

Mission

The mission of Citizens' Oversight Projects (COPs) is to maintain a force of volunteer activists who can attend and review meetings of local, state, and federal officials, to ensure honest and fair decisions benefiting the community.

Participants will become well versed in the specific details of the agenda of each body, learn to speak well, raise issues to the media, and may turn into excellent candidates for future elections.

Who can Participate?

Anyone! COPs was founded in San Diego County, but it is now expanding nationwide. We have associates in Orange, Imperial, Riverside, and even in Kansas and Pennsylvania.

Anyone can participate, but we recommend that you plan to stick with the body you choose as it takes quite a few meetings before you will understand the cast of characters and potential impropriety.

COPs is nonpartisan. We are especially looking for volunteers who can question the decisions of the dominant party and bring some fairness to the process. Becoming a member of the "club" won't do any good. If you are independent in your thinking, then you are perfect for the COPS program!

Once you choose a body to oversee, please come to our website and enter your information so we can track the expansion of oversight nationwide.

Email: info@citizensOversight.org
Phone: 619-820-5321
Web: CitizensOversight.org

Which Governmental Bodies Need Oversight?

Almost all local government runs without any oversight at all. But it is our duty to provide oversight in a democracy. Our government is so immense, no one person can do it all. But as a team, we can have a large impact -- call it crowd oversight. FYou can work on any governmental body in your area, pick one that is unattended to have the most impact.

Federal and State:

- State Senate District
- State Assembly Districts
- Congressional Districts

Boards / Councils

- County Boards of Supervisors
- City Councils
- Hospital District Board
- Fire District Boards
- Water District Boards

School Districts

- Union High School District Boards
- Community College District Boards
- Elementary/Middle School Districts

City Departments / Contracts

- Police Departments
- Performing Arts Centers
- Outsourcing contracts
- Asset investment committees
- City Commissions

Department of Planning and Land Use:

- City Planning Boards
- Community Planning Groups

Registrar of Voters

- Vote count monitoring to reduce likelihood of election fraud. We can provide instructions to limit vulnerability.

Most boards meet monthly or twice a month. You can keep tabs on the many bodies on-line or on TV. Working as a team, you can share the responsibility and make new friends to boot.

See something that seems unethical? It probably won't take long. Discuss these with other COPs volunteers or our staff to choose the best way to expose the corruption to media and the rest of the public. Get the media involved, they're always looking for stories. Speak out. Staff are begging for citizens to give them cover to do the right thing! **Now is the time to get involved to hold their feet to the fire!**

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Please become a supporting member of Citizens Oversight! All donors receive a COPS booklet!

Citizens Oversight, Inc. is a 501(c)3 nonprofit "charity" organization. All donations are tax deductible.

Name: _____ Phone: _____
Address: _____ Email: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

- Basic Membership \$30
- Supporting Member \$60
- Donating Member \$120
- Underwriter \$500
- Make it happen level \$1000

Mail to: Citizens Oversight
771 Jamacha Rd. #148
El Cajon, CA 92019

(Also donate online at CitizensOversight.org)

DON'T WAIT TO GET STARTED!

- Look up all your elected officials and government bodies using your local Registrar of Voters. In San Diego, visit www.sdvote.com, click on "Your Representatives."
- Attend meetings. At the meeting, you are not required to sign-in but it is courteous to do so.
- Introduce yourself to the chair prior to the meeting so there is no confusion about the fact that you are with COPs and are there to provide citizen oversight.
- As a member of the public, you have the right to see any documents they are working on, including detailed agendas prior to and during the meeting.
- You don't have to be in the district to attend and speak at the meeting. All members of the public have equal rights in the meeting, and it can be easier to attend meetings outside of your district as you will have less chance of conflict of interest or retaliation.
- Don't abuse your power as a citizen, particularly when working with volunteer bodies such as the community planning groups. If their operation can be improved, submit a set of suggestions rather than submitting "citations."
- Review the agenda in advance and do preliminary research to understand the issues. Many bodies now publish their agendas on their web sites. If they do not, this is a great change to request of the group.

Speaking at meetings

- Practice makes perfect. Become accustomed to speaking at meetings, both during public comment opportunities, and also with regard to specific agenda items.
- At first, you may feel nervous. Reading prepared comments should help if you can prepare these.
- As you become more comfortable with the situation, you should be able to speak from a set of bullet points, formulating your comments as you speak.
- Practice your comments with a stopwatch so you won't go over the time limit. You'll probably have only two, three, or five minutes for your comments.
- Some chairs will try to intimidate speakers by asking for name and home address. It is recommended that you decline to give your home address, and instead use the address "CitizensCversight.org." The California State Attorney General has ruled that you need not identify yourself to speak at public meetings.
- Public meetings are governed by the Brown Act in

California, and similar laws in other states. As a result, it is not allowed for the elected officials to respond to comments made during public comment period. However, staff may respond to those issues, just as if you had approached them at any other time.

- If possible, speak to agenda items and avoid talking about random and irrelevant topics.

Recording Meetings

One of the most important tactics available to COPs is recording meetings and placing videos on the Internet. Public meetings can be recorded and anyone in the meeting is implicitly agreeing to be included in the recording. However, if someone specifically requests to not be included in the recording outside the course of the meeting, it is advisable to avoid shooting them or edit them out. If someone speaks up at the meeting, you can record their comments.

- Use a digital video recorder and an application like Windows Movie Maker to edit the video and add titles and credits. This program is free with Windows.
- YouTube is the best hosting service and if you identify yourself, you can upload longer videos.
- Add these to your project page at www.copswiki.org.
- It is amazing how courteous officials can be when they realize that they are being recorded and the video will be placed on the Internet "on a permanent basis."
- You are not required to identify yourself or why you are recording, but it is courteous to do so.
- If a video camera is not handy, audio recordings are a good alternative, and can be hosted directly on a web site using simple playback tools.

Organizing Projects on the Web

On CitizensOversight.org, we have established a tool that encourages submission of information and collaboration by a community of users. The most important aspects of this site are:

- Registering you and your group with our site so we can track the expansion of oversight and trade tips.
- The creation of "Projects" which consist of structured pages including background information and listing relevant images, NewsMedia, email lists, and organizations. It is through projects that we organize and track projects related to the bodies being monitored.
- Developing a community of people is still the backbone of any community activism activity. The site provides a means to organize email lists to link them to the relevant projects so people will be able to subscribe to the lists that interest them and become a part of the conversation.



Citizens Oversight Projects

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Bringing accountability to our local governmental bodies and representatives.

GET STARTED TODAY

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Please visit our website at:
www.citizenoversight.org