

**Advisory Handbook for Councils for the
Development of Policies and Procedures
Required by the Form of Government**

Policies and Procedures Required for Sessions

Policies and Procedures Required for Presbyteries

Policies and Procedures Required for Synods

**Policies and Procedures Required
for the General Assembly**

Recommended by the Form of Government Task Force

Established by the 217th General Assembly (2006)
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Policies and Procedures Guide for the Work of the Session

Through the congregation God’s people carry out the ministries of proclamation, sharing the Sacraments, and living in covenant life with God and each other. In the life of the congregation, individual believers are equipped for the ministry of witness to the love and grace of God in and for the world. The congregation reaches out to people, communities, and the world to share the good news of Jesus Christ, to gather for worship, to offer care and nurture to God’s children, to speak for social justice and righteousness, to bear witness to the truth and to the reign of God that is coming into the world (G-1.0101).

The session is the council charged with governance in the congregation under the oversight of the presbytery of which the congregation is a member. The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity lists three primary purposes for the session in its administration. Known as “The Notes of the Reformed Church” (F-1.0303), they are summarized as:

- (1) the true preaching of the Word of God, in which God has revealed himself to us, as the writings of the prophets and apostles declare;
- (2) the right administration of the Sacraments of Christ Jesus, with which must be associated the Word and promise of God to seal and confirm them in our hearts; and
- (3) ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God’s Word prescribes, whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished.

Councils within our denomination are mutually interconnected. Each council has an expansive range of unique responsibilities; however, the life and ministry of each council is subject to review by the next higher council (G 3.0109a). In this review, certain constitutional requirements must be addressed. What follows is a listing of those areas in which a presbytery is required to or justified in reviewing the work of the session of a congregation. The purpose of this review is for mutual awareness of and encouragement in mission. The value of review is in shared knowledge rather than meticulous compliance.

The proposed Form of Government requires that “each council shall develop a manual of administrative operations that will specify the form and guide the work of mission in that body” (G-3.0107). The following list does not intend to be exhaustive of all actions that might now be included in a presbytery’s Manual of Administrative Operations. It does seek to identify those instances in the proposed Form of Government where specific policies or rules are required. In every case, a session should ask whether any existing policies of the session meet the expectations of a particular provision.

Reference	Constitutional Provision	Questions or Options to Consider
F-1.01 G-1.0101	Each congregation is charged to perform especially the ministries of proclamation, sharing the Sacraments, and living in covenant life with God and each other.	Does the session give evidence of a defined mission?
F-3.0106 G-3.0201	Nurturing the faith of members & seeing to the proper preparation of persons for office.	Has the session sought out members to be encouraged to consider their call to the office of minister of Word and Sacrament and recommended and supported those who undertake this process?
G-3.0201	Session is directed to an expansive list of responsibilities.	Are routine responsibilities carried out by the session? Is there evidence of energy, intelligence, and imagination in the work of the session as it fulfills its work?
G-3.0107 G-3.0205 G-4.0101 G-4.0102	Certain corporate and financial practices and safeguards are defined for each congregation and session.	Is the congregation incorporated? Do the minutes of the session and congregation give evidence of adequate insurance? Are financial reports regularly presented and annually reviewed or audited? Has the session prepared and approved a budget?
G-1.0303 G-1.0304 G-1.04	Members are to be trained, received, and nurtured.	What opportunities are given for members to be received? Is there a regular program of member nurture after joining the congregation?

