



Office of the State Long-Term Care

**OMBUDSMAN**

*Established within the Iowa Department on Aging*

# **Family Councils**

## **Facilitator Handbook**

### **A Guide to Creating and Sustaining an Effective Council**

Updated 2017

**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.*

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## Introduction

Welcome and thank you for your interest in supporting a family council in your long-term care facility. The purpose of this handbook is to inform and equip an interested person or group with an overview of family councils as well as how to organize and facilitate a successful family council.

Within this handbook you will find helpful tools and ideas to establish a council as well as form templates and general information for existing councils.

## What is a Family Council?

A family council is an organized, independent and self-led group of family and friends of persons living in a long-term care facility. The family council meets regularly to discuss shared thoughts on how to improve the care and quality of life of residents in their facility while seeking to find shared solutions to concerns.

Family councils give families and friends a voice in decisions that affect them and their loved ones who live at the facility. They support family and friends of new residents, plan and host services and activities for the residents and their families, and provide information on a variety of topics relevant to the care of residents. Most importantly, family councils take action on issues or problems and encourage communication between the long-term care facility and families.

## Who can participate?

Any family, friend, and/or legal representative of a long-term care facility resident can form or participate in a family council.

## Why should we have a Family Council?

Family councils can play a key role in:

- Voicing concerns;
- Supporting the long-term care facility with needed culture change;
- Involving the community in the life of the facility;
- Serving as a support network for family and friends;
- Showing appreciation for facility staff and volunteers; and
- Addressing systemic issues regarding changes in laws, regulations and policies that affect residents in long-term care facilities across the state.

What one concerned person may not be able to accomplish alone can often be done with the help of a dedicated group of people. The family council provides strength in numbers and helps maximize the talents, passions, and skills of many individuals.

## **Benefits of a Family Council**

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

### **For Families and Friends**

- Ongoing support with strength drawn from shared experiences;
- Opportunity to discuss concerns and explore solutions as a group;
- Build communication with staff and create a team environment;
- Provide a connection to the community outside the facility.

### **For Residents**

- Advance the quality of care and life for the benefit of all residents through teamwork;
- Advocate on behalf of residents;
- Support residents who do not have locally involved families or friends;
- Provide a connection to a community outside the long-term care facility.

### **For the Long-Term Care Facility**

- Build communication between the council members and the staff;
- Promote staff appreciation and team interaction;
- Offer an opportunity to know family and friends of residents.

**Together, many voices have strength and effectiveness!**

## Steps to building a successful Family Council

### Helpful Tips:

*Have a signup sheet printed up prior to the meeting.*

*Provide a copy of what the minutes and action plan look like.*

*Some family councils find it helpful to choose a set date to hold their meetings, such as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of every month.*

*Make sure you safeguard resident privacy by excluding personally identifying information.*

*Remain positive by focusing on ways you can support improving the quality of life for residents in their home instead of “fixing” everything that is wrong.*

*Remember, the long-term care facility is the resident's home. All solutions should be driven with them in mind and what they want, not just what their families think they should want.*

### 1) Hold an informational meeting

- Talk to the Administrator about your plan and request a meeting room
- Invite all family members and friends of residents to attend.
- Designate one person to take meeting minutes and complete the action plan (see Appendix B).
- Designate a person to explain what a family council is, what it does, and why it is important to have one. You may request help from your Local Long-Term Care Ombudsman or Volunteer Ombudsman to attend the meeting and explain the topic.
- Provide sample bylaws to help guide discussion and decide on leadership.
- Ask everyone to provide their contact information, including mailing address, phone numbers, email address, and preferred method of communication.
- Discuss when, where, and how often the group should meet and set a date, time, and location for the first official meeting. It is important to find a location where the group can meet every month and is easily accessible to everyone. With members coming from around the county/region you need to be aware of locations.
- Ask for volunteers to help organize the next meeting.
- Ask the facility to designate a staff liaison for the council.

