

ARMER Funding Task Force July Meeting Notes

MEETING DETAILS

Date: Monday, July 27, 2026

Time: 9:00–11:00 a.m.

Location: State Emergency Operations Center

Format: Hybrid—in person and virtual

Facilitators: Marcus Chaffee and Sara McGarraugh, The Improve Group

Meeting support: Minnesota Department of Public Safety

Meeting purpose: Launch the ARMER Funding Task Force, orient members to its legislative charge and timeline, elect Task Force leadership, discuss how the group will work together, and identify initial information needs and next steps.

Note: These notes are intended to summarize the discussion and decisions from the meeting. To request a correction or clarification, please contact ARMERTaskForce@theimprovegroup.com

1. WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

John Cunningham, Assistant Commissioner for Emergency Services at the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, welcomed Task Force members.

Opening remarks emphasized:

- The importance of reliable and interoperable communications for law enforcement, fire, emergency medical services, and other public safety partners.
- Minnesota's leadership in developing a statewide interoperable radio system.
- The importance of maintaining and modernizing the ARMER system as technology and public safety needs continue to change.
- The Task Force's role in identifying a sustainable long-term path for supporting the system.

DPS clarified that the Task Force is an independent, legislatively created body. DPS will provide support, while The Improve Group will facilitate meetings, organize information, document discussions, and assist with development of the legislative report.

2. INTRODUCTIONS AND MEMBER SURVEY SNAPSHOT

Facilitators: Marcus Chaffee, Sara McGarraugh (notes, virtual technology), The Improve Group

Task Force Attendees:

Task Force Members and Designee Present

- Shane Chatleain, Office of Statewide Radio Communications, Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Brent Christensen, Minnesota Telecom Alliance
- T. John Cunningham, Minnesota Department of Public Safety
- Kristine V. Elwood, Minnesota Department of Transportation (*virtual*)
- Mike Gamache, Anoka County
- Dona Greiner, Stevens County
- John Huot, Minnesota House of Representatives
- John Jasinski, Minnesota Senate
- Bruce Lawrence, Pennington County
- Sara Miller, Gibbon Police Department (*virtual*)
- Micah Myers, City of St. Cloud
- Elliott Payne, Minneapolis City Council
- Sara Psick, CTIA, attending as designee for Jake Lestock
- Jonathan Rasch, Minnesota State Fire Chiefs Association
- Jill Rohret, Metropolitan Emergency Services Board
- Eamonn Schmitz, Statewide Emergency Communications Board
- Nate Smolinski, Minnesota Homeland Security and Emergency Management
- Terry Stier, Minnesota House of Representatives
- Jake Thompson, Hennepin County
- Eric Wallen, Lyon County Sheriff's Office (*virtual*)
- Melissa Wolf, Minnesota Cable Communications Association

Task Force Member Absent

- Ron Latz, Minnesota Senate

Introductions

Task Force members introduced themselves and described the experience and hopes for the Task Force's work:

Members represent a range of areas, including:

- State and local government
- Law enforcement, fire, emergency medical services, and emergency management

- Public safety dispatch and communications
- ARMER infrastructure and system administration
- County and municipal government
- Telecommunications and wireless industries
- Legislative and state budget processes
- Regional and statewide emergency communications governance

Common hopes included:

- Identifying dedicated, sustainable funding for ARMER.
- Maintaining and modernizing statewide infrastructure.
- Supporting smaller and rural agencies that may have limited financial capacity.
- Preserving Minnesota’s leadership in statewide interoperability.
- Developing recommendations that are realistic, actionable, and understandable to policymakers and the public.

3. TASK FORCE CHARGE AND TIMELINE

The Task Force reviewed its legislative responsibility to evaluate Minnesota’s public safety radio communications system and recommend how it could transition to a sustainable statewide and state-funded model.

The charge includes recommendations related to:

- Funding statewide ARMER infrastructure and interoperability.
- Establishing a dedicated and sustainable revenue source.
- Clarifying the roles of DPS, the MnDOT Office of Statewide Radio Communications, and the Statewide Emergency Communications Board.
- Establishing statewide performance metrics.
- Identifying other changes needed to support a sustainable statewide public safety communications system.

