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BASELINE DATA REPORT

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Use of Council Committees in Local Governments

The number of standing committees decreases among smaller population groups, from an average of 12 in the population group from 100,000 to 249,999 to 5 in jurisdictions with populations below 2,500.

Almost 29% of respondents indicate that all or nearly all legislative business is conducted in standing committees.

Ad hoc committees, which are formed to a wide range of issues, have been formed at the rate of two per year. Although the range is from zero to twenty-three.



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Use of Council Committees in Local Government

By Victor S. DeSantis, Janay Pollock, and Kimberly Moore

Governments at all levels are under great pressure from citizens. They are asked to provide services efficiently and effectively, allow for representation of both broad and narrow interests, and promote political and social agendas. In carrying out these responsibilities, governments must develop procedures and institutions that facilitate the democratic process. In the legislative branches of our government—Congress, state legislatures, county commissions, city councils—the scope and complexity of public policy issues make the development of certain types of procedural mechanisms necessary. One of these is the committee system.

Committees are smaller, specialized forums where much of the sub-

stantive work of legislatures takes place. Although committees have been universally adopted by federal and state legislatures, their use is not nearly as pervasive in our nation's local governments. Similarly, although researchers have provided a great deal of insight into and documentation of the behavior of committees in Congress and state legislatures, much less is known about the functioning of local council committees. Fortunately, some of the accumulated knowledge regarding committees is relevant across levels of government. The purpose of this report is to describe the extent of the use of committees at the local level and to enhance our understanding of committee roles and procedures. This report builds on applicable data from previous reports on this topic and offers some comparisons over time.

No two cities are exactly alike. They differ in people, governments, economies, and customs. Although many cities adopt the same form of government (mayor-council, council-manager, or other), substantial differences may exist in other governmental features, such as executive departments, council operations and the level of mayoral and managerial authority. Differences are also noticeable when committee systems at the local level are examined. They differ in many characteristics, including the number of committees used and their policy areas, amount of work performed, level of policymaking authority, and composition of the membership. Committees are undoubtedly as unique as the cities they serve.

Local governments use committees for a variety of reasons. First, some mechanism is needed to allow public

discussion and deliberation of the many policy issues that come before a city council. The use of committees allows for the division of labor necessary in councils confronted by a wide range of complex issues. This is especially important because many communities have part-time councils that meet in full session only weekly or biweekly. In the committee setting, community officials and citizens can discuss important policy issues more comprehensively and act upon issues with more deliberation.

Second, committees and advisory boards play a vital role in linking interested citizens to city government in a meaningful way. Because of the relatively small size of city councils (an average of 5 to 7 persons in most communities), citizen volunteers are often asked to serve on standing committees or council advisory boards. This direct involvement can serve many worthwhile purposes. Citizens get an opportunity to serve their community in areas of interest to them, and they receive the intrinsic rewards of public service. Also, by allowing citizens to serve, local policymakers get a broader range of ideas for making decisions; later, these citizens become advocates, encouraging support for council decisions in the community. Citizen involvement is especially important today, when calls for greater public access to government and more participatory democracy are being heard across the country.

Third, committees allow council members and citizens to specialize in particular policy areas, especially those areas in which they have specific knowledge and skills. This is often the case on council committees or boards that oversee technical concerns such as building, plumbing, or electrical codes. In cities with such committees, licensed builders, plumbers, and electricians may serve along with other citizens or council members, providing expertise to help develop the most efficient and effective regulations.

Although committees and advisory boards usually work with more latitude and under less public scrutiny than council members, the need for accountability is great. The development of public policies, especially those of a more technical nature, can be made to serve private rather than

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public ends. Ultimately, the task of guarding against abuse is left to the public at large. For this reason, many local governments make every effort to publicize committee meetings and report minutes or abstracts of the topics discussed in order to promote greater citizen involvement and notify the public of decisions made. Some communities require financial disclosure of committee members as well as of elected officials to help avoid any potential conflicts of interest.

In addition to local regulations, many states have adopted laws that require open public meetings of local councils and their committees to help ensure that fairness and adequate representation are part of the local policymaking. For example, the Missouri Sunshine Law requires that meeting dates and times be posted at least 24 hours in advance, both at the meeting location and at city hall. The law does provide for closed sessions in specific instances, such as city business relating to real estate purchases, discussions of law suits, or the disciplining of public personnel.

