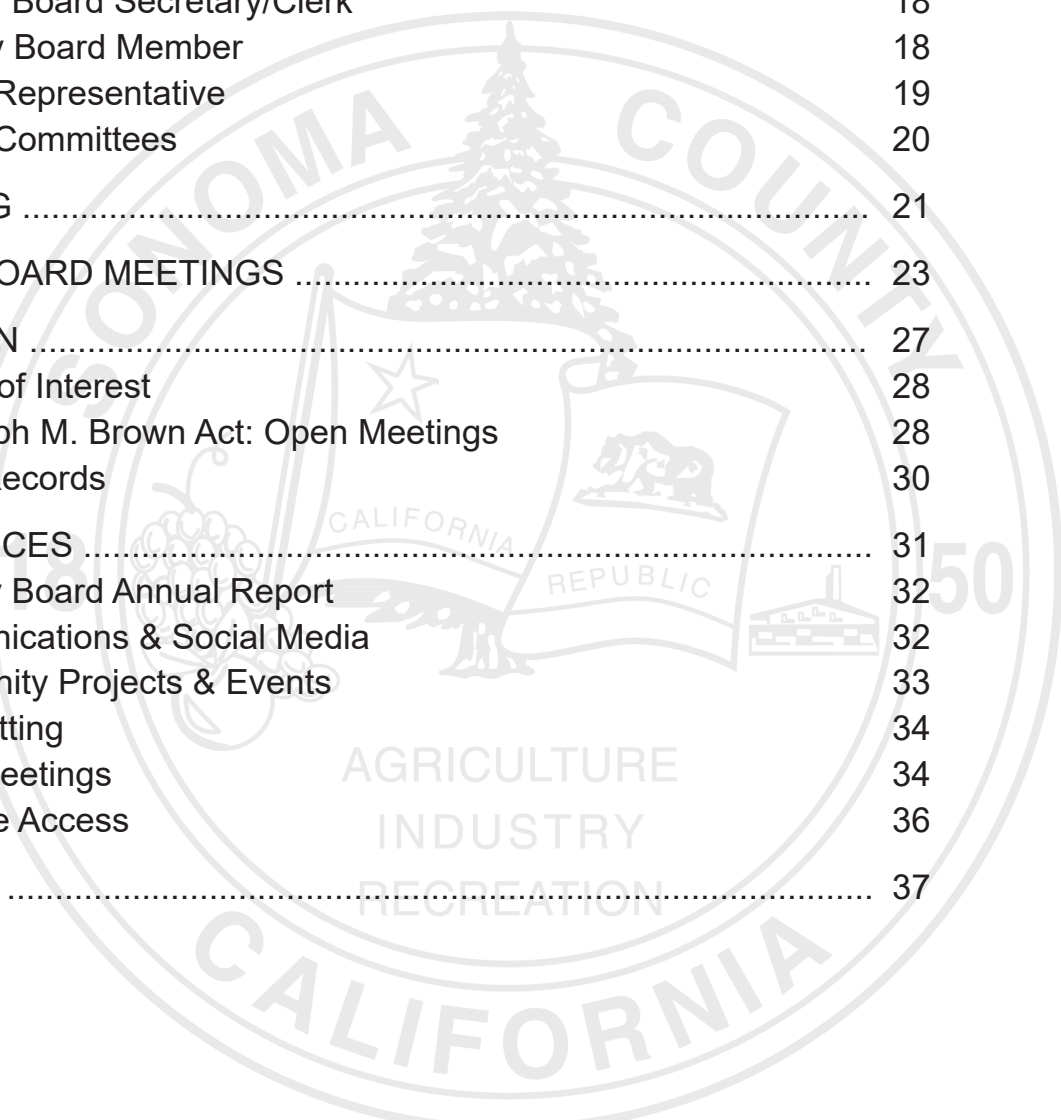


Sonoma County Advisory Board Handbook



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INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE





I. INTRODUCTION

The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors (Board) has taken special interest in opportunities for the general public to become involved in local government by serving on local boards, commissions and committees. The value of these bodies is set forth in the Maddy Act (Cal Gov Code § 54970, et seq). A list of all regular and ongoing boards, commissions and committees to which the Board appoints any members can be found on the [Sonoma County Boards & Commissions website](#).

This Advisory Board Handbook is a living document, subject to changes and additions from time to time, and is intended to be a resource for advisory board members to promote efficiency and quality of work, and consistency across the various boards in the County. This Handbook is designed specifically for the County of Sonoma’s Citizen’s Advisory Councils, Community Advisory Commissions, and Municipal Advisory Councils (CACs and MACs), but the Practices in this document are largely generic and intended to be applicable to all County of Sonoma advisory bodies regardless of type, size, stage and/or products or services provided. For simplicity, this Handbook will refer to all CACs and MACs as “advisory boards” throughout. The Handbook and Best Practices herein are designed to complement, and not compromise, compliance with any legislation or regulation to which the advisory board, and its members, are subject to.

II. PURPOSE

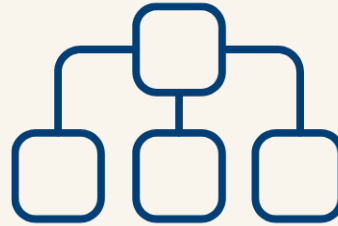
The purpose of an advisory board is to help the Board gain insight and advice to solve problems or explore new opportunities by stimulating robust, high-quality engagement with stakeholders. At the discretion of the District Supervisor, an advisory board may be established for a specific purpose or for general community engagement purposes. Due to the flexible nature of advisory boards, the scope and roles are chosen to fit the County Supervisor’s needs. The specific roles, responsibilities and expectations are normally established within the advisory board’s Resolution and/or Mission Statement.

The role of an advisory board is not to make decisions, but rather to provide knowledge, critical thinking, feedback, analysis and/or recommendations to increase the effectiveness of the Board of Supervisors and County staff. Advisory boards are a voice for the community, provide a forum for public participation, and can greatly benefit a Supervisor when making important decisions that will affect the community.

Four key principles are foundational to an advisory board's success:



Clearly articulated purpose and intended impact.



Clearly outlined advisory board structure and procedures, with protocols to review effectiveness and alignment with County goals.



Atmosphere of openness, trust, curiosity and understanding that individuals are acting in good faith.



Advisory board members fulfill the scope of the mission/charter and are diverse in terms of expertise and personal attributes.



HOW SONOMA COUNTY GOVERNMENT WORKS





III. HOW SONOMA COUNTY GOVERNMENT WORKS

A. Overview

Sonoma County government is structured around an elected Board of Supervisors, that is the governing board of the County and is charged with establishing policy to guide the various functions of the County and, where necessary, to establish procedures by which functions are performed. The Board is composed of supervisors elected from the County's five supervisorial districts to four-year terms, and there is no limit on the number of terms a supervisor is allowed to serve. Every year the Board elects a Chair and Vice-Chair. The Chair presides over board meetings, a duty taken over by the Vice-Chair if the Chair is absent.

Some of the various Board of Supervisor responsibilities include:

- Enacting ordinances: The Board of Supervisors enacts ordinances and regulations that do not conflict with state law.
- Approving annual budgets for operating expenses of departments.
- Approving contracts: The Board of Supervisors approves contracts over \$100,000.

- Managing property: The Board of Supervisors acquires, disposes of, and manages County property.
- Levying and collecting taxes: The Board of Supervisors levies and collects county taxes.
- Overseeing departments: The Board of Supervisors oversees the activities of County departments.
- Quasi-judicial role: The Board of Supervisors may settle claims against the County, audit County officers' accounts, and hear appeals of land use decisions and tax issues.

