

# A GUIDE TO STRENGTHENING RESIDENT COUNCILS IN NURSING HOMES

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# INTRODUCTION

A Resident Council can transform the lives of people who live in a nursing home. For many people living there, a nursing home can feel more like an institution than a home. A well-run Resident Council can change that.

It doesn't matter where residents are in the process, whether they are just starting a Council, revitalizing an already existing Council, or struggling with a specific issue like getting more resident involvement. This guide can help residents and those who support them create a successful Council.

This Resident Council Guide has been developed with national partners to guide residents – and those who support them – help build a nursing home community in which residents are respected and valued—a place where residents have a sense of purpose and their well-being is the primary concern. Residents from around the country provided feedback to help create this guide. One thing that they want other residents to know is: You are not alone. The stories, tips, and quotes throughout the document are from residents who wanted to share their experiences.

This guide is designed to:

- Describe the purpose of a Resident Council
- Explain the benefits of a resident-run Council
- Give guidance on forming or strengthening a Resident Council
- Give problem-solving tips on common issues that could arise to promote Resident Council success

*The Moving Forward Coalition gratefully acknowledges previous Resident Council guides and handbooks written by the Kansas, New Jersey, Pennsylvania Long-Term Care Ombudsman and other LTC Ombudsman Programs.*

# RESIDENT COUNCIL GUIDE AT-A-GLANCE

This “At-A-Glance” provides a summary of each section of the guide so the reader can go right to the section that will be most helpful.

## **What is a Resident Council? ..... Pg. 5**

This section discusses what a Resident Council is, its purpose, and the rights of residents living in nursing homes.

## **Getting Started..... Pg. 9**

*First Resident Council Meetings:* Successfully organizing a new Resident Council or improving an existing one involves the same basic principles. This section covers how to get started and who can help residents along the way.

*Council Structure:* There are different ways to organize a Council to meet the residents’ needs. This section shares a few options that may make the most sense for your nursing home.

## **Examples of Resident Council Best Practices ..... Pg. 16**

## **Organizational Tools.....Pg. 19**

*Agenda:* An essential first step in conducting an effective meeting is planning and preparing an agenda. This section provides tools to building a strong agenda.

*Minutes:* Minutes are an important record of what was discussed during Resident Council meetings. This section includes best practices to take minutes.

*Bylaws:* These rules give members direction on Council procedures and should be established early on. They should be clear, simple, and short. In this section, you’ll find suggestions and a set of sample bylaws.

**Common Challenges and Possible Solutions.....Pg. 25**

There have been thousands of Resident Councils across the country for decades. They have all encountered challenges. This section includes some of the more common challenges and possible solutions.

**Addressing Issues Raised By Nursing Home Residents .....Pg. 30**

Many residents talk about their frustration that issues raised in Resident Council are not resolved. This section discusses how a Resident Council can “close the loop” and solve problems.

**Appendix .....Pg. 32**

**Appendix I. Meeting Structure Guide.....Pg. 33**

**Appendix II. Sample Bylaws.. .....Pg. 37**

**Appendix III. The Importance of Supporting Resident Councils Pg. 41**

**Appendix IV. Sources.....Pg. 44**

**Appendix V. Printable Forms .....Pg. 46**

# **WHAT IS A RESIDENT COUNCIL?**

**“For so long, so many haven’t had a voice, or if they’ve had a voice it was like whispering in the dark. And so now that we have [a voice], it fills the need to say, ‘now we can really have our issues and concerns addressed,’ and we know they will be addressed.”**

**“It’s nice to belong to something, to be part of a group helping my community.”**

## **WHAT IS A RESIDENT COUNCIL?**

A Resident Council is an independent and organized group that meets on a regular basis to promote and enhance the quality of life for all residents. **A Resident Council’s most important and defining feature is that it is made up of residents, directed by residents, and works for residents.**

Resident Councils advocate for change and improvement when quality of care and life issues are identified by residents. Nursing home residents often say that the number one thing is that they want to be heard. The primary goal of a Resident Council is to provide a space for residents to voice their perspectives and speak to the issues that are important to them and their daily life.

While each Resident Council will be unique, all Councils share the general goal to promote better quality of life for residents living in the nursing home.

Here are some **common goals** shared by many Resident Councils:

- Empower residents to improve their quality of life and exercise their rights.
- Identify problems and solutions from the residents' perspectives.
- Promote understanding and respectful relationships among residents, families, friends and staff.
- Make recommendations to the nursing home's administrator about improvement of services, practices and policies.
- Keep up to date on news and information that is relevant to residents living in the nursing home.
- Enable connections to the community through events.
- Raise funds and plan for Council projects and activities.