Although certain aspects of local committee activities are shaped by state law, federal law also plays an important role. During the 1960s, the federal government required local governments receiving federal grants for certain poverty and urban renewal programs to provide for the "maximum feasible participation" of recipient citizens. Both the Model Cities program of the late 1960s and the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, which followed it several years later, required citizen participation for the receipt of federal funds. Today, citizen participation is still the norm and citizen committees set the priorities for spending CDBG money at the local level. In part because of such federal requirements, citizen involvement on local committees has a long history.

TYPES OF COMMITTEES

Two general types of committees exist at the local level: standing and ad hoc. Standing committees are permanent bodies with jurisdiction over specific policy areas. They are commonly created by charter, local ordinance, or council resolution. Although most

standing committees or advisory boards serve the council in making public policy, councils sometimes grant particular committees more independence in decision making. For example, zoning and adjustments, building appeals, or civil service committees may serve a quasijudicial function, hearing disputes and rendering judgments. Other standing committees, such as library or golf course boards, may actually serve as independent governing boards, controlling the finances and management of a service or depart-

ment. Ad hoc committees, on the other hand, are temporary committees established to address short-term problems or issues. However, issues addressed by ad hoc committees often become more enduring and require the development of standing committees.

STANDING COMMITTEES

Standing committees are the most common type of committee used by legislative bodies (Tables 1 and 10). Overall, 52.0% of all responding jurisdictions

Table 1 Council's Use of Standing Committees

Classification	No. reporting (A)	Yes		No	
		No.	% of (A)	No.	% of (A)
All cities ¹	4,739	2,464	52.0	2,275	48.0
Population group					
Over 1,000,000	2	2	100.0	0	0.0
500,000-1,000,000	8	8	100.0	0	0.0
250,000-499,999	30	25	83.3	5	16.7
100,000-249,999	98	66	67.3	32	32.7
50,000-99,999	247	138	55.9	109	44.1
25,000-49,999	496	275	55.4	221	44.6
10,000-24,999	1,068	589	55.1	479	44.9
5,000-9,999	1,177	617	52.4	560	47.6
2,500-4,999	1,238	576	46.5	662	53.5
Under 2,500	375	168	44.8	207	55.2
Geographic division ²					
New England	478	201	42.1	277	57.9
Mid-Atlantic	671	342	51.0	329	49.0
East North Central	922	600	65.1	322	34.9
West North Central	543	294	54.1	249	45.9
South Atlantic	612	290	47.4	322	52.6
East South Central	272	107	39.3	165	60.7
West South Central	476	199	41.8	277	58.2
Mountain	257	138	53.7	119	46.3
Pacific Coast	508	293	57.7	215	42.3
Metro status ³					
Central	374	239	63.9	135	36.1
Suburban	2,519	1,361	54.0	1,158	46.0
Independent	1,846	864	46.8	982	53.2
Form of government ⁴					
Mayor-council	2,110	1,252	59.3	858	40.7
Council-manager	2,276	1,098	48.2	1,178	51.8
Commission	91	28	30.8	63	69.2
Town meeting	228	72	31.6	156	68.4
Rep. town meeting	34	14	41.2	20	58.8

¹The term *cities* is used in this and the following tables to refer to cities, villages, towns, townships, and boroughs.

²Geographic divisions: *New England*—the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont; *Mid-Atlantic*—the states of New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania; *East North Central*—the states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin; *West North Central*—the states of Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota; *South Atlantic*—the states of Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia, plus the District of Columbia; *East South Central*—the states of Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee; *West*

South Central—the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas; *Mountain*—the states of Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming; *Pacific Coast*—the states of Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington.

³Metro status: *Central*—the city(ies) actually appearing in the standard metropolitan statistical area (SMSA) title; *Suburban*—the city(ies) located with an SMSA; *Independent*—the city(ies) not located within an SMSA.

⁴Forms of government: *Mayor-council*—an elected council serves as the legislative body with a separately elected head of government; *Council-manager*—the mayor and council make policy and an appointed administrator is responsible for the administration of the city.

use standing committees in the policymaking process (Table 1). The use of standing committees appears to be positively correlated with population size; all of the largest jurisdictions (those with populations of 500,000 and over) use them. In addition, they are used in 83.3% of the jurisdictions with populations from 250,000 to 499,999 and in 67.3% of those with populations from 100,000 to 249,999. Only in the two smallest population groups (jurisdictions under 5,000 in population) do less than 50% of the communities use standing committees.

Local traditions are important determinants of local government institutions and processes, and geographic patterns often emerge in studies of how people relate to local government and design local charters. As the data demonstrate, there are substantial geographic differences in the use of standing committees by local councils. The greatest use is seen among the East North Central (65.1%) and Pacific Coast (57.7%) jurisdictions. The least use is seen among the East South Central (39.3%) and West South Central (41.8%) jurisdictions.

