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# Governance Toolkit for Unincorporated Communities: Exploring Options to Enhance Local Services

District Formation Advisory Services Initiative  
County of Sonoma County Executive's Office Strategic Initiatives Division  
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## INTRODUCTION & HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

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This Governance Toolkit (“Toolkit”) was developed as part of the County of Sonoma’s (“County”) District Formation Advisory Services initiative. The County initiated this effort in response to growing interest from unincorporated communities seeking clearer information about how service delivery is structured and what options may be available to enhance local services to better address community needs.

In recent years, the County has undertaken broader efforts to assess governance and service delivery in unincorporated areas. Through the Unincorporated Governance Ad Hoc Committee, the Board of Supervisors has examined a range of strategies aimed at strengthening municipal services and advancing more equitable access to services in unincorporated communities. The County has also conducted service needs assessments in areas including the Lower Russian River and Sonoma Valley and evaluated financing mechanisms such as Enhanced Infrastructure Financing Districts.

The District Formation Advisory Services initiative builds on this work and is intended to provide accessible, practical information about service delivery structures and governance options available to unincorporated communities.

### PURPOSE OF THIS TOOLKIT

In many unincorporated areas, municipal services are delivered through a combination of County departments, special districts, regional agencies, and contractual service arrangements. This structure can make it difficult for residents and community leaders to understand which agency is responsible for a given service, and what legal authority exists to modify services.

For purposes of this Toolkit, municipal services refer to services such as water, wastewater, drainage, roads, street lighting, parks, and other similar municipal service functions. Municipal services, as used here, do not include schools, healthcare systems, or County-administered social service programs, which operate under separate governance structures and are not directly shaped by the local governance and service delivery options discussed in this document.

The Toolkit is intended for:

- Residents and community leaders in unincorporated areas;
- Municipal and Citizens Advisory Councils (MACs and CACs); and
- Neighborhood, nonprofit, and other stakeholder groups interested in understanding how local services are provided, governed, and funded.

This Toolkit outlines a range of possible approaches communities may consider to enhance certain municipal services, from strengthening coordination within existing systems to evaluating more formal governance changes. The intent of this Toolkit is to support informed

and realistic decision-making by helping communities understand what options exist, what those options require in terms of time and capacity, and what tradeoffs and limitations should be carefully considered before moving forward.

## HOW THIS TOOLKIT WAS DEVELOPED

The County of Sonoma Strategic Initiatives Division retained RSG, Inc. (“RSG”) to support the District Formation Advisory Services initiative. As part of this work, the project team collaborated closely with County staff and conducted structured engagement with residents, community leaders, and other local stakeholders in select unincorporated communities. This included facilitated discussions and informational workshops designed to better understand service conditions, local challenges, and community priorities. These conversations were complemented by a review of the legal, fiscal, and institutional frameworks that govern municipal service delivery in unincorporated areas.

The Toolkit reflects applicable California statutes governing special districts and local government reorganization, LAFCO policies and procedures, approval requirements related to funding mechanisms, and relevant County administrative practices. Together, this research and engagement informed the structure and content of the Toolkit.

The Toolkit is intended as an informational resource that reflects the governance landscape in effect at the time of publication. Because laws, funding authorities, and agency policies may change over time, the processes and options described herein may also evolve. Communities considering formal governance or service changes should confirm current requirements with the appropriate agencies before proceeding.

## HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

Communities are encouraged to use this document as a flexible reference rather than a step-by-step guide. Sections can be reviewed independently and revisited as questions arise or circumstances evolve.

The Toolkit is intended to help communities better understand their situation and consider which approaches may best address their priorities. Some communities may find that enhanced services can be achieved through coordination or stronger engagement with existing service providers. Others may decide that more formal governance tools warrant further exploration. The Toolkit does not prescribe a single outcome. Instead, it supports informed conversations and thoughtful decision-making grounded in realistic expectations.

**Note on Scope:** This Toolkit is intended to inform discussion and exploration. It does not recommend specific outcomes, replace formal feasibility studies, or guarantee approval of proposed changes. Many governance pathways require additional analysis, coordination with affected agencies, public review, and, in some cases, voter approval.

## UNDERSTANDING LOCAL SERVICES AND COMMUNITY NEEDS

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Before exploring changes to governance or service delivery, communities should first understand who provides services to their community and how those services operate. With this foundation, communities can identify what is not working, clarify the nature of the issue, and determine whether they are prepared to explore potential governance options. Not all concerns require new governance structures, and formal changes may not be appropriate or feasible in every situation.

This section explains how local agencies deliver services in unincorporated areas, helps communities define the issue they seek to address, and provides guidance for evaluating readiness to pursue next steps.

### Key Terms Used in This Toolkit:

- **Municipal Services ("Services"):** Local, place-based infrastructure and community functions such as water, wastewater, drainage, roads, street lighting, parks, and similar community-level services.
- **Service Providers:** Public agencies that deliver municipal services within defined geographic areas. Service providers may include county departments, special districts, or regional agencies with legal authority to provide specific functions.
- **Service Level:** The quality, frequency, responsiveness, maintenance standards, and long-term sustainability of a municipal service.

## SERVICE DELIVERY IN UNINCORPORATED COMMUNITIES

Unincorporated communities are parts of Sonoma County that lie outside city limits. In these areas, the County functions as the primary municipal government. Special districts and regional agencies may also provide specific services within defined geographic boundaries.

Responsibility for a service depends on both location and service type. The County may maintain roads in one area, while a special district provides water or fire protection in another. Because multiple agencies operate across the County, service delivery structures differ from one unincorporated community to another.

## SONOMA COUNTY MUNICIPAL SERVICES

In unincorporated communities, the County functions as the local municipal government. The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors establishes policies and regulations that apply to these communities, and County departments deliver services such as law enforcement, road maintenance, solid waste management, animal care and control, and parks.

The County also provides broader countywide and regional programs that benefit residents regardless of where they live. These include public health, social services, housing assistance, emergency management, elections, and environmental health. These services operate under separate statutory and administrative structures and generally do not change based on district formation or local boundary adjustments.

Community members are encouraged to use existing County resource platforms to identify services and connect with the appropriate department or provider. These tools provide searchable directories of available services and can help residents determine which agencies serve their area. A list of these resources is provided in **Appendix A**.

### SPECIAL DISTRICTS AND MUNICIPAL SERVICES

Special districts provide additional municipal services within defined service areas. Based on their statutory authority and organization, districts may deliver water, wastewater, parks, fire protection, lighting, or other community-level services. **Appendix A** includes tools that can help residents identify the districts that serve a specific property in unincorporated areas of Sonoma County, and **Appendix B** provides a list of all special districts that operate throughout the County.

Communities are encouraged to use these resources as starting points to identify appropriate points of contact and better understand how services are currently delivered. Reviewing this information can help clarify what concerns may be addressed within existing systems, identify practical next steps, and determine whether further exploration of governance or service delivery options is warranted.

