

The Role, Responsibilities and Relationships of the Local Solid Waste Advisory Committee

The role of the Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) is to provide informed advice to the legislative and administrative body of the county or city regarding waste management issues.

The suggested responsibilities of the SWAC are many:

1. **Develop rules and by-laws by which business is conducted and abide by those rules and by-laws.** Committee meetings are most effective when a few rules of business are observed. Rules should be designed to facilitate fair and productive meetings.
2. **Develop an annual work schedule.** *Actively* choose the issues that will be addressed and resolved during the year. This differs from reviewing policies and documents or passively *reacting* to issues that come up throughout the year.
3. **Determine which issues should be discussed at your SWAC meetings.** The chairperson should work with local government staff to develop the agenda. Take ownership as a committee for your work.
4. **Conduct effective public meetings.** This is largely the responsibility of the chairperson. The following are suggested as eight elements of a successful meeting: Define the purpose, give adequate notice/invitation, be adequately prepared for the meeting, have an agenda, encourage participants to participate, ensure a comfortable meeting place, state the results of the meeting, and keep adequate records. (Winholtz, 1968 through Solnit, 1982).
5. **Set deadlines for internal resolution of issues and stick to them.** Research and discuss an issue as thoroughly as possible, but be prepared to make a decision in a timely fashion, recognizing that there will be times when a decision must be made based on the facts at hand, and that the outcome of decisions cannot be known with absolute certainty.
6. **Seek public input on which to base the committee's advice to the legislative body.** The SWAC is intended to represent the interests of the community. Keep in touch with your community by holding public forums, attending community functions, and seeking input from that particular part of the community for which you have been selected as a representative on the SWAC. Ask them how you are doing and what they want done.
7. **Make recommendations to the legislative body and support them with facts.** Particularly in cases where the committee's advice differs from that of the staff, make the recommendation directly. Do not force the staff into a role where they must appear to advocate two different alternatives.
8. **Participate in the preparation and maintenance of a Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan.** Make recommendations that are consistent with the plan. Use it as your guiding document. (Refer to page 15 of Ecology Document 90-11, Guidelines for the Development of Local Solid Waste Management Plans and Plan Revisions.)
9. **Tell your staff what you want, how you want material presented to you.** Don't be a passive committee that waits for the "experts" to tell you what to do next. Be sure, however, that all projects have a budgetary and time limit associated with them. Do not overburden the staff with limitless requests for materials and staff time.
10. **Ask staff to allow the SWAC to participate in developing the county's solid waste budget.** The feasibility of various alternatives often depends on the availability of funds to implement them. A greater understanding, by members of the committee, of these constraints will help to better ground your recommendations. The SWAC may also represent a potentially different viewpoint than that of the staff which may be valuable in developing the budget.

11. **Meet on occasion with your city council or county board.** Develop a constructive working relationship with the legislative body. Assess your mutual objectives and exchange ideas. Provide them with regular updates on the committee's work.
12. **Educate the public on the committee's work and the purpose/need for planning.** Let the people you represent know what you are doing. Make available to them information, data, and maps as requested.
13. **Attend conferences and other training opportunities.** Ask questions. Become a more effective participant/member of the SWAC by making yourself as knowledgeable as possible on waste management issues.
14. **Develop and maintain relationships with other SWACs.** On occasion attend another SWAC's meeting, tour other county facilities, and talk with other SWAC members. Share ideas and experiences. Sometimes you will be pleased to find out how far ahead of others your committee is. Other times you may find ideas worth borrowing.
15. **Orient new members to the job.** Remember how overwhelming it was when you started as a new member of the SWAC? Help new members out by introducing them to critical players, planning documents, county facilities, terminology, policies, etc.
16. **Annually reexamine the SWAC's purpose and effectiveness and make changes accordingly.** Devote one meeting each year to evaluating the previous year and planning the next.

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