

# CITY OF LOS ANGELES CALIFORNIA

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February 5, 2020

Honorable Members of the Health, Education,  
Neighborhoods, Parks, Arts, and River Committee  
c/o Office of the City Clerk  
Room 395, City Hall  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

**SUBJECT: NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL 2019 ELECTION OUTREACH UPDATE**

The Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (Department) piloted the implementation of broad outreach strategies for the Citywide 2019 Neighborhood Council (NC) elections. The effort was designed to create opportunities to address a perceived lack of knowledge Angelenos have about LA's system of Neighborhood Councils and how they serve their stakeholders and the City. Neighborhood-by-neighborhood demographic analysis frequently shows a disparity between the composition of a Neighborhood Council board, and that of the community it serves.

## **SUMMARY**

Our outreach strategies were heavily informed by the parameters of Neighborhood Council elections and the NC election season, which are very different from other local, state, or federal elections. For example, Neighborhood Councils' broad definition of

stakeholdership includes not just local residents, but also those who work locally; own local properties or businesses; or belong to local schools, churches, or organizations. This in turn impacts who can run or vote in NC elections.

Another distinction is that NC elections exist on an independent timeline, that does not coincide with other local or national elections, and they are not a “one and done” process with a single Citywide Election Day that can be simply promoted with unified messaging. Instead, they are run on a months-long cycle of regional dates. In 2019, the Neighborhood Council elections cycle consisted of 81 individual elections held across the City on 13 different dates over a six-month period.

Additionally, each NC’s election operates according to a unique set of rules, so candidate and voter eligibility and seat numbers and types can vary dramatically. Minimum age to run or vote in 2019 ranged from ages 12 - 18. NCs range from 5 - 35 board members in size. Some have at-large seats, open to candidates of all stakeholder types. Others have seats representing internal regions, or stakeholder categories, such as renters, business owners, seniors, youth, or even equestrians, in the northern San Fernando Valley.

Not every NC has every seat type, and some have a combo of different types. Seat types that sound the same on paper may have different eligibility requirements, as well: while all NCs with a Renters’ Representative require candidates for that seat to be renters, some require those who vote for that seat to be renters, as well. Others allow voters of any stakeholder type to elect those seats.

While all NC candidates Citywide are required to provide documents proving their identity and the nature of their NC stakeholdership, some NCs require that their voters do the same. Documentation can be simple: a voter need only prove that they’re a member of the local community with proof of identity and local address, so something like a driver’s license is sufficient.

Some NCs don’t require voter documentation at all. These are called “self affirmation” Councils, because a voter simply signs an affidavit at the polls stating their local address, before receiving a ballot.

But voter documentation requirements can also be complex, asking voters to provide proof of the type(s) of stake they have locally in order to qualify to vote for certain types

of candidates. So for example, in order to vote for Renters' Representative candidates, a voter in a complex documentation election may need to bring a copy of their lease or landlord letter to the polls.

Because most people don't casually carry these kinds of paperwork, making sure voters are educated on the rules pertaining to their particular NC's election is vital - otherwise they won't be prepared for the polls, and will be unable to cast a ballot.

However, since election rules vary so widely between NCs, people who live across the street from each other may belong to different NCs, and may therefore need very different election information. On one side, a voter can just show up at the polls. On the other, a voter needs to ask for a letter from the principal of the school their child attends, which is probably not a same-day request.

Taken together, the breadth of NC election rules, and the length of the election cycle, mean that even though the Neighborhood Council elections happen Citywide, the most successful and Neighborhood Council elections strategies are highly granular.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

In its proposed Fiscal Year 2020-2021 budget, the Department has included a request to support election related outreach in an amount equal to that which was expended in the 2019 Neighborhood Council elections. If funded, this support would ensure the Department's ability to support election-related outreach for the upcoming 2021 Neighborhood Council elections at the same level.

## **2019 ELECTION OUTREACH STRATEGY**

To respond to the aforementioned needs, a Citywide campaign was used to lay a foundation for a more vigorous and inclusive election season than what was

administered in years past. A varied and customized approach was embraced by strategically allocating resources in two areas: Citywide outreach and targeted outreach.

