



# THE NAPA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY

WHAT IS IT, AND WHY SHOULD YOU APPLY?



# What is the Napa County Civil Grand Jury?

The Napa 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 Napa 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 Napa County Counsel's Office.



# Napa 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
- Environmental reviews
- Safety and Transportation reviews
- Editorial & Continuity (Internal Jury)

*Members generally serve on at least two Committees*



# Grand Jury Schedule and Time Commitments

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

Commitment averages 5-15 hours per week, although this can increase as reports are written and reviewed.



# What to Investigate?

- Brainstorming sessions
- Hot topics in the news
- Written formal requests 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 Napa County Civil Grand Jury averages 8-12 investigations and 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 Reports

- 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 Napa County Civil Grand Jury website.*



# Recent Napa Grand Jury Topics:

- St. Helena: A Small Town With Big City Problems
- Napa County Water Quality: It's A Matter of Taste
- Napa County Elections: Results You Can Count On
- City of Napa Garbage Rate Hike Raises A Stink
- Emergency Alerts Lacking During Fires
- Enforcing Short-term Vacation Rental Codes in the Napa Valley



# Juror Selection Qualifications

- Must be a US Citizen, at least 18 years old.
- Must have lived in Napa County at least one year.
- Must be sufficiently fluent in English sufficient to perform duties.
- Must not presently serve as an elected official.
- Never 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 judgment and of fair character.



# Ideal Grand Juror Attributes

- Available / flexible - 5 to 15 hrs./week.
- Interested in local government and community issues. Enjoys learning new things, teamwork.
- Has basic computer skills (email, Word, web search, Zoom, etc.) or is willing to learn and use them.
- 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 data.
- *Able to maintain strict confidentiality at all times.*



# What's in it for Me?

- Learn how county and city governments work from the inside.
- Develop new skills/maintain others.
- Work intensely with other bright interested citizens.
- Gain personal satisfaction from having an impact.
- Develop lasting new friendships/relationships.
- Earn a small stipend for service.



# How to Learn More/Apply

- Check the Napa County Civil Grand Jury website for more information.  
<https://www.napa.courts.ca.gov/general-information/grand-jury>.
- Read past reports and download application form from this website:  
<https://www.napa.courts.ca.gov/general-information/grand-jury/grand-jury-reports-responses>.

Send an inquiry to: [Grand.Jury@napa.courts.ca.gov](mailto:Grand.Jury@napa.courts.ca.gov)