### CLARIFYING THE COMMUNITY NEED

Communities often begin exploring governance or service changes because something is not working as intended, or because existing arrangements no longer reflect current conditions. Clarifying the community need means moving beyond general concerns and identifying the specific issue, location, and impact residents are experiencing, while also understanding what services already exist and who provides them.

Common drivers for these conversations may include:

- Safety concerns, such as traffic conditions or lighting;
- Infrastructure gaps, including roads, drainage, water, or wastewater systems;
- Service gaps in areas such as parks and recreation, solid waste, fire protection, or community facilities; and
- A desire to strengthen local identity, activation, or stewardship.

As communities define the issue, they should determine what type of service concern they are raising. In many cases, concerns relate to:

- The absence of a service,
- The level or quality of service being provided, or
- The cost of service.

Clarifying this distinction early can help communities identify which options may be appropriate to explore. For example, communities can often address concerns about service quality or cost by improving coordination, strengthening communication, or adjusting existing arrangements. In contrast, a true absence of service may require different structural or governance approaches. To move forward effectively, communities should describe what is happening, who it affects, and why current arrangements do not meet local needs. Communities may also consider whether service conditions differ across neighborhoods and whether certain areas experience disproportionate impacts.

### Exercise: Writing a Community Need Statement

- Use 2-3 sentences to describe the need without naming a solution. As you write, focus on whether the issue reflects a lack of service, the level or quality of service, or the cost of service, then answer:
- What is happening, and where?
- Who is affected, and how?
- Why aren't current arrangements meeting community needs?

Example - Infrastructure: "Drainage infrastructure in [Neighborhood] is aging and undersized, resulting in recurring flooding during storm events. Maintenance responsibilities are unclear, and no long-term funding source is in place for repairs or upgrades."

## ASSESSING COMMUNITY READINESS

In this Toolkit, readiness does not mean committing to a specific solution. Rather, it refers to whether a community has sufficient clarity, capacity, and support to explore service or governance options in a meaningful and sustained way.

Communities should carefully consider readiness when exploring more formal governance pathways, such as forming a new special district. These processes involve legal compliance, coordinated organizing efforts, and broad community engagement over time.

As a general guide, communities may be ready to explore options when:

- Residents can clearly describe the issue, including what is happening, where it is occurring, and who is affected;

- Community members show interest in learning about potential approaches, even without full consensus;
- A group of residents commits to convening discussions and remaining engaged over time; and
- Participants understand that more formal options require considerable time, coordination, and sustained follow-through.

If these conditions are not yet in place, communities can take practical steps to build readiness by expanding outreach, sharing information more broadly, coordinating with existing agencies, clarifying service responsibilities, gathering additional data, and strengthening local engagement before pursuing more formal options.

## PAYING FOR ENHANCED SERVICES

As communities consider avenues to enhance services, they must also consider how those services are funded. Service providers typically fund municipal services through a combination of property tax revenues, assessments, service charges, and user fees. These revenue sources may inherently limit the level of services an agency can provide because they can fluctuate with economic conditions and are often legally restricted to specific purposes. Revenue growth frequently lags behind rising labor, infrastructure, and operational costs, limiting an agency's ability to expand programs, increase staffing, or enhance service levels without securing additional funding.

Enhancing municipal services typically requires identifying new or increased revenue to support higher service levels. Cities, counties, and special districts must comply with Proposition 218 of the California Constitution, which generally requires voter approval for new or increased taxes and establishes procedural requirements for certain service charges. Because of these requirements, efforts to enhance services often involve balancing community priorities with the willingness to fund those enhancements.

For that reason, it is helpful to consider funding early in any discussion about service changes. Open and inclusive dialogue about both service expectations and associated costs allows communities to evaluate feasibility and determine whether sufficient support exists to move forward.

A later section of this Toolkit provides additional details on local agency funding mechanisms and related requirements.

## **BUILDING AND SUSTAINING COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

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Building and sustaining community support is crucial when communities explore changes to services or governance. Residents develop understanding and trust over time through clear communication, shared learning, and meaningful opportunities to participate in discussions. This process is rarely linear and often requires sustained effort well beyond an initial conversation or decision point.

It is helpful to think of community support as occurring in two related phases: building support and sustaining support. Each phase presents distinct challenges and involves a different level of effort.

### **BUILDING COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

Communities often build support during the early ramp-up phase, when residents begin discussing concerns and exploring viable options. At this stage, the focus centers on developing a shared understanding of the issue and strengthening trust among participants rather than reaching immediate agreement on specific outcomes.

Early efforts may include:

- Organizing and identifying interested residents or community leaders;
- Sharing information so residents understand the issue and available options;
- Creating space for education, dialogue, and trust-building across diverse perspectives; and
- Generating momentum to continue discussions and gather additional information.

Residents bring various levels of access, time, and familiarity with public processes. Inclusive and accessible engagement approaches can help ensure that a broad range of voices shapes the conversation from the outset.

### **Toolbox: Building Community Support**

- Multilingual community surveys or questionnaires to gather broad input and identify priorities (see Exhibit C for a sample survey template).
- Outreach through multiple channels (flyers, email, social media, community boards) to reach diverse audiences.
- Informal listening sessions or small-group conversations to surface concerns and lived experiences.
- Partnerships with trusted community organizations or leaders to reach underrepresented residents.
- Plain-language summaries describing the concern, existing services, and potential options.

- Clear documentation of input received so participants understand how feedback is used.

## SUSTAINING COMMUNITY SUPPORT

When communities pursue more formal governance options, sustaining engagement over time becomes increasingly important. These efforts often include feasibility analysis, coordination with public agencies, preparation of formal applications, and in some cases, voter approval.

Maintaining sustained engagement can be challenging due to participation fatigue, leadership turnover, limited capacity, and shifting economic or community priorities. Each of these factors can affect residents' ability or willingness to stay involved.

By acknowledging these realities early, communities can set realistic timelines and communicate clear expectations. They can also share responsibility more broadly instead of relying on a small group of volunteers. An equity-centered approach keeps information accessible and transparent over time, even as participation rises and falls.

### Toolbox: Sustaining Community Support

- Regular updates to the broader community on progress, decisions, and next steps.
- Clear communication about timelines, expectations, and when community input will be most important.
- Periodic check-ins or "pause points" to reassess priorities, capacity, and community interest.
- Re-engaging residents at key milestones or decision points rather than expecting constant participation.
- Celebrating milestones and acknowledging community contributions to reinforce shared ownership.
- Sharing leadership roles or responsibilities, where appropriate, to reduce burnout and support continuity.

## MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Governance processes such as forming or expanding a special district, adjusting service boundaries, or pursuing new funding mechanisms often involve defined legal steps, coordination with agencies, technical review, and, in some cases, public hearings or voter approval.

When residents understand how decisions are made, who has authority at each stage, and how community input will be used, they can participate more meaningfully. By identifying key

milestones, decision points, and financial considerations early, communities can make informed choices about whether and how to proceed.

