

BOARD MEMBER BASICS

A GUIDE TO THE LOS ANGELES
NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL SYSTEM

ABOUT

**NEIGHBORHOOD
COUNCILS**

CONTACT INFO

**FOR CITY
DEPTS THAT
SUPPORT
NCs**

DICTIONARY

**OF COMMON
TERMS**



DICTIONARY

OF NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL-RELATED TERMS

1090 = Government Code Section 1090 dealing with issues of financial conflicts of interest

AB1234 = State of California's mandatory ethics training for public officials. NC members are required to take this and other mandated trainings. The training must be updated on a periodic basis.

ADA = Americans With Disabilities Act. NC meetings must meet ADA established standards for accessibility. This includes accommodating requests for language or other assistance, as well as holding meetings at accessible locations. DONE has a map of ADA-compliant meeting locations in the City of Los Angeles at: EmpowerLA.org/accessible-meeting-locations. To find translation or other assistive services, consult the Vendors list on the final page of the Profile report that DONE emails each month to NC members, or ask your NEA.

ARC = Alliance of River Communities: alliance for Northeast area NCs

BAC = Board Action Count, a record of the votes cast by members of a board

Board / Board of Governors / BOG = Neighborhood Council

Board Member = Neighborhood Council member

BONC (aka The Commission) = the **Board of Neighborhood Commissioners** serves as a policy-making and oversight commission for both the NC system and the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment. Each of the 7 Commissioners represents a region of the City. They are appointed by the Mayor and serve 5 year terms. The Neighborhood Commissioners meet twice a month on the first Tuesday and third Monday. See meeting locations and agendas at EmpowerLA.org/commission/policies-and-meetings. Contact them at Commission@EmpowerLA.org.

CA = City Attorney

CAO = Chief Administrative Officer - City official who heads the annual City Budget process

CD = City Council District. LA has 15 City Council Districts, referred to by number - for example, CD15 is in the Harbor. Many NCs fall across two or more City Council Districts.

Representatives from local Council offices often attend an NC's monthly board meeting, to share updates and take notes for the Council Office they work for.

CF = Council File: matters before the City Council are assigned a unique file number by the City Clerk. The City's **Council File Management System** (CityClerk.LACity.org/m.ClerkConnect/#cfmsSearch) allows you to search for decades of current and past City Council actions. Any Community Impact Statement issued by an NC or letters from the public go into the Council File on that matter.

CIS = Community Impact Statement official letters issued by Neighborhood Councils stating the position that board has voted to take on City issues. CIS are one of the primary means by which LA's Neighborhood Councils fulfill their advisory role in the City government. CIS letters get added to the file that the City maintains on each issue, and are considered by the City Council as part of their discussion of an issue. CIS can be viewed by the public on the City Clerk's Council File Management System (CFMS) – a comprehensive index of all matters that are or have been considered and acted upon by the Los Angeles City Council. This index can be searched by keyword or Council File number – view it at CityClerk.LACity.org/lacityclerkconnect/index.cfm. CFMS also gives you an option to subscribe to get email notices whenever a file is updated.

CLA = Chief Legislative Analyst appointed position serving as the City's top policy advisor. The CLA primarily works with the City Council and the Mayor's office

Clerk = City Clerk: the Office of the City Clerk. City Clerk has two different divisions devoted to NC services - one focused on the administration of NC funding; the other dedicated to NC elections.

COI = Conflict of Interest

Congress of Neighborhoods (aka **NC Congress**) - annual gathering of NC members, elected officials, and other City family every September at City Hall for a day of networking and education (<http://NCCongressLA.com>)

Councilmember = one of the 15 Los Angeles **City Councilmembers**. NC members are usually called "board members" or Neighborhood Councilmembers

DONE = City of Los Angeles **Department of Neighborhood Empowerment**, the primary support agency for LA's Neighborhood Council system. DONE's main office is on the 20th floor of LA City Hall in Downtown LA, and they also have an office at Van Nuys City Hall.

EmpowerLA = the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment is sometimes called EmpowerLA because of its mission statement: "Empower Yourself. Empower Your Community. Empower LA."

EE = Exhaustive Efforts: an NC is placed into Exhaustive Efforts if a board is not able to operate in its current state.

