

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL AGENDA PREPARATION

WHEN ARE AGENDAS NEEDED

1. General Board Meetings
2. Special Board Meetings
3. Standing Committee Meetings
4. Ad Hoc Committee Meetings – only if committee is comprised of Board members and stakeholders or other non-board members
5. Any formal or Informal gathering of Board members where NC business is to be discussed by a number sufficient to take board action.
6. Grievance Panel members should check with the Office of the City Attorney to determine whether a Brown Act Compliant Agenda is needed.

TIMEFRAMES FOR POSTING AGENDAS

1. Advance notice of meetings must be provided:
2. Regular meetings must be noticed through the posting of an agenda at least 72 hours before the meeting
3. Special meetings may be called, but only upon 24 hours notice posted in a location freely accessible to the public. Additionally, each local newspaper of general circulation, radio or television station that has in writing requested notice should be sent a copy of the agenda 24 hours in advance of the meeting. Only the business specified for discussion at the special meeting may be addressed.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PREPARING THE AGENDA?

The chair, or in some cases, the executive committee, is responsible for creating the agenda. The agenda itself requires a vision, understanding of the organization and what must be accomplished, and consideration for all the board members and staff's desires and demands. Solicit issues and ideas from other officers and/or committee chairs, making certain that all items are appropriate concerns for the board level.

AGENDAS ARE TO ASSIST THE PUBLIC

The general public has the right to participate in Neighborhood Council Meetings. They also have the right to know what issues the Neighborhood Council is discussing and/or

Rights of the Public

1. To attend meetings
2. To reasonably understand the content of the agenda items.
3. To record meetings
4. To receive written materials shared with the board or committee
5. To address the members of the decision-making body.
6. To access meetings in spaces that are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and to access any accommodations that are available.

taking action on at a given meeting. It is important to understand that your agendas, and your meetings in general, must respect the rights of the public.

AGENDA ITEMS MUST BE CLEAR AND REASONABLY UNDERSTOOD

The Neighborhood Council shall post an agenda containing a brief general description



According to the California Attorney General's guide to the Brown Act, "the purpose of the brief general description is to inform interested members of the public about the subject matter under consideration so that they can determine whether to monitor or participate in the meeting of the body."

of each item of business to be transacted or discussed at the meeting, including items to be discussed in closed session. A brief general description of an item generally need not exceed 20 words. *Government Code §54954.2(a)*.

It is important that your agenda items be written so the average person can reasonably understand what the board or committee will discuss and possibly act on at its meeting.

WHAT NOTICE MUST BE GIVEN OF A PUBLIC MEETING?

The agenda must contain a brief description of each item of business to be transacted (generally not to exceed 20 words). Agenda descriptions must not be misleading. For example, using the agenda item "flood control" to refer to a discussion on a request to

Congress to exempt a certain stream from the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act would be clearly inadequate.

Stakeholders may request that a copy of the agenda and “all documents constituting the agenda packet” be mailed to them. They should be mailed when the agenda is posted or when it is distributed to a majority of the Neighborhood Council Board or Committee Members, whichever is first. The Neighborhood Council may charge a fee for mailing the materials, not to exceed the cost of providing the mailing service. *Government Code § 54954.*

SO . . . YOU MISSED AN ITEM THAT DIDN'T GET ON THE AGENDA. . .

***No action can be taken on items not on the agenda, Except:
Brief responses to public testimony.***

Requests for clarification from or references of matters to staff.

Brief reports on personal activities.

When two-thirds of the Neighborhood Council board (or all members if less than two-thirds of the board is present) agree there is a need to take immediate action on a matter about which the body could not have been aware earlier. (THIS SHOULD BE DONE ONLY AFTER CONSULTATION WITH THE OFFICE OF THE CITY ATTORNEY).

YOUR AGENDA CAN EMPOWER PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

Neighborhood Council agendas should contain critical information for the public, how to find information, how to find the meeting, and how to access services and assistance that will help them participate. **Some of the information, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) language is required.** Some of the information, such as your Neighborhood Council posting locations, is recommended.

