



ACIR is [25-member agency](#) of the State of Connecticut created in 1985 to study system issues between the state and local governments and to recommend solutions as appropriate. The membership is designed to represent the state legislative and executive branches, municipalities and other local interests, and the general public.

The four facets to this work are:

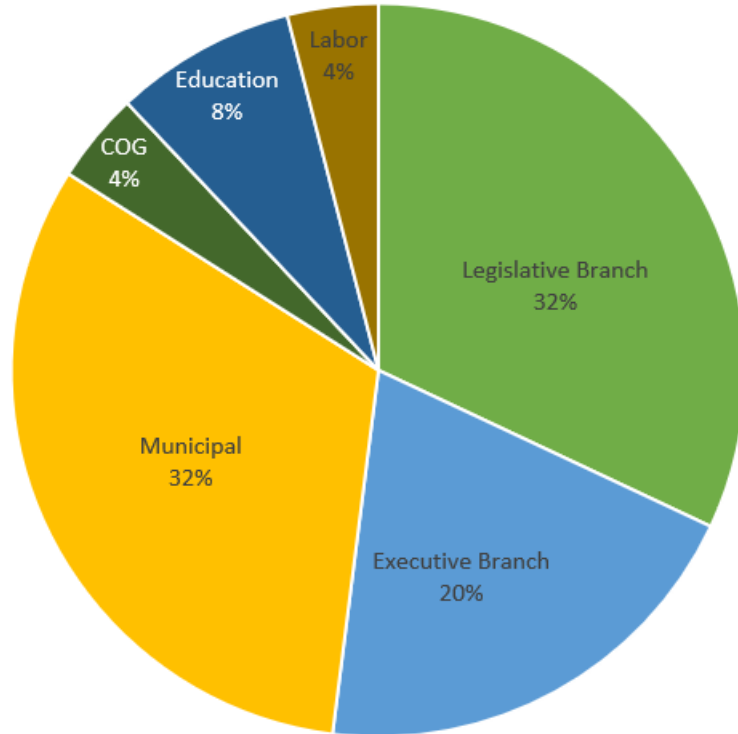
- serve as a forum for consultation between state, regional, and local officials;
- conduct research on intergovernmental issues;
- encourage and coordinate studies of intergovernmental issues by universities, research and consulting organizations, and others;
- and initiate policy development and make recommendations for consideration by all levels and branches of government.

The discussion transitioned to the [Compendium of Statutory and Regulatory Mandates on Municipalities Connecticut](#). CGS Section 2-32c. *“On or before the second Wednesday after the convening of the regular session of the General Assembly in 2020, and every four years thereafter on such second Wednesday, the commission shall submit to the General Assembly a report which lists each existing state mandate, as defined in subsection (a) of section 2-32b, and which (1) categorizes each mandate as constitutional, statutory or executive, and (2) describes the potential impacts on local governments implementing the mandate. In each report the commission may also make recommendations on state mandates for consideration by the commission. On and after October 1, 1996, the report shall be submitted to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to appropriations and budgets of state agencies, to any other joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance and, upon request, to any member of the General Assembly. A summary of the report shall be submitted to each member of the General Assembly if the summary is two pages or less and a notification of the report shall be submitted to each member if the summary is more than two pages. Submission shall be by mailing the report, summary or notification to the legislative address of each member of the committees or the General Assembly, as applicable. The provisions of this subsection shall not be construed to prevent the commission from making more frequent recommendations on state mandates.”*

An open-ended discussion continued on potential revisions of this statute due to the lack of membership participation, difficult meeting quorums and appointment vacancies. And considering whether ACIR’s membership participation is due the convergence of COVID and the change to all remote meetings, appointees not understanding their role, the appointment process, and changes in the General Assembly itself. It was also the opinion of the participants that changes could potentially lead to more ownership of the role and better participation. It was acknowledged this was not the only remedy needed. A recommendation was made to look at what can be learned from national organizations and other states’ ACIRs. **There was broad consensus that a return to in-person meetings, at a minimum alternating monthly remote/in person should be considered.**