Some ideas may not move forward, and certain pathways may face legal, financial, or practical constraints. Even when communities do not pursue a formal governance change, they often gain valuable information, strengthen relationships, and develop a clearer understanding of how local services operate. That knowledge can support future advocacy and problem-solving efforts.

## **GOVERNANCE PATHWAYS: UNDERSTANDING YOUR OPTIONS**

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Communities have several potential pathways for improving services. These pathways range from strengthening existing institutions to considering more formal governance changes. This section introduces commonly used approaches at a high level to help communities understand the range of options available. It does not attempt to capture every possible option, but instead highlights typical pathways that communities often explore when seeking to address service enhancements.

These options are outlined below and further depicted in Figure 1.

### **STRENGTHENING EXISTING INSTITUTIONS AND ENGAGEMENT CHANNELS**

This approach focuses on strengthening a community's role within the existing County governance framework rather than creating a new agency. It emphasizes stronger coordination, clearer communication, and more structured engagement with current decision-making processes.

In communities with a Municipal Advisory Council (MAC), this may include clarifying or expanding the MAC's advisory role, increasing outreach, or improving how community priorities are conveyed to the Board of Supervisors. In communities without a MAC, residents may organize informal committees, participate in existing advisory or planning processes, or work directly with County departments and service providers to address concerns.

For communities seeking greater visibility, coordination, and responsiveness, this pathway can serve as a practical starting point.

### **ESTABLISHING A FUNDING DISTRICT**

A funding district offers a way to generate revenue for specific improvements or service needs, such as infrastructure or public facilities. Rather than creating a new service provider, this option focuses on securing dedicated funding for clearly defined projects.

Communities typically begin by identifying the improvements they wish to fund, selecting an appropriate financing mechanism, and completing the required approval steps. For example, certain financing tools, such as Community Facilities Districts, typically require property owner or voter approval, in accordance with Proposition 218. The boundaries for a funding district are generally established by the legislative body of the local agency. The boundary for the funding district must also be consistent with the agency's jurisdictional boundary as approved by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO).

This pathway often works best when a community has clearly defined projects or targeted investment goals, not to mention the political will to pass the necessary funding measures.

## ANNEXATION

Annexation allows a community to receive services from an existing city or special district that already serves nearby areas. Communities may consider annexation when they need access to a specific service, such as wastewater or water, and when an existing provider can deliver that service efficiently.

The process generally involves evaluating service feasibility, identifying the appropriate provider, and seeking review and approval from LAFCO. In some circumstances, voter approval may be required on the question of annexation itself. Annexation can allow communities to access established service systems without forming a new governing entity.

In situations where the annexing agency providing the service uses special assessments or special taxes to pay for such services, those assessments and taxes may be extended into the new service area without a vote on the taxes, pursuant to how California courts have interpreted Proposition 218 applicability to municipal annexations<sup>1</sup>. In this way, annexations can be an easier pathway for funding services with special taxes or assessments as compared to formation of a new funding mechanism where voter approval is required.

## ACTIVATING POWERS IN EXISTING DISTRICTS

Communities that are experiencing gaps in a particular municipal service may find that an existing special district serving their area already has the legal authority to provide that service, even if it is not currently doing so. These unused authorities are known as “latent powers”.<sup>2</sup>

When a special district forms, it often receives authority under its Principal Act to provide one or more services depending on the type of district it is. However, the special district may initially deliver only the service the community needed at the time of formation. Over time, community needs may change, and residents may identify additional services that would benefit the area.

For example, Community Services District (CSD) Law provides CSDs the authority to provide a broad range of services such as water, wastewater, parks, recreation, or road maintenance. A CSD may initially form to provide only one service, such as wastewater. If the community later identifies a need for parks and recreation, the district may already have the authority to provide that service but may not yet be exercising it. In this situation, the district could seek approval from the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) to activate its latent powers to provide the additional service.

For communities in unincorporated areas, activating latent powers can be a way to expand services through an existing district rather than forming a new district or seeking annexation to

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<sup>1</sup> See *Citizens Association of Sunset Beach v. Orange County Local Agency Formation Commission*, Cal.App.4th, Case No. G045878 (2012)

<sup>2</sup> Under Government Code Section 56040.5 of the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000 (CKH), “latent service or power” are services, functions, or facilities, a district is authorized to exercise under its principal act but has not yet been activated or put into use.

another agency. Because the district already exists, it may already have governance structures, administrative systems, and familiarity with local conditions that can support the addition of a new service.

To activate a latent power, the special district typically must adopt a resolution requesting the activation of a specific service and prepare and submit a change of organization application with LAFCO. LAFCO then conducts an administrative review of the latent powers activation request and determines whether the special district has the financial, operational, and governance capacity to provide the new or extended service. If approved by LAFCO, the special district may begin providing the new or extended service (subject to applicable protest proceedings and/or voter approval requirements).

In limited circumstances, LACO approval may not be required. If the special district received authority for the service at the time of formation and the service does not qualify as a “new or extended” service under statute, activation may not trigger formal LAFCO review and approval. However, districts should consult with LAFCO to determine whether approval is required before providing additional services.

This option may be appropriate where an existing special district holds unused authority to provide the desired service, the community demonstrates a clear need for the service, and the district can demonstrate the financial and operational capacity to provide it.

## FORMING A NEW SPECIAL DISTRICT

Under this pathway, residents or local agencies create a separate local agency to deliver and manage one or more defined services within a specific geographic area. Communities often explore this option when existing providers cannot reasonably address a clearly identified service need and when there is sufficient local interest and capacity to support a new agency long-term.

The process typically includes defining the services to be provided, establishing service boundaries, preparing an application, and undergoing review by LAFCO. In many cases, voters must approve the proposal before the district can begin operating.

A later section of this Toolkit provides additional detail about the district formation process.

## ADDITIONAL GOVERNANCE AND SERVICE DELIVERY OPTIONS

In addition to the options described above, communities and public agencies may explore other approaches to improving how services are delivered. These alternatives are typically initiated by existing public agencies but may be considered when communities are seeking more coordinated, efficient, or sustainable service delivery.

Examples include:

- **District Consolidation:** Two or more existing special districts that provide similar services may consolidate into a single district. Consolidation can streamline governance, reduce administrative costs, and strengthen financial or operational capacity. Consolidation proposals are reviewed by LAFCO and may require protest proceedings or voter approval depending on the circumstances.
- **Joint Powers Authorities (JPAs):** A Joint Powers Authority allows two or more public agencies to jointly exercise powers they already hold, such as providing services, managing infrastructure, or coordinating regional programs. JPAs are often used when agencies want to collaborate on a shared service or project while maintaining their existing governance structures.
- **Shared Services or Interagency Agreements:** In some cases, public agencies may enter into agreements to share staff, facilities, equipment, or services without changing governance structures. These arrangements can help expand service capacity or reduce costs while allowing each agency to maintain its existing authority.

Communities interested in these approaches are encouraged to consult with the relevant agencies and LAFCO to better understand which options may be feasible in their area. For a summary of different advisory groups and financing districts, see **Appendix F**.

