



City of Tacoma

Neighborhood Council Program

Standards and Guidelines

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City of Tacoma

Neighborhood and Community Services
Department 747 Market Street, Room 836



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Section 1: Neighborhood Council Program Overview

The Neighborhood Council Program (“Program”) was established by the City of Tacoma (“City”) thru Ordinance No. 25188 in 1992, and since that time the Neighborhood Council Program has succeeded in developing a sense of pride and responsibility in neighborhoods, as well as developing grass roots leadership for the advancement of neighborhood issues.

The purpose of this Standards and Guidelines document (“Standards and Guidelines”) for the Neighborhood Council Program is to provide additional information regarding the administrative responsibilities of the City, and the City’s expectations and requirements for the Neighborhood Councils (“NCs”) and Community Council of Tacoma (“Community Council” or “CCOT”).

This document will serve as a tool to ensure that Tacoma’s Neighborhood Council Program is accountable and transparent, and meets the program goals to create an environment in which residents are afforded an opportunity to meaningfully discuss City programs and policies that affect the neighborhood, bring neighborhood concerns, priorities, and goals to the attention of the City, and encourage diverse relationships and representative participation where residents feel included and empowered to contribute to improving the livability of their communities.

Section 2: Neighborhood Council Program and Tacoma 2025

The Neighborhood Council program engages residents across Tacoma and creates opportunities for residents to engage civically with their government and better advocate for their neighborhoods. The Neighborhood Council program will support the goals and metrics for civic engagement, equity, and accessibility contained in the Tacoma 2025 Strategic plan in the following areas:



Civic Engagement Goals

- Increase the number of residents who participate civically through volunteering and voting.
- Increase the percentage of residents who believe they are able to have a positive impact on the community and express trust in the public institutions in Tacoma.



Equity and Accessibility Goals

- Elected officials, boards, commissions, and volunteer leadership will reflect the diversity of the Tacoma community.
- Representation at public meetings will reflect the diversity of the Tacoma community.

Section 3: Bylaw Requirements

Neighborhood Councils (NCs) and the Community Council of Tacoma (CCOT) must adopt bylaws that, at a minimum include the following provisions. These requirements must be adopted in NC and CCOT bylaws in order to be eligible for City support.

1. NCs and CCOT must have bylaws on record with the City which include a description of the governance structure and decision-making mechanisms employed by the Neighborhood Council. Neighborhood Councils and CCOT bylaws must include a review period and must not contain provisions which restrict board representation or participation based on protected classes or tenure of service to the Neighborhood Councils (i.e., bylaws cannot contain provisions that restrict individuals from joining a NC board based on the number of meetings they have attended, number of years volunteering, etc.). We define “board” as individuals who apply to join a Neighborhood Council’s board of directors and serve as the governing body of the Neighborhood Council. Additional positions within a Neighborhood Council include community members who attend/participate in meetings (but are not on the board) and board officers who are elected to their roles on the board (i.e., Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer, Secretary).
2. NC bylaws must clearly state geographic boundaries of the neighborhood that do not overlap with other Neighborhood Council boundaries that have been established by the City Council.
3. NC and CCOT bylaws must address term limits.
4. NC bylaws must outline a process for internal mediation of conflicts and a method of addressing community complaints. Complaints will be received by the City and provided to the Neighborhood Councils when received.
5. NC and CCOT bylaws must outline an election process that concludes near the end of the calendar year with terms beginning in January for consistency. This provision must also outline a process for filling leadership vacancies mid-term.

Section 4: Neighborhood Council Essential Duties and Expectations

To be effective the Neighborhood Councils (NCs) should be aware of the duties and expectations the City has of them. Any expectation the City has for the Neighborhood Councils will be supported with technical assistance and training.

