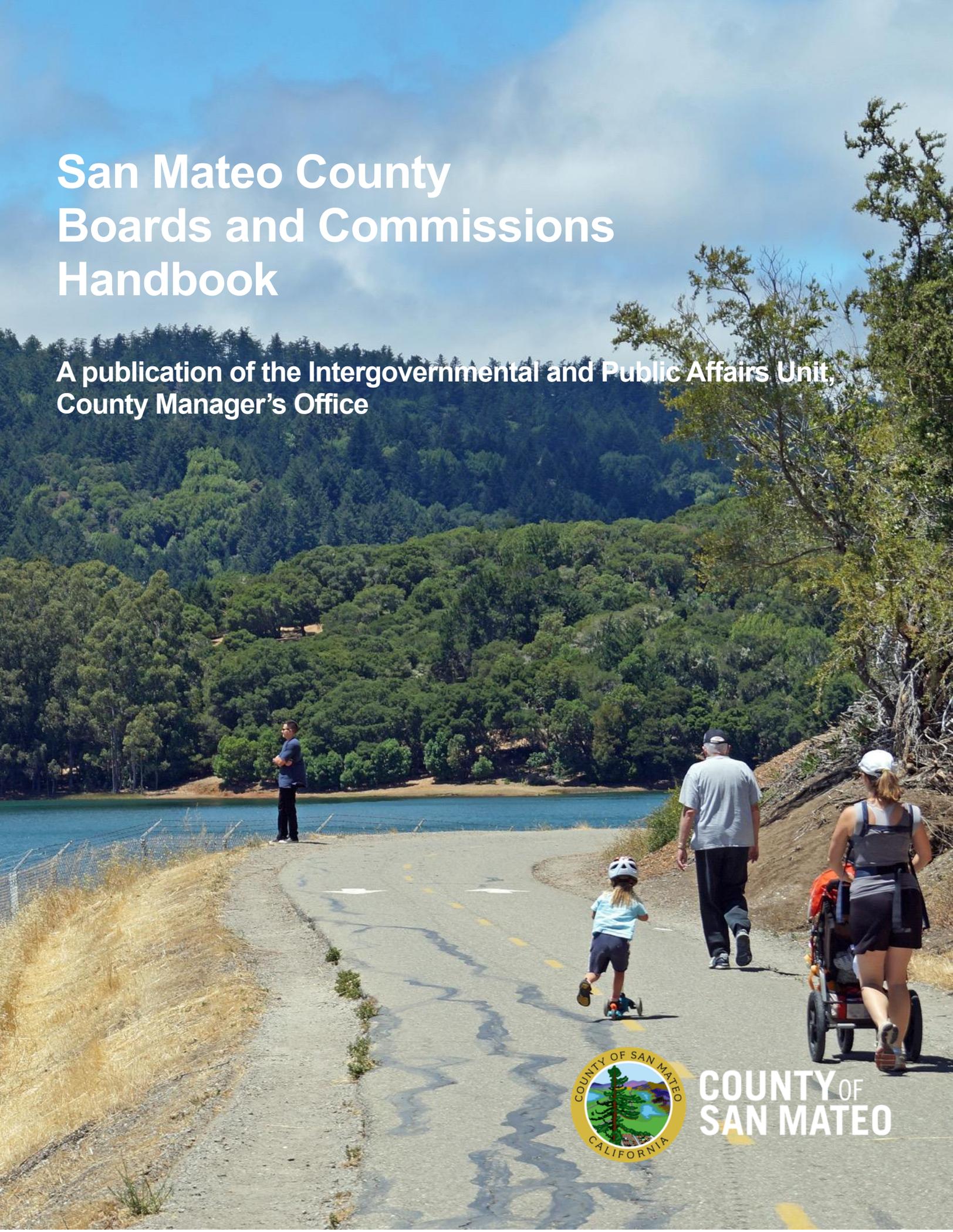


# San Mateo County Boards and Commissions Handbook

A publication of the Intergovernmental and Public Affairs Unit,  
County Manager's Office



**COUNTY OF  
SAN MATEO**



**San Mateo County government protects and enhances the health, safety, welfare, and natural resources of the community; and provides quality services that benefit and enrich the lives of the people of this community.**

SAN MATEO COUNTY MISSION STATEMENT

**We are committed to:**

The highest standards of public service;

A common vision of responsiveness;

The highest standards of ethical conduct;

Treating people with respect and dignity.

