

Minutes: Act 133 Working Group Meeting #9

Thursday, August 28, 2025, 10:00-11:30 a.m.

Attendance: Lauren Hibbert, Sean Sheehan, Frank Nelson, Jenny Prosser, Kelly Pajala, Kate Paarlberg-Kvam, Tim Arsenault, Cynthia Shelton, Meghan O'Rourke, Kate Larose, Alicia Weiss, Susan Clark, Laura Cushman, Mohamed Diop

Meeting started at 10:05 with a round of introductions and an ice breaker question about what people like about the fall change in seasons.

The recording from the previous meeting had been split into two recordings. and was being updated on the Working Group's webpage to include the whole meeting. The transcript will also be updated to include the whole meeting.

Based on the agenda, the conversation began with Funding as an overarching topic that may be associated with many of the recommendations in the report. The topic was framed in two ways:

1. What should be funded by Towns as an expected cost of doing business versus what should be State-funded due to efficiencies, efforts to keep up with changing technology, resources that might be needed on demand rather than universally available at all times, etc.

2. Each topic in the report is likely to have a range of recommendations named. The range was described as "good, better, best." General cost information about each of those resource levels would be helpful.

Conversation on the subject of "funding" generated the following items:

- *The working group is still unclear about what will appear in the report as best practice recommendations, minimum legal standards, and gold standard recommendations for meetings that are accessible and inclusive.

- * It is important to frame the report in terms of standards and requirements for ALL and not call out ADA accessibility as a separate standard with extra costs.

* For each recommendation there will need to be an acknowledgement of any staffing, training, and/or technology costs that will go along with them.

* Several points were made about interpreter and translator services including:

- A description of the process for providing interpretive services in the Winooski School district. Speeches that can be prepared ahead of an event are translated in writing and audio interpretation is prepared. Audio equipment is owned by the school district and provided with technical assistance to event attendees.

- It was mentioned that for live interpretive services without materials prepared ahead of time the best quality services come from a person and not AI. Several people mentioned AI should not be considered a "good" resource for live interpretive services in our report.

- Resources shared: AALV (interpreters and translators), Vancro for ASL, Zoom's translation function. It was noted that getting set up for simultaneous interpretation with up to 15 headsets costs less than \$500, plus the cost of labor for the human interpreter - even the gold standard isn't exorbitant.

- Translation services and tools for the visually impaired for website content and written publications are easily available.

- The Federal rule for ADA accessibility of digital content from State and local governments goes into effect April 2026. The State has a [Digital Accessibility Steering Committee | Chief Marketing Office](#) that is developing resources for State Agencies to use in an effort for State Government to comply. Local governments would benefit from access to the same resources and should be educated about the Federal rule. The work being done by that steering committee is very labor intensive, but the work is long overdue.

- Engagement here requires a municipality to proactively provide interpretive services and make those services known, so that community members have incentive to attend meetings knowing that they will be able to participate.

*The workgroup is considering recommending mandatory websites for Towns. The conversation about mandatory websites for municipalities included:

- Some municipalities have forgone having a website because of Open Meeting Law posting requirements.
- It can be difficult for municipal officials to get approval for budget items both from their legislative body and the voters.
- The lack of modernization in our laws and standards is a systems issue, not an individual [official] one. There should be minimum standards for proficiency with certain technological resources among municipal officers and staff to reduce barriers to access and increase transparency.
- The working group has not voted on mandatory websites as a recommendation to be included in the report. Based on the conversation in a previous meeting it appeared to be a recommendation that had widespread support from working group members.

Feedback on the Draft Report Outline:

- The current outline appears to call out ADA accessibility as a separate item to be funded rather than including it as a universal cost of doing business.
- The report should include a section that describes the current state of municipal efforts to increase accessibility to meetings and use of universal design. The elections division and VLCT have annual surveys available that could provide some of that information.
- The working group would like the Secretary of State's office to create a list of recommendations for the report to be provided for the next meeting.
- Additional meetings need to be scheduled by the Secretary of State's Office.
- The Secretary of State's office intends to consult with subject matter experts during the drafting of sections of the report. The working group will have time during a future meeting to provide feedback and edits for the report.
- Points of disagreement will be identified in the report.
- The meeting on the 12th will happen as scheduled to wrap up discussion from today's agenda and other items the working group feels are unfinished.
- A facilitator and meeting materials to create a structured conversation about the report would be helpful at future meetings.

Meeting adjourned at 11:41 a.m.

