

Tennessee Municipal League Visioning Report

2025 to 2045



TABLE OF CONTENTS

LETTER TO THE BOARD	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
COMPREHENSIVE REPORT	7
VISIONING COMMITTEE	14

To Members of the Board:

The report of the TML Visioning Committee is intended to provide general framework and direction on a range of critical organizational and operational issues through 2045. The committee identified issues, challenges, and direction to ensure the organization is the recognized voice and authority on municipal issues in Tennessee. Our Vision will guide TML's future strategic plans and guarantee organizational focus on mission direction.

TML's Visioning Initiative and Committee was created by the board of directors in November 2023. The Committee held its first meeting in March 2024 and its final meeting in May 2025. The Committee met in Nashville on five occasions, with our executive director and facilitator working on the information gathered during these sessions. During their annual retreat, TML's staff also contributed to the process.

I appreciate the work of our Committee members and thank them for their passion toward this effort. I want to express a special thanks to our facilitator and lead author of this report, Tom Griscom of Chattanooga, and TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes. I also wish to extend our appreciation to our attorneys at the law firm of Spencer Fane - Nashville, who graciously hosted our meetings.

Sincerely,

The Honorable Julian McTizic, Committee Chair
Mayor, Bolivar

TML Visioning Executive Summary

The Tennessee Municipal League (TML) Visioning Committee has developed a vision and action strategies to guide TML's work over the next 20 years to provide clarity and direction.

Our towns and cities are where more than 60% of Tennesseans live and generate almost 90% of the state's sales taxes. Our cities provide critical services across rural and urban areas, serving as vibrant "**Town Squares**" where people come together, debate important public issues, and engage in social and cultural activities.

TML Vision Statement

"The Tennessee Municipal League is the advocacy organization for Tennessee's towns and cities that empowers local governments through strategic support, education, and collaboration."

TML drivers over the next 20 years

- Cities will continue to fuel Tennessee's economic engine.
- Changing population will increase the social, economic, and environmental landscape for emerging urban areas in the state.
- Evolving demographics and emerging pressures within cities.
- All governments will become more comfortable and reliant on data-driven decision-making.
- TML must be nimble, and our Board, leadership, and staff must be aligned for opportunities and challenges.

Action Strategies

Effective Public Policy and Government Relations

TML serves as the unified voice for Tennessee's cities, advocates for the needs of communities, and ensures local government impact on state decision-making.

- Ensure that fact-based input is always given on legislation, proposed regulations, and actions undertaken by state government.
- Keep local governments informed of the daily developments and decisions within our state government impacting their communities.
- Strengthen collaborations with other municipal organizations, TML partner organizations, and interested parties to help ensure the best outcomes for local communities.

Impactful Communications and Identity

Critical support for all mission areas of TML – government advocacy, informational and education programming, and member recruitment and engagement. Effective messaging to multiple audiences requires leveraging dynamic tools and platforms to keep members informed and connected to the broader TML community.

- Maintain an innovative, comprehensive communication strategy with a mix of digital engagement and traditional platforms.
- Continuously evaluate and adjust strategies to ensure our members receive real-time legislative updates, advocacy actions, and news for cities.
- Redesign the TML logo to help provide an updated, new brand identity.

Valued Membership

High member commitment, effective advocacy, innovative programming, and member services must be priorities. TML is well positioned to help secure personal benefits and opportunities to its member cities' employees.

- Strengthen TML's Member Benefits program and actively engage in communications and growth strategies to promote benefits to employees of member cities.

Recognizing the Diversity of Cities

TML must constantly ensure its members are supported, engaged, and empowered to drive desired outcomes to best position their cities for success. TML will continue to ensure diversity in leadership, committees, and activities to best serve its member cities and partner organizations.

Education and Effective Programs

TML should host comprehensive, professional development programs that empower municipal leaders to govern effectively and foster local citizen involvement.

