



# About the Community Advisory Group Toolkit

## A Summary of the Tools





A Community Advisory Group is a committee, task force, or board made up of people affected by a hazardous waste site or other environmental problems. Forming a Community Advisory Group is one of the most effective ways you can help decide how to clean up the site or deal with other environmental issues. The Group provides a public forum where you and your neighbors can discuss your concerns about the site.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed the *Community Advisory Group Toolkit* to help you organize and run your Group. The *Toolkit* contains outlines, forms, publications, and other “tools” you can use in establishing and operating your Group.

This booklet briefly describes the information, tips, and tools in the *Toolkit*. It can help you understand what a Community Advisory Group is and decide if your community needs one. If you live in an area that already has a Community Advisory Group, this information can help you become more involved in it.

Each Community Advisory Group and the Community Involvement staff in each EPA Regional Office has a *Toolkit* containing all the materials described. Contact your Community Advisory Group or the nearest EPA Regional Office to get a copy of specific tools highlighted in this booklet.

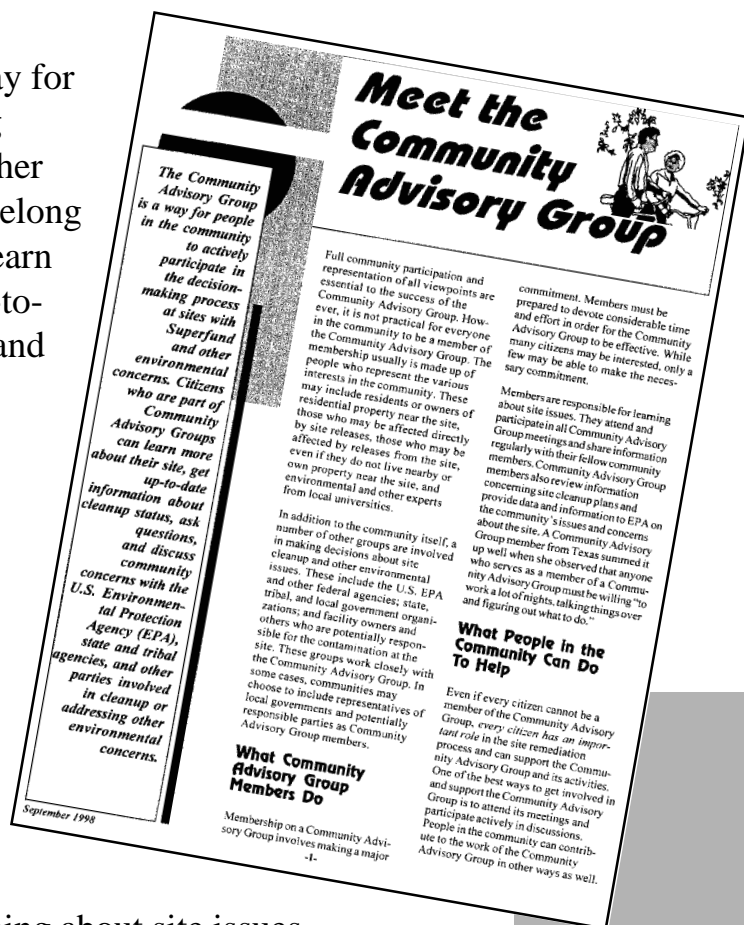
# Meet the Community Advisory Group

A Community Advisory Group is a way for people to actively participate in making decisions at sites with Superfund or other environmental concerns. People who belong to Community Advisory Groups can learn more about their site. They can get up-to-date information about cleanup status and ask questions. They can discuss their concerns with the EPA, state and tribal agencies, and others involved in the cleanup and other environmental programs.

Many people may be interested in the Community Advisory Group, but only a few can devote the time necessary to be members. Group members must attend meetings and share information with their neighbors.

Members also are responsible for learning about site issues. They must review information about site cleanup plans and provide information to the EPA on the community's concerns about the site.

Not everyone can be a member of the Community Advisory Group. Still, every citizen has an important role to play and can support the Group and its activities. The best way to get involved is to attend meetings and participate in discussions. Others in the community can help the Community Advisory Group by offering their knowledge and time or by making donations. This includes parents



**Meet the Community Advisory Group**

Full community participation and representation of all viewpoints are essential to the success of the Community Advisory Group. However, it is not practical for everyone in the community to be a member of the Community Advisory Group. The membership usually is made up of people who represent the various interests in the community. These may include residents or owners of residential property near the site, those who may be affected directly by site releases, those who may be affected by releases from the site, even if they do not live nearby or own property near the site, and environmental and other experts from local universities.

