

ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY INTERIM COMMITTEE

DRAFT

2025 – 2026 WORK PLAN

***PREPARED FOR ETIC
SEPTEMBER 9TH, 2025 MEETING***

Purpose: To help the ETIC plan its interim and establish work priorities. When finalized, the work plan will provide guidance to the members, staff, and public on how the ETIC will conduct its business throughout the interim. It will serve as a blueprint that allows the ETIC to complete its work over the next 15 months.



Prepared by Griffin Burns, Research Analyst

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Energy and Technology Interim Committee
Prepared by Griffin Burns, Research Analyst

INTRODUCTION

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP AND STAFF, 2025-2026

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ABOUT THE ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE (ETIC)

The ETIC is one of several interim committees established by law and required to meet in the months between regular legislative sessions. Interim committees provide oversight for the various state agencies, perform interim studies as needed and as assigned by the Legislative Council, and propose legislation for consideration at the next legislative session. The interim committees also give Montana's citizens an opportunity to provide testimony about their experiences with state government.

The ETIC has broad oversight over a range of energy and technology-related topics in Montana. In addition to assigned studies, the ETIC pursues member-driven topics, and reviews the administrative rules proposed by the Department of Public Service Regulation (DPSR) and Public Service Commission (PSC).

The work plan includes:

- Background on the ETIC and its duties;
- A description of draft study topics and plans to address those topics; and
- A draft committee meeting schedule.

COMMITTEE PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The ETIC is subject to the Legislative Council's Rules, Procedures, and Guidelines for Interim Committees. The rules and guidelines give structure to and provide requirements for the interim committees' work, including public notice and participation requirements, parliamentary procedures, legislative reimbursement, and the use of staff. The Council also suggests that interim committees complete their work by September 15, 2026.

A 10-day advance public notice will be given for all regular meetings and the public will be given an opportunity to comment on any matter that is within the jurisdiction of the committee during meetings. The presiding officer may establish time limits for public comment, if necessary.

Meeting agendas, memos, links, and other information can be found on the ETIC website:

<https://committees.legmt.gov/#/nonStandingCommittees/11>. Interested persons may also sign up to receive electronic meeting notifications at <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/MTLSB/subscriber/new>.

PROXY VOTES

The [Legislative Council's Rules, Procedures, and Guidelines](#) guide the use of proxy votes in interim committees. Generally, the use of proxies is discouraged. However, "for the exercise of a proxy to be valid, the deputized member shall hold a written proxy from the absent member." [Legislative Council's Rule, page 2] Unless the ETIC approves a different proxy policy, the Legislative Council policy applies.

WORK PLAN

HOW THE ETIC PLANS ITS WORK

DEVELOPING A WORK PLAN

The ETIC establishes its work plan at the beginning of the interim by revising the work plan during the organizational meeting and finalizing it at the fall meeting, if needed. The work plan is a blueprint for the interim. The primary constraint limiting the committee's work during the interim is the number of issues that can be effectively addressed within the available time and resources of the committee members and its staff.

This 2025-2026 work plan sets priorities and outlines how and where the ETIC will allocate its time and resources. Staff will use decisions made at the organizational meeting in July to develop plans to complete the committee's work by the September 15, 2026, interim end date.

The work plan is flexible and can be adjusted by the ETIC later if other issues require the committee's attention.

THE DRAFT DECISION MATRIX

The attached ETIC Work Plan Decision Matrix, a separate document, is a way to look at the topics side by side and review time allocations to each topic. It is used in conjunction with this draft work plan.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Review the potential topics, including assigned studies, statutory duties, and any member-suggested topics presented with this work plan or suggested during the committee's work session.
2. Prioritize the topics you want the ETIC to focus on this interim.
3. Select the FTE you wish to allocate to each of the topics in which you're interested. The proposed FTE and corresponding level of study may be adjusted by the ETIC. **The total allocation available is 1 FTE.** The options you chose should add up to no more than 1 FTE. Use the draft decision matrix to assist you with this process.

WORK PLAN TOPICS

Work plan topics include statutorily assigned responsibilities, study resolutions enacted by the 2025 Legislature and assigned to committees by the Legislative Council, and study topics suggested by legislators. Each is discussed further in this section.

WHAT DOES ETIC DO?

The ETIC is assigned other responsibilities from several statutory sources, including the main statute guiding all interim committees' work: [section 5-5-215, MCA](#).

1. **Conduct interim studies** as assigned. The committee may recommend to the Legislative Council that a study be assigned to another committee or not be conducted.
2. **Review administrative rules** of the DPSR and PSC.