Reference	Constitutional Provision	Questions or Options to Consider
G-1.0303 W-2.0311- .0314	The Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are acts of the whole church and authorized by a council.	Is there a program of preparation for Baptism offered to parents and unbaptized adults? Are regular observances of the Lord's Supper authorized? ... special observances reported?
G-3.0108 - 3.0204	Proper and adequate records.	Is there evidence of minutes maintained and reviewed regularly? Is there evidence that membership rolls are current and justly managed?
G-1.05	The congregation holds meetings.	Is an annual meeting held? Has required business been dealt with? Are special meetings appropriately called, reported and minutes approved?
G-3.0104 G-2.0203 G-2.0602	Elections in the congregation are to be fair, just, and inclusive.	Is a nominating process in place that represents the diversity of the congregation and is made up of a majority not currently in active service as ruling elders or deacons? Is evidence given of the concerns for diversity being addressed?
G-2.0204	Preparing and examining candidates for office and ordaining or installing them.	Has the session prepared and examined those elected by the congregation? Are there criteria to assess their fitness for office? Was a service of ordination/installation held prior to the beginning of their service?
G-2.0206	Elders and deacons serve for specific terms.	Are ruling elders and deacons grouped in classes and do terms meet constitutional standards?
G-3.0106 G-3.0107 G-3.0203	Meetings conducted decently and in order.	Are dockets prepared and material made available for discussion? Is some form of procedure agreed to and followed? Do meetings include opportunity for spiritual reflection and prayer? Has the session approved a quorum for session meeting?
G-3.0107	Manual of administrative operations.	What policies have been developed and approved by the session for the routine administration of the congregation's life?
G-3.0107	Consultative mission strategy.	Has the presbytery initiated discussions with the session as to mutually beneficial mission activities?
G-3.0107 G-3.0202	Participation in the work of presbytery.	Are representatives of the session in attendance as commissioners at meetings of the presbytery? Are reports of meetings given to the session? Is responsible financial support of the mission of the larger church a part of the session's work? Are any directives from the presbytery properly spread upon the minutes?
G-3.0110	The work of commissions.	Did the session appoint any commissions? Were the directives specific and clear? Were all actions reported back to the session?

Policies and Procedures Guide for the Work of the Presbytery

The presbytery is the council serving as a corporate expression of the church within a certain district. The presbytery is responsible for the government of the church throughout its district, and for assisting and supporting the witness of congregations to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that all congregations become signs in and for the world of the new reality God has made available to all in Jesus Christ. As it leads and guides the witness of its congregations, the presbytery shall bear in mind the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304) and the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed congregations have identified themselves through history (F-1.0303).

Councils within our denomination are mutually interconnected. Each council has an expansive range of unique responsibilities; however, the life and ministry of each council is subject to review by the next higher council (G-3.0109a). The purpose of this review is for mutual awareness of and encouragement in mission. The value of review is in shared knowledge rather than meticulous compliance.

The proposed Form of Government requires that “each council shall develop a manual of administrative operations that will specify the form and guide the work of mission in that body” (G-3.0107). The following list does not intend to be exhaustive of all actions that might now be included in a presbytery’s manual of administrative operations. It does seek to identify those instances in the proposed Form of Government where specific policies or rules are required. In every case, the presbytery should ask whether any existing policies of the presbytery meet the expectations of a particular provision.

Reference	Constitutional Provision	Questions or Options Consider
G-3.0104	Each council shall develop procedures and mechanisms for promoting and reviewing that body’s implementation of the church’s commitment to inclusiveness and representation.	Does the presbytery choose to retain an entity comparable to the current committee on representation (COR) to serve this purpose? If a COR is retained, what is the appropriate makeup of such a committee in its context? If this responsibility is lodged with another presbytery entity, how will the presbytery approve its plan for complying with the church’s commitment to inclusiveness and representation? How and on what basis will the presbytery review the committee’s implementation of its plan? If no such committee or other entity is employed, by what process will the presbytery ensure compliance?
G-3.0105	Moderators of councils higher than the session shall be elected for such terms as the council determines.	Does the presbytery operate on a calendar year? Should the moderator serve for more than one year?
G-3.0105	Councils shall provide by rule who shall preside in the absence of the moderator.	In the absence of the moderator, who most appropriately should preside at a presbytery meeting (e.g. the vice moderator, immediate past moderator, etc.)? Is this something that state law requires be part of the presbytery bylaws?
G-3.0105	The clerk of a presbytery shall be called stated clerk, shall be elected by the council for a definite term as it may determine.	How long should the clerk’s term be? What is the learning curve for this officer? How often should it be reviewed?
G-3.0108	The clerk of each council shall make recommendation to that body for the permanent safekeeping of the body’s records with the Presbyterian Historical Society or other similarly equipped records storage facility.	Has the clerk made this recommendation? Is it consistent with the intent of ensuring the permanent accessibility and security of the records?