# A Message from the Board of Supervisors

People often ask me how they can become more involved in their local government. The first answer I offer is to simply stay aware of what is going on, starting with those topics that are specifically interesting or important to you. This might spark a desire to have more of a say in decision-making. That's when becoming a member of a Board or Commission can energize your civic involvement engine. I encourage this as either a one-time or a lifetime engagement. You never know. It might make you want to dive deeply into how the wheels of governance work. San Mateo County is a welcoming organization, with many doors for you to enter. Not only that, we do our best to help you understand how to best use your time and talents. You don't have to be shy about getting involved. Go for it. You might just find yourself leading your fellow San Mateo County residents into the future. Those of us on the Board of Supervisors cherish the input and guidance coming from the many board and commission members representing the varied array of topics that make up the county's jurisdiction. Don't hesitate to join in. You'll be glad you did.

President Don Horsley  
District 3



**"You don't have to be shy about getting involved. Go for it. You might just find yourself leading your fellow San Mateo County residents into the future."**

DON HORSLEY, PRESIDENT  
DISTRICT 3

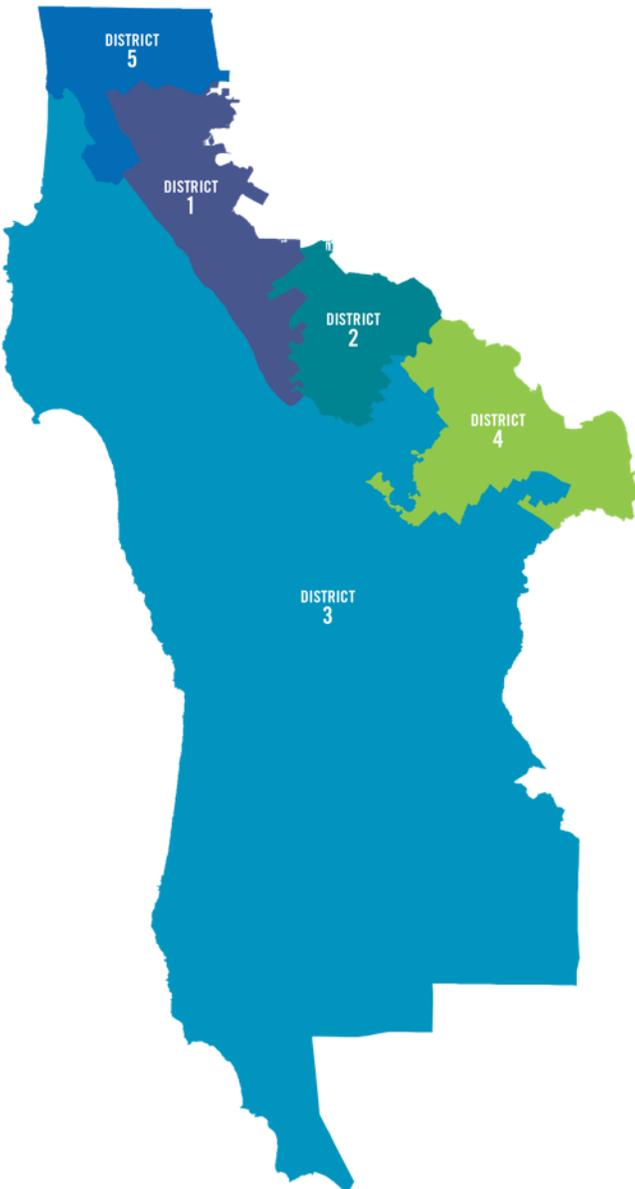
# San Mateo County Board of Supervisors

San Mateo County is governed by a five-member Board of Supervisors. Each supervisor must live in and represent one of five districts, which are roughly equal in population but vary greatly in size.

Supervisors are elected by voters within their districts to staggered four-year terms with a maximum of three terms in office. They appoint the County Manager to carry out the Board's policies and goals and oversee the efficient running of County government.

Voters also elect six additional San Mateo County officials. They are the Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder, District Attorney, Controller, Coroner, Sheriff, and Treasurer-Tax Collector.

The Superior Court appoints the Chief Probation Officer and the Superior Court Executive Officer.



