

Federal Advisory Processes: Advice and Discontent

How do educational policy advisers
appraise their roles?

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Some 5700 representatives of non-governmental professional and interest groups currently serve as members of advisory units to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The growth of this extensive network of advisory councils is construed both as a sign of democratic inclusion of private citizens and as an intelligent quest for technical competence (1). Used properly, these outside advisory groups can effectively help Washington-based officials obtain new ideas and some measure of the degree to which federal programs are being executed wisely. But the mixed record of the ways in which the government utilizes outside advice and the disquietude of many advisory-council participants, at least in the sample discussed below, suggests a need for reexamining the strengths and limitations of the advisory process.

Appointment to national advisory groups conveys distinctive status. It constitutes a form of "patronage" in both a professional and a political sense; for those moving upward professionally or politically, it is one more recognition of prestige and acceptance. Family, friends, and most colleagues look upon such involvement as decidedly within the venerable tradition of civic duty—a response to the challenge "ask what you can do for your country." But the potentially influential and glamorous aspects of the role of part-time Washington adviser are often accompanied by frustration and ambiguity. Advisers often do not have a clear understanding of what they are accepting in terms of the definition of their assignment, the work load, and the results expected of them. What are the functions of the council? Why, really, was the advisory council

formed? What is the timetable? What homework or expertise is required? And what output is anticipated as the end product of the council's work? Not infrequently there evolves a gap in communications or rapport, wherein outside advisers become annoyed because they feel their advice is being ignored or misused. Alternatively, outside advisers can work counter to the "hidden agendas" of departmental officials—occasionally to the point of undermining the realization of a major Administration priority (1).

In this article we examine the individual role definitions and the personal attitudes toward advisory processes of the members of 26 councils and committees that "advised" the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) and the Johnson Administration on educational policy during the years 1966 to 1969. The central focus, in all cases, was on national education, but the diversity of the specialized focus is indicated by a listing of the names of five of the groups: the National Advisory Committee on Vocational Education; the Office of Education Research Advisory Council; the Advisory Council on State Departments of Education; the Commission on Instructional Technology; and the National Advisory Council on Library Resources (2). Two-thirds of these councils were appointed by the Secretary of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare or by the U.S. Commissioner of Education in consultation with the White House; the remaining third were appointed directly by the President. The advisers came together for 2-day work sessions three or four times a year in groups that averaged 10 to 14 members. Most of

the council members of our study served 2- or 3-year terms.

These councils are neither short-duration, ad hoc "task forces" of the type made popular by the Johnson White House for generating new legislative proposals, nor technical review panels that decide upon the merits of competing requests for federal support in the physical and social sciences. In theory, the councils of our study were designed to tap the administrative and research experience of outside educators for suggestions concerning existing or prospective policy governing federal educational programs. The authorizing language of various legislative statutes or executive orders is sufficiently broad to permit a variety of interpretations of the functional tasks of these councils. The tasks are defined in phrases such as these: "to advise the Office of Education in policy matters related to the administration of Title V of W program . . ."; "to review the operation of X federal program and evaluate its effectiveness, and make an annual report to the President and Congress . . ."; "to advise on broad priorities governing Y program, and recommend changes . . ."; or "to assist in determining the goals to be achieved by Z program."

Data presented in this article were obtained in early 1969 from responses to a questionnaire mailed to all members of the existing major federal advisory councils in the area of educational policy. More than 70 percent of the advisers responded. This was hardly a sample of typical Americans. Approximately 60 percent of the sample held doctoral degrees, more than 80 percent were teachers or educational administrators, and 88 percent were over 40 years old. Fifty-seven percent said they were Democrats, as opposed to 12 percent who said they were Republicans, and almost all the respondents said they favored (i) an active federal government role in education and (ii) the domestic program initiatives of the Great Society. Most of the respondents viewed themselves as educational policy makers, or at least as educational researchers and civic leaders knowledgeable about education. Though slightly older, the outside ad-

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visers appear strikingly similar, in vocation and in the values they hold, to the officials in the U.S. Office of Education to whom they report as presumably "independent" advisers.

Previous studies of advisory councils and their membership have shown that council members are rarely neutral participants in deliberations about policy (3, 4). Their biases and loyalties can, and often do, have an effect on policy and on program implementation, even if this effect is merely that of reinforcing the views of the officials they are advising. Less well understood are the personal expectations of the part-time advisers and their role perspectives. In our analysis we sought to answer two sets of questions: (i) How do the advisers define their advisory roles, what expectations do they hold for themselves, and to whom do they consider themselves accountable? (ii) What are their personal perspectives toward advisory processes, and what frustrations or disappointments did they encounter in the course of council proceedings? Answers to these questions should suggest some of the strengths and limitations of public advisory councils as such groups are currently used in Washington.

Advisory Elites and Functional Role Preferences

The role of the advisory council member is conceived here in terms of two dimensions: preferred function and perceived accountability. Members of the national educational advisory system were asked to rank six functions with respect to the degree the function characterized their council work (Table 1). The list of functions was derived from an open-ended preliminary test of former advisers as well as from personal discussions with advisers and government officials. These are, to be sure, functions quite commonly ascribed to advisory work both inside and outside of government.