Residents elect or recruit Council leadership, manage their own meetings, decide who to invite, and determine Council priorities.

Residents coordinate with staff to schedule accessible meeting space within the nursing home. Even when the Resident Council asks staff to assist in organizing meetings or projects, it is the residents who govern what is discussed, what decisions are made, and what actions will be taken.

Every Resident Council has an opportunity to positively impact the lives of all residents in their nursing home. Residents experience unique challenges and best understand the details of their nursing home lives. While staff and LTC Ombudsman Programs may advocate on their behalf, people in those roles do not share the daily experiences of residents who are bound together by nursing home life. The Resident Council draws residents together toward a common cause, increases a sense of shared community, and builds stronger alliances among residents.

The 1987 Nursing Home Reform Act requires nursing homes to promote and protect the rights of residents and places a strong emphasis on residents' individual dignity and self-determination. Nursing homes must meet federal Residents' Rights requirements if they participate in Medicare or Medicaid. Residents' Rights are guaranteed through regulation.

**"We talk about our rights at every meeting."**



# GETTING STARTED

## GETTING STARTED

**“When I started getting involved, there was no one to tell me what to do.”**

Whether organizing a new Resident Council or working with an existing one, the same basic principles lead to success. It takes just one interested and committed person to get things rolling, but it takes many people working together for a Council to be successful.

### **Residents**

Talk with residents in the facility that have had experience with Resident Councils. Work with people who are on Resident Councils at other facilities. There are different ways to have a Resident Council that is made up of residents, is directed by residents, and works for residents. Talking to people with different experiences can help residents figure out ideas that will work for them and their facility.

New Resident Council leaders may also find it helpful to speak with the administrator, activity or therapeutic recreation director, social services director, or others about the history of the Resident Council within the home. This will help the Resident Council members learn what has been done in the past and possibly allow them to avoid any previously encountered challenges.

### **Staff**

The nursing home must designate a staff person (approved by the Resident Council) to provide assistance. Staff can help with administrative tasks, such as finding and setting up a private and accessible space; getting the word out to residents; taking minutes and distributing them; and helping to communicate with residents, staff and administration.

**“My background is totally different, and I wasn’t sure about resident rights and what we could ask for. Meeting with residents from outside the facility has provided a wealth of information.”**

## **Ombudsman**

Every state has a LTC Ombudsman’s Office that supports people who live in long-term care facilities. An ombudsman can help find resources about setting up and running a Resident Council; recruit members; communicate with staff and family members, including those with limited English language proficiency; or give a presentation on a topic important to Council members.

## **Exploratory Meeting**

Nursing home team members and leaders should plan an exploratory meeting of all residents to gauge interest in forming a Council. This meeting may be more successful if scheduled to coincide with a popular activity or event that many residents will be expected to attend. If there are no residents available to co-facilitate the exploratory meeting, it may be necessary for a committed and supportive staff member to provide initial leadership. The purpose of this meeting is to do the following:

- Inform residents of the purpose and benefits of a Resident Council.
- Share staff support and commitment to the formation of a Resident Council.
- Give examples of how Councils are effective in other homes. Invite members of a Resident Council from another nursing home to speak about their Council.
- Determine if there is interest in organizing a Council.
- If there is interest, select a committee of four to six people (including residents, staff, and volunteers) to organize and plan the first meeting.

## **Planning the First Resident Council Meeting**

- Talk with other residents to begin planning for a Resident Council.
- Ask the administrator or other senior leader to identify a staff member to co-lead the Resident Council. Residents should be able to ask that staff member for assistance when necessary.
- Engage residents and the staff member to help organize meetings and arrange an appropriate gathering space (adequate size, privacy, not noisy or in a highly trafficked area; provide technology such as microphones for residents who require them in order to be heard, accessible for people with disabilities).
- Residents decide on the date, time, location, frequency, and duration of regular meetings. These decisions may change based on resident input.
- Announce and post meeting notices where residents will easily see them.
- Ensure all residents receive the information in a way that is accessible to them. For example, make sure residents with low vision are given the information verbally. Consider translating materials for residents with limited English proficiency.
- One or two days prior to the meeting, consider sending out reminders and/or the agenda.
- Inform staff members during change of shift report or through other communication.
- Ask residents if they would like to invite any staff members or visitors to each meeting.

**“The Council helped me get to know people when I first moved here.”**

## **Resident Council Structure**

There is no right or wrong way to organize a Resident Council. Organization can range from highly structured Councils with bylaws, officers, and committees to smaller groups that meet informally with staff to discuss life in the home. Regardless of the complexity of the structure, there is a shared goal among Councils to work on behalf of all residents' needs. Listed below are two common types of Council structures.