ENS = Early Notification System, the City of Los Angeles' agenda subscription service to get email notices about all kinds of City meetings, including Neighborhood Council meetings. To subscribe to receive NC meeting agendas via ENS, visit tiny.cc/NCagendas. (You may also use the links on that page to subscribe to other City meeting agendas, such as the City Council or Planning Commissions.) Anyone who subscribes to receive agendas from your NC will be emailed the board and committee meeting agendas that you share to NCsupport@LAcity.org.

FRF = Funding Request Form

FY = Fiscal Year

HANC = Harbor Alliance of Neighborhood Councils

HC = Hollywood Coalition of Neighborhood Councils

MER = Monthly Expenditure Report

NC = Neighborhood Council

NEA (aka Field representative) = Neighborhood Empowerment Advocate, DONE staff member who serves as the primary liaison between an NC and the Department. Each NEA works with about 5 NCs. NEAs for NCs in the Harbor, Central, West, East, and Northeast areas work at the downtown City Hall office; NEAs for NCs in the San Fernando Valley are based in Van Nuys.

NCAD = the City Attorney's Neighborhood Council Advice Division, a special team of City Attorneys who provide legal advice on NC-related matters to NC members, DONE, BONC, and the City Clerk's NC Elections and NC Funding divisions. NCs are assigned by region to one of the team of three City Attorneys that form NCAD, and contact their City Attorney via their board's Chair or President.

NCSA = NC Sustainability Alliance Citywide alliance of NC members interested in green, environmental, sustainability issues

NPG = Neighborhood Purpose Grant, when an NC votes to allocate funding to a local project or program

PlanCheckNC is the Citywide alliance for NC City Planning & Land Use Committee members

PRA = California's **Public Records Act** (this term is also used to indicate a Public Records Act request). PRAs are requests for information and documents which the public are allowed to make of government agencies and public officials such as NCs and NC board members. If you receive a PRA, please contact your City Attorney for advice on how to respond to the request.

Profile (aka "**Monthly Profile**") is a report sent by DONE to every NC board member at the beginning of each month. The report is customized for each NC, and includes important updates and news for NC members; a snapshot of our records of your training status (so you can update that record if needed); and a current list of authorized vendors who have pre-established City contracts, whom you may hire if needed to perform services like web design/maintenance and language translation. Profiles are sent at the beginning of each month - if you don't see yours, search for subject line, "EmpowerLA - Monthly Profile."

Region (or Service Region) = Neighborhood Councils are divided into service regions EmpowerLA.org/councils-by-service-region that correspond to different parts of the City. Your NC's region determines which City Attorney, DONE staffers, and Neighborhood Commissioner serves your area. Please note that NC service regions are different from the service regions used by the Mayor's Office, and they also do not correspond to City Council District boundaries.

SLAANC = South LA Alliance of Neighborhood Councils

Stakeholders - are those who have a stake in a neighborhood, and who therefore are served by the local Neighborhood Council. Stakeholdership is defined the same way for all NCs across the entire city of Los Angeles. Unlike traditional government bodies, whose elections are only open to local residents, NCs serve all who are part of the fabric of daily life of a community. This includes all who live, work, or own property or businesses within the boundaries. They also serve "**community interest stakeholders,**" who have some other sort of significant, routine involvement locally, such as attending a church or being a student (or parent of a student) at a local school.

VANC = Valley Alliance of Neighborhood Councils

WRAC = Westside Regional Alliance of Councils



ABOUT NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS

WHAT ARE NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS?

LA's 99 Neighborhood Councils together form the grassroots level of the Los Angeles City government. The system was created to connect LA's diverse communities to City Hall, and was established in 1999 by an amendment to the City Charter. While Neighborhood Council board members are volunteers, they are public officials elected to office by the members of their community.

The Neighborhood Council system tailors LA's municipal government to the City's communities, ensuring that recognition and accommodation of these communities' diversity is built into City governance.

As a result, each Council is unique. Though every Neighborhood Council is held to the local, state, and federal standards that other City officials and agencies must observe, each Council has its own board structure, with seats representing the particular type of stakeholders which that Council serves. For example, some Councils have seats for renters, while some have seats for equestrians. Others have seats that represent internal districts. Boards range in size from 7 to 35 members. Most board members serve two-year terms; a few Councils have four-year terms, staggered so that half the board is elected every two years.

Neighborhood Councils advocate on issues like homelessness, housing, land use, emergency preparedness, public safety, parks, transportation, and sustainability. They also provide local expertise and a local voice on the delivery of City services to their communities.