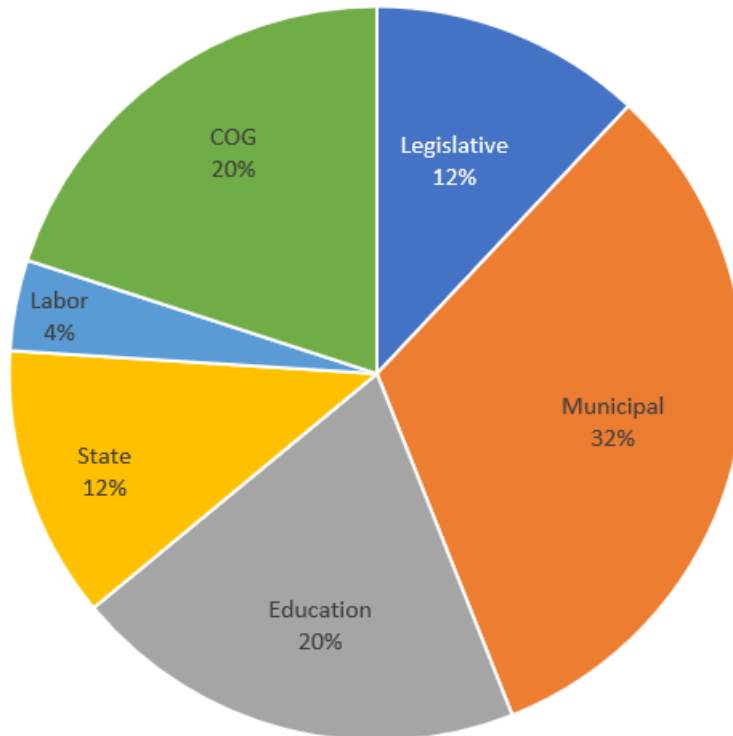
Participants were directed to the following charts on ACIR’s framework set up in statute – ACIR MEMBER STATUTORY APPOINTING AGENCY and the current composite membership – ACIR MEMBERSHIP BY APPOINTEE.

## ACIR MEMBER STATUTORY APPOINTING AGENCY



■ Legislative Branch ■ Executive Branch ■ Municipal ■ COG ■ Education ■ Labor

## ACIR MEMBERSHIP BY APPOINTEE



■ Legislative ■ Municipal ■ Education ■ State ■ Labor ■ COG

The recommendation from this portion of the workshop was for ACIR to consider the following questions:

- Should one or more positions on the ACIR be reserved specifically for General Assembly members?
- Should a position on the ACIR be reserved for someone having expertise at the federal level?
- Explore designee and delegate options. Further review needed of the Office of Policy Management legal notes.
- Should some appointments be made directly by organizations that currently nominate potential members for appointment by the Governor?
- Should ACIR membership vote on the Commission leadership versus Governor appointment?
- Should members who do not attend be replaced by statute? Review terms of members along with their attendance record prior to re-appointment.
- Reevaluate role of the ACIR's mandates and other statutory reporting.

## 2. Workshop Visioning

Before leaving for the break members were asked to share on paper one priority or a challenge which they felt was significant for the action to be taken at the last portion of the workshop. The responses ranged from terse to lengthy statements, but thematically consistent with easier discussions and comments provided in an earlier ACIR survey.

After a brief break the members moved into the Visioning portion of the Workshop. ***What is ACIR doing, why is it doing it, and what could/should it be doing?***

Those written priority actions were used as talking points to drive the Visioning. There was a lengthy discussion of ACIR's potential and limitations regarding a range of topics and key points on how ACIR best serves the State. The questions and answers posed are summarized below:

