

Your Community Impact Statement has been successfully submitted to City Council and Committees.

If you have questions and/or concerns, please contact the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment at NCsupport@lacity.org.

This is an automated response, please do not reply to this email.

Contact Information

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The Board approved this CIS by a vote of: Yea(19) Nay(0) Abstain(0) Ineligible(0) Recusal(0)

Date of NC Board Action: 02/09/2022

Type of NC Board Action: Against

Impact Information

Date: 02/10/2022

Update to a Previous Input: No

Directed To: City Council and Committees

Council File Number: 20-0963

Agenda Date: 02/09/2022

Item Number:

Summary: Please see attached letter

[Council File 20-0963](#)

(Neighborhood Council Elections / Fiscal Year 2020-21 / COVID-19 Pandemic)

The **Sunland-Tujunga Neighborhood Council** has a number of serious concerns regarding the spending patterns and failures of oversight by the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment on the 2021 neighborhood council election and their impact on candidate recruitment and voter engagement. The neighborhood councils function as the closest level of government for four million Angelenos. However, leadership failures by the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment permeated this election cycle. Given that the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment is requesting [one million dollars](#) for the upcoming election cycle, we felt it necessary to express our grave concerns regarding their stewardship of the money in the previous election cycle after a careful and thorough examination of public documents.

We are thankful to the Reseda Neighborhood Council for their diligence in researching this data.

The **Sunland-Tujunga Neighborhood Council** requests a full accounting of the money spent and the money remaining from the \$456,000 allocated to the Department for the 2021 election. We request a full accounting of how and why vendors were selected; many of whom did not have a track record of election experience or high levels of social media engagement. We request that contractual obligations that were not independently verifiable by this neighborhood council be reviewed for their fulfillment and the outcome be shared with all neighborhood councils and the City Council. Please provide the above requested information within 30 days of receipt of this letter

Payments of \$5,000 were each made to four vendors. For two of these vendors, their digital engagement posts occurred after the conclusion of the election. For the remaining two, their engagement was so insignificant, the Reseda Neighborhood Council struggles to understand the justification for their \$5,000 payments.

Our first concern comes from the \$5,000 awarded to the [Dangerman Education Foundation](#) for “2021 election outreach.” It is notable that this payment is specifically for services rendered after all the neighborhood council elections had concluded from July 1, 2021 to September 5, 2021 as listed in the detailed view on the [Controller’s website](#). The final neighborhood council election was on June 15, 2021. Every [twitter post](#) by self-styled superhero Dangerman occurred after the elections had already been finalized. Each [instagram post](#) also followed this pattern. The [youtube video](#) with 34 views followed this pattern. We question why someone who’s social media feed lacks regular organic engagement and whose primary audience appears to be school children (who are too young to participate in neighborhood council elections) would be selected as an election outreach advocate. Additionally, we are also curious why none of the ads contained the [federally required](#) disclosure of payment for sponsored posts. Lastly, given that graphics were professionally produced to promote engagement in neighborhood councils, we question why a photo of a rumpled flyer (Exhibit A) was deemed to be acceptable paid content and who at the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment was responsible for both approval of this content and this contract.

Similarly, the Los Angeles County African American Employees Association (LACAAEA) was paid \$5,000 presumably to promote Neighborhood Council elections, but the [sole post](#) on July 19, 2021 on their twitter and facebook accounts occurred after all elections had closed. This check is earmarked on the city controller's site as being specifically for the 2021 election digital media campaign. How can a digital media campaign consist of one twitter post and facebook post only after the conclusion of the elections? Why was outreach to an underrepresented minority group only done after the conclusion of the elections?

Additionally, the All People's Community Center received a payment of \$5,000 for "general assistance". All People's Community Center did not promote the elections on their instagram. All People's Community Center had 2 facebook posts total on May 6th and May 10th asking voters in region 9 (CANNDU, Central Alameda, Empowerment Congress Southeast, Empowerment Congress Southwest, South Central, Voices, Watts, Zapata King) to request their ballot. There were no follow up posts to remind voters to submit their ballot by election day. The posts had a total of 9 likes. Votes were down 77% in region 9 from the 2019 election. More voters left their ballot unreturned (389) than actually voted (255) in this region with 60% of ballot requesters not returning ballots.

