

A Guide to Planning Simple, Effective Selectboard Retreats



Board development doesn't have to be formal or complicated. A selectboard retreat is a chance to welcome new members, reconnect as a team, and focus on the work ahead. Consider starting with a casual gathering so existing members can get to know new colleagues in a low-pressure setting. Add a tour of town facilities or the site of an upcoming road project to ground board discussions in real-world context. Use a working session to review and update board priorities and create a clear list of upcoming projects. You might also host a "[Selectboard Essentials](#)" watch party or invite a local expert to lead a short workshop or class on a timely topic.

Use this Guide as a menu: pick a few elements that fit your time, budget, and board culture, and build from there. Even a two-hour "mini retreat" with one or two of these ideas can make your board's work together smoother and more satisfying for the year ahead. Remember, low-cost ideas can build connection, clarity, and a shared agenda. And don't forget this pro tip: include food whenever you can—sharing a meal (or even just snacks) helps build relationships, trust, and a stronger sense of community within the board.

Easy Retreat Components (Mix & Match)

- **Welcome gathering for existing and new members**
 - Short, informal meet-and-greet (coffee, cookies, potluck).
 - Simple "round robin": each member shares why they serve and one hope for the year ahead.
- **Tour town facilities**
 - Visit the highway garage, water/wastewater plant, town office, transfer station, or library.
 - Invite key staff to give a 5–10 minute "what we do and what we're worried about" overview.
- **Visit the site of an upcoming road or infrastructure project**
 - Walk or drive the site together.



- Ask: What do we need to understand here before we make decisions?

- **Work session to review and update board priorities**

- List current projects and commitments on a flip chart or screen.
- Ask each member to identify 3–5 top priorities.
- Combine into a short, clear list of upcoming projects with rough timelines and leads.

- **“Selectboard Essentials” watch party**

- Watch live or, if you watch recorded segments, select one or two short segments to watch together.
- Pause to discuss: “What do we already do well?” “What might we try differently?”

- **Workshop or class with a local expert**

- Invite your town attorney, regional planning staff, road foreman, or a local mediator/facilitator.
- Keep it focused: 30–45 minutes on a single timely topic (e.g., open meeting law basics, road funding, conflict at meetings).

Additional Low-Cost, Low-Tech Ideas

- **Board norms mini session**

- In small groups or as a whole, draft 5–7 “how we work together” agreements (e.g., one person speaks at a time; no surprises on big decisions; we ask questions before we assume).
- Post them at future meetings.

- **Strengths and interests round**

- Each member shares:
 - One strength they bring to the board.
 - One area where they'd like to learn more this year.



- Use this to match members with topics, committees, or trainings.

- **Simple reflection exercise**

- Ask: "What went well for the board this past year?" "What was hard?" "What do we want to be different next year?"
- Capture answers on paper and refer back when setting priorities.

- **Mini listening session with staff**

- Invite key staff for a 20–30-minute conversation. Ask:
 - "What's one thing the board does that helps you do your job?"
 - "What's one change that would make your work easier or more effective?"

- **Community "thank you" notes**

- Take 10 minutes to identify volunteers, committees, or partners who helped the town this year.
- Draft a few short thank-you notes or plan a simple public recognition at a future meeting.

Don't Forget the Food

- Light snacks, a potluck meal, or pizza and salad can transform the tone of a retreat.
- Eating together slows the pace, encourages informal conversation, and helps new members feel welcome.
- Keep it simple and within budget—homemade cookies and coffee work just as well as anything fancy.

Open Meeting Law Requirements

- The requirements of the Open Meeting Law are triggered whenever a "quorum" of the body is "meeting." A quorum is a majority of the total members of the



body. Quorum is determined based on the number of positions on the body, not the number of persons occupying those positions.

- The Open Meeting Law does not prohibit a quorum of members of a public body from assembling at social functions, conventions, conferences, training programs, press conferences, media events, or otherwise gathers, provided that the members refrain from discussing specific business of the public body that they expect to take up at a later time. [1 V.S.A. § 310\(5\)\(C\)](#).
- See VLCT's [Open Meeting Law FAQs](#) for additional information.

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