

Advisory Committee on Open Government

November 13, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Members Present and Constituting a Quorum:

Co-Chair Brian Lapps, Tennessee Board of Regents

Co-Chair Joel Christopher, Society of Professional Journalists

Jennifer Wilkerson- Secretary, County Officials Association of Tennessee

Lauren Lamberth, Designee, Tennessee Attorney General and Reporter (Ex Officio)

Ambassador Victor Ashe, Tennessee Coalition for Open Government (participating electronically)

Elisha Hodge, Tennessee Municipal League (participating electronically)

Dr. Karen Jackson, AARP (participating electronically)

Dr. Lee Carter, Tennessee School Board Association

Dan Haskell, Tennessee Association of Broadcasters

Sheriff Eddie Farris, Tennessee Sheriffs Association

Members Absent:

Chris Sherill Vass, Tennessee Press Association

Tunisia Holley, League of Women Voters

Chief Sammie Williams, Tennessee Association of Chiefs of Police

Richard (Dick) Williams, Common Cause

Jonathan Smith, Tennessee Hospital Association

Senator Richard Briggs, Chair, Senate State and Local Government Committee (Ex Officio)

Rep. John Crawford, Chair, House of Representatives State Government Committee (Ex Officio)

Others Present and Addressing the Committee:

Seth May, Office of Open Records

Rachel Appelt, Deputy Tennessee Attorney General

Mr. Robert Walker, League of Women Voters

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order on November 13, 2025, at 9:08 a.m. CT by Co-Chair Brian Lapps. A quorum was established with a total of ten (10) members present, with seven participating in person and three electronically. All committee members participating in the meeting online indicated that they were able to participate in real time and disclosed any other persons who may have been present at their respective locations.

Discussion and Confirmation of August 2025 Actions

The Committee discussed its actions taken to elect officers during the August 25, 2025 meeting. Co-chair Brian Lapps shared Tennessee Code Annotated 8-4-602 and 8-4-603, which define the purpose and structure of the ACOG committee. The Tennessee Code states that co-chairs be selected with one member coming from the private sector and one member from a government entity.

A motion was made by Mr. Dan Haskell that the committee reconsider its action to elect Ms. Elisha Hodge as co-chair in the August 2025 meeting. The motion was seconded by Lauren Lamberth, and the roll call vote was unanimous. Lauren Lamberth moved to elect Joel Christopher as co-chair, representing the Society of Professional Journalists. The motion was seconded, and Mr. Christopher was elected unanimously in a roll call vote. A motion was made and seconded to confirm election of Mr. Lapps as co-chair, and the motion passed unanimously in a roll call vote.

A motion was made by Joel Christopher to confirm the nomination of Jennifer Wilkerson as Secretary, with a second received by Lauren Lamberth. The vote was unanimous in a roll call vote.

Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Upon a review of the August 25, 2025 meeting minutes, Mr. Dan Haskell noted that the chair of the House State and Local Government Committee is Representative John Crawford. This revision will be made to the Minutes as well as the Office of Open Records Website.

Co-Chair Lapps referenced a public comment submitted by Mr. Peter Maher, which had been distributed to all committee members. Mr. Maher's comment suggested that the proposed August meeting minutes may have contained material omissions or did not sufficiently restate all comments made during the August meeting.

Co-Chair Lapps read Tennessee Code Annotated § 8-44-104 and relevant portions of Robert's Rules of Order and commentary, including Section 48:2, which address what details are required for public meeting minutes. Co-Chair Lapps asked if any committee member felt that changes were necessary to more fully reflect the meeting, noting that minutes are not intended to be verbatim. No other changes were requested.

With no further discussion, a motion to approve the proposed August meeting minutes, with one amendment noting Representative John Crawford as Chair of the House State and Local Government Committee, was made by Ambassador Victor Ashe and seconded by Dr. Karen Jackson. The vote to approve the minutes with one amendment was unanimous in a roll call vote.

Review and Approval of Public Comment Policy

A draft of a policy for public comments had been previously distributed to committee members for review and posted to the Comptroller's website. The committee engaged in substantial discussion regarding the policy.

Amendments were proposed to include language stating that written comments or requests to provide public comment at a committee meeting are "encouraged at least two (2) business days" prior to a meeting, and that all public comments submitted should address issues or topics germane to the responsibilities of the committee.

A motion to approve the public comment policy, as amended, was made by Ambassador Victor Ashe and seconded by Lauren Lamberth. The motion received nine (9) votes in favor and one (1) opposed. The motion carried, and the public comment policy was adopted.

Public Comment Period

At this time, the floor was opened for public comment. Comments were received from Mr. Robert Walker of the State Board of the League of Women Voters. Mr. Walker asked whether, if a committee member was absent, another representative from that organization would be permitted to participate.

Co-Chair Lapps noted that Tennessee statute governs how committee members are appointed and selected, and that the bylaws, once adopted, would outline the responsibilities of committee members. No additional public comments were received.

New Business:

Training and information regarding the Tennessee Open Meetings Act, as well as the scope and duties of the Advisory Committee on Open Government (ACOG), were provided by Assistant General Counsel for the Office of Open Records Counsel, Seth May, and Deputy Attorney General, Rachel Appelt.

Mr. May provided information on the Tennessee statutes governing open meetings, what constitutes a “meeting,” and the requirements for holding meetings and discussing business among members of a governing body under the Tennessee Open Meetings Act.

Ms. Appelt discussed the roles and scope of the ACOG committee, the committee’s authority to hold meetings at locations other than the Comptroller’s Office, and the requirements necessary to conduct such meetings.

A draft of the proposed bylaws was reviewed, including discussion regarding the authority of an ex officio member and/or their designee to vote. Potential conflicts of interest, or the possibility of conflicts for committee members were also discussed.

Suggested Topics for Future Meetings and Adjournment

The committee agreed that it would be appropriate to further review the need for a conflict-of-interest policy, as well as continue discussion of the bylaws, at the next meeting.

Future meetings were scheduled for February 26, 2026, and September 21, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. Central Time to be held at the Cordell Hull Building, in the Volunteer Conference Room on the 2nd floor.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 11:20 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Wilkerson, Secretary