The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors also acts as the governing board of various special jurisdictions within the county, including the Sonoma County Water Agency, the Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, the Community Development Commission, and most County Sanitation Districts.

B. Board of Supervisors Meetings

The regular Board of Supervisors meetings are scheduled every Tuesday at a time set by the current Chair of the Board, generally set to start between 8:30 – 9:00 am, in the Board Chambers located at 575 Administration Dr., Santa Rosa, CA. Occasionally, there are Special Board meetings held on different dates and times. Schedule, agendas, minutes and videos of meetings can be found on the [Sonoma County Board Meeting Schedule website](#). Public officials in attendance at every meeting include the Supervisors, the County Executive and County Counsel.

Meeting agendas are governed by the Brown Act (Cal Gov Code § 54954.2) and divided into three sections:

Closed Session: Closed sessions generally involve matters sensitive or confidential in nature, such as personnel matters, pending or anticipated litigation, security threats, real estate negotiations and/or labor negotiations, and are limited to those circumstances found in the Brown Act. Each closed session item must be briefly described on the meeting agenda, including the authority to hear the item in closed session. Upon conclusion of the closed session, County Counsel is required to publicly report out certain actions taken in closed session.

Consent Calendar: These matters include routine financial and administrative actions and are usually collectively approved by a single majority vote, unless a 4/5 vote is required (e.g. budget actions). There will be no discussion on these items prior to voting on the motion unless a Supervisor requests specific items be discussed and/or removed from the Consent Calendar.

Regular Calendar: These items include significant and administrative actions of special interest and are classified by department/program area. The regular calendar also includes noticed hearings, work sessions and public hearings. All Regular Calendar items will have a County staff presentation.

Most background materials for any proposed Board action are available online, linked from their respective agenda item. However, due to legal, copyright, privacy, or policy considerations, not all materials are posted online. In addition, materials related to an item on an addendum agenda that are submitted to the Board after distribution of the agenda packet may not be online prior to a Board meeting. All background materials are available for public inspection in the Board of Supervisors office on the day of the Board meeting.

Members of the public are encouraged to attend the meetings in person in the Board of Supervisors Chambers. Public participation gives stakeholders the opportunity to influence decisions that affect their lives and helps ensure that supervisors understand the needs of their constituents. Attendance at the meetings also helps the public understand the tradeoffs and constraints associated with a particular decision. The public may comment in person in the Board Chambers or through written submission. Available time for comments is determined by the Board Chair based on agenda scheduling demands and total number of speakers. There are four opportunities in a regular Board meeting for the public to speak:

- Comments on closed session items occurs prior to the Board going into closed session;
- Comments on the Consent Calendar occur prior to the Board's voting on the Consent Calendar;
- Comments on Regular Calendar items occur after the staff presentation and supervisors'



discussions, but prior to the Board voting on the item; and

- Comments on items not on the agenda, but within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Board, are heard as set on the agenda.

C. Departments

The County of Sonoma is comprised of approximately 29 departments/agencies that provide a range of services to the community through its 4,000+ employees. A County organizational chart and a brief overview for each department and agency are included in the Appendix.

In addition to the five Supervisors, Sonoma County has four other elected officers within the government: Auditor-Controller-Treasurer-Tax Collector, County Clerk-Recorder-Assessor, Sheriff-Coroner, and District Attorney.

D. Sonoma County Budget

The budget is an operating plan that is developed based upon policy direction given by the Board of Supervisors to provide services to the public within available resources. The County of Sonoma acts as an administrative agent for three sets of services:



- **Municipal Services:** These pertain mainly to unincorporated areas of the County and include fire protection, emergency services and planning, Sheriff’s law enforcement, building and land use regulations, road maintenance, parks, and lighting, water and sewer utilities.
- **Countywide Local Services:** These services are common to most counties in the State, and include the County Clerk, elections, property assessments, Auditor-Controller-Treasurer-Tax Collector, as well as criminal prevention and prosecution, public defense, probation, detention, and environmental protection.
- **Services on Behalf of the State of California:** For the most part, these services impact all County residents and are generally related to health and human services. These efforts are funded primarily by state and federal revenue sources.

Annually, from January – April, the County Executive’s Office, in conjunction with all County departments, works to develop an operating budget for the approaching fiscal year (July 1st through June 30th). All County departments compile and submit financial and program information to the County Executive’s Office where it is reconciled with other factors that may impact County operations

(i.e., available financing, state and federal policies, changes in the cost of doing business, capital asset needs, Board of Supervisors’ annually established policy priorities, etc.). An annual budget workshop is held in April wherein departments present their preliminary budgets for discussion and feedback from the Board of Supervisors, after which County Executive’s Office presents a “Recommended Budget” to the Board of Supervisors at least two weeks before a series of budget hearings by the Board of Supervisors (generally held in June).

During the public budget hearings, usually held in June, the County Executive’s Office and departments present their budgets and any supplemental adjustments for the Board’s consideration. After the Board of Supervisors deliberates all of the departmental requests and County Executive’s Office’s recommendations, an annual budget is adopted. The Adopted Budget document is published by October each year.

The budget is revisited on a quarterly basis for any adjustments. Budget information can be found on the [County’s Budget and Operations website](#).

IV.

WHAT IS A MAC?
WHAT IS A CAC?



IV. WHAT IS A MAC? WHAT IS A CAC?

MACs and CACs are authorized pursuant to California Government Code § 31010. In Sonoma County, they are created by the Board of Supervisors to advise the board on issues facing their defined unincorporated communities. Whether they represent a town or a more broadly defined region, MACs and CACs lend a voice to areas that do not have the layer of representation of a city council, as is the case for incorporated residents. To establish a MAC or CAC, the Board must adopt a resolution that establishes all of the following:

- (a) The name of the municipal advisory council.
- (b) The qualifications, number, and method of selection of its members, whether by election or appointment.
- (c) Its designated powers and duties.
- (d) The unincorporated area or areas for which the municipal advisory council is established.
- (e) Whether the establishment of the council should be submitted to the voters and the method for such submission; provided that if an election is required pursuant to subdivision (b), such election shall be held at the same time as an election held pursuant to this subdivision.
- (f) Such other rules, regulations and procedures as may be necessary in connection with the establishment and operation of the municipal advisory council.

There are currently six Sonoma County Municipal Advisory Councils:

- [Geyserville Alexander Valley MAC](#)
- [Lower Russian River MAC](#)
- [Mark West Area MAC](#)
- [North Sonoma Valley MAC](#)
- [Sonoma Coast MAC](#)
- [Springs MAC](#)

There are currently two CACs, and while they share an acronym, their names differ slightly:

- [Dry Creek Valley Citizens Advisory Council](#)
- [Sonoma Valley Community Advisory Commission](#)

All MACs and CACs serve in an advisory capacity to the Board of Supervisors, though the topics on

which they advise the Board vary from body to body. Generally, the organizational document for each MAC or CAC outlines the advisory topic areas that reflect priorities identified with their geographic boundaries. Examples of advisory topics include, but are not limited to:

- Transportation and transit improvements, maintenance projects
- Health and human safety-net services
- Community projects such as art, clean-ups, and vegetation planting
- Fire services and community preparedness
- Additional topics when requested by the District Supervisor

One of the primary responsibilities that distinguishes certain MACs and CACs from others is whether or not they advise on local planning and land use decisions. When referred by Permit Sonoma, the Dry Creek Valley CAC, Mark West Area MAC, Lower Russian River MAC, Sonoma Coast MAC, and Sonoma Valley CAC may make advisory recommendations to other Land Use bodies, including the Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Adjustments, on applications including:

- Use permit applications
- Rezoning applications
- General Plan amendment applications

However, MACs and CACs (including their individual members or a subcommittee) do not have the authority to have public discussions on housing projects without the consent of the Director of Permit Sonoma in consultation with the District Supervisor and County Counsel.