- If an item needs energy and fresh ideas, put it near the beginning of the agenda.
- Don't dwell too long on trivial but urgent items. Put a time limit on such agenda items and stick to it.
- Minimize oral reports of old business by requiring written reports.
- Focus on the future.
- If an issue is potentially divisive, consider its place in the agenda carefully. You may want to sandwich it between less controversial issues.
- Urgent items must come before those that can wait.
- For each agenda item, list the person who is responsible for introducing the subject.

- Try to end the meeting with a unifying item.

Be sure the agenda is sent to Board Members with any required supporting material in ample time prior to the meeting date. It is helpful to send out the meeting packet in an organized fashion, perhaps tabbed or indexed, so that documents can be found easily during the meeting.

The tone of the meeting, as well as the accomplishments, will be impacted by the design of the agenda. It is a task that should be taken with utmost seriousness by the chair

AGENDA-RELATED MATERIALS

Agenda-related materials are defined as the agenda, reports, and any other document prepared and forwarded to the local body that provides background information or recommendations concerning the subject matter of any agenda item.

☐ NOTE: Examples of typical agenda related material are memoranda, and correspondence sent to the Neighborhood Council body from an outside source, and reports that the Neighborhood Council body will be reviewing or relying upon at the meeting. The agenda and all agenda-related material (except material that is exempt from public disclosure under state or federal law) is a public record subject to public inspection and copying. Every Neighborhood Council body is required to make agenda-related materials available to the public without delay.

☐ NOTE: **Every agenda should state where and how agenda related materials can be reviewed prior to the meeting.** (*Government Code § 54957.5*)

BEST PRACTICES FOR AGENDA ITEMS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include the name and title of any persons or agencies making a presentation to the board.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What funding items are being considered, include the approximate or maximum dollar amount to be considered, as well as the purpose for which the funding is being considered.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicate whether an item is up for discussion or action (i.e. an approval or a vote), or both.

<p>Sample wording that indicates NOT taking Action:</p> <p>Discussion regarding . . . Report regarding . . . Update regarding . . .</p>	<p>Sample wording that indicates TAKING Action:</p> <p>Possible motion/Possible Action . . . Discussion and Possible Action . . . Motion to . . .</p>
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NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL AGENDA POSTING REQUIREMENTS

The Board of Neighborhood Commissioners recently established a new policy regarding the posting of agendas for Neighborhood Councils.

- Neighborhood Councils must post at least ONE Brown Act compliant agenda at a physical location within the council boundaries (as opposed to the previous requirement for five locations), as well as on their website or webpage made available to them on the [Empower LA website](#).
- If the Neighborhood Council does not maintain a website, they must continue to comply with the FIVE location requirement.
- Additional agendas posted within Neighborhood Council boundaries must be Brown Act compliant. This does not preclude additional agendas from being posted at other locations relevant to stakeholders.
- Neighborhood Councils shall submit a copy of all regular and special Board and Committee agendas to the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment to be posted through the Early Notification System (ENS). The agenda for regular meetings must be submitted no less than 72 hours in advance of the meeting, and the agenda for special meetings shall be submitted no less than 24 hours in advance of the meeting.

CANCELING A MEETING

To the extent practicable, all meetings should be cancelled by delivering a "NOTICE OF CANCELLATION" under the same procedure as for noticing a meeting.

However, for meetings cancelled on short notice or due to a lack of members, good meeting practice requires that cancellation be announced at the time and place of the noticed meeting.

