Model Committees, Task Forces and Work Groups Policy + Guidance

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Volunteer committees, task forces, and work groups play an important role in Vermont local government. They provide opportunities for residents to share their knowledge, contribute ideas, and help municipalities address community needs and priorities. Whether a committee is studying a specific issue, developing recommendations, or supporting an ongoing initiative, these groups can be valuable resources for Selectboards.

However, without clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and expectations, volunteer groups can encounter challenges involving authority, communication, accountability, and compliance with Vermont law. Establishing a consistent framework helps municipalities make effective use of volunteer expertise while ensuring appropriate oversight and transparency.

VLCT's *Model Committees, Task Forces and Work Groups Policy* provides a framework for Selectboards to establish, manage, and oversee advisory bodies they create. The policy is intended primarily for **committees created by Selectboards** and does not generally apply to boards or commissions established by statute, which may have separate legal requirements and authority.

Establishing Clear Roles and Expectations

One of the most important steps in creating an effective advisory committee is establishing a clear purpose and scope of work. VLCT recommends that Selectboards formally establish each committee through a written resolution adopted at a duly warned public meeting.

The resolution should identify the committee's purpose, responsibilities, membership, expected outcomes, reporting requirements, and duration. It should also clarify the committee's authority and relationship to the Selectboard.

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The model policy distinguishes between two types of advisory committees:

- **Standing committees** address ongoing or recurring municipal matters and generally continue until modified or dissolved by the Selectboard.
- **Ad hoc committees, task forces, or work groups** are typically established to address a specific issue or project and conclude their work within an established timeframe.

Regardless of their purpose, these committees generally serve in an advisory capacity. They may research issues, gather public input, and develop recommendations, but final decisions remain with the Selectboard.

Supporting Accountability and Transparency

Selectboard-created advisory committees are generally subject to Vermont's Open Meeting Law, 1 V.S.A. §§ 310–314. This includes applicable requirements for public meeting notices, agendas, public participation, meeting minutes, and the conduct of meetings.

Committee members must also comply with applicable municipal ethics and conflict-of-interest requirements.

The model policy establishes expectations for membership, appointments, officer responsibilities, communications, and regular reporting to the Selectboard. It also encourages periodic review of standing committees to ensure their work continues to align with municipal needs and priorities.

Maintaining Financial Oversight

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Advisory committees may identify funding opportunities, research grants, and develop recommendations for municipal projects. However, they should not independently commit municipal funds, staff time, or property, or enter into agreements on behalf of the municipality.

A key provision of the model policy requires that grant applications submitted on behalf of the municipality, or involving commitments of municipal resources, receive Selectboard review and approval before submission. This ensures that the appropriate municipal officials understand the financial, administrative, and long-term obligations associated with proposed projects and funding opportunities.

Putting the Policy into Practice

Municipalities considering adoption of this model policy should review their existing committees, task forces, and work groups and determine whether their purposes, responsibilities, and reporting relationships are clearly documented.

Selectboards should tailor the policy to local circumstances, including municipal staffing capacity, committee structures, and established procedures. Existing advisory committees should be provided with clear written charges and an opportunity to understand the expectations established by the policy.

A consistent approach to committee governance can strengthen communication, reduce misunderstandings, support accountability, and help volunteers contribute effectively to their communities.

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