### 2) Follow-up after the meeting

- Post meeting minutes in the facility and give a copy to the designated staff liaison.
- Post information about when and where the first “official” council meeting will be held.
- Contact family members and friends about the meeting and ask the facility to include a notice in their next newsletter or other mailings.
- Ask potential council members to come to the meeting with a list of items they wish to discuss and at least one way they

### Helpful tips:

*Do not share identifying information about a resident without their permission.*

*Any facility staff should excuse themselves from the meeting when the council begins discussing issues.*

*The family council has the right to meet in a location where they can talk privately and without staff present.*

*Remind individuals who are designated to follow up with the goals on the action plan that they will need to provide a report back to the council at the next meeting.*

are willing to support the council's success.

### 3) Hold the first family council meeting

- Discuss as a group how you will create and adopt your mission statement and bylaws. Keep them simple and easy to follow.
- Elect officers as determined in the bylaws and turn the meeting over to them.
- It is important for every council to keep minutes of every meeting for their records. This information can be provided to those who missed the meeting or were unable to attend; it also shows what has been brought to the attention of the council to work on. Included in this handbook are examples of completed minutes as well as a template to keep basic minutes.
- Every member should be willing to devote some time to the success of the group. Ask people to volunteer to be responsible for simple tasks such as posting notices for the meetings, contacting family members of new residents, making phone calls, or even bringing snacks.
- Discuss the issues the council wants to work on to create your action plan.
- Designate individuals to follow up with appropriate staff regarding goals developed on the action plan.
- Choose the next meeting time and place.

**Never forget your primary goal- to make life better for all residents!**

## What the facility is required to do

Under the 1987 Nursing Home Reform Act, family and friends of individuals residing in a long-term care facility are guaranteed the right to form and hold regular meetings of a family council. Both federal and state laws and regulations also say:

- The facility shall take reasonable steps, with approval of the group, to make residents and family members aware of upcoming meetings in a timely manner;
- The council can meet wherever it chooses. If the council wants to meet at the facility, it shall be given access to a private meeting room during mutually agreed upon hours;
- Staff or visitors may attend council meetings only when invited by the group;
- The facility shall provide a designated staff person (who is approved by the council) to assist the council and answer written requests that result from family council meetings;
- The facility must consider to the views and act upon the grievances and recommendations of residents and families; and
  - a. The facility must be able to demonstrate the response and rationale for such response; and
  - b. This should not be construed to mean that the facility must implement every request as recommended by the family council.

## The council is formed, now what?

A successful family council must have organization, active membership, and the ability to take action. The council is most likely to succeed when it has good communication with staff. The groups may not always agree, but the ability to discuss an issue is essential to solving it.

**The council must be organized.** People without direction, leadership, or structure are not as effective and often find it difficult to get others to participate with them.

**The council must have active members.** Current members must be active and new members must be recruited to keep the group alive and successful. The more family members involved the greater number of voices that will be heard and the stronger the group will be.

**The council must act.** The council might hold educational meetings of members or staff, sponsor resident activities, or ask the facility to address specific quality-of-care issues. Include fun events or speakers in your activities to help keep things fresh and supportive for everyone.

## Organization

Family council members donate personal time to improve the quality of life of someone they love. It is important to use their time effectively and efficiently. To stay organized and on-track, the council needs:

- A mission statement that describes the council and its purpose.
- Bylaws that set the rules for meetings and how the council will operate.
- An agenda that describes what is supposed to happen at each meeting. Sticking to the agenda helps members stay focused on their purpose. The council succeeds only when members work together to decide what they want and how to proceed.
- Minutes taken by a member at every meeting so that all members know what happened at every meeting and what action was taken by the council.
- A plan to share information- a phone tree, emails, a bulletin board in the facility. Be sure the council's activities are shared with everyone.
- An action plan form to express desired goals to the facility and require a written response.

