



Volunteer Advisory Committee – SWOT Analysis

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The analysis highlights that while Volunteer Advisory Committees have strengths such as diverse representation and public accessibility, they also face significant weaknesses related to slow processes and rigidity. To enhance their effectiveness, there is a clear need to streamline procedures, potentially adopting more agile and flexible models similar to those seen in other municipalities. This could involve restructuring committees to be more dynamic or adopting working group models that facilitate quicker decision-making and adaptability.

There is a substantial opportunity to improve volunteer engagement and satisfaction by implementing comprehensive support systems. This includes providing better training, recognition, and honorariums, as well as ensuring a transparent and accessible recruitment process. Enhancing these aspects can help attract and retain motivated volunteers, thereby strengthening the committees' overall impact and effectiveness.

The committees have the opportunity to align more closely with current Public Engagement best practices and the City's new Public Engagement Policy. By addressing barriers and increasing representation, the committees can improve their relevance and effectiveness in community engagement. This alignment can also help bridge gaps in public involvement and ensure that the committees are better integrated with broader municipal goals.

Several threats, such as the slow realization of outcomes and issues with transparency, need to be addressed to maintain and build trust in the committees. Ensuring clear communication with decision-makers and the public about processes and delays is crucial for maintaining credibility. Additionally, overcoming resistance to change and addressing the attachment to existing models are important for achieving the committee's potential and aligning with council priorities.

The analysis underscores the importance of flexibility and innovation in the functioning of Volunteer Advisory Committees. Embracing new engagement methods and adapting to evolving community needs can enhance their effectiveness. This includes exploring new models of engagement and being open to structural changes that can improve responsiveness and impact.

In summary, while Volunteer Advisory Committees have several strengths, addressing their weaknesses and threats through structural changes, enhanced volunteer support, and alignment with best practices presents significant opportunities for improvement.

Embracing these opportunities will be crucial for maximizing their effectiveness and achieving their goals.

SWOT ANALYSIS: KEY THEMES

Overview: Strengths

Volunteer Advisory Committees offer a robust framework for community engagement and decision-making. They serve as a vital communication channel at the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2)’s Involve/Consult level, bringing together diverse voices to support and guide decision-makers. The committees are notable for their broad representation, with 14 distinct groups actively working to include a wide range of perspectives through targeted recruitment efforts. This diversity is complemented by the passion and commitment of community members, who are deeply invested in the work of the committees.

Transparency and accessibility are key strengths, as the committees are open to the public, allowing for in-person attendance, online viewing, and public access to meeting minutes. This openness fosters a sense of accountability and community involvement. Additionally, committees benefit from dedicated staff support and a budget, which helps in managing resources effectively and supporting their initiatives.

The structured nature of the committees, backed by clerks and a well-defined framework, ensures organized operations. Furthermore, the committees play a crucial role in advancing principles of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA), addressing key community concerns, and aligning with the City’s strategic priorities. By providing a direct link to City Councillors and engaging in civic activities, the committees demonstrate the City’s investment in community engagement and provide valuable platforms for addressing high-conflict topics and building meaningful relationships.

Overview: Weaknesses

Volunteer Advisory Committees face several challenges that impact their effectiveness and efficiency. One significant issue is the slow and burdensome process involved in advancing workplans and priorities, which can hinder timely progress and limit the committees’ ability to respond to emerging needs. The complex budgetary and council-approval structure further complicates the spending of allocated funds, often leading to financial and operational constraints.

Additionally, the committees struggle with alignment to current Public Engagement best practices. Their infrequent evaluations—only every four years, with the last review in 2015—can result in outdated practices that do not fully address current community needs. Long fixed terms for members and limited recruitment opportunities outside of these cycles can also restrict flexibility and responsiveness. There is a notable lack of a

formal volunteer engagement process, including policies for recognition and honorariums, which can affect volunteer motivation and satisfaction.

The committees also face challenges related to perception and process. Decision-makers may not fully appreciate the value of the committees, leading to potential issues with trust and support. The rigidity of the existing structural system makes it difficult to implement necessary changes, and transparency issues—exemplified by the lack of communication about delays during the current review pause—can undermine accountability and confidence in the system. These factors collectively contribute to a sense of stagnation and inefficacy within the committees.