Each Council holds monthly meetings of their full board, in addition to monthly Committee meetings with a more targeted focus on key issues or projects, like public safety, transportation, homelessness, or land use. All meetings are open to the public.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

A hallmark feature of LA's Neighborhood Council system is its broad, inclusive definition of stakeholderhood. Unlike other government officials, who are strictly elected by residential stakeholders of the area they serve, Neighborhood Councils are open to participation by anyone who is part of the fabric of daily life in a community. This includes those who live, work, or own property or a business there.

Also included are **"community interest stakeholders,"** who have some type of ongoing, substantial involvement within a Council's boundaries, such as students of a local school, or the congregation of a local church.

Board members – and candidates, and voters – need not be US citizens or legal US residents to qualify. Participation is also open to the formerly incarcerated.

HOW DO NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS WORK?

Since Neighborhood Councils hold their meetings in the communities they serve, they are an important avenue for public participation and civic engagement in the City of Los Angeles. NCs give the members of a community the chance to have direct personal input on decisions that affect their quality of life, and the services they receive from the City.

Neighborhood Councils play an advisory role in the Los Angeles municipal government. They gather, vet, debate, and come to a consensus on matters that impact City life and policy, and deliver their official stance on these issues in letters called "Community Impact Statements" (CIS), which are shared with City decision-makers, such as the Mayor, City Council, or City Departments such as City Planning. The Neighborhood Council may also attend meetings of these decision-making officials in person, to advocate for their board's position on a matter. Neighborhood Councils members take action as a board, and not as individuals, so they do not take an official position without a majority vote first.

Neighborhood Councils receive public funds of about \$42,000 each year to support their activities. Each member takes state-mandated training on the ethical management of public funds, and the funds must be allocated by board consensus. The funds may be used to create events and programs that respond to community needs, or spent to advocate for issues that the board cares about such as crime prevention, better roads and streets, safe spaces for children, help for the homeless, arts, or local economic development.

WHO'S ON A NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL?

- **Executive Officers** - serve on an NC's Executive Committee and perform the administrative duties of the board, including booking meeting locations; creating and sharing agendas; and running meetings. Depending on an NC's voting model, officers may be elected by stakeholders on Election Day, or chosen by board members at the first regular Board of Governors meeting. Titles of Executive Officers vary between boards. Some boards have a President; others may have a Chair.
- **Board Members** - are the members of a Neighborhood Council, which may also collectively be known as the **Board of Governors**. Most board members are voted in by the members of their community, either by election or via a process called "selection," though a few are appointed. While Neighborhood Council board members are elected public officials subject to many of the same laws and regulations governing other California officials, they serve their terms as volunteers. Most NC members serve two-year terms; however, on a few NCs, members serve staggered four-year terms, so that half the board is up for election every cycle. Each of LA's Neighborhood Councils has a unique board structure, so board seat types vary between NCs. Some Councils have seats representing different stakeholder types, such as renters, equestrians, or businesses; others have seats representing internal regions. Still others are comprised entirely of "at-large" board seats, which are open to candidates with any type of stakeholder status within NC boundaries who meet the minimum age requirements.
- **Committee Chairs** - perform administrative duties for each Committee such as preparing agendas and planning meetings; reporting on Committee findings to the Board; and helping prepare Community Impact Statements on matters processed in that Committee.
- **Committee Members** - members of non-Executive NC committees may include both board members and NC stakeholders. There are both permanent committees, called "**Standing Committees**," as well as "**Ad Hoc committees**," which are convened for a particular project or purpose; then dissolved when that project is complete.

IMPORTANT CITY CONTACT INFO

Though the **Department of Neighborhood Empowerment** is the City's primary support agency for Neighborhood Councils, two other City departments are key to supporting NCs and board members: the **Office of the City Clerk**, and the **Office of the City Attorney**.

Contact info for each department is below, along with details to help you determine the best person or team to talk to for a particular issue.

DEPARTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOOD EMPOWERMENT (aka DONE / aka EmpowerLA)

Commission@EmpowerLA.org: The primary email address for the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners. Mail sent here gets forwarded to all the Neighborhood Commissioners.

