



TERRA LAWSON-REMER
SUPERVISOR, THIRD DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: May 24, 2022

10

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

PROMOTING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH BOARDS, COMMITTEES, AND COMMISSIONS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

The County of San Diego has over 100 boards, committees, commissions, and task forces that serve in an advisory capacity to the Board of Supervisors and County staff. Some of these boards, committees, and commissions (BCCs) make decisions on behalf of the Board and others serve as a bridge to the community. Examples include the Assessment Appeals Boards, Citizens Law Enforcement Review Board, Community Planning Groups, Parks Advisory Committee, and Social Services Advisory Board.

These Boards and Commissions serve a vital role, and the purpose of today's action is to strengthen their ability to serve our community.

This action builds on the County's current efforts to assess BCCs for diversity of appointees and update the application process to be more accessible. The recommendations herein call for an assessment of diversity, language accessibility, and the availability of sufficient staff support required for their success. Furthermore, this action advances a concerted effort to improve civic engagement through participation on the County's BCCs. The effort will include actions to improve outreach and accessibility of the application and onboarding process to lower barriers to entry, as well as the creation of a standard training and onboarding process.

On January 12, 2021 (9), the Board of Supervisors (BOS) supported actions to ensure transparency and open government in San Diego County. Under the County's Framework for the Future, the foundation for County operations must be transparent, participatory, and collaborative. The County's BCCs are a prime example of where we can improve in all three principles. I urge your support for this proposal.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

SUPERVISOR TERRA LAWSON-REMER

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1. Approve amendments to Board Policy A-74, “Citizen Participation in County Boards, Commissions and Committees,” to codify the recommendations in this Board Letter. In general, the revisions reflect the following: a clarification on nomination authority, orientation for new appointees, and an enhanced Sunset Review assessment.
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to develop a baseline assessment of the diversity of appointees, language accessibility, transparency efforts, and staff time. The assessment shall include recommendations as necessary to address gaps, shortcomings, and room for improvement in alignment with the County’s new strategic plan. This baseline will be used to inform subsequent Sunset Review assessments.
3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to work with staff to develop a Code of Conduct for all appointees that promotes civil discourse including, but not limited to the Board’s previously adopted Rules of Procedure and conduct described in the “Code of Civil Discourse” from the National Conflict Resolution Center. Staff shall return back to the Board of Supervisors for approval within 120 days and the approved Code of Conduct shall be included in the Orientation in A-74 Section E.5..
4. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to work with departments to develop an outreach strategy to encourage civic participation and transparency with a particular focus on youth and underrepresented populations.
5. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to implement all recommendations and return back to the Board of Supervisors with the baseline assessment, outreach strategy and report within nine months.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

BCCs are a mechanism for civic engagement. Racial and socioeconomic disparities exist across the nation in voter participation and public engagement. Trends show that white people, older adults, and people with higher incomes and education levels vote at higher rates and are more likely to be reflected in elected officials. The disparity continues when we consider that the residents who need policies to support them are less likely to receive support through representation. A 2019 review by the RAND Corporation found that civic engagement, through voting or other activities such as membership in civic organizations is associated with better health outcomes. Civic participation is a key issue in the social and community context domain of Healthy People 2030, an initiative to improve health and well-being through data-driven national objectives. The proposed action will reduce process barriers, evaluate the diversity of representation, and invest in the outreach necessary to encourage civic participation among underrepresented groups.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with today’s recommended actions though they may result in future fiscal impacts. Staff will return to the Board for consideration and approval of any such impacts.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

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ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

The County of San Diego has over one hundred boards, commissions, committees, and task forces that serve to advise and provide a link to community for the Board of Supervisors and County staff. Board Policy A-74, “Citizen Participation in County Boards, Commissions and Committees,” and Board Policy I-1, “Planning and Sponsor Group Policies and Procedures,” outline the formation of new committees, responsibilities of members, the appointment process, sunset review, and related policies and procedures. The full list of current BCCs is found on the County of San Diego website. Committees cannot be solely composed of County employees and are designed to reflect the wider community. Advisory bodies serve an essential role in resident engagement. They are fundamental to the County of San Diego’s ability to navigate complex and dynamic policy challenges, are a conduit to the County bureaucracy, and a broker to community voice.

The application for BCCs is similar for every committee, whether someone is applying for the Behavioral Health Advisory Board or the Assessment Appeals Boards. Despite each BCC’s unique charge, the information solicited from applicants is identical. The existing application form is only available in English and fails to provide enough information to inform the selection process. BCC Chairs can report experience or expertise gaps in their membership through direct communication with Board of Supervisors staff. However, there is no mechanism for BCCs to request applicants answer committee-specific questions that would more easily identify candidates qualified to serve. Applicants complete and return the application to staff which is manually entered into a system that is not adaptive nor user friendly for Board offices considering appointments. To address this issue, the Clerk of the Board identified PrimeGov’s Committee Manager as the most promising software to manage the application and appointment process and plans to implement the solution in summer 2022. Once this system is live, applicants and current appointees can easily submit their application online for one or more committees of interest through a streamlined application process that guides the applicant through the process, capturing demographic information, interest areas, application questions, and community references. The system will allow for increased transparency by allowing the applicant to follow their application and track completion of orientation trainings. Currently, not all BCCs collect demographic information in the application process, and therefore, there is isn’t comprehensive data on the composition of San Diego County’s advisory committees. Once all current appointees are entered in the new system, it will be feasible to assess the current demographic landscape. With the new system, the Clerk of the Board and the Office of Equity and Racial Justice can pull demographic reports and compare the results to County residents. Not only are the efforts to update BCC software beneficial for internal operations, but the interface will also allow for residents to browse available vacancies more easily and submit their interest.

