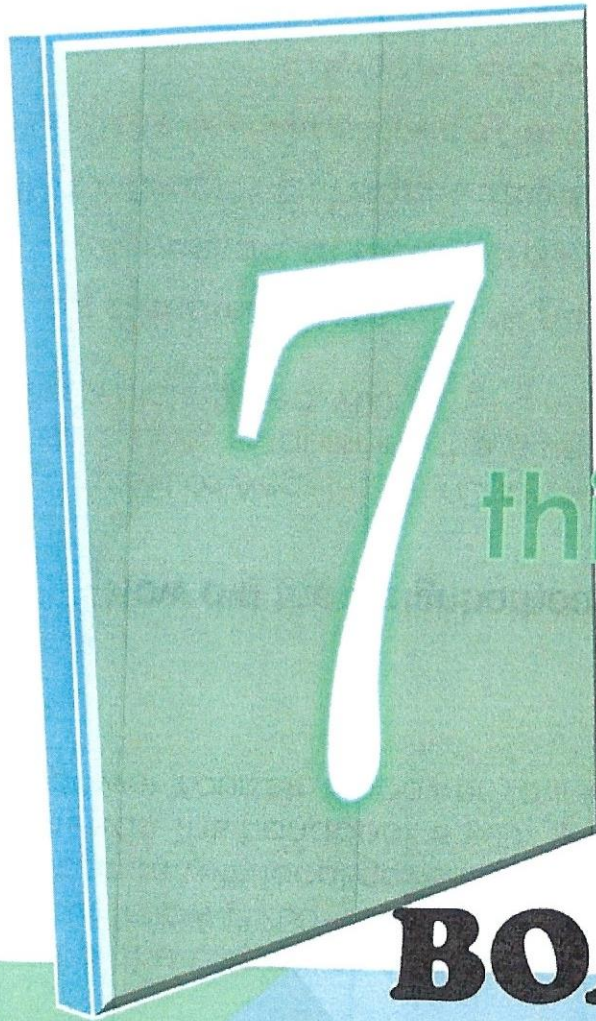


EMPOWER LA

FIELD OPERATIONS

Department of
NEIGHBORHOOD EMPOWERMENT

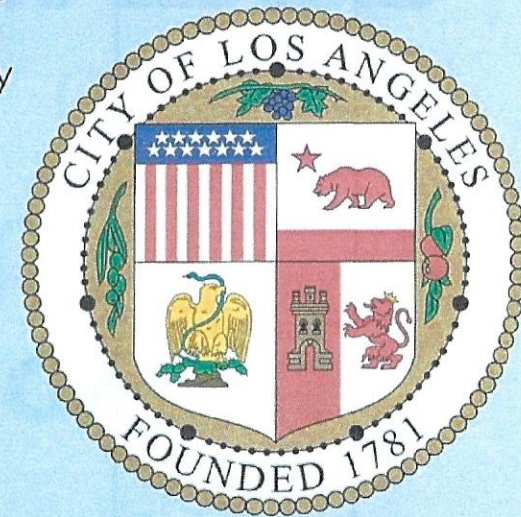


7 things to know as a
neighborhood
council

BOARD MEMBER

Congratulations Felicidades
恭喜你 おめでとうございます
축하합니다 Ἐμπρησάτε
Xin chúc mừng تبریک می گویم

As part of the City of Los Angeles, Neighborhood Council System, you and your fellow (1700+) Board Members are tasked to improve public participation with local government and the City's responsiveness to local needs. This handbook is your guide to help you with your journey to Empower Yourself, Empower Your Community, and Empower LA!



How did the Neighborhood Council Movement Begin?

The City of Los Angeles City Charter Reform was approved by voters in 1999, establishing the system of Neighborhood Councils under Article IX Sec. 900:

“To Promote more citizen participation in government and make government more responsive to local needs, a citywide system of neighborhood councils, and a Department of Neighborhood Empowerment is created. Neighborhood councils shall include representative of many diverse interests in communities and shall have an advisory role on issues of concern to the neighborhoods.”



EMPOWER LA™

Department of
NEIGHBORHOOD EMPOWERMENT



The Department and its Role and Functions:
The Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (the Department) supports the Neighborhood Councils, committed leaders, and their dynamic communities through our programs collectively known as EmpowerLA.

EmpowerLA is the brand created by the Department to encompass the mission and priorities of the Neighborhood Councils. EmpowerLA refers to the movement and the core of the Department, Neighborhood Councils, and the City of Los Angeles.