A fairly distinct clustering of functions appears, as is illustrated (Table 1) by the differential rank order of preferences. Council members almost unanimously say they should advise on program priorities and should review guidelines and regulations. Elsewhere in the questionnaires, in their answers to an open-ended question asking how they viewed the job of the

advisory council member, respondents frequently used such terms as *evaluate*, *advise*, *guide*, and *advocate*. The two functions that the respondents considered next most characteristic of the council involved activities related to the internal decision-making operations of the agency: making managerial suggestions and working out new legislation. It should be noted that these are policy-determining functions, involving genuine participation in the direction of the agency and in its internal decision-making operations, as distinct from consultative opinions on program planning. Lobbying for Administration priorities or engaging in public relations efforts are activities which involve the relations of educational administrative units with Congress or the public, and these were viewed by the respondents of our study as least characteristic of advisory functions.

This rank ordering of characteristic functions suggests three functional role types: "advisers," "directors," and "supporters." These are not mutually exclusive categories. Nearly all of the respondents can be classified as "advisers" of one type or another, while less than half appeared to be "directors," and only a distinct minority could be validly described as "supporters." The differences among these roles may be illustrated by some observations made by respondents in describing their job.

Adviser role. The "advisers" typically commented:

- Advice is the primary function [of] the advisory council . . . not [to] marshal support and legislative backing for new federal public policy, [but to] advocate solutions for major public policy problems.
- An advisory council is not for the purpose of administering an educational program. . . . It should serve as a sounding board or guide to those selected to administer.
- I would oppose the establishment of advisory councils for the purpose of lobbying or for simply increasing visibility of programs. But if the councils are given adequate staff, specific tasks, and a degree of independence, councils can perform the useful functions of analysis and recommendations. They should neither expect to usurp the duties of the Congress or the President, nor "rubber stamp" the legislative or executive policies. They can add new dimensions to the views and perspectives available to the federal process, especially during periods of rapid change and great diversity. . . .

The "adviser" role contains several different elements, among them the "man in the field," the critic, the mon-

itor, the forecaster, and the wise counselor. The "adviser" conceives of his assignment, then, as that of sending information to the government's policy-determining officials, concentrating on the "inputs" rather than on operational "within-puts" or on external relations with other groups. The "adviser" respectfully keeps his distance and does not expect to have operational responsibility for program administration or policy formulation, although on occasion he may wish that his views were more instrumental than they are.

Director role. Respondents of the "director" type commented:

- Members should be more involved in policy formation rather than reacting to policy already determined.
- If councils are made up of truly able individuals, then they should be policy-making rather than advisory.
- A council member should have more to say in decision-making within our governmental set-up.

The "director" orientation is one assumed by council members who want greater involvement than "advisers" in running federal programs and recasting policy directions. Some "directors" are, no doubt, frustrated rationalists—individuals who protest the lack of coordination and the red tape which hold back existing grant-in-aid programs. Some are would-be federal administrators who second-guess current operations, viewing their council membership as a mandate to play an active, instrumental role.

Supporter role. The respondents who were "supporters" wrote:

- A courageous agency, trying to do its job under ill-informed or politically inspired attacks is entitled to have the buttressing support of an informed and competent advisory council.
- I see the job of the advisory council . . . [as] interpreting the program to regional or professional interest groups, as the occasion arises.
- The advisory council I serve on is more window dressing than actual service—[it is] used to get higher Federal appropriations. . . .

The "supporter" role has two aspects: (i) giving reassurance and (ii) serving as an interpreter or conventional public relations agent. Those advisory council members who mention or stress the functional role of "supporter" do not necessarily come to their assignments preferring it, but they sometimes become convinced that it was to perform these functions that they were appointed, or they belatedly acknowledge that this is the only area

in which they can make some kind of contribution to the program. These latter sentiments are not infrequently encouraged by certain types of departmental or bureau officials who quite unabashedly solicit lobbying support for their expansionist objectives or for continuation of their programs.

To be sure, there are occasions when advisory units are, quite understandably, populated largely with supportive elites. As one former HEW aide points out, occasionally a newly enacted program or some element of it becomes extraordinarily identified with a political party or a distinctively partisan White House point of view. As a consequence, the implementation of the program in, for instance, the somewhat nonpartisan world of public school administrators might appear to be headed for a rocky course. In an effort to retrieve a large element of educational legitimacy for the program, and "to relieve the program of some of its intense political overtones," this former HEW aide commented, "We would set about composing an advisory council of as many non-partisan highly prestigious professional educators as we could find." At least from the standpoint of some federal administrators, then, this strategy raises an alternative political perspective for what might otherwise appear to be an elitist and rather undemocratic selection process. Passing reference should be made here, however, to the fact that what is viewed as "supportive" at the Office of Education may not necessarily be viewed in the same way at the White House. For example, Harry Dent, a political operative at the White House under the Nixon Administration, is quoted as saying that presidential boards and commissions are one of "our prime sources of patronage," while James E. Allen, Jr., former Nixon Administration Commissioner of Education, reports (5) that 50 to 60 of the names he forwarded, as nominees for advisory committees, to the White House for political clearance were never approved.