## Membership

To keep current members (AND bring in new ones) the family council should:

- Post family council meeting information where all visitors can read it. Consider using a bulletin board or table in the facility to post meeting notices, minutes, contact information, activities, etc.
- Ask the facility to reserve a spot for council updates in their newsletter or other mailings.
- Educate staff about the family council so they can refer new family members.
- Consider using a suggestion box for meeting topics or issues for discussion.
- Personally invite new family members to attend meetings and activities.
- Publicize meetings and activities in local newspapers, church bulletins, and other community resources.
- Ask the facility to include family council information in their admissions packet.
- Sponsor activities for all family members and residents.
- Keep council meetings interesting, respectful, and meaningful to all members.

Even when working on serious issues, it is important to keep a sense of humor. Build a cooperative spirit within the council and make time for fun activities.

**Remember- People often volunteer when someone asks them to!**



## Planning and taking action:

Think of your family council as a business- not a club or social group. You must be self-determining and self-organized in order to be effective. Think about short-term, versus long-term activities. Some activities can be achieved rather quickly, such as an educational or staff appreciation event. Long-term activities might include staffing or other care issues. Try to achieve a good balance of both types to keep members positive and willing to persevere in resolving more difficult issues.

To help the council decide what to do, and how to do it, consider the following:

- Discuss concerns that affect many residents, along with their thoughts on why it is happening.
- Gather information: What needs to be done, who will be involved, and how soon they can start.
- Discuss possible solutions and how the family council can support resolution.
- Consider ways to document the existence of the problem.
- Formally present your concerns and proposed solutions to the administrator and appropriate staff by using the council's action plan form.
- Allow sufficient time for the facility to respond to your concern and act on it.
  - Discuss the facility's response and let them know if it is satisfactory.
  - If the response is not sufficient, consider discussing the issue with your Local Long-Term Care Ombudsman or the Volunteer Ombudsman.
  - File another written request for action, if necessary.
- Once an issue is resolved, let residents, staff, and family members know what was done.
  - Post successful outcomes on the bulletin boards, meeting minutes, newsletters, etc.
  - Be sure to show appreciation for the facility's responsiveness to your concerns.

The family council takes all concerns seriously, but will generally focus on those that affect many residents. However, the council should help teach and empower families to advocate for their loved ones. Families should learn how to:

- Keep a log with the date, time, place, staff members, and residents involved in any complaint.
- Take their concerns to the administrator or other appropriate staff, in writing.
- Raise any concerns when they occur instead of waiting for the council meeting.
- Attend and participate in care plan conferences for their loved one.
- KNOW the residents' rights.
- Know how to get help from the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program.
- Learn about how other facilities have improved care as a result of family council activities.

## Keys to Family Council Success

Keep the following points in mind at all times to help ensure an effective and highly functional council:

- Meet with the administrator;
- Involve staff and residents;
- Keep lines of communication open;
- Post bylaws and mission statement;
- Post meeting notices and meeting minutes;
- Recruit, recruit, recruit;
- Stick to the agenda;
- Do your homework;
- Put desired resolutions in writing;
- Support good leadership;
- Every member needs a job;
- Communicate with ALL families;
- Be respectful of everyone's point of view; and
- Be aware of and celebrate the various cultures of residents and staff.

## Troubleshooting

Despite everyone's best efforts, there may be roadblocks to overcome as council's are developed and maintained. The following information is provided to help members address obstacles that may come up.

- **Family members don't have time-**
  - Begin and end meetings on time. When meetings are purposeful and effective, family members will be more likely to attend.
  - Share leadership responsibilities and delegate small tasks to members so the time commitment is smaller.
  - Use your agenda to keep meetings focused and on track.
  - Schedule meetings at times that are most convenient for family members.
- **Family members who are not interested-**
  - Get to know the other residents' family members. Most people will respond to a personal invitation from someone they know instead of a letter or flyer.
  - Explain how the family council can help improve residents' lives.
  - Be positive about the council and explain how useful it can be for advocacy, information sharing and support. Every long-term care facility has room for improvement and new ideas.