### **Town Meeting Model**

This type of Council tends to work better in smaller homes and usually has the following traits:

- Every resident is a member of the Council, attends Council meetings, and is encouraged to participate.
- The Council is directed by elected officers such as president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer.
- Monthly meetings follow a planned agenda that allows residents opportunities to comment and participate in decisions.
- Officers plan meetings and ensure the Council is fulfilling its purpose.
- The Council may enlist a staff member to co-facilitate meetings and events. The Council may elect to invite the staff member to participate in meetings – that is the Council members' choice.
- Additional committees may be organized as needed to address various concerns identified by the Council, for example, a meal committee, an activities committee, a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) committee, or other committees.

## Representative Model

This model is often preferred in larger homes where a town meeting model may be impractical due to large numbers of residents attending meetings. This model can operate in the same way as a town meeting model. The difference is that instead of all residents attending, residents elect or recruit representatives to attend on their behalf. Often, the representatives are elected or recruited from various areas of the home, such as floors or wings. However, this does not prohibit any resident from attending the Council meeting and having their voices heard.

**“We have committees that meet at other times and report at the Resident Council, [on things like] activities, food, employee recognition, birthdays, flower gardens, fundraising, and bulletin boards.”**

## Resident Council Roles

Residents make up the membership of the Council. They make Council decisions, manage any donated contributions, meet to discuss concerns, and work to improve the quality of living conditions that affect all residents. Many Councils elect or recruit members to serve as officers in roles such as president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. These officers provide leadership service to the Council. Please see Appendices I and II for more details about these roles.

**“Our President and Vice President have business cards and all new residents are given their cards.”**

## **Staff Member**

A Resident Council may choose to receive support from a staff member. The staff member may co-facilitate meetings and events and may assist residents to attend meetings. Co-facilitating is not “doing for” residents but “helping to get things done.” Staff members may attend meetings when invited by the Council.

# **EXAMPLES OF RESIDENT COUNCIL BEST PRACTICES**



# EXAMPLES OF RESIDENT COUNCIL BEST PRACTICES

Resident Council best practices may share these qualities:

- Residents, not staff, oversee Council meetings and activities at all times.
- The Council receives support, but not interference, from staff.
- Residents feel comfortable speaking freely about their concerns, care, rights, and activities without being intimidated, silenced, or identified as complainers.
- Residents are treated with dignity and respect.
- Residents' concerns are promptly and courteously addressed by staff and action is taken as appropriate.
- The Council has a clear purpose to hear concerns and ideas from residents and promote communication between residents and the administration.

**"Sometimes other people want the same things I do; it makes me feel better to know I am not the only one who thinks a certain way."**

## Effective Membership and Leadership

Nursing home Resident Council members may promote success by doing the following:

- Recognizing that the Council represents all residents.
- Understanding the purpose and benefits of the Council.
- Believing the Council can positively impact resident quality of life.
- Realizing the Council's strength in working together toward common goals.
- Knowing Residents' Rights.
- Respecting the confidentiality and culture differences of other Council members.

- Encouraging council members to speak freely about their concerns.
- Taking time to listen to concerns and ask questions to clarify uncertain statements.
- Helping Council members come to agreement on issues.
- Encouraging members to invite their families, friends, and care partners to meetings; and
- Working collaboratively with staff and administration to improve residents' quality of life.

# **ORGANIZATIONAL TOOLS**

# ORGANIZATIONAL TOOLS

**“We all have really cool background and skills and histories, and this can be a very dynamic environment if people let it be that. We can help each other and share ideas [about how to run] a Resident Council, how do you run a meeting, the agenda, the process, how do you engage people?”**

## Agenda

An essential first step in conducting an effective meeting is planning and preparing an agenda. A written agenda is an important way to help participants stay organized and focused during a meeting. It is helpful to complete and distribute the agenda a few days in advance of the meeting so that everyone can be prepared.

The staff member may offer suggestions, but the Council should provide most of the input into agenda items. Some items are routine in every agenda, including reviewing minutes of the previous meeting, old business, requests or suggestions, and any new business the Council may have.

A Resident Council agenda could include the following:

### 1. Welcome and Introductions

All participants are given a warm welcome, with special attention given to new residents.

Introductions are made, and a roll call may be taken. The Council may wear name tags to help residents become acquainted.

After the welcome and introductions, the Council reviews its purpose and the reasons for the meeting.

## 2. Review Past Minutes

Many councils review the minutes from the past meeting. This helps remind everyone of what happened at the last meeting and helps new residents and guests stay informed.

## 3. Information – Reports

Council officers or representatives may each take a few minutes to discuss residents' needs, concerns, and activities. Any existing committees may also choose to review recent activities.

