



Resident Councils

A Guide to Creating and Sustaining an Effective Council

2015

Developed by the Iowa Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman

The mission of Iowa's Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman is to protect the health, safety, welfare, and rights of individuals residing in long-term care by investigating complaints, seeking resolutions to problems, and providing advocacy with the goal of enhancing quality of life and care.

Table of Contents

Introducing the Resident Council

What is a Resident Council?	3
Benefits of a Resident Council.....	4

Organizing a Resident Council

Roles of the Resident and Facility	5
How to Build a Resident Council	6
Council Leadership.....	8

Making it Work

Council Bylaws	9
Meeting Tips	9
Keys to Success	10
Support	11

Resources

Appendix A Sample Meeting Agendas	12
Appendix B Sample Meeting Minutes	14
Appendix C Promotional Resources.....	18
Appendix D Sample Bylaws	21
Appendix E Federal Law	22
Appendix F Additional Resources	23

What is a Resident Council?

A resident council is an independent, organized group of residents living in a long-term care facility who meet on a regular basis to promote and enhance the quality of life for all residents. Resident councils create change, address quality of life and care issues, plan resident activities, and discuss any matters brought before the council. Resident councils provide a forum for residents to voice their concerns and speak to the issues that are important to them and their daily life. The primary goal of a resident council is to allow residents to exercise self-determination and become more involved in providing input regarding their daily life in the facility.

Specifically, resident councils:

- Permit members to actively participate in making choices regarding activities, meals, daily schedules, personal care, and other aspects of resident life;
- Promote the quality of life and quality of care for all residents;
- Provide an opportunity for residents to discuss concerns in a safe setting; and
- Enhance communication and problem-solving between staff and residents.

Any and all residents of the facility can become a member of the resident council. Anyone else must be invited by a member to attend; this includes facility staff, family members, volunteer ombudsmen, etc.

Every nursing home resident council operates differently due to the uniqueness of the residents who participate and their specific preferences and values. The development of an effective resident council is a vital part in the health, safety, and welfare of residents in nursing homes.

The primary goal of a resident council is to allow residents to exercise self-determination and to encourage them to become more involved in providing input regarding their daily life.

Benefits of a Resident Council

As a team, the council and facility can work to bring about positive changes that will promote the quality of life and quality of care for all residents.

Resident Benefits

The number one priority for resident councils is to meet the needs of the residents. A resident council is an organized and ongoing support mechanism for residents. Through shared experiences, residents are able to draw strength from one another and feel comfortable discussing their concerns and/or wishes in a safe environment. For those who are unable or unwilling to speak up for themselves, the council may be beneficial in communicating their ideas or wishes. Resident councils help to ensure that resident concerns and desires are taken seriously by the staff. Resident councils allow for increased communication between the staff and residents; as well as provide opportunities to make staff aware of issues that are of high importance to the residents. Resident councils also provide an opportunity for resident interaction and engagement with one's peers.

Facility Benefits

The activities of a resident council not only benefit the residents, but also the facility and staff as a whole. Resident councils allow for greater communication between staff and residents, creating a team environment at the facility. In addition, resident councils provide discussion opportunities for staff to address concerns, as well as chances for staff and resident collaboration to improve quality of life and care at the facility.

Roles of the Resident and Facility

A successful and effective resident council depends on the collaboration between residents and facility staff, each with their own set of responsibilities.

Residents

Resident participation is the only thing that keeps a resident council active. Residents who are interested in participating in a resident council have the right to organize and participate. They are ultimately responsible for all activities that relate to their council; encouraging resident participation, holding regular and effective meetings, collaborating with facility staff, addressing facility-wide and specific concerns, etc.

The resident council will have an appointed leader that, among other tasks, will:

- Facilitate communication between residents and staff;
- Create an environment of team work between the council and staff;
- Prompt staff if they are not responsive to council business; and
- Conduct effective council meetings.

Facility Staff

While a resident council is run by the residents, the facility also has a role. It is required by law that the facility must provide a resident council with a private space to meet and a designated liaison that is responsible for assisting the council. This individual is also responsible for listening to and acting upon the concerns and recommendations shared by the council. It is important to note that staff members are allowed to attend meetings **only when invited** by a current resident council member.

