



# Community Advisory Groups

## Overview

A community advisory group (CAG) is a representative committee, task force, or board formed by a community and composed of residents affected by a Superfund site. Forming a CAG can be one of the most effective ways a community can participate in environmental decisions that affect them. A CAG provides a public forum in which community members can discuss their diverse interests, needs, and concerns related to the Superfund decision-making process. A CAG that is representative of the diverse interests of the community can act as an effective “voice” for the community to communicate with EPA throughout the cleanup process.

## Why This Is Important

CAGs are important because they allow the Superfund site team to communicate with an inclusive group of individuals representing all significant stakeholder groups within a community. CAGs also help ensure representation and participation of some populations that may be disproportionately affected by environmental issues or who may have been overlooked in past efforts to participate in the Superfund decision-making process. CAGs can facilitate the exchange of information, including the perspectives of community members with important institutional knowledge of site issues and practices.

## Implementation

CAGs often are formed in a community at EPA’s suggestion, and with limited EPA support. EPA may suggest the formation of a CAG at sites with strong community interest and where it would be useful for EPA to hear from a group in the community that represents numerous stakeholder perspectives. Consult with other members of the site team (including the remedial project manager, on-scene coordinator, or legal counsel) to assess whether a CAG might be a good idea at a site.

Among the factors the site team might consider are the following:

*This and all tools in the Community Involvement Toolkit should be used in conjunction with the [Community Involvement Handbook](#), which provides guidance to EPA staff on how EPA typically plans and implements community involvement activities at Superfund sites.*

- Was interest in creating a CAG expressed by the community during the community interview process?
- What is the history of community involvement at the site?
- What is the likelihood of long-term cleanup activity at the site?
- Is there enough community interest and concern at the site to warrant a CAG?
- Has the community expressed an interest in forming a CAG?
- Does a group similar to a CAG exist?
- Do groups with competing agendas exist at the site?
- Are there any environmental justice issues or concerns related to the site?

The site team can use information gathered from its interactions with community members and from [community interviews](#) conducted for development of the [community involvement plan](#) (CIP) to assess whether the site might benefit from formation of a CAG. Information from the [community profile](#) section of the CIP also can be particularly useful.

## When to Form a CAG

A CAG can be formed at any point in the cleanup process. Generally, the earlier a CAG is formed, the more opportunities exist for the CAG to participate in and have an impact on site activities and cleanup decisions. However, a CAG also can be formed later in the process whenever the need for, or potential benefit of, having a representative community forum becomes apparent. For example, if site reuse issues emerge relatively late in the process, a CAG could still be an effective community engagement tool to discuss [reuse and redevelopment](#) issues.



## Where to Form a CAG

In general, CAGs are a good fit in communities where there is a high level of interest and concern about site activities. Other sites for which formation of a CAG should be considered include:

- Sites that lack an existing inclusive, representative community group interested in site issues.
- Sites with several competing community groups interested in site issues, as long as these groups can agree to work together.
- Sites with environmental justice concerns.
- Sites where there may be a need to coordinate diverse community views and provide a means for the community to seek consensus.
- Sites where there are sufficient time and resources to support formation and operation of a CAG. (While formation of a CAG can be considered at removal sites, keep in mind the time and resources necessary to form and keep a CAG operating effectively. This may preclude forming a CAG at a time-critical or a non-time-critical removal site where site activities are expected to take place over a limited time period.)

CAGs may not be necessary or appropriate in some situations. Examples include:

- Sites where there is a low level of interest or concern about site issues.
- Sites with an existing community organization that is representative of the local community and has been active. Such a group often can fulfill the CAG's role. For example, a local environmental group that has been active on site issues might be appropriate. In some cases, an existing [\*Technical Assistance Grant\*](#) (TAG) recipient group might be able to fulfill a CAG's role.

- Sites at which competing groups cannot work effectively together and it proves impossible to form a representative group willing to work together.
- Sites where EPA lacks resources to support technical assistance needs for CAGs.

## Forming a CAG

Often, a CAG's effectiveness depends on how well it is set up initially. In general, the more careful attention and work that EPA invests during the CAG formation process, the more smoothly and effectively the CAG will operate over the course of the Superfund cleanup process.

EPA, in conjunction with appropriate state, tribal, or local governments, usually starts the process by informing and educating the community about the purposes of a CAG and the opportunities for participation in a CAG. This might include distributing information about CAGs and CAG membership opportunities through [\*fact sheets\*](#), [\*social media\*](#), community websites, [\*public notices\*](#) or news releases.

The site team also can help the community determine the appropriate size and composition of the CAG and help them decide how to solicit nominees and select CAG members. If the outreach efforts are successful and there is sufficient community interest in forming a CAG, EPA often will lead a CAG information meeting in the community. If the community decides to form a CAG, subsequent meetings should focus on deciding about the CAG's structure and operating procedures, and the process of determining CAG membership.

For more detailed information about forming a CAG, please visit the [\*EPA CAG website\*](#).

### *CAG Information Meeting*

*EPA can lead a CAG information meeting to gauge the community's interest in forming a CAG. The purpose of the CAG information meeting is to introduce the CAG concept to the community and educate them about a CAG's purpose, a CAG's relationship with EPA, how CAGs are generally structured and how they operate, and to discuss potential membership models. The meeting also is an opportunity to address questions from the community about CAGs and to explain what assistance EPA can provide if the community decides to form one. CAG information meetings are especially important at Superfund sites where the community may have had relatively limited participation in the Superfund process. The CAG information meeting is an important step for soliciting membership in a CAG, so careful planning is critical.*



## EPA and the CAG

EPA does not direct CAGs. However, EPA can help ensure that a CAG is representative of the community, operates efficiently, and meets the needs and capabilities of its membership and the community it serves. Before deciding that EPA will recognize the group as a voice for the community, the site team must determine that the CAG is representative of the diverse interests of the community.

To maintain legitimacy in the community, each CAG should operate on its own. EPA should be available to provide feedback and support to the CAG when needed. This is especially important during the start-up period for a new CAG. EPA's role in a CAG will

vary based on the needs and organizational capabilities of the community. Some community involvement coordinators (CICs) favor a hands-on approach, while others favor a more hands-off approach. In communities that are new to the Superfund process or which have not been active in site issues in the past, it may be necessary for EPA to provide more hands-on support to a newly forming CAG. However, in communities where community members are vocal and active in site issues or where there is an existing well-functioning community group, the CAG may need less direct assistance from EPA. EPA employees also may help the community in the CAG-formation process by providing guidance or facilitation/mediation support (often through a contractor and/or neutral third party).