Reference	Constitutional Provision	Questions or Options Consider
G-3.0109a	Each council shall review annually or biennially, based on the body's meeting frequency, the proceedings and actions of all entities related to the body, all officers able to act on behalf of the body, and lower councils within its jurisdiction.	Has the presbytery reviewed and made appropriate revision to its existing processes and guidelines for the review of session minutes, the actions of officers, and other proceedings to ensure that they are consistent with the revisions in the Form of Government?
G-3.0110	Councils may designate by their own rule such committees and commissions as they deem necessary.	What committee or other organizational structure has the presbytery developed to support the implementation of its identified mission? What gifts and skills are needed for those serving within that structure? How has accountability been assured and by what process shall those units report to the body and have their work evaluated?
G-3.0110b	A quorum of any commission shall be established by the designating body but in no case shall be less than a majority of its members (except as limited by D-5.0204).	Has the presbytery established a uniform policy regarding the makeup and quorum of any commission it creates, or will it attend to these specifics on a case-by-case basis? If the latter, does the presbytery have guidelines to advise the stated clerk or the presbytery as it constitutes and charges any commission?
G-3.0111	A council shall make provision in its manual of administrative operations (G-3.0107) for the process of election of executive staff and the hiring of other staff, description of the responsibilities of the position, method of performance review, and the manner of termination of employment.	Has the presbytery approved personnel policies and do those policies include the required items? Is a process in place to guide the calling of executive staff as well as hiring other staff? Are these policies consistent with the secular employment laws of the state as appropriate?
G-3.0112	All councils higher than the session shall have a process for nominating persons to serve in positions requiring election by the council.	Has the presbytery developed such a process and organized itself to implement it? Does this process ensure that the presbytery can make nominations from the floor? Are there clear expectations stated for those serving in presbytery elected positions and are there procedures in place for evaluating the effectiveness of those serving in presbytery positions? Are terms clearly stated where appropriate?
G-3.0201	Presbyteries shall provide by rule for moderators when the session is without a moderator for reasons of vacancy or inconvenience.	Does the presbytery have such a rule?
G-3.0301	The presbytery shall adopt and communicate to the sessions a plan for determining how many elders each session should commission to represent it at presbytery meetings.	Does the presbytery have a plan? When will the plan be communicated to sessions?
G-3.0303e	Presbytery has the authority to consider and act upon requests from congregations for permission to take the actions regarding real property as described in G-4.0206.	What entity within the presbytery will consider these matters and make recommendations?
G-3.0304	A presbytery may set its own quorum, but it shall not be fewer than three ministers of the Word and Sacrament who are members of the presbytery and three elder commissioners from three different congregations.	What is an appropriate quorum for the presbytery? Should it be higher than the minimum? Has this been adopted by the presbytery?

Reference	Constitutional Provision	Questions or Options Consider
G-3.0307	It (presbytery) shall be guided in this determination by written criteria developed by the presbytery for validating ministries within its bounds.	Does the presbytery have written criteria for the validation of ministries?
G-3.0307	The presbytery shall examine each minister of the Word and Sacrament or candidate who seeks membership in it on his or her Christian faith and views in theology, the Sacraments, and the government of this church.	Does the presbytery have a process for examining prospective members? Does it comply with the constitutional requirements?
G-3.0307	Non-congregationally based ministers of the Word and Sacrament may administer the Sacraments at times and places as established by the presbytery.	How do non-congregationally based ministers of the Word and Sacrament secure permission for administering the Sacraments? Are there predetermined situations where permission is automatic?
G-3.0308	Each presbytery shall develop and maintain mechanisms and processes to serve as pastor and counselor to ministers, commissioned pastors, and Certified Christian Educators of the presbytery; to facilitate the relations between the presbytery and its congregations, ministers, commissioned pastors, and Certified Christian Educators; and to settle difficulties on behalf of the presbytery where possible and expedient.	<p>Does the presbytery have mechanisms and processes for this? Are there existing entities to provide such care?</p> <p>Will the presbytery continue the committee on ministry structure or does some other process seem more appropriate?</p> <p>What is the best way to settle difficulties? Is there a mechanism in place for this?</p>
G-3.0308	Each presbytery shall develop and maintain mechanisms and processes to guide, nurture, and oversee the process of preparing to become a minister of the Word and Sacrament.	<p>Are there processes and mechanisms in place for this? Do any new procedures need to be developed?</p> <p>See separate manual for preparing for ordained ministry.</p>
G-3.0308	To facilitate the presbytery's oversight of inquirers and candidates, reception of members, approval of calls for pastoral services and invitations for temporary pastoral services, oversight of congregations without pastors, dissolution of relationships, dismissal of members, and its close relationship with both member congregations and member ministers, it may delegate its authority to designated entities within the presbytery. Such entities shall be composed of elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament in approximately equal numbers, bearing in mind the principles of diversity and participation in F-3.0303. All actions carried out as a result of delegated authority must be reported to the presbytery at its next regular meeting.	<p>Are there processes and mechanisms in place for this? Do any new procedures need to be developed?</p> <p>See separate manuals for preparing for ordained ministry and for relationships between congregations and ministers of the Word and Sacrament.</p>

Policies and Procedures Guide For the Work of the Synod

The synod is the intermediate council “responsible for the life and mission of the church throughout its region and for supporting the ministry and mission of its presbyteries as they seek to support the witness of congregations, to the end that the church throughout its region becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness” (G-3.0401). As it meets, it is composed of commissioners elected by its constituent presbyteries.

