

Role of the Neighborhood Empowerment Advocate

Your role as a Neighborhood Empowerment Advocate (NEA) includes many areas of support for the Neighborhood Council (NC) system, such as:

1. Supporting election and selection administration
2. Promoting civic participation in government and in the NC system citywide
3. Providing technical, funding, organizing and logistical support for NC operations at NC meetings, retreats, EmpowerLA Leadership Academy workshops or other opportunities
4. Liaising with representatives from City electeds, departments, commissions and community organizations to further the NC system
5. Managing calls and emails for the NC Support Helpline
6. Compiling information and preparing reports related to project goal implementation and achievement

EmpowerLA's strategic plan provides further detail regarding our vision, mission, how we work and program goals so you should be very familiar with it. Overall, it's important to remember that NC board members are volunteering their time to improve their respective communities and the City of Los Angeles so please be respectful and show your appreciation of their time and efforts.

EmpowerLA views empowerment as collaborating with NCs in determining different options for matters and the pros and cons of each option. Then, the NC takes action on the final option even if there are negative consequences. You can recommend a different option, but if a NC/board member does not take your recommendation, please do not take it personally. Outside of an Exhaustive Efforts situation, you are not empowering NCs if you force an option on a NC because you may believe you "know better."

Remember, your role is to be a coach for Neighborhood Council board members and to help them achieve their goals for their community. Think outside the box about how you can help them accomplish their goals even if your initial analysis is that something cannot be done because of existing procedures or laws. There is usually some way that the NC can meet the goal though maybe not in the manner they first imagined and procedures and laws can be changed with time.

Your role is not to be a cop and to police their actions so be careful and cognizant of how you come across when providing information.

Response Time

Because NC boards typically meet only once a month and because board members are volunteering their time around their other commitments, it is important that your response times to their calls and emails are timely and that the information you provide to any questions are accurate. You are expected to return calls and emails within 1-2 business days even if it is to

say that you received their call or email and need more time to research an answer. If you do require more time to research an answer, be specific as to when you will follow up with the answer.

If for some reason, you cannot respond within the 1-2 business days, respond as soon as possible and apologize for the delay in responding. Such delays in responding should be rare. If you need assistance in meeting this response time, speak with your supervisor for assistance.

NC Meeting Attendance

You are expected to attend 100% of your assigned NCs' regular board meetings as well as any other important NC meetings where you are needed to provide meeting support. If a regular board meeting has been rescheduled as a special meeting to a different date and time, make every effort to attend, and if you cannot, inform your supervisor to see if another NEA can cover the meeting.

If a meeting cannot be covered, email the board to inform them that you cannot attend and ask if they have any questions that you can answer before the meeting. Follow up after the meeting with a call or email to see if any issues came up so you can provide assistance.

NEA Role at a NC Meeting

Your goal for a NC meeting is to support the NC in achieving their actions on the agenda. If there are important and/or time sensitive actions that the NC wants to take, do your best to assist them prior to the agenda is prepared so that everything is in place by the time the item is on the agenda. Give yourself enough time because you may have to work with the City Clerk and/or City Attorney's Office on a funding or contract item.

Prior to attending a NC's board or committee, review the agenda and look for the following:

1. Was it properly posted per the Brown Act and Board of Neighborhood Commissioners Posting Policy?
2. Does the agenda have the required ADA and Brown Act language on it?
3. Is the logistical information on the agenda correct? Regular/Special, Date, Time, and Location
4. Do the agenda items provide enough description that a reasonable person would know what the item is about per the Brown Act?
5. Do any of the agenda items, particularly regarding funding matters, have any issues that you should flag for the board? For example, amounts for services or over \$5,000 might trigger contracts, NPGs could have conflicts of interest issues, and events would need approval. Again, the best practice would be to work with the board before the agenda is prepared to ensure the board has all of the information prior to the meeting so they can take action then without having to table the item because it was agendized incorrectly or information is missing.

If you think you see an issue, make sure it's valid by contacting your supervisor, City Clerk and/or City Attorney as applicable. Once you've confirmed the issue, contact the board or the presiding officer to go over options to correct. Aside from specific instructions from the City Attorney, which usually have to do with Brown Act violations, we do not shut down meetings unilaterally. Again, you make the recommendation to the board along with the pros and cons, including consequences you may need to follow up on, and have them make the final decision.

After reviewing the agenda and supporting documentation, make sure you review and bring the NC's bylaws and standing rules in case any procedural questions come up. Also, have any additional information they may need based on what is on the agenda, e.g. if they have a particular Council File on the agenda, you should review it in case there are questions.

When you are at the meeting, make sure you greet the board members. You should also look around and make sure that there are public documents of the agenda and supporting documents. If not, ask board members to see if they have extra copies to put out. If they don't, make sure you put out a copy either physical or digital using your tablet.

Aside from providing a public report about what's going on with the NC system and or City issues, be mindful of when you speak up during the rest of the meeting. General guidance about how to run a meeting should be saved until after the meeting when you can speak with the board member directly. Do your best not to embarrass the board members in public so be discreet.

If you have relevant information about a matter that could affect the board decision, or you have an answer to a question they have, then raise your hand and provide the information or recommendation. You are not part of the public comment process since you are staffing their meeting so the presiding officer can call on you. If you believe that they are taking action on an item that would cause a violation of a law, grievance or a funding item to be rejected, make sure you share that at the meeting before they take action so that they have an opportunity to correct it. Hopefully, they will be able to correct it on the spot. If not, they may have to have a special meeting to take action then. Providing such information can be awkward, but be sure to use nonjudgmental statements in your suggestions.

If the board asks you a question, and you do not know the answer, tell them that you don't know the answer, but that you will find out for them.

After the meeting, follow up on any questions they had and email or call with the answers. It's also nice to send them a post meeting encouragement email as well if they did a great job running their meeting or taking action on an important community issue.

Lastly, make sure to Quick Base your meeting notes and follow up within 1-2 business days while it is fresh in your mind. Share any best practices and outreach follow up from the meeting.