



Community Planning
Capacity Building

Guidance for Local Governments

Recovery Steering Committees

Cities and Towns impacted by disaster will find it useful to establish an ad-hoc (non-permanent) entity to lead their Recovery efforts. Such groups, often referred to as Steering Committees, are needed because 1) it is unlikely that sitting City Council members have the requisite backgrounds needed to guide long-term Recovery and 2) the amount of work involved – in leading a Recovery effort AND tending to day-to-day City business – is too great for one group.

Need for Clarity

It is often said that a Steering Committee composed of 13 residents, elected officials, staff members, and other stakeholders is likely to put forth 14 opinions as to the group's purpose and functioning. For this reason, your community would be well served to establish clear operating guidelines, often referred to as a Charter or Bylaws, to detail everything from the group's purpose and authority, to proscribing membership composition and meeting rules.

Steering Committee Bylaws should be comprehensive yet written in plain English. Do not hesitate to cover even mundane details but use short sentences and avoid acronyms to do so. Strive to produce a document that can be easily understood by every residents. Consider modifying well-regarded bylaws¹ created by another Steering Committee to meet the needs of your group.

Checklist

Ensure that your Bylaws answer the following questions:

Authorization and Purpose

1. What body authorized the Steering Committee to exist? Was a formal resolution passed authorizing the creation of the Steering Committee and their Operating Guidelines, Bylaws, or Charter?
2. Does the Steering Committee report to the Authorizing body in all situations or does the Steering Committee have independent authority over some actions or issues. If yes, specify.
3. What is the purpose of the Steering Committee – meaning what problem is the Steering Committee trying solve?

BENEFITS OF BYLAWS AND CHARTERS

Operating guidelines, in some settings known as Bylaws, in others as a Charter, offer many benefits to a community in crisis:

Authority – When approved by City Council, such documents codify the authority of the group and, in this sense, bestow it with credibility.

Purpose and Roles – Published responsibilities - what the group is and is not expected to work on – guide the work of the group, reduce mission creep, and inform which skill sets should be recruited for.

Expediency – Debating how a meeting should be run at every meeting wastes valuable time.

Transparency – Bylaws, by their very nature, increase transparency as they provide the public with the rules by which recovery decisions will be made.

Fairness – As a public document, framers will be inclined to write rules that promote equal benefit to all constituencies.

¹ For an excellent example of Steering Committee Operating Guidelines see <http://snohomishcountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/8032>.

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Authorization and Purpose Continued.

4. What are the functions of the Steering Committee – meaning does it make recommendations, does it manage projects, does it fundraise, etc.?
5. When does the work of the Steering Committee end? Does it only provide oversight over the production of a Recovery Plan OR does it also provide oversight over the implementation of that Plan? Keep in mind that different skill sets are needed for each phase.
6. Does the Steering Committee have sub-committee's – as in the Executive Committee, Planning Committee, Citizens Advisory Board, Economic Development Committee, etc.?

Members of Steering Committee

1. How are initial members chosen and by who? Are they appointed, elected?
2. What skill sets are to be recruited for and in what percentages? For example, how many seats are to be filled by those with expertise in community planning, economic development, mitigation, sustainability, resiliency, housing, public administration, infrastructure, fundraising, municipal accounting, health and human services?
3. How many seats are to be filled by residents, business owners, local non-profit executives, city officials, city staff
4. How many seats are to be filled by minorities, underserved populations, and women/men?
5. What are the terms of members and how are new members selected?
6. What are the minimum expectations of members in terms of hours expected to be at meetings, work to be done between meetings, and number of excused absences permitted
7. Are there any desired character traits of members: such as open-mindedness, tolerance of other viewpoints, consensus builder.

Public Involvement

1. Are Steering Committee meetings open to the public? Is there an opportunity for the public to participate? Must they be a resident or can anyone participate?
2. Will Meeting Minutes be taken? If yes, are they to be made public.
3. What other methods will be taken to publicize the findings and actions of the Steering Committee?

GUIDANCE FROM THE AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION:

After a major disaster, local governments have to deal with decisions and activities that their existing codes, processes, and staff are not equipped to handle. Simply, existing ordinances and procedures, while effective during peacetime, often serve to delay time-sensitive post-disaster decisions or actions.

For this reason, the American Planning Association has developed a "Model Recovery Ordinance" (MRO). This Ordinance suggests additional, temporary powers that local governments need to plan, expedite, and implement long-term recovery. APA recommends drafting an ordinance during peace time (pre-disaster). However, communities that cannot do so are encouraged to adopt the model after a disaster. Important points to consider:

- A "Recovery Management Organization is APA's name for Steering Committee
- APA suggests the Recovery Management Organization focus on both Response Phase needs in addition to Long-Term Recovery needs. Be sure to also make sure you have staff who have recovery expertise.

For more information on APA's Model Recovery Ordinance see, <https://www.planning.org/research/post-disaster/briefingpapers/recoveryordinance.htm>

APA's Template can be found at: https://planning-org-uploaded-media.s3.amazonaws.com/legacy_resources/research/postdisaster/pdf/modelrecoveryordinance.pdf



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Meeting Management

4. How will meetings be managed? Will *Roberts Rules of Order* be used? See www.robertsrules.org.
5. Is there any meaningful recourse for residents, businesses, local non-profits, and other stakeholders to challenge with findings and actions made by the Steering Committee?
6. How, specifically, will the work of the Steering Committee to be monitored?

Tips/ Best Practices

- If a member is appointed as a representative of an organization, make sure it is someone with adequate decision-making authority within that organization.
- Hold regular committee meetings planned well in advance.
- Make it clear to all parties that these meetings will be held exactly on the dates and times planned

Other Resources

- Steering Committee Toolkit – Excellent!
<http://collectiveimpactforum.org/resources/tools-steering-committees>
- Example of Steering Committee Operating Guidelines. Note: not for Recovery situations but still relevant
<http://snohomishcountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/8032>
<http://www.imagineflint.com/PlanInfo/SteeringCommittee.aspx>
https://www.cityofflint.com/wp-content/uploads/Tri-fold-draft-3-29-Final_Web.pdf
- From the business world
<https://www.ittoolkit.com/how-to-it/projects/project-steering-committees.html>