## 4. Unfinished Business

The Council may review unfinished business from the previous meeting and discusses completed actions and whether the issues have been resolved. This is a time to share successes and identify unresolved concerns. The Council may invite a staff member to address unresolved concerns at the meeting.

## 4. New Business

After discussing past business, the Council brings forward new ideas and concerns. An active Council continuously works at each meeting to identify any new resident concerns and ways to improve quality of life.

## 5. Guest Speakers

The Council may invite a guest speaker to present at the meeting. The guest speaker can be anyone the Resident Council chooses, from within or outside the home. It may be helpful for the Council to alternate between meetings with a guest speaker and meetings without a guest speaker to provide time for focusing primarily on residents' input.

## 6. Resident Concerns

For the sake of time, Councils may choose to discuss issues affecting all residents at meetings and refer any residents with

specific personal concerns to the grievance committee, social services staff, the ombudsman, or other appropriate resources qualified to address individual resident concerns.

## **7. News**

The home administrator and staff may ask to be put on the agenda to share important information and news. The Council may appreciate the administrator requesting time at a meeting to introduce new or departing staff members to residents. It is at the discretion of the Council whether any person other than a resident is invited to attend a meeting.

## **8. Social Time**

The Council may plan time for refreshments and a social activity following meetings. This provides residents opportunities to get to know one another and expresses gratitude to members for their attendance.

## **Meeting Structure**

Please refer to Appendix I for best practices and guidance on facilitating meetings.

## **Minutes**

Minutes are simple, short, and direct notes that record information discussed at the meeting. Accurate notes should be taken of all happenings at each Council meeting. These serve as a record of who attended and what business transacted. Minutes provide records for absent members to inform them of what took place. Minutes are also an important record of the actions of the administrator in response to residents' concerns. The secretary normally takes the minutes or designates someone to do it in his or her place.

See Appendix V for an example.

## **Tips for Taking Minutes**

Provide a brief, complete description of discussions and activities, written legibly (or typed) in easily understood (plain) language.

Include the following:

- The presiding person's name.
- Names of attending members and any invited guests.
- Name of who is taking the minutes.
- The date and time of the meeting, agenda.

Minutes may be taken by hand but should be typed later so that clear copies can be made. Typing may be done by a resident, volunteer, or staff member. A copy should be provided to every resident and staff member. Minutes should be posted throughout the home in multiple easy-to-see locations such as resident common areas, staff break rooms, lobby and reception areas, and bulletin boards.

Residents who are unable to read independently should receive assistance from a staff member who can read the minutes to them if they desire. The administrator and all managerial staff or department heads should receive their own copies of the minutes to share with the staff they supervise. Families, care partners, and other interested parties may be informed about Council minutes. A complete copy of the minutes can be mailed out or a synopsis of the minutes can be included within a home newsletter.

## **Bylaws**

Council bylaws are written guidelines by which the Council operates. Bylaws give members direction on Council procedures and should be established early in the organizational process.

Bylaws should be clear, simple, and short, with each section containing only one idea.

Bylaws may contain the following sections:

- Council name.
- Council purpose.
- When and how meetings will be conducted.
- Membership criteria.
- Criteria for replacing an officer who is no longer able to serve.
- Officer titles, responsibilities, and term of office.
- Nomination and election procedures.
- Names and functions of committees.
- Criteria for choosing residents to serve on committees.
- Management of funds.
- Procedure for amending bylaws.
- Non-discrimination statement.

After the proposed bylaws are written, Council members should read them carefully and offer suggestions before voting on whether to pass them. See Appendix II for Sample Bylaws.



# **COMMON CHALLENGES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

## COMMON CHALLENGES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

**“It’s better when we put it in writing, and one thing we do is after a resident council meeting, we publish the questions that are getting resolved and we go to management and say, ‘here’s where we are, let’s close the loop.’ Because from what I’ve found, they’re notorious for listening without action and that is sometimes harder than not even being able to say it.”**

Understanding can be increased by identifying challenges from residents’ perspectives. The Council helps determine which concerns are isolated events, an ongoing problem for an individual, or affect multiple residents. The Council may provide possible solutions after defining a challenge from the residents’ perspective.

Council members can then discuss the advantages or disadvantages of each solution and determine whether they are ready to proceed with providing their recommendations to staff or whether further investigation is needed.

The Council may either informally present the issue to the administrator or appropriate staff member, or formally put forth the concern using a Council Action Form or the home’s Resident Grievance form. It is important to keep copies of any forms given to staff to retain for Council records.

The Council should be prepared to meet with the administrator and staff to discuss the issue and recommend actions that may be taken to resolve it. The Council then evaluates whether the issue was resolved to residents’ satisfaction. If the issue was not resolved,

the Council will work to determine why. The Council may contact the ombudsman or other support person to assist with unresolved issues.

