

NRPA Advisory Board Member Resource Guide



NRPA Citizen Board Member Resource Guide

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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations!

You have volunteered, been appointed, been nominated or been cajoled into serving on your community parks and recreation board. Your next question is, or should be, "*Now what do I do?*"

The training and orientation available to citizen board members is as varied as the existing agencies, geographic areas of the country, and types of boards. This Resource Guide seeks to present an overview of information needed to assist citizen board members in the area of parks and recreation to perform their roles effectively. This Resource Guide was created primarily as a tool for new citizen board members, particularly those who do not have access to meetings and conferences that offer training opportunities for board members.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Citizen Branch encourages attendance at face-to-face gatherings because of the invaluable networking that occurs, but sometimes attendance is not possible due to time or agency budget constraints. By developing a printed resource, we are able to reach more citizen board members. NRPA and the Citizen Branch of NRPA offer sessions and training opportunities as part of the NRPA Annual Congress (usually held in September or October) and at regional meetings and schools. These trainings offer information that is specifically oriented toward citizen board members and their agency directors as well as an opportunity to network with other citizens and professionals.

This Resource Guide also serves as a refresher for long-time board members who want to stay current with the latest educational materials. Other relevant resources can be found at www.nrpa.org.

BOARD STRUCTURES

There are three basic board structures among the majority of park and recreation boards: independent boards, s, and semi-independent board independent boards. The semi-independent board independent boards are most often combinations of the first two but tend more strongly toward one or the other type of structure. The three boards are considerably different in their function and level of authority. Most of the information provided in this guide will apply to advisory board members; however a description of the three types of board is included below so that the reader will clearly understand the different board structures.

The Advisory Board

The advisory board is typically associated with a park(s) and/or recreation department administered by a division of government: state, county, parish or municipality. In most cases, the governmental entity is administered by an elected body, which has management and policymaking responsibility for a broad range of governmental services including park(s) and/or recreation. This elected body has the final authority for making all decisions but often looks to an advisory board for recommendations and input regarding decisions that affect the park(s) and recreation department. The advisory board may provide community input to the department director and staff regarding facility operations and programming.

The optimum size for an advisory board is generally five to nine members but larger advisory boards do exist. Boards composed of at-large members, representatives of the entire community, regardless of where they live, their particular interests or memberships, normally fall within this range.

Larger advisory boards often represent geographic areas, school districts or school service areas, or major sub groups that make up the parks and recreation community such as youth and adult sports associations, tree commissions, natural areas, friends groups, arts organizations and preschool or teen councils to name some of the most common.

In the case of at-large advisory boards, members are appointed by the elected body either as a whole, or by the elected chairperson, mayor, governor, etc. In some cases, existing advisory board members will provide the first screening of new members, making recommendations to the elected official(s), who may or may not appoint the recommendations. Appointments are generally for a specific term

In the case of an advisory board representing specific groups or geographic areas, the representative can be a political appointment, chosen by the organization they represent or they may serve because of becoming the president or chair of their respective group. In this case, it is possible to have some representatives change annually while others serve for various lengths of time, depending on the election criteria of the individual organizations.

In all cases, the role of this type of park(s) and/or recreation board is just what the name implies: advisory. The group serves as a resource to the decision makers, be that staff, director or elected officials. The advisory board can convey how the citizens as a whole, or the segment/organization/program they represent, feel about policies, programs, proposals, or decisions.

The Independent Board

(May also be know as an Administrative, Governing, or Governance Board)

The independent board is an autonomous group whose final authority lies with the board members, not another unit of local government. This type of board develops and implements policy; buys, sells and holds title to property, assesses taxes, and has the final authority in financial matters. If a board is the governing body of a public agency, members are usually elected, often in a non-partisan election, by the citizenry within the agency boundaries. In rare instances, a head of government such as a mayor or a city council or county board of commissioners may appoint public agency independent board members. However, when one comes to public board service in any way other than public election, it is usually to serve on an advisory or semi-independent board instead of an independent board. If the board functions on behalf of a nonprofit organization, the members or recipients of services may elect the board or board members are sometimes appointed by officers or elected by a portion (other board members perhaps) of the membership.

Independent boards range in size from five to fifty plus. The majority of local park and recreation agency boards are composed of five to seven members. Private sector and nonprofit boards dealing with parks and recreation are quite varied. Local agency boards are generally elected at-large and do not represent specific areas or interests. In fact, it is important for the members of these boards to have a "big picture" view. Some independent boards may also look to advisory boards and local friends groups to provide input related to geographical areas or special interests.

The roles and responsibilities of the independent board are the most clearly defined. These boards are the final authority on all matters related to their domain.

Governmental independent boards are determined by statutes that spell out and define their right to exist in a state, county, parish or municipality. Likewise, non-profit independent boards are governed by state and local statute and established by the organizations' charter and bylaws.

The Semi-independent Board

(May include aspects of both the independent or governing board and the advisory board)

The semi-independent park and recreation board is a hybrid of the independent board and the advisory board and has some aspects of both of these two boards. Members serving on a semi-independent board may be either appointed by the elected entity to which they answer, or as in the advisory board, hold their seat by virtue of having been elected to chair another group or organization, which is represented on the semi-independent board. (See paragraph 4 of the advisory board above).

What separates the semi-independent board from the advisory board is that the semi-independent board still advises another independent body, which is usually elected and a unit of government. The semi-independent board does have some decision-making power where its decisions are not subject to a higher authority. Often these semi-independent boards will have limited policy-making authority for park operations, programming fees, and facility operating hours so long as they operate within the guidelines of federal, state or local codes and ordinances. In addition, the semi-independent board may advise the independent body in areas such as staffing, park development, and property sales and acquisitions. Some semi-independent boards have general policymaking responsibility, do not have taxing authority but may hire their director. Taxing authority is the major distinguishing feature among the boards.

In some cases, the semi-independent board will be found when two or more jurisdictions have merged or have overlapping geographical boundaries. This often occurs when a formerly independent park and/or recreation board with property, programs, and taxing authority, is annexed into an existing municipality or when a new municipality is formed. While the employees, fiscal functions, even ownership of the facilities may transition into this new or existing entity, the authority to collect taxes to operate the program may remain with the existing board. In this case, the semi-independent board retains their control over the funds raised from their taxing authority but those funds may or may not be the total budget required for the operation of the agency. This arrangement requires a cooperative working relationship among the funding/policy-making entities.

Other semi-independent boards may actually operate as an advisory board in certain aspects, and be a legally constituted not-for-profit board doing fundraising and programming. This is often found when one entity or unit of federal, state or municipal government, or an independent park board, owns the facilities but the semi-independent board advises them as to the development and programming of these facilities and also does fundraising and some programming in the name of the facility or under the auspices of the independent board.

These varying types of boards are as different as the communities or locales where they exist. The important thing to remember is that they only have decision-making authority for part of the operation and they must refer other recommendations or decisions to a higher authority for a final decision.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Roles and Responsibilities of a Citizen Board Member

If you are a recently appointed board member or a prospective member, this section is especially for you. First, allow us to congratulate you and extend our appreciation for your community involvement and your commitment to providing high quality park and recreation

services to your community. This section will provide you with a perspective of what you should expect as a board member, what roles and responsibilities come with the position and a listing of some questions that you may have and some answers to those questions. The NRPA hopes you find this information helpful and wishes you the best in your service as a citizen board member in your community.

Role of a Citizen Board Member

Most of this section pertains to all types of boards. You will need to understand the function and level of authority for your specific board and determine what information is applicable for your use. Citizen boards play a critical role in public parks and recreation, offering agencies an advantage in gaining public trust, fostering partnerships and securing necessary funds, which allow their organizations to thrive. Citizen board governance identifies parks and recreation agencies as accountable to the community. Citizen board members also lend organizations their personal credibility. This becomes increasingly important in raising public and private funds, which can be a necessary and critical component to your agency's existence. Finally, citizen board members bring a vision and enthusiasm to the cause. Your infectious drive and dedication can literally propel an organization to new heights.

The degree to which citizen board members benefit public parks and recreation agencies depends, in part, on their relationship with their director. Staff can act either to negate or to multiply the impact of citizen board members. Perhaps this quote by board development expert John Carver says it best:

“No single relationship in the organization is as important as that between the board and its chief executive officer. Probably no single relationship is as easily misconstrued or has such dire potential consequences. That relationship, well conceived, can set the stage for effective governance and management.” John Carver, 1990.

The role of the citizen board is directly related to the age and stage of development of the organization for which it serves. The external environment, culture and values of each member, as well as the habit and leadership of its chair and executive also affect the role of the citizen board.

While this statement is particularly true of the independent board, is it also true, to a lesser extent for other boards. Good relations with and among the board members, especially the board chair, can affect the success of the parks and recreation professional's career in any community. The citizen board offers multiple perspectives and skills and helps sharpen organizational focus.

Some advisory and semi-independent boards work under the policies and procedures established by their governing body. Every board should adopt a comprehensive set of by-laws or operating procedures. Advisory boards may need to have their rules or procedures approved by their governing body but it is important that they, too, have by-laws or governance procedures so everyone has a clear understanding of roles, expectations and responsibilities.

The by-laws or the rules of procedure or operation should clearly identify the administrative and governance policies of the agency or department. These may be separate documents or one document with specific chapters or sections. By-laws should include, but not be limited to; board structure, terms of board members, and how business will be conducted during all meetings. Illustrated in Appendix C –Board Manual Template is an outline of the various

components that should be considered in a comprehensive set of by-laws and/or governance procedures.

It may be the responsibility of the board and chief executive/ director to recommend or develop policy.