As with all councils, the synod is charged to bear in mind the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304) and the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed communities have identified themselves through history (F-1.0303) as it defines and carries out its mission.

Councils within our denomination are mutually interconnected. Each council has an expansive range of unique responsibilities; however, the life and ministry of each council is subject to review by the next higher council (G-3.0109a). The purpose of this review is for mutual awareness of and encouragement in mission. The value of review is in shared knowledge rather than meticulous compliance.

The proposed Form of Government requires that “each council shall develop a manual of administrative operations that will specify the form and guide the work of mission in that body” (G-3.0107). The following list does not intend to be exhaustive of all actions that might now be included in a synod’s manual of administrative operations. It does seek to identify those instances in the proposed Form of Government where specific policies or rules are required. In every case, the synod should ask whether any existing policies of the synod meet the expectations of a particular provision.

Reference	Constitutional Provision	Questions or Options to Consider
G-3.0104	Each council shall develop procedures for promoting and reviewing that body’s implementation of the church’s commitment to inclusiveness and representation.	Does the synod choose to retain an entity comparable to the current committee on representation (COR) to serve this purpose? If a COR is retained, what is the appropriate makeup of such a committee in its context? If this responsibility is lodged with another synod unit, how will the synod approve its plan for complying with the church’s commitment? How and on what basis will the synod review the committee’s implementation of its plan? If no such committee or other unit is employed, by what process will the synod ensure compliance?
G-3.0105	Councils may provide by rule who shall preside in the absence of the moderator.	In the absence of the moderator, who most appropriately should preside at a synod meeting (e.g. the vice moderator, immediate past moderator, etc.)? Is this something that state law requires be part of the synod’s bylaws?
G-3.0108	The clerk of each council shall make recommendation to that body for the permanent safekeeping of the body’s records with the Presbyterian Historical Society or other similarly equipped records storage facility.	Has the stated clerk made this recommendation? Is it consistent with the intent of ensuring the permanent accessibility and security of the records?
G-3.0109a	Each council shall review annually or biennially, based on the body’s meeting frequency, the proceedings and actions of all entities related to the body, all officers able to act on behalf of the body, and lower councils within its jurisdiction.	Has the synod reviewed and made appropriate revision to its existing processes and guidelines for the review of its own committees and entities, the actions of its officers, and other proceedings, as well as presbytery minutes, to ensure that they are consistent with the revisions in the Form of Government?

G-3.0110	Councils may designate by their own rule such committees and commissions as they deem necessary.	What committee or other organizational structure has the synod developed to support the implementation of its identified mission? What gifts and skills are needed for those serving within that structure? How has accountability been assured and by what process shall those units report to the body and have their work evaluated?
G-3.0110b	A quorum of any commission shall be established by the appointing body but in no case shall be less than a majority of its members...	Has the synod established a uniform policy regarding the makeup and quorum of any commission it creates, or will it attend to these specifics on a case-by-case basis? If the latter, does the synod have guidelines to advise the stated clerk or the synod as it constitutes and charges any commission?
G-3.0111	A council shall make provision in its manual of administrative operations (G-3.0107) for the process of election of executive staff and the hiring of other staff, description of the responsibilities of the position, method of performance review, and the manner of termination of employment	Has the synod approved personnel policies and do those policies include the required items? Is a process in place to guide the calling of executive staff as well as hiring other staff? Are these policies consistent with the secular employment laws of the state as appropriate?
G-3.0112	All councils higher than the session shall have a process for nominating persons to serve in positions requiring election by the body.	Has the synod developed such a process and organized itself to implement it? Does this process ensure that the synod can make nominations from the floor? Are there clear expectations stated for those serving in synod elected positions and are there procedures in place for evaluating the effectiveness of those serving in synod positions? Are terms clearly stated where appropriate?
G-5.0402	The synod or governing body having jurisdiction over each of the uniting bodies shall approve the plan of union.	What expectations does the synod have for what shall be included in a plan of union? Do the provisions of the current G-17.0200 provide guidance in this regard?