Figure 1: Governance Options



## FUNDING MECHANISMS

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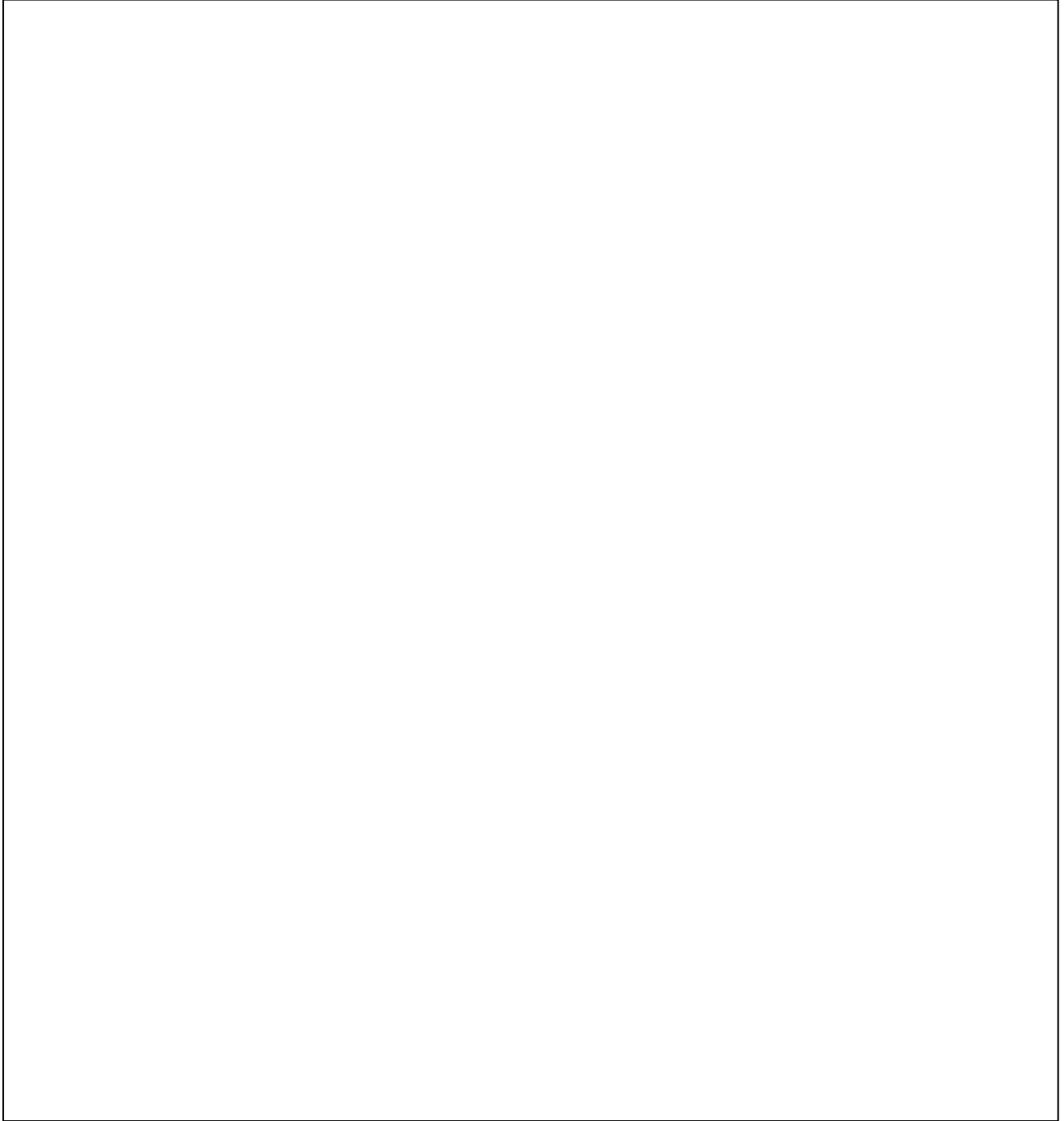
Funding plays a central role in determining what services agencies provide and how they sustain those services over time. Even when a community agrees on a need, the structure and availability of funding often shape which options are realistic. This section introduces basic funding concepts and common tools to help communities understand how agencies finance services and what considerations may arise early in the process.

Local agencies use a combination of revenue sources to fund municipal services and infrastructure, including construction, improvements, and ongoing maintenance. These tools differ in how agencies collect them, who pays them, and what purposes they support. Together, they fund both day-to-day operations and long-term investments.

Examples of common fundings tools are provided below and further illustrated in Figure 2.

- **Property Tax Revenues:** Property owners pay a 1 percent base property tax levy, and the County distributes portions of that revenue to local agencies according to established formulas. Agencies use these funds to support core services and ongoing operations.
- **Special Taxes and Assessments:** Voters or affected property owners approve these additional charges for defined purposes, such as public safety, road maintenance, or facility improvements. Agencies must use these revenues only for the purposes identified at the time of approval.
- **Services Charges and Fees:** Agencies charge customers for specific services, such as water, wastewater, or solid waste collection. These charges recover the cost of providing the service and commonly support utilities and other fee-based programs.
- **Enhanced Infrastructure Financing Districts (EIFDs):** EIFDs allow communities to invest in infrastructure by allocating a share of future property tax growth to pay for improvements. Rather than increasing current tax rates, EIFDs dedicate incremental revenue from new development over time to fund projects such as roads, utilities, or public facilities.
- **Community Financing Districts (CFDs):** CFDs fund services or facilities through special taxes that voters or affected property owners approve. Communities often use CFDs to support enhanced services or specific capital improvements.
- **Grants and Contributions:** Federal, state, and private entities provide grants and other contributions to supplement local revenues. Agencies typically use these funds for specific projects or programs, often to support capital improvements that local revenues alone may not fully cover.

Figure 2: Typical Funding Mechanisms for Enhanced Services



## UNDERSTANDING LAFCO'S ROLE

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Any change to local government boundaries or service responsibilities in Sonoma County requires review by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO). LAFCO evaluates proposed changes to determine whether they are appropriate and sustainable. This section explains LAFCO's role and outlines what communities can expect during the review process.

### WHO IS LAFCO?

LAFCOs operate under the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act of 2000 (CKH). This state law governs how cities and special districts form, expand, reorganize, or dissolve. It establishes the conditions under which local government changes may occur and identifies the factors LAFCO must consider when reviewing proposals. The law directs LAFCO to promote logical growth, discourage unnecessary duplication of services, and support coordinated and sustainable service delivery.

The LAFCO Commission is made up of locally elected officials and appointed representatives from cities, special districts, the County, and the public. This structure helps ensure that members understand local conditions and service needs when they make decisions.

### WHAT DO LAFCOS DO?

LAFCO helps manage how local agencies evolve over time. This includes reviewing proposals for the establishment of new districts, requests to expand service areas and responsibilities, or modify existing boundaries. LAFCO also establishes and periodically updates cities' and special districts' Sphere of Influence (SOI), which reflect the general area where an agency is expected to provide services in the future. To support these decisions, LAFCO conducts Municipal Service Reviews (MSRs) to evaluate how agencies deliver services and how they plan for future needs.