## Dave Pine, 1st District

Cities of Burlingame, Hillsborough, Millbrae, San Bruno (everything east of Interstate 280 and areas west of 280 and south of Sneath Lane), and South San Francisco (east of Junipero Serra Boulevard and south of Hickey and Hillside Boulevards). Unincorporated Burlingame Hills, San Mateo Highlands, and San Francisco International Airport.



## Carole Groom, 2nd District

Cities of San Mateo, Foster City, and most of Belmont (excluding southeast portion).



## Don Horsley, 3rd District

Cities of Atherton, southeast Belmont, Half Moon Bay, part of Menlo Park (west of El Camino Real), Pacifica, Portola Valley, San Carlos, and Woodside. Unincorporated Devonshire Canyon, El Granada, Emerald Lake Hills, Harbor Industrial Park, La Honda, Ladera, Loma Mar, Los Trancos Woods, Menlo Oaks, Miramar, Montara, Moss Beach, Palomar Park, Pescadero, Princeton By-The-Sea, San Gregorio, Skyline, Sequoia Tract, Skylonda, Stanford Lands, Vista Verde, and West Menlo Park.



## Warren Slocum, 4th District

Cities of East Palo Alto, part of Menlo Park (east of El Camino Real), and Redwood City. Unincorporated North Fair Oaks.



## David J. Canepa, 5th District

Cities of Brisbane, Colma, Daly City, San Bruno (north of Sneath Lane and west of Interstate 280), and South San Francisco (east of Junipero Serra Boulevard and north of Hickey and Hillside boulevards). Unincorporated Broadmoor Village.

# A Message from the County Manager

Dear Board, Commission & Committee Member,

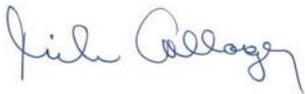
Congratulations on joining the County of San Mateo. A democratic system requires participation to provide local government by the people and for the people. As a Board and Commission member, you serve a critical role in direct civic life and I hope you will find it rewarding.

San Mateo County is diverse and rich with residents who represent a wide range of races/ethnicities, cultures, sexual orientations, gender expressions, immigration statuses, abilities, and more. Our boards, commissions and committees provide a formal structure for inclusion of community voice in our democratic decision-making. Your unique perspective will help our Board of Supervisors and other policy makers better engage with our community, so that governance is informed and responsive to the needs of all our communities.

This handbook aims to guide you through your service, outlining key responsibilities, basic laws, and procedures, and additional information that will aid you in carrying out your duties. Please use it as a resource as well as relying on staff assigned to your board, commission, or committee.

Public service is a noble and exciting journey that makes a real difference. Thank you for giving of your time, experiences, and talents to our County.

All the best,



Mike Callagy  
County Manager/Clerk of the Board

**The San Mateo County  
Boards, Commissions, and  
Committees' mission is to  
advise governmental  
bodies in their decision-  
making process through  
direct citizen participation.**

SAN MATEO COUNTY BOARDS AND  
COMMISSION'S MISSION

# Shared Vision 2025

Shared Vision 2025 reflects the goals and priorities for the San Mateo County community expressed during a series of public meetings and surveys. The five "community outcomes" provide a foundation for sound decision-making. Focusing on the Shared Vision 2025 goals and priorities places an emphasis on what's best for all of San Mateo County today and in the years to come.

## The five community outcomes are



### Healthy Community

Our neighborhoods are safe and provide residents with access to quality health care and seamless services.



### Prosperous Community

Our economic strategy fosters innovation in all sectors, creates jobs, builds community and educational opportunities for all residents.



### Livable Community

Our growth occurs near transit, promotes affordable, livable connected communities.



### Environmentally Conscious Community

Our natural resources are preserved through environmental stewardship, reducing our carbon emissions, and using energy, water and land more efficiently.



### Collaborative Community

Our leaders forge partnerships, promote regional solutions, with informed and engaged residents, and approach issues with fiscal accountability and concern for future impacts.

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# List of San Mateo County Boards and Commissions

Advisory Boards and Commissions are those that provide recommendations or advice to the Board of Supervisors on a wide variety of topics.