In addition to the community itself, a number of other groups are involved in making decisions about site cleanup and other environmental issues. These include the U.S. EPA, tribal, and local government organizations; and facility owners and others who are potentially responsible for the contamination at the site. These groups work closely with the Community Advisory Group. In some cases, communities may choose to include representatives of local governments and potentially responsible parties as Community Advisory Group members.

**What Community Advisory Group Members Do**

Membership on a Community Advisory Group involves making a major commitment. Members must be prepared to devote considerable time and effort in order for the Community Advisory Group to be effective. While many citizens may be interested, only a few may be able to make the necessary commitment.

Members are responsible for learning about site issues. They attend and participate in all Community Advisory Group meetings and share information regularly with their fellow community members. Community Advisory Group members also review information concerning site cleanup plans and provide data and information to EPA about the site. A Community Advisory Group member from Texas summed it up well when she observed that anyone who serves as a member of a Community Advisory Group must be willing "to work a lot of nights, talking things over and figuring out what to do."

**What People in the Community Can Do To Help**

Even if every citizen cannot be a member of the Community Advisory Group, every citizen has an important role in the site remediation process and can support the Community Advisory Group and its activities. One of the best ways to get involved in and support the Community Advisory Group is to attend its meetings and participate actively in discussions. People in the community can contribute to the work of the Community Advisory Group in other ways as well.

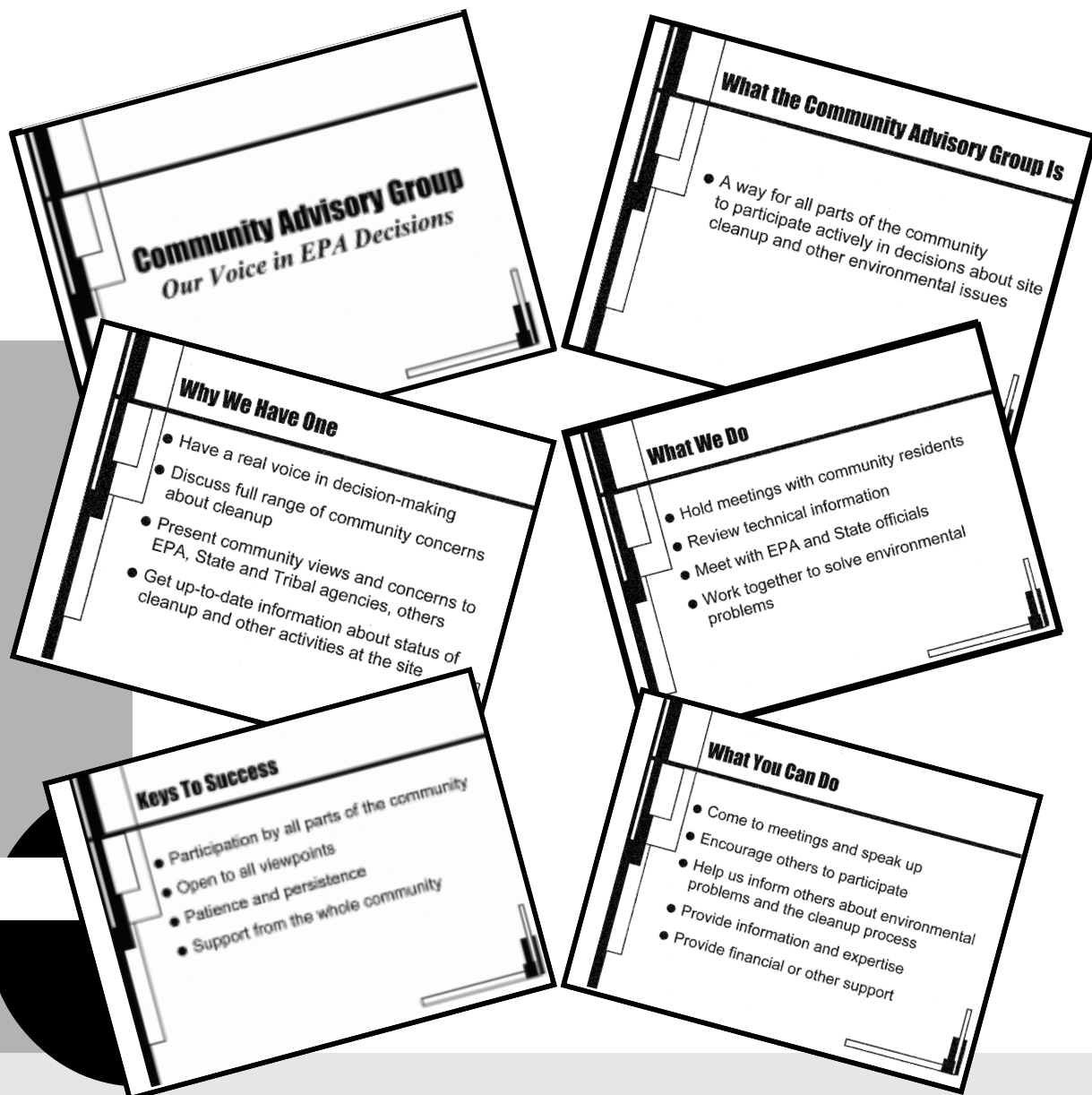
*The Community Advisory Group is a way for people in the community to actively participate in the decision-making process at sites with Superfund and other environmental concerns. Citizens who are part of Community Advisory Groups can learn more about their site, get up-to-date information about cleanup status, ask questions, and discuss community concerns with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), state and tribal agencies, and other parties involved in cleanup or addressing other environmental concerns.*