The use of standing committees varies also by metropolitan status. More than 60% of jurisdictions that are central cities of Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) report using standing committees (63.9%). The percentage drops to 54.0% for suburban and 46.8% for independent jurisdictions.

When the use of standing committees is distributed by form of government, it appears that use is highest among mayor-council jurisdictions (59.3%); council-manager jurisdictions use standing committees at a somewhat lower rate (48.2%). Among the three minor forms of government, standing committees are used in 30.8% of commission jurisdictions, 31.6% of town meeting jurisdictions, and 41.2% of representative town meeting jurisdictions.

When examined over time, the use of standing committees is slightly down from ICMA's *Form of Government 1986* survey, in which 54.0% of responding communities reported using these committees. However, this result may be more reflective of sample differences in the two surveys and not of an actual trend away from use of committees. Although the percentage

increases rise in some population and geographic categories reporting committee usage, other categories show percentage decreases.

Although standing committees cover a wide range of policy areas, some types of committee are more prevalent among local governments. Among the standard types are planning and zoning, community development, parks and recreation, cable television, civil service, budget and finance, beautification and code enforcement, and senior citizens services committees. Standing committees have been formed in many local governments to address such newer policy areas as recycling and the environment, the Americans With Disabilities Act, and ethics. One of the most interesting committees discovered is the Street Address Review Committee in Leavenworth, Kansas. This committee oversees the numbering of homes, naming of new streets, and street signs.

The number of standing committees or boards varies widely among the

responding communities. A variety of factors come into play in determining the necessary number of committees, including the amount of legislative activity, the desire for participatory and open government, and the complexity of policy issues. Table 2 displays the average, maximum, and minimum number of standing committees on local councils. Overall, the responding jurisdictions average slightly over seven (7.17) standing committees on their councils. Most common among the responding jurisdictions are standing committee systems with between four and six committees (not shown), used in slightly over 40% of the responding jurisdictions (not shown). However, several jurisdictions did report having substantially larger committee systems, with several jurisdictions having 50 or more standing committees or boards, the highest number being 58.

Table 2 also shows a slight correlation between the number of committees and population size and metro

Table 2 Number of Standing Committees

Classification	No. reporting	Average No.	Maximum No.	Minimum No.
All cities	2,253	7.17	58	1
Population group				
Over 1,000,000	2	8.00	15	1
500,000-1,000,000	7	15.57	55	4
250,000-499,999	23	9.04	46	1
100,000-249,999	60	12.17	50	1
50,000-99,999	124	8.90	50	1
25,000-49,999	253	8.38	44	1
10,000-24,999	544	7.58	50	1
5,000-9,999	562	6.63	58	1
2,500-4,999	528	6.09	27	1
Under 2,500	150	5.35	18	1
Geographic division				
New England	167	9.37	58	1
Mid-Atlantic	312	7.35	50	1
East North Central	560	7.08	32	1
West North Central	272	6.98	50	1
South Atlantic	275	6.56	50	1
East South Central	98	6.72	40	1
West South Central	170	6.99	44	1
Mountain	123	7.15	55	1
Pacific Coast	276	6.88	40	1
Metro status				
Central	216	10.40	55	1
Suburban	1,252	6.88	58	1
Independent	785	6.73	44	1
Form of government				
Mayor-council	1,153	6.80	50	1
Council-manager	1,013	7.25	55	1
Commission	21	9.33	21	3
Town meeting	55	12.15	58	1
Rep. town meeting	11	8.91	20	3

status. When the data are distributed by population size, the number of standing committees shows a steady decline from 12.17 in the population group from 100,000 to 249,999 to 5.35 in the population group under 2,500. As for metro status, central jurisdictions average 10.4 standing committees, compared with 6.88 for suburban jurisdictions and 6.73 for independent jurisdictions.

Few patterns are noticeable when the data are distributed by geographic division, except that New England jurisdictions have a somewhat higher average number of standing committees than do other areas. Finally, among the two primary forms of government, council-manager jurisdictions tend to average slightly more committees (7.25) than do mayor-council jurisdictions (6.80).

When compared over time, the number of standing committees is relatively stable from 1986 to 1991. The overall average of 7.17 in 1991 is slightly higher than the average of 6.84 from 1986. This pattern also occurred across most of the population and geographic division categories.

Size of Standing Committees

One of the difficulties in constructing committees is balancing the need for broad representation while maintaining an effective work group. A small committee whose members have much in common may not be innovative or inclusive, whereas a group that is large may have difficulty allowing for meaningful discussion and reaching consensus. Survey respondents were asked to report approximately how many members are on standing committees (Table 3). Among the respondents, the average number of members was 4.54. Although some jurisdictions have extremely large committees, it appears that committees with between three and five members are the most widely used in local government, with just over 60% of all responding jurisdictions reporting sizes within this range (not shown).