Communications@EmpowerLA.org: Any inquiries about outreach and communications strategies and tools, including Cornerstone, Nextdoor, Canva, social media, printed outreach collateral, graphics, or any other NC or Department-related Outreach topic. Please note that we do not administer an NC's own website or social media accounts; these are setup and maintained by the NCs themselves, so we unfortunately do not have access to or logins for these kinds of assets. That info would have to be obtained from previous board members, or from your NC's web vendor, if you use one.

Editor@EmpowerLA.org: The general email for the Department's editorial team, who manage the weekly department newsletter and blog. To submit material for consideration, submissions are due on **Wednesday at 5:00pm PST**, for the newsletter that Friday. Submissions will be considered for inclusion according to their fit for our Citywide audience, and according to space constraints.

ELA.PRA@LACity.org: Public Records Act requests for information from the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment should be sent to this address. However, if your NC receives a PRA request, please do not send it here. Instead, please forward that request to your NC's City Attorney and copy your field representative for assistance responding.

EmpowerLA@LACity.org: This is our Department's main inbox, and serves as the primary contact email on our website and other public-facing materials. It is also used as the sender

address for things like our weekly newsletter and monthly NC Profiles. If you are trying to reach your field representative or another staff member, please do not write to them at this address, as this could mean that your important, time-sensitive messages are delayed.

- **Please do not submit NC agendas to this address** as the team this email goes to do not have access to the City's agenda-posting system. Please use NCsupport@LACity.org for agenda submissions, in order to avoid any delay that could result in a Brown Act violation.
- That NC Support email is also the best contact to use if you have a general question for the Department.

NCsupport@LACity.org: Use this for:

- **Submitting your NC meeting agendas**, so they may be shared to anyone subscribing to your NC's agendas through the City's Early Notification System.
- **General inquiries:** If you are an NC board member who is not sure who to email at the Department regarding a specific issue, start here, and we will help get your request to the right people.

Rosters@EmpowerLA.org: this team manages back-end and forward-facing records keeping for the Department. Here's what they can assist with, and how to format your request to ensure you get help as fast as possible:

- **Submit your NC roster:** A **roster** is a record of your board members names, contact info, roles, and training status. Creating; maintaining; and sharing the roster is the responsibility of the records-keeper for your board, such as your Secretary. A Roster Update Form is available at: <http://tiny.cc/NCRosterForm>. Fill it out; download a copy; and email it to Rosters@EmpowerLA.org.
- **Roster changes:** To submit new board member names, fill out the sheet at <http://tiny.cc/NCRosterForm>. **Please highlight and use boldface font** to call attention to any new names on the sheet, before downloading a copy and sending it to Rosters@EmpowerLA.org.
- **Updates to board member training status:** should be sent to this address
- **Updates to your NC's webpage on the Department website:** the EmpowerLA.org website includes a separate webpage for each NC, which can be accessed by clicking your NC's name on the list at <http://EmpowerLA.org/councils>. Your NC's EmpowerLA webpage includes your board roster, with the role, public email address, and training status of each board member. It also includes the day/time/address of your monthly board meeting, main NC contact info, and your board's mailing and City Planning addresses. If you need to update any of those things - for example, you just updated your Ethics training, or your board meeting changed locations - email us at this address, so we can assist.

Webmaster@EmpowerLA.org: NCs and any member of the public may use this address to contact us about issues with the <http://EmpowerLA.org> Department website.

- **Please note that our Department IT team has no passwords or access to any NC websites** (such as <https://www.venicenc.org/>). Those are operated either by board members of the NC the site belongs to, or to the web vendor that NC uses. Our Department IT team unfortunately only has access and editing ability for the Department website, EmpowerLA.org.

CITY ATTORNEY

The **Neighborhood Council Advice Division (NCAD)** of the LA City Attorney's Office can help with legal and ethical questions regarding Neighborhood Councils. Each NC is assigned to a City Attorney that serves their region.

If you need to contact your NC's City Attorney, contact should be made through your board's Chair or President. (Presidents and Chairs - if you did not receive the name and contact info for your NC's City Attorney, please ask your NEA for assistance.) If the matter you wish to discuss is one that you cannot share with your board Chair or President, please ask your NEA to help you make contact instead.

OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK

The LA City Clerk two divisions devoted to Neighborhood Council services: the NC Funding Program and the NC Elections Division.

