

Department-led Working Groups Policy

Approved by: Caitlin Salter MacDonald, City Clerk

Approval date:

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Policy statement

The City of Ottawa is committed to ensuring that Department-led Working Groups operate effectively, transparently and in compliance with relevant legislation while providing valuable advisory input to support the City's strategic priorities.

Purpose

This policy establishes the framework for the creation, operation and accountability of Department-led Working Groups. The objective is to provide clear guidelines on the formation, roles and responsibilities of these groups to ensure their efficient function in supporting City staff and Council decision-making.

Application

This policy applies to all City staff working with Department-led Working Groups established by the City of Ottawa's General Managers.

While provisions of this policy also apply to Members of Council acting in any *ex officio* or liaison capacity in relation to a Department-led Working Group, their conduct is subject to the Code of Conduct for Members of Council.

City staff whose leadership reports to a local board (for example, the Board of Health, Committee of Adjustment, etc.) are not subject to this policy.

Policy requirements

This policy governs the following areas to ensure compliance with municipal policies and legislative requirements: establishment of Department-led Working Groups, memorandum requirement, public information, meetings, records, reporting and responsibilities.

Establishment of Department-led Working Groups

- A Department-led Working Group is established by the General Manager and may include public members, City staff and Members of Council in *ex officio* roles.

- The group must not form a quorum of the Standing Committee associated with the subject matter to avoid statutory open meeting requirements.
- The number of public members and staff should exceed the number of Members of Council to mitigate risks related to open meeting requirements.
- Equity and inclusion should be key considerations when forming a Department-led Working Group. Groups should reflect the diversity of Ottawa populations, the accessibility of participants, and the City's geographic areas.
- The composition of the Department-led Working Group may be adjusted on an issue-by-issue basis at the discretion of the General Manager or designate.
- The term "Working Group" should be included in the group's name for clarity. Where another name is preferred (for example, "Advisory Table" or "Advisory Group"), the term "Working Group" should be included in parentheses following the group's name and clearly explained in the body's Terms of Reference. The term "Committee" should not be used.
- A Terms of Reference document must be developed for each Department-led Working Group and agreed to by each of its members. See Appendix A: Template – Department-led Working Group, Sample Terms of Reference.

Memorandum requirement

- Upon the establishment of a Department-led Working Group, the General Manager must issue a memorandum to the relevant Standing Committee(s) detailing the group's mandate, membership and alignment with Council's strategic priorities. Alternatively, the General Manager may share these details with Standing Committee(s) and/or Council as part of a broader staff report.

Public information

- General information, including the group's mandate, membership and any related Council reports, shall be posted on ottawa.ca.
- Exceptions to the above may be granted in writing by the General Manager, in consultation with the City Clerk and/or City Solicitor, pertaining to specific requests in support of increasing the participation of public members on Department-led Working Groups, and for legal, operational, and/or equity reasons. Any such exceptions, along with the rationale, must be documented on a standard form and preserved as an Official Business Record in accordance with the City's Records Management Policy.

Meetings

- The meeting schedule is set by the General Manager or their designate. Where practicable, the meeting schedule is to be provided in advance to members, to encourage participation and attendance.
- Meetings are not subject to open meeting requirements, but the General Manager may opt to hold open sessions.
- Minutes and agendas, if maintained, must be shared with participants and disclosed via the department's Routine Disclosure and Active Dissemination Plan.
- Meetings can be virtual, in person or hybrid, ensuring maximum participation and accessibility accommodations.
- The Mayor's Office, Standing Committee Chairs, subject-matter experts or other Members of Council may be invited to attend.
- In keeping with the Accessible Formats and Communication Supports Procedure, communication-related accommodations are available upon request.

Reporting

- Reports to Committee and Council must include information on how the Working Group's activities and advice have influenced recommendations.
- Links to these reports must be publicly available on ottawa.ca.

Responsibilities

General Manager

- Establishes and oversees the Department-led Working Group.
- Issues a memorandum to the relevant Standing Committee(s) regarding the Working Group's establishment, mandate, membership and alignment with Council's strategic priorities.
- Can adjust the composition of the Department-led Working Group as needed for specific issues.
- Sets the meeting schedule and decides whether meetings will be open to the public, in consultation with the City Clerk as required.

Department-led Working Group members

- Provide advice and input to City staff within the scope of the Working Group's mandate.

- Must comply with relevant legislation, including the *Municipal Act, 2001* and the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.
- Respect Council's decision-making authority and the advisory role of City staff.
- Public members engaged in political activities must separate those personal activities from their positions and/or activities related to the Working Group, in keeping with the purpose of the City's Election-Related Resources Policy.

City staff

- Share information with the Working Group as necessary to support its mandate.
- Adhere to relevant policies listed in the References section to ensure a respectful and inclusive environment.
- Ensure that reports to Council or relevant Committees reflect the advice and activities of the Working Group.
- Maintain the Working Group's records in accordance with the City's *Records Retention and Disposition By-law* and Records Management Policy.
- Ensure the Working Group reviews its Terms of Reference at its first meeting, and that all Working Group members agree to the Terms of Reference.
- Ensure proper management of any confidential information in accordance with applicable codes of conduct and must not disclose confidential information to members of the public without written permission from the General Manager.

Members of Council (ex officio or liaison capacity)

- Participate in the Department-led Working Group without forming a quorum of a Standing Committee.
- Provide Council perspective and facilitate communication between the Department-led Working Group and Council.

Monitoring/Contraventions

Compliance with this policy is monitored by the General Manager or designate.