- ACIR is an apolitical commission, strictly advisory to the Governor, state agencies and General Assembly. It should be responsive to the direction of the General Assembly priorities and its operation model should be that of program review and investigation. Should the definition be redefined or the mission and role?
- ACIR's function should be collaborative at all levels of government and sectors.
- ACIR's broad membership allows for unique subject matter experts. Disseminating knowledge through reports, testimony, symposiums
- ACIR should develop data driven policy, yet needs resources and research capabilities. Similar to our CT legislative research offices and the former Office of Program Review & Investigation. It was noted that further conversations are needed to align ACIR with a policy institute and collaboration with a school of public policy.
- The Compendium of Statutory and Regulatory Mandates on Municipalities, while comprehensive, is duplicative of other reports from the General Assembly. ACIR and its staff would be better served focusing on a narrowing review of previous statutory mandates from impact level by size of municipality.
- ACIR is most effective when it focuses on long-term priorities -- building consensus through its partners. As a supporting role in coordination between other state agencies where it does not exist.

Drilling down further into topics for *“What ACIR should be doing?”* the Workshop focused more on the objectives listed above. Where there is consensus, the full ACIR membership should review their body of reports created just prior to COVID and more recently -- selecting more manageable subtopics to move forward with the current staffing limitations. \*

*Examples of topics raised:*

- Address and develop efficiencies in state/local operations.
- Assist in bringing expertise to local governments.
- Taxation value for government services
- Economic competitiveness challenges for 169 municipalities
- Aspects of the [Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act \(IIJA\)](#), [Property Tax Reform](#), [Governor’s Bill 7192](#), [An Act Concerning Municipal and Regional Opportunities and Efficiencies](#) and [accompany testimony](#) etc.

*\* Strategies and opportunities to build upon the work -- host a symposium on each topic. Inviting/engaging public and private sector, institutionalizing role, and building partnerships and relevance.*

### **3. Workshop Action:**

The Workshop gathered momentum and the members determined they would forgo the break and work through the last exercise on the opportunities for ACIR to take Action. ***What actions can/should be taken to achieve ACIR's vision? What are the barriers, opportunities, and timelines?***

There was a lengthy discussion of potential approaches and opportunities for the ACIR to consider for acting on its Vision. Noted were recurring concepts among the priorities, definitions of ACIR’s role, challenges and opportunities. This is positive step towards creating an achievable workplan and coincides with opportunities are summarized below:

#### **I. CHALLENGES:**

- Lack of participation
- Not seen as advisory or having influence by General Assembly.
- Need to reset priorities and concentrate on specific versus broad topics
- Need direction from leadership for expectations/focus
- Determine/debate if submitting testimony on bills is within the scope of ACIR. (See reference to Opportunities – ACIR role.)
- Budget for full-time staff. Need to show value of organization to get support for staffing.

#### **II. OPPORTUNITIES:**

- The need to Institutionalize the role of ACIR at all levels of government.
- Data driven research and weight of the organization will drive decisionmakers for ACIR support.

- Develop the ability to advise and advocate for policy.
- Build consensus within ACIR on role by setting agenda and voting.
- ACIR role:
  1. On an advisory basis receiving referrals (similar to zoning regs review)
  2. Review JF reports when potential legislation is raised/discussed and voted on by membership.
    - Interagency cooperation
    - Governmental/municipal impacts
- ACIR roadshow to General Assembly, State Agencies, municipalities, press.
- Invite committee of cognizance leadership to an ACIR meeting when discussing topics.
- Develop a workplan based on priorities and data driven research.

### III. DEVELOP A WORKPLAN

- Specific Topic/Initiatives from “What ACIR should be doing”
- Develop a yearly workplan – include legislative reports, key work items, membership terms. Measure yearly progress of workplans.
- Establish subcommittees for each established tasks, with specific role and facilitator
- Build the policy connection to UCONN and other institutes of higher learning (E.g. Yale).
- Engage with leadership to discuss building upon work previously done and future reports before progressing. Request funding or work with policy groups. (E.g. Education Cost Share, Tax Reform, Special Education Funding).
- Create a focused review of 3-4 previous statutory mandates from impact level by size of municipality.

## 4. Workshop Roadmap:

It was clear from the three-hour conversation there is significant organizational work for ACIR to take on to build upon -- and build up -- its role as outlined in statute. Specific topics covered in the opportunities, challenges and developing a workplan will need to continue through consensus building and partnerships at future full meetings of the Commission.