1) the **Neighborhood Council Funding Program** (Clerk.NCFunding@LACity.org) manages Neighborhood Council funds, including funding requests, approvals, and disbursements. This is the main Help Desk address for the City Clerk's Neighborhood Council Funding Program; to reach individual staff on that team, use the emails listed on this page: <https://clerk.lacity.org/neighborhood-council-funding/contact-us>

2) the City Clerk's **NC Elections Division** (Clerk.ElectionsNC@LACity.org) administers every aspect of Neighborhood Council elections with the exception of outreach and marketing, which is managed by the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment. This includes booking and management of polling places; registration and validation of candidates and voters; development and enforcement of NC Elections rules and regulations; and the creation and counting of ballots.

YOUR CONTACT INFO: SETUP & SHARING

KEEP YOUR PRIVATE EMAIL PRIVATE: CREATE AN EMAIL ADDRESS FOR NC BUSINESS

Contact info for public officials, including Neighborhood Council members, is available to the public, so consider creating a dedicated email address just for Neighborhood Council business. That way, if you ever get a PRA (Public Records Act request) asking for your emails, you do not have to share emails from your private inbox.

If your NC does not issue domain-based email addresses (such as President@ABCNC.org), you can use a free email provider like Gmail or Yahoo to create a public email for your NC correspondence, such as YourNameABCNC@gmail.com . Make sure to follow the instructions below under Rosters, to share your new public email with DONE so we can update our records for you.

BOARD ROSTERS - HOW TO MAKE & MAINTAIN ONE

- **What is your Board Roster & what is it for?** Your board is required to create and maintain a roster of its members listing their names, roles, status of required trainings, and contact info. Once complete, share your roster with DONE by emailing it to Rosters@EmpowerLA.org, in order to ensure you receive essential updates, event and workshop invites, and the weekly newsletter.
- **How to create & submit an NC roster:** Creating; maintaining; and sharing the roster is the responsibility of the records-keeper for your board, such as your Secretary. A Roster Update Form is available at: <http://tiny.cc/NCRosterForm>. Fill it out; download a copy; and email it to Rosters@EmpowerLA.org.
- **Roster changes:** To submit new board member names, fill out the sheet at <http://tiny.cc/NCRosterForm>. **Please highlight and use boldface font** to call attention to any new names on the sheet, before downloading a copy and sending it to Rosters@EmpowerLA.org.

ASSETS YOUR NC SHOULD HAVE

- **NC Website:**
 - Many NCs hire a professional web developer/webmaster service. You may choose one of your own or hire one from our list of approved vendors.
 - If a board member serves as your NC's webmaster, make sure to obtain the login to your account from the board member who most recently occupied that role. DONE unfortunately does not keep login info on file for individual NC websites.
 - If your NC uses a professional web vendor, talk to them to get login info, and to work out who will post meeting agendas and other updates to your website
- **EmpowerLA webpage:** Each NC has a dedicated webpage on the DONE website, which includes a roster of board member names, public emails, and training statuses; your monthly meeting info; boundary map; past elections results; and link to your website and a copy of your bylaws. Click your Neighborhood Council on the list at EmpowerLA.org/councils to see yours - if it needs updating, send a request to Rosters@EmpowerLA.org.
- **Social media accounts** (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, etc) - these are set up by the NC, so please contact former board members or ask your NEA for help reaching the previous administrators, if you need access.
- **Nextdoor** account (<http://Nextdoor.com>) - each NC has access to an Agency User account that allows them to post to all subscribers within their boundaries. If you do not currently have access to your NC's Nextdoor account, send a request to Communications@EmpowerLA.org
- **Canva** account (Canva.com): While the regular version of the Canva graphic design app is free and is still a great tool, every NC has a professional-grade Canva account paid for by the City. These NC Canva accounts allow DONE's marketing and outreach team to create and share easy-to-customize templates for outreach materials that NCs commonly use, but which are not available in the free version of Canva. Need your NC's Canva login? Write to Communications@EmpowerLA.org
- **Email list(s)** for stakeholders subscribed to your meeting announcements, newsletters, etc
- **Email marketing account** (e.g., Constant Contact, Mailchimp) to create and send your newsletters
- **Templates** for emails; Board & Committee agendas; Speaker Cards; event flyers; posters; ads; or website posts
- **Agenda posting info:** you should be given both a location (or list of locations) in your community which are the established locations for posting print meeting agendas

OF LOS ANGELES

