

County Committee Reform Platform

The Kings County Democratic Committee (“KCDC,” or “County Committee”) is the organizing body of Brooklyn’s Democratic Party. This committee is meant to be representative of Brooklyn’s Democrats, with members from every neighborhood of the borough. It plays an important role in shaping Brooklyn’s political arena by nominating judges and candidates in special elections.

In recent years, KCDC has failed to function as an engaging, deliberative, and representative body. Leadership has denied members substantial opportunities to debate or vote on Party business and to participate in functional standing committees, thus barring them from taking on a substantive role in the operation of their Party.

The following platform lays out the ways in which New Kings Democrats (NKD) believes that KCDC can adapt to function more democratically and accommodate Brooklyn Democrats’ interest in meaningful involvement and serves as an update to a previous County Committee Reform Platform adopted in June 2016.

Party Rules: *Currently, KCDC does not comply with many of its own rules. Importantly, it fails to comply with rules that, if followed, would help the Committee function more transparently and inclusively. For example, the County website does not provide guidance on how to run for KCDC, the standing committees have not been formed, and financial statements are not posted to the County website as is required.*

- The Party should comply with its own rules as adopted by KCDC and filed with the State Board of Elections.

Eligibility for County Committee: *NKD has encountered many incidents of candidates “running” or being appointed to KCDC without their knowledge—making it unlikely that they would ever engage as representatives of their community within the County Committee.*

- Every candidate for County Committee, who either appears on a petition or appointment list for a KCDC seat should know that they are running or being appointed and is aware of the responsibilities of the position.
- The Party should maintain a clear and accessible list of filled seats and vacancies on its website.

Gender Designated County Committee Seats: *Currently, County Committee seats in each Election District are divided equally between “male” and “female”. This precludes Democrats who do not identify as either male or female for running for a seat and puts unnecessary restrictions on how many people of one gender can run in the same election district.*

- Eliminate the gender designation of County Committee seats - opening them all up to people of all genders.

Proxies: *While NKD believes that KCDC members should make their best effort to attend all meetings, we recognize that issues including accessibility, work schedules, and family responsibilities sometimes require that a member miss a meeting. KCDC members should retain their right to a vote, even if they cannot physically come to a meeting. Unfortunately, the KCDC's current proxy system allows for the chair of the Party's Executive Committee to accumulate so many proxies as to give them unilateral control over Party business and other matters being voted on.*

- Rules guiding the use of proxies should limit how many each KCDC member can hold. NKD is open to various methods of achieving this.
- Party leadership should notify members about any scheduled votes prior to a meeting, so that proxy givers can provide voting instructions to their proxy holders.
- Party leadership should ensure that all proxy holders are notified of how many proxies they have been designated at the outset of any County Committee meeting, and make known to the entire Committee how many votes will be 'in person' vs. 'by proxy'.

Party Leadership: *The Party's Executive Committee is currently comprised of District Leaders and the officers of the KCDC. The officers are elected by the KCDC general membership. In recent years, rank and file KCDC members have had no representation in Party Leadership because these officer positions have only been filled by District Leaders. Additionally, KCDC leadership has not mitigated conflicts of interest of its District Leaders.*

- Some number of elected officers of KCDC should be filled by KCDC members who are not District Leaders. KCDC members running for one of the officer positions should be required to make their credentials known to the entire KCDC prior to a vote taking place. This change should occur after the proxy reforms mentioned above are implemented, so that the Chair of the Executive Committee is not able to hand-pick party officers.
- The Party rules should be amended to bar District Leaders and state committee-level members from simultaneously holding another elected office.
- The Party rules should be amended such that, if a vacancy occurs in a District Leader position, the Executive Committee cannot appoint a District Leader's family member to fill that vacancy.

Rules Amendments: *Currently, the Party's rules allow for the Party's Executive Committee (i.e. the District Leaders) to adopt changes to the Party's rules without input from the larger KCDC membership. This gives them undue control over the general membership.*

- The rules should be amended to require that any proposed changes to the KCDC rules can only be adopted by a vote of the full KCDC membership. Any rules change proposal referred to the Rules Committee must be put to the general membership for a vote, after the Rules Committee has issued its report on the proposals. This change should occur after the proxy reforms mentioned above are implemented.