As a priority to reimagining ACIR the first steps:

1. Building partnerships by being relevant and responsive to agencies set out in statute and inviting legislative leadership and key partners to meetings to discuss future vision for ACIR.
2. Develop a comprehensive yearly workplan outlining the initiative, resources/partnerships, activities, and the timeline for the outcome to guide how the plan will be implemented.
3. In the last quarter of 2023 soliciting participation from ACIR members to serve on three (3) subcommittees for:
  - Statutory changes to ACIR membership as established in Sec. [2-79a](#) to make ACIR more effective.
  - Address the relevance of the Compendium of Statutory and Regulatory Mandates on Municipalities Connecticut as defined [Section 2-32c](#) of the Connecticut General Statutes.
  - Building capacity for funding, staff support and the future policy connection.

# History and Statutory Framework for Connecticut’s Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR)

Connecticut’s Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (CT ACIR) is a 25-member state agency formed by legislation passed in 1984. Connecticut is one of 25 states that had established an ACIR or similar entity as of 2009, but one of only ten with a still-operating ACIR at that time (Cole 2011). The legislation creating the CT ACIR actually established it with a 1989 termination date under the state’s since-repealed Sunset Law, but that date was extended multiple times and, ultimately, the group outlived the Sunset Law.

The CT ACIR's purpose, as specified in Section 2-79a of the Connecticut General Statutes, is to enhance coordination and cooperation between the state and local governments. Members represent municipalities, the legislative and executive branches of state government, the general public, and other local, regional, or statewide interests.

The CT ACIR initially received annual appropriations and employed an executive director, a research analyst, and part time clerical assistance. A Legislative Branch agency at first, legislation in 1991 moved it to the Executive Branch, where it has remained. Physically, the CT ACIR has always been housed at the state Office of Policy & Management (OPM) and its staff became OPM staff upon its move to the Executive Branch.

In its early years, the CT ACIR studied and reported on 1-3 topics per year, sometimes recommending legislation based on its findings. The first major report, *Home Rule in Connecticut: Its History, Status, and Recommendations for Change*, had been assigned to the CT ACIR by a special act of the legislature in 1986 and was published in 1987. Two follow-ups were issued in 1989. Those and other special CT ACIR reports are listed in Table 1.

1987	Home rule in Connecticut: its history, status, and recommendations for change
1987	Impact of the timing of state aid decisions on local budgetmaking
1988	Independent special taxing districts in Connecticut
1989	Defining statewide vs. local concerns: Can it be done and is it necessary: a supplement to ACIR's 1987 report on Home Rule in Connecticut
1989	Solid waste management practices in Connecticut municipalities: database
1989	The state of state/local relations in Connecticut
1990	Spending in special and other funds in Connecticut municipalities
1990	Local government cooperative ventures in Connecticut
1994	Connecticut Municipalities In Crisis: Can Regional Efforts Help?
1995	Cost estimates for selected statutory mandates on municipalities in Connecticut
1996	Recommendations on Assisting the Financing of Local Government in Connecticut
1996	Local government cooperative ventures in Connecticut
2000	Local government cooperative ventures in Connecticut
2000	The Rural Collector Road Program Project Report
2020	Report of the Task Force to Promote Municipal Shared Services
2020	Report Regarding Issued Executive Orders Relative to the COVID-19 Pandemic for Priority Continuance and Potential Legislative Codification

2022	Final Report on Remote Meetings per Sec. 154 of JSS PA 21-2
2022	Report on Home Rule and Local Control in CT

Table 1’s list of special reports does not include two multi-year series of reports that began within a year of each other. The first is based on an annual survey of the budget adoption experiences of the state’s municipalities and regional school districts. Those studies began in 1990-1991, prompted by the appearance that communities were experiencing greater difficulty in adopting budgets and members’ concern that little systematic data were available to evaluate the apparent problem. The CT ACIR conducted a survey and issued a report that year and continued to do so annually with little change until pausing that work with the onset of COVID-19.