The Board of Neighborhood Commissioners (the Commission)

The Commission is a seven (7) member body that represents the seven (7) geographic areas within the City: Central Area, East Area, Harbor, North Valley, South Valley, and South Los Angeles. The Commission, appointed by the Mayor, is charged with setting policy and approving contracts and leases for the Neighborhood Council System.

Never hesitate to contact us for:

- Meeting Facilitation Support
- Technical Assistance with Neighborhood Councils' Bylaws, Ordinances and Grievances
- Outreach and Community Organizing Assistance
- Board Development, Retreat Facilitation, and Strategic Planning Support
- Neighborhood Council Funding Program Assistance
- Conflict Resolution Services
- Administrative Assistance such as: Interpretation Services, Office Space, and Equipment Purchases

How Neighborhood Councils Create Impact

Neighborhood Councils' purpose/mandate is to increase public participation, increase government responsiveness to local needs, be diverse, and take interest in their respective neighborhoods.

- **Advocating to City Council Members on Local & Citywide Issues**
- **Advising the Mayor on the City budget**
- **Reviewing Proposed Development and Real Estate Projects, Assessing their Impact, and Providing Feedback to City Officials**
- **Hosting Social and Cultural Events** such as Street Fairs and Festivals
- **Organizing Forums** to Engage Community Members on Critical Issues
- **Volunteering on Community Beautification Projects**
- **Funding Initiatives** to Address Local Community Needs

Now that you have an overview of the Department, the System and the evolution of the Neighborhood Councils, it's time to dive into the governing documents, meeting facilitation, outreach and other tools.

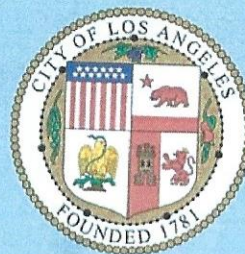
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Building on a Firm Foundation – Governing Documents

The Charter Created the System, Now What's The Plan?

The Citywide System of Neighborhood Councils (Plan) was adopted on May 30, 2001 by the City Council after many community meetings, which allowed for input and feedback. The Plan includes guidelines and regulations for Neighborhood Councils pertaining the certification process, board structure, stakeholder definition, roles, funding requirements and the Department function.

OFFICIAL CITY OF LOS ANGELES CHARTER™



www.lacity.org

June 8, 1999

The Charter includes amendments published as **Revision No. 8**, including legislation adopted through **March 31, 2015**.

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1-800-445-5588

Your Bylaws define many aspects of your Neighborhood Council, including the governing structure, the duties of officers, agenda-setting process, etc.

- How many board seats do we have ?
Article V, Section 1
- How many board members are needed for an official meeting ?
Article V, Section 2
- How long do the officers serve ?
Article VI, Section 4
- What committees have been created ?
Article VII, Section 1
- How do I join a committee ?
Article VII, Section 3
- When are the Regular Board meetings ? Article VIII, Section 1
- Who sets the agenda ?
Article VIII, Section 2
- What are the rules of engagement ?
Article XIV, Section 1
- Can I vote?
Article XIV, Section 2

Your Bylaws

**Do you really know Them?
Do you know where they are
at this time?**

Do you know your Board's quorum?

...Then there's Standing Rules:

Standing rules regulate procedures and operations more specific to your neighborhood council. These rules can be more easily created and amended at the discretion of the Board, and cannot be in conflict with your Bylaws

The Ralph M. Brown Act

(California OPEN Meetings Law)

Come on in – We're OPEN!

The Brown Act (within Government Code at § 54950 et seq.) establishes the rules for the actions and deliberations of commissions, boards, councils and other public bodies of local agencies. It is designed to ensure that meetings are OPEN to the public, accessible, and allow for public input before decisions are made

Meetings under the Brown Act:

Any gathering of a quorum of a legislative body to discuss or transact business under the body's jurisdiction; serial meetings are prohibited § 54952.2

- Meetings and the decision-making process must be open to the public
- Meeting facilities must be in compliance with Americans with Disabilities (ADA) regulations
- Agendas for **Regular meetings** must be posted (and allowed to be viewed) 72 hours in advance
- **Special meeting** agendas must be posted 24 hours and delivered to board members; Agendas must include mandatory ADA language
- Board members may only discuss items that are listed on the agenda

THE
BROWN
ACT

OPEN MEETINGS FOR
LOCAL LEGISLATIVE BODIES

2003

CALIFORNIA ATTORNEY
GENERAL'S OFFICE

No Serial Communication / Meetings.