First, the Department designed a **general Citywide outreach and education campaign** to support the 2019 NC elections. This included organic and paid advertising and media placements and posts on print, broadcast, and digital platforms, to increase NC system awareness, recruit candidates, and get out the vote.

Elections-related trainings and info sessions were held for candidates, NC members, and the public, including a candidate workshop series held in partnership with City Clerk, to register candidates and train them on how to campaign; Citywide, regional, and one-on-one trainings for NC Outreach and Elections Committee leaders, to help them get the most out of their election outreach efforts; and dozens of “NC101” presentations introducing the NC system to nonprofits and community organizations.

In addition, we developed self-serve print and digital tools and resources for candidates and voters, including a dedicated Elections webpage with an FAQ and interactive map to lookup Councils by address or intersection; info videos describing the hours and duties of a Neighborhood Council board member; and step-by-step guides to tasks like using the candidate registration portal, or how to look up election bylaws to determine eligibility to vote or run for particular board seats.

To help implement these efforts, Seasonal Election Assistants were hired and election season contracts set up with traditional PR, digital PR, and digital marketing specialists who had prior experience working with the NC system.

Second, a **targeted outreach and education campaign** was designed for select Neighborhood Councils that met assessment criteria created to identify areas with the greatest need for support. In these areas, targeted outreach allowed the Department to provide customized recruitment and education to Neighborhood Councils having experienced chronically low voter turnout or a limited pool of candidates. A summary of the assessment process follows. The Department reviewed voter turnout and candidate filing data from the 2016 elections as well as data on Neighborhood Councils that were currently in “exhaustive efforts” or which had board seat vacancies.

To clarify, “exhaustive efforts” are conditions where and NC’s operation is managed by the Department until compliance with specific remediations are completed. It is one

step in a continuum of stages administered by the Department to support successful board governance for selected Neighborhood Councils.

Thirty-five Neighborhood Councils met the criteria for targeted elections support in 2019. These Councils either had low 2016 voter turnout, a vacancy rate of 20% or more, were in exhaustive efforts, or some combination of these criteria.

### **Targeted Outreach**

Targeted Neighborhood Councils had more support in the following areas:

1. Additional outreach and social media workshops for candidates as well as for NC members promoting their elections
2. Additional Neighborhood Council 101 presentations and event tabling within the NC boundaries
3. Additional PR and advertising campaigns targeting the area, including social media ads, and distribution of posters and flyers
4. Bus bench and bus shelter ads (if effective for the area)
5. Specific partnerships with community-based organizations in the area
6. Other specific outreach assistance, such as door-to-door canvassing
7. Mailers to advertise the election and to recruit candidates

Comparing 2019 to 2016 election results:

- **Targeted NCs:** NCs in this group who had an election in 2019 experienced an average 40% increase in voter turnout, as compared to their 2016 voter turnout
- **Non-targeted NCs:** NCs in this group who had an election in 2019 experienced an average 12.42% increase in voter turnout, compared to their turnout in 2016

### **HIGHLIGHTS OF OUTREACH EFFORTS**

- Eighty-one Neighborhood Councils held elections, thirteen had board affirmations, and two Councils did not have elections. Not all Neighborhood Councils choose members via traditional elections - three NCs chose members using a process called “selections,” which is not administered by the City Clerk,

nor held on the same timeline as the systemwide elections, and which utilizes a town hall-style voting model. Other NCs had “board affirmations” rather than elections, in which all who filed as candidates were inducted as board members without an election, because there were not any contested seats to trigger the election process.