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and longtime residents, community organizations, churches, environmental groups, doctors and nurses, scientists, business owners, and banks.

Making presentations to community groups and civic organizations is an excellent way to get support for your Community Advisory Group. It also is a good way to encourage everyone to participate. To be effective, presentations should be no longer than 10 or 15 minutes. Urge people in the audience to ask questions and leave time for answering them.

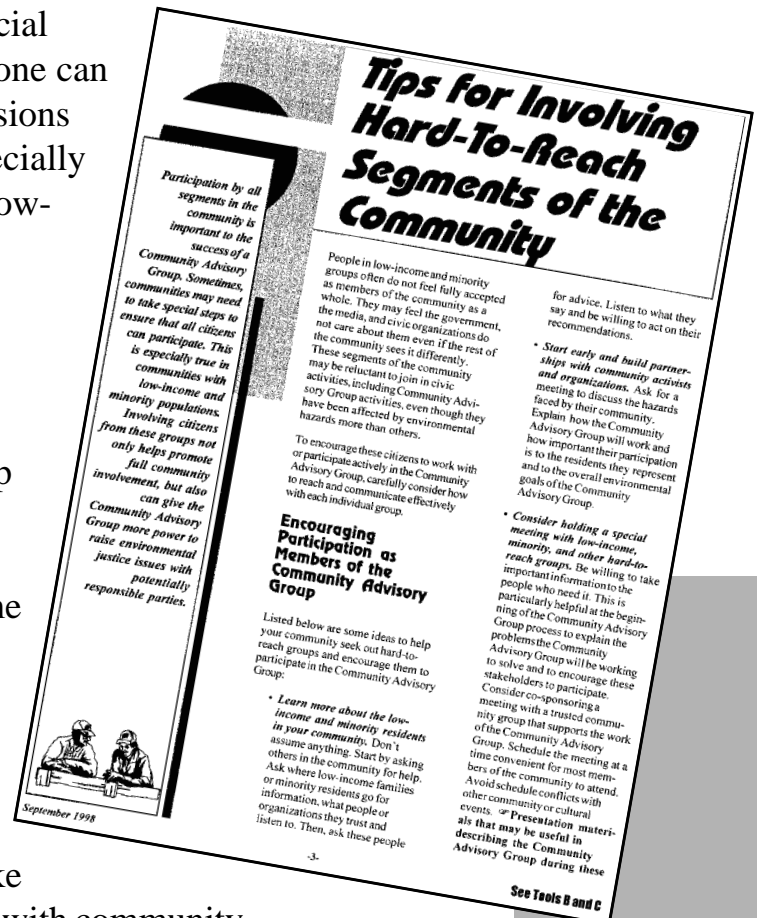
The *Community Advisory Group Toolkit* contains materials that you can use for presentations about your Group.