Task examples the staff liaison may provide to the council:

- Assist with recruiting members and announcing meeting information (with council permission);
- Explain facility policies and procedures;
- Inform the council of changes and new information related to the facility;
- Create an awareness and appreciation of the council; and
- Assist with concern resolution.

See page 22 for specifics about what the law says relating to resident (and family) councils.

How to Build a Resident Council

If you are interested in participating in a resident council, ask other residents and/or staff members if there is a council up and running at the facility. If so, ask for the details about when and where the council meets and join in!

If the facility does *not* have a council established:

- (1) **Hold an exploratory meeting.** The purpose of this meeting is to provide all residents with basic information about a resident council and what it can do for them. Residents may not be aware that they can assemble as an independent group to speak about issues that concern them in the facility. If there is interest in creating a resident council, this meeting can also:
 - Discuss when, where, and how often the group should meet.
 - Determine the desired structure of the council. There is no right or wrong way to organize a resident council; the individual characteristics of the facility and its council members will influence what works best. The structure of the resident council should be flexible and unique to accommodate the needs of the group.
 - Identify potential resident leadership. A successful resident council has at least one representative (President) that can effectively facilitate the meetings and discuss resident concerns with facility staff. It is up to the group how the council should be run. Discuss whether it makes sense for there to be a committee (President, Vice President, Secretary, etc.) or will one individual leader suffice?
 - Determine what role the facility staff will play in the council. It is important to identify a staff liaison that will provide council support when needed. This staff member can help promote resident council meetings within the facility, announce meeting details to residents, relay council concerns to other staff, and follow up on grievances.
- (2) **Follow up after the meeting.** After a meeting date and time is decided, the resident(s) identified as the representatives work (with facility staff, if desired) to promote the resident council meetings by:
 - Developing fliers to include in admissions packets;
 - Creating meeting invitations to distribute to all residents; and
 - Discussing the inclusion of resident council meetings on the activities calendar.

(3) **Hold the first meeting.** During initial meetings, develop meeting bylaws, rules, and expectations to set the tone for an effective discussion and resolution process. The function of a resident council is *not* to attack the facility. The culture of the group should be encouragement and support; also to motivate the staff to work collaboratively with the council. During this meeting, the council could also:

- Provide information about what kind of issues the council can work on.
- Delegate any tasks to support the group (i.e., someone to take and post meeting minutes).
- Discuss the meeting format and agenda.
- Vote on elected officers or representatives.
- Develop bylaws or written guidelines for the operation of the group.
- Decide future meeting dates and times (monthly, quarterly, etc.).

“Participating in Resident Council is very fulfilling. You help people get to know each other, and it’s something the whole nursing home can benefit from.” – Jan Dewey, 2015 Resident Council President

(4) **Holding regular meetings.** After all business matters (officers, meeting place and time, meeting format, etc.) have been finalized, the resident council process can begin! Commit to holding regularly scheduled meetings. Each meeting should follow an agenda that may include the following items:

1. Welcome
 - i. Introductions – welcome new residents
 - ii. Take attendance
2. Old Business
 - i. Review the previous meeting’s notes
 - ii. Discuss follow-up on items from previous meeting’s action plan
 - iii. Share any successes from previous meeting
3. New Business
 - i. Allow the facility staff (if invited) to share any news or information
 - ii. Allow speakers (if invited) to present
 - iii. Allow residents to share any concerns by department
 - iv. Create action plan to resolve concerns
4. Open Discussion on any other topics

Council Leadership

Each resident council is unique. Some councils elect a resident council President. Other councils prefer to appoint tasks to council members as needed. There is no right or wrong way to form your leadership. It is important to continue to make adaptations with your leadership team so as to meet the needs of your council. If it is desired to elect officers, the following includes a listing of the typical officer roles and responsibilities.

- **President/Chairperson**

The president/chairperson's role is to work with the other officers and the staff liaison to create a meeting agenda and lead the meeting. The president will direct the meeting, and ensure that everyone's comments and/or questions are heard. After the meeting, the president/chairperson may act as a liaison between the residents and the facility. This individual will also ensure follow-up on concerns before the next council meeting.