Lastly, a MAC or CAC is not the only option for unincorporated residents to make the voice of their community heard. Residents in Penngrove and Moorland, for example, do not have a MAC or CAC but receive support from the Second and Third District offices to host community meetings to share the concerns of their unincorporated residents.

A. Organizational Document

A well-articulated organizational document is important to setting the stage for a clear understanding of expectations, as well as inform the MAC or CAC as to the scope of their authority. Because MACs and CACs are Board created bodies, they only have those powers expressly granted to

them by the Board. The organizational document is commonly referred to as a Bluebook, or may also be called Bylaws or a Policy and Procedure document. This document should be generated by the District Supervisor, reviewed on an annual basis, and made a part of the public documents available on the County's "Boards and Commissions" website. The organizational document contents should include:

- Advisory Board Mission Statement
- Board of Supervisor Resolution Authorizing the Advisory Board
- Boundary Areas of Advisory Board
- Scope of Authority
- Scope of Work
- Advisory Board membership makeup
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Rules and Procedures
- Source of funding (if any)
- Training Requirements/Opportunities
- District staff contact information
- Pertinent Legislation

B. Funding

The six Municipal Advisory Councils (MACs) may be funded, either wholly or in part, from the Tourism Impact Fund (TIF). TIF allocations are at the discretion of the District Supervisor and may vary from Supervisorial District to Supervisorial District, MAC to MAC. Supervisorial Districts that do not have MACs may use TIF to fund similar initiatives in unincorporated communities. The Geyserville Alexander Valley and Mark West Area MACs have access to additional funding specific to their geographic area. This funding may be applicable to specific project areas, detailed below.

The two CACs – the Dry Creek Valley Citizens Advisory Council and Sonoma Valley Community Advisory Commission – historically do not receive an annual budget. Baseline operational costs, including staff support, minutes, and venue rental are provided by the Supervisorial District, in some cases shared with an additional sponsoring agency.

The information below provides a general overview of the funding sources and the MAC/CACs to which they apply.

Tourism Impact Fund (TIF)

Background: The Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) is levied at a rate of 12% in unincorporated Sonoma County, a rate established in 2016 by the voter-approved Measure L. Shortly after the passage of Measure L the Board of Supervisors adopted the TIF to offset tourism impacts throughout the County. The first 9% of the TOT rate is allocated 33% to the General Fund and 67% to the Community Investment special revenue fund. The last 3% includes Measure L funds. Community Investment and Measure L funds are allocated according to the [Community Investment Fund Policy](#).

One component of the Measure L voter-approved rate is the Tourism Impact Fund, established to mitigate the impacts of tourism. The Tourism Impact Fund allocates 10% of Measure L revenue among the Supervisorial Districts, according to the percentage of Transient Occupancy Tax revenue collected in each District during the previous fiscal year.

The Tourism Impact Fund was established to meet unique and urgent needs of areas within unincorporated Sonoma County that are most impacted by tourism. District Supervisors recommend how funding should be allocated in their district, for approval by the Board of Supervisors. Funds may be used to support organizations that coordinate community improvements, such as Municipal Advisory Councils.

Uses: MAC/CACs utilize Tourism Impact Funds to support operational and programmatic priorities at the discretion of the District Supervisor, including: facility rental, minutes, interpretation, translation, videography, hybrid meeting technology, and community projects

Community Projects: Some MACs make a portion of their annual budget available for community projects, often in collaboration with nonprofit or community partners. Please see Section IX for more information.

Applicable MAC/CAC(s): Geyserville Alexander Valley MAC (D4), Lower Russian River MAC (D5), Mark West Area MAC (D4), North Sonoma Valley MAC (D1), Sonoma Coast MAC (D5), Springs MAC (D1)

Cal Am Water Franchise Fees

Background: The California American (Cal Am) Water Franchise Fees were established in 2009 by two Sonoma County Board of Supervisors (BOS) resolutions:

- 11/17/09 BOS Resolution No. 09-1089 in-tent to establish franchise fees with Cal Am Water
- 12/8/09 BOS Ordinance No. 5861 granting a franchise to Cal Am Water

The franchise fee is paid to the County for the use of “County streets to supply water to consumers in connection with the regulated water system owned and operated by Cal Am in the Mark West-Larkfield- Wikiup area of unincorporated Sonoma County” which includes parts of Fulton.

Resolution No. 09-1089 states that, “the Board intends to pass through a portion of the franchise fees from Cal-Am to a new Community Services District in the Mark West Larkfield-Wikiup area, subject to approval of the CSD by the Local Agency Formation Commission and voters in the area... two percent (2%) of the gross annual receipts of Cal Am arising from the use, operation, or possession of the Franchise” would go to the County for a “term of 20-years, and may be extended by mutual agreement.”

Uses: The Mark West Area MAC’s Neighborhood Improvement Funding Program, funded by Cal Am Water franchise fees, supports neighborhood improvement projects in the communities serviced by Cal Am Water - Mark West, Larkfield, Wikiup and parts of Fulton. The funds are administered through the Sonoma County Department of Public Infrastructure. The intent of the funds is for “public good” projects for either a one-time cost or ongoing maintenance relating to community parks that serve the community serviced by Cal Am. Public good projects that increase neighborhood pride and identity such as community gardens, bicycle racks, picnic tables, benches, signage, curb appeal enhancements, etc. The MWAMAC makes recommendations to the District Supervisor on the proposals for funding, before they go before the full board for approval, and encourages residents to look around their neighborhoods for projects that all residents can enjoy and be proud of.

Applicable MAC/CAC(s): Mark West Area MAC (D4)

Dry Creek Mitigation Fund - Infrastructure Mitigation Fund Balance

Background: The Dry Creek Rancheria operates the River Rock Casino near Geyserville. On February 28, 2023, the Board approved the amended and restated MOA between the Dry Creek Rancheria, Band of Pomo Indians and the County. The financial terms under the restated MOA provide for an annual baseline payment to offset the costs related to County services impacted by operations on the Dry Creek Rancheria. The baseline funding is currently allocated annually to the General Fund. The Infrastructure Mitigation Fund Balance is set aside expressly for Geyserville Planning and Community Improvement Projects.

Uses: To establish a process, for the Board of Supervisor’s consideration, to allocate the Dry Creek Mitigation Fund set aside and the Infrastructure Mitigation Fund Balance expressly for Geyserville Planning and Community Improvement Projects and make project-specific funding recommendations. The Geyserville Alexander Valley MAC coordinates this funding recommendation effort with the District Supervisor’s office in consultation with the County Executive’s Office, to ensure efficiency, transparency, and a participatory budget process.

Applicable MAC/CAC(s): Geyserville Alexander Valley MAC (D4)

V.

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS



V. ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

Typically, there are four key roles within an advisory board structure: a Chair and Vice Chair, a Secretary, Board Members and a County representative.