Many policies concerning the day-to-day operations of the agency are the sole responsibility of the director. It is the responsibility of the chief executive/ director to inform board members of implemented policies. Board members should not attempt to usurp the authority of the chief executive or staff at any level. The chief executive is hired to direct the agency and oversee the day-to-day operations of the agency.

Another role of the board may be to plan for the future. Long-range planning can be a time consuming process but it is necessary for a well functioning agency/department. Potential future problems, needs and opportunities must be identified. The key to the success of this planning is the corresponding development of a long-range financial plan that properly allocates identified resources to implement the plans. Significant levels of financial and human resources are required to develop a meaningful and useful long-range plan. The board and director/chief executive should conduct these planning processes together. The board should avoid delegating this important responsibility solely to the director/chief executive and staff. .

The advisory board and director will likely need to brief and gain support from their governing body before moving on to the next step. It is then the responsibility of the director/chief executive to prepare reports and inform the board about progress, performance and financial status on a pre-determined timeline.

Another vital function of citizen board members is to establish and foster relationships with other governmental and community entities. The park and recreation agency is part of the public system. It should be the goal of each board member and the director/chief executive to build and maintain healthy working relationships with service groups, the Chamber of Commerce, religious groups, neighborhood associations and civic associations. Good relationships with other tax-supported units of local government like school districts, city or village government, police, fire, county officials, etc, are also very important. . Some helpful hints in ensuring this are to:

- Involve groups in future planning - especially if it will affect their operations.
- Send groups agency brochures and publications to keep them informed about the agency.
- Invite groups to important events, groundbreaking, dedications, and ribbon cuttings.
- Coordinate with other agencies to avoid duplications of services or overstepping established boundaries.
- Encourage and look for partnership opportunities.

The most important function of a citizen board member is working with the community residents. Whether elected or appointed to a board position, you are representing the residents served by the agency and must be fair and impartial when working with the public. As an ambassador to the public, a citizen board member shall endorse the following protocol:

- Commit to conducting agency affairs in a manner that wins public respect and support for the agency and guarantees its integrity in the community.

- Welcome suggestions and constructive criticism from the public. Board members should seek opportunities to explain to the public the services and programs of the agency and to correct false impressions. It is important to bring such feedback to the attention of the chief executive/ director.
- Represent the interests of the entire community responsibly and responsively.
- Have knowledge and understanding of the laws and legal requirements of the jurisdiction in which the park and recreation agency exists.

Responsibilities of a Citizen Board Member:

Citizen board members are expected to:

- Attend meetings regularly - commitment is paramount.
- Do your homework and contribute to the discussions - review the information provided, be prepared with questions and relevant discussion points. Clarification of agenda items or need for additional information should be discussed with the director/chief executive prior to the meeting.
- Vote based on what you believe is best for the community, recognizing that you may need to occasionally compromise. A board member must be willing to abide by and support the decisions, policies and programs agreed upon by the board.
- Be aware of the importance and value of parks and recreation in your community– gain knowledge, ask questions, and work closely and in cooperation with the director/chief executive.
- Resist political, personal and special interest pressures – have courage, maintain integrity, set high personal standards for yourself and fellow board members, and avoid potential or perceived conflicts of interest.
- Be familiar with and adhere to Robert’s Rules of Order or whatever source your agency has identified for meeting protocol.
- Serve as your agency’s ambassador – promote and support agency events, programs, services, etc.
- Encourage citizen participation – recruit your fellow residents to participate in agency events, programs and services, and encourage them to volunteer in the park system.

The Role of the Citizen Advisory Board Chair

The role of the citizen board member chair, if the advisory board has a citizen chair, is different than the role of other citizen board members. More responsibilities are given to the board chair than to other board members. If the advisory board has a citizen chair the responsibilities of that position are usually clearly defined. Some of these responsibilities may include being a planner, organizer, communicator, consensus builder, caretaker, housekeeper and troubleshooter. All of these are examples of leadership, which is why the role of board chair can be summed up in the term “leader”.

A citizen board chair must be willing to invest time and energy in a job that commands the respect of both the governing board members and the community served. , Board members look to the chair for guidance, support and leadership. The board chair must assess and direct board and committee assignments to ensure that the work is on target with the vision of the organization and achieved in the most effective way.

Responsibilities of the Citizen Advisory Board Chair:

The advisory board chair maybe expected to:

- Lead board meetings - making sure everything runs smoothly.
- Prepare the agenda and other information needed for the citizen board meeting in cooperation with the director/chief executive.

- Coordinate the planning of the board's activities for the year and ensure that an ongoing planning process exists.
- Ensure that new citizen board members are provided an orientation to the organization.
- Encourage others to voice their opinion.
- Help organize and maintain committees of the citizen board.
- Be aware of the performance of all citizen advisory board members and committees. This *role generally falls to the elected official of the local unit of government (City/County/Township/State) for an advisory board.*

Deleted: committees. This

Conducting the meetings of the board is an important chair responsibility. One key to a successful citizen board relationship involves effectively run meetings. Some pointers that the chair and director/chief executive should consider:

- Putting thought into the agenda design and clarifying desired outcomes.
- Using meetings as board development opportunities, such as communicating what is new in the field, hearing from "customers", having an in-depth review of a popular program or issue, etc.
- Getting materials out ahead of time so board members have time to prepare for the meeting.

By keeping the following goals in mind during meetings, the board chair's leadership qualities will be obvious.

- Start and end the meeting on time.
- Create and maintain a positive tone during the meeting.
- Keep the meeting moving by following the agenda.
- Introduce each agenda item and facilitate discussion.
- Do not let discussions stray from the agenda issue.
- Understand and have a working knowledge of parliamentary procedures.
- Bring items to a conclusion.

Just because you are leader of the citizen board does not mean that you have any less right or responsibility to participate as a board member. Although you may want to let others voice their opinion first, you are certainly entitled to express your own opinion. However, your opinion should not dominate nor force itself onto other members of the citizen board.

The Role of the Director/Chief Executive

A director/chief executive is responsible for the daily on-going operations of the park and recreation agency. In order to perform these duties, the director/chief executive today wears many hats. Today's director/chief executive must be a visionary, a leader, a manager, a communicator, a conflict solver and a technology wizard. He or she must add value by increasing resources via fundraising, grant writing, fee-for-service contracts, partnerships, levies, etc. He or she may face difficult challenges including budgets that are tightly stretched, not allowing much variance or discretionary spending. This makes it difficult to respond to new opportunities, especially when these opportunities present themselves between budget cycles. Part of the growing complexity within parks and recreation agencies involves technology infrastructure. Technology advancements can increase the effectiveness of an agency, but require significant investment of time and fiscal resources for successful implementation. To accomplish all of this, including the long-range goals of the organization, the director/chief executive must continually enhance the visibility and image of the organization. Enhancing and developing the board can extend the agency's visibility in the community for optimum effectiveness.

The director/chief executive encourages staff development, and prioritizes work for the board or (commission/council/administrator/city manager and staff, always keeping his or her eyes on the highest priorities.

The Responsibilities of the Director/Chief Executive

The beginning of a relationship can set the tone for the lifetime of that relationship. This rule applies to the unique association between the director/chief executive and his or her board.

In an advisory board, this may have already been set forth by the governing body or in local statute or code. It is especially important to provide a thorough orientation program for new board members. The director/chief executive may even want to consider an informal “mentoring” program. See Appendix D for the Citizen Board Orientation Manual template.

The director/chief executive has little margin for error. The director/chief executive must report the input of the advisory board to another commission/ board and/or elected official(s). Staff, the advisory board, and the governing entity are counting on him or her, so it is important not to under-manage. The director/chief executive must build a strong relationship with all board members, including the chair. Both roles are critical to any organization, so the two must support each other. It is important for members of an advisory board to understand that the director/manager is responsible to another elected governance body (city/county/township council/commission or other unit of government) and in many cases to another paid administrator (city/county manager).

The most important relationship to the successful operation of any agency is the one among the city/county/township manager, the commission/council, and the director/chief executive. The relationship must maintain open communications, clear expectations, vision and direction, trust, and mutual respect for the roles each plays. Care must be taken to avoid misunderstandings and misperceptions of both verbal and non-verbal communications.

All parties are responsible for the development and maintenance of these relationships. Identification and mutual understanding of the expectations on behalf of the board members, governing officials, and director/chief executive is the key to forging an effective relationship and achieving smooth day-to-day operations. While there is no single prescription for an effective partnership and various dynamics and personalities come into play, a clearly defined set of guidelines and parameters of where one authority begins and another stops can help clarify each party’s role and responsibility.

Guidelines for Advisory Board and Director/Chief Executive

The director/chief executive must be trained and educated in the ability to lead the delivery of high quality park, recreation, open space, and conservation services to the community.

In the case of an advisory board, the director/manager and staff are employees of the local unit of government that has authority. .

The board shall communicate its direction to the director/chief executive corporately or through the chair of the board. Routine communications and informational flow from board members may take place directly with the director/chief executive. Advisory board members should recognize that the director/manager receives his/her direction from a city/county manager/administrator who manages under the direction of the mayor and commission/council or directly from elected official(s).

An advisory board working within a local unit of government such as a city, township, county, parish or state does not generally have final decision making or policy setting authority. The director/manager of the department generally works for a city manager/administrator or, under certain forms of government, a strong mayor or a professional commissioner in charge of two or three other departments in addition to parks and/or recreation. In this case, the following chart indicates the possible roles that the board and the director/manager of a local unit of government department play within a successful partnership towards effective agency operations.

