


A Reference Guide for Advisory Committee Members

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Welcome from the Director

Congratulations! You are now a key player in helping the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) shape the future of Washington State.

Our advisory committees give citizens an opportunity to affect the quality of life for the state's residents. You join many individuals who help ensure worthy projects become a reality. As an advisory committee member you are taking one of the most effective steps residents can take toward truly participating in their government. Your participation is what makes RCO a unique granting agency and Washington a great place to live.

Our advisory committees reflect a mix of agencies, tribes, nonprofit organizations, and citizens who bring their knowledge and skills to the table. Advisory committees play a vital role in reviewing and evaluating project proposals against board-approved criteria. Committee participation helps to ensure that the agency's work is conducted fairly and that public funds are invested in the best projects. Advisory committees also may help develop program goals, rules, and policies.

This guide will be a valuable reference tool for you in your new role as an advisory committee member. It covers the operational procedures for all committees and provides details on each program that uses an advisory committee.

Thank you for stepping forward and participating on a RCO advisory committee. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kaleen Cottingham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kaleen Cottingham
Director

Section 1: Introduction

In this section, you'll learn about:

- ✓ The Recreation and Conservation Office
- ✓ The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board
- ✓ Benefits of being an advisory committee member

Welcome

This guide provides important information about being an advisory committee member including details about the following:

- The Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO).
- Advisory committee member duties and obligations.
- Advisory committee administrative details.
- An overview of the grant evaluation process.
- Specific information on each of the advisory committees.

Find additional information at RCO's Web site at www.rco.wa.gov/.

We are excited to have you on board and we look forward to working with you as we strive to create outdoor recreation opportunities and work to protect the best of the state's wildlife habitat and working farms and forests.

About RCO

RCO is a state agency of about 50 employees who support the work of five boards and offices:

- Recreation and Conservation Funding Board

- Salmon Recovery Funding Board
- Governor’s Salmon Recovery Office
- Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group
- Washington Invasive Species Council

RCO is responsible for investing state and federal money in outdoor recreation facilities, farmland and forestland preservation, and critical habitats for wildlife. It makes those investments by offering competitive grants to local, state, federal, tribal, and non-governmental organizations, using criteria established by the funding boards.

RCO also provides staff to support the state’s efforts to coordinate natural resource data collection and invasive species management.

Funding for RCO comes from a mix of sources including state general obligation bonds and general taxes, federal funds, gasoline taxes, permits, and vehicle registration fees.

RCO Mission

As a responsible steward of public funds, RCO works with others to protect and improve the best of Washington’s natural and outdoor recreational resources, enhancing the quality of life for current and future generations.

RCO Organizing Principles

- Fair and accountable grant management
- Leadership
- Innovative support services

Contact RCO

Mailing Address

Natural Resources Building
P.O. Box 40917
Olympia, WA 98504-0917

Street Address

Natural Resources Building
1111 Washington St. S.E.
Olympia, WA 98501

[Web site](#)

E-mail: info@rco.wa.gov

Telephone: (360) 902-3000

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Key Staff Contacts

Name	Position	Telephone	E-mail
Marguerite Austin	Section Manager	(360) 902-3016	marguerite.austin@rco.wa.gov
<i>Ethics questions, policy issues, grant program questions</i>			
Tessa Cencula	Resource Planner	(360) 902-3027	tessa.cencula@rco.wa.gov
<i>Advisory committee needs, grants process implementation, schedules, and recruitment</i>			
Nikki Gaddis	Administrative Assistant	(360) 902-3013	nikki.gaddis@rco.wa.gov
<i>Grants process implementation, applicant needs</i>			

The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board

RCO supports the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board. Established by citizen Initiative 215 in 1964, the board helps finance recreation and conservation projects throughout the state. The eight-member board consists of five citizens appointed by the Governor, and three state agency directors. Advisory committees work hand-in-hand with RCO in an effort to assist the board in meeting its goals.

Benefits of Being an Advisory Committee Member

Being an advisory committee member provides benefits not only to the state but to the member as well. Members will experience the following:

- Gain experience in being part of a team.
- Learn and grow professionally and personally.
- Shape the quality of life for Washingtonians.
- Become a better grant writer by reviewing and evaluating grants.
- Use their professional skills.
- Add valuable experience to their resumes.
- Be active members of the community.
- Learn about other's perspectives and opinions.
- Obtain a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.
- Challenge themselves.

