key Stakeholders:** Make connections to support resources – communications/media, graphic designers, finance/accounting, admin support, etc.
4. **Build a network of solidarity**

- Connect with, collaborate with, leverage, align other groups/committees who have a similar/supportive interest.
5. Develop and document task force scope

- Clearly define the scope of work for the task force with the executive sponsor.
  - Develop this scope in the form of an official “task force charge” from the executive sponsor.
- Confirm:
  - Expected outcomes and deliverables
  - Final Decisions Model – Who Will Make the Decisions?
  - Expected timeline (establish and negotiate room for flexibility)
  - Encourage executive sponsor to remain open to task force input
- Take time to develop and refine the charge with input from the task force and stakeholders.
  - Use this exercise as an opportunity to team build with the task force and help them become grounded in the work on which you will embark.
- As you finalize the ‘scope of work’/charge, remember it is equally important to state what is not in the scope. This will help you remain focused on the defined goals and objectives with the task force.
6. **Develop task force membership**

- Form task force membership thoughtfully, strategically, and completely – invite differing perspectives, include members of the community directly impacted by the decisions/recommendations the task force will make.
- Be open to large task force membership. Long-term projects may naturally cause shifts in member availability.
- Spend time developing the task force as a team – team building, learning together, and celebrating.
7. **Get to know the landscape**

- Understand the environment (physical, financial, political, social/societal, social justice, etc.), and consider how you may need to engage it in the work of the task force.
8. Communicate thoughtfully, frequently, clearly

- Effective communication isn’t accidental
- Develop a communication plan and platform (consider primary audiences, frequency, methods -- email, web page, social media, local media, update reports, etc.)
- Periodic updates to talking points for different audiences can help maintain focus on facts and manage the “grape vine”.
- Include communication experts as members of your task force.
9. Partialize and prioritize

• Establish clear goals and objectives that align with the task force charge.
• Use your timeline to set priorities for subcommittee work.
• Subcommittees are key to getting work done. Call on members to lead activities of the task force – this allows them to contribute, develop, and shine!
• Outline a Clear Decision-making Process
  • Majority Vote versus Consensus Model
10. **Document related data through solid assessment**

- Define an assessment plan – consider what you need to learn and the different ways you will document findings.
  - Anticipate related challenges. Being prepared with data will be helpful as you respond to challenges and opposition.
- Invite task force members who have experience and expertise with data analysis and assessment.
11. Record and report

- Record meeting minutes with progress and specific action items noted. Distribute minutes to all task force members timely.
- Develop periodic summary progress reports for interested/influential stakeholders – these may best be presented in image-rich infographic form.
- Draft final recommendation/report with input from executive sponsor.
  - Confirm expectations about wrapping up the task force recommendations.
- Connect to your communication plan with final web page, policy, and/or media updates.
12. Celebrate success and accomplishments

- Celebrate milestones along the way to keep everyone energized.
Interesting Related Resources:


• Nelson Strategic Consulting -- nscstrategies.com/governance/10-steps-forming-successful-task-force/

• National Council of Nonprofits -- councilofnonprofits.org/trends-policy-issues/lessons-learned-successful-task-forces
Thank you!