



NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL CERTIFICATION APPLICATION GUIDELINES AND INSTRUCTIONS

These Guidelines and Instructions have been prepared to assist with the completion of the Neighborhood Council Certification Application. The application must be completed by any group requesting official status as a Certified Neighborhood Council. Each section of the Guidelines and Instructions corresponds to the respective section of the Certification Application. Additional information regarding the contents of the application and the certification process is contained in Article IX of the City Charter, the “Plan For A Citywide System Of Neighborhood Councils” (“the Plan”), and Los Angeles City Ordinance No. 174006. Assistance with completing the Certification Application and with complying with the Plan is available from the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (“the Department”), with the main office located at 305 East First Street, Los Angeles, California 90012.

Once a certification application has been received by the Department, the certification process is anticipated to be completed in approximately 60 business days, in accordance with the procedures described in Article IV of the Plan. Factors such as Commission meeting recess dates, the number of certification applications received by the Department, or the mitigation of Neighborhood Council stakeholder issues, may result in a longer certification process. It is the Department’s intent throughout the process to assist groups seeking neighborhood council certification in fulfilling all requirements. Please call Michael Vitkiewicz at (213) 485-1360 if you have any questions.

The Certification Application consists of four sections and four attachments.

The four sections of the Application include:

- (1) Boundaries and Area Profile
- (2) Neighborhood Outreach
- (3) Organizational Structure
- (4) Financial Accountability

The four attachments include:

- (1) Attachment A, “Public Notice Location Log”
- (2) Attachment B, “Neighborhood Council Treasurer”
- (3) Attachment C, “Contact Liaison Roster”
- (4) Attachment D, “Stakeholder Composition and Outreach Worksheet” (optional)

Because each section of the application will be reviewed by the Department for compliance with the requirements for neighborhood council certification, it is important that the information provided by the applicant be as complete and as accurate as possible. Much of the information which can be used to describe the composition of a proposed neighborhood council is available from various public sources, including United States Census data and United States Housing and Urban Development demographic information. Local chambers of commerce may have information regarding the businesses in an area. In addition, general knowledge of a particular neighborhood may be acquired through observation and by communicating with stakeholders directly. All neighborhood council certification applicants are encouraged, but are not required, to utilize such sources in order to provide a description which reflects the composition of the Neighborhood Council.

For assistance with completing the application or to obtain copies of related documents, please contact Michael Vitkiewicz in the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment at (213) 485-1360.

SECTION 1. BOUNDARIES AND AREA PROFILE

Section One of the application should contain a detailed description of the physical area of the Neighborhood Council, as well as a map of the proposed certification area, an explanation of why the specific boundaries were selected and a description or a listing of the stakeholder components within the Neighborhood Council boundaries.

A common method used to describe geographical area boundaries is to state the northern, southern, eastern and western limits of the Neighborhood Council using existing street or avenue names. For example: Spring Street to the north, Main Street to the south, First Street to the east, and Central Avenue to the west. This method typically provides a clear description of the area. However, the boundaries of some neighborhood councils may be difficult to describe clearly by using street names alone. In these situations, an applicant may also include identifiable landmarks or well-known physical features to distinguish and readily identify the boundaries of the Neighborhood Council. Regardless of how you define your boundaries, the boundary description should be as clear as possible.

When identifying the boundaries by the use of formal street names, it is important to use the correct suffix, or ending designation. For example, parts of the City contain areas where numerical streets and places, such as 54th Street and 54th Place, may be very close to each other. If the proposed neighborhood council boundary is “54th Place”, do not list the boundary as “54th Street” or simply “54th”. Similarly, a road named Bluegrass Drive should not be listed as “Bluegrass Avenue” or “Bluegrass” on the application. Providing incorrect suffixes or omitting the correct suffixes may result in unintended boundaries or undesired boundary overlaps, and may create delays in the certification process.

