

Notes on the “Budget Advisory Committee” Approach

Advisory committees are a relatively easy and inexpensive way to include additional voices and fresh perspectives in the budgeting process. These committees can offer important feedback to local agencies on budget ideas and plan, provide new budget ideas and recommendations, and provide a forum where different budget approaches and recommendations can be considered.

Advisory committees can also provide greater transparency to the budgeting process by serving as a conduit of information to the larger community. To the extent the committee enjoys the trust and respect of the community its support for the budget - to the degree that this is communicated widely - may create such trust in the broader community.

Membership can include representatives of community, business or other groups, or may be composed of members of the general public - or a combination of the two.

Keep in Mind

Advisory committees can take a variety of forms in response to local interests and needs. They offer opportunities for the education, engagement and, at times, deliberation of advisory committee members. However as relatively few people are typically involved, there is a risk that important viewpoints won't be represented. A local agency using a budget advisory committee must be realistic about outcomes and consider whether other opportunities for broader engagement exist.

While members can be appointed by individual council members or supervisors, setting common criteria for membership, and having a less political selection processes, may offer greater success.

Key Elements

Budget advisory committees can provide local agencies with more focused input from a select group of community members. Often, but not always, the participants are community leaders or stakeholder representatives with special skills or interest in finance, business or policy. These volunteers become intimately familiar with the details of the budget and are especially active during the development phase of the budgeting process.

Committee members are typically recruited, formally or informally, through political and social networks. Elected officials typically appoint or invite committee members. When

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the committee is composed of representatives of groups and organizations, the committee members can serve as conduits for information between the group and the local agency.

Sometimes the elected officials creating the advisory committees will specify what questions the committee should address. In other situations, committees actively present and advocate new ideas to local leaders.

This note is a service of the Institute for Local Government (ILG) whose mission is to promote good government at the local level with practical, impartial, and easy-to-use resources for California communities. ILG is the nonprofit 501(c)(3) research and education affiliate of the League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties.

The Institute welcomes feedback on this resource:

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