3. **Review legislation** proposed by the agency. Bills requested by an individual member of the Legislature are not subject to this requirement. The review and authorization process is not an endorsement by the ETIC of the agency proposals.
4. **Complete additional statutory duties** including receiving reports required by law to be given to the ETIC.
5. **Monitor the operation of the PSC** with specific attention to the following:
 - a. identification of issues likely to require future legislative attention;
 - b. opportunities to improve existing law through the analysis of problems; and
 - c. experiences of Montana's citizens with the operation of the agency that may be amenable to improvement through legislative action.
6. **Review proposed ballot initiatives** in the ETIC's subject area. The statutory requirement for interim committee review of ballot initiatives is being litigated at the Montana Supreme Court. Staff will update the ETIC when litigation is complete and if the ETIC has any duties in this area while the case is pending. (Case: *Ellingson v. State*, Montana Supreme Court No. DA 25-0142 (Filed Feb. 18, 2025).
7. (Committee driven): Prepare bills and resolutions that, in the committee's opinion, the welfare of the state may require for presentation to the next regular session.
8. (Committee driven): Compile, analyze, and furnish information bearing on the committee's assignment and relevant to existing or prospective legislation that the committee determines to be pertinent to the adequate completion of its work.

STUDY RESOLUTIONS ASSIGNED TO THE ETIC BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

The Legislative Council assigned 3 studies to the ETIC for the 2025-2026 interim:

- **HJ 4: Interim study on artificial intelligence;**
- **SJ 12: Interim study on energy transmission; and**
- **SJ 21: Interim study on interstate power grid development.**

Priorities for each study are expressed in staff hours (or FTE). Most studies have 2-3 options ranging from a full-blown, in-depth study to no action. While the ETIC can choose its preferred level of involvement for each study, most interim studies can be broken into three main stages:

- **Stage 1: Compile Background Information** – This stage is usually the most expansive stage and includes several steps designed to help an interim committee gather background information about a study topic. It sets the foundation for the rest of the committee's work in the policy area. Information is usually generated from reviews of existing laws, other legislative staff research, and information provided by stakeholders through panel presentations or written materials.
- **Stage 2: Identify and Research Issues** – In this stage, committee members identify problems that could be addressed through further study, legislation, or other action. Study activities in Stage 2 can include further research from legislative staff and additional presentations from stakeholders or policy experts.
- **Stage 3: Develop/Finalize Recommendations** – After compiling background information, identifying issues, and researching options, the committee can discuss and act on recommendations it wants to make to the Legislature or others and on any legislation it wants to forward to the next Legislature.

If the ETIC chooses to take no action on a study, it should inform the Legislative Council of the recommendation. Below are summaries of each study assigned to the ETIC. Detailed information can be found on the ETIC Work Plan Decision Matrix.

HJ 4: INTERIM STUDY ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

SPONSOR: REP. PARRY

House Joint Resolution 4 requests that the ETIC study and review state and federal regulatory structures for AI and whether the measures may be effective in Montana.

0.15 FTE Allocated (as of July 28, 2025)

Review Montana laws and regulations on transparency requirements and civil and criminal liability for entities that use AI

Panel on how state agencies currently use and regulate AI

Presentation from national experts on state/federal AI regulatory structures

SJ 12: INTERIM STUDY ON ENERGY TRANSMISSION

SPONSOR: SEN. HUNTER

Senate Joint Resolution 12 requests that the ETIC investigate issues relating to the available transmission capacity on transmission paths 8, 18, 80, and 83.

0.15 FTE Allocated (as of July 28, 2025)

Panel discussion/roundtable with stakeholders to identify issues and recommend solutions to observed transmission pathway congestion

Staff background paper/presentation on Montana transmission pathways, regulatory framework, and factors that attribute to pathway congestions and the current lack of transmission infrastructure

Final report on committee activities, findings, and requested legislation

SJ 21: INTERIM STUDY ON INTERSTATE POWER GRID DEVELOPMENT

SPONSOR: SEN. ZOLNIKOV

Senate Joint Resolution 21 requests that the ETIC study if the establishment of an interstate compact between neighboring states could reduce regulatory barriers and encourage open bidding processes for new transmission projects.

0.15 FTE Allocated (as of July 28, 2025)

Panel discussion/roundtable with stakeholders to explore and identify best practices in implementing a cost-effective interstate cooperative agreement

Staff background paper/presentation on legal and regulatory framework for Montana to participate in new cooperative interstate agreements

Final report on committee activities, findings, and requested legislation

Interim FTE Equivalents

1 Interim FTE = 16.5 months = 2880 hrs.

.05 FTE	144 Hours	18 days	LOW
.10 FTE	288 Hours	36 days	LOW
.25 FTE	720 Hours	90 days	MODERATE
.50 FTE	1440 hours	180 days	MODERATE
.75 FTE	2160 hours	270 days	HIGH
1 FTE	2880 hours	360 days	HIGH

REQUIRED REPORTS

I. **Source/authority:** 69-8-402, MCA.

Requires the ETIC to "review the universal systems benefits programs, and, if necessary, submit recommendations regarding these programs."

Public utilities and cooperative utilities are required to submit an annual summary report of universal system benefits programs to the ETIC for review. The 2015 Legislature expanded this authority by adopting SB 312. The

changes in statute require the ETIC to review large customer reports and compare that information to utility reports to address potential discrepancies in reporting.

II. Source/authority: 90-3-1301, MCA.

Requires the Bureau of Mines and Geology, prior to each legislative session, to update the ETIC on geothermal research conducted by the Bureau and funding received by the Bureau for geothermal research.

