

# NACo POLICY PROCESS

## ABOUT NACo

The National Association of Counties (NACo) unites America's 3,069 county governments. Founded in 1935, NACo brings county officials together to advocate with a collective voice on national policy, exchange ideas and build new leadership skills, pursue transformational county solutions, enrich the public's understanding of county government, and exercise exemplary leadership in public service.

## MISSION

Through NACo, county officials:

- Advocate with a collective voice on national policy
- Exchange ideas and build new leadership skills
- Pursue transformational, cost-effective solutions
- Enrich the public's understanding of county government, and
- Exercise exemplary leadership in public service.

## VISION

Healthy, vibrant and safe counties across the United States.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The board of directors has general supervision, management, and control of the business of the association and sits as the resolutions committee. The board approves the NACo work program and budget and makes interim policy between annual meetings. Board members serve for one year and must come from member counties.

## POLICY MAKING

NACo has three forms of policy pronouncements: the *American County Platform*; policy resolutions passed by the members at the annual meeting; and board resolutions on policy passed by the board of directors between annual meetings.

1. The *American County Platform* is NACo's permanent policy document. When necessary, it is amended at the annual meeting. Divided into substantive policy areas covered by ten policy steering committees, the platform reflects the philosophy and overall objectives of NACo's membership.
2. Policy resolutions are generally single-purpose documents addressing a specific issue or piece of legislation. Resolutions draw attention to a topic of current concern, clarify parts of the broadly worded platform, or set policy in areas not covered by the platform. These resolutions are valid until the next annual meeting, at which time they are reviewed by the appropriate steering committee and considered for inclusion in the platform. If they are not readopted or included in the platform, they expire.
3. Board resolutions are passed by the board between annual meetings and are valid until the next annual meeting, at which time they are reviewed by the appropriate steering

committee and considered by the board of directors and the general membership or they expire.

When necessary, the executive committee may make interim policy decisions between board meetings, provided the policy is not in opposition to an adopted policy of the board of directors or the membership.

The ten steering committees propose platform changes and resolutions to the board of directors, sitting as a resolutions committee, which reports the proposals to the membership at the annual business meeting. No platform change or resolution can be brought before the full NACo membership for discussion or debate unless it has been submitted to the appropriate steering committee. However, issues which clearly do not fit within the jurisdiction of an established steering committee may, at the discretion of the president, be brought before the resolutions committee. Because issues can be crosscutting among policy steering committees, more than one committee may review a resolution or platform change.

Issues which have been addressed by the resolutions committee may then be brought before the general meeting. The membership is the ultimate arbiter of what will or will not be NACo policy. The NACo staff carries out the policy of the association and represents counties only on those issues which have been approved through the policy process.

LUCC and RAC may propose policy to the appropriate committee of jurisdiction, but do not have the authority to enact or recommend policy to the board of directors.

The *American County Platform* and policy resolutions contained in this volume have been adopted by NACo members. The platform and resolutions are carefully considered statements of the needs and interests of county governments throughout the nation and will serve as a guide for NACo members and staff in the year ahead as they appear before legislative and administrative agencies to present the views of county governments.

## **PROCEDURES FOR SUBMITTING AND CONSIDERING NACO RESOLUTIONS**

The NACo resolutions process provides the membership with the ability to create national policies affecting county governments. The process is intended to be as open as possible, in order to allow participation from the entire membership. There are, however, some guidelines to ensure that the process is a relatively orderly one. The guidelines are as follows:

**Submitting Resolutions:** Resolutions and platform changes must be submitted electronically in an editable format to [resolutions@naco.org](mailto:resolutions@naco.org), to the steering committee staff person or NACo Legislative Director no later than 30 days prior to a NACo conference. These resolutions may be introduced at NACo conferences, including the Annual Conference, Legislative Conference or, in some cases, any other conference where the NACo Board of Directors convenes.

Resolutions should, if possible, be no more than one page in length and be simply and directly written. They should include an “**Issue**” statement, a “**Adopted Policy**” statement, a factually accurate “**Background**” statement and a “**Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact**” statement if possible. For those without a specific impact statement, the NACo steering committee staff will develop an

appropriate statement prior to submittal to the board. For resolutions, the “Issue” statement should be a short sentence and state the purpose of the resolution, the “Adopted Policy” section should specify a position or action by NACo and/or other entities, the “Background” section should clearly outline the county interest in the particular issue, and the “Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact” section should attempt to address potential impacts for counties in these areas, if known. Resolutions cannot overrule platform language, which has been ratified by the membership. NACo staff may make necessary changes to the resolutions to ensure that they are in the proper format.