- **Vice President**

The vice president may fill in for the president if he/she is unavailable. Some councils utilize this role to fulfill other purposes that arise. For example, some vice presidents handle the secretary and/or treasurer duties if there are no other council members interested in those positions. A vice president could also chair small group committees (like a fundraising committee, welcoming committee, or activity committee, for example).

- **Secretary**

The secretary is responsible for the documentation of the meeting through minutes. The council should always have someone appointed to take notes during the meetings, even if there is no secretary position. Some resident councils choose to have their staff liaison take minutes, or ask a volunteer to help with this task.

- **Treasurer**

A treasurer position may be appropriate if there are resident council funds that are raised and/or spent. The treasurer can provide routine updates on the status of the treasury. All council funds are to be kept separate from facility funds. The business office staff person may be able to provide some assistance, as requested.

Council Bylaws

Council bylaws serve as written guidelines by which the group operates. While many councils are informal, it may be beneficial to have bylaws which provide clarification on policies or procedures. Bylaws should be simple and provide direction to the council (sample bylaws are on page 21).

Meeting Tips

Resident council meetings provide the council members with an organized period of time to discuss pressing issues in the facility, problem-solve, and engage in productive conversation to create meaningful change in their home.

To conduct an effective meeting, it is suggested that the council:

- Create and stick to an agenda
- Stay on schedule and on topic as much as possible
- Find a comfortable, quiet meeting place (use a microphone if necessary)
- Work in a positive environment through respectful interactions
- Encourage questions and open discussion
- Remind members of the purpose of the council and why meetings are important
- Ensure that a single individual does not monopolize the meeting
 - Encourage residents to complete a complaint form (see example on page 20), or speak directly to staff if they have specific and individual concerns to address
- Make sure information is communicated in ways that all residents are able to understand and access
- Delegate someone to take meeting minutes; this keeps a record of what has been addressed for those who were unable to attend the meeting (meeting minute examples are on pages 14-15)
- Post meeting minutes in a conspicuous place so residents know what issues are being worked on
- Plan a social time or special activity after the meeting as an incentive to participate

Create a “parking lot” for issues that need to be brought up at a later time. This ensures that ideas are not dropped.

Keys to Success

Encouraging ongoing resident participation is key to a successful resident council. Posting an agenda one week in advance is a great way to increase attendance and spread awareness. The staff liaison can also assist with publicizing meetings and encouraging residents to attend (see promotional examples on pages 18-19). Staff and council members should work together to devise a way for bed or room-bound residents to have input into the meetings.

Active council members can assist with recruiting new council members: everyone makes a difference! Recruiting new members may be done in a variety of ways. Council members should encourage residents who voice concerns to attend the council meetings. Some councils appoint certain members to meet with new residents when they move into the facility. These council members educate about and invite new residents to attend the council meetings. In doing so, friendships are formed and new residents are able to begin adjusting to the facility.

Three motives for participation have been identified in the book, Resident Councils in Action¹ by the Advocacy Center for Long-Term Care. These motives include:

1) Self-Interest

- Encourage those who have concerns to address them during the resident council meeting. Residents will want to be involved if the council is discussing an issue that is important to them. It may be helpful to identify the issues of interest for the council members, and focus on those.

2) Results

- Getting results is a big motivator for residents to continue to attend the resident council meetings. It is important that the council be viewed as a forum for resolving concerns, implementing new ideas, and sharing suggestions. Council members remain motivated by seeing the change they have created.

3) Recognition

- Recognize council members who provide helpful solutions, or make important contributions to the council. Officers and council members alike deserve recognition for their continued participation in the resident council.

¹ Vernon, Jane Ellen. Resident Councils in Action, the Advocacy Center for Long-Term Care, Minneapolis, MN.

Support

If your council would like any technical support/assistance with the creation or ongoing success of your Resident Council, the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman is available to assist. This Office's mission is to protect the health, safety, welfare and rights of individuals residing in long-term care by investigating complaints, seeking resolutions to problems and providing advocacy, with the goal of enhancing quality of life and care. A Long-Term Care Ombudsman will be glad to assist your council, if invited. All services from this Office are free and confidential.