## Advisory Boards and Commissions:

Agricultural Advisory Committee	Housing and Community Development Committee
Arts Commission	Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council
Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee	Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention Commission
Charter Review Committee	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) Commission
Child Abuse Prevention Council	Measure K Oversight Committee
Child Care Partnership Council	Mental Health and Substance Abuse Recovery Commission
Commission on Aging	Midcoast Community Council
Commission on Disabilities	North Fair Oaks Community Council
Commission on the Status of Women	Parks and Recreation Commission
Community Corrections Partnership Council	Pescadero Municipal Advisory Council
Confined Animal Technical Advisory Committee	Public Authority Advisory Committee
Domestic Violence Council	Veterans Commission
Emergency Medical Care Committee	Youth Commission
Health Care for the Homeless/ Farm Workers Health Program	

Non-Advisory Boards and Commissions, also known as decision-making groups, are those that are authorized to make final County decisions, can compel a County decision, can prevent a County decision, or make substantive recommendations that are regularly approved without significant modification by the Board of Supervisors.

## Non-Advisory (Decision-Making) Boards and Commissions:

Assessment Appeals Board	Deferred Compensation Committee
Bayside Design Review Committee	First 5 Commission
Board of Building Permit Appeals	Planning Commission
Business License Board	San Mateo Medical Center Board of Directors
Civil Service Commission	Treasury Oversight Committee
Coastside Design Review Committee	

Throughout this document, Boards, Commissions, Committees and Councils will be referred to as “Boards and Commissions.”

# Boards and Commissions: The Basics

Boards and Commissions are groups of local residents who address a specific area of interest with the expertise and lived experience they possess. Boards and Commissions serve a vital role in County government by gathering and analyzing public input and recommending options to the Board of Supervisors. The guiding principle of any commission recommendation to the Board of Supervisors is that of addressing the overall public benefit.

Some Boards and Commissions are mandated by State statute, some by County Charter or ordinance. These boards and commissions vary in legal status; some have advisory capacity, and some make legally binding decisions. While some advisory groups provide advice directly to the Board of Supervisors, others advise County departments.

Boards and Commissions do not make policy decisions, manage or direct programs, commit County resources, or take an official position that has not been approved by the Board of Supervisors

## Requirements for Service



Living in San Mateo County is the sole requirement for service on most County Boards and Commissions, but certain Boards and Commissions may have additional requirements.

County employees are permitted to serve provided there is no conflict of interest.

Once appointed, no member may serve on more than one Board or Commission at a time unless granted an exception by the Board of Supervisors. This is to ensure broad participation. However, some Board or Commission members may serve as a liaison to Boards and Commissions related to their own. For instance, a member of the Commission on Aging serves as a liaison with the Community Development Committee.

# Recruitment and Appointment Procedures

The Board of Supervisors appoints and reappoints most members of Boards and Commissions that advise the Board.



**In most cases, a subcommittee of the Board consisting of one or two Supervisors will review applications and interview applicants.** However, the subcommittee may designate other appropriate persons to review applications, conduct interviews and make recommendations to the subcommittee. The subcommittee's recommendations are then forwarded to the full Board of Supervisors for consideration.



**In some cases, membership on Boards or Commissions is limited to one (or two) representative(s) from each of the five supervisorial districts.** This is the case for the Planning Commission, the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Arts Commission, the Measure K Oversight Committee and the Civil Service Commission. Membership on other boards and commissions may be further limited to individuals with specific qualifications related to experience or employment relevant to the board or commissions focus.



**Vacancies occur year-round.** To help spread the word about vacancies, news releases citing openings are provided to local newspapers and are sent to various community groups. Notices are also posted on the County's web site and public bulletin boards at 400 County Center, Redwood City. You can sign up to receive notices of vacancies at [bnc.smc.gov.org/vacancies](https://bnc.smc.gov.org/vacancies).



**Boards and Commissions require an application that will be listed with the recruitment.** Many utilize the application found at <https://bnc.smcgov.org/webforms/application-boards-commissions-and-committees>. Applications for membership are retained for twelve months in the case of another vacancy



**The Board of Supervisors has the discretion to remove an appointee,** unless the appointee's term is specified by law.

## Length of Service

A typical term is three or four years and is specified in the bylaws for that board, commission, or committee. Members may serve no more than 12 years unless a specific exemption is made by the Board of Supervisors or state law. Members may fill a partial term and then go on to fill their own 12-year term without counting the partial term towards the 12-year total.

Members whose terms have expired may continue to serve until they are re-appointed or the Board of Supervisors appoints a replacement. If a member seeks re-appointment, the normal interview process will take place only at the request of a Supervisor. Re-appointment does not require the member to submit another application.