A series of separate communications involving less than a majority of the legislative body involving a current topic, and not involving a majority (or the least numbers of board/committee members that can take action) of that legislative body. § 54952.2b



OPEN MEETINGS FOR
LOCAL LEGISLATIVE BODIES

How many board members are allowed to communicate outside of a meeting before an improper serial communication occurs?

The number will depend on the Neighborhood Council's bylaws. Communication between Board Members on current items or actionable topics should be no larger than the voting majority of the Neighborhood Council quorum requirement.

For example, if the Board has 21 members, quorum is 11 members, and it takes action by a majority of those members present, six (6) people engaged in a discussion that led to a concurrence on an item; there would be a Brown Act violation.

This concern also applies to the board's committees. For example, if a committee is comprised of five (5) members, quorum is three (3) members, and decisions are made by a majority vote of the quorum present; it would be a violation of the Brown Act if three (3) or more members engaged in communication outside of committee meetings, that led to a concurrence on an item.

2003

ATTORNEY
GENERAL'S OFFICE

Rights of the Public:

- The public may comment on each agenda item before decisions/ recommendations are made by the Board or Committee.
- Members of the public have the right to make general public comments.
- See materials that are distributed at meetings.
- Make audio and visual recordings of meetings.
§ 54954.3; 54953.5; 54953.5; 54953.6
- Although sign-in sheets are commonplace at most meetings, members of the public are not required to sign-in to attend the meeting.
§ 54953.3; 54961

THE BROWN ACT

OPEN MEETINGS FOR
LOCAL LEGISLATIVE BODIES

2003

CALIFORNIA ATTORNEY
GENERAL'S OFFICE

The Public Records Act (PRA)

While the Federal government's Freedom of Information Act allows broad access to federal government documents, the State of California has the California Public Records Act (PRA). Neighborhood Councils are advisors on public matters, entrusted to spend public funds, and integral to local government; thus subject to the California Public Records Act.

- PRA requests may be done **in writing or verbally**. A member of the public does not have to identify his/her request explicitly as a PRA request in order for it to be a PRA request.
- Public records requests may include, but are not limited to, printed documents, computer filings, emails, videos, and audio recordings belonging to the Council.

If a PRA request is made, **immediately contact** the Neighborhood Empowerment Advocate assigned to your Neighborhood Council. There are strict response times required under the PRA.

Some information is not subject to public disclosure as it may not be deemed to be of public benefit, but only the Office of the City Attorney can make that determination. The Neighborhood Council does not have independent discretion to make such a determination.

Neighborhood Councils are advised to select/appoint a **custodian of records** to act, in conjunction with the Office of City Attorney, as the primary coordinator of responses to PRA requests. Nonetheless, the entire Neighborhood Council—including its board and committees—is responsible for responding to PRAs. PRA responses are issued on behalf of the Neighborhood Councils, but all persons who have related records to the request are required to produce it.



Summary
of the
California Public Records Act 2004

California Attorney General's Office

American with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) applies to operations of state and local governments. Neighborhood Councils, as part of the City family, are required to provide a **reasonable accommodation** to the public attending their meetings and events.

What are Reasonable Accommodations?

Reasonable accommodations are efforts made to remove barriers, which prevent or limit participation by persons with disabilities in a program, service or activity.



Considerations when planning a meeting or event:

- Assigning an ADA Liaison to coordinate requests with the Department on Disability
- Access to public transportation
- Availability of disabled parking
- Convenient drop-off and pick-up point, adjacent to the main entrance, where attendees with disabilities may be dropped off or wait for transportation
- Access to restrooms, corridors and aisle sufficient for wheelchair access?
- Common Types of Accommodations
 - Materials in Braille and/or Large Print, Captioning, Sign Language Interpreters, Ramps

Feel free to contact the City of Los Angeles, Department on Disability, should you need further assistance with your event/meeting planning activities:

(213) 485-6334 Voice (213) 485-6655 TTY (213) 485-8052 FAX lacity.org/dod

Ethics and Conflict of Interest – Don't Guess. Call the City Attorney for Advice

As a member of your Neighborhood Council governing board; you hold a position of public trust. As such, Neighborhood Council Board Members should be solely guided by the public's benefit. Ethics regulations help guard against the temptation of self-interest and self-dealing for personal gain.

State laws set the ethics standards and the requirements that all public officials take an ethics courses every two years.