Boundary Goal Criteria

- The boundaries of a Neighborhood Council should follow historic and contemporary community and neighborhood borders, use natural boundaries or street lines, and be defined so that all parts of the Neighborhood Council are clearly connected to each other.
- The boundaries should be comprised of a population, based on United States Census Tracts, of no less than 20,000 residents. Areas that have less than 20,000 residents may receive official certification status provided that they meet at least one of the following three criteria and otherwise meet all other requirements of the Plan:
 - (1) the proposed area is separated from adjacent communities by significant geographic or other features,
 - or (2) the proposed area is identified by name within any of the adopted Community Plans within the City,
 - or (3) the proposed area represents an historic, identifiable neighborhood or community AND includes local City service providers, such as a public library, park or recreation center, fire or police station or a public school.
- Neighborhood Council boundaries may not overlap with other Neighborhood Council boundaries unless the area proposed for inclusion into each Neighborhood Council is designated for a public use, such as a park, school, library, police or fire station or major thoroughfare, or contains a landmark or facility with historical significance.
- The certification application for a Neighborhood Council where overlapping boundaries occur must contain a request for an exemption from the prohibition against overlapping boundaries, in the form of a detailed written rationale for incorporating the proposed area. Generally, applicants should attempt to avoid defining boundaries which overlap with those of another Neighborhood Council.

Area Profile

The Area Profile portion of Section One allows the proposed Neighborhood Council to provide a description of the area. Various types of economic and demographic information are suggested. The Area Profile may be completed in several ways. For example, the optional worksheet may be used to identify the various types of persons, groups, businesses, housing, organizations and agencies which form the stakeholder population within the proposed Neighborhood Council. Or, a response in narrative form may be provided. The primary objective of the Area Profile exercise is to identify and be aware of the potentially diverse components comprising your Neighborhood Council.

SECTION 2. NEIGHBORHOOD OUTREACH

Section Two of the application requests a detailed description of the outreach process used to identify and contact community stakeholders in the Neighborhood Council area. The section also requires the applicant to supply documentation which demonstrates the performance of outreach activities related to the formation of the Neighborhood Council, in the form of signatures of stakeholders in the proposed area.

Signature Collection

The completed application should include original signatures of no less than 200 and no more than 500 signatures from community stakeholders within the proposed Neighborhood Council boundaries. The signatures shall reflect the broadest array of community stakeholders who will be active participants in the Neighborhood Council. If more than 500 signatures are submitted, the quantity of signatures in excess of 500 will be considered to be supplemental outreach documentation and will be kept on file by the City.

SECTION 3. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Section Three of the application requires that a written organization plan be submitted to the Department. This requirement may be satisfied by attaching a copy of the bylaws of the proposed neighborhood council to the application. The bylaws should describe the organizational structure of the proposed neighborhood council. For purposes of organizational structure, the term "governing body" shall refer to the community stakeholders of the neighborhood council who are empowered to make decisions on behalf of that neighborhood council.

Neighborhood Council Bylaws

In order to satisfy the organizational structure requirement, the bylaws submitted with the certification application must include, at a minimum, the following eight subject areas:

- (1) The neighborhood council name.
- (2) A statement that neighborhood council membership is open to all community stakeholders.
- (3) A list of the offices of the governing body of the neighborhood council and its method for regularly electing or selecting its officers who shall serve as the governing body, subject to the following:
 - (1) the governing body must, to the extent possible, reflect the diversity of the neighborhood council's community stakeholders. No single stakeholder group may comprise a majority of the neighborhood council's governing body, unless approved by the Department upon a showing of extenuating circumstances;
 - (2) no person may serve more than eight consecutive years in any office of the governing body; and,
 - (3) the governing body shall include an officer named "Treasurer" whose duties shall include, but not be limited to, maintaining the neighborhood council's book of accounts, as prescribed and approved by the Department, and submitting accounting statements to the Department.