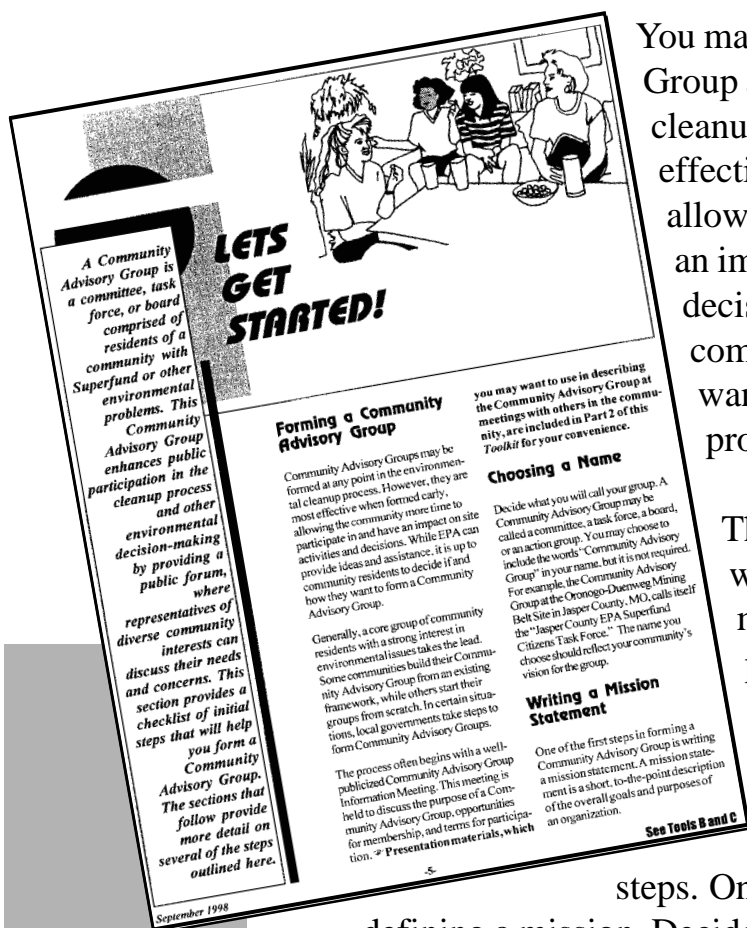
# Tips for Involving Hard-To-Reach Segments of the Community

You may need to take special steps to ensure that everyone can participate in making decisions about the site. This is especially true in communities with low-income and minority populations.

The *Community Advisory Group Toolkit* contains several suggestions to help you reach out to these groups. Start by learning more about the low-income and minority people in your area. Stress that every person has a voice. Encourage everyone to work together to solve community problems. Take time to build relationships with community groups that people already trust. Be sensitive to different cultures when you prepare materials to hand out. Avoid stereotypes. Use language that people can understand. Don't talk down to people. Distribute information in a variety of ways to ensure that everyone has a chance to get it.



# LETS GET STARTED!



You may form a Community Advisory Group at any point in the environmental cleanup process. However, they are most effective when they are formed early. This allows the community more time to have an impact on site activities and decisions. It is up to the people in the community to decide if and how they want to form a Group. The EPA can provide ideas and assistance.

The process usually begins with a well-publicized meeting. At this meeting, people can discuss the purpose of a Community Advisory Group and find out who is interested in forming one. If enough people are interested, you should consider several initial

steps. One is choosing a name. Another is defining a mission. Decide a basic organizational structure for your Community Advisory Group. Decide how Group members will share information with each other. Investigate whether your Group should incorporate and seek tax-exempt status. This booklet highlights some of these steps, and the *Toolkit* provides more details.

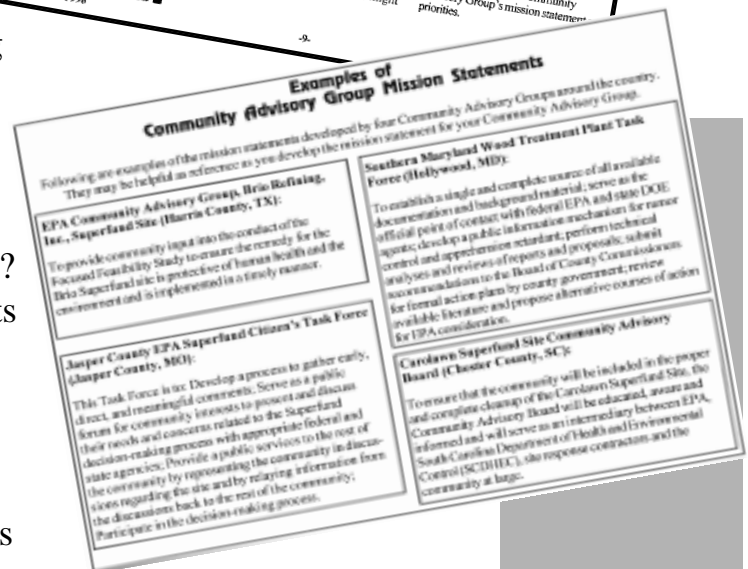
# Writing a Mission Statement

Your Community Advisory Group's mission statement tells why the Group exists and what it has set out to do. A mission statement is a short, to-the-point description of the overall purpose of your Group. A well-written mission statement brings a clear focus to an organization. The mission statement is important for letting the community know about your Group's goals and objectives.

