

NYC COMMUNITY BOARDS

What is a community board?

In New York City, community boards are the lifelines between communities and the local government. Established by local charter, there are 59 boards — one for each of 59 community districts in the five boroughs. Each community board consists of 50 appointed volunteers who are residents in their respective districts.

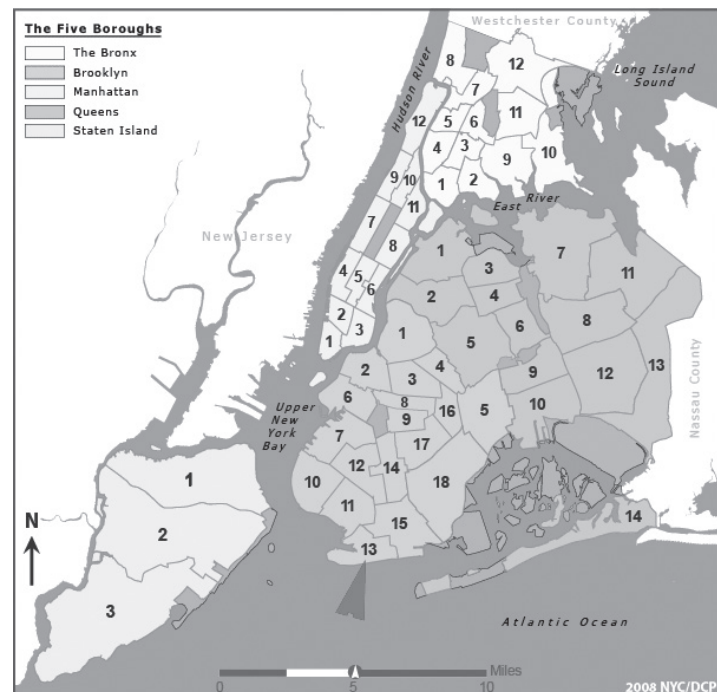
They deal with matters related to local government, including:

- Facilitating public meetings
- Approving zoning requests for land use such as new housing, landmarks, parks, schools
- Allocating city funds

They make recommendations to the city based on public hearings and community input, and propose additional projects of their own. As *Gothamist* has reported, boards across the city have, on top of their regular responsibilities, also offered college scholarships, commissioned studies on early childhood education, and secured more social services for the elderly. Boards may make budget requests to city agencies or other public entities to fund additional projects.

Why should you join?

Are you concerned by the pattern of unsafe driving near your children's school? Or recent luxury housing developments raising rents in your neighborhood, or out-of-control litter at the park? Community boards advise council members and public agencies on how citywide policies are implemented in their neighborhoods and make sure that your concerns get heard by the local government. It's important to get a diverse range of views in these meetings.



Some community boards hardly meet half the 50-member capacity, but women and people of color are still under-represented.

HOW TO JOIN A COMMUNITY BOARD

1. Attend public meetings as a community member.

Check your community board's website for the general public meeting schedule. Regular public hearings allow community members a chance to voice their opinions on ongoing neighborhood developments and initiatives.

2. Become a public member.

Public members are appointed by the chair of each community board and may serve on subcommittees. As a subcommittee member, you may volunteer services such as researching for a resource guide, or get to offer opinions on a new charter school opening in your neighborhood

Becoming a public member is a great way to get to know decision-making procedures, current board members, and the general landscape of New York City politics. Some public members get the opportunity to sit in on meetings and interact with committee heads, public agencies, and partner organizations.

3. Apply to be a full board member.

Board members serve for two-year terms, and only 25 seats open up every other year. Some boards require you to serve on at least one subcommittee and possibly two. Time commitment varies, but subcommittees will meet at least once a month and the full board meeting every month. This is a nonsalaried volunteer position, requiring, according to Curbed New York, at least 10 hours a month.

Certain committees also require specific expertise or experience. For example, the land use subcommittee may require specialized technical knowledge of zoning codes and variances, though the New York City Civic Engagement Commission is working on educational materials for community boards.

Before applying, you may want to reach out to your community board chair or district manager about any special requirements. Some boards may have residency or experience requirements, or require that you serve as a public member first.

If you think community boards might not be the best fit for your schedule, interests, or skills, you can check out other ways to volunteer in the city or join your neighborhood's mutual aid group.

Sign up for WCC's newsletter to learn other ways to be civically engaged.

SOURCES:

"Community Boards," New York City Mayor's Community Affairs Unit. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/cau/community-boards/community-boards.page>

"Chapter 69 -- Community Districts and Coterminality of Services," New York City Charter. <https://nyccharter.readthedocs.io/c69/>

"How to join your New York City community board," Curbed New York. <https://ny.curbed.com/2017/3/15/14918194/nyc-community-board-member-get-involved>

"Ask a Reporter: What Do Community Boards Do?" *Gothamist*. <https://gothamist.com/news/ask-a-reporter-what-do-community-boards-do>

New York City Civic Engagement Commission, "Apply to Serve On Your Community Board," <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/civicengagement/get-involved/community-boards.page>