- Out of 1,804 candidates that registered in 2019, 51% were first-time candidates, compared to the 44% of candidates new to the NC system in 2016.
- Overall voter turnout in 2019 increased by 5% as compared with 2016. Total voters in 2019 elections was 22,795. Total voters in 2016 - including online voting (7,761) - was 21,647.
- Standalone branding for the Neighborhood Council system was created to establish a system identity separate from the Department, and was used consistently to promote the 2019 Elections.
- Extensive paid and organic social media campaigns promoted candidacy and voter turnout on Facebook, Nextdoor, Instagram & Twitter. Highlights include nearly 400 posts - each customized to an NC’s individual election parameters - to over half a million Nextdoor followers Citywide, and a vigorous Facebook ad campaign which Facebook cited, in [this Adweek article](#), as a model success story for political advertising on their platform, as it achieved 5.5 million impressions, reached 1.5 million people, and got 117,547 post engagements. Candidate recruitment ads performed well on Facebook, sending 17,284 people to the candidate registration portal.
- Seventy bus bench ads and 130 bus shelters ads were placed throughout the City, with special focus on targeted NC service areas where available.
- Nine candidate workshops on how to register and run a campaign were held in partnership with City Clerk at locations across the City; 348 students enrolled
- Eight Citywide trainings on gender issues and political candidacy were held by our IgniteLA team - a division of the nationwide Ignite women’s leadership program - to promote greater gender equity in the NC system
- Additional self-serve candidate tools were generated and shared, including a downloadable one-pager guide to using the candidate registration portal (4,126 clicks / 3,717 uniques) and a candidate info video (4,801 views)
- Fifteen outreach trainings were held for Neighborhood Council Elections and Outreach Committee members, to help them learn how best to promote their local elections
- Four large scale election rally events were hosted, which featured candidate workshops and support sessions, as well as tables from local NCs

- Community education included 132 NC 101s workshops and participation in 70 tabling events.
- Outreach staffing was increased by hiring skilled Election Assistants to help with outreach and targeting under-participating stakeholders.
- Elections-related marketing materials were developed and distributed. This included nearly 31,000 mailers and 260,000 door-to-door flyers.
- The 2019 NC elections were featured in thirty newsletters and online publications, including both paid and earned placements on outlets like [Fox News LA](#), [LAist.com](#) and the [Daily News](#).
- A presentation about the 2019 NC election cycle was made to staff from every City Council office. Lists of NC election dates and timelines within each Council District were shared, and several Councilmembers also partnered with the Department to produce [videos promoting the elections](#), which were shared in Department and NC newsletters, and on social media and Nextdoor.
- Other City and state elected officials, including [Mayor Garcetti](#) and State Senator Hertzberg also made and shared videos to increase elections awareness.

The following tables provide summary data on new/incumbent candidates by region; 2016 vs. 2019 voter turnout/voting methods; and an overview of how NCs chose their board members in 2016 vs 2019.

## New Candidates vs. Incumbents

		Candidates New in the NC System	Candidates already involved in the NC system	Total Number of Candidates
Region 1	North East Valley	80 (51%)	77	157
Region 2	North West Valley	34 (40%)	50	84
Region 3	South West Valley	74 (44%)	93	167
Region 4	South East Valley	111 (61%)	72	183
Region 5	Central 1	64 (40%)	96	160
Region 6	Central 2	42 (35%)	78	120
Region 7	East	66 (42%)	90	156
Region 8	North East LA	38 (27%)	104	142
Region 9	South LA 2	73 (72%)	29	102
Region 10	South LA 1	66 (64%)	37	103
Region 11	West LA	199 (70%)	84	283
Region 12	Harbor	36 (35%)	67	103
Region 13	Downtown LA	32 (73%)	12	44
<b>Total</b>		<b>915 (51%)</b>	<b>889</b>	<b>1804</b>

## Voter and Voting Method Information

Description	2019	2016
Voters (not including selections)	22,795	21,647
Online Voters	N/A	36% of Total (7761 voters)
Mail-in ballots	N/A	323 (out of total)

## Candidate Information

Description	2019	2016
Election Candidates	1,804	1,839
New Candidates (not incumbents)	51%	44%
Oldest Candidate	96	93
Youngest Candidate	15	14

## Systemwide NC Elections / Selections / Board Affirmations

Description	2019	2016
No. of Neighborhood Councils	99	96
No. held elections	81	82
No. held Selections	3	8
No. of Board Affirmations	13	5
No. <i>not</i> holding elections or selections	2	1



## **POST-ELECTIONS FOLLOW-UPS: VOTER SURVEY, FEEDBACK SESSIONS, GM LISTENING TOUR**

During the summer of 2019, a **post-election voter survey** was sent to Nextdoor users Citywide and to EmpowerLA newsletter recipients; 443 responses were received. Of those surveyed, 41.8% self-identified as first time Neighborhood Council voters.