Koreatown Youth and Community Center Inc also received a \$5,000 payment for "in person and virtual outreach". Their digital engagement included only four facebook and [instagram](#) posts which did not include a direct link to request a ballot. Their [twitter](#) account was not used to promote the elections. Engagement was low on all posts with few likes and was lower than their average engagement. We would like to know the scope of the agreement between all of the above organizations (Dangerman, LACAAEA, All People's, and KYCC) and the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment as contracts are not publicly available for amounts of \$5,000 and under. The Reseda Neighborhood Council questions the lack of dynamic and timely digital media engagement by these organizations.

We next review a series of much larger payments and their accompanying public contracts. The Reseda Neighborhood Council uncovered a pattern of unfulfilled contracts, erroneous information, and, shockingly, payment for a council election not even scheduled to occur in 2021.

Our first concern is regarding the \$53,200 contract with Evitarus, a survey and public policy polling firm. Despite this [contract](#) being approved on [March 15, 2021](#) by BONC, the contract was not executed until after the elections on June 16, 2021. Evitarus was identified in the [2021 election justification report](#) as a possible vendor for general and microtargeting voter engagement with a total budget of \$165,000 allocated for these purposes. Given that this contract was not signed until after the election and the Department has admitted that this has now become a neighborhood council engagement and awareness survey, that is a significant lapse in voter engagement that affects every neighborhood council. Additionally, [Evitarus](#) does not advertise itself as a firm focused on voter engagement, but rather on data analysis and polling.

We question why this firm was selected in the first place for possible voter engagement as it does not specialize in it. This contract represents more than 10% of the total allocated budget and is a significant expense. Why was the execution of this contract delayed by months and how were stakeholders disengaged by the shifting of its purpose? Evitarus promised to reach 1.2 million Angelenos to “provide key information to Residents about current and future NC elections, such as candidate filing, ballot request, and voting deadlines and requirements; and provide information to Residents about opportunities and methods for candidates and/or voters to register to participate—including online and other available resources.” This did not occur and the contract is likely unfulfilled. Our constituents pay this price.

The failure to execute the contract with Evitarus in a timely manner to engage candidates and voters is particularly concerning in the light of the election spending moratorium by Facebook. The moratorium was lifted on March 4, 2021. This means that voter engagement in regions 5, 6, 7, 8, and 1 was significantly affected and candidate recruitment was even more severely impacted and affected every region. The Reseda Neighborhood Council worries that many regions suffered a significant disadvantage for voter turnout that the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment has failed to adequately acknowledge or address how they would fix in the future.

Our next concern is regarding the [contract](#) with AltaMed Health Services for \$20,000. Altamed’s contract specified that they would do voter engagement targeting 5 neighborhood councils: MacArthur Park, East Hollywood, Westlake North, Boyle Heights, and Watts. The Reseda Neighborhood Council is curious why a contract was executed that specified MacArthur Park for voter engagement given that MacArthur Park [did not have an election scheduled for 2021](#). The contract was executed on April 9, 2021. This means that Neighborhood Council elections for East Hollywood and Westlake North had passed by the time this contract was signed. In addition, Boyle Heights had already passed its deadline for ballot requests. Additionally, the Altamed contract specified that information about neighborhood council elections would be shared on all social media platforms, including facebook, twitter, and instagram with a goal of 30,000 impressions. No posts regarding neighborhood council elections were made to their [twitter](#) or [instagram](#) account despite this contractual obligation. Additionally posts to their Facebook account referenced neighborhood councils that do not exist. A June 8th posting on Facebook encouraged voters to request a ballot for the Harbor Gateway Neighborhood Council. There is no Harbor Gateway Neighborhood Council. There is Harbor Gateway North and Harbor Gateway South. Another post encouraged voters to vote in the Van Nuys North Hollywood Neighborhood Council. There is no Van Nuys North Hollywood Neighborhood Council. Additionally, posts encouraged readers to vote in the Empowerment Congress Neighborhood Council. There are 5 neighborhood councils with Empowerment Congress in their name spread across 2 neighborhood council regions with differing timelines (Empowerment Congress Central, Empowerment Congress North, Empowerment Congress West, Empowerment Congress Southeast, Empowerment Congress Southwest). Accurate information is so incredibly important when doing “get out the vote” activities. The carelessness of these posts could not possibly have helped voter engagement and turnout.