### WHAT DO LAFCOS LOOK FOR IN A PROPOSAL?

When considering a proposal for a new district, LAFCO looks at a range of practical and community-focused factors. This includes:

- Whether the proposal addresses a clearly identified service need
- Whether the proposed boundaries make sense based on geography, infrastructure, and existing development patterns
- How the change would affect other agencies and service providers
- Whether the agency has the financial capacity to sustain the service over the long term
- Whether the proposal demonstrates sufficient community support

### Engage with LAFCO Early

If your community is considering forming a new district, annexing into an existing district, or pursuing other boundary or governance changes, contact LAFCO early in the process.

LAFCO staff can:

- Explain legal and procedural requirements
- Clarify eligibility and service boundary considerations
- Identify required studies or application materials
- Provide insight into timelines and decision thresholds

By starting conversations early, communities can better assess feasibility, anticipate next steps, and understand available options before investing significant time or resources.

**FORMING A NEW SPECIAL DISTRICT**

For communities that have reached the stage of exploring the formation of a new special district, it is important to first understand what a special district is, how districts are categorized, and what legal framework governs them before moving forward with the formation process.

**WHAT IS A SPECIAL DISTRICT?**

California Government Code Section 16271(d) defines a special district as “any agency of the state for the local performance of governmental or proprietary functions within limited boundaries.” Unlike counties or cities, which provide a broad range of municipal services, a special district operates as a local government entity that delivers one or more specific services within a defined geographic area.

Communities often explore special district formation when:

- Persistent service gaps or unmet needs affect residents
- Representation feels fragmented or local autonomy seems limited
- Coordinated solutions are needed across neighboring areas
- There is a desire for stable, predictable local funding mechanisms

A special district can provide focused governance and dedicated service delivery within a defined area. This approach may work well when a community identifies a clear service need, develops a sustainable funding plan, and builds sufficient community support.

**HOW SPECIAL DISTRICTS ARE CATEGORIZED**

Special districts vary in three primary ways: (1) how they are governed, (2) how they are funded, and (3) what services they are authorized to provide. These distinctions shape the level of local control, financial flexibility, and overall scope of the district.

**Figure 3: How Special Districts are Categorized**

Category	Type	What It Means	Example	Considerations
<b>Governance</b>	Independent District	Governed by an elected or appointed board; operate separately from cities/counties	Fire districts, water districts, CSDs	Greater local control and flexibility
<b>Governance</b>	Dependent Districts	Governed by county board or city council	CSAs, lighting/maintenance districts	Lower autonomy; priorities set by parent agency
<b>Funding</b>	Enterprise Districts	Primarily funded by user fees and service charges	Water, sewer, airports	Fees must be closely tied to service use

Category	Type	What It Means	Example	Considerations
<b>Funding</b>	Non-Enterprise Districts	Primarily funded by taxes or assessments	Fire, parks, lighting	Often require voter or landowner approval
<b>Function</b>	Single-Function Districts	Provide one primary service	Fire, sewer, water	Limited flexibility; focused scope

## PRINCIPAL ACTS: THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

California law establishes “Principal Acts” for most common types of special districts. A Principal Act serves as the rulebook for a specific type of district.

Each Principal Act defines:

- The powers the district may exercise
- The governance structure it must follow
- The services it may deliver
- The revenue tools it may use
- The procedures required to form the district

State law includes Principal Acts for fire districts, water districts, parks and recreation districts, cemetery districts, Community Services Districts (CSDs), and many others.

Communities that consider district formation benefit from reviewing the relevant Principal Act early in the process. A careful review helps clarify the legal parameters, available powers, and limitations that apply to the proposed district type.

In some cases, a Principal Act authorizes a district to provide multiple types of services. A newly formed district may initially provide only the service needed at the time of formation but may retain legal authority to provide additional services in the future. These unused authorities are referred to as “latent powers.” Considering both current service needs and potential future needs can help communities select a district type that provides appropriate flexibility as conditions change.

Principal Acts are available in the California Constitution and can be accessed through the [California Legislative Information website](#).

**Appendix D** summarizes the statutory framework for some common district types and offers a starting point for identifying the appropriate Principal Act and understanding its key provisions.

DISTRICT FORMATION PROCESS OVERVIEW

Communities form a new special district through a two-phase process. First, applicants prepare and submit a proposal. Second, LAFCO reviews the proposal and makes a decision.

During the initial phase, applicants define the proposal, gather required documentation, and complete the materials needed for submission to LAFCO. Figure 4 outlines the key steps involved in this early stage of the process.

Figure 4: Applicant Formation Steps: New Special District

Step	What Happens
Pre-Application Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify the services to be provided and who would be affected</li> <li>• Refine the community needs statement and general service area</li> <li>• Identify potential service and funding approaches</li> <li>• Coordinate early with LAFCO staff on requirements and timing</li> </ul>
Feasibility Analysis & Boundary Definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate whether the proposed district can operate sustainably by assessing service delivery, governance structure, and funding sources</li> <li>• Consider retaining an outside consultant to prepare a feasibility analysis</li> <li>• Define proposed boundaries<sup>3</sup>, including a professionally prepared map and metes-and-bounds legal description</li> </ul>
LAFCO Application Initiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate the LAFCO process, typically through a petition or resolution by local agency</li> </ul>
LAFCO Application Preparation & Submission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare the full application describing proposed services</li> <li>• Compile required technical materials, including boundary documentation</li> <li>• Address environmental review requirements, as applicable</li> <li>• Submit the completed application and required processing fees to LAFCO, as applicable</li> </ul>

After the applicant submits a complete application and LAFCO accepts it for review, the process transitions from applicant preparation to LAFCO’s review and decision-making phase. Figure 5 outlines the key steps in LAFCO’s review process.

<sup>3</sup> The new district boundaries are proposed as part of the formation application with LAFCO (Government Code Section 56650 et. seq.) but are subject to LAFCO review, modification, and approval.

Figure 5: LAFCO Review Steps: New Special District

Step	What Happens
Application Processing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the application for completeness</li> <li>Issue a Certificate of Filing if all required materials are included</li> <li>Notify affected agencies, including the County, cities, and service providers</li> <li>Initiate property tax exchange discussions, if applicable</li> </ul>
Public Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LAFCO staff prepares analysis and recommendations</li> <li>The LAFCO Commission holds a noticed public hearing</li> <li>Public input is received and considered</li> <li>The Commission approves, denies, or modifies the proposal</li> </ul>
Post-Approval Proceedings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct protest proceedings, as required</li> <li>Determine whether an election is required based on protest thresholds</li> </ul>
District Formation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Record the final action</li> <li>Officially form the new special district if all requirements are satisfied</li> </ul>

**Note:** Specific requirements and procedural steps may vary depending on the Principal Act under which the proposed district would be formed. Communities are encouraged to consult LAFCO staff and applicable statutes for details specific to their proposal.

