



# **San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury Information Session**

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# What is the SMC *Civil* Grand Jury?

The San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury is :

- A citizen watchdog function mandated by the California State Constitution
- An investigative body; an “arm of the Court”
  - Assesses action and performance of local government
- 19 citizens serving a 12 month term

***Every County has one. Standing Civil Grand Juries exist in this form today only in California and Nevada!***

# How Does it Operate?

- It is not like regular jury duty!
- Members decide the best way to get the work done.
- Some best practices carry over year to year.
  - Committee/team structure and leadership roles
  - Meeting and training schedule
  - Documentation standards
  - Often holdover jurors (1 or 2) will provide continuity
  - Support of County Counsel's Office.

# Civil Grand Jury Structure

- Typical Committees
  - Administration and Fiscal / Audit
  - Cities and Special Districts
  - Education
  - Health and Human Services
  - Law Enforcement
  - Public Works, Environment, Safety and Transportation
  - Editorial
  - Continuity

***Members generally serve on at least two Committees.***

# Civil Grand Jury Schedule

- Meets for a full day once every two weeks
  - Committee Chairs and Foreperson meeting
  - Individual committee meetings
  - Full Grand Jury session
- Committees and Investigation teams schedule interviews, working sessions and site visits in between full day sessions based on their availability.

# What to Investigate?

- Brainstorming sessions
- Hot topics in the news
- Requests from the general public
- Follow-ups to previous investigations
- Ideas from other county grand juries
- Leads from background research
- Mandatory jail inspections

# Typical Investigation Process

- Do background research – make the case.
- Present topic to full Grand Jury for approval.
- Investigate – conduct interviews, perform document reviews, do surveys, visit sites.
- Document and ***confirm*** Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations in a report.
- Submit to Fact Checking and Editorial Review.
  - Most go through ***many*** drafts and revisions.
- Present report to full Grand Jury for Approval.

# Final Reports

- SMC Grand Juries average 12 reports/year.
- Approved reports are reviewed by the assigned Counsel and Judge before issuance.
- Reports are Issued to responsible authorities (BOS, Mayors/City Councils, Agency Heads)
- Press releases notify the media of new reports
- Authorities have 90 days to respond to Findings and Recommendations.



# Final Report Impact

- Recipients are not legally required to implement recommendations but must respond in writing.
- Findings are sometimes “challenged”.
- The rigorous process results in an over 60% implementation rate of recommendations.

***682 of the Civil Grand Juries’ recommendations were implemented or committed to be implemented over the last three years!***

# High Impact Investigations/Reports

- **County financing – pension funding, structural deficits, reserve use**
  - Changes in practices and reporting
- **Cal Fire service on the Coastside**
  - Recall of three elected officials
- **Lack of school bullying policies**
  - Launch of county wide **RESPECT 24/7**
- **Board of Supervisors Elections**
  - Change to District from County-wide elections
- **San Bruno explosion/fire follow-up**
  - City participation in remedial action plan development

# Sampling of Other Recent Topics

- Contracting city policing to the County Sheriff
- Taser standardization across County cities
- Aircraft noise reduction effectiveness
- Water management and recycling needs
- Mentoring emancipated foster youth
- Peninsula and Sequoia Health Care Districts spending
- Cell Towers: Public Opposition and Revenue Source
- Electronic Monitoring of pretrial detainees
- Food Truck Inspection and Safety

***15 years of reports and responses are available on the San Mateo County Grand Jury website!***

# Juror Selection

- Qualifications:
  - US Citizen, at least 18 years old, reside in County for at least 1 year, English sufficient to perform duties, not presently serving as an elected official
  - “ordinary intelligence, sound judgment and good character”
- Applications are solicited each February - April. Grand Jury Judge conducts interviews to create pool.
- Court seeks a jury representative of the County’s population.
- Jurors and alternates are selected by random draw.
- Typically 1-2 volunteers holdover for continuity.

# ***Ideal Grand Juror Attributes***

- ***Available and flexible - average 15 hrs./week***
- Interested in local government and community issues
- Enjoys learning new things, ***teamwork***
- Has basic computer skills (email, Word, web search, etc.) or is willing to learn and use them
- Has good writing skills – e.g. for interview notes, report drafts
- Manages time well – meets commitments
- Comfortable expressing/defending positions but open to change based on data
- ***Able to maintain strict confidentiality at all times***

# What's in it for ME?

- Learn how government works from the inside.
- Develop new skills/maintain others.
- Work intensely with other bright interested citizens.
- Gain personal satisfaction from having an impact.
- Develop lasting new friendships/relationships.
- Earn some small stipend for service.

# What's in it for ME?

***“ it was a great experience to work on something important with a team of people who took their responsibility so seriously.”***

# How to Learn More/Apply

- Check SMCAGJ website for more information.  
<http://www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/smcagj/>
- Read past reports and download application form from SMCAGJ or San Mateo County Court websites.  
[http://www.sanmateocourt.org/court\\_divisions/grand\\_jury/](http://www.sanmateocourt.org/court_divisions/grand_jury/)
- Have questions answered and learn what it is **really** like from a recent former grand juror living in your area.
  - Email [grandjury@sanmateocourt.org](mailto:grandjury@sanmateocourt.org) or
  - Call 650-261-5066 to be put in contact with someone from our volunteer network.