The following are more common challenges and possible solutions that may be encountered by a Council:

### **Members' Concern over Limited Leadership Capacity**

Clearly describing officer roles and responsibilities may encourage resident participation in the Resident Council. However, in some cases, residents may be concerned about their ongoing ability to serve as an officer due to health or disability concerns. Potential officers may be more willing to participate if they know there are others who can step in for them if they become ill or unable to serve due to disability.

### **Lack of Knowledge about Residents' Rights**

Consider discussing Residents' Rights at a Council meeting. The LTC Ombudsman Program offers Residents' Rights training and educational opportunities for residents, family members, staff, and others.

### **Lack of Leadership Training**

If a resident has never been involved in a Resident Council before, they may benefit from encouragement to take on a leadership role. Providing leadership education may increase resident willingness to participate in a leadership role. Leadership education may be provided by organizations such as LTC Ombudsmen Programs, Quality Improvement organizations or other professional organizations.

## **Fear of Retaliation by Staff**

Fear of retaliation (real or perceived) happens when people are worried that if they speak out, they may experience a negative outcome. Residents are protected from retaliation by federal and state law. The administrator must respond to and remedy any verbal or nonverbal signs of retaliation by staff members.

## **Limited or Lack of Administration Support**

At least one staff member should be identified as someone to support and assist residents with Resident Council as needed. Staff members must not interfere with the Council or prevent the group from meeting.

The support of an administrator impacts other nursing home staff members. If the administrator does not support the Resident Council, other staff may be more likely to have negative attitudes toward the Council. A lack of support by the staff can present itself in different ways, such as staff taking over the Council for their own purposes, interfering with Council business, or limiting assistance to the Council.

Some staff may avoid helping those residents who need assistance getting to meetings. Other staff may show a lack of support by not reminding residents of meetings or being negative about the Council's work. Such a lack of support can be discouraging for residents. The importance of the administrator's active, consistent, and open support for the Council cannot be emphasized enough.

## **Limited or Lack of Staff Support**

Talk with staff one at a time or at a training for several staff members. Ask your ombudsman for help. Residents have the right to private and regular Council meetings and the facility is required to help them. Hopefully it won't take more than education and talking with staff for them to become more supportive of the Council. However, if there is continued resistance, ask your ombudsman for help in advocating for your Council.

# **ADDRESSING ISSUES RAISED BY NURSING HOME RESIDENTS**

## Addressing Issues Raised By Nursing Home Residents

**“We have to keep track of when we first raised an issue and make sure we mention that when we talk about it. Otherwise, it’s like the first time every time.”**

A Resident Council is made up of residents, is directed by residents, and works for residents; however, they rely on administration and staff to address many issues. Residents often face challenges resolving problems raised during council meetings. Not only is there no solution to the problem, a Council can begin to feel like a place where people “just complain” and “nothing gets done.” People stop coming.

Here are a few ideas about how to close the loop:

- Council clearly identifies the problem.
- Council discusses ideas about how to solve the problem.
- Council meets with administration to discuss the issue and recommend solutions.
- The facility is responsible for putting the solution in place.

Having clear and agreed upon expectations in writing, including when the first time the issue was raised, is an important step in “closing the loop.”

- Write up an action plan that clearly lays out the issue and who is responsible for doing what by when.
- Evaluate whether the issue was resolved to residents’ satisfaction.
- If the issue was not resolved, the Council will work to determine why.
- The Council may contact the ombudsman or other support person to assist with unresolved issues.

# APPENDICES



# Appendix I: Meeting Structure Guidance

## Best Practices for Holding Meetings

### Before the Meeting:

- Make sure residents who use mobility aids or wheelchairs receive staff assistance in getting to the meeting place on time.
- Offer residents preferred refreshments at the meeting if available.
- Change the meeting time to meet residents' needs.
- Meetings scheduled just before or after a popular activity on special event days may be more successful.
- Publicize meetings on the calendar and in other ways, such as flyers, invitations, reminders, agendas, and announcements.
- Try to keep the meeting date consistent, for example, the second Thursday of each month.

### For All Members:

- Create a culture of respect and belonging. Every person is welcome; not every action is welcome. Talk about what respect and belonging look like to the group.
- Agree on shared expectations. Some examples include:
  - Only one person speaking at a time.
  - Ensure everyone has had the chance to speak if they wish.
  - Staying on topic.
  - No cell phones.
  - Limit side conversations.
  - Disagreement about topics is ok.
  - Focus on the idea, not the person.

