



The Laboratory Charter School of Communication and Languages

Accessibility and Public Comment Policy

I. Purpose

This policy ensures that the public has a reasonable opportunity to comment on issues before the Laboratory Charter School Board in compliance with Pennsylvania's Sunshine Act (65 Pa.C.S. §§ 701-716). The policy aims to promote transparency, public participation, and informed decision-making by integrating relevant legal codes and establishing clear procedures for public comment.

II. Meeting Schedule

1. Publication of Meeting Dates:

- The Laboratory Charter School Board will publish the dates, times, and locations of upcoming Board meetings on the school's official website. This information will be updated regularly to ensure public accessibility and compliance with 65 Pa.C.S. § 709(a), which mandates public notice for meetings.
- Additional notices will be distributed through channels such as email newsletters, social media, and physical postings at the school's main office, further ensuring public awareness as required by 65 Pa.C.S. § 709(b).

2. Emergency and Special Meetings:

- In the event of an emergency or special meeting, the Board will provide as much notice as possible, adhering to the requirements of the Sunshine Act, specifically 65 Pa.C.S. § 709(a). The agenda for these meetings will be made available to the public as soon as it is finalized.

III. Registration for Public Comment

1. Pre-Meeting Registration:

- Members of the public who wish to comment during a Board meeting are encouraged to register in advance. The registration process, including deadlines and required forms, will be clearly outlined here, and on the school's website, in compliance with the transparency requirements of 65 Pa.C.S. § 710.1(a).
- Registration will typically close at 4:00 PM on the day of the meeting for online and email submissions, and at 3:00 PM for phone registrations.

2. Walk-In Registration:

- Walk-in registration will be available at the meeting location, opening 30 minutes before the meeting start time and closing promptly at the start of the meeting.

Walk-in participants will be added to the speaking list in the order of their registration, ensuring compliance with 65 Pa.C.S. § 710.1(a).

Registration Process and Procedure for Public Comment at Laboratory Charter School Board Meetings

I. Overview

Members of the public who wish to comment during a Laboratory Charter School Board meeting should sign up early. This process ensures an orderly and fair opportunity for all individuals to participate in the meeting, in compliance with Pennsylvania's Sunshine Act (65 Pa.C.S. §§ 701-716), specifically § 710.1(a), which mandates a reasonable opportunity for public participation.

II. Legislative Framework

1. Sunshine Act Compliance:

- § 702 of the Sunshine Act emphasizes the importance of public access to meetings, reinforcing the need for transparent procedures that allow citizens to observe and participate in the decision-making process of public agencies.
- § 703 defines an "agency" as anybody authorized to take official action on matters of public business, which includes the Laboratory Charter School Board.
- § 704 mandates that all official actions and deliberations by an agency take place in an open meeting, underscoring the necessity for public comment opportunities.
- § 710.1(a) explicitly requires that public agencies provide a reasonable opportunity for residents and taxpayers to comment on matters of concern, official action, or deliberation before any action is taken.

III. Registration Process

1. How to Register:

- **Online Registration:**
 - Visit the Laboratory Charter School's official website at <https://thelaboratorycharterschool.site/>
 - Navigate to the "Board Meetings" section, where you will find a link labeled "Register for Public Comment."
 - Click on the link to access and complete the online registration form. This ensures that all necessary information is gathered in advance, in compliance with § 710.1(a), which encourages reasonable procedures for public participation.
- **Email Registration:**

- If you prefer, you may register by sending an email to astibbins-oliver@labcharter.com. In your email, include your full name, the topic or agenda item you wish to address, and your contact information (phone number and email address). This alternative method is provided to ensure accessibility for all members of the public, as required by the transparency principles outlined in § 709.
 - **Phone Registration:**
 - Individuals without internet access may register by calling the school's main office at (267) 817-4720. Provide your full name, the topic or agenda item you wish to address, and your contact information. This option is available to accommodate all members of the community, in alignment with the Sunshine Act's commitment to public accessibility and inclusion.
2. **Required Information:**
- **Full Name:** First and last name of the individual registering.
 - **Contact Information:** Phone number and email address for communication purposes, as required by § 710.1(a) to ensure effective communication between the agency and the public.
 - **Residency/Taxpayer Status:** Indicate whether you are a resident or taxpayer within the Laboratory Charter School's service area. Proof of residency or taxpayer status may be requested in accordance with § 710.1(a), which allows agencies to prioritize input from those directly affected by the Board's decisions.
 - **Topic/Agenda Item:** Specify the topic or agenda item you wish to address during the public comment period. This requirement helps maintain order and relevance during meetings, as encouraged by § 710.
 - **Additional Materials (Optional):** If you plan to submit written materials or presentations, please indicate this during registration and attach any relevant documents. This facilitates the efficient management of public input, as supported by § 710.
3. **Registration Deadline:**
- **Online and Email Registration:**
 - Registration for public comment will open seven (7) days before the scheduled Board meeting, allowing ample time for public participation, as supported by § 709.
 - The deadline to register online or via email is 4:00 PM on the day of the meeting. This ensures that the Board has sufficient time to organize the meeting and accommodate public comments, in compliance with the requirements of § 710.1(a).
 - **Phone Registration:**
 - Phone registration is available during school office hours and will close at 3:00 PM on the day of the meeting. This deadline ensures the Board can effectively manage the meeting while still providing reasonable access for public input, as mandated by § 710.1(a).
4. **Confirmation of Registration:**

- Once your registration is received, you will receive a confirmation email or phone call within 24 hours. This confirmation will include your assigned speaking time and any additional instructions for the meeting. This step aligns with § 710.1(a) to ensure the process is clear and well-organized, thereby fostering meaningful public participation.
5. **Walk-In Registration:**
- For those unable to register in advance, walk-in registration will be available at the meeting location. Walk-in registration will open 30 minutes before the meeting start time and will close promptly at the start of the meeting. Walk-in participants will be added to the speaking list in the order of their registration, ensuring compliance with § 710.1(a). This option accommodates last-minute participation while maintaining the orderliness of the meeting, as supported by § 710.