Community Advisory Groups should answer four primary questions in writing a mission statement:

- (1) What is the Group's function or job?
- (2) For whom does the Group work?
- (3) How does the Group carry out its function?
- (4) Why does this Group exist?

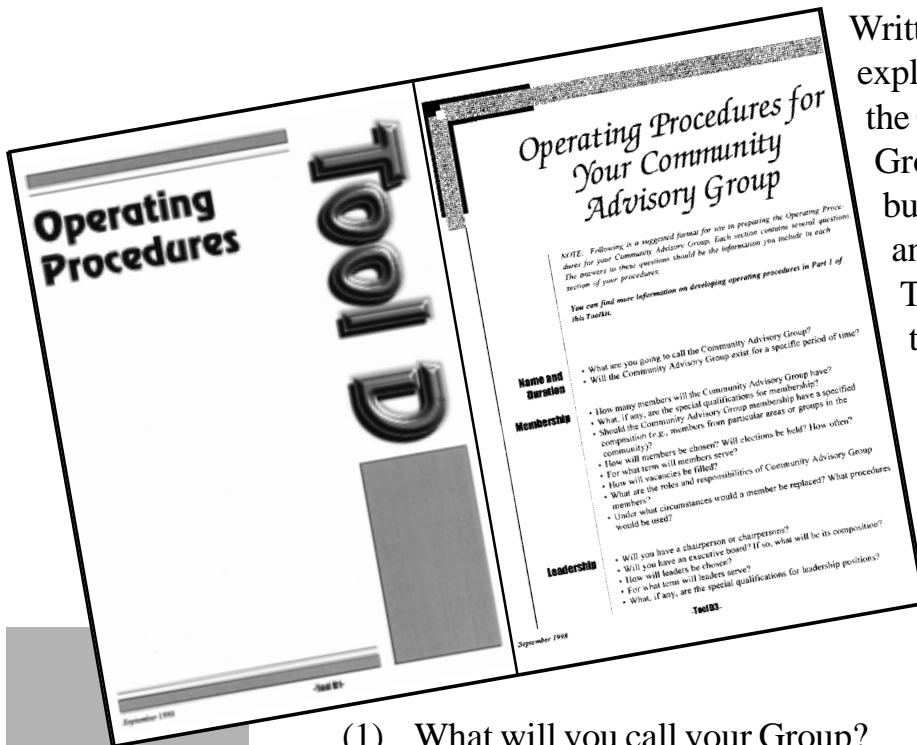
To prepare a mission statement, write a sentence or short paragraph that answers these questions. Then list a few of the Community Advisory Group's priorities. After Group members thoroughly discuss and agree upon the mission statement and priorities, present the mission statement to the community. Be sure that all segments of the community understand and accept your mission statement. Be willing to revise the mission statement over time, as issues and community concerns change.



# Developing Operating Procedures

Written operating procedures explain how you will organize the Community Advisory Group, how it will conduct business, make decisions, and resolve disputes.

These procedures provide the basic structure for how the Group will do its work. Your operating procedures should answer the following questions:



- (1) What will you call your Group?
- (2) What will be the size and composition of the membership?
- (3) Who will lead the Group?
- (4) What basic ground rules will the Group follow?
- (5) How often will the Group meet?
- (6) How will it announce and publicize meetings?
- (7) How will it resolve disputes?
- (8) How will it set meeting agendas, keep records of meetings, and share this information with the rest of the community?

Effective operating procedures do not have to be long or complicated. The *Community Advisory Group Toolkit* contains a guide to help you prepare operating procedures for your Group.



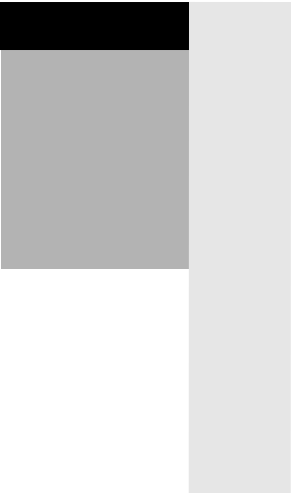

# Incorporating Your Community Advisory Group

By incorporating, your organization adopts a widely recognized structure and certain operating procedures required by state law. It is important to identify your Group as a nonprofit organization when you incorporate.