HELPFUL HINTS ON AGENDA WRITING

- ❖ The actual agenda is nothing more than a list of topics or agenda items. It will clearly limit what will be discussed during the meeting and if done correctly . . . for how long. It will help to stay focused and keep the participants involved. It does not matter if it is a general board meeting, a standing committee meeting, an ad hoc committee meeting, or whatever meeting . . . having an agenda is a must!
- ❖ An agenda is the nucleus of the meeting. A properly created agenda has the power to energize the meeting and provides direction and purpose. It serves to accomplish the objectives of the organization and to fulfill the mission. It manages the meeting.
- ❖ If you are having special guests attending the meeting, find out whether they have any issues that can be combined because they are related, similar, or even the same in terms of means or ends. If so, arrange them under one agenda item.
- ❖ Organize the order of events according to time and importance. If something really needs to be discussed urgently or as a matter of priority, you may wish to put it near the top of the agenda so you can be certain you will get to it in the course of the meeting. Some people like to put things that take a lot of time near the top of the agenda, so that they can be certain they will be able to talk at length about them. Others prefer to put such items near the bottom as it means that discussion on these topics won't push other items off the agenda and discussion that does occur will be forced to be succinct; it's your call dependent on the topic. It may take a little trial and error to decide on an organization style you like.
- ❖ Be realistic. Make the agenda manageable. Don't add more items than the meeting can reasonably consider. Some items may need to be held over.
- ❖ Keep the focus of the meeting as narrow as possible, define the topics to be discussed and don't allow additional issues to interfere. Stakeholders and members of the public have no chance to prepare or think about these spontaneous topics, which results in a useless discussion that will inadvertently be reopened at the next meeting. Just stick to the agenda and place new items in the separate list, so they won't be forgotten when preparing the agenda for the next meeting.

- ❖ Make certain that items have been researched with supporting data, committee findings, options and recommendations made available. Only legitimate items go on the agenda. Nothing should be vague or unexplained.
- ❖ In dealing with agenda items requiring action, allow sufficient time for discussion to allow for opposing points of view, clarification of ideas and expression of personal viewpoints.
- ❖ Even simple ad-hoc meetings are more effective with an agenda. These kinds of meetings are often about one subject, so the purpose of the meeting is very clear, the participants are all directly involved and the result is a clear decision or action item. **They are optional if the committee is made up only of Board Members, BUT, required if any committee member is a non-Board Member.**
- ❖ Consider the use of a consent agenda which eliminates the need to vote separately on many of the routine items and resolutions not requiring explanation or board discussion. All items for the consent agenda (e.g., such as signatory authority for banking and investment accounts, minor procedural changes, reports) are grouped together. There will be one motion to approve all items on the consent agenda, but it will take only the request of any one board member - not a formal vote - to remove any item from the consent agenda before the vote. If removed from the consent agenda, the item will be taken up later in the regular agenda.
- ❖ The final piece of effective preparation for your meeting is the availability and accessibility of supporting materials. This could be a report, financial statements, or important incoming mail, anything that is necessary for discussing the relevant topic effectively. These materials should be made available in advance of the meeting so stakeholders and members of the public have enough time to study them. These materials can be easily attach to the agenda by using a hyperlink.

QUICK HITS (information that should be on every agenda)

Information to include on your Agenda	Required or Recommended?	Sample Language
The Brown Act notification informing the public of their right to obtain written materials that are distributed to the board/committee.	Required	In compliance with Government Code Section 54957.5, non-exempt writings that are distributed to a majority of 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 [insert web 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 [insert name and contact information]
The information required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) that informs all persons of their right to participate in meetings and how to obtain any accommodations they may need in order to participate.	Required* Note: This information may not be in type smaller than 12 point font.	As a 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 [insert name and contact info].
Time and Location of the Meeting	Required	
Minimum of 1 physical posting location which the agenda is regularly posted at that is ADA and 24 hour accessible.* <i>But see: 2014 BONC posting policy</i>	Required	This is the posting location listed in your certification application, or if updated, that are on file with the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment.
Information on how a member of the public can obtain language translation services. (Preferably in the language most likely to be used within the NC's boundaries.)	Recommended	Si requiere servicios de traducción, favor de notificar a la oficina 3 días de trabajo (72 horas) antes del evento. Si necesita ayuda con esta agenda, por favor llame a nuestra oficina al [phone number].

Information on how a member of the public can file a grievance	Recommended	This language should be taken from the Neighborhood Council bylaws.
The Neighborhood Council's process for reconsidering motions previously taken by the board.	Recommended	This language should be taken from the Neighborhood Council bylaws.
The process by which members of the public can address the body.	Recommended	The public is requested to fill out a "Speaker Card" to address the board on any agenda item before the board takes an action. Public comment is limited to 3 minutes per speaker, but the board has the discretion to modify the amount of time for any speaker.