The Joint Powers Act gives broad authority for governmental units to partner and cooperatively work with other governmental units. While there are required aspects that must be addressed in the agreement document, there are best practices that can lead to a smoother cooperative process from the beginning and throughout the partnership.

**What’s Required**

Agreements must address at least the following, pursuant to MN Statue 471.59:
- Each governing body must formally approve the JPA.
- If a board is created, it must be representative of all the parties.
- Agreement must have a clause enabling authority of the joint powers.
- The purpose of the agreement must be defined.
- The structure of governance and powers of the board must be defined.
- There must be a method of distributing and a strict accountability of all funds.
- The agreement must have definite beginning and end terms, and withdrawal and termination procedures.

**Top Priorities**

- Incorporate outside community members.
- Encourage engaged, focused board members.
- Meet as regularly as possible (e.g., monthly).
- Incorporate the people implementing the plan on the decision-making.
- Have a clear procedure for future changes such as amendments and adding new members.
- Have a plan on resolving disputes.

**Common Asks**

In a survey to which 49 county commissioners responded, these are the most common things that they either wished they had or were helpful to have upon joining their respective joint powers boards:

- A background and history of the organization, including past agendas, minutes, and budgets
- Comprehensive information on the current purpose, goals, bylaws, finances, and community interactions
- An orientation for new commissioners on serving on boards and how Joint Powers work
- Mentorship pairing between experienced and new commissioners

**Best Practices**

- Ensure a clear and shared understanding by all parties as to the purpose of the joint powers agreement.
- Periodically review the agreement to determine whether the purpose has or should change.
- Give new board members and staff orientations on serving in the organization.
- Prioritize financial stability and fairness.
- Adopt clear policies establishing what staff can do on their own and what needs to be done as a group.
- Establish communication guidelines and expectations to facilitate respectful, open, and thoughtful conversations.
- Be open to having uncomfortable discussions.
- Encourage and respect a diversity of opinions.
- Maintain strong connections to the broader community.
- Ensure there is a diversity in board members, including experience in serving on one.

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