

COMMITTEE BEST PRACTICES | SEPTEMBER 2018

INCLUSIVE COMMITTEE FORMATION

PROVOST COMMITTEES

Committee members are invited to serve to provide essential input into the decision-making and feedback gathering process. Members serve as representatives of the university looking out for the best interests of Vanderbilt as a whole, and work to ensure that all relevant constituencies are considered in meeting the charge and are appropriately consulted for input.

The Office of the Provost convenes the following types of committees:

[Advisory Committees and Working Groups](#) – This includes working groups, study groups, task forces, strategic planning, review and advisory committees to provide assessments, recommendations and reports on a given topic or area for functional impact or consideration of a new initiative. See the [Provost Office Initiatives Best Practice](#) document for more on how initiatives are selected. These committees are charged to do their work over a given time frame and are then closed.

[Search Committees](#) – These committees are formed to recommend to a hiring manager a new candidate for a given role.

[Standing Committees](#) – Two types of standing committees exist: 1) Provost Standing Committees who preside annually over given programs or areas and 2) University Standing Committees which are mandated by the Faculty Manual, and overseen by the Office of the Chancellor with direct support from the Office of the Provost.

All committees, including those that have closed, are listed on the [Office of the Provost](#) website.

BENEFITS OF HAVING INCLUSIVE AND DIVERSE COMMITTEES

A successful committee is dependent on a core of committed, dedicated and energetic individuals who share a common interest in the task at hand. The committee goals can only be accomplished by building a solid foundation of engaged and invested committee members with a strong leader or co-leaders. The goal in committee formation is to develop a broadly representative group that is inclusive and diverse on many dimensions including demographic and disciplinary diversity as well as diversity of faculty rank, employment status or student degree program.

Having a wide range of perspectives represented is critical to Vanderbilt's shared governance efforts because doing so ensures that the broad needs of the Vanderbilt community are represented in every committee effort. Being able to draw upon a diverse set of competencies and knowledge is essential if a committee is to successfully address the complex issues facing the university. A diverse committee allows for the group to better anticipate and consider the concerns and perspectives of all constituencies.

As an added benefit, research has shown that diverse teams can have better processes and produce better outcomes. From more accurate and objective group thinking to an expanded capacity for innovation, diverse and inclusive groups lead individual committee members to challenge their assumptions and keep biases in check. An article by [Inc.com](#) summarizes a number of studies that support this conclusion and offers insights on how to ensure diverse work teams are successful.

COMMITTEE FORMATION – OFFICE OF THE PROVOST PROCESS

1. **Nominations:** Deans of the Schools and Colleges or leaders of involved campus partners are asked to nominate faculty, students or staff (the exact mix of faculty, staff and/or students depends on the nature of the initiative). The Faculty Senate Executive Committee is also asked if they would like to nominate potential committee members. Self-nominations are also considered concurrently.
2. **Long List:** Nominators are asked to provide more names than the slots to be filled to account for availability and also to help build an inclusive team.
3. **Spread the Work:** The Office of the Provost maintains a list of those who have served or are currently serving on Provost or Chancellor appointed committees. The nominees are cross-referenced to ensure they have not been overly burdened with service and to ensure new individuals are engaged. The initial list is also checked for Faculty Senator representation (past and present senators).
4. **Short List:** After the information has been gathered on current service, an initial short list is assembled that strives to achieve constituency balance and a high-level of inclusivity.
5. **Formal Invitations and Public Notification:** The Provost will formally invite members to serve on the committee. The final committee composition and charge is posted on the Provost website and shared through MyVU and other distribution networks.
6. **Committee Members as Liaisons:** In the interest of keeping committees at a reasonable size, not all segments of all constituencies (e.g. departments, schools/colleges) will necessarily have a member on a committee. However, committee members are expected to connect broadly with others and serve as liaisons gathering feedback to bring back to the group. At the charge of the committee, the Provost may ask certain members to ensure that engagement with given constituencies is fully accomplished.