Onboarding has historically been a challenge for BCCs. When an individual decides to apply for a vacancy, most of their communication is with individual Supervisor offices. Once the Board of Supervisors as a whole approves an appointment at a public meeting, there can be challenges in the handoff between the Clerk of the Board, the Supervisor, supporting department staff, and the

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Chair of the BCC. As required by Board Policy A-74, orientation trainings are the responsibility of the BCC Chair and are expected to include information specific to the committee. However, this policy has not prepared appointees for their role, and is not reliably completed due to lack of clarity during the handoff. The revisions to Board Policy A-74, Section, E.5. proposed in today's action will ensure orientation training that is consistent across BCCs and prepares appointees with information needed for their role. This is especially important for community members who are new to government or not familiar with County operations.

The *Live Well San Diego* Youth Sector was recently formed to encourage young leaders to advise, educate, and organize around youth needs in San Diego County. One of the sector's first initiatives was to present to BCCs the importance of youth engagement. During this process, County leadership recognized the importance of training youth on Robert's Rules of Order, the Brown Act, and conduct as a member of a Board. We recognize the need to expose and train our youth and must extend the same welcoming environment to our entire community who may not have prior experience serving in this capacity. The revisions proposed today place the responsibility with County staff to ensure completion of mandatory onboarding training. The training will be led by the Clerk of the Board and County Counsel, and include, at minimum, information about Robert's Rules of Order, the Brown Act, conflicts of interest, code of conduct and conflict resolution. The intent is for appointees to complete their orientation prior to becoming a voting member.

There is a consistent flow of appointees in and out of our advisory committees. Membership is limited to two consecutive terms and appointments are not intended to be long-term. And yet, consistency and continuity are essential for operational success. Before Measure B passed in 2010, there were no term limits for the Board of Supervisors. Decades without any turnover on the Board also meant less turnover for appointments. Measure B created an environment where no Supervisor will serve more than eight years and thus, there is a need for clear processes during staff transitions. When a new supervisor takes office, there needs to be clarity for which appointees serve in committee leadership roles and an indication in the portal whether they seek reappointment. Another transition occurs every ten years when the County undergoes redistricting. New district boundaries established this year highlighted the need for changes in Policy A-74, which outlines the appointing authority of Supervisorial Districts. The proposed revisions will clarify the responsible party if a BCC spans multiple districts. Community participation in BCCs is often voluntary in nature and time burdensome. Every fiscal year the Clerk of the Board conducts a sunset review of one fourth of all advisory committees (A-74, Section G). This review presents an opportunity to thoughtfully assess the outcomes of the committee, departmental staff time expected to support its activity, appointing authorities, and outstanding vacancies that may require additional outreach.

Each BCC has assigned departmental staff who are responsible for posting agendas and minutes and responding to requests that require less than four hours to prepare (A-74, Section C.5.). The staff time required to properly assist BCCs can range dramatically from hours to full-time employment. For most staff, the requirements to support a BCC are not included in their job description. Today's action requests a review of the staff time needed for each BCC to ensure that staff have the capacity to properly prepare for meetings, respond to requests, and post materials in a timely manner, consistent with legal requirements.

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On January 12, 2021 (9) the Board of Supervisors (BOS) supported actions to ensure transparency and open government in San Diego County. The County's Framework for the Future aims to ensure that every decision and action is transparent, participatory, and collaborative. To actualize this future, we must reform how we approach boards, committees and commissions. BCCs serve a vital role in our government's ability to make decisions, address complex issues, build public consensus, and provide a forum for community input. The Board's Transparency Committee established by the January action is charged with assessing and developing recommendations to enhance public engagement and access to government. This action shall build on the committee's work on public records, stakeholder engagement, and technology as a tool to promote accessibility.


The action today calls for an outreach plan to encourage civic engagement and ultimately, fill vacancies with residents who represent their communities and have the time, expertise and interest to serve the County. In 2019, the Governor signed AB-931 into law. It takes effect on January 1, 2030 and requires gender equity for nonsalaried, nonelected BCCs. While the law only applies to cities, it is equally as important for counties to prioritize equal representation on advisory boards. The law requires boards with five or more members to have both genders represented and no gender may represent more than 60% of its membership. The California State Association of Counties and the Urban Counties of California registered opposition to this bill citing the challenge for elected officials to find individuals of any gender or ethnicity to volunteer for appointments that require specific qualifications. The identified challenge emphasizes the need for San Diego County to identify gaps in its ability to attract diverse resident leaders. Access to boards and commissions can give underrepresented communities a voice and can even establish a pathway to other leadership positions in our community. The County of San Diego has a role to play in developing the pipeline of civically engaged leaders of all backgrounds and perspectives. I urge your support for this proposal.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

The County of San Diego adopted a Strategic Plan on January 11, 2022 (9) which identifies values of integrity, equity, access, belonging, excellence, and sustainability. Community engagement is placed at the core of the strategic plan to underscore its importance in all we do. The value of access speaks to the trust established by transparent communication with residents. BCCs should be a reliable option for accessing County decision making. When a community member attends a meeting, they should see the diversity of San Diego reflected in the faces of the representatives. Today's action to implement an orientation that centers transparency, accountability, and conduct centers the values of integrity and belonging. Ultimately, BCCs are one of the best ways to achieve the strategic initiative to, "inspire civic engagement by providing information, programs, public forums or other avenues that increase access for individuals or communities to use their voice, their vote, and their experience to impact change."

Respectfully submitted,

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Terra Lawson-Remer', with a stylized, cursive script.

TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Supervisor, Third District

ATTACHMENT(S)

Attachment A - Revised Board Policy A-74, "Citizen Participation in County Boards, Commissions and Committees"

Attachment B - National Conflict Resolution Center's [Code of Civil Discourse](#)