Member Attributes

RCO seeks advisory committee members who meet the following criteria:

- Are available for, and have a high interest in, advisory committee participation.
- Are knowledgeable and experienced in the activities and issues that relate to the committee's grant program.
- Demonstrate an ability to be creative in seeking solutions.
- Have an interest in public policy issues.
- Work for the greater good of the program.
- Can demonstrate an appreciation and understanding of views of those with different recreation and habitat interests.
- When appropriate, can work for win-win solutions while still advocating for their primary recreational interest.

In addition, in two grant programs (Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activities and Recreational Trails Program), advisory committee members must declare a primary recreation interest (for example, hiker, mountain bicyclist, etc.). This does not apply to agency members.

Member Duties

Advisory committee members represent the interests and views of their respective activities while helping RCO achieve grant program goals.

Advisory committee duties usually include the following:

- Providing technical counsel on project merits.
- Scoring projects for funding.
- Advising RCO on issues that affect the agency's grant program.
- Assisting with the development and application of program policies and procedures.
- Providing counsel on legislative issues and statewide planning.

Advisory committee members need to limit their activities to those requested by RCO. For example, they must not use committee time to advocate for personal goals and

members must not represent RCO or the advisory committee in external forums or deliberations.

RCO Advisory Committee Information

Specific information about each advisory committee may be found on [RCO's Web site](#). Each committee page has a description of the grant program as well as the following:

- Advisory committee charter: Charters contain the "rules of the road" for each committee.
- Advisory committee volunteer application.
- A list of current members.
- A list of several funded projects that have come before the committee.

Section 2: General Guidance

In this section, you'll learn about:

- ✓ The advisory role
- ✓ Meetings
- ✓ Compensation and travel reimbursement
- ✓ Volunteer hours
- ✓ Ethics and the appearance of conflicts
- ✓ Keeping and releasing records
- ✓ Appointment and removal

The Advisory Role

Advisory committees do not have authority to enforce policy or create rules, but their analysis and recommendations can play an important role in helping RCO continue to make the grant programs efficient and effective.

Advisory committees use the project selection process adopted by the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board to evaluate and rank grant requests that are presented in-person or in a written format. The RCO director considers the advisory committee's evaluations when recommending projects to the board for funding.

Advisory committee members provide an important link between the public, RCO, and its boards. The information that advisory committee members provide about community needs and opinions can have a profound effect on state policies and lead to improved service.

Advisory committee members are expected to do the following:

- Share community opinions, attitudes, and needs about individual grant programs with RCO.
- Be knowledgeable on the grant program and services, and able to analyze problems and needs.

- Offer new proposals and recommend changes in programs, policies, and standards.
- Provide the public with information and interpretation of department and state policies, programs, and budgets.
- Be fair, impartial, and respectful towards projects and project proponents.

Meetings

Typically, RCO staff facilitates all advisory committee meetings. RCO staff also notifies advisory committee members of pertinent issues. They arrange schedules, prepare meeting rooms and materials, and moderate grant program review and evaluation meetings and host post evaluation conferences. Most grant programs require at least two meetings in the year applications are taken – one for technical review and one for evaluation.

Meetings for the in-person grants process normally occur in Olympia at the Natural Resources Building, typically in the Training Rooms 175A or 175B. Visit the RCO Web site for [a map and driving directions](#).

Attendance

Regular attendance is essential so that decisions will represent the opinions of the committee as a whole. In addition, regular attendance enables advisory committee members to keep abreast of committee concerns and helps ensure that issues are examined from a variety of perspectives. Poor attendance may result in removal from an advisory committee.

Preparation

Adequate preparation is another requisite for effective membership on the committee. RCO staff will provide information in advance of meetings to help advisory committee members make informed decisions. Do not hesitate to request any additional information needed to make thoughtful decisions.

Effective advisory committee members do the following:

- Attend all meetings.
- Are well prepared.
- Recognize that serving the public interest is the top priority.
- Recognize that the committee operates in an open and public manner.

- Are knowledgeable about the grant process and issues affecting the committee.
- Examine all available evidence before making a judgment.
- Communicate well and actively participate in group discussions.
- Are aware that authority to act is granted to the committee as a whole, not to individual members.
- Possess a willingness to work with the group in making decisions.
- Recognize that compromise may be necessary to reach consensus.
- Do not let personal feelings toward other members, staff, or project proponents interfere with their judgment.
- Above all, exhibit fairness and impartiality towards projects and project proponents.
- Avoid conflicts of interest.

Advisory committee members are asked not to investigate projects or project sites for technical or evaluation review on their own. Information for these reviews must be consistent and obtained in the same method as other members on the committee.

Compensation and Travel Reimbursement

Advisory committee members may need to attend meetings in Olympia or, on rare occasions, other locations throughout the state. As budgets allow, citizen, local agency, Native American tribal, and nonprofit organization members of the advisory committees may be reimbursed for RCO business, in accordance with the applicable laws and rules.