A. Advisory Board Chair

Best practice for advisory boards is to have a Chair, whose role is to oversee and guide the work of the advisory board. The term length of an advisory board chair can be a fixed term, while others can serve indefinitely. If an advisory board is doing long-term planning or strategic oversight, a longer term may be warranted and determined by the appointing Supervisor or by the Board of Supervisors approved bylaws for the advisory board. Ideally, the board's work is developed in a yearly scope of work that is approved by the appointing Supervisor. Core Chair responsibilities include:

- Draft annual goals of the advisory board, in consultation with advisory board members and County staff. This should not preclude the advisory board taking up emerging issues during the year but should serve as a general guide for the board's work.
- Develop meeting agendas (often in collaboration with District staff) and lead meetings. Meeting agendas need to have the right balance of providing important updates and information, utilizing the board's expertise to help provide advice and feedback on important issues. A structured agenda that focuses on key issues ensures each member's time is well-spent. Encourage open discussions and brainstorming while maintaining a disciplined approach.
- Ensure committee/ad hoc work is pursued between meetings.
- May serve as liaison between the advisory board and the appointing Supervisor. This would be determined by the District Supervisor.
- Assign tasks to board members.
- Evaluate existing advisory board structures for effectiveness and best practice.
- Regularly assess advisory board's performance and whether it is meeting its goals. Collect feedback from both board members and County leadership. Make adjustments to improve the advisory board's effectiveness, if necessary.

- The Vice Chair acts in the Chair's absence and may perform other duties as specified.

B. Advisory Board Secretary/Clerk

A Secretary to the advisory board should be established either through appointment (by the Chair or Supervisor) or by vote of the advisory board. District Staff may also serve as the Secretary. A Secretary's responsibilities may include:

- Prepare, distribute and post agendas for meetings at least 72 hours in advance of the meeting in compliance with the Brown Act.
 - Keep minutes of all meetings, specifying the call to order, the attendees, the business conducted and the adjourning time, and send copies of the minutes to the District Supervisor's Office.
 - Arrange sites for all meetings and confirm all necessary public posting requirements are completed in appropriate timelines.
 - Update and maintain the advisory board website
- Assist all members with compliance with the Brown Act.
- Notify members of the advisory board of special meetings, giving the time, place and reason for meeting.
- Keep an up-to-date roster of members of the advisory board, to include the name, mailing address, phone number and email address.
- Keep a record of items that the advisory board has acted upon.
- Prepare and store materials regularly used at the advisory board's meetings

C. Advisory Board Member

The Bylaws of the Advisory Board will state how and by whom members of the advisory board are appointed. Generally, the District Supervisor has some input in the recommendations and appointments of members, where the skills, experience and/or contributions of the member align with the advisory board's scope and purpose. Generally (and in some cases where required), members of the advisory board shall reside or have business within the advisory board boundaries but may also include subject matter experts, stakeholder representatives and/or experienced professionals. Ideally members are appointed for their knowledge

and direct experience to problem solve, and represent a wide array of backgrounds, ethnicities, skills and experiences. Advisory board members are critical to the advisory board's success. To make the most of this position, members should:

- Encourage open and honest contact with the board's leadership. Engage in discussions to ensure that your ideas and suggestions are properly appreciated and in line with the strategic direction of the board.
- Make a serious commitment to participate actively in the board's work. Attend meetings and discussions regularly.
- Attend meetings and discussions well informed on the issues. Read all reports and agenda materials prior to a board meeting in order to more effectively utilize the time at meetings.
- Volunteer for, and willingly accept, assignments and fulfill them timely.
- Stay informed about community needs and trends which will enable you to come well-prepared for meetings. Bringing relevant insights to the work of the advisory board makes for a valuable member.
- Get to know other board members and build a collegial working relationship that contributes to consensus.
- Act on behalf of the County and not in a personal interest or that of an external constituent.
- When dealing with sensitive information, maintain the utmost level of confidentiality to protect the advisory board's integrity and strengthen your reputation as valued advisor.
- If required, adhere to the County's Conflict of Interest Code and Policy and Sexual Harassment Policy.
- If required, take the [FPPC's AB 1234 Ethics Training course](#). Disclose real or perceived conflicts of interest in which there either is conflict of interest or a perceived conflict of interest.

D. County Representative

A representative from the respective District Supervisor's staff will be assigned as the liaison between the advisory board and the Supervisor. The county representative may also serve as the Advisory Board Secretary/Clerk. This representative should:



- Articulate the board’s mission, roles and responsibilities, purpose and expectations through a strong organizational document.
- Ensure advisory board members know that they are advisory in nature and do not have decision-making authority.
- Outline the roles and responsibilities of board members.
- Once a member agrees to the role, participate in an effective onboarding process, which is important to setting the stage for a positive experience and setting the proper expectations.
- Coordinate all trainings for advisory board members.
- Ensure that agenda items align with the strategic priorities of the Supervisor and/or the County. This will help educate the advisory board to be better advocates and understand the priorities.
- Implement advisory board assessment and metrics. Regularly evaluate board member satisfaction and the effectiveness of achieving the board’s mission, potentially through surveying members annually and/or scheduling one-on-one meetings to discuss the board experience at least once during their time of service. (See Appendix for an example of a board member assessment.) Establish metrics that will help evaluate the effectiveness of the board. Some metrics to consider are board meeting attendance and engagement activities outside of board meetings.

E. Ad Hoc Committees

An ad hoc committee is a temporary group of people that works together to complete a specific task or to address a problem. The term “ad hoc” means “as needed.” Ad hoc committees can be an effective tool when there is work needed on an issue that is more complex than what can effectively be managed at the board’s regularly scheduled meetings. Ad hocs are created for a single purpose. The ad hoc must be limited in term (usually one year or less) and once they complete the purpose for which the body was formed, the ad hoc is disbanded by operation of law. An ad hoc committee must contain less than a quorum of advisory board members. (A quorum is the minimum number of members who must be present at a meeting to conduct business, and the number varies depending on the number of members.

Generally, but not always, it is a simple majority of the advising board.) Ad hoc committees do not need to meet on a regular fixed-meeting basis. If all of the above conditions are met, the ad hoc committee is exempt from complying with the [Brown Act](#). (See Section VIII.)

Ad hoc committees may be established to solve a particular problem, develop ideas on a particular issue, research issues, compile and analyze information, and/or to make recommendations to the full advisory board. If an advisory board decides to establish an ad hoc committee to address a particular issue, the following suggested steps are recommended:

- Prepare a written work plan that includes a description of the purpose of the ad hoc that links the work to an issue of the advisory board, a general description of how the work will be done, and an approximate schedule of target dates, including a date of completion. This schedule may be amended from time to time as the ad hoc reports on its work to the full advisory board; and,
- Establish and assign roles of leadership on the ad hoc committee.
- Upon conclusion of the ad hoc’s work, present the results to the full advisory board to vote on/ approve any recommendations by the ad hoc.

The Chair of the advisory board is responsible for ensuring the ad hoc committee completes its tasks in a timely manner, and regularly reports to the advisory board on the status of its work.

VI.

ONBOARDING



VI. ONBOARDING

The onboarding process for new members is essential for the continued and uninterrupted progress of the advisory board. Enabling new members to seamlessly transition into their roles greatly improves the effectiveness of the board. New members should begin their term with a clear understanding of the advisory board's organizational and functional purpose, and the status of current projects. The onboarding process is often the first exposure the new board member encounters, and the goal should be that the new member feels integrated and prepared from day one. The introduction should be geared towards delivering an impression and experience that can positively impact the new board members' commitment and contribution.

In addition to documentation provided to a new member, an in-person meeting should occur, ideally with the County staff liaison and the Chair to share information for the new member(s) to deepen their understanding of the board's mission and role, and to deepen the Chair's understanding of what the new member can contribute for a more effective performance. This meeting should be an opportunity for new member(s) to ask any questions they have, as well as establishing an open relationship with the Chair and County liaison. A "board buddy" or mentorship system can also be established to assist a new member getting acclimated to their role.