### BEST PRACTICES FOR A SUCCESSFUL LAFCO APPLICATION

LAFCO evaluates a proposed district primarily through its Plan for Services and supporting budget materials. The Commission reviews these materials to determine whether the district can deliver services in a cost-effective, coordinated, and sustainable manner and whether the proposal provides a clear public benefit compared to existing service arrangements.

A strong application uses the Plan for Services not only to satisfy statutory requirements, but also to clearly demonstrate readiness, feasibility, and alignment with identified community needs.

**Appendix E** includes a checklist of common elements that LAFCO reviews during district formation proposals. Communities can use this checklist to assess their proposal, identify potential gaps, and strengthen materials before submitting an application.

### WHO PAYS FOR A DISTRICT FORMATION EFFORT?

When a community initiates the formation of a new special district through the petition process, they bear the upfront costs associated with this effort. This includes but is not limited

to, the related LAFCO application fees, consulting services, legal counseling, and public outreach efforts as detailed below.

### COMMON EARLY-STAGE COSTS

During exploration and application, communities may encounter costs such as:

- Feasibility or service studies
- Financial analysis or revenue modeling
- Legal descriptions and boundary mapping
- LAFCO application and processing fees
- Community outreach and engagement efforts
- Environmental review (such as CEQA), if required

The scope and scale of these costs vary depending on the complexity of the proposal.

### HOW EARLY EFFORTS ARE TYPICALLY FUNDED

Communities often support early-stage efforts through a combination of:

- Volunteer time and in-kind contributions
- Contributions from local property owners or community groups
- Donations or community fundraising
- Grants or philanthropic support for planning or technical assistance
- In some cases, assistance from public agencies already operating in the area

Support from public partners may include sharing data, providing staff guidance, or coordinating technical information. The level of involvement may depend on local priorities and policy direction.

### PLANNING FOR UPFRONT INVESTMENT

Because formation requires upfront effort and resources, communities benefit from discussing early on how exploration costs will be covered. Clarifying this approach helps set realistic expectations and ensures that the process remains transparent and sustainable.

If LAFCO and voters approve the district, the newly formed district may then begin collecting revenue to support service delivery and ongoing operations. However, exploration and formation costs generally occur before that point, and it may take considerable time for revenue generation to reach a sustainable level.

## EVALUATING FEASIBILITY AND FIT

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Before investing time and resources in a formal governance change, communities should first assess whether a proposed pathway fits local conditions. Not every option works in every setting. Careful evaluation early in the process can help clarify what is realistic and where additional groundwork may be needed. This section offers practical considerations to help communities evaluate feasibility.

### UNDERSTANDING LOCAL CONDITIONS

Local context shapes which governance pathways make sense. Communities can begin by asking:

- **Service Landscape:** Who currently provides the service, and how effectively does that arrangement function?
- **Community Alignment:** Do residents share a clear understanding of the issue and the desired outcome?
- **Geography and Infrastructure:** Do development patterns, infrastructure networks, or natural features influence how services can be delivered?
- **Population and Scale:** Does the size and density of the community support the type of solution under consideration?
- **Institutional Context:** Can an existing agency address the issue through coordination, service adjustments, or expanded responsibilities?
- **Fiscal Context:** What funding sources currently support the service, and would changes require new or reallocated revenue?

### EVALUATING PRACTICAL FIT

After considering these questions, communities can reflect on what their answers suggest. Certain conditions often align more naturally with certain pathways. For example:

- If an existing agency already provides the service but residents experience coordination or communication challenges, strengthening engagement within current governance structures may offer a practical starting point.
- If no agency currently provides a needed service and the community can identify stable and sustainable funding, more formal options such as annexation or district formation may warrant further exploration.
- If the population or tax base is limited, a standalone district may not be financially sustainable, and partnership models may offer a better fit.

- If residents express mixed levels of support, additional outreach and dialogue may strengthen the foundation before advancing a formal proposal.

## **APPENDIX A: SONOMA COUNTY SERVICE AND INFORMATION TOOLS**

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Residents in unincorporated communities may need to identify which agencies provide services to their property or where to obtain assistance for specific needs. The County of Sonoma maintains several public online tools that can help residents locate services, identify service providers, and access information about their property.

The resources below provide starting points for identifying County departments, special districts, and community services:

### **Open Doors Sonoma County**

Website: [Open Doors Sonoma County Website](#)

Open Doors Sonoma County is an online resource portal that provides a searchable directory of County and community services. The platform includes information about public programs, nonprofit services, and community organizations available to residents throughout Sonoma County.

### **2-1-1 Sonoma County**

Website: [211 Sonoma County Website](#)

2-1-1 Sonoma County provides a comprehensive database of health, human services, and community resources available throughout the County. Residents can search the online database or dial 2-1-1 to connect with trained specialists who can provide referrals and information about available services.

### **Sonoma County Parcel Information Map**

Website: [Sonoma County Interactive Parcel Map Website](#)

Sonoma County provides an interactive online map that allows residents to view information associated with a specific parcel in unincorporated areas of the County. The tool can help identify the special districts and other service providers associated with a property. Users can search for a property by address or Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) and access parcel-specific information. To use the map:

1. Enter the address or parcel number in the search bar.
2. Confirm that the parcel is highlighted (shown in blue).
3. On the right side of the screen, locate the "Permitting & Zoning" section.
4. Click the "+" icon to expand the section.
5. Select "View Parcel Detail & Permit History for <APN>."

The parcel information page includes details about the districts associated with that property along with other permitting and land use information.

**APPENDIX B: SPECIAL DISTRICTS IN SONOMA COUNTY<sup>4</sup>**

#	District Name	Service Provided
1	Bay Area Air Quality Mgmt	Air Quality
2	Northern Sonoma County Air Pollution Control District	Air Quality
3	Green Valley Cemetery District	Cemetery
4	Shiloh Public Cemetery District	Cemetery
6	Coast Life Support District	Emergency Medical
7	Flood Zone 1A Laguna Mark West	Flood Protection
8	Flood Zone 2A Petaluma Creek	Flood Protection
9	Flood Zone 3A Valley of the Moon	Flood Protection
10	Flood Zone 5A Lower Russian River	Flood Protection
11	Flood Zone 8A South Coastal	Flood Protection
12	Spring Lake Park	Flood Protection and Maintenance
13	Cloverdale Fire Protection District	Fire
14	CSA #40 Fire Services	Fire
15	Gold Ridge Fire Protection District	Fire
16	Graton Fire Protection District	Fire
17	North Sonoma Coast Fire District	Fire
18	Northern Sonoma County Fire Protection District	Fire
19	Occidental Community Service District	Fire and Water
20	Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District	Fire
21	Schell-Vista Fire Protection District	Fire
22	Sonoma County Fire District	Fire
23	Sonoma Valley Fire District	Fire
24	Timber Cove Fire Protection District	Fire
25	Cazadero Community Services District	Fire, Parks and Recreation, and Street Lighting
26	Petaluma Valley Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency	Groundwater Sustainability
27	Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency	Groundwater Sustainability
28	Sonoma Valley Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency	Groundwater Sustainability
29	Palm Drive Healthcare District	Healthcare
30	Cloverdale Healthcare District	Healthcare
31	North Sonoma County Healthcare District	Healthcare
32	Sonoma Valley Healthcare District	Healthcare
33	CSA #41 Zone 6 Sea Ranch Zone 2	Sanitation
34	Sonoma County Library	Library
35	CSA #41 LD - Countywide	Lighting
36	Marin-Sonoma Mosquito and Vector Control District	Mosquito

<sup>4</sup> The list of Districts reflects those existing within Sonoma County as of April 2026 and is subject to change as districts are formed, dissolved, or reorganized over time.