The process for incorporating your Group as a nonprofit organization varies from state to state. Consult the corporate law of your state government for the specific requirements and procedures you must follow.

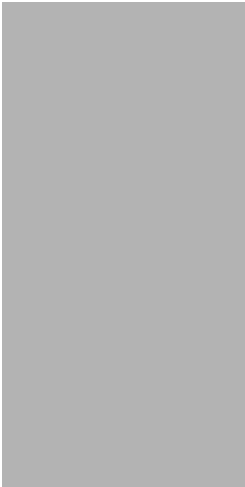
One important advantage of incorporating is that it can help your Group qualify for financial assistance from federal, state, public, or private sources. For example, Groups formed at National Priorities List (NPL) sites must be incorporated as nonprofit organizations to be eligible for EPA Technical Assistance Grants (TAGs). The TAG program provides funds for hiring an independent technical advisor who can offer reliable technical expertise to help Groups participate in the decision-making process.





Incorporating also has other advantages. For example, banks and other financial institutions often view incorporated organizations favorably. Incorporation also shields officers, board members, and the employees of a corporation from liability from debts incurred by or legal judgements against the corporation. Consult an attorney for more information on the legal and financial benefits of incorporating your Group as a nonprofit organization.

Incorporating your Community Advisory Group as a nonprofit organization does not exempt the Group from taxation. The Group must file a corporate tax return (U.S. Internal Revenue Service *Form 1120*) with the federal government, even if it takes in no revenue. The only nonprofit corporations that do not have to file a corporate tax return are those that the IRS has recognized as “tax-exempt.” Filing for tax-exempt status is a separate process. The next section describes the procedures for obtaining tax-exempt status.



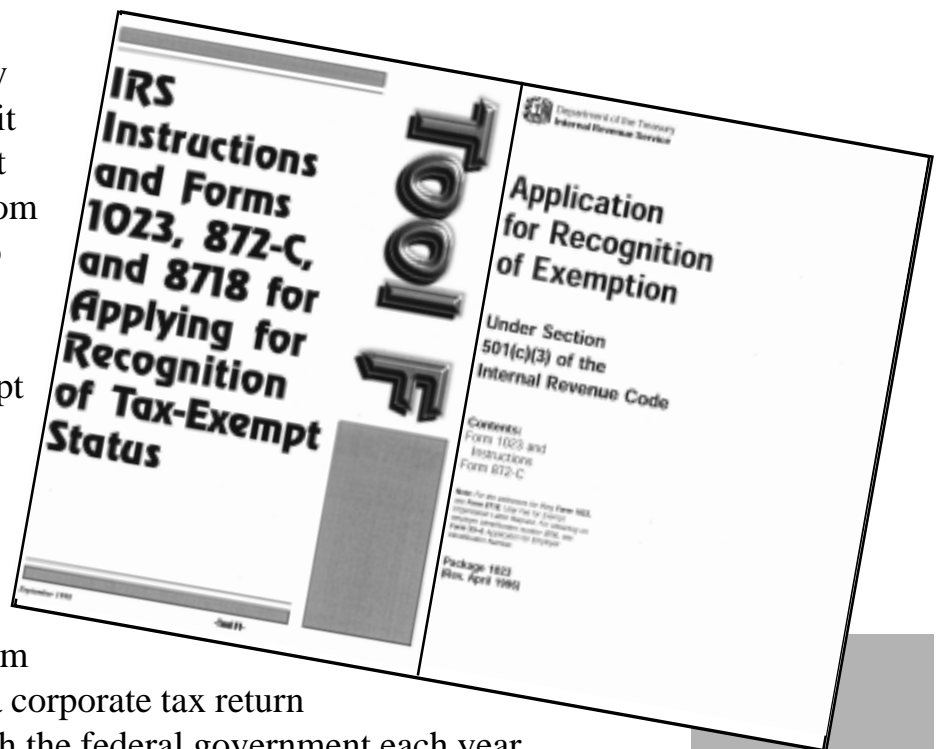
Most states also require nonprofit corporations to file corporate income tax returns, even if the nonprofit corporation has no revenue. Some states impose a minimum tax on any corporation, even a nonprofit one, that is not recognized as tax-exempt by the IRS. Not all states impose minimum taxes. Requirements and definitions vary widely among the states, so it is important for your Group to find out what your state requires.