## Standing Rules

The Board of Supervisors has adopted a resolution describing the standing rules for County Boards, Commissions and Advisory committees. To view the standing rules, go to:  
[bnc.smcgov.org/sites/bnc.smcgov.org/files/Standing%20Rules\\_0.pdf](http://bnc.smcgov.org/sites/bnc.smcgov.org/files/Standing%20Rules_0.pdf).

## Bylaws

Board and Commission bylaws are developed by each body. The bylaws provide guidelines about such essential organizational matters as the number of seats on the body, number of body meetings, requirements for a quorum, qualifications and/or residency requirements for specific seats, methods of selecting officers, designation of any sub-committees (and their responsibilities). Bylaws should be understood and carefully observed by members of Boards and Commissions and their staff liaisons. Board and Commission members and their staff liaisons should contact the County Counsel's Office whenever organizational changes are considered by Board or Commission that could require amendments to its bylaws.

## Relationship with the Board of Supervisors

There are multiple ways for Boards and Commissions to communicate with the Board of Supervisors. Boards and Commissions can go before the Board of Supervisors at their bi-monthly, public meetings to present informational materials or to recommend that the Board take a formal action. Board and Commission members must work through their Board liaison when business needs to be conveyed to the Board.

More informally, each member of the Board of Supervisors typically has a Board aide assigned to work with Boards and Commissions and this is most often the person with whom to speak. This person often attends Board or Commission meetings and will keep the Board member informed on commission business. The Board of Supervisors is always interested in facilitating the work of your commission and will welcome any suggestions you have.

Board and Commission members are encouraged to become acquainted with their staff liaisons and Board aides. The Board of Supervisors members value the information that alerts them to upcoming issues and concerns because the sooner they know of an issue, the more capably they will be able to address it.

## More Information

The primary sources of information for open recruitments are the Boards and Commissions' website and the staff liaison for each Board or Commission. The liaison's name and contact information are listed under the "Contact" section for each Board and Commission at [bnc.smcgov.org](http://bnc.smcgov.org). San Mateo County has a number of resources where residents can learn more about the County, its role, the operations of County government and the community's priorities.

- San Mateo County Shared Vision 2025 ([bos.smcgov.org/shared-vision-2025](http://bos.smcgov.org/shared-vision-2025))
- Office of the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors ([cmo.smcgov.org/clerk-board](http://cmo.smcgov.org/clerk-board))
- Boards and Commissions ([bnc.smcgov.org](http://bnc.smcgov.org))
- Civics 101 ([cmo.smcgov.org/civics-101-academy](http://cmo.smcgov.org/civics-101-academy))

# Roles and Responsibilities

Board members and commissioners are deeply appreciated for the time and expertise they bring to the County. Accompanying the benefits of membership are responsibilities. The following traits are valuable for participation on Boards and Commissions:

**Service-oriented**

**Enjoys working for the greater public**

**Has an active interest and involvement in the community**

**Able to consider differing perspectives and look for common ground**

**An effective communicator**

**Has an interest in learning the functions and workings of county government**

**Is willing and able to commit the time needed to serve effectively and agrees to regularly attend meetings**

**Brings unique lived experiences and expertise**

**Represents impacted community voices to bring a critical perspective to County governance**

## The Benefits of Membership

The benefits of service on a Board or Commission include:

- Making a positive difference in the community
- Developing and enhancing leadership capabilities
- Having a voice in decisions that affect the community
- Expanding networks
- Learning new skills
- Better understanding the operations of government



The individuals who serve on San Mateo County Boards and Commissions are among the most appreciated volunteers in the community.

## The Responsibilities of Membership

Board and Commission members perform a variety of tasks and are responsible for staying informed, complying with established policies and regulations and providing high-quality service to County government and the greater community.