Onboarding information should include:

- Information on any required forms or trainings
- Clarification of new member's role, responsibilities and expectations
- Introduction to the board's culture, vision, mission, and policies
- Overview of the board's subcommittees and projects
- Creation of interpersonal ties to build a collaborative working relationship
- Introduction of the new member by the Chair at the first meeting
- Being provided a copy of the Brown Act



The Advisory Board Chair should check in with a new member monthly to ensure a new member understands his/her role, the issues the board is undertaking and to keep an open line of communication for questions. Feedback should be requested from new members six months from the date of appointment about the effectiveness of the onboarding experience to make improvements or adjustments in the onboarding process.

VII.

ADVISORY BOARD MEETINGS

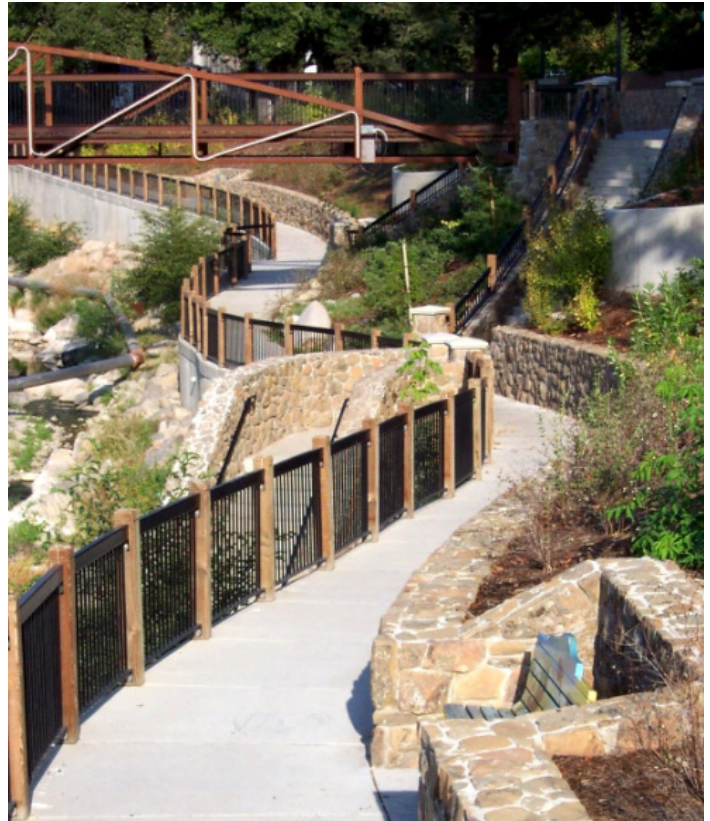


VII. ADVISORY BOARD MEETINGS

The phrase “time is money” is used to express the value of time, and that it should not be wasted. It is important to show that everyone’s time is valuable during a meeting by being punctual, being prepared, being clear and concise, following up, communicating expectations, and setting boundaries. Demonstrating that someone’s time is valued furthers the respect of fellow board members and the public.

To ensure openness, responsibility and equitable procedures, California enacted legislation known as the Brown Act. (See Section VIII.) Adhering to the provisions of the Brown Act promotes accountability and openness, and adopting efficient meeting procedures is critical to the effectiveness and credibility of advisory bodies. To achieve maximum public participation, advisory board meetings should be on a consistently scheduled date (i.e., first Wednesday of the month) at the same location. A board may wish to have the meeting times consistently alternate to encourage more residents to attend (i.e., one occurring during the day and another in the evening). Advisory boards should utilize various communication channels (social media, advisory board website, County government website, email newsletters, community bulletin boards, community organizations) for meeting announcements. Meeting materials should be made available as early as possible prior to a meeting so the public has a clear understanding of the issues that will be addressed at a meeting. Advisory boards are encouraged to invite their District Supervisor to attend their meetings, to ensure they are apprised of the work of the advisory board.

Agenda: As mentioned, meeting agendas are governed by the Brown Act. Proper preparation and noticing of the meeting and the agendas are necessary to provide board members and the public sufficient time to prepare and participate. Not only are agendas generally required by law, time spent planning an agenda will save time for all meeting participants by providing a clear set of topics, objectives, and time frames. A clear agenda is crucial for people to know what to expect at a meeting and can help steer the meeting back on track if necessary. An overly long or poorly organized agenda can result in meetings going longer than expected. Approximate time allotments on the agenda are one tool to avoid any single issue from monopolizing a



meeting and/or meetings running overtime. Where items are placed on the agenda is an important tool to a successful meeting: items placed too soon or too late on an agenda can result in a non-meaningful or incomplete discussion, or the item needing to be carried over to the next meeting. The order of agenda items is determined by the board, but generally an agenda should include the following components:

- Welcome & Introductions
- Approval of Minutes
- Financial Reports (if applicable)
- Community Announcements and/or Updates
- New Business – discussion and public comment specific to the item
- Old Business Updates/Status
- Future Business
- Public Comment for items not on the agenda
- Conclusion and Adjournment

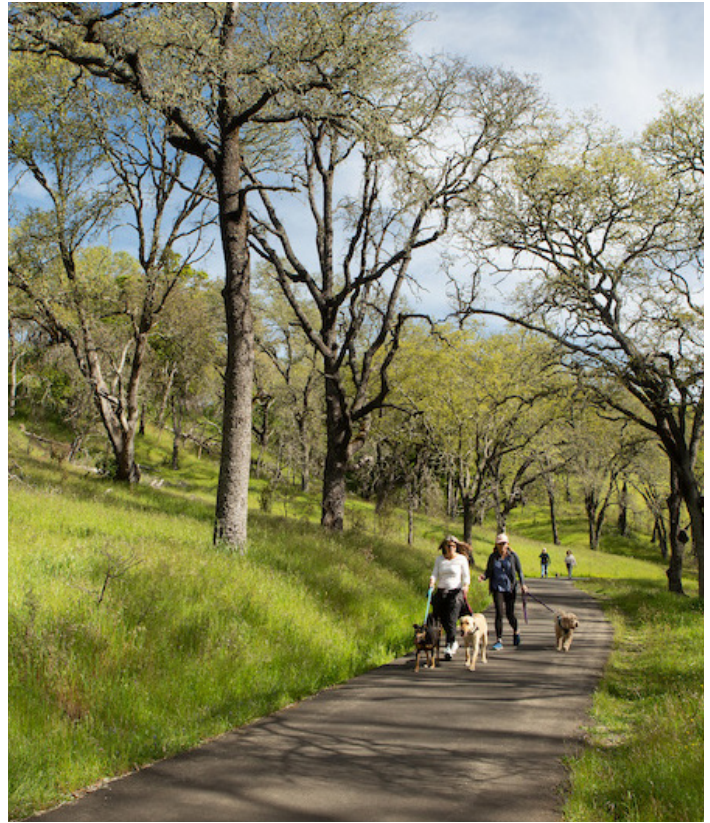
Rules/Guidelines/Process: The leader of the meeting (generally the Chair) should explain the Chair role and the meeting process so that all attendees have a clear understanding of how the meeting or a particular item will be handled. In these opening remarks, civility should be stressed to embrace diverse points of view.

Desired Outcomes: Knowing what you want from a particular item on an agenda helps steer the discussion and potential action items. Is the purpose of the item to get ideas? Is there a budget that needs approval? Does the item need more research, and is it appropriate for a subcommittee to be formed? Is it to make a final recommendation to a supervisor on an issue? The leader of the meeting should state the desired outcome of an agenda item at the outset of the discussions. The final action on an item should be going over next steps and assignments (if any) and laying down a clear action plan.