Council members were then asked, in the questionnaire, which of six general functions they felt their council *should be* involved in. Their normative statements about the functions of advisory councils indicate not only strong preferences for practices related to the "adviser" and "director" roles, but also little regard for the "supporter" role (see Table 2).

Table 1. Educational advisers' ranking of functions.*

Functions	Reply (%)†		
	Characteristic	Not characteristic	No opinion
1. Advise on program priorities	91	7	2
2. Review guidelines and regulations	88	8	4
3. Make managerial suggestions	57	30	13
4. Work out new legislation	45	41	14
5. Work on publicity and support	38	49	13
6. Do lobbying work	17	68	15

* The question was presented in a close-ended format: "There are many functions characteristic of Advisory Councils. Which of the following are characteristic of your unit?" † Number in sample, 176.

Government officials should be alert to the very real disposition of many advisory council members to play a more substantial and involved part in policy-determining activities. About half of the council members say (Table 1) that their council performs managerial-directorial functions, whereas almost three-fourths of the members think the managerial-directorial role desirable and proper. Presumably this indicates an interest in increased participation in, if not control over, the decision making of departments and bureaus. Such participation would no doubt be of considerable benefit to "concerned" outside professional and associational interests, but, on the other hand, it might be highly undesirable for the consumers of educational services (students, parents, and ultimately the public) as well as for those officials within the government who wish to remain somewhat aloof and detached from the producers of educational services and products (6).

Officials who expect advisory councils to perform various political or supportive functions should be prepared to meet with noticeable resistance to such requests. Often the advisers resent or reject attempts on the

part of government aides to exploit an advisory council in this manner. Often, one would suppose, a closer affiliation between the advisory council member and a federal department would bring about greater empathy from the citizen adviser for the job of the department—a feeling that more needs to be done, that more help is required. Advisory council members, however, show little appetite for assisting with political and public relations through lobbying or efforts to forge supportive coalitions. This may be due to the council member's well-developed career orientation as "a professional man." It may be that educators feel a lack of experience in their dealings with government at any level, or even an apprehension about "political" activities. In any event, there seems far less convergence between advisory roles on the one hand and political or public affairs roles on the other in the field of education than in that of law (7). The educational policy adviser, at least as he defines and performs his task, contributes more to the federal executive branch through adaptive than through supportive functions.

Generally, however, there is a rather

Table 2. Educational advisers' role preferences.*

Category	Role preference	Level of agreement (%)†				
		Agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Disagree	No reply
"Adviser"	Council members should seek out and advocate solutions for major problems	47	29	12	7	5
"Director"	Councils serve very much like a board of directors, lending advice and opinions	17	54	16	9	4
"Supporter"	Councils should marshal public support and legislative backing for new federal policy	10	21	31	35	3

* The statements of column 2 were included in a closed-choice section of our questionnaire. † Number in sample, 176.

Table 3. Educational advisers' general accountability perspectives.*

Accountability focus	Levels of accountability (%)†			
	High	Low	None	No reply
U.S. Office of Education	52	29	11	8
Executive Branch	31	31	27	10
Interest group organization	24	27	38	11
Professional association	20	33	36	11
Home state	13	25	50	12

* The question was posed as follows: "In terms of your service on this Advisory body, what degree of accountability do you feel toward the following institutions or persons?" The respondents were asked to treat each category separately; this encouraged a multiple response. † Number in sample, 176.

close correspondence between what members believe their council is doing and what they feel it should do. Many of these outside advisers want, if anything, to be more involved and have a more direct effect upon what is going on in national educational policy, and to avoid situations in which they are asked to act as lobbyists. We may tentatively postulate, though, that most advisers have adequate leeway in determining the functional uses that are made of their contributions as members of advisory councils.

Advisory Elites and Accountability Perspectives

A second notable feature in the educational advisers' definition of their role is the way in which they view their accountability. To what groups or interests do they feel they owe some measure of loyalty or obligation? Whose interests are uppermost in their minds as they participate in advisory council deliberations? To some extent, educational policy advisers are free agents. Unlike legislators or even chief executives, they have not stood, and will not stand, for election before an explicit political constituency. Unlike civil servants or appointed officials, they are not subject to extensive legal rulings and bureaucratic traditions. On the other hand, they have been designated by public officials to render policy guidance to the federal government. Moreover, they are usually paid a consultant's fee of approximately \$100 a day, in addition to travel and living expenses. And, perhaps of greatest importance, most of these citizen-advisers are closely affiliated with specialized professional and interest groups. The designated adviser's colleagues in such career associations hold some implicit, if not explicit, expectations about his role performances. Hence, it is relevant

to inquire whether the adviser acknowledges any such obligation ("peer expectations") or whether he fashions his role in response to some set of competing factors.

