SAFECOM Best Practices for Governance Charters

A Guide to Developing Charters and Bylaws for State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Entities

INTRODUCTION

Public safety agencies must consider the various functions and people that exchange information prior to, during, and after incidents in an increasingly complex and interconnected emergency communications ecosystem. Similarly, agencies are integrating new and emerging communications technologies that must be interoperable with existing systems and across partner entities. With this integration of capabilities and partners, a single agency cannot solve communications operability, interoperability, and continuity alone. Effective communications require a partnership among response entities across all levels of government and disciplines to ensure the right information gets to the right people at the right time. The first goal of the [National Emergency Communications Plan](#) (NECP), the Nation's strategic plan to improve emergency communications, calls for strengthened governance and leadership. A strong governance framework brings together all relevant participants with a stake in emergency communications to plan, collaborate, and make decisions.

Cohesive governance structures representing the whole community will provide greater perspectives into the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to emergency communications systems. Formalized governance provides a unified approach to partnerships across multiple disciplines, jurisdictions, and organizational functions. Documentation of processes and decision-making structures allows for greater understanding and evaluation of existing communications capabilities and the development and implementation of a coordinated plan to address gaps, align resources, and prioritize investments. Written agreements, backed by formal governance, establish common goals and objectives and minimize risk for the communities they serve. These mechanisms establish legal authorities and set the vision of what the group wishes to accomplish and why.

✔ CHECKLIST

Key Charter Elements
- ☐ Introduction
- ☐ Purpose
- ☐ Authority
- ☐ Outcomes
- ☐ Scope (Roles and Responsibilities)
- ☐ Operating Principles
- ☐ Membership
- ☐ Decision Making
- ☐ Logistics

Key Bylaws Elements
- ☐ Authority
- ☐ Purpose
- ☐ Board Composition
- ☐ Meetings/Meeting Proceedings
- ☐ Adoption, Review, and Amendments
- ☐ Committees of the Board

ESTABLISHING EFFECTIVE CHARTERS AND BYLAWS

One of the most important elements of effective governance is a set of guidelines and principles, also known as charters or bylaws[1]. Charters and bylaws describe why the group exists, outline its authority, establish accountability for members and the group, and identify ground rules for operation. The rules of conduct are intended to guide the governance group as they work together to address common goals and objectives that cross jurisdictions and disciplines. Clear decision-making and conflict resolution processes for the governance structure ensure the successful development and execution of strategic efforts when multiple agencies, disciplines, and jurisdictions are involved. Transparency in these processes helps build support for their outcomes.

When creating bylaws or a charter, the governance group must agree upon key policies and procedures that determine how the group will operate. Charters and bylaws promote transparency by making the governance body's procedures and processes accessible to the communities it serves. Many aspects of charters and bylaws overlap, and the choice to employ one or the other is at the discretion of the governance body and its leadership.

The tables on the following page describe the key elements found in effective charters and bylaws.

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[1] Bylaws complement a charter by providing important operational details. Bylaws do not operate independently of a primary charter document.

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KEY ELEMENTS OF CHARTERS AND BYLAWS

Table 1: Key Charter Elements

Element	Definition
Introduction	Provides an overview of the governance structure and outlines the sections within the charter
Purpose	Describes who established it, why it was established, and its mission, vision, goals, and objectives
Authority	Describes the governance structure's authority and funding sources
Outcomes	Describes the objectives of the governance structure in a quantifiable manner, so members can measure effectiveness and progress
Scope (Roles and Responsibilities)	Describes the scope of the governance body's responsibilities to include, but not limited to, level (e.g., command, tactical), discipline, function, communications type (i.e., data, voice, video, imagery) and usage
Operating Principles	Describes the ground rules for meetings and communications, including whether attendance and voting may be conducted electronically (from a distance)
Membership	Identifies the types of members and organizational structure. This element should also include identifying alternate, advisory, and ad-hoc members
Decision Making	Outlines the decision-making process and reporting for the governance body
Logistics	Describes meeting logistics including meeting frequency and meeting locations. Includes administrative responsibilities such as who develops meeting minutes, to whom and when they are distributed, and where they are archived

Table 2: Key Bylaws Elements

Element	Definition
Authority	Declares the legal language that gives the governance structure authority to oversee or advise on emergency communications and interoperability
Purpose	Describes why the governance structure was established and elaborates on the roles and responsibilities outlined in the authority
Board Composition	Identifies the governance structure membership, board chair/vice chair, duties of the elected and appointed officers and members, membership terms and termination process, election and appointment processes, and compensation
Meetings	Describes meeting frequency, quorum requirements, voting procedures, attendance requirements, and reasons and requirements for notification of special meetings
Meeting Proceedings	Specifies if Robert's Rules of Order or other rules of order will prevail in board or working group proceedings
Adoption, Review, and Amendments	Describes the process to review, adopt, and amend the bylaws
Committees of the Board	Describes the process for the governance structure to establish subcommittees, working groups, or ad-hoc groups and identifies the subcommittees that may be established to better facilitate collaboration

CONCLUSION

Engaged and effective governance is pivotal to operable, interoperable, and continuity of emergency communications. Robust governance establishes and maintains a central coordination point for efforts across the broad spectrum of public safety partners and the whole community, as well as helps to address challenges in a unified manner. Incorporating the elements described above into a governance body's charter or bylaws promotes a stronger framework to plan, collaborate, and make decisions. It promotes transparency by making the governance body's procedures and processes accessible to the communities it serves.

For more information on establishing, assessing, and updating governance structures that support interoperable emergency communications, view the *Emergency Communications Governance Guide for State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Officials* (Governance Guide), developed in 2018 by the Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency in coordination with SAFECOM and the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators.

For additional information regarding SAFECOM, visit cisa.gov/safecom