- The Political Reform Act of 1974
- Government Code 1090
- The Common Law Conflict of Interest Laws
- City of Los Angeles Ordinance 176477

In some cases, conflicts between Board Members could affect the Board's ability to make a decision and take action. In the best interest for your entire board and the community, it is incumbent and the responsibility of individual Board Members to **contact the Office of the City Attorney for advice** on ethics questions, perception of conflict of interests, any ethical concerns.

Due to attorney/client privilege, the Office of City Attorney will not advise persons on the board regarding another board member's possible conflict. All determinations regarding possible ethics concerns and/or conflicts of interest are entirely fact-specific to a given scenario. Representatives from the Office of City Attorney will not respond to "hypothetically" posed questions, as there is too much room for interpretation and error.

3


Successful Neighborhood Council Meeting: Before, During, and After

Before

During

After

Effective and efficient meetings are integral to the success of a Neighborhood Council. Without effective and efficient meetings, it is difficult to maintain the focus and community engagement needed to achieve a Neighborhood Council's goals.



Before the Meeting

Plan, plan, plan.

The chairperson should also consider the date, time, and location that can work for the majority of the participants. Assess the level of interest and the potential for contentiousness for each item. Allot time to each item.

Think of the logistics

- How the room will be set up
- Whether you will need translation equipment
- Where people can park,
- Accessibility to public transportation
- Signage to the meeting room
- Public documents handouts
- Board Member table-top name tags
- Refreshments

Design your agenda to achieve meeting goals.

- Decide what materials may be needed and what kind of facilitation support you may need at the meeting (e.g. a co-facilitator, a parliamentarian, a time-keeper.)
- The chairperson should consult with the secretary regarding the agenda;
- Ensure that all interested parties have been notified.

Ensure that your agenda meets all requirements in respect to the rights of the public.

The public has the right to know what the Neighborhood Council is discussing and/or taking action on, and has right to participate in Neighborhood Council Meetings. Your agendas should at a minimum include:

- Descriptive wording that allows the public to know if the Board will be taking an action on an item or simply giving a report; If funding, the amount being considered, the purpose and applicant name
- An item for General Public Comment for concerns/issues not listed on the agenda

Before

the Meeting

Required Language on Agendas

Public Input at Neighborhood Council Meetings - The public is requested to fill out a "Speaker Card" to address the Board on any agenda item before the Board takes an action on an item. Comments from the public on agenda items will be heard only when the respective item is being considered. Comments from the public on other matters not appearing on the agenda that are within the Board's jurisdiction will be heard during the General Public Comment period. Please note that under the Brown Act, the Board is prevented from acting on a matter that you bring to its attention during the General Public Comment period; however, the issue raised by a member of the public may become the subject of a future Board meeting. Public comment is limited to 2 minutes per speaker, unless adjusted by the presiding officer of the Board.

Public Posting of Agendas - "Pacoima NC agendas are posted for public review as follows:

- Pacoima Community Center, 11243 Glenoaks Blvd, Pacoima
- www.PacoimaNC.com
- You can also receive our agendas via email by subscribing to L.A. City's Early Notification System at <http://www.lacity.org/government/Subscriptions/NeighborhoodCouncils/index.htm>

American with Disabilities - "As covered entity under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the City of Los Angeles does not discriminate on the basis of disability and upon request, will provide reasonable accommodation to ensure equal access to its programs, services, and activities. Sign language interpreters, assistive listening devices, or other auxiliary aids and/or services may be provided upon request. To ensure availability of services, please make your request at least 3 business days prior to the meeting you wish to attend by contacting First-name Last-name, (XXX) XXX-XXXX or e-mail somebody@something.com"

Public Access to Records - "In compliance with Government Code section 54957.5, non-exempt writings that are distributed to a majority or all of the board in advance of a meeting, may be viewed at [insert address], [optional: at our website by clicking on the following link: ,] or at the scheduled meeting. In addition, if you would like a copy of any record related to an item on the agenda, please contact _____

During the Meeting

Communicate Clearly

At the beginning of the meeting, set the ground rules and the goals for the meeting. Stay lively and use language that everyone can understand, avoid jargon and acronyms. Summarize key points to end a topic and to ensure that everyone understands what took place and what actions are required.

Remain Impartial

Your role as Chair is to ensure all participants have the opportunity to express their perspective. Chairpersons should not use your position as facilitator to impose their opinion/solution on the board to stakeholders.

Stay on Course

Keep the board focused on its goals. The chairperson should provide leadership to remain focused if one topic begins to dominate the discussion. Allot a fair amount of time for discussion on agenda items. It may be necessary to call for a decision or table the item for further discussion. At times, the board may find itself entertaining a very heated and passionate discussion about an issue. If necessary, the Chair may call for a recess for parties to calm down and refocus.