Here are some ways a Long-Term Care Ombudsman assists residents in long-term care:

- By acting as an advocate for individuals residing in nursing facilities
- By investigating complaints made by, or on behalf of, residents
- By serving as a resource for answers regarding long-term care rules and rights
- By providing information, education, awareness, and training about long-term care options and residents' rights
- By promoting policy changes to improve the quality of life for individuals in long-term care

If you need assistance, the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman is available to help. Contact your Long-Term Care Ombudsman for more information:

1-866-236-1430

Appendix A | Sample Meeting Agendas

SAMPLE

Resident Council Meeting

9/10/14

- 1) Welcome
 - a. Introductions
 - i. Welcome new resident, Sarah!
 - b. Attendance
- 2) Old Business
 - a. Review meeting minutes from 8/13/14
 - b. Overview of progress and action plans
 - i. Action plan review: Frank (Food Services Director) has addressed the food temperatures: hot items weren't hot enough. This is resolved.
 - ii. Shopping Trip
 1. On activities calendar for next Thursday
 - iii. Take-Out Food Day
 1. Sue (Activities Director) is planning for some time next month
- 3) New Business
 - a. Facility updates: Frank (Food Services Director)
 - i. Meal suggestion box placed in the dining room
 - ii. Resident-selected birthday treat
 - b. New concerns/develop action plans
 - i. Would like coffee refills during meals. Action Plan: Frank will have staff put coffee carafes on each table.
 - c. Resident Rights review
 - i. The right to privacy
 - d. Speaker, Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

Save the date! Our next meeting is 10/8/14.

TEMPLATE

Resident Council Meeting

1) Welcome

a. Introductions

i. Welcome new resident(s), _____!

b. Attendance

2) Old Business

a. Review meeting minutes from _____

b. Overview of progress and follow-up

i. _____

1. _____

ii. _____

1. _____

3) New Business

a. Facility updates: _____

i. _____

ii. _____

b. New concerns

c. Develop action plans

d. Resident Rights review

e. Speaker, if any

Save the date! Our next meeting is _____ .

Appendix B | Sample Meeting Minutes

Date: 10/13/14

Time Started: 3:02 pm

Time Adjourned: 3:52 pm

Resident Council Minutes

Facility Name: Mountain View Manor

Officers in Attendance:

Sharon Jones Dick Brown Karen Smith (notes)

Pam Anderson _____

Residents in Attendance:

Tyler Jackson Arlene Moore Chelsea Miller

Red Wilson Tim Gavin Bill Clark

Doris Hall Betty Young Ruth Lee

Donna Scott Shirley Green Judy Wilson

Kathy Baker _____

Staff and Visitors Invited by Resident Council and in Attendance:

Patti Davis (administrator) Chris White (clerk) Donna David (director of nursing)

Minutes or Previous Council Meeting:

☒ Read and approved as read ☐ Council concerns from previous meeting were reviewed and accepted

☐ Read and approved as corrected

Old Business (list follow-up from last month's minutes and identify person responsible. Move issues that were not resolved to New Business):

* Shower schedules - Dick Brown
→ Director of Nursing to meet w/ any residents interested
in changing bath times 10/14 at 10:00 am in Act. Room

New Business:

Department Overview/Develop Action Plan

Current Situation	What is our goal?	What do we need to do to get there?	Who will help us get there?	
Food temps cold/ room trays	Hot food	Can dietary send trays out 1/2 hour before meals? Or change routine?	Chris can work on routine change. Will also order insulated plate warmers	<input type="checkbox"/> Resolved (Continue monitoring) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Resolved (Action needed) <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Resolved (Further steps needed)
Need more outings	Increase outings to 3x per month	Arrange transport - will budget allow this?	Patti will talk with Julie in Activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Resolved (Continue monitoring) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Resolved (Action needed) <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Resolved (Further steps needed)
Treatments are always late	Have nurses provide timely treatments	Work on this with DON	DON has already talked to staff. Have new protocol + residents to monitor	<input type="checkbox"/> Resolved (Continue monitoring) <input type="checkbox"/> Not Resolved (Action needed) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Resolved (Further steps needed)
				<input type="checkbox"/> Resolved (Continue monitoring) <input type="checkbox"/> Not Resolved (Action needed) <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Resolved (Further steps needed)

Compliments/Notes of Appreciation: loved last month's trip to the City museum!

