

Organizational Structures for Cooperative Groups

Type of Group	Activities/Need for Decisions	Organizational Form	Membership Requirements
Support group	Ideas and feelings shared, no critical decisions	Loose discussion, no designated facilitator	May be open or restricted to those who are safe for other participants
Discussion group	Ideas and information shared, no critical decisions	Loose discussion, participants may try to persuade each other to a particular perspective, but don't need to	Usually open
Lectures, workshops	Presentation by knowledgeable or skilled person to less-knowledgeable or less-skilled, no critical decisions	Very structured agenda, designated presenter/facilitator	Usually open
Individual working on her/his own	—	Individual takes own initiative to do whatever she/he wants; individual is not restricted unless she/he infringes on others	—
Individual (or small task group) working on behalf of a larger group	Day-to-day tasks, many non-critical decisions	Decisions are (1) left to individual's discretion, (2) dictated by a supervisor (who interprets the group's mandate), or (3) obvious from steering group's mandate	Supervisor or steering group selects; payment may be made for satisfactory work
Task group	Tasks to reach a goal, important decisions — everyone's input needed, careful deliberation necessary	Consensus of group, cooperative facilitation	Restricted to those willing to work with group and who have skills of cooperative decision-making
Federation, alliance of groups with similar values and goals	Tasks to reach a goal, decisions restricted to areas where groups are trying to work together	Consent of each group to federation decisions, cooperative facilitation	Restricted to those willing to work with other groups and who have skills of cooperative decision-making
Coalition of groups with diverse values and goals	Tasks to reach a goal, decisions restricted to areas where groups are trying to work together	Minimal consent of each group to coalition decisions, may require strong facilitation and structured, rule-based decision-making process	Restricted to those groups useful for coalition purposes
Network	Communication among dispersed individuals or groups, no critical decisions	Loose discussion, participants may try to persuade each other to a particular perspective, but don't need to	Usually open
Large, dispersed task group that must coordinate many activities	Tasks to reach a goal, decisions must be coordinated	Hierarchical organization with strict authority, decisions made by those at the top and passed down, sanctions imposed against those who disobey	Very restricted and chosen by those at the top; payment probably required for compliance