

10 Things to Know as a Neighborhood Council Board Member



NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS
EMPOWER LA
Department of
NEIGHBORHOOD EMPOWERMENT



10 Things to Know as a Neighborhood Council Board Member...

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1. WHAT IS MY ROLE AS A NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL BOARDMEMBER?

[Neighborhood Council Board Oath](#)

As a Neighborhood Council Board Member, there are three roles to consider.

What does it mean to be a ... Public Servant? Elected Official? Representative of the Community?

A PUBLIC SERVANT...

- Serves the public
- Maintains strong personal integrity and ethics
- Helps to facilitate the delivery of City services
- Serves the public interest and promotes public trust in the democratic system
- Practices non-partisanship, transparency, and professionalism

AN ELECTED OFFICIAL...

- Exercises courage to take a position, speak objectively and takes responsibility
- Reads, prepares and is well-informed about matters before the Board
- Cooperates, coordinates and collaborates
- Practices civility and decorum in discussion and debate
- Demonstrates balance and effective problem-solving
- Is on the public stage and is subject to public scrutiny

A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE COMMUNITY....

- Welcomes the public to participate in the democratic process
- Treats the public with care and empathy
- Demonstrates active listening skills during public comment
- Understands the community's values and issues
- Fosters a sense of community for all people to express ideas and opinions about their neighborhoods and their government

2. WHAT IS PUBLIC PARTICIPATION?

Public participation is the involvement of affected stakeholders in the decision-making process and providing full consideration to public input before the making of that decision. The public consists of a wide range of stakeholders who hold an array of views and concerns on an issue. Public participation instills legitimacy in the decision, builds trust and facilitates collaborative solutions to address complex problems. Through participation in the Neighborhood Council System, the public helps the City of Los Angeles be more responsive to local needs. By engaging in the public policy decision-making process, the public helps the City of Los Angeles arrive at better policy solutions.

The Neighborhood Council System is a representative democracy where stakeholders s/elect representatives to advise the City of Los Angeles in legislation and the delivery of City services. Representatives are elected to make decisions, with public discussion, and arrive at a decision through consensus by majority. Neighborhood Councils promote public participation through inclusive membership, transparent operations and provides opportunities for the public to give input on matters within the jurisdiction of the Board and the City of Los Angeles.

Neighborhood Councils are self-governing and independent, and make decisions on behalf of their stakeholders. Neighborhood Councils are a deliberative body and have the right to assemble, make motions, speak in debate and vote. The opinion of each Board Member has equal weight when voting and the public has the right to give input prior to the Board taking a vote. In a representative democracy, the decision is up to the elected body and the decision of the Neighborhood Council is upheld.

It is the responsibility of each Neighborhood Council to consult and involve the public prior to making a decision on a matter, and to inform the public of the decision once it has been made.

3. WHAT RULES AND POLICIES APPLY TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL SYSTEM?

FEDERAL LAWS:

American with Disabilities Act

STATE LAWS:

The Ralph M. Brown Act

The California Public Records Act

Government Code 1090

Political Reform Act of 1974

CITY LAWS:

The Los Angeles Administrative Code, Chapter 28

The Plan for a Citywide System of Neighborhood Councils

BOARD OF NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSIONERS POLICIES:

Agenda Posting Policy

Minutes Policy

Grievance Policy

Code of Conduct

OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK:

Neighborhood Council Funding Program Policies and Guidelines

Neighborhood Council Election Handbook

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL:

Neighborhood Council Bylaw

Neighborhood Council Standing Rules

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES:

Robert's Rules of Order or Rosenberg's Rules of Order

4. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT?

- Implement and oversee compliance with City ordinances and regulations related to [The Plan for a Citywide System of Neighborhood Councils](#)
- Provide operational support to Neighborhood Councils such as: facilitate meetings, help secure meeting and office space, early notification system, agenda writing/setting, outreach
- Assist Neighborhood Councils with the selection of their Governing Body and conduct outreach efforts to mobilize stakeholders to vote in Neighborhood Council Elections
- Help coordinate and facilitate collaboration among Neighborhood Councils and help organize an annual Congress of Neighborhood Councils
- Promote and facilitate open communication among Neighborhood Councils and City agencies and provide education, guidance, and assistance in developing strategies for providing comments and feedback to the City Council and its Committees, and City Boards and Commissions
- Provide operational and capacity-building trainings for Neighborhood Council Board Members such as:
 - Board Orientation
 - Community Impact Statements
 - Communications Training
 - Community Outreach
 - Leadership Development

5. CITY GOVERNMENT 101

The City of Los Angeles is a Mayor-Council-Commission form of government, as originally adopted by the voter of the City of Los Angeles, effective July 1, 1925. In 1999, the voters approved a new City Charter that addresses government in this new century. The new City Charter, effective July 2000, provided for the creation of a Citywide System of Neighborhood Councils. The goal of the Neighborhoods Councils is to promote public participation in City governance and decision-making process to create a government more responsive to local needs.

