

Selecting Advisory Board Members

The methods and care used in selecting members are critical in shaping the nature and ensuring the success of the board. Every member should have a "can-do" attitude. The first step is deciding which professions and fields of expertise need to be included.

Earthquake concerns cut across traditional disciplinary boundaries. A broad perspective on seismic safety is essential to help a seismic safety advisory board achieve a well-balanced program. The board might include representatives of earthquake-related governmental agencies and private-sector organizations, as well as experts in such fields as architecture, planning, fire protection, medicine, law, public utilities, insurance, finance, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, structural engineering, geotechnical engineering, geology, seismology, education, emergency services, public policy, the media, contracting, and land development.

Although an advisory board will not necessarily need representatives from each of these areas, the membership should be multi-disciplinary and well balanced (perhaps including a member representing the public at large) so that no one group or discipline dominates. Seismic safety policies should be formulated in consultation with the private sector. Including private representatives of the commercial and manufacturing sectors along with nonprofit scientific, educational, professional associations or foundations engaged in promoting seismic safety—and even the public at large—will prevent the development of organizational biases and procedures that may tend to insulate even the best organization from perceptive and innovative practices. Integration of the public and private sectors promotes the consistency in policy that is a must if a seismic safety advisory board is to

benefit its constituency and ensure accountability.

Selecting the Members

Methods of selecting individuals to serve on the board can be critical in the board's success. Prospective members should be leaders in their fields, whose intellectual integrity is recognized by their peers and the organizations representing their professions. Equally important, nominees should be knowledgeable about earthquake risks and willing to devote substantial amounts of uncompensated time to the board's pursuit of seismic safety and hazard mitigation. Each member should be a "spark plug" who can create a sense of excitement and an abiding desire in his or her contemporaries to be a part of an organization that is accomplishing something.

Nominees must want to be on the board. At the very outset, they should be advised that board membership is a job, not an honor. Nominees should accept appointment to a seismic safety advisory board with the understanding that the position carries significant public service responsibilities. Members not only serve on the board itself but as ambassadors to their constituencies and other audiences, interpreting the mission of the board, defending it when it is under pressure, and representing it within their professional organizations and communities. They also must be sponsors of the board, assigning a high priority of their personal time and effort to the advisory board. In recruiting members, it is not unrealistic to ask them to accord as high a priority to the work of the board as they do to their efforts in their own professions. In addition to a commitment to the work of managing earthquake risks, they must also be able to work effectively in

achieving a consensus with colleagues from other backgrounds.

The relationship between the legislature and the board may be enhanced by requiring that the board's members be confirmed by the legislature and providing that the board's membership include one member from each house of the legislature. The legislators or their staffers (sitting as alternates) can provide the board access to the legislature's leadership and may facilitate the successful translation of seismic safety advice into public policy.

It may be advisable to have members appointed by the chief elected executive and confirmed by the legislative branch of government. If the board is established as a state-level body, it will be helpful to include a member from each house of the legislature.

How Many?

Although Arkansas' 47-member seismic safety advisory board has proven to be quite effective, experience by other existing boards suggests that the number of board members is best kept to a manageable level—between nine and 19 members—if it is to be effective. The board should be just large enough to ensure participation by all elements of the private and public sectors with an interest in earthquake risk management, yet it should not be so small as to be viewed as elitist or a special-interest clique. A semblance of parity should be maintained between the socioeconomic interests and the geotechnical and engineering interests represented on the advisory board. Inviting representatives of organizations and disciplines not represented on the board to serve on committees is a good way to involve these persons.

The use of alternate members (except for legislators) should be limited, if not prohibited. The use of alternates creates an impediment to the development of the working relationships

necessary for the board to develop a true consensus on issues and policies. Moreover, using alternates will deprive the board of preeminent expertise, the continuity and commitment its concept is based on and its effectiveness depends on. Effective advisory boards typically prohibit the designation of alternates by members. It should be clear that board members are personally responsible to the board for their performance.

Term of Office

The viability of a board and a seismic hazard mitigation program requires a broad consensus. The term of office for members of the board should be long enough to provide for continuity in the board's policies. Four years is probably a good starting point, with reappointment possible. Initially, it may be advisable to appoint one-half of the members to terms that expire two years after appointment and the remaining members, including the chair, to terms that expire four years after appointment. Such overlapping terms of office tend to promote continuity since the entire board would never change at one time. Any unexpected vacancies could be immediately filled by the appointing power for the unexpired part of the term.

To prevent stagnation and forestall the growth of institutionalized views and procedures that can isolate even the best organization, the board may find it advisable to limit the terms of board members. An alternative to term limits may be for the appointing authority to evaluate a board member's performance when his or her term is completed. If a board member has performed effectively in terms of attendance, professional expertise, participation, and stewardship, then that member could be invited to serve further. In any event, the board's leaders must deal with poor performance.