The NACo Legislative Director, in consultation with the steering committee staff person, shall make a preliminary decision as to which steering committee(s) to initially refer the proposed resolution, and will be subject to review by the Policy Coordinating Committee at the conference.

**Distribution of Resolutions:** No later than 14 days prior to the Legislative and Annual conferences, all proposed resolutions pertinent to a steering committee and those acted upon at a previous NACo conference which need final disposition by the NACo Board and general membership will be sent to members of the appropriate steering committee. The steering committee chairs, vice-chairs, subcommittee chairs and vice-chairs will be sent material containing all steering committee resolutions and platform changes to be considered at a conference.

**The Role of the Policy Coordinating Committee/Request for Referrals:** The Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) consists of the chairs of each of the policy steering committees and the NACo Officers. It is the responsibility of this body to review all proposed resolutions and determine, prior to the meetings of the full steering committees, whether there are resolutions which must be considered by more than one steering committee because of a policy issue that cuts across steering committee jurisdictions.

The first meeting of the PCC is typically held prior to the steering committee meetings. Prior to, or during the first PCC meeting, it is the responsibility of steering committee chairs to request, through the NACo Legislative Director and the presiding NACo Officer, the opportunity to consider a resolution that has not been previously referred to it by NACo staff. If a subcommittee chair is interested in considering a resolution that was not referred to the full steering committee, he/she must, prior to the first PCC meeting, ask the steering committee chair to consider requesting a referral of the resolution.

For resolutions that have been referred to another committee, time must be made available at the steering committee meeting for the sponsor of the resolution or his/her representative to explain its intent. This presentation may also be made at a subcommittee meeting, but it shall not replace the presentation at the full steering committee.

**Emergency Resolutions Submitted After the 30 Day Time Limit:** Steering committees may also consider other resolutions or platform changes that were not submitted within the 30 day time limit. These so-called “emergency” resolutions are federal legislative or regulatory matters that could not have been foreseen 30 days prior to the conference, and is an issue of a timely

nature that NACo should consider action immediately. Inaction on the part of a submitter is not grounds for an emergency resolution.

Steering committees receiving emergency resolutions or platform changes may consider them only if two-thirds of the steering committee members present vote to review them. This vote and the vote resulting in the adoption or defeat of the actual resolution must be tallied and reported to the PCC at the conclusion of all steering committee meetings.

If a steering committee, after a two-thirds vote to take action, considered and ultimately adopted a resolution that was not anticipated before the first PCC meeting, the PCC, at the request of any steering committee chair, may table the resolution for consideration until the next NACo conference. The request to table must be approved during the PCC meeting by a majority of the steering committee chairs or their designees or officers present.

**The Subcommittee's Role:** NACo subcommittees usually meet prior to their steering committee to both receive specific, detailed information about their issues and to consider resolutions for later disposition by the full steering committee. Most, but not all, resolutions are usually considered first in a subcommittee. The subcommittee may consider the resolution referred to it by the steering committee chair and make a recommendation, with a recorded vote, to the full steering committee on the disposition of the resolution. A subcommittee does not have the ability to table or defeat a resolution, thus prohibiting full committee consideration. There is no specific requirement for subcommittees to make recommendations.

**Platform Changes/Existing Resolutions:** Platform changes are considered only at the Annual Conference. As with resolutions, they must be submitted to the NACo legislative staff at least 30 days prior to the conference.

Each year resolutions will automatically be deleted from the *American County Platform* at the following Annual Conference. At that conference, those resolutions that are still relevant must be incorporated into platform language or offered 30 days in advance as a “new” resolution to be considered by the appropriate steering committee. Resolutions passed by the NACo Board at the Legislative Conference must be reviewed by the appropriate steering committee and recommended for ratification by the general membership, or be dropped. Resolutions cannot be used to overturn or modify existing language in the platform.