Advisory Board/ Director-Manager Responsibility Chart

	Director/Manager	Board
Accounting/auditing	-oversees -reviews & monitors monthly financial reports from accounting department -identifies problem areas	-reviews reports and assists with establishing budget priorities. -may assist in budget presentations
Attorneys	-works with legal department or contract attorney	
Board meetings	-prepares agenda with board input and chair assistance -forwards information/direction from local unit of government	-requires progress reports from director/manager -forwards recommendations to decision makers
Budget	-plans -develops -administers -recommends funding sources -submits to the city manager/administrator/finance director	-makes recommendations to director/manager -supports at budget hearings -supports/lobbies for approval or increases -defends cuts or lobbies for reinstatement.
Consultants	-conducts background checks -prepares specifications -interviews candidates -submits choices to the local unit of government as a report to the council/commission	-reviews applicants/proposals -makes recommendation to elected officials
Facilities	-develops reports and master plans -reviews reports and forwards recommendations to council/commission	-reviews reports and master plans -gathers public comments, if appropriate. -makes recommendations to local unit of government if necessary and/or appropriate
Lobbying	-provides information on local, state and national legislative initiatives	-does not participate in partisan politics -lobbies for legislation and funding at local, state and federal levels under the guidance/ authority of the local unit of government
Maintenance	-ensures well maintained and safe facilities and park lands -develops standards -develops risk management plan	- may review director/manager guidelines for facility development and standards and may make recommendations to local unit of government

Personnel	-recruits with assistance of personnel department -hires with assistance of personnel department -supervises -trains -evaluates	- may provide input to personnel department on job description for director/manager -if asked, reviews applications and/or participates in the interview panel for director/manager
Planning	-conducts research -develops goals and objectives -hires consultants	-holds public meetings on plans -makes recommendations to elected officials
Policies	-researches -drafts language	-reviews -recommends to director/manager, city manager/administrator or elected officials, depending upon procedures in place.
Public	-actively seeks public input -works with citizen advisory Councils, civic groups, and neighborhood associations -addresses complaints	-solicits public input -receives complaints and refers to chief executive for resolution -identifies public input on board meeting agenda
Vendor contracts	-reviews bids -recommends to board or directly to elected officials of local government depending upon procedures in place	- may review -may make recommendation to elected officials

Source: Adapted from; Are You on Board? Theodore B. Flickinger, Ph.D.¹

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS for/by CITIZEN BOARD MEMBERS

How do I know I can be an effective citizen board member?

Let's face it, not everyone is cut out for this job. For you to be successful as a board member, you must be interested in serving the community in this capacity. You should also closely examine your motivations and abilities to serve the community in an effective manner. The following self-examination chart, found here and on the next page, will be helpful in determining whether you have what it takes to be an effective citizen board member:

ANSWER EACH QUESTION TRUE OR FALSE.	TRUE	FALSE
I understand my role as a member of the park board/advisory committee.		
I understand my relationship to the agency's chief executive and other employees.		
I make positive contributions toward helping the board establish clearly stated and coordinated goals and objectives.		
I am committed to all citizens of the community or district.		
I am prepared for every board meeting.		
I always ask the director/chief executive for an explanation in private if I don't like something that a staff member is doing.		
I support needed legislation at both the state and federal levels.		
I attend educational meetings and conferences to further my knowledge as a board member.		
I am comfortable receiving and considering citizen suggestions and/or complaints.		

¹ Theodore B. Flickinger, PHD, Are You On Board?, p.111

Deleted: ,

I respect my fellow board members.		
I recognize excellent performance of the staff.		
I encourage and support effective public information programs.		
I encourage effective press, media, and public awareness programs.		
I regularly set aside time to study and learn so I can become a better board member.		
I am able to function effectively under pressure.		
I try to be reasonable and consider the workload of those involved if I make requests.		
I show a willingness to try new ideas, approaches or methods.		
I ask questions when I don't understand a policy, suggestion, recommendation or situation.		
I try to treat board members and staff in an unbiased, impartial and friendly manner.		
I try to create a feeling of openness, unity and enthusiasm when dealing with agency matters.		
I maintain a sense of humor.		
I try to be conscious of the needs and problems that exist on the board.		
When asked to serve on a committee or handle a special assignment, I do so with accountability and pride in the pending results.		
I know the importance of attending all board and related committee meetings.		
I have the courage of my convictions and will voice my concerns during discussions, but will fully support the group decision once it is made and is final.		
I identify with the agency's purpose, goals and objectives, and I put the welfare of the community ahead of my own interests.		
I believe that I am capable of earning the trust and mutual respect of my fellow board members, staff and the citizens of the community.		
I believe my community deserves high quality park and recreation services within the community.		
I believe that all public business should be discussed at an open public meeting, except for the areas of land acquisition and personnel matters.		

If you answered **TRUE** to 25 or more of the aforementioned questions, you are or will be an effective citizen board member. Source: Adapted from *Are You on Board?*, Theodore B. Flickinger, Ph.D.²

What is the advisory board's role?

The role of an advisory board depends upon the board's charter, by-laws and legal authority bestowed on it by the governing board. In almost all cases the citizen advisory board is only advisory in nature.

What should be covered in a board meeting?

The advisory board should focus agenda items on issues put to it by the governing authority. The advice provided by the advisory board should promote the organization's vision and mission, not day-to-day operations unless so requested. Public sessions should be focused on:

- Long range planning
- Design approval
- Committee reports
- Community/visitor comment
- Policy Issues

Citizen board members should be actively involved in the work of the board. When they have information that needs to be discussed by the entire board, members should contact the board chair, or in some cases the director/chief executive, to have this item placed on the next meeting agenda.

The board-meeting packet should include the agenda, director's report, supporting material, meeting minutes, and committee reports.

² Theodore B. Flickinger, *Are You On Board?*, p 40-43

How should the citizen board operate?

A sample agenda for a park and recreation advisory board could include:

1. Call to order
2. Call the roll
3. Recognize visitors
4. Approve the agenda
5. Review previous meeting minutes
6. Report on good news
7. Present the director's report
8. Present committee reports
9. Conduct unfinished business
10. Call for new business
11. Announcements
12. Public comments
13. Adjournment

What role should citizen board members play with the media?

The media can quote anything said in an open forum, but the citizen advisory board chair should be the only individual addressing the media on behalf of the advisory board.

What are the main tasks of the advisory board? These include serving on board committees, long range and strategic planning, making recommendations and representing the public point of view to the elected representatives of a unit of government.

What can a citizen board member do to remain effective during their tenure on the board?

Just like a park and recreational professional, citizen board members need to remain informed on current industry and community trends, issues, and initiatives. Therefore, training for citizen board members does not end at the completion of the orientation program, but rather is an on-going process with a personal commitment to continue your education as a board member.

This can be accomplished through many approaches. A few are illustrated below:

- Attend local, regional, state and national conferences and workshops on parks and recreation.
- Choose sessions that relate to your interests and matters relevant to the agency you represent. Share the information you gather with fellow board members and the chief executive.
- Read related park and recreation industry publications, trade magazines, newsletters and browse related websites.
- Attend agency and board member retreats and actively participate in discussions.
- Network with board members from other agencies. Typically, other agencies are experiencing or have experienced the same issues and initiatives as yours. Share information and experiences with the other attendees. Relate that information to your board and director/chief executive.
- Become involved in state and national citizen parks and recreation advocacy organizations. .

What are the important qualities and motivations for being a citizen board member?

The most important quality a board member can possess is the "right attitude". Knowledge, expertise and interest are certainly helpful, but a positive attitude and sincere interest in the importance of parks, recreation, conservation and open space in your community and beyond are the most important qualities.

Other qualities of effective board members are:

- Believing in the agency's mission, purpose, goals and objectives.
- The ability to place the larger interest of the agency above personal concerns or convictions.
- A willingness to serve as an effective intermediary between the agency and outside affiliated groups and organizations.
- A willingness to give freely of one's time and possessing the energy to learn.
- Respecting the varied opinions, points of view and backgrounds of fellow board members, staff, elected officials in the decision-making chain, staff and community at large.
- Being able to inspire the community's confidence, respect and support.
- Having the ability to accept board decisions.
- Respecting the democratic processes.
- Participating in discussions with demonstrated reasoning, good judgment and the courage of personal convictions.
- Demonstrating support for the director/chief executive as manager of the agency/department.

Individuals join park and recreation agency boards for different reasons. Many have a desire to serve their community by improving conditions and contributing to the welfare of the community. Some individuals gain a sense of satisfaction and power that comes with board service. Others get involved to have a new experience or find opportunities to make new friends. Other motivations for serving stem from social status, peer endorsements or even family tradition. Some individuals may have aspirations for higher political office and use this as a stepping-stone on their way to other civic service. Regardless of the motivations, a citizen board member must realize and accept that he or she is a leader who has accepted a major civic responsibility. The citizen board member must be committed to advancing the agency /department's mission and must do so within the defined roles and responsibilities enumerated in a previous section of this document.

Whether it is a sense of civic duty, belief in the importance of parks and recreation or wanting to provide service and value to a community, serving as a citizen board member is an important and vital position in every community across this nation, regardless of whether you serve in a governance or advisory capacity.

BOARD MEMBER ORIENTATION

Orientation of a new board member can make a major difference in the time it takes for that person to become a fully participating member of the board and their effectiveness. Board orientation is intended to prepare new board members for their role in the organization. It is extremely useful for **all** members to ensure that everyone is operating from the same "script." Orientation is a strong team-building activity that should be conducted once a year, either before a regular board meeting or during a retreat. Orientation of new board members shortly after election/appointment is essential.