Preparation: Proper preparation for a meeting focuses discussions and improves efficiency at meetings. Members should educate themselves about agenda items before a meeting and talk to stakeholders to gain an understanding of the community response. Any materials provided should be reviewed prior to the meeting, and talking points or remarks should be outlined in advance of the meeting. Members' comments should be succinct and aimed at moving the conversation forward.

Give Everyone a Chance to Speak: Public comments at meetings are important because they allow residents to directly express their opinions, concerns, and perspectives on issues to decision makers, ensuring the public's voice is heard and considered. Recommendations made to supervisors will be stronger if the public has been provided an opportunity to actively participate and feel they were involved in any decision that affects them no matter the outcome. Each item on an agenda must have a designated time for any person to speak to the issue. If it appears that there are a lot of attendees who want to speak, the Chair can impose a time limit for comments to adhere to the time allotted for the item. While not required, it is best practice for the sake of the public record to ask commenters to identify themselves and any organizations or affiliations, but no one can be prohibited from speaking if they don't do so.

There must also be an agenda item in every meeting in which the public can speak regarding issues not on the agenda, but within the subject matter jurisdiction of the advisory board. It is recommended that this time be at the beginning of a meeting (as opposed to the end) so that those wishing to share items/ ideas with the board do not have to stay for an entire meeting.



Minutes: Taking thorough minutes at a meeting, including all motions put forward, statements made, and decisions made makes for a clear public record. In the minutes of the meeting, public speakers should be identified and their comments briefly recorded (i.e., in favor, opposes because ..., etc.).

Security/Safety: Advisory bodies sometimes have agenda items that are controversial and emotionally charged where tensions can run high and tempers may flare. While such items can test the members of the advisory board, it is important to remember that sometimes conflict and controversy can also make a positive contribution to the decision-making process. Some steps that can be taken to result in a less stressful and more productive environment, or to deal with an unruly attendee include:

- **Meeting agenda.** A [meeting agenda](#) with designated time allotments can keep things moving along and eliminate the appearance of subjective closing of discussions. Consideration should also be given as to where a controversial issue appears on a meeting agenda. If you know that a particular item is likely to generate significant controversy and a larger than normal audience, consider moving it to the top of your agenda so that attendees are not forced to wait, adding to their frustration.



- **Implement procedural rules.** Clear, easy-to-understand ground rules can go a long way toward maintaining order and civility.
- **Limited public forum.** Since the public comment period at a public meeting is considered a “limited public forum” for free speech purposes, a local government can regulate the time, place, and manner of speech, provided such regulations are reasonable and content neutral. Such reasonable regulations may include:
 - limiting speaker remarks to a certain number of minutes, and/or
 - limiting speaker remarks to items on the agenda.
- **Restrict back-and-forth dialogue.** The meeting leader should clarify that during the public comment portion of the meeting members of the governing board will listen but not engage in back-and-forth dialogue with commenters. If a question arises during public comment, the board can defer answering at the meeting and advise that the response will be forthcoming
- **Take a break.** Meeting breaks can help to ease tensions and regroup when appropriate. Time gives attendees a chance to calm down and can allow the board to restore order.

- **Deal with serious disruptions.** Calmly address the disruptive behavior directly, using a firm but respectful tone. The Chair may warn individuals that their behavior is disrupting the meeting and that if it doesn’t immediately cease, the individuals will be removed from the meeting. If the behavior doesn’t immediately cease, the Chair can have the individuals removed.

By following these best practices and Brown Act requirements, local legislative bodies can uphold the principles of transparency, accountability, and public participation, thereby strengthening democratic governance and fostering trust within their communities. Embracing these principles not only ensures compliance with legal requirements but also demonstrates a commitment to ethical and inclusive decision-making processes, ultimately benefiting the communities you serve.

VIII.

LEGISLATION



VIII. LEGISLATION

A. Conflict of Interest

Conflict of interest rules are governed by the Political Reform Act (Cal Gov Code 81000, et seq) and exist to promote transparency and reinforce public confidence that public officials are acting in the best interest of the public, and not in furtherance of their own self-interest. While advisory boards are advisory in nature and not charged with decision-making authority, members should be aware of situations that impact, or appear to impact, their financial interests, and in certain scenarios, may have an ethical obligation to abstain or recuse themselves. As a rule, members should avoid situations where their official actions may have a financial impact on their personal finances or the interests of their immediate family members. Even situations that may create the appearance of impropriety should be avoided. California Government Code § 87103 sets forth the types of financial interests that could potentially be disqualifying and 2 CCR § 18700 sets forth the basic rule for determining whether a prohibited conflict of interest exists.

Because it can be difficult to determine whether specific prohibitions apply that may create a conflict of interest, members should always contact District liaison staff if a question arises. Staff may confer with legal counsel or may refer members to the Fair Political Practice Commission (FPPC) advice line at advice@fppc.ca.gov or 1-866-ASK-FPPC (1-866-275-3772).

If a conflict of interest does exist, members must “disqualify” themselves, meaning they must abstain from making, participating in making, discussing, or attempting to use their official position in any way to influence the government decision that might affect that personal interest. That member must also leave the room while the issue is being discussed.

Members of all advisory bodies are encouraged to review the [FPPC's website on Conflicts of Interest](#).

B. The Ralph M. Brown Act: Open Meetings

The Brown Act was adopted by the Legislature in the 1950's. The purpose of the Act is best stated in Government Code section 54950:



“In enacting this chapter, the Legislature finds and declares that the public commissions, boards and councils and the other public agencies in this State exist to aid in the conduct of the people’s business. It is the intent of the law that their actions be taken openly and that their deliberations be conducted openly.

The people of this State do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies which serve them. The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know. The people insist -on remaining informed so that they may retain control over the instruments they have created.”

The Brown Act helps ensure that government conducts itself openly and in a manner that is accessible to the governed, and provides an opportunity for people to meaningfully participate in public proceedings, by being informed of what will be discussed, by having a chance to speak at the meeting, and by having an opportunity to review all of the material that is available to the advisory board in its decision-making process. All meetings of an advisory board of a local agency shall be open and public, and all persons shall be permitted to attend and participate in the meetings. In short, **the public’s business needs to be done in public.**

A meeting is a gathering of the majority of an advisory board majority to hear, discuss, deliberate, or take action on any item that is within its subject matter jurisdiction. General guidelines for meetings include:

- The agenda for a regularly scheduled meeting must be publicly posted at least 72 hours in advance, or 24 hours for special meetings.
- Agenda items should have brief descriptions of the business items.
- The public must be allowed to speak on every specific item of business on the advisory board's agenda.
- Every agenda for a regular meeting must also include a designated time for public comment on matters not on the agenda (but within the subject matter area of the advisory board).
- The advisory board cannot discuss items that are not on the posted agenda.
- The Chair of the advisory board may adopt a time limit for public comment, which needs to stay the same for all commenters on a given item.
- Whatever time is given for public comment, at least twice that allocated time must be provided for a member of the public using a translator to ensure that those speaking languages other than English are granted the same opportunity, unless simultaneous translation equipment is utilized that allows the advisory board to hear the translated public testimony simultaneously.