In our sample, the advisers, despite their unfavorable attitude toward the "supporter" role, evidenced a measurably greater degree of accountability to the U.S. Office of Education and to the Executive Branch than to any external interest. This may in part reflect a sense of obligation to the authority that accords them the status of advisory council membership. Or perhaps it is merely a realistic acknowledgment that, if one cannot be of help to the Office of Education and the White House, then there is little justification for participation in the first place. It may also be that the question concerning accountability elicits a public-spirited civic service ethic—which is one of the several elements that attract many of these citizens to advisory council work. In any case, they interpret their assignment more as that of consultants *to* the government than as that of representatives *from* a more restricted constituency.

The manner in which the question about accountability was posed (see Table 3) permits a multiple response, and although the highest percentage of accountability was accorded the host agencies, it is important to note that many respondents felt some measure of accountability to professional associations or to interest-group organizations. Their occupational background, which, for the most part, is that of educational professionals, is of some consequence in guiding or forming their policy preferences and policy-making behavior (3, 8).

We also asked in the questionnaire about cue-giving "significant others" taken into consideration by the individual adviser as he performs his task (see Table 4). Answers to this question

were coded in a manner which would indicate only the major or dominant concern of the advisory participant. Such coding encourages a response different from "the federal government" or "the federal government's constituent agencies" in that it implies the presumption that advisory participants were recruited to speak for interests and concerns not sufficiently represented in the government. Despite the respondents' highly homogeneous occupational background as educational professionals, broader public or consumer concerns were mentioned more often than specific professional or specialized educational concerns. Perhaps professional socialization has, at least to some extent, translated professional interests into public interests, and vice versa. An equally plausible explanation is that many of the individuals selected as advisers to their national government have developed a personal code of accountability which is broader than specialized vocational preoccupations.

While it is impossible to determine how pervasively the attitudes indicated in the data of Table 4 guide advisory performance, they do fit the profile pattern of a public-spirited, voluntary citizen participation in the altruistic pursuit of educational opportunities for the public. Council members seemingly perceive student and consumer interests as a major focal point of the work of their council. Questions concerning ways to improve the quality of education for all, ways to upgrade educational opportunities for the poor, and ways to bring greater educational advantages to all age groups loom as central concerns of the typical advisory council participant. In such advisory council endeavors, members act more as private citizens accountable to the national government than as politically motivated individuals promoting their own or specialized professional interests. This is not to suggest that private or narrow professional interests go entirely unrepresented in the advisory processes. In response to both of the questions about perceived accountability (Tables 3 and 4), many advisers explicitly mention such interests; if anything, this type of inquiry is likely to generate a bias toward understatement of this concern rather than frank acknowledgment of narrower obligations.

It is a personal observation of one of us, who has frequently participated

in national educational advisory groups, that advisory council participants and government officials who are present at council sessions also act as significant cue-givers. For example, advisory council participants with explicit and sometimes strong occupational and interest-group orientations often, in council sessions, temper their expression of such attitudes in order to win respect and approval from their fellow participants. Not to do so might result in having one's views discounted. To speak loudly or at length solely for one's client or one's interest group would surely earn the disapproval of the majority of one's council colleagues, not to mention that of the attending public officials. To be sure, it is expected that on certain occasions a member will submit the facts as they are viewed back home at his State House or within his own professional circles. But exposure to counterbalancing views lessens strong interest-group bias and leads to action based on the participant's personal convictions, to a balance of perspectives, to greater open-mindedness, and to a commitment to learn about the deleterious consequences of a policy one has favored or the advantages of a policy one has opposed.

The operational "rules of the game" in most of these national advisory councils can be compared with those described by Barber (9) in his analysis of community finance boards. Although the boards he examined met much more often than the councils of our study and had more explicit authority over budget and tax matters, the norms he observed at work are strikingly similar to those operating in the councils we studied: controversy does not reflect political partisanship, controversy does not involve personal animosity, and unanimity does not indicate passivity. Barber concludes that (9, p. 113):

The important point behind these norms is that controversy and integration are not opposites in the deliberative process, but rather factors which complement and support one another. Controversy is possible because the group has defined it in a particular way, channeled it into productive courses. Integration thus includes agreement on the norms by which this defining and channeling is accomplished. Conversely, integration in the sense of unanimous agreement on practical solutions in which the members have confidence is made possible by controversy, by the working through of many objections to the proposal the group finally adopts.

Table 4. Educational advisers' interest-group accountability perspectives.*

Concerns or interests	Percent-ages†
General public interest	20
Students, children	20
The poor or minorities	14
Specific levels of education or governments (for example, higher education, states)	13
Professional associations or other special interests	15
Don't know, no answer, or other concerns	18

* The question was open-ended. Responses were coded according to the predominant accountability focus. The question read: "When you are participating in the work of Advisory Councils, whose concerns are uppermost in your mind—whom do you speak for?" † Number in sample, 176.

Within the advisory councils of our study, substantive controversy apparently was kept to a minimum: 63 percent of the advisers say there was little or no difference of opinion on substantive matters within their council, and 72 percent report that there were few or no differences on substantive matters between the council and the government staff members.

