



THE SONOMA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY

What is it, and why should you apply?

WHAT IS THE SONOMA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY?

The Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury is:

- A citizen watchdog function authorized by the California State Constitution
- An investigative body; an “arm of the Court” – Assesses action and performance of local government entities
- A group of 19 citizens serving a 12-month term. Every California County has a civil grand jury.

CALIFORNIA AND NEVADA ARE THE ONLY STATES TODAY WITH STANDING CIVIL GRAND JURIES.

How does the Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury function and operate?

- It is not like regular jury duty!
- Members of the Civil Grand Jury decide the best way to get the work done.
- Some best practices carry over year to year, such as committee/team structure and leadership roles, meeting and training schedules, and documentation standards.
- IN many years, holdover jurors provide continuity for new members.
- Legal support is provided by the Sonoma County Counsel's Office.

Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury Structure

Typical Committees and Investigations

- Administration and Fiscal / Audit of Cities and Special Districts
- Education Department reviews
- Health and Human Services reviews
- Law Enforcement reviews
- Public Works Departments' reviews
- Environment reviews
- Safety and Transportation reviews
- Editorial & Continuity (Internal Jury)

Grand Jury Schedule and Time Commitments

- Meet 1 -2 hours weekly as a group (called the Plenary).
- Committees Chairs and Foreperson meetings *may* occur, usually before Plenary.
- Individual committee meetings (planning and discussion).
- Committees and Investigation teams schedule interviews & working session and site visits in between the Plenary sessions based on their availability.

Commitment averages 10-25 hours per week, although this can increase as reports are written and reviewed.

What to Investigate?

- Brainstorming session
- Hot topics in the news
- Written formal requests/complaints from the general public
- Follow-ups to previous investigations
- Ideas from other county civil grand juries
- Leads from background research
- Mandatory Jail and Juvenile Hall Inspections

The Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury averages 6-12 investigations and/or reports per year.

Typical Investigation Process

- Do background research - make the case
- Present potential topic to full Grand Jury for comments, review and approval
- Investigate - conduct interviews, perform document reviews, do surveys, visit sites
- Document and confirm Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations in a report
- Submit to Fact Checking and Editorial Review - *most go through multiple drafts and revisions*
- Present report to full 19-member Grand Jury for final approval

Final Grand Jury Report

- Approved reports are reviewed by assigned County Counsel and Judge *before issuance*.
- Reports are issued to responsible authorities (Board of Supervisors, Mayors/City Councils, Agency Heads).
- Press releases notify the media of new reports.
- Authorities have 90 days to formally respond to Findings and Recommendations.

Final Report Impact

- Recipients are not legally required to implement recommendations but must respond in writing.
- Findings are sometimes “challenged.”
- The rigorous process can result in many recommendations being implemented over time.

**Twenty years of reports and responses are available on
The Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury website**

Recent Sonoma County Grand Jury Topics

- Affordable Housing: Monitoring and Compliance
- Affordable Housing: Past, Present and Future
- Department of Health Services
- Rohnert Park Department of Public Safety
- SMART Decision Making
- What Happens When the Grand Jury Makes Recommendations

Juror Selection Qualifications

- Must be a U.S. Citizen and at least 18 years old.
- Must have lived in Sonoma County for at least one year.
- Must be sufficiently fluent in English sufficient to perform duties.
- Must not presently serve as an elected official.
- Must never have been convicted of a malfeasance in office or any Felony or other higher crime.
- Not currently serving as a trial juror.
- Not discharged as a grand juror within one year prior to commencement of term of office.
- In possession of natural faculties, of ordinary intelligence, of sound judgement and of fair character.

Ideal Grand Juror Attributes

- Available / flexible - 5 to 15 hours a week (more time commitment during report writing).
- Interested in local government and community issues. Enjoys learning new things, teamwork.
- Has basic to advanced computer skills (utilization of email, ability to communicate using Word documents, conducting web-based search functions, Video Conferencing and preparing basic Spreadsheets).
- Has good writing skills - e.g., for interview notes, report drafts.
- Meets commitments and is comfortable expressing/defending positions but open to change based on the data.
- ***Able to maintain strict confidentiality at all times.***

HOW TO LEARN MORE/APPLY

- Check the Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury website for more information at:
<https://sonoma.courts.ca.gov/general-information/grand-jury>
- Read past reports and utilize the on-line Grand Jury Application form from this website:
Grand.Jury@sonoma.courts.ca.gov
- Send an inquiry to: Grand.Jury@sonoma.courts.ca.gov