

Finding the Right People

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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Table of Contents

Finding the Right People	3
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Finding the Right People

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Once the decision to appoint an advisory committee is made, qualified residents must be identified and recruited to serve. This sounds much easier than it usually is. Many qualified people will decline involvement due to their lack of time to commit to the project. Others will decline service if the project is seen as controversial.

Cities are urged to avoid the “want ads” approach to finding people to serve on committees. Advertisements in the media may attract a large number of volunteers, but most will not have the expertise you are looking for. Some may have issues with the city and are looking for a platform to air these issues. Remember that you are seeking advice from known experts in your town to help resolve difficult problems. Every person on the street will have an opinion about what direction the city should take, but expertise is not evenly distributed throughout the community.

Instead, the governing board and staff should draw up lists of people recognized as having the necessary qualifications and who also are seen as community leaders. A proactive approach to recruiting these individuals should be undertaken. Professional groups, civic organizations, educators, clergy and neighborhood associations may be helpful in identifying those who possess the knowledge for the task.

In making appointments to citizen panels, you generally should avoid the following types of people:

- People known to have conflicts of interest in the issue and those who want to sell the city a specific product or service and who have a stake in the final decision.
- Relatives of board members or staff.
- Obstructionists. An effective citizen panel will consist of citizens having wide and diverse backgrounds. Each member should be able to speak freely and be critical of the status quo. You should look for problem solvers and avoid those who cannot suggest reasonable solutions to the objections they may raise.
- People with political ambitions. One of the purposes of seeking citizen advice is to receive input that is not colored by politics and that provides an objective analysis of facts. Appointing politicians (or wannabes) to advisory committees defeats this purpose.

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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