

# Guide for Members Serving on Department of the Interior Federal Advisory Committees

## OVERVIEW OF FEDERAL ADVISORY COMMITTEES AT THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Federal advisory committees are an important tool that the Department of the Interior (DOI) uses to receive advice and recommendations from DOI's diverse partners and stakeholders. The Department manages 85 advisory committees pursuant to the Federal Advisory Committee Act that are integral to advancing the agency's key priorities and carrying out its mission to protect and manage the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage; provide scientific and other information about those resources; and honor its trust responsibilities or special commitments to American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and affiliated Island Communities. In 2023, DOI held 120 committee meetings with the participation of over 1000 members representing the interests of a wide variety of communities, including the public, science and technology, industry, academia, nonprofit organizations, recreation, grazing, fire management, Tribes, among others.

## FEDERAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ACT

The Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. Ch. 10) was enacted in 1972 to ensure that the public has knowledge of and an opportunity to participate in meetings between Federal agencies and groups that the agency has either established or manages and controls for the purpose of obtaining group advice and recommendations regarding the agency's operations or activities. The Act formalized a process for establishing, operating, overseeing, and terminating advisory committees and created the Committee Management Secretariat in the General Services Administration to monitor compliance with the Act.

The Federal Advisory Committee Act fosters transparency and accountability by providing public access to advisory committee deliberations and minimizing the influence of special interests through balanced committee membership. In some instances, advisory committees may provide the Federal Government an opportunity to create a publicly accessible and accountable forum for discussing potentially controversial topics.

Federal advisory committees are established by one of four authorities:

- **Required by Statute** (*non-discretionary*) - By law where the Congress establishes an advisory committee or specifically directs the President or an agency to establish a committee.
- **Authorized by the President** (*non-discretionary*) - By Executive order of the President or other Presidential directive to establish a committee.
- **Authorized by Statute and established at Agency Discretion** (*discretionary*) - By law where the Congress authorizes, but does not direct, the President or an agency to establish a committee.
- **Established at Agency Discretion** (*discretionary*) - By an agency under general authority in Title 5 of the United States Code or under other general agency-authorizing statutes.

Today, across the Federal Government, about 1000 advisory committees with more than 60,000 members advise the President and the Executive Branch on a wide variety of issues.

## YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS A MEMBER

As a member of a Federal advisory committee your responsibilities are to:

- Attend and participate in committee meetings.
- Review materials provided in advance of meetings.

- Be willing to engage in an exchange of views and perspectives and help the DOI fulfill its various missions by providing thoughtful advice and recommendations.
- Between meetings, continue working on individual committee assignments to be fully prepared for the next public meeting.
- Comply with the applicable ethics in government laws, including those related to conflict of interest and financial reporting.
- Cooperate with your committee's Designated Federal Officer regarding the rules for participating in meetings.
- Serve on the committee for your appointed term, or if you find you cannot serve, resign from the committee.
- Refrain from publicly presenting your individual views as those of the Committee as a whole.
- Complete required administrative tasks within the timeframes set by the Designated Federal Officer, including, but not limited to, responding to polls sent out to set meeting dates, providing documentation to obtain reimbursement for travel and other expenses, completing ethics paperwork by the deadline, etc.

### THREE DIFFERENT TYPES OF APPOINTMENTS TO FEDERAL ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Your functions as a committee member may differ depending on the type of appointment under which you were invited to serve. Below are the three types of designations for Federal advisory committee members.

- **Representative members** are selected to represent the point of view of a specified group. Representative members may represent groups or organizations, such as academia, recreation, Tribes, the public, and other stakeholders having an interest in matters before the committee.
- **Special Government Employee (SGE) members** are appointed to provide the agency with their own best independent judgment based on their individual expertise. As a SGE member, you are speaking for yourself as an expert in your field.
- **Regular Government Employee (RGE) members** are individuals employed by the Federal Government. As an RGE member, you are providing your best judgment based on your professional expertise, consistent with your agency's policies.

### SOME REQUIREMENTS FOR HOLDING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

- Each committee must have a Designated Federal Officer to manage the committee and attend each committee and subcommittee meeting. Committee meetings may not be conducted in the absence of the Designated Federal Officer.
- Committee meetings must be announced in advance and open to the public. The public will be provided an opportunity to provide comments, in writing and/or orally, to the committee. Designated Federal Officers will also ensure fulfillment of any reasonable accommodation requests from committee members and others who attend the meetings.
- All committee documents provided to or prepared by the committee, including reports, transcripts, drafts, minutes, working papers, and agendas must be made available for public inspection and copying. All committee documents are agency records.
- The committee must be fairly balanced in terms of the points of view represented and the functions to be performed.
- Committees can not meet or take any action without a valid, current charter. Charters are renewed on a biennial basis unless specified otherwise through legislation.

This guide is not intended to be exhaustive and is provided for informational purposes only. If you would like additional information on DOI's Federal Advisory Committees, please visit DOI's Committee Management website at <https://www.doi.gov/execsec/faca> or contact your Designated Federal Officer.