A year after beginning its municipal budget adoption work, the CT ACIR, in conjunction with the Governor, surveyed municipalities to identify which state mandates were considered most onerous. The group evaluated and reported on the fifteen most-cited mandates and, following further work, the legislation passed in 1993 required the ACIR to report annually on the mandates created or modified by each year’s legislative sessions. The CT ACIR also was required to prepare and update a compendium of all statutory and regulatory mandates. That work has also continued to the present with the exception of a two-year break in mandate reporting imposed by legislation in 2017.

The post-1990 decline in the number of special reports listed in Table 1 suggests the CT ACIR’s mandates and municipal budget experiences reporting reduced its capacity for the deep dives it had previously done into a variety of topics. The ACIR’s published reports, however, do not account for all of its work. Early CT ACIR annual reports mention workshops, at least some leading to legislation, and the group later began sponsoring or cosponsoring symposiums and conferences on a variety of topics. Some but possibly not all of the workshops or symposiums not associated with a report in Table 1 are itemized in Table 2.

1998	Getting the Job Done in Cities and Towns (municipal service delivery systems)
1999	Special Education and the Town-School Relationship
1999	Workshop on Municipal Cooperative Ventures at 1999 CCM Convention
2002	Local Government And Education Funding: Issues And Opportunities
2004	Regional Planning Organizations: Better Use of a Hidden Asset
2006	Municipal Shared Services: The Road Ahead

CT ACIR files include proceedings for one of those events and recordings of three, but otherwise little record of the findings and recommendations of that work. A study of municipal fiscal challenges undertaken in 2007-08 ended with cancelation of a symposium intended for early 2009 due to a lack of funding.

The loss of support in 2009 to wrap up the group’s work on municipal fiscal challenges reflected long-term changes in CT ACIR staffing. After following the group to the Executive Branch in 1991, the group’s staff continued their focus on CT ACIR work for more than a decade even though they were then employed by the agency, not the group. They did have non-ACIR assignments, perhaps increasing with time, but the first major reduction to ACIR staffing occurred around 2003, when the executive director retired and was not replaced. In 2009, furthermore, the remaining staff member was re-assigned to other work in the agency and the CT ACIR staffing role was added



to the responsibilities of another agency staff member, who remains the only staff for the group while retaining his other duties.

The CT ACIR was able to continue its mandates and municipal budget experiences work with its more limited staffing but lacked its previous capacity to expand on that work or to take on other studies. Due to the increasing relevance of intergovernmental issues, however, there were many discussions of the group's role, both inside and outside the group.

By 2013, the legislature's Commission on Municipal Opportunities and Regional Efficiencies (MORE) was considering new approaches to state and local government. Its subcommittees and working groups, addressing education budgets, mandates, municipal efficiencies, municipal tax authority, regional entities, and special education. The synergy with the mission of the CT ACIR is clear and some group members were active participants. One of the legislative leaders who set that initiative in motion is now chair of the CT ACIR.

Following his election in 2018, Governor Lamont established a transition team and one of its committees, which focused on shared municipal services, included members of the CT ACIR. That led to legislation creating the Task Force to Promote Municipal Shared Services, which included the entire ACIR and leaders of certain legislative committees. The CT ACIR also that year modified the approach to mandates reporting to reduce the amount of staff time consumed by that work. With a combination of its own staff and legislative staff the ACIR was able to host multiple working group meetings leading to submission of a report in early 2020, largely written by one ACIR member, with specific legislative recommendations for that year's and future legislative sessions.

The arrival of COVID-related shutdowns just weeks later prevented immediate consideration of the task force recommendations and the CT ACIR shifted preparing COVID response guidance for a wide range of municipal functions. It is important to highlight here the extent to which the ACIR's expanding role depended on ACIR members and others volunteering increasing amounts of time and effort to do much of the actual research and report preparation that would have been the responsibility of staff in the years that the ACIR previously produced recommendations and reports at the same scale.