Use your Facilitator Tools

Timers, standing rules & parliamentary procedures, a clearly written agenda, the code of civility, and speakers' list are some of the many tools available to help keep the meeting on course.

Enforce Fairness

Ensuring that everyone can participate will almost certainly involve stopping someone from dominating the proceedings. The more contentious the issue, the more likely you are to require firmness. You don't need to be rude or dogmatic. Phrases such as "I think we should hear from Ms. Smith on this" or "can we have some comments from the Engineering Department on this" should be sufficient in most cases. Once you provide this opening, however, you need to ensure that there are no interruptions while the next speaker has their say.



the Meeting

Communicate Action Items, Next Steps, and Assignments

Action items should be assigned to (a) point person(s) to ensure follow through and completion

Engage New Stakeholders

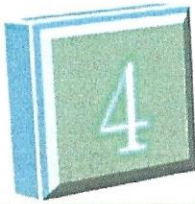
After the meeting, take the opportunity to welcome new stakeholders, encourage participation, and learn more about their interests. New stakeholder should be greeted by a Neighborhood Council board member and volunteers. New stakeholders should have the opportunity to sign up for Neighborhood Council activities.

Update your Neighborhood Council contact information

Input contact information from speaker cards, business cards, and meeting sign-in sheets to email lists as soon as possible. Stay connected to your stakeholders by asking for their interests for their community.

Ensure that meeting records are maintained

Record, type, and distribute minutes (i.e. meeting notes) to ensure that Board Members and Stakeholders stay informed about Neighborhood Council activities



Money Management

Basics on The NC Funding Program

It is the responsibility of the entire Neighborhood Council Governing Board to manage and oversee the funds of the Council.

Budget

Neighborhood Councils are required to submit a board approved annual budget each Fiscal Year (July 1st – June 30th) detailing how the NC will allocate its funding within the five (5) allowed categories; Operating Expenses (100), Outreach Activities (200), Community Improvement Projects (300), Neighborhood Purposes Grants (400), and Elections (500).

The Annual Budget must be submitted along with a Board Vote Form showing board action description, date, vote count, and signed by the Treasurer and 2nd Signatory, along with a current Board Roster, Strategic Plan, Outreach Survey, and previous-year Self-Assessment.

Expenditures

All expenditures must be included on a board agenda and discussed and approved at a public meeting in accordance with the Brown Act. At a minimum, the information on the agenda should include the name of the vendor(s) or organization that the funding is for, the amount requested, and the purpose of the expenditure.

Unacceptable Purchases

Expenses not approved by the Board, advanced payments, transportation, travel, split-charges, donations, third-party reimbursements, alcohol, tobacco, firearms, adult entertainment, purchases in conflict with the separation of church and state or conflict of interest laws, purchases in support of or opposition to ballot measures or candidates, lawsuits against the City