When distributed by population size, the data show that jurisdictions in the two largest categories, both of which average around six members, use slightly larger standing committees than do medium and smaller jurisdictions. Likewise, central cities average

slightly more members on their standing committees than do either suburban or independent jurisdictions. Responding jurisdictions from four (New England, South Atlantic, West South Central, and Mountain) of the nine geographic divisions average more than 5 members on their standing committees. Finally, council-manager jurisdictions have a slightly higher average number of members (5.00) than mayor-council jurisdictions (4.05). The three minor forms of government all average more standing committee members than do the two primary forms of government.

When compared over time, the average size of standing committees in the 1991 survey is substantially larger than that reported in the 1986 survey. The 1991 average is 4.54 (Table 3) compared to 3.25 for 1986 (not shown). This noteworthy trend may be attributable to the call for more open and democratic government being heard at the local level, because

many standing committee members are citizen volunteers.

Because the number of standing committee members can vary widely even within the same jurisdiction, respondents were also asked to report the size of their smallest and largest standing committee. These data appear in Tables 4 and 5, respectively. The average number of members on the smallest standing committee for all responding jurisdictions is 3.57. The average number of members on the largest standing committee is 5.99.

As expected, there is more variation among the independent variables in Table 5, which shows the average number of members on the largest standing committees. The responding jurisdictions with populations from 500,000 to 1,000,000 report an average of 9.29 members on their largest standing committees. Conversely, jurisdictions reporting with populations from 2,500 to 4,999 average 5.16 members on their largest committees. Jurisdictions

Table 3 Number of Members on a Standing Committee

Classification	No. reporting	Average No.	Maximum No.	Minimum No.
All cities	2,216	4.54	40	1
Population group				
Over 1,000,000	2	6.00	9	3
500,000-1,000,000	7	6.14	14	3
250,000-499,999	23	4.70	10	2
100,000-249,999	63	5.48	22	2
50,000-99,999	122	5.11	15	1
25,000-49,999	251	4.82	15	1
10,000-24,999	520	4.77	40	1
5,000-9,999	553	4.35	17	1
2,500-4,999	525	4.16	20	1
Under 2,500	150	4.33	20	1
Geographic division				
New England	159	5.23	15	1
Mid-Atlantic	312	3.96	16	1
East North Central	554	3.88	22	1
West North Central	269	4.58	17	1
South Atlantic	269	5.26	40	2
East South Central	95	4.00	12	1
West South Central	168	5.33	20	1
Mountain	128	5.20	17	1
Pacific Coast	262	4.82	19	1
Metro status				
Central	223	5.20	22	1
Suburban	1,206	4.55	40	1
Independent	787	4.34	19	1
Form of government				
Mayor-council	1,156	4.05	22	1
Council-manager	977	5.00	40	1
Commission	21	5.62	9	2
Town meeting	51	5.94	13	1
Rep. town meeting	11	6.91	14	2

in the New England and West South Central divisions have a substantially higher average than jurisdictions in other geographic divisions (8.11 and 7.54 members, respectively). Council-manager jurisdictions average 6.89 members on the largest standing committees compared with 4.87 for mayor-council jurisdictions.

Length of Term

Communities establish various term lengths for their standing committee members. In setting term lengths, there must be a balance between the need for membership turnover, which can promote vitality and innovation, and the need to allow experience to develop among committee members. Term lengths on standing committees vary across jurisdictions and across committees within the same jurisdiction. For example, in Pocatello, Idaho, committee terms vary in length from one year (Mayor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

and Older Workers) to six years (Civil Service Commission, Sister Cities Committee). Another committee in Pocatello, the Fort Hall Replica Commission, has membership terms that do not expire and has awarded several honorary lifetime memberships. Many communities also stagger terms and establish term limitations to foster broader representation on committees.

Frequency of Meetings

The frequency of standing committee meetings largely depends on the amount of business pending. In many communities, committees such as those that hear planning and zoning requests meet more often than others because of constant demands for their services. Some standing committees, such as those that review and make recommendations on the local budget, are driven by the budget cycle and meet more often during high-activity periods. Overall, 47.5% of the responding jurisdictions claim that standing committees

meet once a month (Table 6). Although 12.4% of jurisdictions report that standing committees meet twice a month, 10.1% indicate that their standing committees meet less than once a month. A meeting schedule that differs from the options on the survey instrument is used in 27.0% of jurisdictions. This "other" category includes those jurisdictions where committees lack a formal schedule but meet as the need arises.