Further Study/Additional Resources

- The County of Sonoma has a 40-minute Brown Act training video given by County Counsel. This was given to County staff. All of the information is correct, though it predates the new teleconference rules. [Watch the Brown Act video.](#)
- The City Attorney of Los Angeles also created this video for onboarding of Neighborhood Councils that has some practical examples of how Brown Act bodies work. It's a bit outdated but shows how members interact with one another in real world situations. It's a little over 20 minutes long, and worth a watch. [Watch the Brown Act video.](#)





C. Public Records

The California Public Records Act (CPRA) declares that access to information concerning the conduct of the people's business is a fundamental and necessary right of every person in the State, and requires that records of government agencies (including advisory bodies) be disclosed to the public, upon request, unless there are certain exemptions, such as privacy and/or public safety considerations, which would prevent disclosure. Government Code §7920.530 defines a public record as "any writing containing information relating to the conduct of the public's business prepared, owned, used or retained by any state or local agency regardless of physical form or characteristics." This can include written documents, emails, databases, pictures, and more. Even advisory board business conducted on a personal device, such as a cell phone or personal email address, is subject to the CPRA if it relates to the business of the advisory board.

The CPRA establishes a right for the public to both (1) inspect public records and (2) receive copies of public records. When a request for public records is made to an agency, the agency has 10 days to respond to the request. However, an agency can extend their response time by an additional 14 days

in limited circumstances through a written notice explaining the reasons for the extension.

Public records best practices include utilizing proactive compliance measures. Doing so increases public trust and maintains consistent record-keeping. Maintaining organized records will make responding to any CPRA request more efficient. Establishing internal policies and procedures for handling CPRA requests is a first step. This should be done in consultation with the advisory board's district representative, who can educate the members on CPRA roles and compliance. Recommended steps in responding to a CPRA include:

- Acknowledge that the request has been received.
- Provide the request to your district representative.
- Review the request and identify responsive records.
- Provide all responsive records to the district representative who will assist in preparing a written response. The district representative will consult with legal counsel, if necessary, and calculate any applicable fees.

IX.

BEST PRACTICES



IX. BEST PRACTICES

A. Advisory Board Annual Report

Some advisory bodies have annual reporting requirements to the Board of Supervisors. Whether it is required or not, annual reports are advisable in communicating an overview of the successes of the board and the hard work the board has engaged in over the previous year. Generally, annual reports cover a calendar year, and should be submitted within the first sixty days of the year following the reporting period. Once submitted to the district supervisor, district staff should agendize acceptance of the annual report by the Board of Supervisors. This item would be on the consent calendar, and not require a staff presentation. However, the advisory board may wish to attend the Board of Supervisors meeting if the district supervisor chooses to make comments on the item.

In addition to the advisory board's key activities and decisions, components of an annual report should include:

- A message from the chair of the advisory board.
- The results of any election of officers.
- Current membership, including any vacancies.
- Meeting dates throughout the year.
- Identification of any ad hoc or sub-committee of the advisory board, including its purpose
- Accomplishments, including any events organized by the advisory board.
- Community issues in which the advisory board provided input.
- Obstacles and potential solutions.
- Goals for the upcoming year.
- Acknowledgements.

B. Communications & Social Media

Advisory board members may wish to utilize electronic communication methods, such as e-mail and social media, to engage with their fellow advisory board members and/or the public. In these instances, advisory board members should remain in compliance with the Brown Act. A majority of the advisory board (generally known as a quorum) shall not, outside of a meeting as defined, use a series of communications of any kind, directly or through intermediaries, to discuss, deliberate, or take

action on any item that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the advisory board. This includes:

- E-mail/texting/messaging apps: Informational materials and other matters brought up in public meetings with requests to share with the advisory board should be routed through the advisory board staff to avoid Brown Act violations.
- Social media: Advisory board members may not use social media platforms to discuss amongst themselves business within the subject matter jurisdiction of the board. They also may not make posts, "like"/react (heart, smiley face, etc.), or comment on other member's posts about subject matters under the advisory board's jurisdiction.

Exceptions and clarifications:

- Advisory board members may communicate on social media to answer questions, provide information to the public, or ask for feedback from the public, provided they do not discuss business with other advisory board members.
- Any social media platforms used to communicate on matters within the advisory board's jurisdiction should be open and accessible to the public, free of charge, and not require approval to participate.
 - Nextdoor is not open and accessible because it requires approval to join.
 - Private Facebook groups are not open and accessible because they require approval of a moderator.

C. Community Projects & Events

Advisory board members may be interested in initiating or participating in community projects and events. Community projects and events can provide opportunities to raise awareness about the MAC or CAC, such as sponsoring a trash pick-up, hosting a table at a farmers' market, or walking in a parade. Projects and events are also an opportunity to form partnerships with local nonprofit organizations and community groups, with potential collaborations in the advisory topic areas of public art, community health, and emergency preparedness, as examples.

The Geyserville Alexander Valley MAC and Mark West Area MAC have specific community project programs as part of their overall scope. Please refer to Chapter IV, Section B for more information.

In some instances, additional MACs have made advisory recommendations to their District Supervisor that a portion of their budget be used to sponsor community projects and events in partnership with a nonprofit organization. Such sponsorship recommendations must be approved by the full MAC in a MAC meeting, with subsequent approval by the District Supervisor before being approved on a Board of Supervisors agenda. Advisory board members should confer with their Advisory Board Clerk/Secretary and/or County Representative for funding request guidelines specific to their advisory body, but an approximate timeline for funding request submission, approval, and funding disbursement is as follows:

- Advisory Board Member(s) (less than a quorum) submit Funding Request Form to Advisory Board Chair and Advisory Board Clerk/Secretary: three months in advance of project or event start date
- Advisory Board Clerk/Secretary publishes agenda with Funding Request item for approval: two months in advance of project or event start date, minimum of 72 hours in advance of advisory board meeting
- Advisory Board Clerk/Secretary receives final approval from District Supervisor, processes funding request: 2 months in advance of project or event start date, immediately following advisory board meeting approval

As in the previous section on communications and social media, advisory board members should participate in community projects and events in compliance with the Brown Act. A majority of the advisory board (generally known as a quorum) shall not, outside of a meeting as defined, use a series of communications of any kind, directly or through intermediaries, to discuss, deliberate, or take action on any item that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the advisory board. This includes:

Exceptions and clarifications:

- The advisory board may form ad hoc committees of less than a quorum, focused on a single issue, which are time-limited (generally, 1 year). Once the ad hoc completes the purpose for which the body was formed, the Ad Hoc is disbanded by operation of law. The intent of ad hoc committees is to have them conduct their work and report out at regular advisory board meetings. Ad hoc committees are not subject to the Brown





Act and can communicate amongst themselves, provided they do not communicate with other advisory board members regarding ad hoc business outside of a public meeting.

- Advisory board members may attend social/ceremonial events with other members where no business is discussed. They may also attend community forums, other government meetings, and public conferences provided they do not discuss amongst themselves business of the advisory board.

D. Goal Setting

Advisory board members are encouraged, but not required, to complete annual goal setting. Goal setting can be led by the Chair and Vice Chair, and provides the opportunity to set priorities for the proceeding twelve months, including for planned agenda items, presenters, and ad hoc committees. Goal setting may occur at the start of the calendar year, the start of the fiscal year, or at the occasion of the annual election of the Chair and Vice Chair. For an example Goal Setting template, see the Appendix.

E. Hybrid Meetings

A hybrid meeting is one in which one or more advisory board members attend the meeting remotely by teleconference, while other board members attend

in person. In the event a board member attends the meeting by teleconference, except in circumstances of a disability accommodation, the public may also attend the meeting by a remote option and participate remotely or may attend in person. Hybrid meetings can be seen as a tool to increase public participation and engagement by providing an additional option for attendance.

