

County of San Bernardino



Handbook For Members of Advisory Boards, Commissions and Committees

June 2011

PARTICIPATION

Members of Boards, Commissions and Committees (BCCs) provide an important service to our County. They advise the Board of Supervisors on a wide variety of complex and significant policy issues or programs of concern to the Board.



The County of San Bernardino is fortunate to have many community-minded citizens who have special experience and interests and who generously volunteer their time and expertise to serve on the County's advisory BCCs. The complexity of local government and the increasing interest in citizen participation in the decision-making process is reflected in the existence of over 125 such appointed bodies functioning within the County of San Bernardino.

Serving on a commission can be a rewarding experience and is an excellent way to participate in county government and make a personal contribution to the community. If we are to have a government that is truly effective, we must rely on the active participation of many dedicated commission members. The Board of Supervisors recognizes the level of commitment and professionalism required to serve as a commission member. Your role as a commission member assists the Board immeasurably in making San Bernardino County government both effective and responsive to its citizens.

In September 2003, the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors adopted Mission, Vision and Values Statements and Countywide Goals focused on improving services and the quality of life for all of our residents. Commissions serve as a catalyst in supporting the Board by incorporating these values throughout the decision making process.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The primary purpose of a commission is to serve as an advisory body to assist governmental bodies in the decision-making process. Commissions serve as a conduit for citizen input by gathering, analyzing and recommending options to the Board of Supervisors. Some commissions are mandated by federal or state statute, others are established by County ordinance or resolution; still others are established by a Joint Powers Agreement. Regardless of the establishing mechanism, the Board of Supervisors usually retains the final responsibility and authority for making policy decisions. The Planning Commission and the Assessment Appeals Board are two of the few exceptions and have the authority to take independent actions.

Each commission should have a set of bylaws outlining the mission, purpose and specific details on the functioning of the group. Most commissions have an establishing ordinance, resolution, or legal mandate that outlines the scope and

function and composition of the commission. This is very useful in orienting new members to the specific charge and focus of the commission.

Each County commission has an identified department or “Liaison Agency” which provides staff support for the commission’s activities.

Many commissions also have an annual list of goals and priorities that guide their work program for the year. Reviewing these goals and priorities will assist you in understanding the function of the commission you now serve, especially its authority, work programs and relationship to the Board of Supervisors, county staff and other commissions. The most productive and effective commissions are those whose members are clearly committed to fulfilling the mission and goals of their commission and focus on accomplishing the annual priorities.

COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

As with any new assignment, it is important to begin building relationships with fellow commission members, local elected officials and their staff and the department staff person(s) who provide technical support to your assigned commission. An attitude of cooperation, spirit of tolerance and understanding and a goal of promoting consensus will be key attributes in your role as a commissioner. You will also want to have a working knowledge of your commissions’ bylaws so you are clear about the purpose, membership, meeting times and operating procedures of the group. Robert’s Rules of Order are widely accepted as the “standard” rules for conducting meetings. These procedures also insure that the flow of communication is clear and everyone has an opportunity to be heard.



Commission members represent the whole community and not the exclusive point of view of a particular group or special interest. The role of the commission is to gather and analyze public input prior to making a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors. The guiding principle of any decision or recommendation is that of addressing the overall public benefit.

COMMISSION MEETINGS

You will typically receive a meeting agenda and a packet of related material a minimum of three days prior to the scheduled meeting date. This should allow adequate time for you to review any background information in preparation for agenda items to be discussed or acted upon at the meeting. Stay informed about commission matters by reading minutes, staff reports and related material. Be prepared to ask clarifying questions, invite and consider public input, promote discussion and make decisions.

Regular attendance at meetings and important related events is vital to the overall functioning, success and effectiveness of the commission. Although regular attendance at commission meetings is essential to the work program and functioning of the committee, there will be occasions when it is not possible to attend a meeting. In this situation, please give a courtesy call in advance to your staff support person or chair, so they will be aware of your absence. This can be critical as member absences can result in less than a majority (quorum) of members being present, in which case no formal action can be taken at the meeting.

Although each of us has individual opinions and preferences, the role of the commissioner is to represent the public—this can be achieved by being open-minded, respecting and valuing the perspective of others and inviting differing points of view. This will insure a process that is both open and inclusive. Your responsibility as a commission member is to represent the public interest, putting the needs, interests and protection of the citizens as your primary concern.

BOARD, COMMISSION OR COMMITTEE BYLAWS

In general, advisory boards, commissions and committees have developed and adopted bylaws, approved by the County Board of Supervisors, which provide general operating rules and meeting guidelines. The bylaws typically include the following:

- ❑ Purpose – description of the purpose for which the board, commission or committee (BCC) exists
- ❑ Membership - the number of individuals on the committee; qualifications; method of appointment, term of office
- ❑ Meetings – date, time and place of meetings; statement that meetings are open to the public unless closed pursuant to state law; voting procedures and development and distribution of meeting agendas and minutes
- ❑ Officers – title (i.e., Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary), term and duties of each office; methods for selecting and removing officers
- ❑ Committees – definition and purpose of standing or ad hoc committees; reporting requirements; procedure for appointing and removing members
- ❑ Miscellaneous – other operational guidelines including procedures for amending bylaws

ETHICAL EXPECTATIONS

The County of San Bernardino is serious about establishing a climate where the highest ethical standards are maintained. Many of the County's BCCs deal with highly confidential or sensitive information (i.e., physical and mental health conditions, child/elder abuse reports, etc.). In addition to ensuring proper handling of confidential matters, the Code of Ethics serves to guide the behavior of BCC members when they are asked to consider and/or act on matters which could directly (or indirectly) affect them, their family or their property interests.

Many of the County's BCCs have adopted Codes of Ethics which describe the behavioral requirements and expectations for BCC members. In accordance with the Code of Ethics for each BCC, members may be required to formally disclose potential conflicts of interest by filing Statements of Economic Interest (California Form 700). Filing of this statement requires the BCC member to disclose financial, investment and property interests as well as gifts received. Check with liaison agency staff and/or refer to your Code of Ethics to determine if this requirement applies to your BCC.

In March of 2006, the County of San Bernardino adopted an ordinance entitled the "Ethics in San Bernardino County Act". This ordinance established specific guidelines regarding expense reimbursement and the expectation of timely filing of any required Statements of Economic Interest (Form 700). The ordinance also sets forth specific penalties for failure to comply with these requirements.

In 2005, Assembly Bill 1234 was signed into law. This legislation established the following state mandates for members of County BCCs:

- New BCC members assuming office after January 1, 2007 must complete a 2-hour state-approved ethics training program within one year of assuming office
- Continuing BCC members must complete state-approved refresher training on ethics every two years thereafter

Staff from the Clerk of the Board and your liaison agency will work with the BCCs to facilitate and ensure your participation in the initial and ongoing ethics training as required by the State of California.

THANK YOU

The County Board of Supervisors and the residents of San Bernardino County thank you for your participation and civic spirit.

Your contribution is immeasurable.

Please visit the County of San Bernardino web site as often as possible to view the Board of Supervisors agenda and access information about current County activities and initiatives.

www.sbcounty.gov