- Foster improved local planning programs through coordination with UT Institute of Public Service and other stakeholder organizations.
- Continued partnership with the Comptroller of the Treasury in providing training opportunities and identifying new programs that impact the effective delivery of municipal services.

Organizational Strength and New Enterprises

TML will explore ways to diversify its revenue stream and minimize financial exposure that could impact program delivery and overall organizational health.

- Explore new financial opportunities preferably tied to TML's organizational mission and the work of municipalities. Place a major emphasis on diversity of revenue sources that help ensure financial strength and stability of the organization.
- Semi-annual reviews of Board membership and duties for alignment with membership and key issues. Strengthen collaborative partner relationships and seek new non-traditional alliances.

TML Comprehensive Visioning Report

Process

The Tennessee Municipal League (TML) Visioning Committee has developed these vision and action strategies to guide TML's work over the next 20 years. This effort provides clarity and direction by highlighting long-term goals, values, and actions. Our mission is to be the advocacy organization for Tennessee's towns and cities, positioning local government as the core driver of the state's economic growth and prosperity.

While addressing the unique challenges of urban centers and the shared needs of rural and small cities, our vision reflects the values of collaboration, support, and service to all communities.

Our towns and cities are where more than 60% of Tennesseans live. They generate almost 90% of the state's sales taxes supporting numerous programs, functions and operations of our statewide government. Our cities provide critical services in both rural and urban areas and are the vibrant **"Town Square,"** where people come together, interact, debate important public issues, and engage in social and cultural activities.

TML Drivers Over the Next 20 Years

These key factors will shape our work and the future for Tennessee's cities:

- Cities will continue to fuel Tennessee's economic engine. They are central to Tennessee's economic success with job creation, innovation, and increased state revenues.
- Changing population will increase the social, economic, and environmental landscape for emerging urban areas in the state. The traditional 4 urban centers will expand to 8 or perhaps 12, resulting in new alliances and new challenges. The result will be pressure on transportation, higher cost of living, education, health care, and infrastructure development.
- Diversity of Tennessee's cities will help provide solutions to new and unique challenges. Cities, large or small, rural or urban, all have shared challenges, and by working together, the result will be greater regional and state outcomes.

- There are evolving demographics and emerging pressures within cities. Challenges such as affordable housing, stretched public services, and pressure on aging and new infrastructure are critical issues in need of solutions.
- All governments will become more comfortable and reliant on data-driven decision-making. Collaboration across cities will help ensure all Tennesseans benefit economically and improve their quality of life.
- TML must be nimble, and our Board, leadership and staff must be aligned to positively address our opportunities and challenges.

The Proposed Vision Statement and Action Strategies

TML Vision Statement

"The Tennessee Municipal League is the advocacy organization for Tennessee's towns and cities that empowers local governments through strategic support, education, and collaboration."

Action Strategies to Achieve the Vision

Our towns and cities fuel Tennessee's economic growth, enhance quality of life, and strengthen communities statewide. Prioritizing the steps, resources, and milestones are actionable assignments to achieve positive results.

Strategic communication is the valued link among TML members. The organization will be informed on issues, membership, and critical updates that impact cities. TML will be on the cutting edge of adapting ever-evolving technology that facilitates the flow of information and drives effective execution.

Effective Public Policy and Government Relations

TML serves as the unified voice for Tennessee's cities, advocates for the needs of communities, and ensures local government impact on state decision-making. For more than 85 years, TML has served as the unified voice for Tennessee's cities. We advocate for the needs of communities and ensure that local government is ever-present in the state's decision making. TML historically has served as the voice for local communities through advocacy on legislative and regulatory issues impacting cities.

Strengthened connections among cities, legislators, and administration officials help ensure outcomes in the best interest of the state and our communities that people that call home. The integration of data-driven public policy initiatives and effective government relations:

- Ensures that fact-based input is always given on legislation, proposed regulations, and actions undertaken by state government.
- Keeps local governments informed of the daily developments and decisions within our state government impacting their communities.
- Strengthens collaborations with other municipal organizations, TML partner organizations, and interested parties to help ensure the best outcomes for local communities.