Allowable Expenses

Advisory committee members may seek reimbursement for travel expenses incurred in the performance of their duties as a member of an advisory committee. These expenses include mileage reimbursement, lodging, and meals up to the maximum allowable rates.

- **Mileage** – mileage reimbursement may be reimbursed when traveling for official state business such as RCO approved meetings and other advisory committee business.
- **Meals** – Expenses for meals will be reimbursed at the state per diem rate. Meal reimbursement eligibility is determined by the time of day and location.

- **Lodging** – Allowable overnight lodging expenses will be reimbursed up to the maximum allowable state per diem rates and must include an original hotel receipt.
- **Other travel costs** – You must use the state’s contracts for travel agents, airlines, and rental cars when on official business. Air travel must be approved in advance by RCO’s deputy director. Contact RCO if you have questions. Mileage is reimbursed according to state allowable rates.

To receive payment, you must register with the Statewide Payee Desk. To do this, go to the [Department of Enterprise Services Web site](#) and follow the [instructions](#).

To be reimbursed, report travel and other costs using the RCO Non-Employee Reimbursement for Travel Expenses/Volunteer Log form. Members may pick up the form at advisory committee meetings or access it [the form](#) online.

Advisory committee members should remember to do the following:

- Provide an original copy of the lodging receipt.
- Provide departure and arrival times for the dates of travel.
- Sign the form in ink.
- Keep a copy of what was submitted to RCO in case there are questions.

Note: Per diem reimbursement depends on the reported departure and arrival times. Give your signed form to an RCO staff member, or mail it to:

Tessa Cencula
Recreation and Conservation Office
PO Box 40917
Olympia, WA 98504-0917
Tessa.Cencula@rco.wa.gov

Volunteer Hours

RCO collects information on the hours volunteered by each advisory committee member. This includes members who participate in the written review or evaluation processes as well as those who travel to another location to participate. This reporting process helps ensure that all people who volunteer for RCO are covered for any work-related injury.

Written Evaluation Process

RCO will e-mail members to ask for total hours. This includes any time spent during the review or evaluation process and post evaluation meeting, using the telephone or computer, reading, scoring, etc.

In-Person Evaluation Process

Members will report hours on the Non-Employee Reimbursement for Travel Expenses/Volunteer Log form, if they are asking for travel reimbursement. Note on each line of travel the departure and arrival times. The grey box will be filled out by RCO.

Members not requesting travel reimbursement will report volunteer hours on the volunteer travel form. RCO will sum those hours.

Ethics and the Appearance of Conflicts

As representatives of RCO and its boards, employees, board members, and volunteers, advisory committee members should avoid any circumstances that invite a conflict of interest or create the appearance of unethical conduct or practices. Compliance with the ethics requirements is an individual responsibility.

"RCO members" means officers, employees, volunteers, and members of the RCO and its boards and committees.

RCO members may not do the following:

- Have a financial interest or engage in any activity that is in conflict with the proper discharge of their official duties.
- Use their official positions to secure special privileges for themselves or any other person or entity.
- Receive compensation from any source, except the State of Washington, for performing their official duties, except that volunteers may continue to receive normal compensation from their employers while participating in an RCO board or committee.

Advisory committee members must uphold a high ethical standard. It is extremely important to avoid both the appearance of and actual conflicts of interest.

A conflict of interest occurs when a member has a private interest that may benefit from that member's actions, or when a private interest could interfere with the member's duties on behalf of RCO. Such interests do not need to be financial. Members must not

make decisions to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

Members can avoid conflict of interest and other ethical problems by being aware of statutory restrictions, adhering to such restrictions, using good judgment, and being fair and equitable in decision-making. RCO recommends that you carefully review Revised Code of Washington Chapter 42.52, the statutory Code of Ethics for public officials.

Limitations on Gifts¹

RCO considers all RCO members to be subject to "Section 4"² because the agency provides grant funds. As such, the strictest provisions of the state ethics law apply.

- A RCO member may not accept a gift if it could reasonably be expected that the gift would influence the recipient's action or judgment, or the gift could be considered a reward for the recipient's action or inaction.
- A RCO member may not accept from any person or organization any gift or gifts with a value in excess of \$50 a year. Such gifts are limited to those permitted by statute. The Executive Ethics Board produces a brochure that lists the types of gifts that may be accepted.
- A RCO member may accept only gifts of nominal or promotional value from an individual or organization that receives RCO grant funds or is subject to RCO policies.

RCO members are expected to use good judgment. Even if a situation seems to comply with the ethics law, members should avoid it if it would appear unethical or unfair to others.

