



**LOS ANGELES
CITY PLANNING**

Safety at Public Meetings
Guidelines and Toolkit

JANUARY 2026

Goal

This guide is intended to be used in preparation for Non-Brown Act meetings including hearings of the Zoning Administrator, Planning Director, Advisory Agency, and staff level hearings. It is also intended for use during workshops, information sessions, and any event convened by the Planning Department where staff are seeking public feedback or sharing information.

Guideline 1: Establish Appropriate Safety Protocols

Agreeing on safety protocols before the start of the meeting can help it run smoothly and gives staff an opportunity to prepare a safety plan. Safety protocols should be context-sensitive and situational, depending on factors including the type of meeting, the expected number of attendees, and controversy of subject matter. Review the below best practices to determine which protocols are appropriate for your meeting:

BEST PRACTICES

Reference the Code of Decorum:

- The Code of Decorum sets the tone for the meeting by providing clear and visible guidelines for how the public can participate constructively.
- The hearing officer and attending planning staff should review existing department documents including the “Hearing Office Script” and “Best Practices at Brown Act Meetings to Address Disruptions” memo to remind attendees of accepted conduct during the meeting.
- Staff should reference the Code of Decorum at the beginning of the meeting and reassure attendees they will have an opportunity to provide public comment.
- If the meeting is in person, staff should post the Code of Decorum at the sign-in table.

Plan for an Appropriate Number of Staff:

- Assign Roles in Advance: Ensure each staff member has a clear role (e.g., facilitator, note-taker, timekeeper, public liaison).
- Rotate Staff: Rotate staff roles to evenly distribute responsibilities and provide support as needed.
- Pair Staff Members (Buddy System): Assign staff in pairs to support each other, especially during challenging discussions. One person can lead the discussion while the other monitors the room, takes notes, or assists attendees.
- Ensure Visibility: Staff should be clearly identifiable (name badges, lanyards) so attendees know who to approach for assistance.

Hold Multiple Meetings:

- Provide More Meeting Options: Additional meeting options can provide more accessibility to the public and prevent overcrowding that can lead to disturbances.
- Consider Meeting Times: Offer meeting options during different times of day (e.g., morning, afternoon, evening) to accommodate various schedules.
- Offer Smaller Meetings: Host smaller, targeted meetings (e.g., neighborhood-based or stakeholder-specific sessions) prior to larger public hearings.
- Set Agendas Strategically: If possible, spread controversial items across multiple meetings to avoid overwhelming a single session.

Consider Virtual Meetings Options:

- Virtual Meetings Provide Greater Flexibility and Control: Virtual meeting options offer a number of safety advantages including accessibility, and provide staff with greater control over the meeting environment.
- Offer Virtual & Hybrid Options: For controversial items, consider offering both virtual and in-person meeting options. Scheduling office

hours, workshops, and virtual information sessions before a hearing can reduce in-person overcrowding and limit disruptive behavior.

Have Officers Present as Needed:

- Assess the Need for Security: Determine the necessity of security officers based on meeting size, topic sensitivity, and prior threats of disruption.
- Use Officers Trained in De-escalation: Employ security personnel that are trained in crowd control and de-escalation techniques to maintain a neutral and calm environment.
- Station Officers Discreetly: Position officers at entry points or floating to avoid raising attention and causing unnecessary tension.



Guideline 2: Define Roles and Responsibilities

Understanding the roles involved in facilitating a smooth meeting is key to ensuring the public can fully participate and minimizing disruptions. Below are descriptions of these roles and their respective responsibilities.

BEST PRACTICES

Planning Staff Role

- Facilitate the Meeting Process: Ensure that discussions stay on topic and align with planning procedures.
- Provide Technical Expertise: Clearly and concisely explain planning policies, zoning regulations, and project details.
- Educate: Ensure that complex technical information is explained in a way that is understandable to the public.
- Engage with the Public: Address questions, clarify information, and ensure transparency in the decision-making or data collection process.
- Document Public Input: Record comments, concerns, and suggestions for consideration in the planning process.
- Time Management: Note the start and end of the meeting and how much time is allocated for public comment, participation, and discussion.
- Redirect Questions from the Media: Planning staff should direct any questions from the press to the communications team at planning.media@lacity.org.