When asked where they heard about the Neighborhood Council elections (with the option to select more than one source), 51.8% reported hearing about the election from their local Neighborhood Council; 27.9% from a candidate, 26.9% from a friend, family member, or coworker; 21% from the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment; 3.6% from Office of the City Clerk; 3.6% from City Councilmembers. A minute percentage reported hearing about NC elections from other sources.

Of those who chose “Department of Neighborhood Empowerment” as their source for learning about Neighborhood Council elections, 46.7% reported learning about the elections via the Department’s Nextdoor app; 26% from the Department’s Social Media posts; 21.9% from the Department website; 18.9% from email; 11.2% from the weekly EmpowerLA newsletter; and 11.2% from presentations by Department staff. Other reported sources included flyers, mailers, community events, bus shelter and bus bench advertisements, blog articles, and TV.

When asked about ways in which the Neighborhood Council elections can be improved, 64% suggested “increasing awareness of elections,” 51.8% suggested “adding online voting,” while 43.5% suggested “adding vote by mail.” Regarding election aspects to improve, 21.8% answered “election day information”, 19.9% chose “election day process”, 17.4% chose “date of election”, and 17.4% chose “additional polling locations.” (*Percentages don’t add up to 100% because respondents were allowed to choose more than one option.*)

The Department also partnered with the Office of the City Clerk to conduct **post-election feedback sessions** in every region of the City, to listen to NC members, candidates, and voters talk about their 2019 experiences, and hear their ideas for 2021. Individual comments were catalogued and are being used to inform NC awareness

outreach strategies for 2020, as well as outreach plans for the next NC elections cycle in 2021.

In addition to the election-specific feedback-gathering efforts detailed above, the ongoing **General Manager's Listening Tour** of all Neighborhood Councils and NC Alliances Citywide - which has currently visited about 75% of all NCs and NC Alliances - has been an important source of comments and insights about NC elections and elections outreach.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

Although this report reflects targeting of enhanced election outreach support based on defined criteria, comments gathered throughout the GM Listening Tour indicates strong interest in offering this level of increased election outreach support to every NC systemwide during future election seasons.

Toward this end, based on feedback gathered during the Listening Tour, the voter survey, and the feedback sessions conducted with City Clerk, as well as comments from Department and elections staff, the Department recommends the following:

### **Recommendation #1: Adjusting the proportions of the advertising mix and diversifying marketing channels**

Street furniture ads are time-consuming to design; expensive to print; their timeline is too imprecise (we still get the occasional inquiry on how to run for office from 2019 outdoor ads); and it is hard to get enough density via the City of Los Angeles' Coordinated Street Furniture Program to create a meaningful level of exposure within a short enough time frame. Outdoor ads might be useful for general NC awareness advertising, but we would not prioritize them for future NC elections.

We recommend increasing investment in social media advertising, on the other hand, as it was among the most cost-effective strategies used to recruit candidates and bring out voters in 2019. This was largely thanks to the ability of Facebook/Instagram ad tools to allow us to very precisely geotarget audiences, so that potential candidates and

voters would only see the NC election information that pertained to their own particular situation. For about \$70,000 we achieved a Citywide reach of over 1.4 million (4.6 million impressions / 117,000 engagements) while still delivering highly granular information customized to each of the 81 individual NC elections held during 2019.

Continuing to develop and diversify outreach and marketing channels is another recommendation for future NC elections. Seeking partnerships and placements with organizations and media outlets with connections to communities currently under participating on their local Neighborhood Council boards will help create a more truly representative NC system. Similarly, we had great success partnering with City Council offices, the Office of the Mayor, and other City, County, and State agencies and offices on getting the word out about the 2019 NC Elections, and hope to be able to expand on those partnerships in 2021.

Finally, our 2019 experience showed that vendor research and negotiations must begin earlier. While we had great success with the contractors who supported PR and digital marketing efforts, we did not complete the approval process till about 2.5 months before the first regional election season opened. The timeline for negotiating with vendors will be adjusted accordingly, to allow more time to work with them before the elections start.