Advisory board member participation via teleconference is allowed under the Brown Act in certain circumstances, some of which are described below.

Attending a meeting via teleconference

There are currently two ways an advisory board member may be able to attend a meeting via teleconference: Traditional Brown Act Teleconferencing Rules, and SB 707.

Traditional Brown Act Teleconference Requirements (Cal Gov Code 54953):

- A quorum of members must participate from locations within the jurisdictional boundary of the advisory board.
- Each teleconference location (address) must be included in the required notice and agenda of the meeting.
- Agendas need to be posted at each teleconference location.
- Each location must be accessible to the public, and ADA compliant.
- The public must be given the opportunity to address the advisory board directly at the teleconference location.
- All votes must be by roll call.
- Members must participate through both audio and visual technology.
- Members must disclose, before any action is taken, whether any individuals 18 years of age or older are in the room at the remote location with the member, and the general nature of the member's relationship with those individuals.

SB 707, discussed in more detail below, also added a disability accommodation exception to the traditional teleconference rules, which allows board members with a disability, as defined, to participate remotely as a reasonable accommodation and treats such attendance as in person attendance. Cal Gov Code 54953(c).

SB 707: Alternate Teleconference Provisions (Cal Gov Code 54953.8)

Effective January 1, 2026, SB 707 provides alternative teleconferencing provisions that allow members to participate without identifying, posting and making accessible to the public the teleconference location(s) to the public, if the following conditions are met:

- A quorum of members must participate from a location within the jurisdictional boundary of the advisory board.
- Either a two-way audiovisual platform or a two-way telephonic service and a live webcasting of the meeting are provided for the public to remotely hear and visually observe the meeting and remotely address the body.
- The agenda must state how the public may virtually access the meeting and offer public comment.
- Members must participate through both audio and visual technology (camera must stay on).
- All votes must be by roll call.
- Members must disclose, before any action is taken, whether any individuals 18 years of age or older are in the room at the remote location with the member, and the general nature of the member's relationship with those individuals.
- Stopping the meeting in the event of a disruption to the virtual access options.
- Stating the member name and reason for remote participation in the meeting minutes.
- Having a procedure for resolving requests for reason accommodation for individuals with disabilities, which info shall be included on the agenda.

Just Cause (Cal Gov Code 54953.8.3) (repealed effective January 1, 2030)

- At least a quorum of the members must participate in person from one location identified on the agenda, which is open to the public and within the advisory board's boundaries. The member must notify the advisory board and advisory board staff at the earliest opportunity possible of their need to participate remotely for "just cause". This notification can take place as late as the start of a regular meeting.
- The member must provide a general description of the qualifying reason, but do not need to dis-

close any medical diagnosis or disability, or any personal medical information that is otherwise exempt under existing law.

- Qualifying reasons for Just Cause are:
 - Childcare/caregiving needs for child, parent, grandparent, grandchild, sibling, spouse/ domestic partner
 - Contagious illness
 - Physical/mental condition not subject to the Disability Accommodation
 - Travel on official business of the advisory board
 - An immunocompromised child, parent, grandparent, grandchild, sibling, spouse, or domestic partner
 - A physical or family medical emergency
 - Military service obligations under certain circumstances.

A member is limited to two "just cause" instances in a calendar year if the legislative body regularly meets once per month or less, and more if the body meets at least twice per month.

Emergencies (Cal Gov Code 54953.8.2)

During a proclaimed state of emergency or local emergency, the board may hold a teleconference meeting for the purpose of determining, by majority vote, whether as a result of the emergency, meeting in person would present imminent risks to the health or safety of attendees, and may proceed with teleconferencing once that determination is made.

- Certain findings must be made by the board every 45 days to continue to utilize this provision.
- The board does not need to provide a physical meeting location where the public may attend or comment.

Eligible Advisory Subsidiary Bodies (Cal Gov Code 54953.8.6) (repealed effective January 1, 2030)

In the event the Board of Supervisors, as the legislative body that created each advisory board ("eligible subsidiary body"), takes formal action to make certain findings to allow the eligible subsidiary body to teleconference, the following shall apply, in addition to the alternate teleconferencing provisions above:

- Only boards that serve exclusively in an advisory capacity and do not have primary subject matter jurisdiction as defined by the governing document(s) that focuses on elections, budgets, police oversight, privacy, removing from, or restricting access to, materials available in public libraries, or taxes or related spending proposals may avail themselves of this teleconferencing provision.
- The eligible subsidiary body must approve the use of teleconferencing by a majority vote before using teleconferencing pursuant to this provision.
- The eligible subsidiary body must designate one physical meeting location within its boundaries where members of the body who are not participating remotely may attend, observe, hear and participate in the meeting, and at least one staff member of the eligible subsidiary body or the legislative body that created the eligible subsidiary body shall be present at the physical location during the meeting.
- Agendas must be posted at the physical meeting location, but not at a remote location.
- Members shall appear on camera, except in circumstances where the member has a physical or mental condition that results in a need to participate off camera, or when such appearance may be technologically infeasible, including unreliable broadband or internet connectivity, and in which case the member must announce their reason for nonappearance prior to turning off their camera.

This provision may not be used unless and until the Board of Supervisors makes certain findings required by SB 707 to authorize it, and such authorization must be renewed every six months.

F. Language Access

Sonoma County Language Access Policy and Implementation Plan

On May 14, 2024, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors approved the Language Access Policy and Implementation Plan, developed by the county's Office of Equity. The Language Access Policy is applicable to the County of Sonoma and its departments and agencies, inclusive of boards, commissions, and committees like MACs and CACs.

The purpose of the Language Access Policy is to improve language access for Sonoma County residents who do not speak English as their primary language, or who do not speak any English.

Policy Directives

1. The County will make reasonable efforts to provide language access to County services, through interpreting, translation, and localization, as appropriate, for non-English speaking residents.
2. The County will follow Plain Language guidance, including: writing in short sections; using short, simple words; writing in short sentences; avoiding technical jargon; and designing documents for easy reading.
3. The County will make efforts to notify the public about the County's language access policy for department programs and services, and how County residents can access language assistance services. These notices will be provided through departmental websites, translated documents, and community-focused outreach.
4. The County will establish a central focal point to assist all County departments and agencies in providing and tracking language access.

While implementation is ongoing, MACs and CACs can familiarize themselves with the Language Access Policy and Implementation Plan:

- [Language Access Policy](#)
- [Language Access Implementation Plan](#)

X.

CONCLUSION





X. CONCLUSION

The goal of this Handbook is to promote consistent practices for advisory bodies. If there are recommendations in this Handbook which are not currently being practiced, advisory bodies should work with their county representatives on goals, resources needed, implementation plans, and timelines. If there are multiple areas where changes can be made, select just one or two to focus on.

A strong and effective advisory board can be an asset to both the community and the government that serves it. Best practices for advisory boards should be a continual process of evaluation and improvement implementations. This Handbook is designed to complement and strengthen an advisory board's effectiveness, an individual advisory member's satisfaction and sense of accomplishment, and the community's participation and confidence in its governance.

Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the leadership of the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors' Unincorporated Governance Ad Hoc Committee comprised of First District Supervisor Rebecca Hermosillo and Fifth District Supervisor Lynda Hopkins, and formerly retired Supervisor Susan Gorin. Additionally, we would like to thank all Advisory Board members and staff, past and present, for attending meetings, participating in surveys, volunteering their time, and sharing invaluable feedback in the development of this Handbook. Lastly, we would like to thank Gina Stocker of the Sonoma County Communications Division for completing the Handbook design.



Document revised March 2026



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