

Date: December 20, 2005

To: Neighborhood Council Leaders
From: Greg Nelson, General Manager
Subject: INNOVATION GROUPS CREATING INNOVATION GROUPS

Our system of Neighborhood Councils was designed using a couple of important principles.

First, one size couldn't fit all. What works in one part of the city might not work in another part.

Second, the system of grass-roots, participatory democracy through the new Neighborhood Councils would best be designed by the people themselves. If City Hall could do a better job, they would have already done it. So the public, through its charter reform commissions, guaranteed that the system be established, and it left the details up to both City Hall and the public.

We are close to finishing the phase of our evolution that involves the building of the system. Time is short because starting in the middle of 2006, a new commission will begin looking at our system. It would be unfortunate if the evaluation took place before the building phase was completed. Our new, and hopefully final, phase is one in which the department will devote maximum resources toward helping Neighborhood Councils be the best that they can be. We call it the Empowerment Phase.

The system belongs to the Neighborhood Councils. It has produced and attracted to it many outstanding people who truly believe in the value of creating and nurturing a citywide system of independent Neighborhood Councils.

To speed us toward the end of the building process, and to help Neighborhood Councils prepare for the system's review in six months or so, I am asking for volunteers to serve on 13 blue ribbon innovation groups.

I will appoint the members of each group, and they will report their recommendations and findings to me. Therefore, the restrictions of the Brown Act will not apply. I will encourage each group to host public meetings, but they will be allowed to communicate between themselves and with others whenever, wherever, and however they wish. This should allow each group to complete its work more quickly and thoroughly. Don't worry, it won't be difficult for me to know whether or not each group has been thorough and inclusive in its work.

At the end, an "all-star" team of innovation group members will be selected to examine all of the recommendations and findings, and develop a profile of the ideal Neighborhood Council. It will be a profile that will not have been created by City Hall, but from those in the public who have participated in this grand experiment in participatory democracy.

It will be important that those who serve on the groups be ready, willing, and able to take a citywide perspective. Those with personal agendas or narrow perspectives will not be a good fit. Volunteers may come from literally anywhere. They may be Neighborhood Council board members, former board members, students, teachers, members of other community organizations, employees of governmental agencies or elected officials, etc. The goal is good work product.

Our staff and staff from other governmental agencies will be available to assist the work of the groups.

I know what you're thinking "We can't possibly handle more projects. We're just volunteers." I encourage you to look at the glass as being half full. You should be able to interest more people in getting involved with your Neighborhood Council by giving them a specific project with which to get involved.

A description of the innovation groups may be found on our home page at www.LACityNeighborhoods.com.

Those who are interested, or who have questions, should contact Greg Nelson at greg.nelson@lacity.org or 334-B East Second Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012, or reply to this message.

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