- (4) A description of its meeting procedures which shall include provisions that each neighborhood council shall do all of the following:
 - a) meet at least once per calendar quarter;
 - b) obey any or all applicable sections of the Ralph M. Brown Act, including the provisions regarding open meetings and the posting of notices in public places;
 - c) establish procedures for communicating with all Neighborhood Council Community Stakeholders on a regular basis in a manner ensuring that information is disseminated evenly and in a timely manner; and,
 - d) adopt procedures for running meetings, including provisions that identify the number of governing body members that constitute a majority and a quorum, the number of votes by which a governing body may take an action on a matter before it, and, the manner in which a vote by the governing body or action by a certified neighborhood council can be reconsidered, if applicable.
- (5) The method it will use to address grievances and resolve disputes by which an individual community stakeholder or group of community stakeholders of a neighborhood council may express concerns to their neighborhood council about its actions.
- (6) A declaration and guarantee that all meetings will be open and public and permit, to the extent feasible, every stakeholder to participate in the conduct of business and deliberation.
- (7) A process for amending the bylaws of the Certified Neighborhood Council.
- (8) An acknowledgment and agreement that the neighborhood council will abide by all applicable provisions of the City's governmental ethics ordinance, as set forth in Los Angeles Municipal Code Section 49.5.1., et seq., and an acknowledgment and agreement that the neighborhood council will abide by all applicable laws of the federal, state and local government.

SECTION 4. FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Section Four of the application requires the applicant to describe the financial accounting system to be implemented and used by the neighborhood council, and to attach a copy of sample documents which illustrate the selected system of financial accountability. The selected system shall comply with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) as appropriate for the type of entity established by or through a Certified Neighborhood Council.

Each Certified Neighborhood Council shall:

- (1) Prescribe a method for keeping a book of accounts that complies with applicable local, state and federal laws.
- (2) Discuss its finances at a regularly scheduled or special meeting prior to submitting accounting statements to the Department, in order to gather input from neighborhood council community stakeholders.
- (3) Ensure that each Certified Neighborhood Council's book of accounts shall be open to all community stakeholders of any Certified Neighborhood Council.
- (4) Establish a process by which each Certified Neighborhood Council member can review the Certified Neighborhood Council's book of accounts.

ATTACHMENT A. PUBLIC NOTICE LOCATION LOG

A Public Notice Location Log, which must be completed by the applicant and submitted with the Certification Application, is included with the application as Attachment A.

ATTACHMENT B. INFORMATION FOR NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL TREASURER

Information regarding the position of Treasurer of the Certified Neighborhood Council, including general definitions and terms, is included with the application as Attachment B. The applicant must provide samples of the documents to be used in the process of neighborhood council financial accounting. The samples should be attached to the application. As required by the Plan, the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment will review and approve the format of the accounting documents which the Treasurer will employ in the accounting process.

ATTACHMENT C. CONTACT LIAISON ROSTER

A Contact Liaison Roster must be completed and attached to the application. The Roster should include the names and communication addresses (mailing address, telephone, email) of no less than three and no more than five individuals who shall submit the application on behalf of the proposed neighborhood council and who shall act as official liaison contacts between the proposed neighborhood council and the Department until the neighborhood council is certified. Each person who agrees to serve as a contact liaison must sign the roster. The Contact Liaison Roster is included with the application as Attachment C.

ATTACHMENT D. STAKEHOLDER COMPOSITION AND OUTREACH WORKSHEET

A worksheet has been provided to assist applicants with the Neighborhood Council stakeholder identification and outreach process. Using the worksheet is optional and voluntary. Returning the completed worksheet is also optional and voluntary. The Stakeholder Composition and Outreach Worksheet is included with the application as Attachment D.

PLEASE RETURN THE COMPLETED CERTIFICATION APPLICATION AND
REQUIRED ATTACHMENTS TO:

Michael Vitkiewicz
City of Los Angeles, Department of Neighborhood Empowerment
305 East First Street
Los Angeles, California 90012
(213) 485-1360

*Completed applications should be delivered to the Department via US mail or courier.
Please note that electronic transmissions of the application (email, fax) cannot be accepted.*

Applicants will be notified in writing by the Department when the certification application review has been completed and when the application has been scheduled for a hearing before the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners.

Thank you for participating.