- **Family members may fear retaliation-**
  - Explain that issues are presented to the administration as a group, not as individual concerns.
  - Consider holding meetings outside the facility if family members are concerned about being seen at the meetings.
  - Let them know that other council members will provide support and encouragement.
- **Council members can get discouraged easily-**
  - Make sure council goals reflect common concerns and interests.
  - Balance short-term and long-term goals so members can see progress.
  - Meet regularly to make sure members understand the issues and are updated on their progress.
  - Use other resources when stuck on a particular issue, including other family councils or the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program.
  - Publicize council successes, no matter how small.
- **Council experiences resistance from the facility-**
  - Council leaders should meet with the facility's management to discuss the council's purpose in a positive way.
  - Communicate regularly and respond tactfully to concerns the facility may have.
  - Discuss and come to agreement with staff about how specific concerns can be resolved.
  - Follow up on conversations with written communication to prevent misunderstandings.
  - Know the rights guaranteed to family councils by federal regulations.
  - Seek guidance from the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program.
- **Council has difficulty obtaining names of other family members-**
  - Complete a sign-in sheet at each meeting to gather contact information.
  - Ask the facility to provide space for council information.
  - Set up a system to have council members greet new families and invite them to meetings.
- **Family members need information and education-**
  - Arrange for speakers on topics of interest to attend council meetings.
  - Contact the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program.
  - Use community and online resources included in this document.

## Ideas for Family Council Projects

### Resolutions

- Develop a response when a problem is brought to the attention of the council by a resident, family or visitor.
- Steps in the problem solving process include:
  - Clearly identify the concern (who, what, where, when).
  - Identify what the resident sees as resolution.
  - Develop ideas to implement a resolution.
  - Talk with the council advisor.
  - Follow up to assess the resolution.

### Develop Projects

- Projects should always benefit the residents.
- Suggestions for projects include:
  - A welcome committee for new residents and families
  - Family support group
  - Resource library
  - Resident activities such as coffee hour for early risers, community outings, gardening, holiday parties, library on wheels, gift shop/shopping cart.
  - Salute to veterans
  - Staff appreciation

### Education

- Invite speakers to the meeting to learn about a certain topic.
- Invite a facility staff member to the meeting to explain staff roles and jobs, how the long-term care facility operates or to answer questions.
- Invite a speaker from the community such as a legislator, community leaders or other professionals.
- Suggested topics include:
  - Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman
  - Resident rights
  - Long-term care facility regulations
  - Improving the care plan process
  - Legislative issues
  - Role of the medical director
  - Hospice/palliative care
  - A specific disease such as Alzheimer's Disease
  - Elder abuse and neglect prevention
  - Prevention of pressure sores
  - Restraints
  - Medications
  - Nutrition and hydration
  - Survey process

## Appendix A | Sample Meeting Agendas

### SAMPLE

#### Family Council Meeting 9/10/14 Next Meeting 10/8/14

- a. Welcome
  - i. Take attendance
  - ii. Introductions (Name, Resident)
- b. Old Business
  - i. Review Minutes from 8/13/14
  - ii. Overview of progress and follow-up
    - 1. Resident Rights Month Activities
- c. New Business
  - i. New Residents
    - 1. John D
    - 2. Sarah F
  - ii. Open Forum (Department Overviews)/Create Action Plan
    - 1. Housekeeping
    - 2. Dietary
    - 3. Nursing
    - 4. Other
  - iii. Resident Rights
  - iv. New or changed facility policies and procedures
- d. Educational program- Local Long-Term Care Ombudsman
  - i. Office of the State Long-term Care Ombudsman
  - ii. Resident Rights

**TEMPLATE**

**Family Council Meeting:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Next Meeting:** \_\_\_\_\_

- Welcome
  - Take attendance
  - Introductions (Name, Resident)
- Old Business
  - Overview of \_\_\_\_\_ Meeting
  - Discuss progress and follow-up
- New Business
  - New Residents (with permission)
    - \_\_\_\_\_
    - \_\_\_\_\_
  - Open Forum (Department Overviews)/Develop Action Plan
    - Housekeeping: \_\_\_\_\_
    - Dietary: \_\_\_\_\_
    - Nursing: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Resident Rights
  - New or changed facility policies and procedures
- Educational program- (if any) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Main Points: \_\_\_\_\_
    - \_\_\_\_\_
    - \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix B | Sample Meeting Minutes