The Task Force met the statutory requirement to hold its first meeting before August 1, 2026. Its final legislative report is due February 15, 2027.

Discussion Themes

Sustainable and Ongoing Funding

Members emphasized that ARMER will require an ongoing funding mechanism rather than only one-time appropriations. The system requires continuing maintenance, replacement, modernization, staffing, and security investments.

Members noted that both state and local governments face financial constraints. Smaller and rural jurisdictions may have particular difficulty covering major capital and operating costs.

ARMER Is More Than Subscriber Radios

Members emphasized the importance of distinguishing subscriber radios from the larger infrastructure that makes them work.

The system includes:

- Towers and shelters
- Microwave connections
- Hardware and software
- Network equipment
- Local system enhancements
- Maintenance, security, and administrative systems

Members noted that this infrastructure is less visible than radios but essential to reliable public safety communication.

Reliability and Performance

Members described reliable communication as a public safety necessity. The system must function consistently during emergencies, routine operations, major incidents, and periods of high demand.

Future discussions will need to address:

- Reliability and system availability
- Coverage
- Interoperability
- Capacity
- Security
- Maintenance and modernization
- Statewide performance expectations

Quantifying Current and Future Needs

Members asked whether Minnesota has fully quantified:

- Immediate system needs
- Long-term capital needs
- Ongoing operating and maintenance costs
- State-owned and locally owned infrastructure needs
- Expected replacement and modernization timelines

Members identified the need for an environmental scan or needs assessment that incorporates information from state, regional, county, and local system owners.

Statewide and Local Considerations

Members emphasized that recommendations must work statewide while recognizing differences in:

- Geography
- Population and call volume
- Local system ownership
- Existing infrastructure
- Local financial capacity
- Rural and metropolitan operating conditions

Members expressed differing perspectives on whether some locally owned infrastructure should transition to state responsibility. Future discussions will need to account for local control, statewide standards, reliability, and funding.

Legislative and Public Education

Members noted that many policymakers, system users, and members of the public may not fully understand the complexity or importance of ARMER.

The Task Force may need to develop a clear and consistent explanation of:

- What ARMER is
- What the system does
- Why interoperability matters
- What infrastructure is required
- What risks arise if the system is not adequately maintained
- Why sustainable funding is necessary

Scope and Related Issues

Public safety answering point consolidation and shared dispatch services were raised as related issues. Members noted that these topics may affect costs and system sustainability but could also significantly expand the Task Force's scope.

The group discussed the importance of identifying which issues are central to the legislative charge and which may need to be documented for separate or future consideration.

Timing of Recommendations

Although the final report is due February 15, members noted that legislative proposals may need to be developed earlier. Members suggested that the Task Force should aim to have substantial direction on recommendations by approximately mid-December so that bill drafting and legislative planning can begin.

BREAK – 5 Minutes

4. TASK FORCE CHARTER DEVELOPMENT

Task Force Leadership

Members discussed whether an elected official or another Task Force member should serve as Chair. The discussion emphasized the potential value of legislative leadership in communicating and advancing the Task Force’s recommendations.

The Task Force elected:

- **Chair: Representative Terry Stier**
- **Vice Chair: Representative John Huot**

Representative Stier’s election as Chair was unanimous. The Task Force did not establish additional leadership positions at this time.

Draft Working Agreements

The Improve Group presented the following draft working agreements:

- Come prepared and participate actively.
- Make space for different perspectives and areas of expertise.
- Ask clarifying questions and test assumptions.
- Stay focused on the Task Force’s legislative charge.
- Help connect discussions to findings and recommendations.

Members were encouraged to raise questions about both the content and the process, particularly when terminology, responsibilities, or assumptions are unclear.

Site Visits and Public Communication

Members expressed interest in visiting public safety answering points, radio towers, dispatch centers, or other ARMER facilities. Site visits could help members better understand system operations and infrastructure needs.

Members also discussed using site visits or future meeting locations to increase public awareness of the Task Force’s work.

