

Department Meetings & White Paper Training

NC Budget Advocates | Saturday, August 22, 2026 | Thomas J. Norman, Ph.D., Chair, Training & Education Committee

thebudgetadvocate.com

Why This Work Matters

"A budget is a mission statement in numbers."

- Meeting the City's top managers is rare access - and Neighborhood Councils fund it.
- We bring neighborhood concerns to the people who run the departments.
- Two goals: improve city services, and advocate for budget transparency.

Barbara Ringuette, on 19 department meetings:

"I found something interesting - brutally, very interesting - even in departments that were not my first choice. In every report I found something really remarkable. I learned a lot."

Her tip: read the prior reports, and use the Department Descriptions on the trainings page.

This Advocacy Works

2,200+

recommendations submitted to Council over the
years

~55%

success rate on those recommendations

44

City departments and bureaus on our team list

"There are things that are really important to you that we'd like to hear... we're here to help, to advocate, to give suggestions." - Jay Handal, to the Personnel Department GM

Departments talk to us because it pays off for them too.

Where We Stand: Teams and Coverage

26 of 31

seated Advocates signed up

0

departments with zero coverage - every one
has an owner

Teams that need YOU (one or two members):

- One member: Cultural Affairs, Engineering Bureau, Information Technology Agency, Pensions (Fire & Police), Public Works, Sanitation Bureau
- Two members: City Clerk, City Council, Contract Administration, Disability, EWDD, Ethics, Library, Mayor, Port of LA, Rec & Parks, LACERS, Street Lighting, Zoo
- Three teams each is the floor, not the ceiling. Cap is seven per department.

Sign up or add teams right now: forms.gle/TUVQ4brud9YcyyXr9 (link in chat)

The Arc: Research, Meet, Write

1

Know your department

Research profile: budget, staffing, mission, prior reports

Worksheet 1

2

Meet the leadership

Set it up, send questions ahead, run it well, debrief

Worksheet 2

3

Write the report

Turn what you learned into White Paper recommendations

Worksheet 3

Each worksheet has an online form - share your work so teams can learn from each other.

Worksheet 1: Research Before You Reach Out

Fifteen focused minutes gets most of this:

- Your department's report in the most recent White Paper - what did we recommend, what happened?
- Department Descriptions and Categories PDFs - budgetadvocates.org/trainings
- The budget itself: Council File 26-0600, department budget pages, positions and vacancies
- Department website, GM's name, org chart, recent news coverage
- What your NC and stakeholders complain about that touches this department

Why it matters

When we met Personnel, research let us ask real questions: 116 positions cut, 33,000 employees served, 18 analysts carrying 4,200 workers' comp claims. The GM engaged because we had done the homework.

End your research with the three questions your team most wants answered.

Worksheet 2: Getting the Meeting

1

Find the door

GM's office or public information officer; prior contacts in last year's report; ask Thomas or Jay if you hit a wall

2

Make the ask

Introduce the Budget Advocates, offer two or three dates, keep it to 60-90 minutes, name who is coming

3

Send questions ahead

Five questions from your research, a few days early - it changes the quality of the answers

4

Confirm roles

Lead opens and closes; note taker writes; timekeeper tracks the question list

In the Room: Tone and Technique

- We are citizens who want the department to succeed - not auditors.
- Open positive: thank them, note what is working, name your NC connection.
- Listen more than you talk. Follow the interesting thread.
- Close with: what should we advocate for on your behalf?

The question that opens doors:

"What do you need to do the job effectively?"

And its cousin: "If you could shape the budget, what would help you do your job better, faster, cheaper?"

Same Day, While It's Fresh

1

Debrief as a team

What did we learn? What surprised us? Ten minutes, same day.

2

Log the follow-ups

Who promised what, by when - theirs and ours.

3

Send the thank-you

Within 48 hours. It keeps the door open for the follow-up meeting.

4

Share it

Submit Worksheet 2's form so other teams learn from your meeting.

Break after this section - 10 minutes. Links go in the chat.

Worksheet 3: The Report Skeleton

- 1 Department overview - two or three sentences
- 2 Budget snapshot - appropriation, trend, key line items
- 3 Staffing picture - positions, vacancies, impact
- 4 Key issues - three, grounded in the meeting
- 5 What the department says it needs
- 6 Recommendations - about six, no fewer than three, each one testable
- 7 Sources - every document, meeting, article

House rules

- Fact-check every number before submission
- Cite the budget year on every dollar figure
- Plain language first - polish comes in editing
- Follow the standard report template

What Makes a Recommendation Land

Weak

- "The department needs more funding."
- "The City should fix hiring."
- No cost, no owner, no way to tell if it happened.

Strong

- "Fund 6 additional workers' comp analysts to cut the 233-claims-per-analyst load and reduce penalty payments."
- Names the department's own stated need.
- Testable next year: did it happen, did the metric move?

Share Your Work: The Team Forms

All three forms live at thebudgetadvocate.com - one response per department, editable later, sharing voluntary.

Worksheet 1 form

Research profile

Before your first outreach

Worksheet 2 form

Meeting report

Within a week of each meeting

Worksheet 3 form

Report progress

Monthly, and at each draft stage

Slides from today: thebudgetadvocate.com > Training Slides.

Workshop: Your First Move (15 minutes)

Draft your department intro email, right now:

- Who you are and which NC you serve
- Why the Budget Advocates want to meet - improve services, support their asks
- Two or three proposed dates, 60-90 minutes
- One research-based question as a preview
- Sign with your team members' names

No meeting yet to email about?

List your first three research sources for Worksheet 1 instead. Two or three volunteers share when we regroup.

Next Steps

This week

Reach three teams if you are under; add a thin department if you can

September - November

Department meetings: research, meet, debrief, share

Early winter

Draft reports due to the Editor - dates announced this fall

Questions or teammates' contacts

Thomas Norman - tjnorman@gmail.com or LABudgetAdvocates@gmail.com