- Ask for what you need. (“Can you speak louder, I can’t hear.”)
- When possible, limit socializing and conversations that are outside of the agenda.
- Present facts and challenge rumors.
- Allow others time to share by keeping comments brief and relevant.
- Listen carefully to others and ask questions for clarification.
- Thank members and participants for their work and time.

#### For Facilitators and Leaders:

- Have an agenda and stick to it.
- Have clear goals and objectives.
  - Explain the process. Start each meeting by briefly going over the agenda and rules.
  - Explain clearly how to participate.
  - Have a way for nonmembers or people who want to discuss items not on the agenda to have some time to speak or submit their ideas in writing.
- Know who will be leading the meeting and taking the minutes.
- Have the tools needed to make the meeting accessible for everyone.
- Keep the meetings goal-based. Take a pause if it starts to be a “gripe session” where people are talking about the problems without exploring the issues and trying to identify solutions.
- Encourage individuals to advocate for themselves on personal issues by providing them resources.
- Start on time and end on time.
- Invite staff members to talk about their specific areas of responsibility and answer residents’ questions.
- Consider having new staff introduced to residents.

- Follow-up: Wrap up with action items and next steps. Post minutes where all residents and staff have access to them. Meet privately with participants who had lingering concerns.
- Recognize contributions: Thank current and exiting Council members, as well as staff, volunteers, and others who have helped the Council.

## **When Interacting with Staff and Administration**

- Have a standard format for requests and responses and submit in writing for Council records. Be precise regarding requests and recommendations made to staff. Please refer to “Closing the Loop” section in the guide.
- The president serves as the liaison between the administrator and the Council.

## **Sample Council Discussion Topics**

Offering education is a key function of a Resident Council. Some Councils prefer a flexible discussion format with invited speakers and topics. The LTC Ombudsman or the staff member may suggest speakers and resources within and outside the home. Listed below are several topics to consider for discussion.

- Resident Rights and person directed/person-centered living
- Culture change in nursing homes (enhancing quality of life and services)
- Communication with direct care staff
- Using the grievance procedure to resolve specific concerns
- Understanding anything that prevents your freedom of movement
- Health care planning and decision-making
- Health and wellness initiatives, including nutrition services
- Family or care partner involvement in care planning

- Doctor's or Nurse Practitioner's role in the nursing home
- Nursing services in the nursing home
- Understanding medications and pharmacy services
- Information about specific health issues
- Art, music appreciation, and other creative pursuits
- Laws or federal or state regulations affecting nursing home residents
- Awareness about older adult mistreatment (abuse/neglect/misuse of funds)
- Hospice care
- Coping with grief and loss
- The LTC Ombudsman Program
- Transportation services
- Other available community resources, such as services for vision or hearing loss, public libraries, parks and recreation, senior centers and clubs, support groups and social networks, educational events, museums, civic and cultural events, and music venues

## Appendix II: Sample Bylaws

### I. NAME

The name of our Resident Council shall be *(name of Council)*.

### II. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Resident Council is to do the following:

- Give residents greater participation in affairs within their own home.
- Suggest improvements and assist administration in providing better programs, surroundings, and services.
- Promote friendship and understanding among residents.
- Provide and receive necessary information for the benefit of all residents.

### III. MEMBERSHIP

Every resident of *(name of nursing home)* is a member of the Resident Council. Every member shall be given the opportunity to vote.

*Note: Some Councils have representative members from each neighborhood, building, or floor who make up the Council.*

*This structure needs to be developed before bylaws are written.*

### IV. OFFICERS AND THEIR DUTIES

Officers of the Council shall be:

*President/Chairperson or Co-Chairs:* The president creates the agendas and leads the meetings. The president is responsible for keeping to the agenda and schedule. The president often speaks for the Council and presides over all meetings.

*Vice President/Vice Chair:* The vice president or vice chair fills

in for the president if needed. Sometimes, the vice president is also the chair of important committees.

*Secretary:* The secretary is the record-keeper for Council meetings. The secretary distributes minutes and agendas, calls the roll, and takes meeting minutes. If the secretary is unavailable another member takes the minutes.

*Treasurer:* The treasurer keeps records of Council funds, reports to the Council on the funds, and keeps the funds separate from other funds.

Officers of the Council shall be elected every (*period of time*). If an officer becomes unable to fulfill the position duties, a special election will be held at the next regularly scheduled Council meeting.

## **V. COMMITTEES**

Executive Committee - The Council shall have an Executive Committee whose purpose is to give direction and organization to the Council.

The Executive Committee will include (*list of members*)

*Note: The Executive Committee is made up of the Officers, and if the Council so chooses the Committee Chairs.*

### **Standing Committees**

The Council shall also have the following standing committees as needed:

- “Welcoming”- to greet new members and orient them to the facility.