Overview: Opportunities

Volunteer Advisory Committees have several promising opportunities for enhancement and greater impact. One key opportunity lies in evolving their engagement strategies to be more meaningful and flexible. By creating innovative, creative spaces for community interaction, the committees can better reflect the diverse voices they aim to serve, fostering more impactful and relevant discussions. Embracing trends from other municipalities, which are moving towards streamlined or working group models, presents a chance to explore structural changes that could improve effectiveness and responsiveness.

Enhancing the volunteer program itself offers substantial opportunities. Implementing comprehensive training, recognition systems, and honorariums can greatly improve volunteer engagement and satisfaction. A clear and open recruitment process, along with agile and reduced-barrier participation, would make the program more inclusive and responsive. Integrating principles of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) and expanding access to various levels of IAP2 engagement can further enhance the committees’ effectiveness and alignment with best practices.

Moreover, strengthening the City's new Public Engagement Policy by aligning committee operations with its principles can increase consistency and inclusiveness in community engagement efforts. This alignment could help bridge gaps, increase representation, and reach new demographics, thus broadening the committees' impact and relevance. By accessing new audiences and referencing municipal best practices, the committees can improve their approach and better serve the community’s evolving needs.

Overview: Threats

Volunteer Advisory Committees encounter several threats that can undermine their effectiveness and credibility. A primary concern is that these committees might inadvertently undermine the Public Engagement Policy, Framework, and guidelines, potentially failing to advance meaningful engagement. The slow pace at which

committees realize outcomes can erode trust in both the committees themselves and the broader City government, as delays and inefficiencies become more apparent.

Liability expectations associated with committee work can negatively impact members' reputations and careers, deterring potential volunteers and causing stress for current members. Additionally, the lack of confidence in the current system may result in diminished trust in the advice and recommendations provided by the committees. Issues with transparency and accountability have arisen, particularly during periods of review or change, which can exacerbate concerns about the system's effectiveness.

Resistance to change poses another significant threat which can hinder progress and adaptation. This resistance threatens to prevent the achievement of Term of Council priority #3, which focuses on increasing public involvement in decision-making and problem-solving.

SWOT ANALYSIS DATA

Identified Strengths

- **Structured Communication:** Advisory Committees serve as a regular communication channel at the IAP2 Involve/Consult level, providing a panel of diverse voices to assist decision-makers.
- **Diverse Representation:** With 14 committees, there is a strong emphasis on recruiting members from diverse backgrounds, ensuring a broad range of perspectives.
- **Passionate Volunteers:** Members are highly motivated and committed to their roles, contributing to a vibrant and engaged committee.
- **Public Accessibility:** Meetings are open to the public, allowing for in-person attendance, online viewing, delegation delivery, and public access to process and minutes, fostering transparency.
- **Support and Resources:** Committees benefit from dedicated staff support, allocated budgets, and resources, which aid in their functioning and initiatives.
- **Awareness and Connection:** There is some awareness and opportunity for consultation with the Advisory Committees, along with connections to Term of Council Priorities and the Strategic Plan.
- **Conflict Engagement:** Committees provide a platform for engaging with high-conflict topics, offering a structured method to address sensitive issues.
- **Relationship Building:** Opportunities exist for building and strengthening relationships within the community and with stakeholders.
- **Policy Alignment:** There is potential alignment with the Public Engagement Policy, enhancing the committee's relevance and impact.
- **Community Feedback:** Committees facilitate shared feedback on community concerns, such as police board selection questions, ensuring that diverse viewpoints are considered.

- **Expertise and Skills:** Members bring a wealth of expertise, skills, and knowledge, representing broader sections of the population and enhancing the committee’s effectiveness.
- **Well-Defined Structure:** A clear organizational structure, supported by clerks, ensures efficient operation and clarity in roles and responsibilities.
- **Equity and Inclusion:** Equity-deserving committees address key community issues, advancing principles of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) and supporting council priorities.
- **Direct Council Connection:** There is a direct link to City Councillors, which can facilitate better communication and influence.
- **Civic Engagement:** Committees play a role in civic engagement, including leading community events and demonstrating the City’s investment in various communities.
- **Broad Coverage:** The existence of a large number of committees allows for extensive community involvement and representation.