Decision-Maker Role

- Facilitate the Meeting: Ensure that discussions stay on topic and align with planning procedures.
- Time Management: Emphasize time management and allocate enough time for public comment and discussion of each item.
- Listen to Public Comment: Listen, document, and consider diverse perspectives before making decisions.
- Ensure Fair and Transparent Deliberation: Follow established rules and guidelines to maintain integrity in decision-making.
- Make Informed Decisions and Recommendations: Carefully evaluate technical information, legal considerations, and community feedback.
- Communicate Decisions Clearly: Provide explanations for decisions and next steps in an accessible manner.

Community Leader Role

- De-escalate Tensions: Community leaders with established community ties can serve as ambassadors to help de-escalate tense situations.

- Crowd Management: Some council offices and public agencies use community ambassadors to provide information and guidance to attendees at meetings and in public settings.
- Facilitate Productive Discussions: Use engagement techniques to encourage respectful and solution-focused dialogue.
- Mediate Conflicts: Help resolve disputes between stakeholders and focus on consensus-building.

Trained Mental Health Professionals

- Offer Professional Support: Support attendees' well-being during and after the meeting.
- De-escalate Volatile Situations: Manage situations that require the expertise of a trained mental health professional.
- Contact other Professionals: Contact additional City staff if needed (security officers, LAPD, etc.)

Officer Role

- Maintain Order: Maintain a safe & orderly environment for staff and attendees.
- De-escalate Conflicts: Use verbal and non-confrontational techniques to address tensions or disruptions.

- Crowd Management: Assist with entry/exit flow and secure clear pathways for emergency situations.
- Remain Neutral: Avoid taking sides in discussions and focus on maintaining a safe and respectful space.
- Support Staff & Attendees: Provide assistance to Planning staff or community members who may feel unsafe.



Guideline 3: Select a Suitable Venue

The quality of a meeting venue can impact attendance and participation. Factors such as the room's layout and the venue's proximity to transit can influence how safe staff and members of the public feel in a space. Follow the best practices below to achieve a welcoming and inclusive meeting environment.

BEST PRACTICES

Venue Location

- Choose a location that accommodates the expected number of attendees.
- Ensure the space allows for clear visibility and audibility of speakers.
- Verify that the venue has essential facilities such as restrooms, seating, and power outlets.

Accessibility

- Ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), including ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms.
- Provide accommodations such as sign language interpreters, assistive listening devices, and multilingual translation, as needed.

Lighting

- Lighting should be bright and evenly distributed to enhance visibility for attendees and speakers.
- Ensure that emergency exits are well-lit and clearly marked.

Windows and Transparency

- Try to choose a venue with windows to create a more open and inviting atmosphere.
- Balance openness with safety to ensure that visibility does not compromise security.

Proximity to Transit and Parking

- Select locations near public transit hubs to promote accessibility.
- Provide information about nearby parking options, including ADA-accessible spaces.
- Ensure bicycle parking is available.

Environment

- Minimize external noises that could disrupt discussions (e.g., traffic, construction).
- Maintain good air quality and ventilation, especially for extended meetings.
- Provide water and, when applicable, light refreshments for attendees.
- Evaluate how the space is delineated between decision maker and the public. Try to select a venue that can create separation between the two.

Surrounding Area

- Choose a venue in a neutral or trusted area to ensure attendees feel safe and welcome.
- Consider historical and social contexts, avoiding locations that may have negative associations for the community.
- Evaluate street lighting and safe pathways for attendees arriving on foot or by transit.

Wayfinding

- Provide clear signage inside and outside the venue to direct attendees.
- Use bilingual or multilingual signs as needed to reflect community demographics.

Familiarity

- Choose a venue that is well-known and comfortable for attendees, such as community centers or public libraries.
- Consider locations that have successfully hosted meetings in the past.
- Engage community members in the selection of the meeting space.



Guideline 4: Coordinate with Other City Departments

Ensuring safety at public City meetings requires coordinated efforts across multiple City departments, including security personnel, community partners and, as appropriate and available, mental health professionals and medical services experts. A comprehensive approach that addresses both physical and psychological well-being helps maintain an inclusive and productive meeting environment.

CURRENT PRACTICES

Commission Office

- The Commission Office oversees 9 commissions and maintains detailed procedures for hiring security officers. The office also provides training for new commissioners on Brown Act procedures and strategies for running a successful meeting.

DEPARTMENTS

Los Angeles Police Department

- The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) provides security for City Council and other council meetings as needed.

Personnel Department

- The Personnel Department retains a medical services psychologist that can provide training on best practices to de-escalate a situation where an individual may be experiencing a mental health crisis.