III. Source/authority: 17-7-214, MCA.

Requires the Department of Administration in conjunction with the university system to update the ETIC on the use of the high-performance building program. The report must include an overview of use of the voluntary program and actual or estimated savings.

IV. Source/authority: 69-1-222, MCA.

Requires the Consumer Counsel to prepare and submit a yearly report and other interim reports to the Legislative Consumer Committee that the counsel determines advisable concerning the counsel's activities during the year. The counsel also may recommend remedial legislation to the committee. The annual report and any recommendations for remedial legislation must also be provided to the ETIC.

V. Source/authority: 2-12-105, MCA.

Requires the Public Service Commission to provide an annual report to ETIC. The annual performance report must focus on measuring outcomes and outputs with respect to performance measures.

VI. Source/authority: House Bill No. 61, 2017.

HB 61, in the 2017 session, required the Department of Administration to report on the award and disbursement of next-generation 9-1-1 grants. The grants are intended to 9-1-1 infrastructure improvements. The statutory requirement for the related statutes now found in Title 10, Chapter 4, MCA, expired during the 2019-20 interim. ETIC members at the time asked the department to continue providing the report.

ADDITIONAL TOPICS FOR ETIC DISCUSSION

Typically, the ETIC members allocate committee and staff time to gather information or provide updates on topics that were the subject of recent legislation or recent ETIC attention or issues that may emerge during the interim.

There are numerous energy and technology-related topics the ETIC could choose to designate committee time to study. However, given the number of studies assigned to the ETIC this interim, time to pursue other topics might be limited if the committee plans to dive deep into one or more of the study topics. Many issues will overlap with the committee's routine agency oversight duties, so there is flexibility for the committee to choose what issues of interest should be covered and in what manner.

The committee will prioritize member topics and emerging issues as the biennium progresses. Members should discuss and decide upon their actual priorities during the organizational meeting. If additional issues emerge over the course of the interim, the ETIC is free to revise the work plan to accommodate its changing needs.

Committee member topics suggested by committee membership or submitted to staff (as of July 28, 2025) include:

- Community Solar
- Energy Economics
- Waste-to-Energy
- Broadband Easements
- State Land ROW Process
- Utility Scale Storage
- MEPA and GHG Regulatory Methods
- Genetic Sequencing
- History of Monopoly Utilities In MT and Future Analysis
- Social Media and Children
- Genomic Security
- Nuclear Energy
- Data Centers
- Public Service Commission Composition
- Consumer Counsel
- Blockchain and Digital Innovation
- Colstrip Water Supply

* During ETIC's July 28, 2025 meeting, the committee allocated 0.3 FTE to member topics. The committee will examine member topics on a rotational basis.

INDIVIDUAL MEMBER RESEARCH REQUESTS

Individual members of the committee may seek additional information on issues that fall under the jurisdiction of the ETIC. These issues may be raised by constituents, may be emerging problems in Montana or other states, or may be of interest to a particular member. If the committee chooses not to pursue information on a topic, the individual committee member may submit a research request. Under rules adopted by the Legislative Council, a staff member may provide up to 16 hours of research for a request that is not included in a committee's work plan unless the presiding officer of the interim committee approves additional research time.

MEETING SCHEDULE AND WORK PLAN TIMELINE

The following meeting dates provide a tentative schedule for the interim. This work plan proposes 10 meeting days, including the organizational meeting. If the ETIC forms a subcommittee, the number of meeting days for the full committee may be reduced. A more specific outline of potential tasks for each meeting will be tracked in a separate meeting chart once the ETIC adopts a work plan.

Committee members may change the dates or number of meetings as their schedules allow to better reflect their needs for the interim and any changing priorities as the interim progresses. However, because the ETIC shares 8 members with a combination of 7 other interim committees and shares staff with other commissions and committees, changing or adding meeting dates after the ETIC adopts a work plan is discouraged.

- July 28, 2025 **Organizational Meeting.**
- Interim work plan prioritization and other organizational tasks
 - Agency introductions and overviews
 - Selection of studies and topics
- September 9, 2025 **1-day meeting.**
- Adoption of final work plan
 - Review of initial interim meeting chart and future meeting topics
 - Start studies and continue agency oversight
- November 6, 2025 **1-day meeting.**
- Continue studies and agency oversight
- January 15, 2026 **1-day meeting.**
- Continue studies and agency oversight
- March 26, 2026 **1-day meeting.**
- Continue studies and agency oversight
 - Develop/discuss any draft recommendations
 - Develop topics for final reports, if any
- May 14-15, 2026 **2-day meeting.**
- Continue studies and agency oversight
 - Develop/discuss any draft recommendations
 - Potential travel/off-site meeting
- July 16-17, 2026 **2-day meeting.**
- Continue studies and agency oversight
 - Develop/discuss any draft recommendations
- September 9, 2026 **Final meeting.**
- Final approval of recommendations, reports, and proposed legislation
 - Select bill sponsors
 - Authorize agency bill draft requests