

Writing Your Department Report

NC Budget Advocates · Format guide for White Paper department reports · 2026-27

Each departmental team turns its meeting with a City department into a short report for the NCBA White Paper. The Mayor, Council offices, and CAO analysts read these reports, and CAO analysts take our recommendations back to the departments. A shared format makes every report easy to read, compare, and edit.

1. Page setup

Department name	Calibri 14 point, centered, at the top
Meeting line	"Meeting of October xx, 2026" in Calibri 12 point, centered
Headings and body	Calibri 12 point throughout, single-spaced
Margins	1.25" left and right; 1" top and bottom
File type	Word document (.docx) only. No PDFs.
Length	Two to five pages, plus addenda only if needed

2. The four headings, in this order

1 ATTENDEES

Department: Name, Title; Name, Title; Name, Title.

Budget Advocates: Name, Name, Name; Budget Representatives: Name, Name.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Four to six bullets is typical. These are **our own** recommendations. They may or may not match what the department asked for, and they must not simply echo it. Each should make sense within the whole City budget and improve the department's services or make them more efficient. More than six? Use two subheadings, such as *Budget Recommendations* and *Recommendations re Homelessness*.

3 DISCUSSION

Open with a few sentences on what the department does. Then cover the budget picture (revenue, staffing, challenges, efficiencies, metrics) and the core of the meeting: prior-year NCBA recommendations and neighborhood council concerns. Use subheadings so readers can find the explanation behind each recommendation. Keep paragraphs short to medium and in active voice.

4 CONCLUSION (or SUMMARY)

Assess the meeting in two or three sentences. Introduce no new topics.

ADDENDA. Include pertinent documents, reports, or charts only when they are needed to explain your thinking. Most reports need none.

3. Writing strong recommendations

- **Start every bullet with an active verb** and format them all the same way.
- **Keep each one short.** The reasoning belongs under DISCUSSION, not in the bullet.
- **Think about the reader.** CAO analysts consult the department and report back to us on each recommendation, so write something a department can act on and answer.

Verbs that work: Fund, Increase, Expand, Hire, Allocate, Establish, Create, Require, Develop, Expedite, Prioritize, Partner, Improve, Update, Upgrade, Evaluate, Assess, Conduct, Clarify, Pursue, Ensure, Explore, Eliminate, Focus, Accelerate, Promote.

From the 2024 White Paper: *Provide access to language translation for City Planning Department hearings. Post Department metrics to the Department's website to increase transparency.*

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