

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
STRENGTHENING GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY
From the Summer Government Accountability Committee

Government accountability means that public officials, elected and unelected, have an obligation to explain their decisions and actions to the citizens. Elected officials need to be accountable for making policy decisions that meet the needs of their constituents and are accessible to the people they serve.

Recommendations strive to be simple, clear, independent, objective and fact-based. Enhancing the Legislature’s government accountability efforts should be systematized as much as possible, and not reliant upon individual legislators or individual committees to be exemplary in this regard.

Summary of Recommendations:

1. A General Oversight Function is needed.
2. Adding a program evaluation staff function to assist the Vermont legislative branch with improved accountability.
3. Making sure both state and federal audit findings are considered.
4. Change the timing of Programmatic and Performance Measure Budget Reports.
5. Increasing consistency and accountability in rulemaking.
6. Information Technology support is needed to ensure all reports and deadlines are easily accessible to the public.
7. Once a bill becomes law, there needs to be a broader communication process.
8. Committees should be encouraged to put aside a certain percentage of time on issues of accountability.
9. Committees should be encouraged to review past legislation and legislatively mandated reports, study committees, etc.
10. Explore a mechanism that allows the Appropriations Committees to follow-up on last year’s budget bill.
11. Explore a mechanism that makes it possible for Committee Assistants to keep track of all deadlines.
12. Legislation that is a priority and costs more than a threshold dollar amount should be required to have a performance note.
13. Review New Mexico’s “Legislating for Results”.
14. Education for all members on Government Accountability.
15. Overall staffing for Vermont’s legislative branch should also be considered when making recommendations to strengthen accountability.

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creating a Government Oversight and Accountability Committee. Such a committee would do the following:

- a. Examine, in relation to accountability, in conjunction with the committees of jurisdiction, matters of significant public concern that affect the state as a whole. For example, juvenile justice, EB-5, Dam Safety Program, and inspections of assisted living facilities by Department of Aging and Independent Living.
 - b. Selectively review the findings and recommendations of audits conducted by the State Auditor, and federal agencies, and examine whether those findings have been implemented.
 - c. Conduct oversight themselves, refer matters to the committees of jurisdiction, or empower an independent third-party entity to do so.
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- 5. Increasing consistency and accountability in rulemaking.** Formally task Legislative Counsel at the end of each legislative session with producing an inventory of all new rulemaking provisions that have been enacted, including the responsible agency and any deadlines. At present, no single office is responsible for this. As a result, some rulemaking requirements fall through the cracks, some deadlines are not met, and legislators do not have a one-stop location to monitor agency compliance with rulemaking provisions. This inventory could be posted to the LCAR committee page and updated each year.
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13. Review New Mexico’s “Legislating for Results”.

- a. Identifying priority areas and performance.
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- a. As part of the orientation for new legislators, an overview related to government accountability should be provided including professional development/training related to data-informed decision-making, any procedures for developing a newly mandated body or report, etc.
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- b. Any tools developed to strengthen accountability practices (procedures, templates, checklists, etc.) should be made available in plain language versions to promote accessibility.

15. Overall staffing for Vermont’s legislative branch should also be considered when making recommendations to strengthen accountability. Based on 2021 [research from NCSL](#), Vermont has the 3rd smallest legislative staff during session. Insufficient staffing capacity may limit the legislature’s ability to use data to inform policy and implement new accountability procedures.