Discontent with Various Aspects of Advisory Council Work

Despite the fact that most advisory council members feel flattered at being asked to participate in national policy deliberations, many of them are not altogether pleased with the quality of the process. Some express bitter resentment at the ineptness of the federal bureaucracy in operating these councils. Writers in the past (10) occasionally have pointed out the disadvantages of relying on part-time advisers and outside experts. And more than a few critics have noted that it is impossible to compose a council in such a way as to please all parties. There will always be some interests excluded, some overrepresented, and so forth. Similarly, the sensitivity, patience, and available time of the federal officials who work with outside groups of advisers are often inadequate to the demand. Government administrators often are rushed and think in terms of expediency and time-saving, whereas many outside experts want to take a long-range view of a particular policy problem. On the other hand, certain outside advisers who happen also

to be state or local administrators may differ in the opposite direction, wanting to speed up grant-in-aid processes or wanting to discuss specific "nuts and bolts" types of concerns. And, of course, some advisory council members emphasize one type of advisory function over another, or view themselves as representing one particular interest group. In short, advisory groups can be unwieldy and difficult to use to good advantage.

Our data indicate that advisory councilmen hold conflicting views about the advisory process and about the degree of success their council is having. When asked to evaluate the policy impact of their council's work, or to comment on the shortcomings of the federal advisory process, they are often quite negative (Table 5). Yet, as was reported elsewhere (3), advisers feel that their council participation is "valuable" for themselves and for the government agency concerned. Most participants feel that they themselves are performing "well" and "influentially." They welcome the invitation to serve, and they usually have a sense of making a contribution to the nation. This apparent contradiction between one's appraisal of (i) an organization's work and (ii) one's own performance in that organization may reflect a difference in degree of objectivity.

The impact of council activity is perceived as somewhat greater on policy implementation than on new legislation. This difference quite correctly reflects the emphasis of advisory council assignments and the preoccupation of councils with the administrative rather than the legislative process. Only about half of the councils surveyed had express mandates to report to both Congress and the Executive Branch. It should be noted, too, that advisory councils have frequently been established in new legislation, primarily for purposes of program and policy review and only secondarily for the purpose of making legislative recommendations. Furthermore, in recent years presidential staff members have tended to rely upon "White House task forces" rather than departmental advisory councils when formulating legislative recommendations (11). It is to be expected, then, that advisory councils will have more of an impact on policy implementation than on legislative developments. What is notable here, however, is the generally modest assess-

Table 5. Advisers' assessments of their council's impact on quality of (i) legislation and (ii) policy implementation.

Category	Degree of impact (%)*			
	Significant	Moderate	Limited, or none yet	No reply
Legislation	16	23	45	16
Policy implementation	25	30	32	13

* Number in sample, 176.

ment of this impact. Although the respondents of our sample regard their task seriously and consider their own performance quite satisfactory, they nonetheless seem to feel that the council has relatively minor impact on administrative and legislative policy.

There are several factors that may explain this rather modest assessment. Some advisers assume that the effect of their contributions *should* be meager, because of their distance from government operations. Others have been engaged in their assignments for only a year or so and probably estimate that it will be a long time before any "significant" changes can be made. It is also likely that these modest assessments of impact are closely related to, if not explained by, council members' dissatisfaction with various aspects of the organization and operation of the councils. Table 6 presents the educational advisers' responses to a number of statements about advisory work.

The range of problems afflicting the advisory process suggests several critical limitations to the effectiveness of advisory councils. The noncirculating, elite membership of the councils calls into question the rationale for the existence of "citizen" advisory councils and raises anew the often-debated question of whether advisory boards should be manned by "experts" or by representatives of the "public interest." Some people argue that the political and legislative processes present ample opportunity for representative expression of the public interest and that what is needed within an advisory process is the specialist or expert drawn directly from the professions and industry (12). Do away with the middleman, they say: "The representative factor is of little consequence except as an indication of the expert qualification of the committeeman, the breadth of his experience, and his close touch with a profession or industry" (12). But in more recent years, especially in the War on Poverty and Model Cities experiences, scores of spokesmen have

called for greater representation for both the poor and the program consumers (13).

As may be seen in Table 7, a substantial proportion of the advisers in our sample were opposed to the proposition that council participants should act as spokesmen for their professions. There is less agreement, however, on the long-controversial question of whether councils should have an "expert" or a more "representative" orientation. A number of the advisers were in sympathy with the view expressed by one of their number:

Most advisory council members are representative of areas, or race, or sex, or political leanings. Many are useless on advisory committees but seem to come for the ride. Members should be selected more on their competencies for creative ideas in the area they are to advise!

Obviously, the ideal condition is one where highly knowledgeable laymen can be recruited along with objective professionals to introduce a fresh point of view and something of the "outsider's" perspective. Such people, however, are difficult to find and, once found and involved, often become hardly distinguishable from the "inside" specialists and professionals.

