



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.](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.](https://www.napa.courts.ca.gov/general-information/grand-jury/grand-jury-reports-responses)

Send an inquiry to: Grand.Jury@napa.courts.ca.gov