IV. Access to Registration Forms

- **Online Form:**
 - The online registration form can be accessed directly through the school's website. A direct link will be provided in the "Board Meetings" section. This supports the Sunshine Act's emphasis on transparency and public access, as outlined in § 709.
- **Downloadable PDF Form:**
 - A PDF version of the registration form will be available for download on the website. Individuals may print, complete, and submit this form via email or in person at the school's main office. This option ensures all community members have access to the registration process, in line with the inclusive principles of the Sunshine Act.
- **In-Person Form:**
 - Paper registration forms will be available at the school's main office during regular office hours. Completed forms can be submitted in person at the main office. This option aligns with § 710.1(a) by providing multiple methods for public participation, ensuring no undue burden is placed on those wishing to comment.

V. Important Notes

1. **Late Registrations:**
 - Registrations received after the specified deadlines may not be guaranteed a speaking slot but will be accommodated if time permits, in compliance with § 710.1(a). This policy ensures that while the Board operates efficiently, it remains flexible to accommodate as much public input as possible.
2. **Multiple Registrations:**
 - Individuals are limited to one speaking slot per meeting. If multiple registrations are submitted by the same person, the earliest registration will be honored. This rule is in place to ensure fair and equitable participation for all attendees, in alignment with the orderly conduct principles of § 710.

3. Withdrawal of Registration:

- If you wish to withdraw your registration, please notify the school via email or phone as soon as possible, preferably before the registration deadline. This policy ensures that meeting agendas remain current and reflective of the participants, as encouraged by § 709(c.1).

This process ensures that all community members have clear and equitable access to participate in the public comment period during Laboratory Charter School Board meetings, in full compliance with Pennsylvania's Sunshine Act. By providing multiple avenues for registration and maintaining transparency throughout the process, the Board upholds its commitment to fostering an inclusive and participatory environment for all stakeholders.

IV. Public Comment Opportunities

1. Time Allocation:

- Each public commenter will typically be allotted three (3) minutes to speak, in accordance with the Sunshine Act's guidance on providing a reasonable opportunity for public input (65 Pa.C.S. § 710.1). However, the Board reserves the right to extend or reduce this time limit based on the complexity of the issues being discussed or the number of participants wishing to speak.

2. Content of Comments:

- Comments should pertain to matters that are or may be before the Board. The Board encourages constructive feedback and dialogue on agenda items, as outlined in 65 Pa.C.S. § 710.1(a).

3. Equal Access:

- The Board will ensure that all registered participants, whether pre-registered or walk-ins, have an equal opportunity to speak. The Board will not show partiality to any commenter based on their viewpoint or the content of their comments, in compliance with the non-discrimination principles of 65 Pa.C.S. § 710.1(a).

V. Guidelines for Public Participation

1. Respectful Conduct:

- Commenters are expected to address the Board respectfully, avoiding personal attacks, inflammatory language, or disruptive behavior. The Board Chair has the authority to rule out of order any comments that do not adhere to these guidelines, as per 65 Pa.C.S. § 710.1(d).

2. Relevance:

- Comments should remain relevant to the agenda items under discussion. The Board may ask commenters to focus their remarks on the specific issues before the Board, in line with 65 Pa.C.S. § 710.1(a).

3. Residency Requirement:

- Public commenters must be residents or taxpayers of the area served by the Laboratory Charter School. The Board may require proof of residency or taxpayer status as part of the registration process, ensuring adherence to 65 Pa.C.S. § 710.1(a).

4. Accommodations for Special Needs:

- The Board is committed to making meetings accessible to all community members, including those with disabilities. Requests for special accommodations should be made at least three business days prior to the meeting to allow sufficient time for arrangements, in accordance with ADA guidelines.

VI. Flexibility in Application

1. Adjustments for Complex Issues:

- The Board recognizes that certain meetings, such as those involving complex issues like budget discussions, may require more extensive public input. In such cases, the Board may adjust time limits, extend the public comment period, or implement other measures to ensure thorough and equitable public participation, consistent with 65 Pa.C.S. § 710.1(a).

2. Consideration of Written Comments:

- The Board may accept written comments from individuals who are unable to attend the meeting in person. These comments will be read into the record during the public comment portion of the meeting, ensuring compliance with 65 Pa.C.S. § 710.1(a).

VII. Enforcement and Oversight

1. Role of the Board Chair:

- The Board Chair or a designated presiding officer will have the authority to enforce this policy during meetings. This includes managing the time allocated for public comments, ensuring adherence to participation guidelines, and addressing any disruptions that may arise, as per 65 Pa.C.S. § 710.1(d).

2. Appeal Process:

- In the event that a member of the public believes their right to participate has been unfairly limited, they may submit a written appeal to the Board for review. The Board will consider such appeals and provide a response within a reasonable timeframe, in line with 65 Pa.C.S. § 710.1.

VIII. Amendments

This policy may be amended by the Laboratory Charter School Board as needed to ensure compliance with the Sunshine Act and to address the evolving needs of the school community. Any amendments will be made with public input to ensure that the policy continues to serve the best interests of both the Board and the community it serves, in accordance with 65 Pa.C.S. § 712.

This comprehensive policy ensures that the Laboratory Charter School Board remains accessible, transparent, and responsive to the needs and concerns of its community members, promoting a robust and inclusive decision-making process in compliance with Pennsylvania's Sunshine Act.

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