1. NCs should encourage all participants in the program to actively engage and be involved in Neighborhood Council decisions and actions.
2. NCs are independent organizations that work closely with the City of Tacoma to support the success of the program and the intent of TMC 1.45. NCs may receive funding or contract with the City and must adhere to those contracting requirements to receive resources.
3. NCs may review and recommend an action, policy, or plan to the appropriate Council Committee, department, or committee, board, or commission on matters that affect the neighborhood.
4. NCs provide effective community participation in government by articulating, defining, and addressing neighborhood problems by consulting and cooperating with various City departments and the City Council, and by notifying and relaying information to NC participants regarding matters that affect their respective neighborhoods.
5. NCs must provide contact information for all board members for all official communications from the City via email, and at least one physical address for mailings (information may be subject to public disclosure under RCW 42.56).
6. NCs will be accountable to participants within the neighborhood in which they represent. They will be responsible for disseminating information and notifying participants about meeting times and location, elections, Neighborhood Council events, and when decisions will be voted on in advance (with a preference for at least 24-hour advance notice). This is intended to address planned elections and votes, not matters brought up by the community or board members during a meeting.
7. Neighborhood Councils may make recommendations concerning particular actions, policies, plans, programs, projects, and other matters affecting the quality of life to the various offices, departments, commissions, boards, committees and council. Review items for inclusion in the City budget, make recommendations which reflect the needs of the neighborhood, and state the priorities thereof. Advocate members' interests to all departments of City government. Matters affecting the quality of life include, but are not limited to, land use, housing,

community facilities, human resources, social and recreational programs, traffic and transportation, environmental quality, and public safety. The Neighborhood Council should be encouraged to review and make recommendations on changes occurring City-wide which may affect the quality of life within its area.

8. The governance and decision-making mechanisms and processes utilized by the Neighborhood Council to elect leadership or submit letters of support and/or opinions to the City must be transparent, equitable, well documented, and provide adequate opportunity for participation by the Neighborhood Council participants.
9. NCs will submit an approved Annual Report, Annual Action Plan and Budget, and if applicable provide a current long-range neighborhood plan. Upon request, NCs will also provide minutes to include votes adopting Action Plan, Annual Report, Budget, or changes to the long-range neighborhood plan to the City. NCs must demonstrate community outreach and equitable inclusion in the development of the annual action plan, annual report, budget, or long-range neighborhood plan.
10. NCs must also include in their annual reports, in a template provided by NCS, their board recruitment, participant outreach, and a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
11. NCs should consider the views of people affected by proposed policies or actions and shall review all proposed options before adopting any final recommendations or actions.
12. NCs will designate at least one person to the Community Council of Tacoma to attend meetings as the NC representative.
13. NCs and CCOT must maintain a physical or digital copy of current bylaws and/or governing documents that must be made available at each Neighborhood Council and/or Community Council meeting for reference.
14. NCs will collaborate with the City to complete the reviews of the TMC and Standards and Guidelines document for the Neighborhood Council program.
15. NCs will review proposals for new Neighborhood Councils or boundary adjustments and make recommendations to staff and the City Council.

Section 5: Community Council of Tacoma Essential Duties and Expectations

The Community Council of Tacoma (CCOT) is an independent body that brings together the eight Neighborhood Councils to share information and work together to address larger citywide issues. Like Neighborhood Councils, the expectations of CCOT will be supported by the City through training and technical assistance.

1. CCOT will support and advocate for the needs of the individual Neighborhood Councils.
2. CCOT will disseminate the citywide strategic plan and encourage the individual Neighborhood Councils in doing the same.
3. CCOT may review and recommend an action, policy, or plan to the appropriate Council Committee, department, or committee, board, or commission on matters that affect neighborhoods across Tacoma.
4. CCOT in partnership with the NCs will collaborate with the City to complete a review of the TMC and Standards and Guidelines document for the Neighborhood Council program at least every five years and 180 days.
5. CCOT in partnership with the NCs will review proposals for new Neighborhood Councils or boundary adjustments and make recommendations to staff and the City Council.

Section 6: Neighborhood Council Program Support

The Neighborhood and Community Services Department (NCS), which will administer the program in a manner that best serves neighborhoods and effectively uses City resources, will provide support for the Neighborhood Council program. The responsibilities of the department are outlined below.