SAMPLE

# Family Council Minutes

Facility Name: Prairie Meadows

Date: 10/7/14

Time Started: 7:03pm

Time Adjourned: 7:40pm

**Officers in Attendance:**

Julie Young

Courtney Hall

Tyler Lee

**Members in Attendance:**

Clark Wilson

Sarah Green

Morgan Scott

Tim Hall

Katie Smith

Emily Davis

Brittney Wilson

Jessica Lee

Nathie Moore

**Staff and Visitors Invited by Family Council and in Attendance:**

Pat Davis

Chris White

**Minutes of 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):**

\*Nurse Appreciation Event - Courtney Hall  
-> November 11th @ 6pm

**New Business:**

Issue	Resolution Desired	Action to be Taken	Department Responsible	
Food (lunch) times & options	none currently	monitor	Food Service	<input checked="" 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: Residents raved about new lunch times & options!

Resident Right(s) Review: not needed

Facility Policies or Procedures Developed/Revised/Updates in Past 30 Days: New policy for personal belongings

Next Meeting (date & time): 11/4/14 @ 7pm

Signature of Resident Council Secretary or Representative: Julie Young



**TEMPLATE**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time Started: \_\_\_\_\_

Time Adjourned: \_\_\_\_\_

**Family Council Minutes**

**Facility Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

Officers in Attendance:

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Members in Attendance:

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

Staff and Visitors Invited by Family Council and in Attendance:

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

**Minutes of 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

New Residents: \_\_\_\_\_

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): \_\_\_\_\_

# Welcome to (Facility)!

Family Council meets the first Tuesday of every month at  
6:00 pm in activity room.

Please consider joining us!

---

## What is a Family Council?

Under Federal law, family members in long-term care facilities can join together to form a united consumer voice which can communicate concerns to facility administrators and work for resolutions and improvements by forming an independent family council.

Family Councils can play a crucial role in voicing concerns, requesting improvements, supporting new family members and residents, and supporting facility efforts to work for high quality of care and life in the facility.

## What can a Family Council do for (Facility)?

- Sponsor staff appreciation and educational programs.
- Allow family members to meet and discuss issues honestly.
- Advocate for resident food preferences.



Sample Meeting Announcement:

## Family Council Meeting



- Work to Maintain or improve the quality of life for the residents at a specific facility.
- Act as a representative group to ensure that resident concerns are addressed and corrected.
- Provide support for council members.
- Promote communication between council members, the residents and nursing facility staff.

Tuesday at 6:00 p.m.  
located in the Activity Room

## Appendix E | Sample by-laws

### SAMPLE

- I. Name  
The name of the organization shall be (**name of family council**).
- II. Purpose  
The purpose of the (**name of family council**) is to:
  - A. Provide opportunities for family and friends of residents to give input regarding decisions within the facility;
  - B. Suggest improvements and help the administration provide better programs, surroundings, and services; and
  - C. Promote and receive necessary information for the benefit of all residents; and
- III. Membership  
Any interested family member or friend of a current resident of (**name of facility**) may choose to become a member of the family council. Every member of the family council shall be given the opportunity to vote.
- IV. Officers and Their Duties  
Officers of the family 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 family 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 time of the electing meeting.
- 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 Family 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 family council meeting will follow the agenda as prepared by (**name of position**). Robert’s Rules of Order will be followed unless the family council wishes to change or add to the rules to suit the wishes of the majority.

## Appendix F | Additional Resources

- NORC website: <http://www.ltombudsman.org/issues/resident-and-family-councils>
- Consumer Voice website re: family councils:  
<http://test.theconsumervoice.org/issues/family/family-council-center>
- Missouri's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program Family Council Manual  
<http://health.mo.gov/seniors/ombudsman/pdf/FamilyCouncils.pdf>
- Iowa Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman:  
<https://www.iowaaging.gov/long-term-care-ombudsman>