The Purpose of Orientation

Board orientation provides important information about the organization and about the board's responsibilities. Orientation helps build a healthy working relationship among board members and assists the board in understanding and reaching consensus on how it will carry out its work.

Consider the following elements when preparing a board orientation program.

The board chair and the chief executive typically facilitate the orientation session.

- Make introductions and consider using nametags.
- Review pertinent topics, including:
 - the Board Manual - the mission, vision and values of the organization
 - a brief history of the organization
 - the roles and responsibilities of the board and the staff
 - the administrative calendar which identifies major activities of the board
 - the organizational chart, including the list of current and planned committees
 - the procedures for conducting meetings, including relevant actions from Roberts' Rules of Order
- Ensure adequate time for questions and answers.
- Consider assigning a current board member as a mentor to help orient a new board member.

NOTE: See Board Orientation Manual template in Appendix D

BUILDING COMMUNITY SUPPORT

It is important for the agency or department to have community support on a continuing basis. It becomes particularly important when embarking on a new venture. A venture can be a new facility, program, intergovernmental agreement or even a reorganization of some nature. Whatever it may be, a new project generally represents some form of change to a community. When an agency or department embarks on a new project, it is important to build community support for that project. Typically, 5 to 10 per cent of community members will support the project initially and 5 to 10 per cent of people will oppose it. These opponents and supporters are unlikely to change their position. The remaining 80 per cent, called the *silent majority*, are undecided, indifferent or skeptical about the project. Failure to bring the silent majority on the support side can lead to opposition and seriously jeopardize the project. Building community support may be one of the most important stepping-stones to getting a project off the ground. It can also be one of the most challenging. It requires helping people in the community understand the issues and recognize the need for the change. Outlined below are some suggestions to help achieve this task successfully.

Create Your Message

It is important to develop a consistent and easily understood set of statements about your project and its benefits to the community. It is also essential that everyone in the decision-making chain is delivering the same message.

Know Your Audience

When building community support, it is important to understand the audience you are trying to influence. Five of the common types of audiences you will encounter are:

- Users of your services or facilities
- Non-users of your services or facilities
- Elected Officials
- Community Leaders
- Media

Each of these groups will have different agenda and concerns. The roles they play in the community influence their points of view. Non-users will not care if a particular service is no longer available to them if they do not use it in the first place. Issues must be focused to grab the attention of the otherwise apathetic. Similarly, community leaders will be less likely to support an issue if it does not affect the entire community. In this case, you must look at the long-term broad scope of your project. However, specific interest groups can be very effective in developing support for their issue.

Get Supporters Early

Often, people will be hesitant to support your cause if it has become a high profile, controversial issue. This is why it is a good idea to gain support before your project becomes of major community interest. People will be more willing to listen to what you have to say about your project if they are not preoccupied with worrying what others will think of them if they support such a plan. Various communication strategies can be used to win the support of this undecided group. Open public participation is one communication strategy that has proven to be successful.

Listen

Hold public meetings and solicit community input before the project begins. When holding a community meeting to inform people of the progress of the project, explain what is proposed and be ready to listen to the responses. Frequently, what attendees hear at a community meeting is that the decisions have been made and there is little they can do. Instead of focusing on the progress of your project, ask for input, opinions and advice. Adopt suggested elements that enhance the project and respond to community needs and concerns. This will show people that they are an important part of the project. Community support is most likely when people know their voices are being heard and are included from the beginning.

Tools

There are a number of tools to use in educating the public to gain their support. Some tools can also be used to evaluate the level of support that exists. Some of these tools include:

- Gather and provide information to policy boards and citizen focus groups.
- Inform key advocates so they can speak on behalf of the project
- Obtain and read program evaluations
- Conduct resident input surveys on a regular basis
- Hold a public Open House where the public can ask questions and provide input
- Maintain Reference Centers where current information and a contact number are available; e.g. public library, local store, bulletin boards, website
- Distribute a fact sheet, possibly with a tear-off response
- Provide information to be included in community and neighborhood council/association reports for distribution
- Provide information in general print and visual communications: news letters, brochures, emails, websites
- Provide the media with information

Building community support for your project is an on-going process. It requires a significant investment of time and requires both perseverance and diligence. Effective and accurate communication is paramount. Be sure to listen and take advice from the community. Let the community know where its input has made a difference. Public participation leads to successful and sustainable projects in your community.

CITIZEN ADVOCACY

Advocacy Basics

Effective advocacy may be a foreign concept to those who have not participated in it. Advocacy is the act of supporting or speaking out for a cause you believe in. Advocacy can be put into action on the local, state, and federal levels of government. This section discusses some of the more effective ways to advocate for your cause.

Getting Involved

Getting involved is the single most important way for you to make your cause known. One way is by participating in your local governments' public meetings or by serving on local boards and committees. If you attend a public meeting, be sure you understand the issues and have the facts that you want to present well organized. This simple step will help lead to better discussions and public officials are more likely to understand and support your ideas.

The Power of Numbers

Having numbers on your side can be helpful in your advocacy efforts. Public officials will be more likely to support the cause you are advocating for if others share the same concern. You still want your message to be exactly that – your message. If your message is simply a copy of everyone else's and has no personal component, it will be more likely to get lost along the way.

Building a Relationship

Building a long-term relationship with your elected officials benefits you and the officials. As you provide information about your cause on a continuing basis, you maintain contact and visibility and gradually educate the officials about your area of interest. Some suggestions of ways to build a relationship are:

- Invite the official to events related to your cause or that highlight the benefits of your cause.
- Thank the official when he or she has publicly supported your area of interest.
- Support your official in his or her campaigns.

General Principles of Communicating as an Advocate

Deliver your message in a way that will make elected officials and their staff sit up and take notice! Elected officials and their staff are not mind readers. They will not know how you feel about an issue unless you tell them. However, you have to be sure to deliver your message in the right way. Otherwise, your communication will be lost in the flood of mail, e-mail, phone calls, and faxes that come into their office everyday. Following are some tips and techniques that will help ensure that your voice is heard above the fray.

- **Consider the Method of Communication.** The methods of communication you chose should depend on the type of message. A simple request to vote for a particular bill can easily be relayed over the phone, while it might be a better idea to put a more complicated message in writing. Think about what works best for you in terms of time, energy, personal preference, and money.
- **Volume Does Not Necessarily Equal Effectiveness.** Highly controversial issues can create a flurry of communications to elected officials. Many offices consider the numbers when making a decision, but only to a point. In fact, one thoughtful and well-argued message from a constituent can have more impact than a thousand letters, emails, or calls.
- **Always Identify Yourself** It is a waste of time to communicate with your elected officials without identifying yourself. Unidentified communiqués will generally be ignored or thrown away. Because the main duty of an elected official is to represent the people who live in a defined area, e.g. district ward city, or state, they need to know who is trying to communicate with them.

- **Be Specific.** If you support a particular bill, issue, statute, or ordinance under consideration, ask him or her to cosponsor it or speak in support of it. If your concern is with an agency or departmental action, ask him or her to send a letter to that agency. Whatever it is, the best way to ensure that the office pays attention to your issue is to force a decision by requesting a specific action by the official.
- **Prioritize Your Requests.** If you ask for too many things without making it clear what your top priorities are, the official may feel overwhelmed. Let the official know what actions need the most attention, or time your requests so that you are not asking for more than a few things at once.
- **Offer To Be a Resource.** Elected officials and their staff usually are not experts in all the issue areas they cover and often turn to trusted outside experts. If you are an expert in your field, let your elected official know that you can answer any questions they may have.
- **Support the Candidate.** Become involved in the official's political campaign as a volunteer or contributor.
- **Develop a Relationship.** Develop a first name relationship with the staff member responsible for your area of interest. They will be more likely to respond favorably to your requests.
- **Be Polite.** Treat the staff and the office with respect. If you are disagreeable, it will make the staff far less likely to want to work with you in the future. You can be forceful about your views and opinions without being rude.
- **Be Patient and Follow-up.** You should not expect an immediate response to your comments or concerns. In many cases, the issue may be one about which the elected official has not yet formed an opinion. Do, however, ask when you should call back to see if the official has taken a position or if any additional information is wanted.
- **Always Tell the Truth.** Staff turns to outside individuals for advice and assistance on important policy issues all the time. They must feel that they can trust the individuals with whom they are dealing.
- **Do Not Vilify Your Opponents.** At the very least, you should refrain from labeling those who disagree with you as unenlightened idiots. In fact, you can go even further by fairly presenting the other side's argument and then explaining why you have the stronger counter-argument. It is a great way to build trust; especially since the staff person you are dealing with most likely will hear from the other side. He or she will realize that you have developed your position based on a careful evaluation of the facts.

The Role of a Citizen Advocate

An advocate's role can vary. Many times, advocates work to educate, represent and persuade. Sometimes, advocates take an even more active role in drafting, commenting on and contributing to ordinances, statues, and/or legislative proposals before they are adopted. Regardless of the role you assume, remember that statistics and real life stories can be effective tools in gaining attention for your cause and moving decision makers to take action.

Important Roles for Any Advocate are:

- **Educator:** You are the expert on your topic. Your expertise may come from years of experience working in parks and recreation or from your own personal experience with the issues at hand. Policymakers look to advocates to provide them with factual, pointed and relevant information. A good advocate is confident about the information he or she is presenting and works to convince the policymaker that the issue at hand is worthy of attention.