1. Contact and Coordination – NCS will identify a point of contact for all Neighborhood Council business. This may be a specified employee or program email maintained by the department specifically for this program, responsible for ensuring timely responses to Neighborhood Councils.
 - NCS will promote and facilitate open communication between the City and the Neighborhood Councils and Community Council.
2. Information Resource – NCS will support NCs in accessing information through publicly available reports, dashboards, data sets, and notification listservs.
 - Upon request from the NCs or CCOT, provide information regarding the process to receive notifications of meetings, hearings, elections, and other resident participation events. If needed, clarify the timeline and processes for notifications to NCs (i.e. notification process and timeline for receiving Land Use Notices). If NCS has a role in providing such notices to the NCs, ensure that NCS staff are meeting the expectations for notice requirements.
3. Community Participation— NCS will support and promote resident participation within the Neighborhood Council program.
4. Publicizing Program – NCS will publicize contacts, websites and/or social media of the Neighborhood Councils on the City webpage, TV Tacoma, or City Social Media as appropriate to ensure community members have access to NCs meeting dates, times, locations, bylaws, events, elections, and other applicable information.
 - NCS will provide updates to City leadership (i.e., an annual presentation to the Community Vitality and Safety Committee and share information at the Director Forums).
 - NCS will maintain a list of NCs for all departments to have access to.
 - NCS will maintain a current map of all Neighborhood Council boundaries that is made publicly available.

5. Reporting and Requests – NCS will create and make available standard forms and templates for annual reports, budgets, agendas, and other items as they emerge.
6. Feedback System – The City will host an online system Neighborhood Council participants can use to submit feedback about the Neighborhood Council program. NCS will provide all feedback to the appropriate Neighborhood Council to address as their bylaws outline.
7. Meeting Liaisons – The City Manager’s Office will identify a liaison to attend NC meetings to be the connection between City leadership and the neighborhoods. Liaisons may provide technical assistance and provide information, but are not expected to take minutes or provide direct staff support to the Neighborhood Councils.
 - Other City departments may send representatives, such as Tacoma Police Department, Tacoma Fire Department, and Tacoma Public Utilities.
 - The City will assist in inviting outside agencies to send liaisons as requested, though it cannot compel those agencies to attend. Such liaisons include the Tacoma School District, Metro Parks Tacoma, and the Port of Tacoma, for example.
8. Training and Development – NCS will provide annual training and development opportunities to Neighborhood Councils in areas of:
 - Board Governance
 - Community Outreach
 - Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
 - Other areas identified as needs by staff or the Neighborhood Councils.These trainings will be open to all leaders and participants of the Neighborhood Councils. Upcoming training opportunities are found on the Neighborhood Councils webpage.
 - NCS will provide an annual orientation for new board members after elections to include board governance, annual action plans and reports, and budgeting.
9. New Board Member Handbook – NCS will develop, and update annually, a handbook for all new board members that outlines the relationship of the Neighborhood Council to the City, available resources and timelines for reoccurring funding opportunities, and tips for being a successful board member.
10. City Engagement with Neighborhood Councils – NCS will assist city officials and staff in developing methods to more effectively engage neighborhoods through the Neighborhood Council Program and act as a liaison between the Neighborhood Councils and the City as a whole.

Section 7: Funding Opportunities

In some instances, funding resources may be available to the Neighborhood Councils through the City or other source. Neighborhood and Community Services may provide opportunities for operational funding to Neighborhood Councils and will make a good faith effort to publicize the availability of various public grants. In any case where the Neighborhood Councils receive funding from the City the contracts will detail the use of funds and spend-down requirements of the funding.

1. **Operational Funding** – NCS may provide annual operational funding to cover basic expenses of the Neighborhood Council such as insurance, printing, and space rental. To receive operational funding from NCS, a contract will be executed between the NCs and NCS.
2. **Capacity Funding** - NCS may provide additional funding to support activities beyond basic operations such as board development trainings, community events, and community projects. Capacity funding is based on the size of the Neighborhood Council boundaries, the participants represented by the Neighborhood Council, and the existing treasury. Capacity funding activities and details are outlined in contract documents.
3. **Grant Opportunities** – The City of Tacoma may provide a number of grants with various purposes that would be available to the Neighborhood Councils to support projects, development, outreach, and more. The City will make a good faith effort to inform Neighborhood Councils of the opportunity to apply in a timely manner and support them in sharing that information within their boundaries.