Resident Right(s) Review: discussed Res Right to visitors

Speaker Summary: Ombudsman - advocate for us/ helps resolve problems!

Facility Policies or Procedures Developed/Revised/Updates in Past 30 Days: _____

Donna discussed new procedures nurses to use to complete treatments.

Next Meeting (date& time): 11/7/14 @ 3pm

TEMPLATE

Date: _____

Time Started: _____

Time Adjourned: _____

Resident Council Minutes

Facility Name: _____

Officers in Attendance:

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Residents in Attendance:

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Staff and Visitors Invited by Resident Council and in Attendance:

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Minutes or Previous Council Meeting:

☐ Read and approved as read ☐ Council concerns from previous meeting
were reviewed and accepted

☐ Read and approved as corrected

Old Business (list follow-up from last month's minutes and identify person responsible. Move issues that were not resolved to New Business):

New Business:

Department Overview/Develop Action Plan

Current Situation	What is our goal?	What do we need to do to get there?	Who will help us get there?	
				<input type="checkbox"/> Resolved (Continue monitoring) <input type="checkbox"/> Not Resolved (Action needed) <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Resolved (Further steps needed)
				<input type="checkbox"/> Resolved (Continue monitoring) <input type="checkbox"/> Not Resolved (Action needed) <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Resolved (Further steps needed)
				<input type="checkbox"/> Resolved (Continue monitoring) <input type="checkbox"/> Not Resolved (Action needed) <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Resolved (Further steps needed)
				<input type="checkbox"/> Resolved (Continue monitoring) <input type="checkbox"/> Not Resolved (Action needed) <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Resolved (further steps needed)

Compliments/Notes of Appreciation: _____

Resident Right(s) Review: _____

Speaker Summary: _____

Facility Policies or Procedures Developed/Revised/Updates in Past 30 Days: _____

Next Meeting (date& time): _____

Appendix C | Promotional Resources

SAMPLE: Flyer for Admission Packets

Welcome to Mountain View Manor!

Resident Council meetings are held the first Tuesday of every month at 10:00 am in the Activity Room. Please join us!

What is a Resident Council?

A group of residents living in a long-term care facility that join together to form a united voice to communicate concerns to facility staff and collaboratively work toward improvements in the facility.



What have we done so far for Mountain View Manor?

- Improved variety of meal choices
- Scheduled regular resident outings and social activities
- Held educational presentations for residents on a variety of topics
- Implemented weekly “Karaoke Night”
- Helped make Mountain View Manor a great place to live!



Resident Council Meeting



- Create change
- Address quality of life
- Address quality of care, dignity and respect
- Plan resident activities



The first Tuesday of every month at
10:00 am in the Activity Room

Sample of a Complaint Form Template

Mountain View Manor Resident Complaint & Action Plan

Issue/Action Plan example: Mr. Smith requests that the dietary workers be educated about his request to receive a breakfast tray each day around 10 am. Mr. Smith would like Jerry to follow up with his staff to arrange for this.

Date of resident council meeting: _____

Following concerns/action plan suggestions were directed to _____

Issue/Action Plan:

Please review this issue/suggested action plan, and respond by: _____
to this individual: _____

Mountain View Manor Resident Complaint & Action Plan

Issue/Action Plan example: Mr. Smith requests that the dietary workers be educated about his request to receive a breakfast tray each day around 10 am. Mr. Smith would like Jerry to follow up with his staff to arrange for this.

Date of resident council meeting: _____

Following concerns/action plan suggestions were directed to: _____

Issue/Action Plan:

Please review this issue/suggested action plan, and respond by: _____
to this individual: _____

Appendix D | Sample Bylaws

I. Name

The name of the organization shall be **(name of council)**.