Finally, we have concerns regarding the \$20,000 [contract](#) with Central City Neighborhood Partners to promote four neighborhood councils: Westlake North, Westlake South, Pico Union, and Rampart Village with an allocation of \$5,000 per neighborhood council specified in the contract. This contract was executed on March 22, 2021, which means that the three neighborhood councils under contract in region 6 (Westlake North, Westlake South and Pico Union) had no election outreach support as specified in the contract. Westlake North and South had a total of 10 voters despite having 16 registered candidates between them. With an allocation of \$5,000 per neighborhood council, this means the elections for these two councils represent [the most expensive election](#) in US history when evaluated by the cost per vote metric at \$1,000 per vote cast.

Each region was supposed to have up to 21 social media postings in March 2021 regarding the election. However, only Rampart Village was promoted on their facebook, twitter, and instagram accounts with two total posts dedicated to the election across platforms. Central City has promoted neighborhood council meetings following the election and the Reseda Neighborhood Council wonders if this may be connected to the noted deficiency in meeting the bare minimums of their contract. It is noted that while awareness of the neighborhood council meetings is welcome, this does not promote participation in elections. Given the deficiencies in the digital aspects of this contract, the Reseda Neighborhood Council must wonder if voters were actually telephoned for this election as specified in the contract with Central City.

Lastly, while \$456,000 was requested and allocated for the 2021 election, we do not believe nearly that amount was spent based on receipts filed with the controller's office. There is a minimum of \$150,000 that appears to have been left unspent based on current filings. Payments for outreach to the unhoused and youth that were detailed in the justification budget appear to have not been spent. The Reseda Neighborhood Council would like to inquire why. We would also like to inquire where these funds will be used moving forward. If the Department did not spend their full election budget, then what justifies a doubling of their budget moving forward? Perhaps, Neighborhood Councils should be given access to additional supplemental funding in election years as an alternative to increasing the election budget of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment in light of these serious findings of mismanagement.

The Reseda Neighborhood Council presents this detailed report because we are gravely worried about the future of neighborhood council elections if steps are not taken to acknowledge and remediate the leadership failures apparent at the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment during this process. We believe the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment presented an inaccurate picture of the full scope of the election in their report of the 2021 election outreach results. We believe that taxpayer money was mismanaged and squandered. We do not bring this to the City Council and the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners lightly. However, the Sunland-Tujunga Neighborhood Council is committed to the improvement and empowerment of neighborhood councils throughout the City of Los Angeles **and joins with the Reseda Neighborhood Council in our belief that** the findings in this report need to be explored further and thoroughly.

Exhibit A

< Photo

 dangermanurban • Follow ...



JOIN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL & GET INVOLVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Together, LA's 99 Neighborhood Councils form the grassroots level of Los Angeles city government. Each has a unique structure, in order to reflect the people and the needs of the community it serves. Here are some ways you can get involved.

JOIN A COMMITTEE  Neighborhood Council (NC) committees meet monthly on topics like land use, public safety, transportation, outreach, homelessness and sustainability. Being a committee member allows you to focus on specific issues and create impact in a limited amount of time. Additionally, committee members don't need to be members of an NC's board.

FILL A BOARD VACANCY  NC board members are elected every two years, but in between elections, board seats may become vacant if members become unable to fulfill their entire term of service. Vacant seats are then filled by someone who serves the remainder of the term.

VOLUNTEER  Help your NC through short-term commitments that fit your busy schedule. Example of projects may include event staffing, community cleanups, social media, or graphic design.

GET NEWS/UPDATES FROM YOUR NC  Find your NC: tiny.cc/FindMyNC and sign-up on their website

ATTEND YOUR NC'S MONTHLY MEETING  Sign up to receive meeting agendas: tiny.cc/NCagendas

LEARN MORE: visit EmpowerLA.org/GetInvolved or call (213) 978-1551

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SEPTEMBER 1, 2021

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