- **Representative:** As an advocate, you are a spokesperson for constituents. There may be hundreds or even thousands of people affected by the outcome of any contested issue. One of your goals should be to bring the issues of the people you represent to the attention of policymakers. If you want them to care, you have to convince them that you are not alone.
- **Persuader:** To be influential as an advocate, your goal is to gain the support and backing of decision makers who will commit to your cause throughout the legislative or administrative process. This might mean getting a government official to vote for or co-sponsor legislation, getting a zoning commissioner to support preserving open space, or just getting a member of a crucial official's staff to care enough about the issues important to you to discuss your proposals with his or her boss.

Choosing the Appropriate Advocacy Forum

The following information will focus primarily on lobbying at the national level. However, the tools and techniques discussed in this guide can be tailored to suit any advocacy needs. Terminology applicable to local and state government has been included to emphasize that lobbying may take place at all government levels.

Your effectiveness as an advocate for parks and recreation may depend upon the forum before which you choose to advocate. When deciding upon the most effective forum, remember that your goal is to be heard by those who wield influence. Many people perceive the legislative and executive branches at the national level as the forums that provide advocates with the greatest opportunity to influence laws and policies. The legislative branch is primarily responsible for creating laws, and the executive branch is primarily responsible for administering those laws by creating regulations, rules and policies to implement them. Within each branch of government, and throughout the law and policymaking processes, there are several opportunities for lobbying.

Understanding the Role of the Legislative Branch

The legislative branches of state and federal government can help influence the executive branch. It is easier to lobby, inform and build relationships with members of the legislative branch than with the executive branch. The legislative branch, at all levels of the United States government, has three basic roles: to represent the public, make laws, and exercise oversight.

Lawmaking involves reconciling differences between legislators or parties as well as with the executive branch. In most legislative bodies, the work of reconciling conflicts is accomplished in committees or small sub-groups of legislators.

Because each committee specializes in a specific area, legislators can and should become experts and skilled negotiators regarding the issues they cover. However, to do so, they need reliable and detailed information that can come from interested constituents such as yourself or your group. ***It is imperative that you understand how the committee system of your legislature works, if you expect to be effective in your lobbying efforts.***

Understanding the Role of the Executive Branch

The Executive Branch of the U.S. government is very influential in setting policy goals and influencing legislation. If the president does not support or place a high value on the benefits of parks and recreation, then the administration can curtail these benefits or restrict park and recreation activities and funding through many avenues.

The executive branch of the U.S. government develops rules, regulations, and policies that help interpret and implement the laws passed by Congress. The executive branch can also develop legislative proposals for Congress. ***It is important not only to understand the legislative and administrative processes when lobbying, but also to fully understand the rules and regulations governing lobbying because violating them can have significant consequences.***

Advocates' Role in Lobbying the Executive Branch

Anyone can offer comments on the rules and regulations produced by the executive branch during a scheduled period for comments. Advocates can also attempt to influence the less-formal policies that are developed by departments, bureaus and agencies and their respective subdivisions. Many of these rules, regulations and policies can affect the way in which park and recreation agencies offer programs, employ staff, design their facilities, and protect open space.

Putting Advocacy into Action

After you have determined the forum in which you are going to lobby (legislature, executive branch, city council), it is wise to find the most effective way to influence that body.

Some methods include the following:

- **Convince the elected officials or staff to help draft legislation on your issue.** By asking the government to help do the drafting, you are asking them to make a commitment to the issue.
- **Comment on the draft legislation proposed by other groups or members of the legislature.** If other organizations or legislators are drafting legislation that is relevant to your work, attempt to get a copy of the legislation as early in the process as possible. This can be an extremely influential time during which you can provide input into the way the legislation will be written. If you have comments, try to make sure you offer them to those involved in the drafting before the legislation has been officially introduced.
- **Work on reforming current laws.** Instead of writing a new law, you can try to influence current law through reforms such as amendments. This is a way to change laws or policies that already exist by changing only specific sections.
- **Offer to assist in developing policy language in legislation or in a revision to an existing law.**
- **Comment on the effectiveness of current laws.** You can look at current laws and publish reports on how the laws or policies are affecting people. This is an opportunity to identify unintended consequences.
- **Contribute to negotiations at the final stage of passage or defeat of a bill.** As a credible advocacy group, coalition or individual, you may have the ability to influence not only the process of drafting legislation, but also the politics of getting it passed or defeated. Legislators are often forced to compromise or trade their votes. If you have been involved with the process from the beginning, you may be able to influence the compromises or trades that may take place.
- **Offer to assist in developing policy language in legislation or in a revision to an existing law.**

Understanding the Types of Actions Policymakers Can Take

Before meeting with policymakers or their staff, it is wise to understand the actions that policymakers can choose to take. Here are some examples of what they can do:

- Work to create a new policy.
- Work to amend an existing policy.
- Co-sponsor legislation or lobby their colleagues.
- Investigate an issue through hearings, letters of inquiry, phone calls, or reports.

- Speak publicly about an issue by making public statements for the official record on the floor of the legislature or in public hearings and through media outlets such as talk shows and op-ed pages in the newspaper.
- Send a letter to their colleagues or to other policymakers, sometimes referred to as a “dear colleague” letter, soliciting support for their position.
- Issue a press release.

Meeting with Policymakers

When dealing with powerful and influential people, you may only be able to meet with a staff member. Most policymakers are required to know about so many issues that they typically rely on staff experts and advisers. If you get a meeting with the actual policymakers, that is even better! As you deal with staff members or policymakers themselves, remember to give them accolades and credit for all of the work that they do on your issue. Also, provide as much assistance and clear concise information on the issue as possible. This can make their job easier and your research and arguments more accessible and likely to be used.

Steps for Scheduling a Meeting

- **Do your homework.** Know about the legislator before you call his/her office. Read about his or her committees, etc., by going to www.congress.org (for federal elected officials) where you can access your legislators’ offices/information through a zip code match. Try to get a sense of the types of issues he or she cares about and, if possible, how he or she feels about your issue. Also, read your fact sheets (these are explained in Tools of Communication) to be prepared to talk about the issue.
- **When you call, introduce yourself.** Ask for the person who deals with your issue and then briefly explain why you are calling. You may not get a meeting unless you can win over the first person to whom you speak.
- **After you reach the right staff person, explain your issue** and ask if you can schedule a meeting to discuss it further and provide them with information. You may need to convince them at this time that the issue is relevant.
- **If they agree to a meeting, set up a time and place.**
- **Thank them and start preparing for your meeting.**

Preparing for the Meeting

Set goals and expectations. Determine exactly what issues and topics you want to address in the meeting. It is best to focus on only one or two issues.

- **Decide what commitment you are requesting** and what you would like the policymakers to do. Are you asking them to define their position on an issue? Do you want them to vote a certain way on a bill? Do you want them to co-sponsor a bill? Do you want their leadership on the issue? Do you want them to sign a letter to their colleagues? Do you want them to mention your issue when talking on record, with constituents, in letters, or with their colleagues? Do you want them to attend an event? It is important to know what type of commitment you want to have when you leave the meeting and to ask for it.
- **Discuss the meeting with colleagues beforehand.** Make sure everyone knows what he or she plans to say. It is wise to have a designated leader who will facilitate or coordinate the meeting and make sure that all of the points are made. It is important to include one actual constituent in your group.

- **Prepare a packet of information.** Bring your fact sheets, briefing/position papers, editorials, and draft legislation or policies, if applicable. It is especially effective to bring media clips or recreational guides from the policymaker's home district. Also, make sure to provide basic information about your organization, such as brochures. Finally, always have business cards with you and get one from the people you meet with for your files.
- **Practice talking about the issue.** Rehearse your message points and know what you plan to say.
- **Prepare a one or two page summary of the issue or request including contact information**

Things to Remember When Meeting With a Legislator or Staff Person

- **Be on time.** Legislators and their staff are very busy and may not have too much time to meet with you.
- **Be concise and to the point.** Keep your presentation focused and brief, leaving enough time for questions and discussion.
- **Use your information.** Explain your fact sheets and other materials. Highlight the main points and show where the research and information is to back them up. Offer your information and talking points for legislators to use when they are writing speeches and letters—this makes their task easier.
- **Make it real.** Identify the connection between the official and constituents. Bring up real-life examples of how the issue is affecting people.
- **Make it relevant.** Identify the connection to the policymaker's home district and the people he or she has been elected to serve. Give examples, cite statistics, and inform him or her of other high-profile supporters or dissenters (depending on your position on the issue).
- **Request the action you want the policymaker to take.** Do not be shy; ask for what you want! Make sure you are clear about what you are asking for. If the policymaker is evading the issue, try another angle. Suggest that instead of cosponsoring a bill, he or she sign a letter to colleagues or mention the issue in a speech or in letters to constituents. Try to leave the meeting with at least one commitment.
- **Listen to what a policymaker has to say.** Understand if he or she is not able to commit to what you are requesting. If you cannot secure a commitment to your issues from the policymaker, tell him that you will follow up later.
- **Do not be intimidated.** Legislators are real people and they are in office to serve the public. If you are asked a question and you do not know the answer, be honest and say that you do not know the answer but you will find it. Then make sure you follow up and get the answer to them as soon as possible! Follow-up can present another opportunity to push your message. Remember, you are their source for reliable and factual information.
- **Be sure to thank them for their time!**

After the Meeting

- **Make a follow-up call or send an email.** You do not want to overwhelm policymakers, but you do want to thank them for their time. This can be a chance to summarize your main points and to ask again for a commitment if they were unable to offer one during your meeting. It is a good time to determine if they need additional information. Often, if policymakers know you are going to follow up they will take the time to determine whether they can make the commitment you requested.