Table 6 also shows the frequency of committee meetings broken down by population size, geographic division, metro status, and form of government. Among responding jurisdictions with populations from 250,000 to 499,999, 24.0% report that their committees meet more than twice a month, and 28.0% report biweekly meetings. Combining these two percentages shows this to be the only population group in which more than 50% of the responding jurisdictions meet two or more times each month (except the two jurisdictions with populations over one million). Among the three population categories with populations from 25,000 to 249,999, two or more meetings each month are scheduled in approximately 30% of jurisdictions. When the data are distributed by geographic division, they show that the highest percentage of jurisdictions that report meeting twice a month or more are in the Pacific Coast division (combined 4.2% and 22.2%). The responding jurisdictions from the Mid-Atlantic and East South Central divisions are more likely than other jurisdictions to report less than one meeting each month (14.1% and 13.9%, respectively). Slightly more evident is the pattern when the data are distributed by metro status. Almost 30% of the central jurisdictions report that their standing committees meet twice a month or more (combined 9.6% and 19.3%), compared with a combined percentage of 15.5 for suburban jurisdictions and 11.5% for independent jurisdictions.

Finally, more than half of the council-manager jurisdictions (55.9%) report monthly meetings, compared with 39.2% of mayor-council jurisdictions. Mayor-council jurisdictions are slightly more than council-manager jurisdictions to have meetings twice a month or more.

Table 4 Number of Members on the Smallest Standing Committee

Classification	No. reporting	Average No.	Maximum No.	Minimum No.
All cities	2,065	3.57	14	1
Population group				
Over 1,000,000	1	3.00	3	3
500,000-1,000,000	7	4.57	7	3
250,000-499,999	23	3.96	7	2
100,000-249,999	57	3.95	10	2
50,000-99,999	117	4.16	14	1
25,000-49,999	239	3.69	10	1
10,000-24,999	491	3.58	10	1
5,000-9,999	511	3.44	10	1
2,500-4,999	489	3.44	12	1
Under 2,500	130	3.47	8	1
Geographic division				
New England	142	3.56	14	1
Mid-Atlantic	290	3.14	11	1
East North Central	516	3.27	10	1
West North Central	262	3.66	9	1
South Atlantic	249	4.04	10	1
East South Central	79	3.25	10	1
West South Central	154	3.95	8	1
Mountain	114	3.84	12	1
Pacific Coast	259	3.86	10	1
Metro status				
Central	206	3.84	10	1
Suburban	1,132	3.59	14	1
Independent	727	3.46	12	1
Form of government				
Mayor-council	1,042	3.32	11	1
Council-manager	943	3.81	12	1
Commission	23	4.09	7	2
Town meeting	47	3.57	7	2
Rep. town meeting	10	5.30	14	3

Role of Standing Committees in the Legislative Process

The survey instrument includes several questions about the role of standing committees in the legislative process. These questions cover how much legislative business is conducted in committee, whether the committees have power to recommend formal policy to the council, and how often these recommendations are accepted.

The amount of legislative business that is handled by committees is largely a function of the volume and complexity of issues before the council. As council agendas fill with important policy issues, more substantive work often gets thrust upon committees. Committees may also have a greater policymaking role in situations in which the complexity of an issue requires greater debate and more intense investigation, such as the development of ordinances for building design and signs. As committees take on greater policymaking roles, committee chairpersons and other key committee members take on greater visibility and authority.

As Table 7 indicates, 65.3% of the survey respondents claim that one-quarter or less of legislative business is handled in committees. Almost 15% of respondents to the question claim that three-quarters of legislative business is conducted in committee, and 13.5% report that nearly all legislative business is conducted in committee.

When data are broken down by population size, there appears to be a slight positive correlation between the amount of legislative business conducted in standing committees and population size. Although 16.7% of jurisdictions with populations from 500,000 to 1,000,000 report that one-quarter or less of council business is conducted in committee, over 80% of the jurisdictions with populations under 2,500 jurisdictions make this claim. Conversely, half the responding jurisdictions in the two largest population groups report that nearly all legislative business is performed in committee, with over one-quarter of responding jurisdictions with populations from 250,000 to 499,999 also making this claim.

Several wide variations are evident among the geographic divisions (Table 7). The East North Central (27.0%) and

New England (17.9%) divisions show substantially higher percentages of respondents in the "nearly all" category than other divisions. Not surprisingly, these two divisions show substantially lower percentages than the other divisions in the "one-quarter or less" category. Patterns among the remaining seven geographic divisions are similar across response categories.