**Presentation of Resolutions and Platform Changes to the NACo Board of Directors Sitting as a Resolutions Committee:** Each steering committee chair will report to the Resolutions Committee the platform changes and resolutions adopted by the steering committee. They will also report on the proposed disposition of resolutions adopted at any previous conference. Steering committees should make every effort to settle disputes on resolutions before the meeting of the NACo Board of Directors. They should consider blending and amending the resolutions into one compromise proposal or they should table the issue for further discussion. If those alternatives are not acceptable to the steering committees that have differing views, then the disputed resolution(s) shall be presented to the Board of Directors after all other resolutions have been considered and acted upon. The representative of the steering committee that

originally drafted the resolution shall present their resolution first, followed by a response and resolution from the other committee.

A steering committee chair shall report actions taken on all platform changes and resolutions, both as part of the resolutions “package” and during the chair’s report to the Board of Directors when it sits as a Resolutions Committee.

The chair’s report shall identify:

- those platform changes and resolutions that were adopted unanimously;
- those platform changes and resolutions that were adopted with some unrecorded “nay” votes; and
- those platform changes and resolutions that were adopted by roll call vote, announcing the “yeas” and “nays”.

**Minority Reports:** If a resolution is defeated during steering committee consideration, a one page minority report may be made on an action taken by roll call vote where the voting minority constituted at least 25 percent of those steering committee members present and voting. After announcing such a vote, the steering committee chair may allow a member of the minority to present the minority report to the board for informational purposes only. No board action is taken on the minority report.

### **STEERING COMMITTEE NOMINATIONS PROCESS**

Every spring, NACo calls for NACo steering committee nominations through the state associations of counties. Approximately one month before the NACo annual conference, county officials must submit their completed nomination forms to their state associations of counties. Generally, the President of the state association, in consultation with the state executive director, appoints state members to NACo’s steering committees. Nomination forms are sent to the state associations of counties, along with a list of the current steering committee members from their state and a sample announcement they may use to notify their membership about the process and the deadlines for submitting nominations. Affiliate nominations to steering committees must also follow the same process.

Applicants are urged to mark their first and second choices of steering committees on the nomination form. The state associations of counties will submit names electronically by a deadline determined by the NACo Legislative Director.

**The Eight and Two Rule:** NACo will make every effort to accommodate the nominee’s first choice of steering committee assignments. NACo will consider the state and regional balance on the steering committees and ensure that, at a minimum, the membership of each steering committee is at least two-thirds elected county officials. Only eight county officials from the same state will be appointed to any one steering committee, and no more than two persons from the same county may serve on any one steering committee. This does not include NACo presidential appointments.

Prior to the mailing of the appointment letters, the NACo staff will review the new steering committee rosters to ensure that there is geographic and demographic diversity within each committee and the above guidelines for membership by a state or county are followed.

**Appointments:** The NACo president will send each appointee a letter announcing their appointment to a steering committee. The NACo Legislative Director, Deputy Director, or an Associate Legislative Director will contact appointees with relevant information regarding the NACo policy process, committee membership links, schedules, the *American County Platform* and other relevant information.

Steering committee appointees will serve on the committee for one year and cannot transfer membership to another committee, or serve on more than one steering committee, during that year. (As with any other NACo member, however, the appointee is welcome to attend any other steering committee meeting to learn about its issues.) Committee appointees may serve simultaneously on NACo caucuses, standing committees, task forces, or ad hoc committees.

**Steering Committee Roles and Responsibilities:** Each policy steering committee has members who are nominated by the state associations of counties and appointed by the NACo president for one year. The committee chair and subcommittee chair are generally elected officials who are appointed by the NACo president for one year. At least two-thirds of the members of each steering committee should be elected officials, but many committees have a much greater elected representation. Steering committees are responsible for studying issues, recommending new policy positions, and carrying out the *American County Platform* through advocacy activities.

Committees review problems facing counties, identify areas of concern to counties, and make suggestions for federal, state, and county involvement. They build county and state support for recommended revisions in federal rules and regulations and assist in building state association participation in policy formulation and implementation processes. Committees also advise the NACo board on priorities, strategies, and tactics involving federal legislation, rules, and regulations, and they participate in special rallies, conferences, and meetings of the association to advance the objectives of the committee.

Platform amendments and resolutions from member counties are submitted to the appropriate steering committee for review and recommendation. At least one NACo staff member is assigned to each steering committee to work with the committee chair in arranging meetings and determining agendas. Each steering committee reviews legislation and issues within its jurisdiction. Committees usually meet at least twice a year, always at the annual conference and legislative conference. In many cases, informal arrangements are made for joint consideration of certain issues.

