

A Framework for Advisory Committees of Council

Short Version

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Introduction

Every year, more than 100 residents of Guelph commit their time, energy and expertise to support the City of Guelph (“the City”) in making the tough decisions that impact the lives of all residents. Advisory Committees of Council (“ACOCs”) hold the potential to realize better policy making and facilitate more inclusive civic participation and stronger local democracy. Yet, we know little about how ACOCs function, and they differ significantly in terms of their structure, scope, and membership. There are also very few resources available to assist Ontario’s 444 municipalities in developing and operationalizing new and existing ACOCs.

In 2022, the City of Guelph’s Clerk’s Office expressed interest in better understanding the form and function of the City’s ACOCs and wanted a tool to guide the development of future ACOCs. The ACOC Framework is the response to this interest and is being proposed for consideration by City Council.

The Framework is the result of a collaboration, hosted by the Guelph Lab, between the University of Guelph and the Clerk’s Office. The Framework reflects what we learned through our research and community engagement process, the expertise and experience of the members of the project team, and extensive and ongoing feedback from two groups of residents: a working group of eight current ACOC members; and a group of three community reviewers selected randomly from those who attended a community engagement session focused on equity and inclusion.

The purpose of the Framework is to guide the creation, design, function, and evaluation of ACOCs. There are two parts to the Framework. Part 1 has seven key commitments that should



guide all ACOCs. Part 2 of the Framework is a step-by-step process for City staff and City Council to follow when they are considering the creation of a new ACOC. Part 2 also ensures that new ACOCs, as well as City Council and staff, adopt practices that will enable the ACOC to contribute to the City's decision-making successfully and effectively.

A note on using the Framework

There are two versions of the Framework. This document provides a short summary of the Framework and is for quick reference. The full version of the Framework provides guidance on implementing the Framework. There are important ideas, details and rationales in the full version that are not covered in the short summary, so anyone considering the creation of an ACOC should read and reference both documents.

ACOCs are a long-standing and important part of the City's community engagement efforts, though they have not always, or by all people, been regarded as such. The ACOC Framework aims to ensure that ACOCs better serve both the Corporation of the City of Guelph (their policy and program needs and community engagement commitments) and the residents of Guelph (their inclusion and democracy needs).

The ACOC Framework

Part 1: Key commitments of ACOCs


Part 1 of the Framework presents seven key commitments that apply to all ACOCs.

Commitment #1: ACOCs are an important form of community engagement.

The City should think about ACOCs as one possible community engagement tool amongst a suite of options available. They are an opportunity for residents to learn about topics they care about and participate in ongoing discussions that contribute to important decisions affecting their community. ACOCs offer the City, and specifically City Council, an opportunity to get carefully considered advice from the residents they serve.

Commitment #2: ACOCs should shape the City's strategic goals.

An ACOC should provide the City with long-term, high-level guidance, that shapes the City's strategic and other guiding priorities as outlined in relevant documents (e.g., the Strategic Plan, Master Plans, the Community Plan). Accordingly, ACOCs should help shape the policy agenda rather than respond to it.





Commitment #3: ACOCs should adopt a deliberative approach.

ACOCs should facilitate ongoing discussions amongst members, and between members and City staff. Discussions should adopt a deliberative approach – where participants engage in an informed, facilitated dialogue and hear and offer thoughtful reasons in support of their positions. Discussions that take a deliberative approach can lead to deeper exploration of public issues, consideration of a wider range of policy options, and more careful attention to potential policy consequences.

Commitment #4: ACOCs should contribute lived and professional expertise.

Both lived and professional expertise are valuable to the work of ACOCs. Accordingly, both should be considered when residents are recruited and appointed, and these different forms of knowledge should be treated as equally valuable when defining and proposing solutions to important challenges and questions facing the City.

Commitment #5: ACOCs should include members with diverse identities and perspectives.


At the heart of community engagement is the idea that all residents have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives, yet many residents face barriers to equitable participation. At the same time, more diverse groups (i.e., including those who are often excluded) can offer more considered recommendations and advice. ACOCs should therefore address barriers to participation to ensure all residents can meaningfully contribute as ACOC members, and to improve the contributions of ACOCs.

Commitment #6: There should be clear communication between ACOCs and City Council.

ACOC members must know how and when their advice has been received by City Council. At the same time, City Council must clearly understand what ACOCs think about the issues and decisions they are considering.

Commitment #7: ACOCs should be adequately resourced.

As an important form of community engagement, ACOCs must be adequately resourced to realize their potential. Resources can help ensure more equitable opportunities for participation, and that ACOCs can fully serve their important role in shaping the community.



Part 2: Creating and operating ACOCs

Stage 1: Core decision-making

In Stage 1, the people (typically either City Council or City staff) contemplating the creation of an ACOC should consider whether an ACOC is the best community engagement option for the problem or topic at hand. Stage 1 is guided by the four questions listed below.

Q1. Is the ACOC required by provincial legislation?

If there is a legislated requirement for an ACOC, the City is required to create the ACOC and should proceed to Stage 2.

Q2. Is the topic appropriate for an ACOC?

The topic is appropriate for an ACOC if:

- it is linked to/identified as a priority in the City's latest Strategic Plan or another current guiding document (e.g., community plan or master plan);
- it is of ongoing importance/requires ongoing attention for at least the term of the existing City Council;
- it will benefit from information and ideas generated through a deliberative approach amongst residents with diverse lived and professional expertise; and
- it is not already being addressed through another community engagement tool and/or ACOC (City staff can check this with the City's community engagement team and Clerk's Office).

