

## **U.S. Commission on Civil Rights –Advisory Committees**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **Overview**

##### **Question: What is the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights?**

**Answer:** The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights has, for over sixty years, been charged by Congress to inform development of national civil rights policy and enhance enforcement of federal civil rights laws. The bipartisan, independent Commission has jurisdiction over voting rights as well as discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, national origin, or in the administration of justice. The Commission monitors federal enforcement of civil rights laws in addition to evaluating the need for improved or changed federal civil rights law or policy. The Commission, including its 56 Advisory Committees for all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories, publishes reports following investigations; the Commission's reports include findings and recommendations to inform the President, Congress, and the public on important civil rights issues.

##### **Question: What is a Commission Advisory Committee?**

**Answer:** Congress mandated that the Commission establish Advisory Committees in every state and the District of Columbia. At the request of Congress, the Commission also established an Advisory Committee in the five U.S. territories. These committees serve as the Commission's eyes and ears on the ground and advise the Commission about civil rights matters in their locales.

#### **Purpose of Advisory Committees**

##### **Question: What kinds of issues do Commission Advisory Committees examine?**

**Answer:** The Commission's jurisdiction includes voting rights as well as discrimination or the denial of equal protection based on race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, national origin, or in the administration of justice. Advisory Committees have recently examined voting rights, civil rights impacts of education funding, seclusion and restraint of students with disabilities, women's prisons, civil rights impacts of civil asset forfeiture, immigration issues, policing practices, human trafficking, fair housing, civil rights issues related to payday lending, and criminal justice issues, including civil rights implications of solitary confinement policies in prisons and disparate incarceration rates.

##### **Question: What does a Commission Advisory Committee produce?**

**Answer:** Committees hold briefings with expert/public testimony, and produce reports and advisory memoranda.

##### **Question: Where can I see the activities of the Advisory Committees?**

**Answer:** Information about Advisory Committee activities, including scheduled meetings, briefings, press releases, current member rosters, and recent Committee reports are available on the Commission's [website](#).

**Question: Who do Commission Advisory Committees advise?**

**Answer:** The Commission Advisory Committees advise the Commission. The published reports are made readily available to the public and are posted to the agency website. Thus, they also inform state and local policymakers, the media, and the general public.

**Question: Are there examples of Commission Advisory Committee reports that have influenced policy changes at the national, state or local levels?**

**Answer:** Advisory Committee reports may lead to policy changes at the national, state or local levels. Recent examples where reports were cited as a source for such changes include reports on solitary confinement policies in Connecticut; the conditions of women's prisons in New Hampshire, and seclusion and restraint policies of students with disabilities in Kansas. In addition to legislators, civil rights advocates frequently use Advisory Committee reports as a resource to make change on national, state and local levels.

**Interaction between Commission and Advisory Committees**

**Question: How do Advisory Committees interact with the Commission?**

**Answer:** The Advisory Committees advise the Commission on civil rights issues that the Committees choose to evaluate. The Commission may also ask Advisory Committees to take up a civil rights topic in support of a Commission investigation. After a Committee's report is submitted, the Commission may invite the Advisory Committee Chair to discuss the report, including the findings and recommendations, at regularly scheduled Commission business meetings. The Commission may notify the U.S. Congressional delegation for the particular locale that the advisory committee within their jurisdiction has published a report. In addition, the Commission may distribute Committee reports to the federal, state, and local bodies that are identified in the Committee report. Lastly, individual Commissioners often attend the Advisory Committee meetings, which are open to the general public.

**Question: Are there recent examples of Commission use of Advisory Committee reports?**

**Answer:** The Advisory Committees are greatly valued by the Commission. The Commission relies on Committee work when it considers the new topics it will investigate, and it references Committee work in Commission reports, when relevant. Recent examples include the Commission review of minority voter access, which the Commission undertook in part due to the [recommendation](#) of the Kansas Advisory Committee; the Commission's incorporation of testimony and findings from twelve Advisory Committees in its [national report](#) on minority voter access ([Alabama](#), [Alaska](#), [Arizona](#), [California](#), [Illinois](#), [Indiana](#), [Kansas](#), [Louisiana](#), [Maine](#), [New Hampshire](#), [Ohio](#), and [Texas](#)); and the Commission's reliance on testimony and findings from four Advisory Committees in its [national report](#) on policing practices (Delaware, Maine, [Minnesota](#), [New York](#)).

## **Qualifications and Selection of Members of Advisory Committees**

**Question: What skills and experience is the Commission seeking when appointing members to its Advisory Committees?**

**Answer:** Committee members are recruited from a broad cross-section of professional, educational, and political backgrounds. The Commission is especially interested in appointing individuals who have a demonstrated interest in civil rights, voting rights and the equal protection of the law in the administration of justice – the civil rights issues within the Commission’s jurisdiction. It seeks individuals who can approach these issues from diverse personal and professional experiences and with various points of view.

The Commission hopes to recruit Advisory Committee members with a broad diversity of skills and experiences, including but not limited to social science research, legal research and analysis, statistical analysis, and report writing. The Commission is also looking for Advisory Committee members who are knowledgeable about governmental operations and the public service sector; those who have had experience in such sectors as business/finance, organized labor, news media, and religious groups; and persons who have advocated on civil rights matters.

**Question: How is an individual appointed to a Commission Advisory Committee?**

**Answer:** Individuals apply to serve on an Advisory Committee using the online application portal. After reviewing applications, Commission staff compose a slate of candidates for Commission approval. After their own review, Commissioners approve members by majority vote. Commission staff then contact appointed members about their membership and future orientation dates.

**Question: How long does an individual serve on a Commission Advisory Committee?**

**Answer:** Committee members are appointed to serve four-year terms.

**Question: Are Advisory Committee members compensated?**

**Answer:** Committee members serve as unpaid Special Government Employees. Members are reimbursed for travel expenses to in-person Committee meetings. Committee members are expected spend several hours on preparation and coordination between meetings, particularly while planning a briefing or drafting a report.

**Question: How much time does an individual need to commit to a Commission Advisory Committee?**

**Answer:** Committees hold one or two hour planning meetings on average once every quarter, but Committees working on a project may meet monthly. Advisory Committees may meet in-person, by phone, or webinar.

**Question: What kinds of responsibilities and duties do individuals have on Commission Advisory Committees?**

**Answer:** Members are expected to make meaningful contributions to the Committee in its development of projects and creation of reports for the Commission. Committees individually may decide to create executive positions, voted on by members of the Committee. Positions for these executive positions often include Vice Chair(s) and Recorder or Secretary. At minimum, attendance at meetings is required. Members who miss two consecutive meetings may be subject to constructive resignation from the Committee.

**Question: What are the conflict of interest and ethics rules for Committee members?**

**Answer:** As Special Government Employees, Advisory Committee members must follow the executive branch's ethics rules, which includes submitting a conflicts form yearly and notifying Commission staff of any financial conflicts with a proposed topic the committee is evaluating. Members also must take an annual ethics training.

**Question: Are applications for membership on Advisory Committees only accepted during certain periods?**

**Answer:** Applications are accepted at any time for an Advisory Committee. However, applications for membership on a particular Advisory Committee are normally collected about six months prior to the Committee's expiration. For various reasons, the Commission may make interim appointments to certain Advisory Committees.