Identified Weaknesses

- **Slow and Burdensome Process:** The process for advancing workplans and priorities can be slow and cumbersome, hindering timely progress.
- **Budgetary Challenges:** Navigating the budget and council-approval structure can be difficult, often leading to challenges in spending allocated funds effectively.
- **Misalignment with Best Practices:** Advisory Committees may not fully align with current Public Engagement best practices, potentially limiting their effectiveness.
- **Relevance Concerns:** Committees are evaluated only every four years, with the last evaluation occurring in 2015, which may result in outdated practices that do not address current needs.
- **Long Fixed Terms:** Members are appointed for long fixed terms (4 years), which can limit flexibility and responsiveness to changing community needs.
- **Limited Recruitment Opportunities:** Recruitment opportunities are restricted to a four-year cycle, making it difficult to introduce new members outside of this period.
- **Perceived Lack of Value:** Decision-makers may not fully appreciate the value or impact of the committees, affecting their support and engagement.
- **Timeliness Issues:** The committees often struggle to meet timelines for public engagement projects due to procedural constraints.
- **Limited Tools and Methods:** While the Public Engagement policy supports diverse methods and tools, these are not available to Advisory Committees, limiting their engagement capabilities.

- **No Volunteer Engagement Process:** There is no formal policy for volunteer engagement, including the absence of honorarium payments or recognition processes.
- **Intimidation Factors:** The presence of recordings, live streaming, and adherence to ombudsman and integrity commissioner restrictions can create a sense of intimidation for members.
- **Inflexible Structure:** The structural system of the committees can be rigid and difficult to change, sometimes making it impossible to adapt or address issues.
- **Limited Recognition and Compensation:** Volunteers receive minimal recognition and cannot receive honorariums, which may impact motivation and appreciation.
- **Complex Learning Curve:** There is an extensive learning process involved in understanding municipal processes and working with government structures, which can be a barrier for new members.

Identified Opportunities

- **Enhanced Community Engagement:** There is a chance to create more meaningful and flexible ways to engage communities, fostering creative and brave spaces that reflect the diverse voices of those being reached.
- **Adapting Municipal Trends:** Other municipalities are evolving their approaches by reducing the number of committees or shifting towards working group models. This trend presents an opportunity to explore similar innovations.
- **Structural Evolution:** There is an opportunity to move away from the traditional Advisory Committee model towards a more dynamic and adaptable structure.
- **Volunteer Program Enhancements:**
 - **Training:** Implement comprehensive training programs for volunteers.
 - **Recognition:** Develop systems to recognize and celebrate volunteer contributions.
 - **Honorariums:** Introduce honorariums to acknowledge the time and effort of volunteers.
 - **Clear Recruitment:** Establish a transparent and efficient recruitment process.
 - **Agility:** Facilitate quick and open participation with reduced barriers.
 - **IDEA Principles:** Integrate Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) principles into the volunteer program.
 - **IAP2 Engagement Levels:** Increase access to various levels of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum.
 - **Privacy and Anonymity:** Ensure that the program supports privacy and anonymity where needed.
- **Career Advancement and Networking:** Advisory Committees offer opportunities for members to build valuable relationships and advance their careers.

- **Best Practice Integration:** Reference and incorporate municipal best practices to enhance committee operations and effectiveness.
- **Strengthening Public Engagement:** By aligning more closely with the City’s new Public Engagement Policy, there is an opportunity to strengthen engagement efforts with greater consistency and inclusiveness.
- **Increased Representation:** Reducing barriers and increasing representation can help ensure that diverse voices are heard and involved.
- **Access to New Demographics:** Engage with new people, audiences, and demographics to broaden the committee’s impact and relevance.

Identified Threats

- **Undermining Public Engagement Standards:** Advisory Committees may undermine the Public Engagement Policy, Framework, and guidelines, potentially failing to advance meaningful and effective engagement.
- **Reputational and Career Risks:** The liability expectations associated with committee work can negatively affect reputations and careers, deterring potential volunteers and impacting current members.
- **Slow Outcome Realization:** The slow pace of committees in delivering outcomes can erode trust in the City and local government, affecting public perception and confidence.
- **Lack of Confidence:** The current system’s inefficiencies or perceived shortcomings can contribute to a lack of trust in the advice and recommendations provided by the committees.
- **Transparency and Accountability Issues:** During the pause for review, a lack of communication with decision-makers about delays can lead to issues with transparency and accountability, undermining stakeholder confidence.
- **Attachment to Existing Models:** Staff or members may have strong attachments to existing Volunteer Advisory Committees (VACs), making it difficult to implement changes or reforms.
- **Resistance to Change:** Current committee members may be invested in maintaining the status quo, creating resistance to necessary changes, and making it challenging to adapt to new approaches.
- **Impact on Council Priorities:** Maintaining the status quo threatens to hinder progress toward Term of Council priority #3, which aims to increase public involvement in decision-making and problem-solving.