The cross-tabulation by metro status is more revealing. Almost one-fourth of central jurisdictions (23.1%) report that nearly all legislative business is conducted in committee, and 48.7% of respondents from central cities report that one-fourth or less of their business is conducted in committee. This contrasts with independent jurisdictions, among which only 10.9% claim that nearly all business is conducted in committee, while over two-thirds (68.8%) report one-fourth or less.

Finally, mayor-council jurisdictions report somewhat more business conducted in council committees than do

council-manager jurisdictions. While 18.5% of mayor-council jurisdictions report nearly all business conducted in committee, this figure falls to 7.7% for council-manager jurisdictions.

Standing Committee Role in Policy

Overall, 93.5% of the jurisdictions indicate that their committees make policy recommendations (not shown). Only 6.5% of the jurisdictions claim that their committees are unable to recommend formal policy. Standing committees without the ability to recommend policy may serve only fact-finding or hearing functions. Few noticeable differences are evident when the data are broken down by population size, geographic division, metro status, or form of government.

Respondents were asked how often the formal recommendations of committees are accepted by the local council in full session (Table 8). Respondents used a five-point scale ranging from 1 (always) to 5 (never) to

Table 5 Number of Members on the Largest Standing Committee

Classification	No. reporting	Average No.	Maximum No.	Minimum No.
Population group				
Over 1,000,000	1	3.00	3	3
500,000-1,000,000	7	9.29	27	3
250,000-499,999	22	6.73	15	2
100,000-249,999	56	7.84	21	2
50,000-99,999	116	6.73	30	2
25,000-49,999	239	6.81	39	1
10,000-24,999	491	6.52	35	1
5,000-9,999	509	5.55	40	1
2,500-4,999	485	5.16	18	1
Under 2,500	133	5.58	40	2
Geographic division				
New England	141	8.11	40	1
Mid-Atlantic	292	4.99	35	1
East North Central	518	4.80	30	1
West North Central	261	5.79	20	1
South Atlantic	247	6.53	30	1
East South Central	77	5.42	30	1
West South Central	155	7.54	40	1
Mountain	114	6.78	27	1
Pacific Coast	254	6.96	30	1
Metro status				
Central	202	7.29	39	2
Suburban	1,131	5.92	40	1
Independent	726	5.73	40	1
Form of government				
Mayor-council	1,044	4.87	40	1
Council-manager	935	6.89	39	1
Commission	23	8.87	30	2
Town meeting	48	10.75	40	3
Rep. town meeting	9	9.56	15	3

indicate frequency. Overall, 11.5% of the respondents reported that committee recommendations were always accepted by the council. Slightly over 60% choose the second category, suggesting frequent acceptance of committee recommendations. The middle response category was selected by approximately one-fourth of the respondents (24.4%). Only 1 of the 2,078 jurisdictions reporting checked "never" on the scale.

The data distributed by population size show the three population groups from 50,000 to 500,000 with somewhat lower percentages in the "always" category than those jurisdictions under 50,000 population. Although the population groups from 50,000 to 500,000 rank slightly higher than other population groups in the second response category, they do show more consistency with other groups in response category three.

Committee recommendations appear to carry more weight in the East

North Central and West North Central divisions. For both of these divisions, combining the first and second response categories yields percentages close to or above 80.

Recommendations from committees are most likely to be always accepted among the independent jurisdictions (12.3%) and least likely to be always accepted among the central jurisdictions (7.6%).

Finally, among forms of government, mayor-council jurisdictions (14.0%) are more likely than council-manager jurisdictions (8.8%) to always accept committee recommendations.

Citizen Service on Standing Committees

Citizen involvement on local committees has a long history. Using non-elected citizens to help set public policy can have many advantages for a local community. Citizens feel more involved and bring new ideas and expertise to local government.

In an effort to make committees and boards more effective in their roles, many communities provide orientation sessions and training manuals for newly appointed committee members. Most important, council and staff must ensure that committee members understand their role and the committee's mission and objectives. One excellent example of this approach is the city of Kirkwood, Missouri, which has compiled a document entitled *Board and Commission Guidelines: A Summary of Duties and Responsibilities*. This 33-page document addresses the role of the commission member, role of the council liaison, minute taking in commissions, attendance requirements, conflict of interest issues, and a review of each commission's powers, duties, and procedures.