- **Stay in contact.** The issue on which you are working may be relevant for some time, so continue to be in contact with the legislator's office so that he or she does not forget about your issue. Try to build a relationship with the staff person or the legislator. Whether or not the bill you are working on passes, there may be another opportunity to work with the staff person or legislator in the future, so it is important to develop lasting relationships.

The following tools can help you convey your message. They provide a starting point for thinking about the best ways to educate policymakers about your issue. Remember to use any message points that you have already developed. It is important to stay on message in all publications, letters to the editor, guest op-eds, and discussions with policymakers and members of the media to ensure that you are being consistent and accurate every time you talk about your issue.

TOOLS OF COMMUNICATION

Fact Sheets

Fact sheets are an easy and effective way to illustrate the points of your argument. They should be one or two pages in length. Most policymakers do not have a lot of time to examine in depth every issue that comes their way, so being brief and to the point is essential.

Suggestions for Writing a Fact Sheet

- Determine who your audience is. If your audience includes policymakers, make sure you are brief and to the point.

Start with a summary of the issue.

- Highlight three to five of your main arguments with bullet points or boxes.
- Provide enough analysis of the issue so that readers can understand your arguments, but be brief enough to keep their attention.
- Use graphs, charts and boxes to make the information look interesting.
- Put your organization's logo on the fact sheet to enhance the visibility and credibility of the information. (There are times when it is better not to include your logo, such as when you want other organizations to adopt and use your language.)
- Always provide the date your publication was produced.

Using Fact Sheets

Fact sheets are great tools to use when you meet with policymakers. They are easy to carry to a meeting. They can be used to point out key bits of information when talking with a legislator or staff person, and can be easily distributed to policymakers.

You may not get very much time when meeting with a legislator, but if you leave behind your fact sheet; legislators can reference your information for themselves even after you have left. Policymakers may use the talking points from fact sheets in speeches or in letters to constituents.

Briefing/Position Papers

Briefing or position papers provide policymakers with a more in-depth analysis of an issue. Analyzing an issue in depth also demonstrates your expertise and shows that you are a reliable source of information.

Not all groups have the capacity to develop briefing or position papers. The process requires thorough research and analysis of an issue. Briefing or position papers are not essential for lobbying, but if you can develop one, it will eventually prove worth the time and resources.

There are no set formats for briefing or position papers. However, they should explain an issue in more detail and in greater depth than a fact sheet.

Writing Letters of Advocacy

You can use different types of correspondence to communicate your message points to policymakers. Policymakers may welcome letters and use them to support their position on legislation.

Basics Principles of Writing Letters of Advocacy

Letter writing can be an effective tool to communicate with elected officials if attending public meetings is not an option. Elected officials, contrary to popular belief, do pay attention and care about the mail they receive – both written mail and e-mail. It is important to find out whether your elected official prefers email or postal mail. The time delay in delivery of postal mail can be a complicating factor. Both forms are perfectly acceptable. These few simple tips for writing either type of letter to an elected official will help your message be noticed.

- Use a personal letter, not a form letter.
- Keep the letter brief (2 pages max), informed, factual and respectful
- Stick with one subject or issue.
- Be factual and support your position with information about how pending legislation will likely affect you and your community.
- Make sure you include an **ASK**, urging support, action, or feedback, but do not be disrespectful or demanding. Include your e-mail and U.S. mail addresses so the elected official can use their preferred way to respond to your letter.
- Identify a shared interest with the elected official's positions or background to show a connection.
- Know to whom you are writing. If an issue is not relevant to the official's constituents, it will be of little or no concern to him or her and your challenge will be greater.

Types of Advocacy Letters

Lobbying letter: These are letters addressed to policymakers themselves and are the most common used by citizen advocates. The letter may highlight an action you would like the policymakers to take or a vote you hope they make. They can also point out a policy area to address. The letter can be used in lobby visits.

Open letter: An open letter may come from one organization or a coalition of groups. It may be addressed to the president, or an entity such as the legislature, an executive branch agency or department, city council, or county commission.

Sometimes open letters are published in a newspaper or other print media, rather than sent only to the addressee to gain greater attention for the issue. By publishing an open letter, a group can publicly put pressure on the policymaker to take a particular action.

Open letters also create accountability by informing the public that you have asked the policymaker to address the issue, creating further pressure for the policymaker to take action. The letters can also be published to educate the public about your issue. By purchasing space in the print media or submitting an op-ed letter or letter to the editor, you can raise awareness and reach the public with your arguments.

Sign-on letter: An effective way of demonstrating widespread support for your issue is by initiating a “sign-on” letter. Circulate your letter to organizations that might agree with you and ask them to show their support by signing onto the letter. This shows policymakers that the issue enjoys broad-based support from various organizations, some of which may represent many members. If so, let the policymaker know. You can send these letters to policymakers and bring them to your lobby meetings.

“Dear colleague” letter: Policymakers can be strongly influenced by fellow policymakers. This letter originates in one legislator’s office but carries the signatures of many more legislators who then use the letter to gain support from other colleagues. You can offer to write this letter for a legislator and then ask him or her to circulate it for signatures.

You can also volunteer to call other legislators’ offices to urge them to sign onto the letter. The more signatures that are on the letter, the more powerful the endorsement of your argument will be.

Distributing Your Message

Once you have produced your fact sheets and briefing/position papers, distribute them to policymakers. Writing a cover letter that highlights the main points in a concise way is helpful.

- **Determine which policymakers should receive your information.** If you are dealing with an issue that is highly political and sensitive, it may be counterproductive to distribute your research to those you know have deeply held public positions in opposition to yours.
- **Be timely.** If a bill is pending in the legislature and you have a fact sheet and briefing/position papers on the issue, try to send out your information near the vote or prior with enough time so that lawmakers can see your arguments before they make a decision on the issue.
- **Have a reason to send your information.** If there is no bill or upcoming vote, you may not want to distribute your information at that time, unless you are trying to build general awareness of and support for your issue. If you are at an initial stage of looking for a policymaker to champion your issue, an in-person meeting may be more productive.

Remember that the issue you are promoting must be relevant to the work of lawmakers. If you send the legislators information about something they are not working on, they may ignore it.

Internet Communications

How to Be an Effective Cyber Advocate

It seems like you cannot click the mouse these days without finding a website seeking to connect citizens with their government. However, are these sites looked at as a tally sheet or thoughtful advocacy?

What really influences elected officials? It is good old-fashioned policy analysis, research, and personal beliefs. To be an effective advocate, you must become part of that process and you may not get there by pointing and clicking. The most important thing to remember in seeking to influence the policy making process is that you have something of value to contribute. You probably have a particular reason for your position about a specific policy proposal or a change in law. A thoughtful approach to policy issues combined with a careful explanation of why it is important to you personally is very compelling to elected officials and their staff. In writing a personal, thoughtful, well-argued letter or e-mail, your chances of influencing your representative’s decision-making process increase dramatically.

Make sure in all advocacy you are sending original messages. Canned or generic messages are typically overlooked.

Websites

If your organization has a web site, it can be an effective tool for disseminating your message to policymakers and the general public. If you create a specific page or pages addressing the issue you are advocating, you can then direct policymakers to your web site to access the information at any time.

Web sites are also a great tool for educating the public about your issue and encouraging them to take action. If your organization is able to participate in grassroots lobbying, urging the general public to take action for or against a policy, you can use your web site to encourage people to contact their representatives and policymakers, provide sample letters and provide links to other organizations that work on similar issues or are members of your coalition.

Using The Media

The media can be an advocate's friend or foe; the key is learning how to make them work for you. Most policymakers monitor the media to determine what is important to their constituents, so using the media to your advantage is a powerful skill to master. You can learn to use the media to help accomplish the following goals:

- **Inform the public about the issue** and why it is important. If the public is concerned about your issue and there is coverage by the media, then policymakers are more likely to care about it.
- **Help change public attitudes and opinions** about your issue. By informing the public, you may be able to persuade those who were previously opposed to your position to support it.
- **Mobilize supporters of your cause.** If can use the media to influence public opinion on your issue, you are likely to gain support for your cause. This is important in lobbying because the more people who agree with your argument and are willing to publicly support it, the more policymakers may believe it is an issue that deserves attention.
- **Influence decision makers, policy and legislation.** This is the ultimate goal when using the media. If you are successful, you can convince lawmakers that the issue is relevant and that you have public support.

Writing Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor can be written in response to a recent news article or a story printed in a newspaper or magazine. A letter written by you or your organization is published, is a chance to convey your point to a larger audience. Many people, including policymakers, read letters to the editor, which makes them a great lobbying tool. Usually this type of letter is written to correct a story with incorrect facts or to show how the news is related to your issue. If your letter is not printed, keep trying when other important articles appear.

Opinion-Editorial Columns

Opinion editorials, often called op-eds, are guest essays written about issues that are of particular interest to the media's audience. In newspapers, guest writers produce a column based on opinion on an issue or event.

Television and radio news programs often set aside time for guest opinions as well. Op-eds can help make your audience aware of an issue and send your organization's message to the public and to lawmakers.

Getting the Media to Publish Your Op-Ed

Try to write the op-ed before you call the newspaper. If the editor is interested, he may ask you to send it immediately. It is good to have it on hand. Once one media outlet has agreed to look at it, do not send your op-ed to others until your initial pitch is rejected or accepted. If the article is not accepted, revise and improve it and keep passing it around to different media outlets until someone agrees to use it or its timeliness has faded.