A second complaint of the advisers in our sample concerns the lack of time available for in-depth discussion of policy and program alternatives. Nearly three-fourths of the advisory participants cite this problem, and this alone is reason for concern. But the fact is that it is precisely because government aides do not spend enough of their own time on comparative analysis of program implications that the advisory groups are set up, and this is even greater cause for concern. Never before has the federal government been so in need of systematic assessment of competing policy approaches for the resolution of critical social and economic domestic problems (14).

The advisers feel, moreover, that there are not enough council meetings. Often there is not enough money to

finance more frequent meetings, and often meetings are postponed because of turnovers in personnel within the government agencies in question. But the problem here is not entirely the fault of the relevant government officials. Often the council members themselves are exceedingly busy people. Not infrequently it takes at least an hour for a panel and its staff merely to settle upon a time and place for the next meeting. And, of course, the more prestigious the panel is, the more difficult it is to select a time when its members can all come for more than a day and a half.

As a consequence of the short duration of meetings and their infrequency, a council often depends quite heavily upon the quality of research provided by council staffs or by professional researchers. But almost half of the educational policy advisers of our sample view the quality of current research as "inadequate." And many of them view the staff help as inadequate. Witness the following statements made by members of three different advisory councils:

► The problem is *not* with the advisory councils. The problem is that USOE staff is inadequate in quantity and quality. They are also subjected to unreasonable demands on their time. For these reasons they do not ask their advisory councils the right questions and are unable to provide the right or adequate data when the right questions do come up.

► The advisory council must be evaluated on the basis of its staff-work. If that is creative and good, the advisory council can do an outstanding job. If not, the advisory council is usually ineffective and tends to be a cover or screen for inadequate performance. In the case of my own council, the staff is earnest but untrained and ineffective—and the result has been a less excellent performance than might have been the case.

► Usually they [councils] are badly staffed, and not advised as to their proper functions. Usually they are presented with a staff document that is too long for them to digest properly; usually it comes too late, too near the deadline, and is so badly phrased that the council doesn't understand much of it. . . .

Funds are rarely appropriated when Congress creates advisory councils. Instead, these councils almost always compete for very limited salary and expense funds allocated for departmental administration. This means that councils seldom have an independent staff or sufficient resources to contract for independent studies and evaluations.

All too often these inadequacies are manifested in something like the following sequence. The first meeting or two is very well attended, both by the advisory council members and by senior officials of the government; expectations are high and lofty objectives are set. At succeeding sessions the attendance of participants is uneven, staff preparation is less adequate, and fewer government officials are present. Later in the sequence of events officials may exhibit indifference toward council recommendations, and some may explicitly request resolutions of endorsement and lobbying activity rather than "advice"; for example, they may say, "We need more help on the Hill," or "Give us some ammunition to strengthen our hand with the Budget Bureau!" In a series of interviews, some bureau-level officials of the U.S. Office of Education told us rather frankly: "Just about everybody knows these advisory groups are set up mainly for lobbying, but since it is really illegal [to put outside consultants on the government payroll for lobbying purposes], you have to be somewhat subtle about it and be sure not to put it in writing. . . ." This de-emphasis of the adviser's potential intellectual contribution in favor of seemingly manipulative solicitation for endorsement may further undermine the morale of many advisers. Understandably, but regretfully, the more talented and often the more critical advisers may gradually stop attending, and the professional meeting-goers and interest-group representatives are left to carry on the work.

The fundamental concern persists: Can advisory councils be made to operate effectively in the pursuit of better policy intelligence, appraisals, and program feedback? One-third of the council members frankly admit that the expectations held for such councils are far too high (see Table 6). Complaints about the misuse or exploitation of the councils were frequent among the members. Said one: "Now and then I get the idea that the council was called so as to comply with the law, rather than with any expectation that we might make some real contribution." Said another: "Political sensitivity to special interest lobbies is more deeply entrenched than I had anticipated." While most of the advisers are not harsh critics of the advisory process in which they participate, there is surely an underlying sense of discontent. This

Table 6. Advisers' perceptions of advisory process problems.*

Problems	Percentage†
1. Too many of the same people already involved in the policy area are also sitting on advisory councils. Greater efforts should be made to attract new and younger members.	74
2. Not much time for critical in-depth discussion of policy and program alternatives.	72
3. The quality of basic research relevant to advisory council's scope of concern is inadequate.	47
4. Our advisory council did not meet often enough.	37
5. Advisory councils are far too overrated with respect to what they can do.	34
6. Advisory councils seem to be used more as "window dressing" or for public relations rather than for genuine advisory work.	31
7. Quality of advisory council staff has been mediocre or unsatisfactory.	18

* Each of these close-ended inquiry statements was presented for respondent reaction. † Number in sample, 176.

is clear because the two concerns most frequently cited are *fundamental*: the first questions the openness and democratic makeup of the membership; the second questions whether members have adequate opportunity to make intellectually honest appraisals of programs and policies, given the restrictive time framework.

In a discussion of general advisory boards, MacMahon (15) has summed up a familiar attitude of resignation toward these two concerns.