- “Sunshine”- to prepare greeting cards for residents in the hospital, and those who have birthdays - they may send cards to families who have lost a loved one.
- “Food”- to serve as a liaison between dietary services and the residents for suggestions and improvements.
- “Activities”- to serve as a liaison with the activities staff to plan and set up recreational programs.
- “Grievance”- to listen to concerns and provide an opportunity for discussion before the full Council meets to follow up on complaints with the administrator or ombudsman.

Each standing committee will select a chairperson who will serve for (*period of time*). Temporary committees can be established by appointment on an as-needed basis.

## **VI. ELECTIONS**

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

## **VII. MEETINGS**

General meetings of the Council will be held every (*day, time, location*).

*Note: If you have executive meetings or committee meetings, list date, day, time, and location for those as well.*

## **VIII. AMENDMENTS**

Amendments may be made to the bylaws at any regular or special meeting of the Council by 2/3 vote, providing suggested changes have been read at the previous meeting. Amendments will go into effect immediately.

## **IX. RULES OF ORDER**

Each general meeting will be conducted according to a written agenda. Robert's Rules of Order will be followed unless the Council wishes to change or add to the rules based on the determination of the group. See page 45 for a link to Robert's Rules of Order.



## **Appendix III: The Importance of Supporting Resident Councils**

Communal living in a long-term nursing home is a partnership of cooperation, communication, and companionship among residents and staff. Ideally, residents look out for each other and discover friendships in their new home community. Moving into a congregate setting is sometimes difficult, and Council participation may help residents by providing a social network where there are opportunities to be active and learn important information. A Resident Council advocates for the well-being of all residents by offering a forum for residents to contribute to the decision-making process within their home.

Leaders play a pivotal role in helping the Resident Council be an effective part of the community culture. The administrator serves as a positive role model to all by showing a willingness to work in partnership with residents to make the Council successful. When the administrator recognizes the importance of a Council, other staff are more likely to be supportive of Council formation and resident participation.

Resident Councils provide opportunities to create mutually supportive relationships in efforts to improve the care and services in the nursing home. This is true for both short and long-term residents, who may share different types of goals given the purpose of their stay (short-term rehabilitation with return home or living in the nursing home long-term). Council members and leaders can work together collaboratively to address concerns, complaints, and recommendations. There are many benefits to Council members and the administrator partnering with all staff to discover solutions to common challenges through dialogue.

When Councils are new or when there is no one available to co-lead a Council meeting, the Council can choose to hold a meeting

without a chairperson or leader. They may also choose to ask a staff member, the ombudsman, or other volunteer to facilitate the meeting. Staff, visitors, and other guests may attend Council meetings only by invitation. The Council may choose to invite the administrator, staff, or other guests, including ombudsmen, to meetings to listen or to speak about the role and the services they provide. This gives residents an opportunity to ask questions directly and receive an immediate response.

Staff must consider concerns of Council members and act promptly upon any grievances or recommendations regarding policy and operational decisions affecting residents' quality of life and care. Regularly invited guests should excuse themselves at least for a portion of the meeting so that the Council members feel free to bring up any issues privately.

Resident Councils and the nursing home administration may have success in coming together to share new ideas in the spirit of collaboration and transparency. Many issues can be resolved before becoming a larger problem through sharing experiences, preferences, and challenges.

There are many ways the administrator can help improve the efficacy and sustainability of Resident Councils. Below are some examples:

- Encourage full engagement with residents by prioritizing coverage plans so that a colleague covers the staff member's regular duties while they are directly supporting Council activities and meetings.
- Monitor (have a process) for how issues raised by the Council are resolved. This not only accelerates the joint problem-solving process and improves quality, but also demonstrates responsiveness to residents' needs and could be part of Quality Assurance Performance Improvement (QAPI).

- Encourage staff to put the people first by asking residents, “What does a good day look like for you?” Staff can then partner with residents to achieve residents’ goals. The nursing home administrator and staff show support for Resident Councils by ensuring that:
  - Residents have an opportunity to learn about the Council and are encouraged to actively participate in activities and social events.
  - During orientation, all staff and volunteers learn about the culture of the nursing home and its support for the Council.
  - Private space, with minimal noise and distractions, is reserved for Council meetings.
  - Additional staff and volunteers are available to help all participating residents arrive at Council meetings on time.
  - Residents receive physical or other assistance, as required, to be able to participate fully in Council meetings and activities.