Recommendations

1. The TML Board of Directors should ensure annual organizational expenditures on government relations and related activities are at a level necessary to serve as the resource for local and state governments on proposed legislation, regulations, and policy. Resources should be sufficient to maintain a dedicated, respected government relations staff, with resources also sufficient to secure outside support.
2. TML should lead the effort to establish the Center for Municipal Policy and Research. The nonpartisan, research-based Center would provide statistical trends and research-based analysis, and then disseminate data to be used in the development of public policy by TML, local communities, and state government.
3. TML should continually strengthen the grassroots capacity via member participation with the goal of achieving a unified, engaged statewide network of municipal interests.
4. The TML Board should evaluate reconstituting parts or entirely its organizational status to best achieve a strong advocacy focus. Specifically, it should consider the creation of 501c6 within TML, or reincorporating as a 501c3, or both.
5. TML should ensure its public member policy process is open and accessible to municipalities.
6. TML should utilize the grassroots strength of community-based organizations such as homeowner groups, neighborhood associations, and civic organizations.

Impactful Communications and Identity

The strength of TML-- its effective mission delivery and public identity-- should be easily recognized through its communications, messaging, and brand. Collectively, attaining successful outcomes across these and other areas will require a significant commitment to the communications functions of our organization. Impactful communications provide critical support to all mission areas of TML – government advocacy, informational and educational programming, and member recruitment and engagement. Effective messaging to multiple audiences requires leveraging dynamic tools and platforms to keep members informed and connected to the broader TML community.

Recommendations

1. Maintain an innovative, comprehensive communication strategy with a mix of digital engagement and traditional platforms to communicate with TML members, partner organizations, and the public. Employ a full range of traditional and digital communication tools to convey information.
2. Commit to timely, accurate, and impactful information disseminated across platforms that motivates action and provides feedback via performance analytics. Provide easy-to-use platforms to disseminate information, facilitate communication, and track engagements.
3. Set the standard for timely, concise, and action-driven communications.
4. Employ communication tools to link current members with prospective new members.
5. Tailor updates to desired outcomes, providing general information and targeted messages that bring greater focus on select issues.
6. Continuously evaluate and adjust strategies to ensure our members receive real-time legislative updates and advocacy actions, as well as other news important to the management and governance of cities.
7. Redesign the TML logo to help provide an updated, new brand identity.
8. Develop a campaign to promote a greater awareness and recognition of TML among public audiences.

Valued Membership

Towns and cities must feel there is great value in TML membership. As many membership organizations continue to see downward trends in participation, TML member participation has remained strong. In addition to government advocacy and educational programming, peer-to-peer collaboration on a statewide scale remains a unique benefit only available through TML membership. To maintain a high member commitment, effective advocacy, innovative programming and member services must be priorities. TML is also well positioned to help secure personal benefits and opportunities to its member cities' employees.

Recommendations

1. Regularly evaluate the distribution and reach of TML legislative and annual reports, issue briefs, and conduct webinars to maximize audience across member cities.
2. Strengthen TML's Member Benefits program and actively engage in communications and growth strategies to promote benefits to employees of member cities.

Recognizing the Diversity of Cities

Tennessee's cities are very diverse in terms of their history, demographics, population, incorporating charter, and regional influences. TML must work to constantly ensure its members are supported, engaged, and empowered to drive desired outcomes to best position their cities for success. TML has historically taken steps to ensure diversity in leadership, committees, and activities to best serve its member cities and partner organizations.

Recommendations

1. Ensure TML's bylaws continue to recognize, prescribe, and set forth avenues for the Board of Directors to reflect the diversity of its membership and the state of Tennessee, specifically along the lines of race, gender, age, grand division, population, and office holder.
2. Continue efforts to recruit diverse participation in TML's committees and working groups to help ensure a representative cross section of TML membership.

