

ENRTF Community Grant Program advisory council open meeting and public body overview

Purpose of this overview

This overview explains basic public meeting expectations for the ENRTF Community Grant Program Advisory Council.

The council is a public body. Its meetings are open to the public. This means council work is conducted in a manner that supports transparency, public access, and public trust.

This overview is intended to help members understand practical expectations before the first meeting. DNR will provide additional guidance as council operating procedures are developed.

Why open meeting requirements matter

Open meeting requirements help ensure that public bodies conduct their work transparently.

For the advisory council, this means members should have a shared understanding of:

- When council business should occur in a noticed public meeting
- How members may communicate between meetings
- How hybrid meetings are handled
- How meeting materials and records are managed
- How to avoid accidental deliberation outside a public meeting

DNR staff will support notice, access, agendas, materials, meeting records, and public participation logistics.

Public body status

The ENRTF Community Grant Program Advisory Council is a public body under the law establishing the Community Grant Program. Because the council is a public body, its meetings must be open to the public unless a specific legal exception applies.

In general, Minnesota's Open Meeting Law requires meetings of public bodies to be open to the public. [Minnesota Statutes, chapter 13D](#) is the state's Open Meeting Law.

What counts as council business

Advisory council discussion, deliberation, and recommendations should occur during properly noticed public meetings.

Examples may include discussion of:

- RFP design
- Application questions
- Eligibility
- Reporting expectations
- Outreach
- Technical assistance
- Grantee barriers
- Program policies
- Budget considerations
- Advance payment issues
- Fiscal agents or partnership models
- Recommendations to the DNR
- Recommendations to the legislature
- Council operating practices

Council business should occur during a properly noticed public meeting when members are discussing, deliberating, polling or attempting to reach agreement as a council.

Communications outside meetings

Members may contact DNR staff outside meetings for individual questions, logistical needs, accessibility requests or requests for information.

Members should avoid discussing, deliberating, polling or attempting to reach agreement on council business outside a properly noticed meeting.

This includes:

- Group email discussions among members
- A series of separate conversations intended to build agreement among members
- Text message discussions among members
- Phone calls among members about council business
- Back-and-forth discussion in shared documents that becomes council deliberation
- Informal polling of members
- Side conversations before, during or after meetings that involve council business

A helpful rule of thumb: Use DNR staff for individual questions and logistics. Use public council meetings for council discussion, deliberation and recommendations.

Conflict-of-interest questions outside meetings

Members may contact DNR staff outside meetings with individual conflict-of-interest questions or disclosure updates. This is appropriate because the DNR may need to review the circumstances before determining whether any additional steps are appropriate.

Members should not discuss another member's possible COI by email, text, shared document or side conversation. If a concern arises, members should bring it to DNR staff.

Avoid discussing council business through separate conversations

A series of separate conversations can create Open Meeting Law concerns if council members use them to discuss council business or build agreement outside a public meeting.

Members should not use separate emails, phone calls, text messages, shared documents or individual conversations to discuss council business with other members outside a properly noticed public meeting.

If a topic needs advisory council discussion, members should ask DNR staff to place it on a future meeting agenda.

Email and shared documents

Email and shared documents can be useful for distributing materials and collecting individual comments, but they should be used carefully.

Appropriate uses may include:

- Receiving meeting materials from the DNR
- Asking DNR staff an individual question
- Submitting individual comments to DNR staff
- Requesting an agenda item
- Providing availability or logistical information
- Sending accessibility or participation needs to DNR staff

Avoid using email or shared documents to:

- Debate council business among members
- Ask members to agree or disagree with a position
- Conduct a vote or poll
- Develop group recommendations outside a meeting
- Pressure other members to support a position
- Create side deliberations outside the public meeting process

Hybrid meetings

The council may meet in a hybrid format, with some participants in person and some participating remotely.

When telephone or interactive technology is used for a meeting, Minnesota law includes requirements related to member participation and public monitoring. Minnesota law establishes requirements for remote participation. DNR will ensure meetings are conducted consistent with applicable law.

The DNR will provide meeting instructions for hybrid participation, including:

- Location information
- Virtual meeting link
- Public access information
- Technology support
- Instructions for members participating remotely
- Accessibility information

Members participating remotely should join from a location where they can hear, be heard and participate fully.

Public access

Council meetings are open to the public.

The DNR will provide information about how the public may attend or monitor the meeting, either in person, remotely, or both, depending on the meeting format.

Public access does not necessarily mean that every meeting will include public comment. The DNR will clarify when public comment is part of an agenda.