## Appendix IV: Sources

1. Adult Home Resident Council Tool Kit, Coalition of Institutionalized Aged and Disabled and the New York State Office of Long-Term Care Ombudsman.
2. Consumer Voice Resident Council Fact Sheet. [https://theconsumervoice.org/uploads/files/long-term-care-recipient/Resident\\_Council\\_Rights\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](https://theconsumervoice.org/uploads/files/long-term-care-recipient/Resident_Council_Rights_Fact_Sheet.pdf)
3. Department of Health and Human Services. Center of Medicare & Medicaid Services. Federal Register, Vol. 81.
4. Federal Resident Rights PDF. [https://downloads.cms.gov/medicare/Your\\_Resident\\_Rights\\_and\\_Protections\\_section.pdf](https://downloads.cms.gov/medicare/Your_Resident_Rights_and_Protections_section.pdf)
5. How to Organize and Direct an Effective Resident Council: A Technical Assistance Manual of the Missouri Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, April 2005. <https://health.mo.gov/seniors/ombudsman/pdf/consumer-handbook.pdf>
6. Kansas Statute & Regulations Adult Care Home/Nursing Facilities. [https://www.kdads.ks.gov/docs/default-source/General-Provider-Pages/provider-statutes-and-regulations/ksa-and-kar-for-adult-care-homes/nursing-facilities-2015.pdf?sfvrsn=cd9a3dee\\_2](https://www.kdads.ks.gov/docs/default-source/General-Provider-Pages/provider-statutes-and-regulations/ksa-and-kar-for-adult-care-homes/nursing-facilities-2015.pdf?sfvrsn=cd9a3dee_2)
7. Resident Council Handbook: Creating Opportunities for Meaningful Decision-making. Resident Councils of Washington, 2001. <https://www.waombudsman.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/94/2022/12/Resident-Council-Handbook-2.pdf>

8. Resident Council Handbook: Florida's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, administered by the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, 2018. <https://ltcombudsman.org/uploads/files/support/Florida-Residents-Council-Handbook-2018.pdf>
9. Resident Council Toolkit for Residents of Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Facilities. Texas Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman, 2017. [https://theconsumervoice.org/uploads/files/long-term-care-recipient/Resident\\_Council\\_Toolkit\\_FINAL\\_ELECTRONIC.pdf](https://theconsumervoice.org/uploads/files/long-term-care-recipient/Resident_Council_Toolkit_FINAL_ELECTRONIC.pdf)
10. Robert's Rules of Order. <https://robertsrules.org/robertsrules.pdf>
11. State Operations Manual Appendix PP. <https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Provider-Enrollment-and-Certification/GuidanceforLawsAndRegulations/Downloads/Appendix-PP-State-Operations-Manual.pdf>
12. Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services, 2017. <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/strengthening-resident-and-family-council-engagement>

# **APPENDIX V. PRINTABLE FORMS**

# TEMPLATE COUNCIL ACTION FORM

<b>Council Action Form</b>	
<b>To:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>From:</b>	
<b>Concern or Idea:</b>	
<b>Recommendations/Solutions:</b>	
<b>Return to:</b>	<b>By:</b>
<b>Implementation Date:</b>	
<b>Staff Signature:</b>	<b>Staff Title:</b>
<b>Staff Response (additional space on back):</b>	

# TEMPLATE COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA

Date: (month/day/year)

Meeting Location:

## **1. Welcome**

## **2. Review Resident Council purpose**

## **3. Introductions and Departures**

## **4. Read last meeting minutes**

## **5. Unfinished/previous business**

reports, action form responses, project progress

## **6. New business**

announcements, new issues, concerns, ideas

## **7. Education topic and discussion**

(insert topic)

## **8. End meeting**



# TEMPLATE MEETING MINUTES

<b>Resident Council Minutes</b>	
Nursing Home Name	Date
	Time Started
	Time Ended
Officers in Attendance	
Residents in Attendance	
Invited Staff or Visitors in Attendance	
<b>Minutes of Previous Council Meeting</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Read and approved as read Read and approved as corrected <input type="checkbox"/> Council concerns from previous meeting were reviewed and accepted	
<b>Old Business</b> List follow-up from last month's minutes and identify person responsible. Move issues that were not resolved to New Business.	

<b>New Business</b>				
Department Overview/Develop Action Plan				
Issue	Goal	Action	Participants	Resolution
				<input type="checkbox"/> Resolved <input type="checkbox"/> Unresolved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Resolved <input type="checkbox"/> Action Needed
				<input type="checkbox"/> Resolved <input type="checkbox"/> Unresolved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Resolved <input type="checkbox"/> Action Needed
				<input type="checkbox"/> Resolved <input type="checkbox"/> Unresolved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Resolved <input type="checkbox"/> Action Needed
Compliments/Notes of Appreciation				
Residents' Rights Review				
Speaker Summary				
Nursing Home Policies or Procedures Developed/Revised/Updated in the Past 30 Days				
Date and Time of Next Meeting				