Members are not allowed to accept the following:

- Payments for expenses in connection with a speech, presentation, or appearance made as an advisory committee member.
- Payments for seminars and educational programs.
- Flowers, plants, and floral arrangements.

¹Revised Code of Washington Chapter 42.52.150

²"Section 4" refers to Revised Code of Washington 42.52.150 (4), Limitations on Gifts.

Keeping and Releasing Records

All documents related to RCO's evaluation or advisory committees are subject to disclosure, unless there is a specific exemption.

When RCO sends an e-mail or other documents to an advisory committee member, RCO maintains the primary record, so the member may delete or destroy the information when it is no longer needed.

If a committee member receives an e-mail or other document from someone else about committee activities, it may need to be kept or disclosed. You may want to set up a unique e-mail account that you use solely for RCO business so that it is easier to manage the information. The e-mail address that you use for committee business is subject to disclosure.

- For example, if a member of the public were to contact an advisory committee member about a project or evaluation results, the communication and the response should be kept.
- Records of routine business, such as confirming attendance or arranging carpools to meetings may be discarded.

If an advisory committee member receives a request for disclosure of documents, he or she must forward the request immediately to the RCO public disclosure officer and be prepared to provide the requested documents in a timely manner.

Appointment and Removal

The RCO director appoints advisory committee members based on the goals of each grant program. Each appointed member shares in the duties and responsibilities of his or her committee. The director also may appoint ex-officio or alternate members. An ex-officio member participates in the project review process providing expertise and comments as needed. They do not evaluate projects. An alternate member also serves as a reviewer but only steps in as an evaluator when needed.

The director also may dismiss advisory committee members for reasons including, but not limited to, lack of participation in committee activities, an unexcused absence from a required meeting, and actions that are contrary to RCO's mission, the advisory committee's charter, or RCO statutes and policies.

Terms

Members typically serve 4 years. Terms of members overlap to ensure continuity of experience on the committee. The director may reappoint members to one additional term, for a maximum of 8 years of service. Agency members serve at the pleasure of their

agency directors. Advisory committee members have equal status and shall share fully in all activities and duties.

Section 3: Evaluating Grants

In this section, you'll learn about:

- ✓ Reviewing and evaluating grant proposals
- ✓ Technical review
- ✓ Evaluations
- ✓ Post evaluation meeting

Reviewing and Evaluating Grant Proposals

Advisory committee members should read through the policy manuals relevant to their committees before reviewing and evaluating grant proposals. The evaluation criteria or questions are in the back of each manual. You may find the relevant [manuals](#) on RCO's Web site.

An advisory committee member's primary duties are to review and evaluate grant proposals. The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board has established two methods of evaluating grant proposals: In-person presentations and written evaluations. Technical review also uses the in-person and written processes.

The table below shows the format used for each grant program for both technical review meetings and project evaluation meetings.

Section 3: Evaluating Grants

Grant Program	Technical Review	Project Evaluation		
	In Person	Written	In Person	Written
Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account	●		●	
Boating Facilities Program	●		●	
Boating Infrastructure Grant Program – Tier 1				●
Boating Infrastructure Grant Program – Tier 2		●	Written evaluation done by national team	
Firearms and Archery Range Recreation	●		●	
Land and Water Conservation Fund	●		●	
No Child Left Inside	RCO staff review only			●
Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activities				
Nonhighway Road, Non-motorized, and Off-road Vehicle Categories	RCO staff review only		●	
Education and Enforcement Category	RCO staff review only			●
Recreational Trails Program	RCO staff review only			●
Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program				
Critical Habitat Category	●		●	
Farmland Preservation Category	●		●	
Forestland Preservation Category	●		●	
Local Parks Category	●		●	
Natural Areas Category	RCO staff review only			●
Riparian Protection Category	●		●	
State Lands Development and Renovation Category		●		●
State Lands Restoration and Enhancement Category		●		●
State Parks Category	●		●	
Trails Category	●		●	
Urban Wildlife Habitat Category	●		●	
Water Access Category	●		●	
Youth Athletic Facilities	RCO staff review only			●

Technical Review

For all projects, RCO Grant Managers perform a review of each proposal for eligibility of the applicant and details of the project proposal with the grant program, including the technical completeness of the proposal. The processes described below are descriptions of how Advisory Committees conduct the Technical Reviews and Evaluations.

Written Reviews

In the written technical review process, the applicant does not prepare additional materials specifically for the review. Instead, RCO selects key information from the application and forwards it to reviewers electronically. Advisory committee members then review materials independently, within the time period allotted, and provide written comments to RCO. RCO relays the information back to grant applicants. See a [sample response](#) to written evaluation questions.