II. Purpose

The purpose of the **(name of council)** is to:

- A. Give residents greater participation in decisions within the facility;
- B. Suggest improvements and help the administration provide better programs, surroundings, and services;
- C. Promote and receive necessary information for the benefit of all residents; and
- D. Promote friendship and understanding among residents.

III. Membership

Every resident of **(name of facility)** becomes a member of the council upon admission to the facility. Every member of the council shall be given the opportunity to vote.

IV. Officers and Their Duties

Officers and council shall be elected every **(period of time, such as yearly, every six months, etc.)**, and include:

- President – shall preside over all meetings;
- Vice President – presides in the absence of the president;
- Secretary – records and maintains the minutes of each meeting; and
- Treasurer – responsible for all financial business of the council.

V. Elections

Elections of **(officers/representatives and committee members)** shall be held every **(month of elections)**. The elections will be conducted using written ballots listing nominations for each office or committee. Nominations will be made at the meeting prior to the election.

VI. Meetings

Meetings will be held **(specific day/month/time)**.

VII. Amendments

Amendments may be made to these bylaws at any regular or special meeting of the council, by a 2/3 vote, providing suggested changes have been read at the previous meeting. Amendments will go into effect in seven (7) days.

VIII. Rules of Order

Each general council meeting will follow the agenda as prepared by **(name of position)**. Robert's Rules of Order will be followed unless the council wishes to change or add to the rules to suit the wishes of the majority.

Appendix E | Federal Law

Below are the federal laws mandating long-term care facilities to offer and support councils.

F243

§483.15(c) Participation in Resident and Family Groups

- (1) A resident has the right to organize and participate in resident groups in the facility;
- (2) A resident's family has the right to meet in the facility with the families of other residents in the facility;
- (3) The facility must provide a resident or family group, if one exists, with private space;
- (4) Staff or visitors may attend meetings at the group's invitation;
- (5) The facility must provide a designated staff person responsible for providing assistance and responding to written requests that result from group meetings;

F244

§483.15(c)(6) When a resident or family group exists, the facility must listen to the views and act upon the grievances and recommendations of residents and families concerning proposed policy and operational decisions affecting resident care and life in the facility.

Interpretive Guidelines §483.15(c)

This requirement does not require that residents' organize a residents or family group. However, whenever residents or their families wish to organize, facilities must allow them to do so without interference. The facility must provide the group with space, privacy for meetings, and staff support. Normally, the designated staff person responsible for assistance and liaison between the group and the facility's administration and any other staff members attend the meeting only if requested.

"A resident's or family group" is defined as a group that meets regularly to:

- Discuss and offer suggestions about facility policies and procedures affecting residents' care, treatment, and quality of life;
- Support each other;
- Plan resident and family activities;
- Participate in educational activities;
- For any other purpose.

The facility is required to listen to resident and family group recommendations and grievances. Acting upon these issues does not mean that the facility must accede to all group recommendations, but the facility must seriously consider the group's recommendations and must attempt to accommodate those recommendations, to the extent practicable, in developing and changing facility policies affecting resident care and life in the facility. The facility should communicate its decisions to the resident and/or family group.

Procedures §483.15(c)

If no organized group exists, determine if residents have attempted to form one and have been unsuccessful, and, if so, why.

Appendix F | Additional Resources

[Consumer Voice website additional resident council resources:](#)

<http://theconsumervoice.org/uploads/files/long-term-care-recipient/Additional-Resources-f.pdf>

[Consumer Voice website regarding resident councils:](#)

<http://theconsumervoice.org/issues/recipients/nursing-home-residents/resident-council-center>

[Iowa Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman:](#) <https://www.iowaaging.gov/long-term-care-ombudsman>

Missouri's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program's Technical Assistance Manual titled ["How to Organize and Direct an Effective Resident Council"](#):

http://health.mo.gov/seniors/ombudsman/pdf/HowToOrganizeAnd_DirectAnEffectiveResidentCouncil.pdf

Vernon, Jane Ellen. [Resident Councils in Action](#), the Advocacy Center for Long-Term Care, Minneapolis, MN.