Other Media-Related Tools

- **Press releases:** A press release is a one-page document that explains an event or issue to the press. It is usually written like a news story so that reporters will find it easy to read and will find the information they need to understand the story. Often news outlets will print a story straight from your release. It is a good idea to include a quote(s) from recognized individuals or experts for the media to use.
- **Press conferences:** A press conference is an event your organization or coalition puts together with speakers to announce something newsworthy and important to your organization or your cause. They are a way for journalists to hear about your issue, ask questions and possibly follow through with an article. Supportive elected officials can be asked to participate. Press conferences should be reserved for big events or announcements. It is also a good idea to schedule them in the morning so journalists have a chance to write about the event and file their story in time for publication or for TV coverage later that day.
- **Approach journalists:** It may be worthwhile to approach journalists who focus on your issue as well as editorial boards and encourage them to cover it in their stories, editorials and articles.
- **Magazine and newsletter articles:** Another way to inform the public and policymakers is to publish an article. Approach a magazine or organization that publishes a newsletter. Pick publications that typically publish articles written by guest authors. If you make your issue relevant to their readership, you may have a better chance of being published.
- **TV/Radio interviews:** Approach local or national radio or television shows regarding your issue and ask to be a guest. You might be asked to answer questions from the host or debate the topic with another person. This is another opportunity to use your message points and gain public attention for your issue. Send your fact sheets and press releases to TV and radio producers, community access cable stations, and public stations on a regular basis. You can also discuss your issue on call-in shows, and if you belong to a membership group, you can mobilize them to call in to shows.

Organizing A Site Visit

Parks and recreation issues have many advantages over others contending for national priority. Most Americans value public recreation as a core element of their community. If you can make an emotional connection to your parks system and programs, that personal interest and emotion will carry over into the political arena. A site visit can have advantages for decision makers. When arranging a site visit it is important to understand four components that make it worth your legislator's time. They are **People, Place, Press, and Recognition**. Legislators tend to be at home during congressional recesses. Use these recesses to secure a time in their schedule. The occasion can be as large as a community festival or as small as a therapeutic recreation program's barbeque.

- **People-** These are the legislator's constituents who put him/her in office. These are votes in an upcoming election and the most powerful and reliable form of public relations--word of mouth.

- **Place-** The main purpose of the site visit is to inform about issues that your community cares about. In determining a site, you must relate it to the legislative priority you are advocating. Be ready to coordinate a 15-minute tour to focus on the talking points you want to convey. In addition, the site should have activity occurring during the visit.
- **Press-** Will the activities at your site visit be here today and gone tomorrow or will they live on in the local papers, local radio and TV stations, and take on a second media life of its own? Providing an environment where the press is interested is likely an environment where the legislator will be interested.
- **Recognition-** Examples of recognition can come in the form of awards, ribbon cuttings, or certificates of appreciation. All of these can be tied to a recent piece of legislation and encourage legislators to attend. **Do not forget to explain and give recognition to your activities. Do not get so caught up in the event that you fail to give the tour mentioned above and convey the talking points related to federal or state legislation.**

How to Set Up the Actual Visit

Some communities have specific protocols for inviting elected guests to events. Confirm those protocols with the appropriate authority before arranging a visit. Once you have the event planned, call your elected official's office to contact the staff that handles your issue. Explain your event and the connection to the legislator - the people, place, press, and recognition. Invite the official to attend and participate in whatever type of recognition you have planned. Provide a chance for the official to address constituents. Ask the staffer about the proper way to submit invitations to the scheduler, and request that they make sure that the invitation is considered. Ask when a good time to follow-up would be, and do so appropriately. It may be a good idea to check with the official's scheduler and get a commitment to attend before finalizing a date.

Advocacy Checklist

- ▶ **Where is the Best Place to Start?** I have figured out that I want:
- ▶ **Casework** I need help with a particular program (grants, legislation).
- ▶ **Policy Representation** I want my elected official(s) to take a position on a certain issue.
- ▶ **Background Research** Think about the following questions:
 - Who are my elected official(s)?
 - What are their legislative records and general philosophies?
 - What issues are they passionate about?
 - What committees are my elected official(s) on?
 - Are my elected official(s) newly elected or more senior?
 - What party do my elected official(s) belong to?
 - What has been their position on previous related issues?
- ▶ **Message Development**
 - Tell a compelling story – you have something of value to contribute!
 - Know your facts.
 - Make the message your own.
 - Be positive.
- ▶ **General Message Delivery**

These tips apply to all communications – letters, emails, phone calls, and meetings.

 - Decide which method of communication suits you and your purpose.
 - Develop a thoughtful, well-articulated message.
 - Ask your official to take a specific action.
 - Ask your official to respond to the request.

- Make it clear what your priorities are.
- Tell your legislator's office how you can be an ongoing resource.
- Make your message targeted and forceful without being rude or threatening.
- Tell the truth.
- Be reasonable about opposing points of view.
- Be prepared to answer questions about opposing arguments.

► **Effective Meetings**

- Determine whether a meeting is needed to deliver the message.
- Decide where you want to meet.
- Decide whom you want to deliver your message (preferably someone from the district).
- Limit the number of people you bring to the meeting.
- If you're in DC for a national meeting, try to coordinate with others from your state.
- Fax the scheduler a meeting request, including a list of issues and attendees.
- Follow-up with a phone call to the scheduler after sending a written request.
- Schedule carefully to ensure you will be on time, but not too early for each meeting.
- On voting days, try to schedule meetings with members before 11:00 A.M.
- Be prepared to meet anywhere, standing up in the hallway or on the run to a vote.
- Be prepared to deliver your message in five minutes in case you have to.
- Make sure you have short, concise, and consistent information to leave behind.
- Leave your information in a file folder with your organization's name on the label.

► **Effective Written Communications**

- Make your communication stand out by making it personal, thoughtful, and accurate.
- Ask for a response.
- Confine each written communication to one topic.
- Double check office numbers, fax numbers, and e-mail addresses.

► **Effective Phone Calls**

- If you want someone to think about what you're saying, ask for a response.
- Have the basic facts about the issue on hand.

► **Following Up**

- Send a thank you note to the staff and the member soon after a meeting.
- Wait at least three weeks for a response before checking back.

► **Effective Site Visit**

- Coordinate it around an event or ceremony.
- Make an emotional connection with the community and facility.
- Consider People, Place, Press, and Type of Recognition.
- Make sure it will be a lively environment.
- Develop key points you want to urge the public official to support.
- Do not forget to take them on a tour of the facility.

Source: Stephanie Vance, AdVanced Consulting

Web Resources

This section provides additional resources that will help answer specific questions concerning your role in board development. It contains helpful websites having information about board development, consensus building and advocacy efforts.

Board Development

- ▶ www.archrespice.org
- ▶ www.boardseat.com
- ▶ www.boardsource.com
- ▶ www.Businessleader.com
- ▶ www.carvergovernance.com
- ▶ www.echoinggreen.org
- ▶ www.eurekaalert.org
- ▶ www.mapnp.org
- ▶ www.mit.edu/activities/e-club

Advocacy

- ▶ www.nonprofit.about.com
- ▶ www.congress.org
- ▶ <http://www.nrpa.org/content/default.aspx?documentId=3532> How to Be an Advocate – NRPA Distance Learning

Consensus Building

- ▶ www.policyconsensus.org

Parks and Recreation

- ▶ www.nrpa.org
 - ▶ www.tpl.org Trust for Public Land
 - ▶ www.cityparksalliance.org City Parks Alliance
- Place your own website here if you have one
-

- ▶ www.advocacyguru.com

APPENDIX A

Code of Ethics

Park & Recreation Board Members

As a parks and recreation board member, representing all of the residents, I recognize that:

- I have been entrusted to provide park and recreation services to my community.
- These services should be available to all residents regardless of age, gender, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, physical or mental limitation.
- While honest differences of opinion may develop, I will work harmoniously with other Board members to assure residents the services they require.
- I will invite all residents to express their opinions so I may be properly informed prior to making my decisions. I will make them based solely upon the facts available to me. I will support the final decision of the Board.
- I must devote the time, study and thought necessary to carry out my duties.
- I accept as fact that the board establishes the policy and the staff is responsible for administering the policies of the board and handling the day-to-day operations of the agency.
- I have no authority outside of the proper meetings of the board.
- All board meetings should be open to the public except as provided by law.

APPENDIX B

Board Organizational Self-Assessment Checklist

Note: Items highlighted indicate that this service may be provided by another division or department or this decision may be made by another elected body when parks and/or recreation is part of a local unit of government like a city/county/township/state and the parks and/or recreation department and their board may have limited ability to impact this service. The advisory board may not have control of many of these decisions.

ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE	Strong	Adequate	Weak	N/A
1. Concise, written mission/philosophy statement				
2. Understanding of mission/ and philosophy by board and staff				
3. Understanding of mission/philosophy by constituencies/general public/fund resources				
4. Mission statement/philosophy reviewed regularly				
5. Concise, written history of the organization				
PROGRAMS	Strong	Adequate	Weak	N/A
1. Sense of vision and continuity provided by leadership				
2. Annual program planning process				
3. Written annual program plan				
4. Formal communication of annual program plans to staff/board/volunteers				
5. Method for review/evaluation of prior year's program				
6. System for costing-out program elements				
7. Volunteer support of programs				
GOVERNANCE	Strong	Adequate	Weak	N/A
1. Role of advisory committees				
2. Understanding of the responsibilities of the advisory board				
2. Written board member job descriptions				
3. By-laws: current, functional, complied with				
4. Procedure for evaluating short-term/long-term objectives				
5. Procedure for recruiting new board members				
6. Procedure for orientation of new board members				

7. Procedure for evaluating board members and/or board rotation				
8. Structure of board committees				
9. Frequency of board meetings				
10. Attendance at board meetings				
11. Procedure for meeting notice and preparation				
12. Effective use of time at board meetings				
13. Board attendance at events				
14. Staff input into board decision-making /recommendations				
15. Understandable financial reports presented to board				
16. Board's understanding of finances				
18. Board represents community served				
19. Board's understanding of board/staff relationships				
21. Board members advocate for the organization in the community				
STAFF				
1. Clarity of reporting relationships				
2. Current and accurate written job descriptions				
3. Administrative leadership				
4. Communication among staff members				
5. Communication between staff and board				
6. Communication among staff, board and community				
7. Staff's understanding of the function and duties of the board				
8. Staff participation in planning				
9. Appropriateness of staff size re: programming challenge				
10. Staff experience in relationship to the job assignment				
11. Time available to perform jobs satisfactorily				
19. Staff morale				
MARKETING	Strong	Adequate	Weak	N/A
1. Understanding of who currently uses/participates				
2. Understanding of target markets				
3. Understanding of competition and annual review of their activities				
4. Mechanism for regular market research and analysis				
5. Annual written marketing plan				
6. Effective marketing/promotional materials				
7. Marketing budget				
8. Staff use of marketing consultants				
10. Process for evaluating effectiveness of marketing plan				
11. In-house mailing list computerized				
12. In-house mailing list - procedures for updating/purging information				
PUBLIC/COMMUNITY RELATIONS	Strong	Adequate	Weak	N/A
1. Consistency and clarity of organizational image communicated to the public				
2. Mechanism for handling of public queries, complaints, etc.				
3. Annual public relations plan				
4. Effectiveness in representing the organization: to its constituencies, general public, the press				
5. Grant writing expertise	Strong	Adequate	Weak	N/A
7. Corporate, foundation, government grants research capacity				
8. Involvement of Board in prospect identification				
10. Non-Board volunteer support of fundraising effort				
12. Organization's ability to attract: individual donations, gifts, corporate and corporate foundation gifts, private foundation funding				
13. Level of government grants				
14. Development materials				

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT				
1. Annual budgeting process	Strong	Adequate	Weak	N/A
2. Computerized accounting/budgeting/reporting systems				
6. Formalized cost controls				
FACILITIES				
1. Space for use demand at present level	Strong	Adequate	Weak	N/A
2. Space for expanded use demand				
3. Space for current administrative staff				
4. Space for expanded administrative staff				
5. Storage facilities				
6. Image facilities communicates to constituents				
7. Ambience of space for staff and volunteers				
8. Degree of organization's control of facility				
9. Length of lease agreement(s)				
EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT				
1. Understanding of local/regional economic climate	Strong	Adequate	Weak	N/A
2. Organization's knowledge of/relationship to user community				
3. Organization's knowledge of/relationship to non-user community				

Source: Adapted from the National Endowment for the Arts; Morrie Warshawski is a consultant, facilitator, and author specializing in the arts

APPENDIX C

Board Manual Template

This template can be used to create an advisory board orientation manual.

1.0 GOVERNANCE POLICY

- 1.01 Forward
- 1.02 Purpose
- 1.03 Definitions
- 1.04 Statement of Objectives
- 1.05 Agency Governance
 - 1.05.1 By-Laws
 - 1.05.2 Advisory Board + relationship to elected governance board*
 - 1.05.3 Agency Ordinances + local unit of government ordinances which apply to Department*
 - 1.05.4 Agency Policies*
 - 1.05.5 Agency Procedures*
 - 1.05.6 Agency Manuals*
 - 1.05.7 Internal Organizational Charts
 - 1.05.8 Park District+ Municipal Code
 - 1.05.9 County/Municipal Clerk Requirements
- 1.06 Board Governance
 - 1.06.1 Number of Members*
 - 1.06.2 Terms of Office*
 - 1.06.3 Qualifications*
 - 1.06.4 Nominations and Appointments*
 - 1.06.5 Officers
 - 1.06.6 Appointments
 - 1.06.7 Vacancies*
 - 1.06.8 Installation of Members
 - 1.06.9 Advisory Board Member Benefits
 - 1.06.10 Orientation of Board Members
- 1.07 Board Ethics and Conduct
 - 1.07.1 Ethics Act/Code/Statute

- 1.07.2 Representation
- 1.07.3 Board Decisions/Recommendations
- 1.07.4 Conflict of Interest Designations
- 1.07.5 Relationship with Executive director
- 1.07.6 Board/Staff Role Definitions
- 1.07.7 Code of Conduct
- 1.08 Powers and Duties of the Board
 - 1.08.1 Strategic Planning
 - 1.08.2 Reimbursable Expenses*
 - 1.08.3 Board Committees
 - 1.08.4 Meeting Attendance
 - 1.08.5 Policy and Procedural Review
 - 1.08.6 Board Service
 - 1.08.7 Qualified Employees
 - 1.08.8 Official Actions
 - 1.08.9 Dealing with the Press
- 1.09 Officers of the Board
 - 1.09.1 President/Chair
 - 1.09.2 Vice-President/Vice-Chair
 - 1.09.3 Secretary
 - 1.09.4 Terms
 - 1.09.5 Absence of Officers
- 1.10 Appointments of the Board
 - 1.10.1 City Planning Commission
 - 1.10.2 Committee Chairs
- 1.11 Committees of the Board
 - 1.11.1 Committee of the Whole
 - 1.11.2 Special Committees
 - 1.11.3 Staff Representation
 - 1.11.4 Ad Hoc Committees
 - 1.11.5 Scheduling of Committee Meetings
- 1.12 Meetings of the Board
 - 1.12.1 Regular Meetings
 - 1.12.2 Special Board Meetings
 - 1.12.3 Committee Meetings
 - 1.12.4 Emergency Meetings
 - 1.12.5 Board Retreat
 - 1.12.6 Park/Facility Tours
 - 1.12.7 Effective Meetings
 - 1.12.8 Schedule and Notice of Meetings
 - 1.12.9 Staff Attendance
 - 1.12.10 Preparation of Agenda
 - 1.12.11 Posting of Agenda
 - 1.12.12 Standing Agenda Items
 - 1.12.13 Community Input
 - 1.12.14 Voting
 - 1.12.15 Roll Call/Quorum
 - 1.12.16 Voice Vote
 - 1.12.17 Meeting Discussions
 - 1.12.18 Meeting Minutes
 - 1.12.19 Rules of Order
 - 1.12.20 Board Packets
 - 1.12.21 Old Business
 - 1.12.22 New Business
- 1.13 Fiscal Operating and Financial Policies

- 1.13.1 Fiscal Year
- 1.13.2 Operating Budget
- 1.13.3 Budget and Appropriations
- 1.13.4 Fund Balances
- 1.14 Miscellaneous Governance Policies
 - 1.14.1 Board Calendar
 - 1.14.2 Intergovernmental Agreements
 - 1.14.3 Grants
 - 1.14.4 Foundation
 - 1.14.5 Land Acquisition
 - 1.14.6 Donations
 - 1.14.7 Recognition
 - 1.14.8 Board Continuing Education
 - 1.14.9 Canvassing Board

* Often set by unit of government who has responsibility for the department being advised

APPENDIX D

Citizen Board Orientation Manual

1. Introduction/Purpose Statement

- Purpose of this manual

2. Background/Context

- Agency profile
 - Population, demographics (age profile, income, racial diversity)
 - Statistics: operating and capital budgets, parks, park acres, # employees, # classes
 - Agency awards
 - Parks and recreation distinctive features/characteristics
- Agency mission/philosophy/values
 - Inclusion philosophy
- Agency organizational Chart – where do parks and recreation and its citizen board fit within the jurisdiction?

3. Role and Expectations of a Board Member

- Discuss specific type of jurisdiction (Municipal, County, Township, District, etc)
- Discuss type of Board (Advisory, Semi-Independent, Independent)
- Discuss primary purpose/priority of specific agency (advocacy, advisory to staff, advisory to governing body, etc.)
- Relationship between staff and the citizen board members
- Relationship between the citizen board member and other support groups within the jurisdiction (Parks Foundation, Friends Groups, ad hoc committees, Independent Youth or Adult Sports Organizations)
- Include any applicable laws, ordinances, administrative regulations, by-laws
- Logistics – frequency of meetings, roster of board members, key liaison/support staff

4. An effective Board Member needs to know...

- Key agency policies
 - Long and short term financial policies
- Legislative agenda, representatives
- The parks and recreation services and facilities
- Long range master plan for parks and recreation
 - Related planning documents and agencies (county comprehensive plan, regional council of governments agreements/committees)
- Challenges and issues facing the Agency

APPENDIX E Open Meeting Laws

Open Meeting Laws, sometimes known as Public Meeting Laws or Sunshine Laws are common among states but the exact wording and requirements differ from state to state.

In the broadest terms, these laws state that elected bodies – boards, commissions, councils, legislatures—must conduct business in open meetings which members of the public may attend, except when conducting certain type of business. Matters of personnel and land purchases both generally allow for closed meetings, however many states require the actual land purchase to be made in a public meeting as well as any personnel action taken.

This law may also govern how meeting notices are distributed and posted; how meetings are announced; and how many days prior to a meeting this must be done. *Since advisory boards do not have final decision-making authority, some of these regulations may not apply.* As an elected board member, you need to be aware that this can be a very complicated process and has legal implications.

If there is not a section in the board's orientation manual, board members should obtain a copy of the open meeting laws pertaining to their state from one of these sources:

1. The agency/department director/executive director
2. The board attorney or the staff or contract attorney employed by the unit of government
3. The State Attorney General

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