The survey asked respondents to report how many of their standing committees include citizens who are not council members. Overall, the responding jurisdictions indicate that an

Table 6 Frequency of Standing Committee Meetings

Classification	No. reporting (A)	More than twice a month		Twice a month		Once a month		Less than once a month		Other	
		No.	% of (A)	No.	% of (A)	No.	% of (A)	No.	% of (A)	No.	% of (A)
		All cities	2,347	70	3.0	292	12.4	1,114	47.5	238	10.1
Population group											
Over 1,000,000	2	2	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
500,000-1,000,000	7	0	0.0	1	14.3	1	14.3	1	14.3	4	57.1
250,000-499,999	25	6	24.0	7	28.0	7	28.0	2	8.0	3	12.0
100,000-249,999	62	7	11.3	12	19.4	26	41.9	4	6.5	13	21.0
50,000-99,999	130	6	4.6	35	26.9	47	36.2	5	3.8	37	28.5
25,000-49,999	266	15	5.6	60	22.6	123	46.2	14	5.3	54	20.3
10,000-24,999	554	14	2.5	78	14.1	290	52.3	40	7.2	132	23.8
5,000-9,999	589	10	1.7	60	10.2	282	47.9	67	11.4	170	28.9
2,500-4,999	552	8	1.4	33	6.0	267	48.4	80	14.5	164	29.7
Under 2,500	160	2	1.3	6	3.8	71	44.4	25	15.6	56	35.0
Geographic division											
New England	175	8	4.6	28	16.0	84	48.0	8	4.6	47	26.9
Mid-Atlantic	326	6	1.8	22	6.7	157	48.2	46	14.1	95	29.1
East North Central	583	18	3.1	96	16.5	229	39.3	57	9.8	183	31.4
West North Central	281	5	1.8	24	8.5	132	47.0	35	12.5	85	30.2
South Atlantic	282	6	2.1	22	7.8	158	56.0	29	10.3	67	23.8
East South Central	101	1	1.0	9	8.9	43	42.6	14	13.9	34	33.7
West South Central	185	9	4.9	11	5.9	97	52.4	18	9.7	50	27.0
Mountain	130	5	3.8	17	13.1	73	56.2	12	9.2	23	17.7
Pacific Coast	284	12	4.2	63	22.2	141	49.6	19	6.7	49	17.3
Metro status											
Central	228	22	9.6	44	19.3	83	36.4	14	6.1	65	28.5
Suburban	1,297	29	2.2	172	13.3	646	49.8	119	9.2	331	25.5
Independent	822	19	2.3	76	9.2	385	46.8	105	12.8	237	28.8
Form of government											
Mayor-council	1,202	38	3.2	167	13.9	471	39.2	144	12.0	382	31.8
Council-manager	1,047	26	2.5	115	11.0	585	55.9	87	8.3	234	22.3
Commission	27	1	3.7	1	3.7	20	74.1	2	7.4	3	11.1
Town meeting	58	4	6.9	7	12.1	30	51.7	5	8.6	12	20.7
Rep. town meeting	13	1	7.7	2	15.4	8	61.5	0	0.0	2	15.4

CONCLUSIONS

This report has described committee systems used by local governments across the United States. As noted earlier, 52% of the responding jurisdictions are served by standing committees. Many communities also reported having recently established ad hoc committees to address short-term issues. However, the question of what factors contribute to a more effective committee and advisory board system remains unanswered. From information provided by the survey and follow-up interviews with local officials, several recurring themes emerge regarding the establishment of better committee systems. Although these ideas are not applicable in all communities because of different local contexts, they may prove useful in some and provide a basis for constructive debate in others.

First, each committee or board must be provided with a specific mission and set of objectives to guide its work. It is equally important that committees' missions and objectives be frequently updated to reflect new priorities or directions of the city council. Updates can keep committee members in tune with the elected leadership and minimize tension in the policymaking process. Having clear objectives and expectations of committees also helps to limit debate on less relevant issues, an important concern when committee members often give of their valuable time and energy in order to serve.

Second, standing committees and advisory boards in the community should be limited to a manageable number. Most of the jurisdictions surveyed operate with between four and ten committees. One of the ways that their numbers can be limited is to monitor committees' activities continually and decide which committees, if any, may not be needed. Though committees and advisory boards often become entrenched, if a policy issue no longer seems relevant, it may be time to disband the committee. Although some committee members may be reticent to disband because they feel that they are losing influence in city affairs, there may be other activities in which their talents can be put to use.