### **Recommendation #2: Stretch marketing budget by advertising the NC system during off-years**

Short, simple messaging of the kind that makes the use of mainstream media outlets with Citywide reach more cost-effective is not generally possible with NC elections. Voters can't vote without messaging specific to the actual Neighborhood Council they belong to.

Customized, granular messaging is time-consuming and expensive - but it's also necessary, during an NC election year, due to the widely variable nature of NC elections. This is why allocating resources to NC awareness and participation-building outreach starting in 2020 and continuing every off-year (NC elections happen every two years) will stretch budget further, as the messaging - which focuses on what NCs do, and how to get involved - is not time-sensitive, and is the same for every neighborhood. This means that we can pay volume rates - rather than boutique pricing - for off-year NC advertising.

According to our post-election survey, people get involved with their Neighborhood Council for issues-driven reasons. Homelessness, land use, and housing are some of the most common issues that first connect stakeholders to their NC. An off-year NC awareness campaign that uses issues-based advertising Citywide would be an effective way to build participation in the NC system, and would also naturally pave the way for participation in the elections the following year.

### **Recommendation #3: Alternatives to the polls - Vote By Mail**

Of the 443 people who responded to our post-elections survey, when asked how NC elections could be improved, 51% said to add online voting, and 43% asked for Vote By Mail.

In the 2016 elections, when online voting was offered by 35 NCs, 17% of voters Citywide did not vote at Election Day polls; instead, they voted remotely, sometime during the 21-day period that online ballots could be cast. While we were fortunate to regain those numbers with turnout at the polls in 2019, this points to the need for offering an alternative means of casting NC ballots, so that everyone who knows about an election can participate in it.

Statistics show that access to alternative means of casting votes will likely increase voter participation. The US Census Bureau stated that 40% of voters nationwide used alternative means such as mail-in ballots or early voting to cast their votes. That's up 9% from 2014. These numbers are higher in California, where 54% voted via alternative means in 2014, and 60% did so in 2018.

### **Recommendation #4: Enrich candidate trainings; increase their number; and make them mandatory**

Our 2019 regional candidate workshops on what NCs and board members do and on how to register and run a successful campaign were well-attended, but they were optional, and there was demand for more than the nine sessions offered. Building on the material presented at these workshops; integrating them with the election outreach efforts of nearby NCs; holding more of the workshops; and making them mandatory

would help newly-elected board members hit the ground running, and also help drive voter turnout. The logistics of this proposal would be carefully coordinated with the Office of the City Clerk, in order to avoid any conflict with their election schedule and processes.

**Recommendation #5: Schedule the seating of all newly-elected NC boards in July, to allow staff to dedicate full attention to on-boarding**

Better support for on-boarding of new Neighborhood Council members was a frequent request from experienced NC members who attended the post-elections feedback sessions. Currently, newly-elected NC boards are seated on a rolling basis, in a three-month cycle lasting from approximately April until June, which follows on the heels of the Citywide elections.

While drawing out the election cycle for six months allows the unique quality of each NC election to be maximally supported, the opposite is true of board seating. Because many staff who provide direct NC support are also integral to the election outreach process, the attention they are able to dedicate to onboarding of new NC members is split until the election cycle ends in June.

This means that Neighborhood Council boards elected during the first regional dates may have been in office for a few months before they can be fully supported. However, it is vital for those who work with an NC directly all year long to be part of that Council's election outreach efforts, due to their expertise with the communities that NC serves and existing relationships with the NC members and their stakeholders.

LA's Neighborhood Council system is the first of its kind in the world, so many Angelenos are unfamiliar with how NCs work. This means training and support for new NC board members is important - particularly since many of those elected to NCs are new to being public officials. Safeguarding that accessibility is dependent on providing the best foundation possible to support these individuals' entry into public service.

The time and attention of Department staff providing direct NC support can be utilized most effectively for onboarding without a loss of the expertise they contribute to the NC elections process by scheduling the seating of all boards Citywide in July, regardless of when their election fell within the months-long cycle.