Advisory bodies have an advantage when their scope is limited and relatively technical. They are inherently disadvantaged when attached as standing bodies for overall counsel to an agency or unit as a whole. In such circumstances, amid the pressure of administrative decisions, items for the agenda are likely to be history when the committee meets. The sessions are padded with descriptive lectures. It may happen, therefore, that administrators become irked and the advisers frustrated and indifferent even when they cherish the honor of membership and attend through habit or curiosity.

Other critics question the logic of relying on outside committees for anything but symbolic or pedestrian functions. These reservations are well ex-

pressed in the following comments made by Henry Kissinger nearly 10 years before he joined the White House national security staff (16):

The committee system not only has a tendency to ask the wrong questions, it also puts a premium on the wrong qualities. The committee process is geared to the pace of conversation. Even where the agenda is composed of memoranda, these are prepared primarily as a background for discussion, and they stand or fall on the skill with which they are presented. Hence, quickness of comprehension is more important than reflectiveness, fluency more useful than creativeness. The ideal "committee man" does not operate with ideas too far outside of what is generally accepted. Thus the thrust of committees is toward a standard of average performance. Since a complicated idea cannot be easily absorbed by ear—particularly when it is new—committees lean toward what fits in with the most familiar experience of the members. They therefore produce great pressures in favor of the *status quo*. Committees are consumers and sometimes sterilizers of ideas, rarely creators of them.

While Kissinger is perhaps more pessimistic than most government officials, his observations are not greatly at odds with our own. For, in general, we conclude (admittedly going beyond the

Table 7. Educational advisers' perceptions of representation focus.*

Representation statement	Percentages who agree or disagree†				
	Agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Disagree	No reply
Advisory council members should primarily serve as representatives of their professions	10	19	27	42	2
If positive recommendations are sought from an advisory committee, this should be composed of <i>experts</i> rather than <i>representatives</i>	20	26	31	18	5

* These two statements were presented in a close-ended format. † Number in sample, 176.

evidence of our survey data) that advisory boards are more often conservative than creative, more often superficial than systematic, and more often co-opted as supporters of incremental expansion of existing activities than independently engaged in fundamental or fresh policy reappraisals.

Discussion

If a substantial number of participants in the federal educational advisory process feel that they are not making a significant contribution to policy-making activities of the federal government, one of the basic troubles appears to lie in the unclear manner in which advisory councils are conceived and defined at their outset. Is the council expected to develop legislation, marshal public support, evaluate program implementation, or merely reassure government officials that programs are moving along on the right track? Government officials should specify as precisely as possible the exact function or functions that are desired, and these functions should be explicitly stated when prospective council participants are being recruited.

In general, so long as the individual council member performs the primary functional role of "adviser," there is little ambiguity regarding his assignment. When, however, he moves more aggressively into the policy-making role of "director," or when government officials succeed in casting outside policy advisers in the role of "supporters," discontent may develop. An advisory council participant who wants to be more of a "director" than an "adviser" will feel more discontent if his council does not bring about legislative change or change in administrative policy. The role of "adviser," which encompasses advocacy of new ideas, assessment of needs, and a critical evaluation of existing programs, should be more rigorously defined and accorded prime recognition. The propensity of advisory council members to aspire to active participation in the determination of policy and the tendency of government personnel to prefer that councils perform supportive functions should be acknowledged. In short, the advisory council process might operate much more effectively if both advisory council members and the governmental recipients of advice were clearly aware

from the start of what each expected of the other.

Even if a more precise understanding about advisory functions and roles can be communicated between insider and outsider, significant limitations on the impact of advisory councils on federal policy will remain. We strongly suggest that advisory councils not be established if staffing must be inadequate and meeting time insufficient. A related and perennial concern, from the point of view of the advisers, is the fact that rarely have their government counterparts kept them adequately informed between official council meetings. However, these shortcomings should all be amenable to objective attack. Regrettably, few, if any, serious efforts to improve this basic situation were made during the latter years of the Johnson Administration or have been made during the first 2 years of the Nixon Administration (17). Indeed, in what little attention they give these councils, both Administrations have exercised control over them by blacklisting or politically vetoing certain types of critics and by recruiting partisan supporters who were favorably disposed toward White House policy perspectives and less likely than others to complain about the limitations of the advisory process itself [see (18)].

There is also a need for a more thoughtful congressional appreciation of the use of advisory councils. Congress tends to legislate advisory units every time it passes a major bill, with the result that the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and the Office of Education end up with an excessive number of advisory councils, usually too fragmented or ill-organized for giving helpful advice on broad policy problems. The Office of Education might be much better off with fewer councils, some with a broader focus that, preferably, would cut across bureau lines rather than run the chance of being the captive of any one bureau.