3. While promoting unity, TML will identify shared and unique challenges, as well as solutions, regardless of population size or regional influences.
4. Ensure TML's programming provides a unique opportunity to help educate and inform officials of the state's ever-changing demographics and how to best serve their communities, as well as recruiting for their own workforce.
5. Work with UT MTAS in identifying and addressing unique issues that arise across municipalities, especially aging populations, veterans, youth engagement, and historically ethnic neighborhoods.

Education and Effective Programs

TML should host comprehensive, professional development programs that empower municipal leaders to govern effectively and foster local citizen involvement. Such programs could be those developed by TML, as well as those delivered in conjunction with partner organizations.

Recommendations

1. Develop targeted educational programs for young professionals, new officials, and seasoned leaders to build greater local leadership capacity.
2. Offer specialized workshops to address emerging topics such as technology, infrastructure, public safety, and economic development.
3. Foster improved local planning programs through coordination with UT Institute of Public Service and other stakeholder organizations.
4. Continue to partner with the Comptroller of the Treasury to provide training opportunities and identify new programs that impact the effective delivery of municipal services.

Organizational Strength and New Enterprises

As with most municipal leagues throughout the country, TML's major funding sources are member dues, sponsorships, and contributions from its affiliated risk management pool. Ongoing efforts to diversify that revenue stream should continue and is in the best interest of the League. Achieving greater diversity of revenues assists in minimizing financial exposure that could impact program delivery and overall organizational health. TML should continue to explore new enterprises and sponsorship opportunities to strengthen financial stability. Annual member dues should be fair, support a proportional share of operation expenses, and track with inflationary growth.

TML also should take steps to serve as an “umbrella organization” for various municipality management and governance interests in a manner that advances TML’s and allied municipal organizations’ interests.

Recommendations

1. Continue to explore new financial opportunities preferably tied to TML’s organizational mission and the work of municipalities. Place a major emphasis on diversity of revenue sources that help ensure financial strength and stability of the organization.
2. Conduct a semi-annual review of the Board membership and functions to remain aligned with membership, key issues, governance, and financial health.
3. Create a working group to periodically review and recommend appropriate member dues levels and assessments.
4. Strengthen collaborative relationships with municipal partner organizations to advance the shared interest of cities and to strengthen the voice of cities.
5. Develop new strategic alliances with nontraditional organizations that increase support for broad-based issues.
6. Develop Tennessee Municipal Services one-stop operations center for TML members that supports and administers functions such as HR, finance, audit, and other operational support areas.



TML Visioning Committee

The Honorable Julian McTizic, Chair

TML 1st Vice President, Mayor, Bolivar

The Honorable Paige Brown

TML President, Mayor, Gallatin

The Honorable Ron Williams

TML Past President, Mayor, Farragut

The Honorable Bobby King

TML Past President, Former Mayor, Henderson

The Honorable Ken Moore

TML Past President, Mayor, Franklin

The Honorable Roland Trey Dykes

Mayor, Newport

The Honorable Nina Smothers

Former Mayor, Huntington

The Honorable Darrell Duncan

Councilman, Kingsport

The Honorable Mike Palazzolo

Mayor, Germantown

The Honorable Joe Pitts

Mayor, Clarksville

Ms. Kim Foster

City Manager, Paris

Mr. Richard Stokes

Human Resource Consultant, UT MTAS, Spring Hill (Retired)

The Honorable Johnny Dodd

Councilman, Jackson

Mr. Kirk Bednar

City Manager, Brentwood (Retired)

Mr. Tim Ellis

City Manager, Goodlettsville

Mr. David Smoak

City Manager, Farragut

The Honorable Stefanie Dalton

Mayor, Red Bank

The Honorable Tim Kelly

Mayor, Chattanooga