Q3. Is an ACOC an appropriate engagement tool?


An ACOC is an appropriate engagement tool if:

- there is an opportunity for the ACOC to contribute to understanding/defining the topic (or problem) and possible solutions (i.e., to contribute early in the process);
- the professional and lived expertise of ACOC members are useful for informing a range of decisions related to the proposed ACOC; and
- if City Council is prepared to receive and consider advice from an ACOC on the topic.

Q4. Are there adequate resources to support an ACOC on this topic?

Sufficient resources for an ACOC include:

- the Clerk's Office being able to provide support for legislative needs and compliance, including related to: meeting documentation, procedural guidance, and reporting relationship to City Council;

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- the Clerk's Office being able to plan and provide sufficient (as articulated in Stage 2) training for ACOC members and staff liaisons;
 - the Clerk's Office being able to research and implement the necessary recruitment procedures;
 - a staff member, whose responsibilities include providing strategic guidance to the City, being available to serve as a staff liaison for the ACOC;
 - the prospective staff liaison having sufficient time to participate in and support training, work with the ACOC Chair to set agendas, fulfill reporting and communication functions between the ACOC and City Council, and respond to ACOC member requests for information; and
 - funds to compensate and cover the participation-related expenses of ACOC members.

Stage 2: Supplemental decision-making

Once a decision to establish an ACOC is made, its purpose, formation, and design must be clearly articulated. Stage 2 offers a series of prescriptions and practices for creating an effective ACOC, in response to four important questions that should be addressed during this stage. Stage 2 is guided by the four questions listed below.

Q1. What are the topic and purpose of this ACOC?

All ACOCs are to provide the City with considered, long-term, high-level guidance, linked to its strategic and other guiding priorities.

Q2. What should the membership composition of this ACOC be?

The ACOC's membership composition should be based on three main considerations:

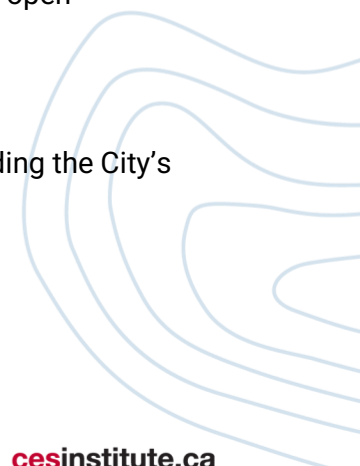
- How lived and professional expertise will benefit the work of the ACOC, and which of these is most relevant;
- The extent to which the City wishes to engage with residents who have not previously been engaged; and
- That ACOC membership should reflect the demographic diversity of the community.

Q3. What recruitment methods should this ACOC use?

ACOC members should be recruited using a combination of strategies, including open recruitment, targeted recruitment, and representative random sampling.

Q4. Who is an appropriate staff liaison for this ACOC?

Staff liaisons should be more senior staff members with more experience regarding the City's overall operations.



Stage 3: Developing the ACOC

Stage 3 describes several operational features of ACOCs and serves as a checklist that the staff person(s) responsible for proposing the ACOC can use to confirm the details of the ACOC being developed. The six items on the checklist are listed below.

1. Create the Terms of Reference (TOR).

The TOR should include:

- The ACOC's topic and purpose, clearly articulated.
- The ACOC's membership, including the desired mix of lived and professional expertise.
- The recruitment strategies the ACOC will use.
- The roles and responsibilities of ACOC members.
- The roles and responsibilities of the staff liaison, the Clerk's Office, and other support staff.
- The size of the ACOC.
- The meeting schedule and format.

2. Confirm the person who will serve as the staff liaison.

As explained in Stage 2, the staff liaison should be a staff person who can advise on high-level decision-making and bring deep knowledge regarding the strategic goals and priorities of the City.

3. Seek approval for the ACOC from City Council.

City Council is the only body with the authority to create or dissolve an ACOC. Members of City Council will be well equipped to decide whether to establish an ACOC after all the above details have been considered and are presented to them.

4. Create a training plan for ACOC members.

This training plan should include a combination of mandatory and optional trainings for all ACOC members, additional trainings for Chairs and Co-Chairs, and specific trainings for those ACOCs required or enabled by provincial legislation and those with delegated authority.

5. Create a training plan for City staff who interact and liaise with the ACOC.

This training plan should include communication and facilitation skills, policy development and community engagement skills, and practices related to equity and inclusion.



6. Plan and prepare the agenda for the first meeting.

The first meeting should include discussion of:

- Members' experiences, expertise, and expectations for the committee.
- The committee's TOR.
- The plan for reviewing the TOR.
- The flow of information between the ACOC and City Council.
- How and with what level of detail the committee's deliberations should be shared with the public.
- How members will receive compensation and funds to cover participation-related expenses.

Stage 4: Evaluating the ACOC

Stage 4 provides guidelines for reviewing and evaluating ACOCs. The goal of this stage is to ensure that each ACOC continues to provide the City with long-term, high-level guidance, linked to its strategic and other guiding priorities. This stage includes four main steps, that occur over the four-year cycle of City Council.

Step 1: Complete TOR review.

This step should take place within the first year of a new term of City Council for a previously existing ACOC, or one year following the creation of an ACOC.

Step 2: Create self-assessment tool.

The ACOC will create a self-assessment tool concurrently with its TOR review.

Step 3: Report to City Council.

City Council will receive a package including a report of the ACOC's activities, the results of the self-assessment and TOR review, and any resulting recommendations.

Step 4: Complete self-assessment.

The self-assessment should be guided by the assessment tool created in step 2. The self-assessment should be completed by both ACOC members and City staff.