Training

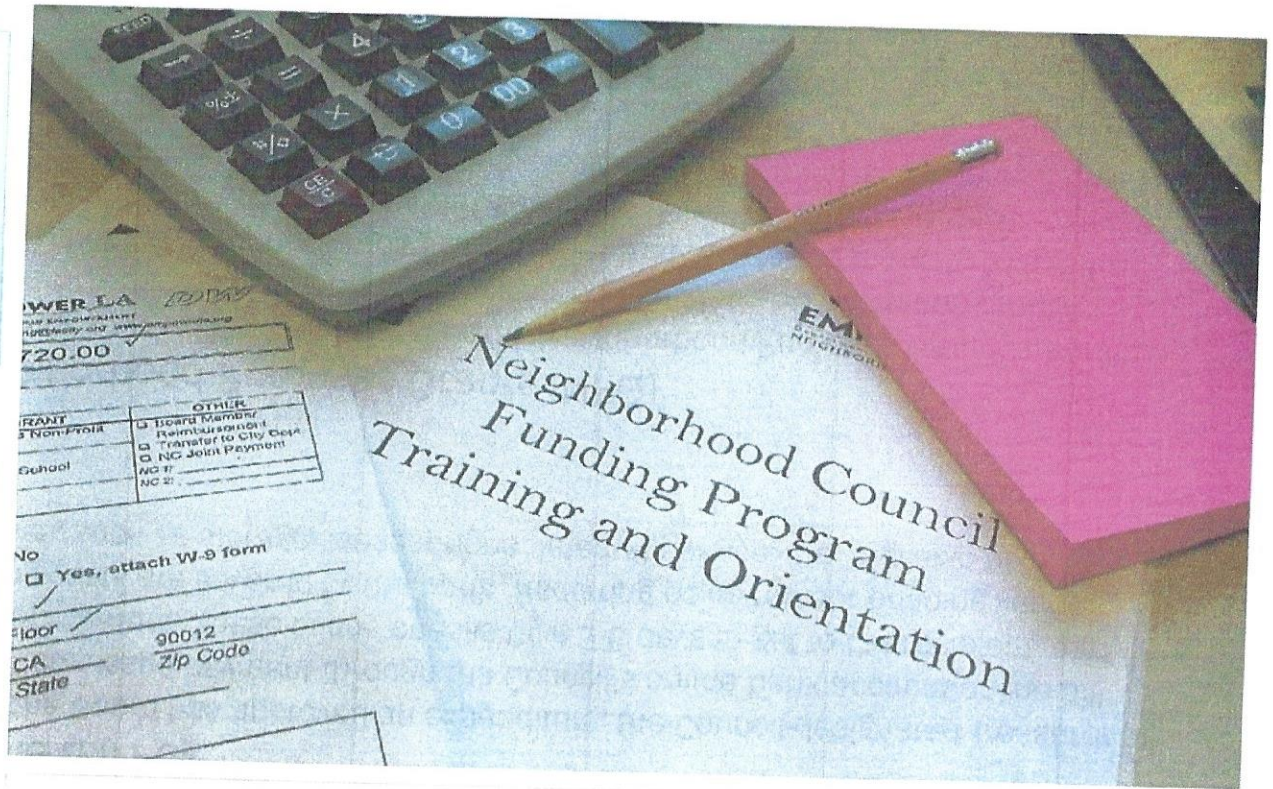
Treasurers and Second Signatory are required to attend the Department's Funding Program training and orientation session in order to access the NC's funding allocation.

Treasurer and Second Signatory

Persons assigned these roles are to oversee and conduct the day-to-day bookkeeping responsibilities such as keeping track of expenses, making purchases, reconciling documents, and providing reports to the board, public and City.

Reporting Requirements

Each month a Monthly Expenditure Report (MER) of all financial transactions must be reviewed and approved by the Board in a public meeting and submitted to the Department. MERs are due ten (10) days after the NC meeting in which they were approved. The report must include the MER Form, bank statements, and original receipts corresponding to the transactions on the bank statement as well as the Board Vote Count Forms approving the transaction.



Board members are required to view online or attend in-person the Department's condensed Funding Program training in order to be able to vote on funding expenditures for their respective Neighborhood Council board.



Payment Methods available to Neighborhood Councils

There are two main methods of payments that a Neighborhood Council can use to transact board-approved expenditures.

Bank Card

Currently, each NC has access to one (1) Card with a spending cap of \$2,500.00 per day to make payments to vendors that accept card payments.

Split charges, or transactions split into multiple charges, in order to circumvent the transaction limit amount, are not allowed.

Online Bill Pay

Once the Board has approved an expenditure, the Council-designated Treasurer or Signer can issue payment through the Council's online bank account online bill payment feature. These online checks take 3-5 days to get to the recipient, and mailing costs are covered by the bank. Recurring payments for ongoing vendor services, such as storage, lease, phone, Internet service, etc. can also be set up.

Neighborhood Purposes Grants (NPG)

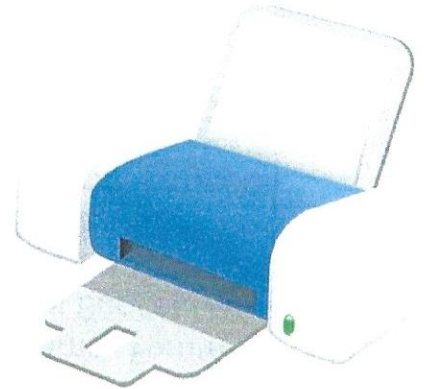
While not a payment method in general, Neighborhood Purposes Grants are funding awards NCs can issue to public schools or non-religious 501 C(3) non-profit organizations for proposed projects/activities that are deemed worthy to fulfill a public benefit in the community. NPGs can be for any amount, paid through online payment; However, a contract must be executed for any request above \$5,000.00

Equipment Inventory

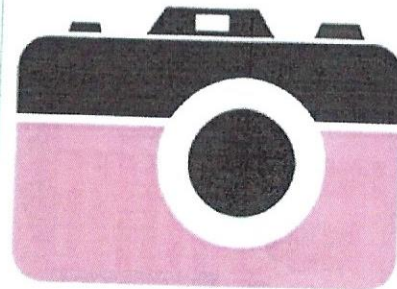
Neighborhood Councils purchases that qualify as inventory under City Policy must track and maintain the items. Inventory items are defined as:

Each NC is required to maintain a list of its inventory and affix an inventory tag with a unique number (e.g. WANC10-001) for any item that falls under the City's inventory policy:

Any electric or electronic office and communications equipment, such as printers and copying machines, regardless of cost



Any computer hardware, including desktop or laptop computer(s), regardless of cost.