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#	District Name	Service Provided
37	Camp Meeker Recreation & Park District	Recreation and Parks
38	CSA #41 Parks - Sonoma Valley	Recreation and Parks
39	Monte Rio Recreation & Park District	Recreation and Parks
40	Russian River Rec & Park District	Recreation and Parks
41	Camp Meeker Recreation & Park District	Recreation and Parks
42	Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District	Resource Conservation
43	Sonoma Resource Conservation District	Resource Conservation
44	SF Bay Restoration Authority	Restoration
45	Bittner Lane Perm. Road Dist.	Roads
46	Canon Manor Assessment District	Roads
47	Mill Creek Ln Perm. Rd. Dist.	Roads
48	Mirabel Height Perm. Rd. Dist.	Roads
49	Monte Rosa Perm. Road Dist.	Roads
50	Peaks Pike Perm. Road Dist.	Roads
51	Airport/Larkfield/Wikiup Sanitation Zone	Sanitation
52	CSA #41 Mirabel Heights Zone	Sanitation
53	Geyserville Sanitation Zone	Sanitation
54	Occidental County Sanitation Zone	Sanitation
55	Penngrove Sanitation Zone	Sanitation
56	Russian River County Sanitation District	Sanitation
57	Sea Ranch Sanitation Zone	Sanitation
58	Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District	Sanitation
59	South Park County Sanitation District	Sanitation
60	Sonoma Water	Sanitation, Water, Flood Protection
61	Canon Manor Assessment District	Sewer
62	Graton Community Services District	Water
63	Bodega Bay Public Utility District	Water
64	Forestville Water District	Water
65	Occidental County Water District	Water
66	Rains Creek Water District	Water
67	Russian River County Water District	Water
68	Sonoma Mountain County Water District	Water
69	Sweetwater Springs Water District	Water
70	Russian River County Sanitation District	Water
71	CSA #41 Salmon Creek Water	Water
72	CSA #41 Freestone Water	Water
73	CSA #41 Jenner Water	Water

**APPENDIX C: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES AND SAMPLE SURVEY TEMPLATE**



## Understanding Local Governance

### Exploring Local Governance Options In Unincorporated Sonoma County

The County and local leaders are working together to explore new ways to strengthen local services and representation in unincorporated areas like yours. That might include improving existing services or exploring new governance options. We want your input as we prepare for upcoming community conversations.

### What Is Local Governance?

Governance is how decisions are made and services—like water, parks, fire, or roads—are delivered in your community. In unincorporated areas, the County handles some services directly, while others are managed by special districts. These agencies may serve different areas, and each community is unique in the mix of services it receives.

### Governance Pathways: Strengthening local services

#### 1. Strengthen Existing Institutions

*Improve what's already in place.*

**Examples:** Expand your local MAC's role, improve coordination among service districts.

**What it takes:** County support and agency collaboration.

#### 2. Activate Latent Powers in a District

*Let an existing district provide additional services.*

**Examples:** A municipal water district adds fire protection or wastewater.

**What it takes:** LAFCO approval, funding, and board action.

#### 3. Expand Services via the County

*Request more or improved services directly from the County.*

**Examples:** Enhanced road maintenance, or new community programs.

**What it takes:** County Board approval; new taxes/reallocating existing funds.

#### 4. Consolidate Special Districts

*Reorganize services to streamline delivery.*

**Examples:** Neighboring CSA takes on water services for neighboring water district.

**What it takes:** Coordination among agencies, LAFCO approval, and possibly a community vote.

#### 5. Annex to an Existing District

*Join a neighboring district that already provides services.*

**Examples:** A nearby fire or sanitation district expands its service area.

**What it takes:** LAFCO application and agreement from the district.

#### 6. Improve Services Through Funding Districts

*Enhance local services or infrastructure using new funding tools.*

**Examples:** Assessment Districts, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), Enhanced Infrastructure Financing Districts (EIFDs)

**What it takes:** Studies, agency approval, voter/property owner support

#### 7. Form a New Special District

*Establish a new agency to manage local services.*

**Examples:** A district for parks, fire protection, or road maintenance.

**What it takes:** LAFCO application, service plan, and possible public vote.

#### 8. Form a New City

*Incorporate as a city with full control over governance and local services.*

**Examples:** City government manages planning, roads, law enforcement, etc.

**What it takes:** Extensive feasibility study, LAFCO approval, and majority voter approval.

### Who Is LAFCO?

The Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) oversees changes to local government boundaries—like creating a new district, adjusting service areas, or forming a new city. If a community chooses to pursue a new form of governance, LAFCO would guide and review that process.



## Your Community, Your Voice

### 1. Which neighborhood or area of the community do you live in?

\_\_\_\_\_

### 2. What services do you care most about in your community?

*(Check all that apply)*

- |   |                                     |   |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parks & Recreation | <input type="checkbox"/> Water      | <input type="checkbox"/> Fire or Emergency Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Road Maintenance   | <input type="checkbox"/> Wastewater | <input type="checkbox"/> Trash & Recycling          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other:             |                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Safety              |

\_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Are there any public services you feel are missing or could be improved?

*Please describe what's missing or not working well and where the need exists (e.g., one neighborhood vs. region-wide):*

### 4. What challenges make it hard for your community to get the public services it needs?

*(Check all that apply)*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough funding                           | <input type="checkbox"/> No clear place to ask questions or share concerns |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hard to know who provides the service        | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of local input in decisions                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Services are spread across too many agencies |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other:                                       |  |

\_\_\_\_\_

### 5. Would you like to stay involved in shaping local decisions about services and governance?

*(Check all that apply)*

- Yes, I'd like to stay informed (email updates, meeting invites, etc.)
- Yes, I'd consider joining a community working group (occasional meetings to give input)
- Maybe—I'd like to learn more first
- No, not at this time

If yes or maybe, what's the best way to reach you? (Optional)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email or Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

#### How to Share Your Feedback:

- Return your completed form to your local leader
- Take a photo and email it to: [Insert Contact Info]
- Submit online (optional): [QR Code to a Survey]
- Join us at the upcoming community meeting to share your thoughts