Reviewers are expected to participate, be prepared, and offer constructive criticism and feedback to applicants in the written, narrative format.

In-Person Reviews

In this process, RCO invites applicants to meet with the advisory committee. The review is intended to provide applicants with feedback on the proposal before final evaluation. See [guidelines for in-person presentations](#) given to applicants.

To participate, RCO assigns grant applicants a reservation time with the advisory committee. The applicant then prepares responses to the program criteria and a PowerPoint® presentation to showcase the project. RCO also may provide supplemental materials to the advisory committee.

The role of the advisory committee at this meeting is to provide comments on the projects. Members look at project strengths and weaknesses, how well the project meets grant program goals, clarity, and completeness of evaluation criteria responses. To ensure the time is used well, advisory committee members are expected to participate, be prepared, and offer constructive comments to the applicant. This feedback allows the applicant to make changes that may improve the project proposal and presentation in advance of the final project evaluation.

Applicant participation in the project review process is not mandatory, but highly recommended.

Before this meeting, advisory committee members should be familiar with program evaluation criteria and any project review materials sent to them by RCO.

Evaluations

Evaluations are the cornerstone of the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board ranking and project selection process. To be considered for funding, each project is evaluated and scored against the grant program evaluation criteria. This is a mandatory step in the process and all applicants must participate. It is equally important that advisory committee members participate in the entire evaluation process. If an advisory committee member cannot review and evaluate all projects in the prescribed format and time, then it is likely that none of the evaluator's scores will be used – so be sure to share any schedule conflicts with RCO as soon as possible.

Unlike the technical review meeting, project evaluations are not the time to critique a project with the intent of improving it. In the evaluation meeting, advisory committee members will score each project on how well it meets the established evaluation criteria. RCO encourages committee members to ask probing questions to gain information that will help score the proposal.

Written Evaluations

Applicants prepare final project evaluation materials based in part upon the comments they received during the project review. RCO will compile all project materials in an electronic format and forward them, along with instructions and a score sheet, to advisory committee members for final evaluation. Reviewers will have about 2 weeks to go through the materials and score each project.

When reviewing project proposals, advisory committee members should consider how well the applicants have addressed the program criteria. Members score all projects independently keeping their score sheets until all projects are evaluated. Team-scored questions are subjective in nature, which allows the evaluators to use discretion in scoring. Advisory committee members need to be consistent and to use whole numbers. When finished, advisory committee members return their score sheets to RCO for final review and tally.

In addition to the questions scored by advisory committee members, RCO staff score non-subjective questions. The scores for all the questions, with any multipliers applied; result in a total score for a project. The ranked list becomes the core element in the funding recommendations that RCO staff make to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board.

In-Person Evaluations

Before in-person evaluations, RCO will send advisory committee members information about each project. This information should be reviewed ahead of time and will allow

advisory committee members an opportunity to learn what changes were made because of project review comments.

On the first day of project evaluations, advisory committee members will meet with RCO staff for an orientation. During this time, committee members will get to know each other and review the evaluation process, grant program criteria, and scoring mechanism.

The Presentation Structure

Once evaluations begin, advisory committee members will hear a new project presentation about every 20 to 30 minutes. Applicants are asked to present their information in a clear and concise manner and demonstrate how well their projects fit program goals. Applicants usually start with a brief introduction and then answer, in order, all the necessary evaluation criteria for their projects. The PowerPoint® slides are meant to portray and enhance the oral remarks made by the presenter. Applicants have about 12-15 minutes for their presentations. At the end, evaluators will have about 10 minutes to ask clarifying questions. How an applicant allocates time in the presentation can be critical.

When reviewing project proposals, advisory committee members should listen carefully to ensure all of the criteria are addressed. Once a presentation is complete, members ask questions and score the applicant's proposal. All projects are scored independently and score sheets are kept until evaluations are complete. Team-scored questions are subjective in nature, which allows the evaluators to use discretion in scoring. Advisory committee members need to be consistent and to use whole numbers.

Evaluation Scores and Project Ranking

In addition to the questions scored by advisory committee members, RCO staff score some questions. The scores for all the questions, with any multipliers applied, results in a total score for a project. The result will be a "ranked list" of projects. These ranked lists become the core elements in the funding recommendations that RCO staff make to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board, the Governor and the State Legislature.

Post Evaluation Meeting

A few weeks after the final evaluation process is complete, RCO will host a post evaluation meeting with advisory committee members to discuss the ranked list and evaluation process. Members may choose to come to Olympia for this meeting or call in via conference call or Web meeting.