If public comment is included, the DNR will explain the process, timing and any applicable participation guidelines.

Meeting agendas and materials

The DNR will prepare and distribute meeting agendas and materials.

Members should review materials before meetings when possible. If members have questions, they may send individual questions to DNR staff.

Meeting materials should be used for advisory council business. The DNR will provide guidance if any materials require restricted handling.

Members should not share sensitive, private, confidential or not-public information unless the DNR has confirmed the appropriate process and system.

Requesting agenda topics

Council members may ask DNR staff to consider adding a topic to a future meeting agenda. Members should send agenda topic requests to DNR Community Grant Program staff rather than starting a group email discussion or side conversation with other members.

The request should briefly describe the topic, why it is relevant, whether the member is requesting information or discussion, any timing concerns, and whether the member knows of a possible conflict of interest.

DNR will review requests and determine the most appropriate way to address them, including a future meeting agenda with appropriate. Requesting a topic does not guarantee placement on the next agenda.

Meeting records

The DNR will support meeting records. Meeting records may include:

- Agendas
- Meeting materials
- Attendance
- Minutes or meeting summaries
- Formal recommendations
- DNR responses
- Public notices
- Related council records

Advisory council materials and communications may be subject to Minnesota's public records and data practices requirements. The DNR will provide guidance when information requires restricted handling.

If a conflict-of-interest disclosure affects participation in a meeting topic, the meeting record may include a high-level note that a disclosure was made or that a member did not participate in a specific topic. Meeting records should avoid including unnecessary sensitive personal, financial, legal or other protected information.

Sensitive information

Advisory council members should not need access to most sensitive information to carry out their role.

Members should not send, upload, request or retain sensitive information unless DNR has provided instructions and identified the appropriate process or system.

Examples of information that should not be shared through email or the Advisory Council SharePoint site include:

- Social Security numbers
- Tax identification numbers
- Banking or other financial account information
- Signatures

- Tax returns
- Financial statements
- Nonpublic applicant information
- Reviewer notes or evaluation materials
- Legal advice or privileged communications
- Security-related information
- Private contact information
- Personnel information
- Protected business information

If you are unsure whether information is appropriate to share, contact DNR staff before sending or uploading it.

Role of DNR staff

DNR staff will support the council by:

- Preparing agendas
- Posting or distributing meeting notices
- Sharing meeting materials
- Supporting hybrid access
- Coordinating accessibility requests
- Documenting attendance
- Preparing meeting records
- Tracking formal recommendations
- Helping members route questions
- Managing records and data practices questions through appropriate DNR processes

DNR staff may also remind members when a topic should be saved for a public meeting or future agenda.

Practical member expectations

Members should:

- Review materials before meetings when possible
- Participate in council discussion during noticed meetings
- Ask DNR staff questions when they need clarification
- Avoid discussing council business with other members outside properly noticed public meetings
- Disclose possible conflicts of interest early
- Disclose agenda-specific conflicts to DNR staff before or during the relevant meeting topic
- Use approved systems for council materials
- Avoid sending sensitive information by email or uploading it to the external council SharePoint site
- Bring proposed agenda topics to DNR staff
- Respect public access and transparency requirements

Practical examples

Example 1: Individual question to DNR staff

A member emails DNR staff to ask when the next meeting will be held or where to find the RFP timeline.

Generally appropriate. This is an individual logistical or information request.

Example 2: Group email discussion

A member emails all council members asking whether they agree that the RFP should require advance payments for all grants.

Avoid. This could become council deliberation outside a public meeting. The member should send the topic to DNR staff for a future agenda or survey question.

Example 3: Shared-document comments

Several members begin commenting back and forth in a shared document about what the council should recommend.

Avoid. Shared-document comments can become deliberation. The DNR may use structured tools to collect individual comments, but council discussion should occur during public meetings.

Example 4: Requesting an agenda item

A member emails DNR staff to ask that fiscal agents and bonding be included on a future agenda.

Generally appropriate. This is a request to DNR staff for future public discussion.

Example 5: Informal conversation before a meeting

Several members discuss how they plan to vote on a council recommendation before the meeting starts.

Avoid. Council deliberation should occur during the noticed public meeting.

Key reminders

- The council is a public body.
- Council meetings are open to the public.
- Council-level discussion should occur during noticed public meetings.
- Members may contact DNR staff individually for questions, logistics, accessibility needs or agenda requests.
- Do not deliberate, poll, vote or attempt to reach agreement on council business by email, text, phone, shared documents or a series of separate conversations intended to build agreement.
- When in doubt, ask DNR staff before proceeding.