DPS noted that Task Force meetings are subject to Minnesota’s Open Meeting Law. Meeting information and recordings will be made available through the DPS ARMER Task Force webpage.

Decision-Making Principles

The Task Force reviewed a proposed consensus-oriented decision-making approach.

Under this approach:

- Members will seek to understand different perspectives before making decisions.
- Full agreement will not be required for every decision.
- Formal votes may be used for leadership elections, recommendations, or other significant decisions.
- Differing or minority perspectives may be documented when full agreement is not reached. Final recommendations should reflect the discussion, evidence, and tradeoffs considered by the Task Force.

5. PROPOSED PROCESS AND MEETING ARC

The Improve Group presented a proposed meeting arc that will move the Task Force from shared learning to recommendations and final reporting.

The process is intended to be iterative. Funding, governance, infrastructure, performance, and system needs are interconnected and may need to be revisited as the group learns more.

The proposed process includes:

- Building foundational knowledge and understanding the current system.
- Exploring current conditions, needs, and available information.
- Examining funding, governance, roles, and performance.
- Identifying and evaluating alternatives.
- Developing and refining recommendations.
- Reviewing and finalizing the legislative report.

Meeting Length and Number of Meetings

Several members expressed concern that seven two-hour monthly meetings may not provide enough time to understand the information, discuss tradeoffs, and develop recommendations by December.

Ideas raised included:

- Extending the length of monthly meetings.
- Scheduling additional meetings.
- Holding a longer retreat-style working session.
- Scheduling optional site visits or foundational learning sessions.

- Placing additional dates on members' calendars now and canceling them later if they are not needed.

The Improve Group and DPS will review the meeting schedule and determine how additional or longer meetings might be accommodated.

6. INFORMATION GATHERING: QUESTIONS, RESOURCES, AND DATA NEEDS

Before the August meeting, members will use a shared Padlet to contribute:

- Questions for the Task Force to explore
- Reports and background materials
- Existing data or information sources
- Ideas and observations
- Topics requiring additional discussion

The Padlet will be organized around the Task Force's legislative charge areas.

Members emphasized that requests for infrastructure, cost, and system-needs information should begin soon. A comprehensive environmental scan may require information from MnDOT, DPS, regional entities, counties, and local infrastructure owners.

7. NEXT STEPS, QUESTIONS, AND CLOSING

File Sharing

Box.com will serve as the primary file-sharing platform for Task Force materials. Members should accept the Box invitation and contact The Improve Group if they experience access problems.

A SharePoint site may be used as a backup for members who cannot access Box.

Alternates and Designees

Members discussed whether appointed members should be allowed to send an alternate or designee when they cannot attend.

Discussion included the following considerations:

- Maintaining representation from each appointed sector or organization.
- Preserving continuity across meetings.
- Encouraging primary members to attend whenever possible, including virtually.

- Determining whether appointing organizations must formally approve alternates.
- Clarifying whether alternates may participate in formal votes.

No final policy was adopted. The group generally recognized the value of maintaining representation while also noting that formal votes may require the appointed member to be present.

Next Steps

The Improve Group and DPS will:

- Prepare and distribute meeting notes and materials.
- Share the meeting recording.
- Distribute the information-gathering Padlet.
- Prepare and distribute a draft Task Force Charter.
- Prepare and distribute a Task Force Member Agreement.
- Finalize and distribute the monthly meeting calendar.
- Continue planning the August foundational and current-state discussion.
- Review options for longer or additional meetings.
- Explore potential site visits and alternative meeting locations.
- Clarify expectations related to alternates, designees, and voting.
- Begin identifying priority data and information requests

Task Force members will:

- Review the draft Charter.
- Review and sign the Member Agreement.
- Complete the scheduling survey, if they have not already done so.
- Accept the Box.com invitation and report access problems.
- Contribute questions, resources, and data sources through Padlet.
- Attend the next Task Force meeting on August 26.

Next Meeting

Date: Wednesday, August 26, 2026

Time: 12:30–3:30 p.m.

Format: Hybrid

Location: MnDOT Training and Conference Centers, 3725 12th St. N., St. Cloud, MN 56303