The membership composition of advisory councils should be designed in the light of the specified functions the council is expected to serve. Certain groups might be explicitly made up only of outstanding individuals in specialized fields. Others should be as representative as possible of consumer interests from all regions and from all age groups. This latter objective is rarely achieved—in part because of a

lack of precedent and in part because of a bureaucratic lack of imagination. Deep and divisive conflicts in this nation will not be assuaged if government officials neglect the views and complaints of the poor, the young, and the disaffiliated. To be sure, formation of a genuinely representative advisory group that will function effectively may require additional time and preparation. But, to date, relatively little federal effort has been expended on experimenting with various modes of popular or representative consultative practices. Ironically, the federal government frequently urges a more broadly based citizen participation at the local levels of government while hypocritically eschewing any serious commitment to such strategy in its own processes.

It is important to recognize that a spectrum of options concerning advisory councils is available to federal officials and that no one format should become fixed as the model. Occasionally, for example, it is more effective and productive to appoint five or six talented specialists and let them constitute themselves a working group of experts for making explicit recommendations about certain complicated policy matters. Such a group might best operate under a 1- or 2-year deadline and go about its work in an unpublicized and highly professional way. But for a variety of other advisory assignments, advisory councils will prove to be valuable only if they are independent of the agencies they are advising. Many councils of these types should be sufficiently representative of the general public to be truly independent of (i) the political and professional interests of the incumbent Administration and (ii) the vested interests of the well-organized interest groups in the policy area in question. To achieve this end, Congress and the Executive Branch should occasionally fund such advisory groups independently of the federal departments and ensure that adequate staff is provided and that non-politicized recruiting operations are permitted. There are risks involved in council formats of this latter type; they may prove unwieldy and costly for national political leaders. But such risks and costs may be preferable to indictments of national advisory systems as *elitist* and *closed* (19). And Robert Dahl's recent suggestions (20) about worker-council and self-manage-

ment strategies point in the direction of yet another set of policy-appraisal possibilities.

Also, there is the important normative question of how effective or influential advisory councils should be allowed to become. Can a political system which is based on the periodic electoral accountability of public officials accord a special policy-determining role to an elite, nonelected group of advisers, responsible not to a constituency but to their own values and standards? Despite our findings indicating a relatively high sense of accountability to the federal Executive Branch and the general public, many of these advisers admitted ties to occupational and interest group organizations. If these latter interests were representative of the diversity of professions and interest groups within the country, there would be less cause for concern, but this is clearly not the case. This question is one of special importance in the current period of strong pressures for expanded popular involvement in governmental decision-making processes (21).

Properly recruited and staffed, advisory councils can help to redirect uncertain federal programs and to recast misdirected policy intentions. Advisory councils may also prove to be an effective means of encouraging critical popular participation within the existing governmental system—but this is a matter that so far has been little explored (21, 22). The benefits and the costs of democratically representative advisory councils will be different from those of advisory councils whose members have been selected for their technical expertise. And it is possible that, on occasion, both types of advisory councils (representative and technically specialized) might productively give advice on the same sets of problems.

Whatever the function and whatever the strategies of advice, advisory councils are not cost-free; needed intelligence is rarely secured without cost in any enterprise. Careful projection of the costs required by the scope of the advisory task is obviously necessary, and now all too often neglected. For, as the record of existing national advisory councils in education suggests, the process by which policy advice is obtained seems to be characterized by its ambiguities and shortcomings as well as by its potential effectiveness.

References and Notes

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13. For various discussions of the proposals for more participation of the public, see R. Blumenthal, in *American Political Institutions and Public Policy*, A. Sindler, Ed. (Little, Brown, Boston, 1969); P. Goodman, *N.Y. Rev. Books* (14 Oct. 1965); and F. Popper, *The President's Commissions* (Twentieth Century Fund, New York, 1970).
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15. A. W. MacMahon, in *Public Administration and Democracy*, R. Martin, Ed. (Syracuse Univ. Press, Syracuse, N.Y., 1965), p. 201.
16. H. A. Kissinger, *The Necessity for Choice* (Harper, New York, 1960), pp. 356-357.
17. *Presidential Advisory Committees: Hearings Before the Special Studies Subcommittee of the Committee on Government Operations, House of Representatives, March and May, 1970* (Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1970).
18. B. Nelson, *Science* 164, 813 (1969). It has been a practice in both the Johnson and the Nixon Administrations to overrepresent the White House party on advisory councils. And, not surprisingly, our data indicate high measures of support from the Democrats for the Johnson Administration in general and for its educational programs in particular. We would suppose that Republicans would be more supportive of the Nixon Administration. Advisory councils recruited and appointed solely by the White House will be more supportive of, and responsive to, the presidential orientation, while those primarily recruited and appointed at the bureau level or Office of Education level will usually be somewhat less favorably disposed toward White House goals and more likely to favor programmatic expansion and substantive professional goals. This distinction is not always clear, because the White House staff and presidentially placed aides in a Department Secretary's office will often try to gain control over departmental advisory groups in support of White House goals. Some initiative of this type characterized the first 2 years of the Nixon Administration; the White House repeatedly encouraged the disbanding of some Office of Education advisory units and recommended the overhaul of several others, with a major influx of Republican nominees. The noteworthy point here is that advisory councils are often viewed more as political resources than as sources of information on which to base policy.
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