**APPENDIX D: STATUTORY FRAMEWORK FOR COMMON SPECIAL DISTRICT TYPES**

District Type	Governing Principal Act <sup>5</sup>	Authorized Services (High-Level)	Governance Structure <sup>6</sup>
<b>Community Services District (CSD)</b>	<a href="#">Community Services District Law (Gov. Code §61000 et seq.)</a>	May provide multiple municipal-type services, including water, wastewater, parks, recreation, street lighting, solid waste, and other authorized services (subject to adopted powers).	Independent district governed by an elected board (typically five members).
<b>Fire Protection District</b>	<a href="#">Fire Protection District Law (Health &amp; Safety Code §13800 et seq.)</a>	Provides fire protection, emergency medical response, fire prevention, and related emergency services.	Independent district governed by an elected board (typically five members).
<b>Public Utility District</b>	<a href="#">Public Utility District Act (Public Utilities Code §15501 et seq.)</a>	May construct and maintain utility infrastructure to provide services such as electricity, natural gas, water, power.	Independent district governed by an elected board (typically five members).
<b>Recreation and Park District</b>	<a href="#">Recreation and Park District Law (Public Resources Code §5780 et seq.)</a>	Develop and promote programs for community recreation, parks and open space, parking, transportation and other related services.	Independent district governed by an elected board (typically five members).
<b>Sanitation District</b>	<a href="#">Health &amp; Safety Code §6400 et seq.</a>	Maintain and operate systems for wastewater, solid waste, storm drainage, and related sanitation services.	Independent district governed by an elected board (typically five members).
<b>Water District</b>	<a href="#">California Water District Law (Water Code §34000 et seq.)</a>	Maintain and operate facilities for the production, storage, and distribution of water for irrigation, domestic, industrial, and municipal purposes, and any drainage or reclamation works.	Independent district governed by an elected board (typically five members).
<b>Wastewater District</b>	<a href="#">Water Code §13910 et seq.</a>	Maintain and operate the infrastructure required for the diversion, management, treatment, discharge, and reuse of stormwater and dry weather runoff.	Independent district governed by an elected board (typically five members).

<sup>5</sup>For a complete listing of these acts, please refer to the California Legislative Information website via their code search resource page which can be accessed here:

[https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes\\_displayText.xhtml](https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml).

<sup>6</sup> Special districts may be formed as independent agencies with their own governing board, or as dependent agencies governed by a city council or county board of supervisors.

**APPENDIX E: SPECIAL DISTRICT FORMATION CHECKLIST**

# APPLICANT CHECKLIST:

## Preparing a Strong LAFCO Application

### 1. AUTHORIZED SERVICES & PURPOSE

**Clearly define what services the district would provide and why those services are needed.**

- Have you identified the Principal Act under which the district would be formed?
- Are proposed services authorized, clearly described, and tied to a public purpose?

### 2. SERVICE AREA & BOUNDARIES

**Ensure proposed boundaries align with where and how services would be delivered.**

- Is the proposed service area clearly defined and mapped?
- Do boundaries logically support service delivery and governance?

### 3. SERVICE DELIVERY & OPERATIONS

**Outline the service delivery model, administrative capacity, and approach to coordination or phasing.**

- Is it clear how services would be delivered (directly, by contract, or partnership)?
- Are basic operational needs and administrative capacity identified?
- Does the proposal distinguish between near-term and phased services?
- Have existing service providers been identified and potential overlap addressed?

### 4. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

**Demonstrate that the district can support services over the long term.**

- Are startup and ongoing costs estimated realistically?
- Are funding sources clearly identified and legally feasible?
- Does the budget account for administrative, legal, and election-related costs?

### 5. IMPROVEMENTS & INFRASTRUCTURE

**Identify any infrastructure or facility needs tied to the proposed services.**

- Are required infrastructure or facility improvements identified?
- Is there a general plan for how improvements will be financed?

### 6. FEASIBILITY & OVERALL READINESS

**Confirm there is enough clarity and capacity to move forward.**

- Is the community need clearly articulated and understood?
- Is there an identified group willing to support coordination and next steps?

**APPENDIX F: TYPES OF ADVISORY GROUPS AND FINANCING DISTRICTS**

Entity	Definition	Purpose	Formation	Fiscal Powers
<b>Community Advisory Committee/ Commission (CAC)</b>	Issue oriented community group.  E.g. Community Advisory Council for the Independent Office of Law Enforcement Review and Outreach  See: Gov. Code § 31000.1	Provide recommendations to the Board on a particular issue.	Resolution of the Board	No fiscal authority
<b>Municipal Advisory Council (MAC)</b>	Geographically oriented (unincorporated area) community group.  E.g. Dry Creek Valley Citizens Advisory Council  See: Gov. Code § 31010	Provide recommendations to the Board on local issues affecting a particular unincorporated area of the County.	Resolution of the Board	No fiscal authority
<b>Assessment District</b>	District created to finance identified public improvements or services through a special or benefit assessment against parcels within the assessment district.  See: Improvement Act of 1911 (Sts. & Hy. Code § 5000 et seq.); Municipal Improvement Act of 1913 (Sts. & Hy. Code § 10000 et seq.); Benefit Assessment Act of 1982 (Gov. Code § 54703 et seq.)	Fund public improvements or services that provide a special benefit to subject parcels.	Resolution of Board, subject to notice, hearing, and protest rules. Procedures depend upon which assessment law is used.	Levy assessment on real property
<b>Community Facilities District (CFD)</b>	District created to finance public improvements with a useful life of 5 years or more.  See: Mello-Roos Community Facilities Act of 1982 (Gov. Code § 53311 et seq.)	Fund the purchase, construction, expansion, improvement or rehabilitation of property with a useful life greater than 5 years.	Resolution of Board, subject to notice, hearing, and protest rules.	Levy special tax upon approval by a 2/3 vote of the qualified electorate of the district.
<b>Community Services District</b>	District created to finance public services and facilities within the boundaries of a district.	Finance a variety of services and facilities within the boundaries of a district.	Resolution of the Board, subject to notice, hearing, and protest rules, and LAFCO approval.	Levy assessment or special tax, subject to applicable financing laws. Includes ability to levy service charges and user fees for services provided.

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	See: Community Services District Law (Gov. Code § 61000 et seq.)			May also receive property tax revenues and other funding sources subject to County allocation.
<b>County Service Area (CSA)</b>	Public entity that provides specific public services to all or some unincorporated areas within the County.  E.g. CSA 41  See: Gov. Code § 25210 et seq.	Fund and provide specific public services to all or some unincorporated areas within the County.	CSA formation requires a Board resolution, subject to notice, hearing, and protest rules; LAFCO approval; and a landowner vote. Zone of benefit formation requires a Board resolution, subject to notice, hearing, and protest rules.	If property tax revenue allocated to the CSA or benefit zone is inadequate, the Board may raise revenue by levying special taxes, fees, assessments, rates, charges or issuing bonds, subject to applicable financing laws.
<b>Special Road Maintenance District</b>	District created to fund road maintenance.  See: Sts. & Hy. Code § 1550 et seq.	Fund maintenance and improvements of existing road infrastructure within the County.	Resolution of the Board, subject to notice and hearing.	Levy special tax upon approval by a 2/3 vote of the qualified electorate of the district.