All members of the public have the ability to provide public comment at City Council, Committee and Commission meetings. Neighborhood Councils have the unique ability to address the City Council or a Council Committee for an extended period to elaborate on the official position of the Neighborhood Council, by an authorized Board Member, through the filing of a Community Impact Statement (CIS). The opportunity for Neighborhood Councils to speak is considered separate from the public comment process.

“Community Impact Statements” can be filed by a Board authorized Board Member, and the Neighborhood Council’s Board approved position will be recorded to the corresponding “Council File” in the City Clerk’s [Council File Management System](#) (CFMS). The CFMS is an online tool that provides summaries and details of all legislation considered and/or acted upon by the Los Angeles City Council.

The City also provides “Early Notification Subscriptions” (ENS) for agendas for the following meetings: [Neighborhood Councils](#), [City Council](#), [Council Committees](#), [Commissions](#), [Department of City Planning Bi-weekly cases](#), and [other City Departments](#). Both Neighborhood Councils and the public are encouraged to sign up to stay informed.

6. RUNNING YOUR FIRST NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL MEETING

The first Neighborhood Council meeting after an s/election will require the seating of the Board. Then, Executive Officers will be appointed by the Board unless these Executive Officers are already elected by their stakeholders or otherwise noted in the Neighborhood Council's Bylaws.

Executive Officers play an important leadership role in each Neighborhood Council and their duties and responsibilities are outlined in each Neighborhood Council's Bylaws. Executive Officers should work as a team and share administrative duties to keep the Neighborhood Council operating effectively.

It is recommended that a "Bank Cardholder," "Second Signer," and "Alternate Signer" also be appointed at the first meeting. Board Members are required to complete a 2-hour Ethics Training, Funding Training and the Code of Conduct prior to voting on any funding items coming before the Board including the budget and the appointment of Funding Officers. The first Board meeting may also be the time when committee chairs are appointed, unless otherwise noted in the Neighborhood Council's Bylaws.

Available to Neighborhood Council Board and Committee members are:

Sample Agenda Templates: [Echo Park NC](#), [Greater Toluca Lake NC](#), [Palms NC](#)
[Sample Meeting Script](#)
[Required Language for Meeting Agendas](#)

Please be sure to have copies of the Board meeting agenda and all supporting documents available for the public. Establishing a "Legacy Book," is a good way to avail Neighborhood Council documents and records for the public to review at each meeting.

In addition, all Neighborhood Council meetings and events must be open and inclusive, and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

7. COMMUNICATION SKILLS & CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Neighborhood Councils are composed of individuals with a wide variety of backgrounds, personalities, values, opinions and goals; and the focus of collaboration shifts from the individual to the Board. However, with such diversity of thoughts and opinions, conflict within the Board can occur from time to time. Utilizing parliamentary procedures to facilitate orderly discussion and having empathy are two key strategies for improving communication with the Board and the public.

Parliamentary Procedures:

Respect the role of the Chair/President – This person should be well-versed in parliamentary procedures and Neighborhood Council Bylaws and addressed as Mr. President/Madam President.

“Obtain the Floor” prior to speaking – Before a Board Member can make a motion or speak in debate he/she/they must obtain the floor by being recognized by the Chair as having the exclusive right to be heard at the time. When speaking, Board Members should address his/her/their comments to the Chair.

Communication Tips:

- Show appreciation to your fellow Board Member and volunteers
- Connect on a personal level and find shared interests
- Stay positive to keep the meeting environment enjoyable and among good company
- Watch your tone; there is a fine line between assertive and aggressive
- Focus on the results as clear objectives will help direct the conversation
- Listen, maintain an open mind and do not interrupt
- Notice non-verbal cues such as body language, lack of eye contact, and yawning
- Request feedback to confirm your message has been received and for buy-in
- Follow up with clear deadlines, responsibilities and expectations for accountability

Productive communication involves respect, consideration, awareness and clarity.

8. NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL BYLAWS

Neighborhood Council Bylaws are set rules established and agreed upon by the Neighborhood Council. Because Neighborhood Councils are self-governing and independent, Bylaws are the guiding document to help the Neighborhood Council self-regulate. It is the responsibility of each Board Member to be familiar with the Neighborhood Council's Bylaws.

Neighborhood Council Bylaws outline the geographic boundaries of the Neighborhood Council and set the Governing Body of the Council. Neighborhood Council Bylaws also sets quorum (minimum number of Board Members present to conduct business), how it takes "[official action](#)," duties and responsibilities of Board Members and its officers (executives), and how officers are selected. Neighborhood Council Bylaws also define absences, filling vacancies on the Board, and how to address censure and removal of board members. The City Attorney's Neighborhood Council Advice Division must be consulted prior to the Board discussing censure and/or removal of a board member.

Neighborhood Council Bylaws establish committee creation and authorization. Committees help to facilitate adequate consideration on matters within the Board's jurisdiction and make written recommendations for the Board to deliberate and take action. Committees are advisory to the Board and all positions/documents must be reviewed and approved by the full Board for official action. Neighborhood Council Board, Standing Committees and possibly Ad Hoc Committees, must adhere to the Brown Act and follow the Commission's [Agenda Posting Policy](#).

Neighborhood Councils have the opportunity to amend its bylaws with the submission of the [Bylaw Amendment Application](#) during designated periods set by the Department. All bylaw amendments are submitted to the Department for review and approval. Any amendments to Article III (Boundaries) or Article V (Governing Board) will require approval by the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners.

9. PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES

Parliamentary procedure is a set of rules for meetings and seeks to expedite the business of the Neighborhood Council in an orderly manner. While decisions are made by majority vote, parliamentary procedure such as Robert's Rules of Order and Rosenberg's Rules of Order, protect the minority voice.

A "[motion](#)" is a formal proposal upon which certain action can be taken and is the means by which all business is introduced to the Board. To make a motion:

Boardmember A – 1. Addresses the Chair to obtain the floor

2. Awaits recognition from the Chair

3. Makes the motion

Boardmember B – 4. Seconds the motion to indicate support for a vote

Chairperson – 5. States the "Question" (repeats the motion) to open discussion

6. Board Member discussion/debate (can occur as step 7)

7. Public comment (can occur as step 6)

8. Calls for the "Question" and ends debate

9. Takes the vote in favor, opposed and abstain

10. Announces the vote of the prevailing side, and immediately moves on to the next item on the agenda

An "[amendment](#)" is a motion to change the wording of the main motion. There are also "privileged," "incidental" and "subsidiary" motions which have rules for debate and vote thresholds.

All business of the Board is controlled by the will of the Board. Parliamentary procedure should help, not hinder the business of the Board.

Additional tools and resources are available from the Department ([video](#) & [Point of Order](#), & [Debate Ground Rules](#)) and from professional parliamentarians.

10. EMPOWERING YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD!

Whether it is community “organizing”, “outreach”, or “empowerment”, Neighborhood Councils first need to know who makes up its community. The Department provides demographic data from the Census Bureau to inform Neighborhood Councils about its residents and equally important, who is presently not being represented.

There are a variety of communication methods to reach stakeholders including: mailings, emails, flyers, website, newsletters, door to door canvassing, and phone banking. To identify the most effective methods of reaching stakeholders, an “outreach plan,” that includes defined goals, activities, timelines, and evaluations, should be developed. An “outreach plan” should also contain strategies for capturing stakeholder data.

Neighborhood Council Board Members volunteer their time, network and expertise, committing to 5 – 20 hours a month, on behalf of the Neighborhood Council System. Neighborhood Councils rely on its Board to conduct community outreach, partnership projects and events. Each neighborhood in Los Angeles has its unique character, history, and neighbors. “Asset mapping” is another important strategy in identifying the people and resources available within each Neighborhood Council to help accomplish its goals and objectives.

Neighborhood Councils work at the grassroots level to bring change and help shape the community. Through collaborative and collective efforts, Neighborhood Councils work to address issues in the community, develop innovative solutions and advocate for the neighborhood’s interest.

The Department of Neighborhood Empowerment is a partner in empowering communities throughout the City of Los Angeles and we look forward to working with you. Thank you for your service!