This additionally addresses an issue that has been raised over several previous NC elections cycles: whichever regions go first have candidate enrollment periods that open during the holidays, and are the first to experience new paperwork or portals. But as long as NC boards are seated on a rolling basis, it is difficult to rotate regional positions, as board member terms - normally two years, or in a few cases, four years - could be a few months longer or shorter as a result. Having a systemwide uniform seating date creates a more equitable election cycle, and ensures the strongest support without any additional cost.

# 2019 NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL ELECTIONS

## Outreach Report

In conjunction with the City Clerk, the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment oversaw outreach for the 2019 elections. A Citywide campaign of various strategies was used to increase awareness of what Neighborhood Councils are and what they do, in order to lay the foundation for a more vigorous 2019 election season, and a more representative, inclusive NC system.

### VOTER INFORMATION

**22,795**

**voters**

(not including selections)



**40%** increase in voters for targeted NCs

The 35 targeted NCs were determined by the Department as Neighborhood Councils that either had low 2016 voter turnout, had a vacancy rate of 20% or more, were in Exhaustive Efforts, or had some combination of the three.

**12%** increase in voters for non-targeted NCs

### OUTREACH OVERVIEW

A new branding of "Neighborhood Councils" was created specifically for the 2019 elections, along with a robust social media campaign which included LinkedIn, Facebook/Instagram, NextDoor, Twitter, and other websites (details in Outreach Efforts attachment). In addition to digital outreach, the Department delivered an extensive amount of mailers and door-to-door flyering. Also, a staff of Election Assistants and Public Allies assisted with outreach and targeting underrepresented stakeholders.

**9** candidate workshops  
with **348** students enrolled

**132** NC 101s  
with **70** tabling events

**19** outreach trainings  
with **4** large scale events

**70** bus benches

**130** bus shelters

**30** newspaper/online publications

### NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL INFORMATION

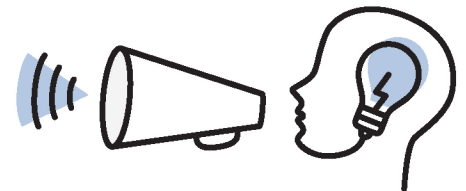
Of the **99** Neighborhood Councils,

**81** elections      **3** selections      **13** board affirmations

2 Neighborhood Councils did not have elections

### CANDIDATE INFORMATION

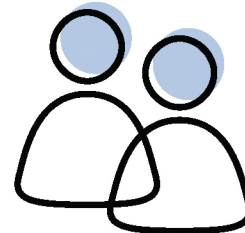
**1,804**  
candidates



**51%**  
new candidates

**49%**  
incumbents

**96** years old  
oldest candidate




**15** years old  
youngest candidate

# 2019 NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL ELECTIONS


## Outreach Efforts

### DIGITAL MARKETING


Impressions are the total number of times the post was displayed. Reach is the total number of (unique) people who saw the post. Clicks directed mostly to City Clerk's NC Elections page.




**Facebook/Instagram Ads**  
IMPRESSIONS **5,511,349**  
REACH **1,572,045**  
CLICKS **50,288**




**Email Marketing**  
EMAILS **16,753**  
OPEN RATE **38%**  
CLICK THRU **6%**



**Twitter Ads**  
IMPRESSIONS **128,966**  
CLICKS **2,914**



**Nextdoor**  
POSTS **376**  
REACH **515,503**



**LinkedIn Ads**  
IMPRESSIONS **16,012**  
CLICKS **54**



### TRADITIONAL MEDIA



**16** *election videos*  
with 5,917 views



**30** *newspaper/online publications*



**15** *organic media pickups*



**30,708**  
*mailers*



**260,000**  
*walking man*



**200**  
*street furniture ads*

Walking Man is a door to door flying service. Street furniture ads are ads placed on bus benches and bus shelters.

### EDUCATION + TRAINING



**9** *candidate workshops*  
with **348** students enrolled



**132** *NC 101s*  
with **70** tabling events



**19** *outreach trainings*  
with **4** large scale events

**3,477** UNIQUE CLICKS TO THE  
*Candidate Registration Guide*

**4,630** VIEWS OF  
*Candidate Info Video 2018-19*