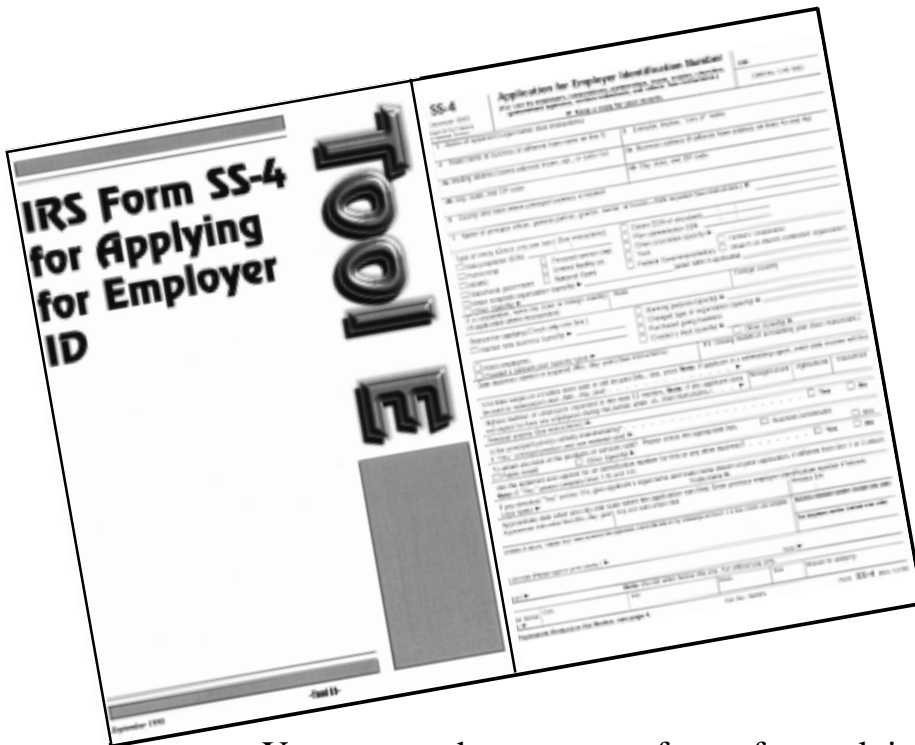
# Securing Tax-Exempt Status

Incorporating your Community Advisory Groups as a nonprofit organization does not exempt the Group from taxation. Your Group must apply to the Internal Revenue Service for tax-exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of the *Internal Revenue Code*. Unless the Group obtains tax-exempt status from the IRS, it must file a corporate tax return (IRS *Form 1120*) with the federal government each year, even if the Group takes in no revenue.

If the Group also wants to be exempt from state and local taxes, it must file separate applications with state and local taxing authorities. Approval of these applications usually is automatic if your Group already has received tax-exempt status from the IRS.

Securing tax-exempt status from the IRS has several advantages. The income and assets of your Group are free from federal taxes. Tax-exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) provides the legal authority to accept contributions. Contributors can deduct the contributions from their income taxes.



