



Highlights

Why OCA Did This Study

In accordance with the City Auditor’s FY 2017 Work Plan, we conducted a performance audit of the City’s management of its Advisory Boards in order to:

- 1) Evaluate whether the City’s process to fill vacant member positions for Advisory Boards is effective and efficient;
- 2) Evaluate whether the City provides Advisory Boards with adequate information and resources to comply with applicable transparency requirements and best practices, such as the Brown Act (California’s open meeting law); and
- 3) Evaluate the processes to create and periodically review Advisory Boards, and identify potential opportunities to standardize their organization and operation.

What OCA Recommends

OCA made 14 recommendations to improve the process to identify and appoint qualified candidates to the City’s Advisory Boards, help increase transparency and promote public participation, and monitor efficiency and effectiveness. The Mayor’s Office, City Attorney’s Office, City Clerk’s Office, and the City Administration agreed with 14 recommendations. Key recommendations include:

- Improving the process of notifying the City Council of its authority to appoint members to certain Advisory Board positions;
- Consider establishing a means for the Mayor to appoint if the City Council does not provide required nominations within a specified timeframe;
- Formally documenting the vetting process for nominees, including establishing responsibilities and timelines for completion;
- Developing a strategy for publicizing vacancies and positions for which terms have expired;
- Requiring all Advisory Board members to receive training on the Brown Act;
- Providing all Advisory Boards with a website on which to post meeting agendas and minutes;
- Reviewing proposed new Advisory Boards prior to their establishment to identify potential overlap and analyze the estimated cost to administer the new board;
- Requiring all Advisory Boards to complete and submit an annual report to the City Council; and
- Periodically formally reviewing all Advisory Boards.

For more information, contact Eduardo Luna at (619)533-3165 or cityauditor@sandiego.gov

Advisory Boards

The City Can Take Additional Steps to Improve the Process for Filling Available Positions, Help Increase Transparency and Promote Public Participation, and Monitor Efficiency and Effectiveness

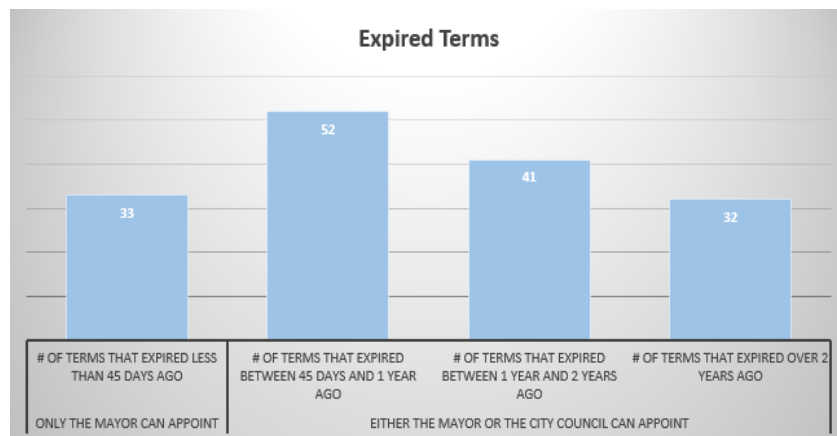
What OCA Found

The City of San Diego (City) values a high degree of civic engagement and participation in public decision-making. To that end, the City Council has created more than 40 Advisory Boards, which provide the City’s citizens the opportunity to volunteer their services on significant matters.

We found several areas where the City can improve its processes for identifying candidates and filling available Advisory Board positions, increasing Advisory Board transparency, promoting public awareness and participation in board activities, and monitoring Advisory Boards to ensure they are operating efficiently and providing a valuable service. Specifically, we found:

FINDING 1: As of March 2017, over half of the 334 member positions on the City’s active Advisory Boards were either vacant or filled by members serving on expired terms. The high number of vacancies has impacted several City Advisory Boards’ ability to meet quorum. In addition, allowing members to serve on expired terms may limit opportunities for other qualified residents. Although the City Council has the authority to appoint members to positions on Advisory Boards that have been vacant or filled by members serving on expired terms for over 45 days, the City Council generally does not use this authority. As a result, it is primarily the responsibility of one staff member of the Mayor’s Office to identify potential appointees for over 200 positions. The majority of expired terms and vacant positions have been expired or vacant for over 45 days (expired terms are shown below):

Many Positions Have Been Expired for Well Over 45 Days



Source: OCA, based on data from the City Clerk’s Boards & Commissions Tracking Matrix

FINDING 2: All Advisory Boards are required to comply with the Brown Act, California’s open meeting law. The Brown Act guarantees the public’s right to attend and participate in meetings of local legislative bodies, including the City’s Advisory Boards. However, we found that the guidance the City provides to Advisory Board members on Brown Act requirements is limited. The City also does not currently provide all Advisory Boards with websites on which to post meeting minutes and agendas, likely reducing public awareness and participation for some boards.

FINDING 3: The Mayor’s Office is taking action to review existing Advisory Boards and address some issues on a one-time basis. However, because there is no standard analysis of potential new boards, and because many boards are not required to regularly report to the City Council, there is a risk of overlap, inefficient organization, and other issues reoccurring.