Policies and Procedures Guide for the Work of the General Assembly

The General Assembly is the council of the whole church and is representative of the unity of the synods, presbyteries, sessions, and congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The General Assembly constitutes the bond of union, community, and mission among all its congregations and councils, to the end that the whole church becomes a sign in and for the world of the new reality God has made available to all in Jesus Christ. As it leads and guides the witness of the whole church, it shall bear in mind the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304) and the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed communities have identified themselves through history (F-1.0303).

Councils within our denomination are mutually interconnected. Each council has an expansive range of unique responsibilities; however, the life and ministry of each council is subject to review by the next higher council (G-3.0109a). The purpose of this review is for mutual awareness of and encouragement in mission. The value of review is in shared knowledge rather than meticulous compliance.

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Reference	Constitutional Provision	Questions or Options to Consider
G-3.0104	Each council shall develop procedures for promoting and reviewing that body’s implementation of the church’s commitment to inclusiveness and representation.	Does the General Assembly choose to retain an entity comparable to the current committee on representation (COR) to serve this purpose? If a COR is retained, what is the appropriate makeup of such a committee in its context? If this responsibility is lodged with another unit of the General Assembly, how will the General Assembly approve its plan for complying with the church’s commitment to inclusiveness and representation? How and on what basis will the General Assembly review the committee’s implementation of its plan? If no such committee or other unit is employed, by what process will the General Assembly ensure compliance?
G-3.0105	Councils may provide by rule who shall preside in the absence of the moderator	In the absence of the moderator, who most appropriately should preside at a General Assembly meeting (e.g. the Vice Moderator, immediate past Moderator, etc.)? Is this something that state law requires be part of the General Assembly’s bylaws?
G-3.0108	The clerk of each council shall make recommendation to that body for the permanent safekeeping of the body’s records with the Presbyterian Historical Society or other similarly equipped records storage facility.	Has the Stated Clerk made this recommendation? Is it consistent with the intent of ensuring the permanent accessibility and security of the records?
G-3.0109a	Each council shall review annually or biennially, based on the body’s meeting frequency, the proceedings and actions of all entities related to the body, all officers able to act on behalf of the body, and lower councils within its jurisdiction.	Has the General Assembly reviewed and made appropriate revision to its existing processes and guidelines for the review of its own committees and entities, the actions of officers, and other proceedings, as well as synod minutes, to ensure that they are consistent with the revisions in the Form of Government?

Reference	Constitutional Provision	Questions or Options to Consider
G-3.0110	Representative bodies may designate by their own rule such committees and commissions as they deem necessary.	What committee or other organizational structure has the General Assembly developed to support the implementation of its identified mission? What gifts and skills are needed for those serving within that structure? How has accountability been assured and by what process shall those units report to the body and have their work evaluated?
G-3.0110b	A quorum of any commission shall be established by the appointing body but in no case shall be less than a majority of its members...	Has the General Assembly established a uniform policy regarding the makeup and quorum of any commission it creates, or will it attend to these specifics on a case-by-case basis? If the latter, does the General Assembly have guidelines to advise the Stated Clerk or the General Assembly as it constitutes and charges any commission?
G-3.0109	A council shall make provision in its manual of administrative operations (G-3.0107) for the process of election of executive staff and the hiring of other staff, description of the responsibilities of the position, method of performance review, and the manner of termination of employment.	Has the General Assembly approved personnel policies and do those policies include the required items? Is a process in place to guide the calling of executive staff as well as hiring other staff? Are these policies consistent with the secular employment laws of the state as appropriate?
G-3.0112	All councils higher than the session shall have a process for nominating persons to serve in positions requiring election by the body.	Has the General Assembly developed such a process and organized itself to implement it? Does this process ensure that the General Assembly can make nominations from the floor? Are there clear expectations stated for those serving in General Assembly elected positions and are there procedures in place for evaluating the effectiveness of those serving in General Assembly positions? Are terms clearly stated where appropriate?
G-6.02	The General Assembly shall provide by its own rule for the qualifications of members of the Advisory Committee on the Constitution.	Has the General Assembly defined clear expectations of and qualifications for service on the Advisory Committee on the Constitution?