Contraventions of this policy or failure to comply with statutory and/or code of conduct requirements may result in penalties such as suspension or disbandment of the Department-led Working Group and disciplinary actions for City staff or Members of Council.

References

[Accessibility Policy](#)

[Accessible Formats and Communication Supports Procedure](#)

[Accountability and Transparency Policy](#)
[Anti-Racism Strategy](#)
[Bilingualism Policy](#)
[Delegation of Powers Policy](#)
[Election-Related Resources Policy](#)
[Employee Code of Conduct](#)
[Equity and Diversity Policy](#)
[Public Engagement Strategy](#)
[Records Management Policy](#)
[Term of Council Priorities](#)

Legislative and administrative authorities

[Municipal Act, 2001](#)

[Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#)

[Delegation of Authority By-law](#)

[Records Retention and Disposition By-law](#)

Recordkeeping requirements

As per the Records Management Policy, Official Business Records generated as a result of Department-led Working Group activities and operations must be declared as such in the appropriate SharePoint site, RMS (Records Management System) or approved business system.

Definitions

Department-led Working Groups: These are advisory bodies established by the General Manager of a department to provide advice to staff on a particular matter, including both continuous and ad-hoc matters. They are typically composed of members of the public and staff and may include Members of Council in an *ex officio*/Council liaison capacity. Department-led Working Groups are not established under legislation and are not considered to be “local boards” of the City for statutory purposes. For greater certainty, internal working groups or other similarly-named bodies composed only of City staff and representatives of local boards are not included in the definition of “Department-led Working Groups” and are not subject to this policy.

Ex officio: A non-voting member by virtue of holding a particular office.

Quorum: In keeping with Section 80 of the *Procedure By-law*, a quorum for a Committee shall be the majority of the members thereof.

Enquiries

For more information on this policy, contact the City Clerk.

Appendices

Appendix A: Terms of Reference template

Departments are encouraged to use the Terms of Reference template to align with the requirements of this policy.

Appendix A: Template – Department-Led Working Group, Sample Terms of Reference

[Note: Ensure the Terms of Reference are reviewed at the inaugural meeting as the first agenda item. Receive agreement regarding the Terms of Reference from all members, either via signatures or verbal review of the Terms of Reference and asking for verbal agreement].

Department-led Working Group name:

[Insert name of the Department-led Working Group]

Department:

[Insert the name of the department establishing the Working Group]

Date established:

[Insert the date when the Working Group was established]

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Working Group is to provide advisory input and recommendations on *[insert specific focus or mandate of the group]*. The group will support the City's *[insert relevant strategic priorities or objectives]*.

2. Group members

The Working Group will be composed of the following members:

- Public members:
 - *[Insert names and their roles]*
- City staff:
 - *[List relevant staff names, job title and their department]*
- Council Members (*ex officio*):

- *[Include names of Council Members or liaisons, if applicable]*

3. Roles and responsibilities

- **General Manager:**

- Establishes and oversees the Working Group.
- Issues a memorandum regarding the group's formation, mandate, and membership.
- Adjusts the group's composition as needed.
- Sets meeting schedules and determines if meetings are open to the public.
- Identifies the Chair.

- **City staff:**

- Support the Working Group's activities and share relevant information.
- Maintain records in accordance with the City's Records Management Policy.

- **Members of the public:**

- Participate in discussions and provide input based on their expertise or community representation.
- Respect the confidentiality of any sensitive information acquired through their participation in the Department-led Working Group.
- Ensure any personal political activities are kept separate from positions and/or activities related to the Working Group, in keeping with the purpose of the City's Election-Related Resources Policy.

- **Working group members:**

- Provide expert advice within the scope of the group's mandate.
- Comply with relevant legislation.
- Maintain confidentiality where applicable.

- **Chair:**

- Leads and facilitates the Working Group, ensuring the group's goals are met efficiently, effectively, and in accordance with its Terms of Reference and the Department-led Working Group Policy.

4. Meetings

- **Frequency:**
 - *[Specify how often the group will meet – for example, monthly, quarterly].*
- **Format:**
 - Meetings may be held virtually, in person, or in a hybrid format to ensure maximum accessibility.
- **Agenda and minutes:**
 - Agendas will be distributed in advance, and minutes will be shared with all participants. Public access to minutes will be determined by the General Manager.
- **Quorum:**
 - Number of members required for quorum: *[Insert number]; OR*
 - Percentage of total members required for quorum: *[Insert percentage]*
 - Minimum members required from specific departments/teams (if applicable): *[Insert number and department/team names]*

5. Reporting

The Department-led Working Group will report its findings and recommendations to *[insert relevant Committee or department]*. Reports must include how the group's activities informed decisions or policy recommendations.

6. Term of the Working Group

The Department-led Working Group will operate from *[insert start date]* to *[insert end date or specify if ongoing]*.

7. Conflict of interest

All members shall declare if a conflict of interest is present and all members shall not benefit from any confidential information to which they may be privy.

8. Monitoring and compliance

Compliance with this Terms of Reference will be monitored by the departmental General Manager. Any failure to comply may result in suspension or disbandment of the Department-led Working Group.

9. Recordkeeping

All records will be managed according to the City's Records Management Policy and documented in the appropriate system (for example, SharePoint).

Any confidential information must be properly managed in accordance with applicable codes of conduct, and must not be disclosed without written permission from the General Manager.

10. Definition/acronyms

[If applicable, stating explicitly definitions and acronyms]

Signatures:

General Manager:

[Name, Signature, Date]

Working Group Members:

[Name, Signature or noted verbal consent, Date]