Third, provide committees and boards with a city staff member to help foster good community relations

Table 9 Committees with Members Who Are Not on the Council

	Committees with non-council-citizens as members			
	No. reporting	Average No.	Maximum No.	Minimum No.
All cities	839	6.50	55	0
Population group				
500,000-1,000,000	1	55.00	55	55
250,000-499,999	2	14.50	17	12
100,000-249,999	17	16.12	50	1
50,000-99,999	38	8.84	30	1
25,000-49,999	87	8.18	30	1
10,000-24,999	187	7.96	40	1
5,000-9,999	224	5.33	35	1
2,500-4,999	208	4.99	22	0
Under 2,500	75	4.32	22	1
Geographic division				
New England	50	8.34	40	1
Mid-Atlantic	86	6.00	23	1
East North Central	129	6.22	24	1
West North Central	114	6.34	30	0
South Atlantic	118	6.03	50	1
East South Central	30	7.10	30	1
West South Central	87	7.85	39	1
Mountain	78	7.36	55	1
Pacific Coast	147	5.50	35	1
Metro status				
Central	52	14.12	55	1
Suburban	457	5.90	40	1
Independent	330	6.12	24	0
Form of government				
Mayor-council	304	5.48	50	1
Council-manager	495	6.88	55	0
Commission	12	10.92	20	3
Town meeting	25	9.32	40	1
Rep. town meeting	3	4.00	5	2

Table 10 Number of Ad-Hoc Committees Established Since 1/1/91

	No. reporting	Average No.	Maximum No.	Minimum No.
All cities	1,518	2.22	23	0
Population group				
Over 1,000,000	1	2.00	2	2
500,000-1,000,000	4	3.50	5	2
250,000-499,999	9	2.89	6	1
100,000-249,999	46	3.22	12	1
50,000-99,999	111	2.49	13	1
25,000-49,999	210	2.37	18	1
10,000-24,999	397	2.16	18	0
5,000-9,999	357	2.06	12	0
2,500-4,999	309	2.14	23	0
Under 2,500	74	2.15	10	1
Geographic division				
New England	167	2.27	7	1
Mid-Atlantic	204	2.11	13	0
East North Central	316	1.91	12	1
West North Central	179	2.18	23	0
South Atlantic	177	2.27	11	1
East South Central	54	2.70	12	1
West South Central	116	2.25	10	0
Mountain	81	2.44	16	1
Pacific Coast	224	2.52	18	0
Metro status				
Central	167	2.74	18	1
Suburban	870	2.17	23	0
Independent	481	2.14	16	0
Form of government				
Mayor-council	594	2.18	23	0
Council-manager	825	2.27	18	0
Commission	19	1.58	5	1
Town meeting	68	2.19	7	1
Rep. town meeting	12	2.58	5	1

and assist the group in carrying out its mission. This person may handle inquiries and act as a liaison with other city personnel, coordinate meeting times and facilities, and assist in keeping the committee focused on its mission. Some communities with full citizen committees ask at least one council member to serve as an ex-officio member of each committee.

Finally, bringing new members into the system is an important function of many committees. Without new ideas and innovative solutions to issues, local policy may become stale and rigid. A continuous effort to bring in new committee members and not merely recycle former members should help to keep the system successful. However, this effort should be balanced with the need to keep some experienced members on committees. Members who understand the procedures and prior positions of the committee are important assets and can help guide new members.

APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

The data in this report were gathered during the fall of 1991 through ICMA's *Form of Government-1991* survey. This survey instrument, similar in many respects to data collection efforts in 1981 and 1986, was sent to city clerks in all 6,579 cities with populations of 2,500 or

more and 562 cities with less than 2,500 people that ICMA recognizes as providing for a professional management position. A total of 7,141 jurisdictions were given two opportunities to respond. Completed questionnaires were returned by 4,967 cities for a 69.6% response rate (Table 11).

Table 11 Survey Response

Classification	No. of cities surveyed (A)	No. reporting	% of (A)
Total, all cities	7,141	4,967	69.6
Population group			
Over 1,000,000	8	2	25.0
500,000-1,000,000	16	8	50.0
250,000-499,999	40	32	80.0
100,000-249,999	133	100	75.2
50,000-99,999	334	255	76.4
25,000-49,999	674	517	76.7
10,000-24,999	1,590	1,128	70.9
5,000-9,999	1,794	1,228	68.5
2,500-4,999	1,990	1,311	65.9
Under 2,500	562	386	68.7
Geographic division			
New England	794	530	66.8
Mid-Atlantic	1,180	713	60.4
East North Central	1,350	952	70.5
West North Central	721	558	77.4
South Atlantic	869	640	73.7
East South Central	470	282	60.0
West South Central	746	502	67.3
Mountain	368	263	71.5
Pacific Coast	643	527	82.0
Metro status			
Central	511	382	74.8
Suburban	3,828	2,663	69.6
Independent	2,802	1,922	68.6

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