

Focusing the Committee

Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the MTAS website ([mtas.tennessee.edu](http://www.mtas.tennessee.edu)). This website is maintained daily by MTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee municipal government.

We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with municipal government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other MTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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It generally is best for the committee to be appointed by the governing board. It lends legitimacy to the committee and underscores the importance of the project.

Prior to appointment, the city must provide a charge for the committee, a clearly written mission statement and set of objectives. The objectives should be provided in writing and clearly delineate the sort of recommendations being sought. Ideally, the charge to the committee would be put in the form of a question, for example, "What training, skills and experience should the city council seek in a new city manager?"

The focus of the committee will be improved if the city provides written instructions on the following:

- The authority of the committee to expend money, hire consultants, etc. Generally, it is a good idea to require that all committee expenditures be approved in advance by the appropriate city official or the governing board. Be very clear about this point. Do not let the panel spend money for which it is not legally accountable.
- Likewise, the authority to solicit donations on the city's behalf should be clearly understood by all parties. If the committee is given such authority, it is wise to have a written policy in place on the methods and conditions of such solicitations.
- The need for the committee to comply strictly with the Tennessee Open Meetings Law and the Open Records Law. There can be no secret meetings, and all documents must be turned over to the city recorder for safekeeping.
- Some basic operating rules: where meetings are to be held, appointing a chairperson, etc.
- The authority, if any, to direct the work of city staff.
- The names of staff members and consultants available to assist the committee and how such individuals are to be contacted.
- The deadline for submitting a recommendation.

Most importantly, before beginning its work the advisory committee members must clearly understand and accept that the governing board will make the final decision on any recommendations it receives and that the final decision may be at variance with the committee's advice.

Without such explicit instructions, a citizen committee may find itself exploring issues that were never intended when they were appointed. This can result in embarrassment to the governing board and threaten the committee's success.

DISCLAIMER: The letters and publications written by the MTAS consultants were written based upon the law at the time and/or a specific sets of facts. The laws referenced in the letters and publications may have changed and/or the technical advice provided may not be applicable to your city or circumstances. Always consult with your city attorney or an MTAS consultant before taking any action based on information contained in this website.

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