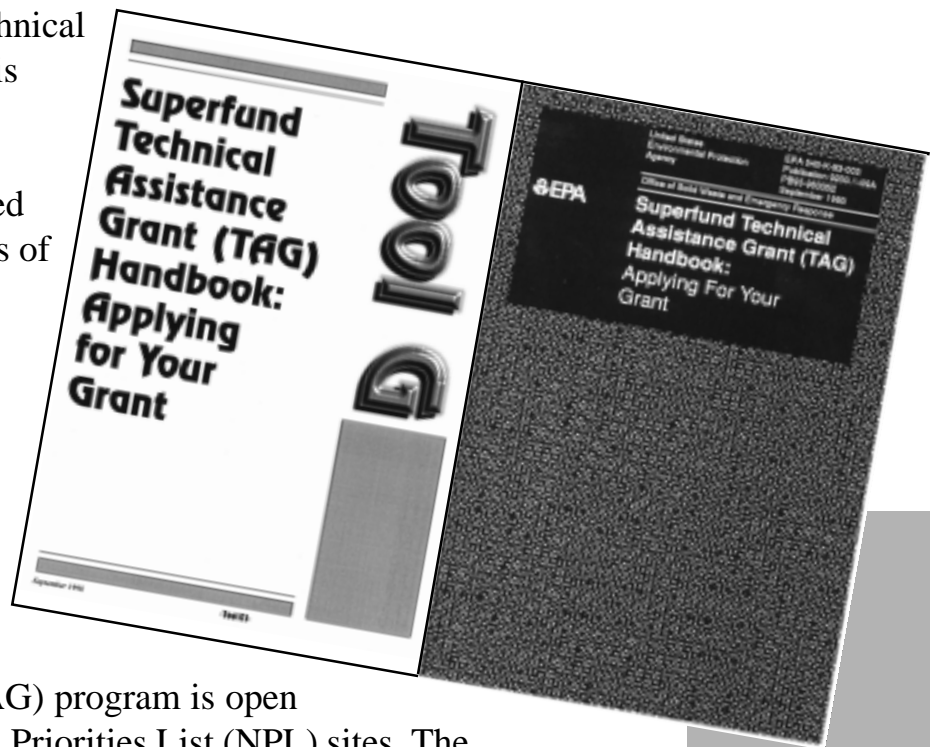


You can get the necessary forms for applying for tax-exempt status from the IRS. You will need IRS *Form 1023, Application for Recognition of Exemption Under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code*. Your Community Advisory Group also must apply for an Employer Identification Number (EIN), using IRS *Form SS-4, Application for Employer Identification Number*, whether or not the Group has employees or plans to hire any. Copies of both of these forms are in the *Community Advisory Group Toolkit*. Another booklet, IRS *Publication 557, Tax-Exempt Status for Your Organization*, is a helpful document available free from the IRS. Find the address of the nearest IRS office in the “United States Government” section of your local telephone directory. Many IRS publications and forms also are available on the Internet at [www.irs.ustreas.gov](http://www.irs.ustreas.gov).

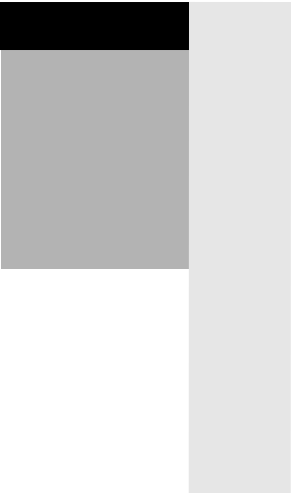

It is wise to have an attorney or accountant help you prepare your application or review the documents before you submit them to the IRS.

# **Community Advisory Groups and Technical Assistance Programs**

Access to reliable technical advice and expertise is fundamental to the success of a Group. Most Groups will need to engage the services of an independent technical advisor. Groups may get technical assistance from several sources at the local, state, and federal levels.

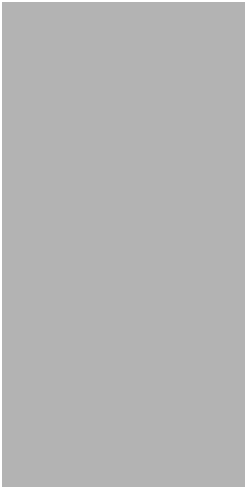


The EPA's Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) program is open to Groups at National Priorities List (NPL) sites. The Technical Assistance Grant program provides grants of up to \$50,000 to qualified citizens' groups to hire independent technical advisors. The role of the technical advisor is to help citizens understand and comment on site-related information. This helps ensure citizen participation in cleanup decisions. Contact your Community Involvement Coordinator or the Technical Assistance Grant program manager in your EPA Regional Office for more information.



*A Superfund Technical Assistance Grants Fact Sheet* (PB93-963301) is available free from the National Technical Information Service, 5285 Port Royal Road, Springfield, VA. You may order by telephone by calling 703-487-4650. Include the publication number listed after the title with your order.

Community Advisory Groups also may receive technical assistance through the EPA's Technical Outreach Services for Communities (TOSC) program. This program provides grants to the national network of Hazardous Substance Research Centers. The Centers then provide independent technical advice to communities. For more information on this program, contact the Community Involvement Coordinator in your EPA Regional Office. You also may contact the Technical Outreach Services for Communities program coordinator in your regional Hazardous Substance Research Center.



If your Community Advisory Group does not qualify for assistance under these programs, look for other federal, state, and local sources. Ask Group members and federal, state, and local government officials for suggestions.

# Finding Funding for Community Advisory Groups

Where can Groups find funds to support their work? While many people look first to the federal government or to national charitable foundations, most support is found closer to home. Local companies, major retailers, and even small businesses are potential contributors to Groups. There also are voluntary service organizations and scores of small, local foundations and plant-level corporate-giving programs eager to support worthwhile local programs.

Thinking locally is very important. Even getting funds from state and federal sources often depends on making contacts at the local level first. The key is to talk to people in your area. Form partnerships with local agencies and organizations. The *Community Advisory Group Toolkit* contains a guide to help you write an effective proposal to attract funders to your Group.