Any digital cameras, regardless of cost

Any item with an acquisition or assigned value of at least \$1,000.00 and an estimated useful life of at least three years



Each NC is also required to submit its inventory list to the Department along with its year-end reconciliation report or as prescribed by the Department.



Neighborhood Council Advocacy

Actions & Tools that Neighborhood Councils Use

Advocate to City Council Members on Local & Citywide Issues

- Take official positions on City policies
- File **Community Impact Statements (CIS)** that allows NCs to take official position before City Council and its Committees
- Subscribe to meeting Agendas through the City's Early Notification System (ENS)
- Host Planning and Land Use Meetings
- Review Requests for New Building Permits in your Region
- Establish Liaisons with City Departments

Advise and Advocate to City Departments

Re: City Services and Policies

- DWP Memorandum of Agreement with Neighborhood Councils
- Changes adjustments to the Citywide Neighborhood Council Election Policy



Funding Initiatives to Address Local Community Needs

- e.g...Provide Grants to Local After-school Sports Programs
- e.g...Provide Grants for Local Non-Profit to Assist with Homeless Services

Advise Mayor on City Budget

- Attend Annual Budget Day
- Distribute Budget Survey in their communities
- Host discussions on City Budget at NC Meetings
- Serve as a Budget Representative or Advocate in the Community Budget Process

Organize Forums to Engage Community Members

- Election Forums for new NC Candidates
- City Attorney Forum
- Regional Budget Decisions

Volunteering on Community Beautification Projects

- Clean-Ups and Days of Service
- Commercial Corridor Design Enhancements

Host Social and Cultural Events

- Spring Street Fair
- Art Walks
- Unity Fair



What are Community Impact Statements (CIS)?

A CIS expresses a position taken by a Neighborhood Council regarding a matter (proposed policy or legislation) that is before the City Council or any of its committees or commissions. Taking a position means that the Neighborhood Council has voted on the matter at a public meeting and thereby determined what it wants to say about the matter's possible impact on the community it represents. Once submitted, the CIS is indicated on the City Council agenda when it addresses that matter.

How Do We Know Which Matters the City Council is Addressing?

As part of the Early Notification System created to keep Neighborhood Councils and other stakeholders informed, the Office of the City Clerk has a comprehensive Council File Management System that enables you to follow any matter throughout the legislative process. Each proposal or legislative item introduced is given a Council File Number that identifies it throughout its life cycle. You can track proposals and ensure that your community's impact statement is linked simply by knowing the CF # of the matter you are concerned about. (The Department of Neighborhood Empowerment provides training on how to use the Council File Management System and track legislation.)

How do Neighborhood Councils submit Community Impact Statements?

1. The Neighborhood Council takes an official board position on a matter at a public meeting. The record of this action* must accompany any CIS that the NC submits.
2. The Neighborhood Council finds out the correct Council File Number to link to their CIS. All CIS must be linked to a Council File Number.
3. The Neighborhood Council submits its CIS with the Council File Number to the Office of the City Clerk by one of the following means:
 - Online. Each Neighborhood Council may select up to five (5) persons to file CIS's on behalf of the Neighborhood Council. Once the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment receives the NC's record of action indicating the designated filers, the Department will set up password-protected access to the CIS submission portal for each person.
 - Fax
 - Email
 - By mail/hand delivery

*A Neighborhood Council's record of action may be either:

- The Minutes and agenda for the meeting at which the action was taken

OR

- A Board Vote Form signed by at least two designated board members. A meeting agenda should also accompany the signed Form.



Outreach

Key Aspects

Strategy

What are we Doing? A strategy has four real parts. What one wants to achieve; activities and tactics to be utilized; the timeline to conduct/carryout the plan; evaluation. Having a strategy allows the Neighborhood Council to track if it has met the goals for the action it has taken.