There are specific policy outreach expectations for every member of a steering committee. Each steering committee member needs to read and understand the established policy positions in the *American County Platform* within their respective jurisdictions. Each member also needs to be prepared to contact members of Congress on important policy issues, both in Washington, D.C. and in their districts and state. They should be prepared to discuss and inform constituents about

the importance of the policy positions taken by NACo, and suggest ways they can help. Steering committee members should be ready and able to contact local and state media outlets to inform and impress upon them the importance of the county positions on policy questions affecting their steering committee jurisdiction. This includes writing op-eds, letter to the editor, editorial boards, etc.

Members should also be prepared to convene in meetings, participate in coalitions, and use the “bully pulpit” of elected office to inform a broader audience of the importance of NACo’s policy issues. Because many issues cut across jurisdictional lines, steering committees may provide oversight of platform amendments and resolutions from other committees that affect their areas of jurisdiction. The specific committee jurisdictions are:

- **Agriculture and Rural Affairs:** All matters pertaining to legislation and administrative actions affecting agriculture; rural development programs; rural renewable energy development; research and extension; food safety; and USDA conservation programs.
- **Community, Economic, and Workforce Development:** All matters pertaining to housing programs; community and economic development; public works including the creation of affordable housing and housing options for different populations; residential, commercial, and industrial development; and building and housing codes.
- **Environment, Energy and Land Use:** All matters pertaining to air, water, energy, and land use; including water resources/management, stormwater; pesticides; air quality standards; climate change; solid, hazardous, and nuclear waste handling, transport, and disposal; national energy policy; renewable/alternative energy; alternative fuel vehicles; energy facility siting; electricity utility restructuring; pipeline safety; oil spills; superfund/brownfields; eminent domain; land use; coastal management; oceans; parks and recreation.
- **Finance, Pensions and Intergovernmental Affairs:** All matters pertaining to the financial resources of counties; fiscal management; federal assistance; municipal borrowing; county revenues; federal budget; federal tax reform; elections; and Native American issues.
- **Health:** All matters pertaining to public health and healthy communities, including disease and injury prevention and health promotion; health disparities reduction; financing delivering health care, including services for the uninsured, underinsured, and medically indigent; Medicaid; Medicare; long-term care; behavioral health services; substance abuse prevention and treatment; and services for persons with developmental disabilities.
- **Human Services and Education:** All matters pertaining to children’s issues; foster care; public assistance and income support; services to senior citizens and individuals with disabilities; immigration policy; social services; and elementary, secondary and post-secondary education.
- **Justice and Public Safety:** All matters pertaining to criminal justice and public safety systems, including criminal justice planning; law enforcement; courts; corrections; homeland security; community crime prevention; juvenile justice and delinquency prevention; emergency management; fire prevention and control; and civil disturbances.
- **Public Lands:** All matters relating to federally-owned public lands including federal land management programs; natural resource revenue sharing payments; payments in lieu of

taxes; and property tax immunity concerns.

- **Telecommunications and Technology:** All matters pertaining to telecommunications and technology policy, including, but not limited to, the county role as a telecommunications regulator, service provider, and consumer; cable services technology and implementation; information technology development and implementation; information technology innovation; e-governance; and geo-spatial data collection and utilization.
- **Transportation:** All matters pertaining to federal transportation legislation, funding and regulation and its impacts on county government, including highway and bridge development, finance and safety; public transit development and finance; transportation planning; airport development and service; passenger and freight railroads; ports and waterways; freight movement; and research and development of new modes of transportation.

**Task Forces:** In addition to the ten policy areas governed by steering committees, there are, occasionally and periodically, issues which impact the jurisdictions of several steering committees. Because these areas are not appropriate for limited consideration, they are often referred to special task forces for broader policy consideration than that offered initially by a single steering committee.

These task forces or other special review bodies, like steering committees, report their findings to the Board of Directors and the membership as a whole. Where permanent policy is required, the policies so adopted may be inserted into appropriate locations within the platform. Temporary or other impermanent policies are treated as general resolutions. Resolutions and platform changes recommended by a task force must be considered and adopted by the relevant steering committee(s) through the regular resolutions process.