County Committee Meetings: *KCDC meetings occur with little notice to members, no pre-distributed agenda, and little space for the KCDC general members to discuss the business of KCDC.*

- The Party should collect email and phone contact details for all County Committee members and reach out to members by these means. Members should be able to opt in to receive meeting details by mail, but the default communication method should be email.
- Party Rules should be amended to require that Party leadership notify all KCDC General and Executive Committee members 30 days prior to a meeting taking place; that emailed or mailed notice include the meeting time, date, and location, and information on when and where the meeting agenda will be available; and that leadership make the agenda for the meeting public by posting it on the KCDC website, emailing it to membership, and making hard copies available to membership at least five days in advance of the meeting.
- The Chairperson should ensure that all members can be heard during the meeting, when speaking within the rules of order. The Chairperson should ensure integrity in the voting process (including ensuring that all proxy votes are appropriately applied) and ensure that all resolutions properly submitted are brought to a vote. All votes and all candidates running for officer positions should be announced prior to the meeting so members can make an informed decision.
- All meeting locations should be accessible by public transportation.
- All meeting locations should be ADA-compliant.
- The Chair of the County Committee should be certified in Parliamentary Procedures, and if not, the Party should hire a Parliamentarian to advise the chair during County Committee meetings.
- KCDC meetings should include opportunities for ADCs and Standing Committees to report back to the rest of KCDC.
- Party rules should be amended to require that New Business be heard first, prior to any public policy discussion, at all KCDC meetings except the Organizational Meeting.
- The Party should archive and make available minutes as well as audio and video recording of all general membership meetings. Minutes should be distributed to all members by email.
- The Chairperson may also delegate the responsibilities outlined in the above bullet points to an Executive Director, if the Party employs one, but the Chairperson still holds ultimate responsibility.

Quorum: *Quorum (the number of individuals required to be present in person or by proxy in order for the KCDC to conduct business) must balance two competing needs. On the one hand, quorum cannot be so low that business can be conducted by a non-representative sample of KCDC. On the other hand, quorum cannot be so high as to make it impossible for any business to be conducted at all.*

- The Party's current quorum requirement, 450, appears to achieve a balance between representativeness and practicality. NKD remains open to an argument that it does not. It may make sense to set quorum at a fixed percentage of certified membership, or the average attendance at the three prior County Committee meetings.

Standing Committees of the Executive Committee: *These committees are advisory and consider issues such as upcoming elections, fundraising, and legislation. KCDC's capacity to function as an effective, responsive political party is hampered by the fact that 14 of its 15 standing committees have not been convened in some time, despite the KCDC rules mandating their existence. The standing committee that has convened, the Rules Committee, is not open to the general membership of KCDC. Under current rules, leaders of standing committees are selected by the Chair of the Executive Committee.*

- A County Committee member should be able to initiate the establishment of a Standing Committee at any KCDC meeting (not just at the organizational meeting), as long as some number of County Committee members have expressed interest. This change requires the rules to be amended so that the general membership of the KCDC elects the chairs of the standing committees, instead of chairs being appointed by the Chair of the Executive Committee.

Assembly District Committees (ADCs): *KCDC's capacity to function as a grassroots organization is limited because ADCs have not been established in most Assembly Districts. These Committees perform important functions like filling vacancies in special elections (which happen frequently) and can provide members an opportunity to organize for the Party within their district.*

- As required by the rules, District Leaders should convene ADC's in every Assembly District and meet regularly.
- If District Leaders are unwilling or unable to organize an ADC in their district, the Executive Committee Chairperson must convene an ADC in that district and should strive to include all KCDC members in that district who wish to participate.
- ADCs should be convened through either of the two means outlined above within 60 days of the primary at which the County Committee members are elected.

Financial Oversight: *The Party's Treasurer is required to post quarterly financial statements on the KCDC website - this requirement has not always been met. Further, the level of detail in financial statements does not sufficiently make clear the nature of the Party's expenditures. In particular, there is a sizeable "housekeeping" account that does not classify expenditures by type.*

- The Party's financial statements should contain a meaningful level of detail so that Party donors, KCDC members, and Brooklyn Democrats as a whole can form a clear view of Party finances.
- The Finance Committee should be convened and its purview should be expanded to oversight over KCDC expenditures, in addition to KCDC fundraising.

Judicial Elections: *The Party convenes a judicial screening panel each election cycle to assess the qualifications of judicial candidates. The Party's Executive Committee may only endorse candidates that are deemed qualified by the screening panel.*

- The rules of the Judicial Screening Committee should be integrated into the KCDC rules (they currently exist in a separate document).
- The Party rules should be amended so that any meeting at which the Executive Committee discusses the endorsement of judicial candidates must be public, with notice given to all members of the KCDC.

Nominating Candidates in Special Elections: *This issue is addressed in NKD's [Vacancy Nomination Process](#) platform.*

The Party's Role in Primaries: *This issue is addressed in NKD's [The Democratic Party's Role in Primary Elections](#) platform.*