Communication

You must make contact and you must communicate, effectively, to build community. "Communication" has roots in the Latin words "communis" and "communicare", meaning, "to make common", "to share", "to unite" When we communicate, we are trying to establish "commonness" and to build community.

Messaging

Your message must be: Clear, Concise, Consistent and Compelling.

What is Outreach?

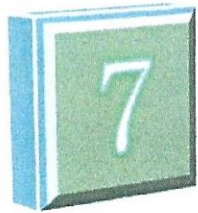
American Heritage's definition of outreach: "The act or process of reaching out." It is the act and process of reaching out to – community members, groups, organizations, institutions. It is reaching out to new stakeholders and it is the process of retaining those that you already have involved.

Outreach is Everyone's Responsibility...

Most Common Methods of Outreach

- ◆ One-on-One, face-to-face visits with your stakeholders
(This is the most effective method if you want to foster a relationship with stakeholders)
- ◆ Door-to-Door ◆ Group Meeting ◆ Phone Banking
- ◆ Flyer Distribution ◆ Mailings ◆ Emailing
- ◆ Websites ◆ Social Media





Neighborhood Council Support

EMPOWER LA™

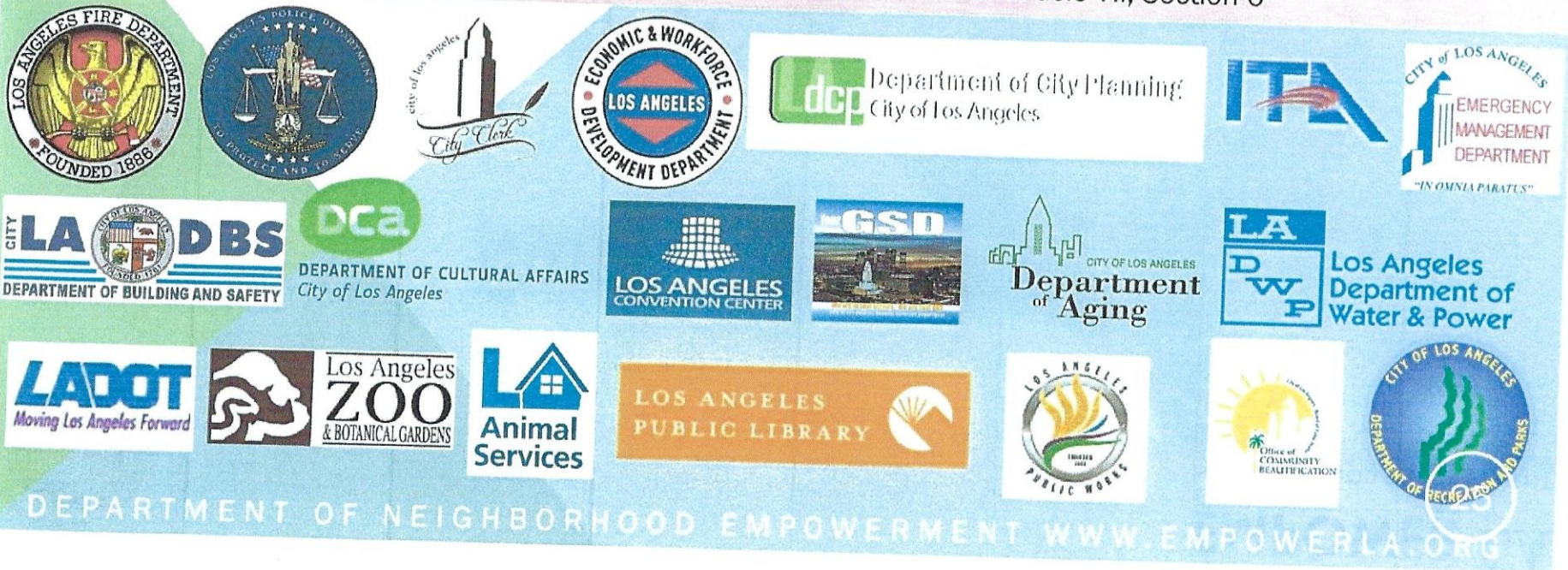
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NEIGHBORHOOD EMPOWERMENT

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14410 Sylvan Street, Ste. 401
Van Nuys, CA 91401
818-374-9898
ncsupport@lacity.org

“Promote and Facilitate open communication among City agencies and Certified Neighborhood Councils, 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.”

- Plan for a Citywide System of Neighborhood Council Article VII; Section 6





Empower Yourself

Empower Your Community

EmpowerLA