**Some of the duties you will be expected to perform as a member of a Board or Commission are included below. Trainings on a number of topics listed will be provided to you.**

- Attending meetings regularly
- Learning the function of the Board or Commission on which you serve, and working collaboratively with board and staff liaisons
- Familiarizing yourself and ensuring compliance with regulatory statutes such as the Brown Act and the Public Records Act
- Acting responsibly and efficiently when using County assets, including personnel, time, property, equipment and funds
- Maintaining the highest ethical standards
- Respecting the voice and spirit of your Board or Commission peers and the community you serve
- Developing a deeper bond or relationship with your community
- Being an active member of a collaborative effort to serve the community good
- Advancing the goals of the Board or Commission
- Bringing an equity lens into the makeup, priorities and recommendations of the Board or Commission

# Frequently Asked Questions

**Q What is the time commitment to serve on a Board or Commission?**

**A** Some Boards and Commissions require more time than others. In general, the bodies meet approximately two hours per month. In addition, members may participate in meetings of committees, sub-committees or ad hoc committees, for which time commitments vary. Board and Commission member time commitments include: preparation for the meeting, meeting attendance, participation in training sessions, ethics training as determined by law, and possible attendance at some Board of Supervisors' meetings and Board of Supervisors' committee meetings.

**Q What are the attendance requirements and who should I call if I am unable to attend a meeting?**

**A** By ordinance, most Boards and Commissions require that a vacancy shall be declared if a member misses three consecutive meetings or workshops. It is required that you call the staff liaison or the Board or Commission Chairperson if you cannot attend and explain the reason. It is the responsibility of the staff liaison to poll the Board or Commission membership by telephone or electronic mail one or two days before the meeting to determine the presence of a quorum for regular business meetings. If the staff's office

has information that a quorum will not be present, they will, with the consent of the Chairperson, cancel the meeting and notify the membership.

**Q What training is provided for Board and Commission members?**

**A** The County Manager's Office provides training sessions to current and newly appointed Board and Commission members. Trainings help explain members' roles and responsibilities, introduce members to County government operations and personnel, provide basic skills for meeting facilitation and leadership, and other skills or needs as needed

The County Counsel's Office also provides training on certain matters, such as Ethics and the Brown Act.

Further, individual Boards and Commissions may provide additional training specific to their subject matter or operating procedures.

**Q Are Board or Commission members compensated?**

**A** Board or Commission members generally serve without compensation, unless otherwise specified by law or by action of the Board of Supervisors.

**Q What is the process for resignation from a Board or Commission?**

**A** Send a letter of resignation to your staff liaison. You may be required to refile a Form 700 depending on the Board or Commission on which you served.

# You've Been Appointed, Now What?

## Meeting Basics

As a new member of a San Mateo County Board or Commission, you have a responsibility to prepare for the meetings you attend and contribute to their productivity. The following information is intended to help you in your new role. Boards and Commissions are asked to follow guidelines for meeting procedures, such as Rosenberg's Rules of Order, as they are conducting their business.



## What Are Rosenberg's Rules of Order?

"Rosenberg's Rules of Order" are a simplified version of the better-known *Robert's Rules of Order*. "Rosenberg's Rules of Order" were written to cover the rules of procedure for meetings in state and local government and are supported by the following four principles:

### 1. Rules should establish order.

The first purpose of the rules of procedure is to establish a framework for the orderly conduct of meetings.

### 2. Rules should be clear.

Simple rules lead to wider understanding and participation. Complex rules create two classes: those who understand and participate and those who do not fully understand and do not fully participate.

### 3. Rules should be user-friendly.

That is, the rules must be simple enough that members feel they are able to fully participate in the process.

### 4. Rules should enforce the will of the majority while protecting the rights of the minority.

The ultimate purpose of the rules of procedure is to encourage discussion and to facilitate decision-making by the body. In a democracy, the majority rules. The rules must enable the majority to express itself and fashion a result, while permitting the minority to also express itself (but not dominate) and fully participate in the process.

A link to Rosenberg's Rules of Order can be found here: <https://www.calcities.org/detail-pages/resource/rosenberg's-rules-of-order-simple-rules-of-parliamentary-procedure-for-the-21st-century>.



## The Role of the Chairperson

While all members of the Board or Commission should know and understand the rules of procedure, it is the chairperson (chair) who is charged with applying the rules of conduct. The chair should be well-versed in those rules, because the chair, for all intents and purposes, makes the final ruling on the rules. In fact, all decisions by the chair regarding the rules of procedure during meetings are final unless overruled by the governing body itself. The staff liaison is present to support the chair as needed.

Because the chair conducts the meeting, strong and fair facilitation that thoughtfully draws out all member expertise is important. Best practice is for the chair to contribute to the debate or discussion after other members have had a turn. It is helpful for the chair to clearly state the purpose of the discussion as it begins and to summarize the discussion as it ends.

Decisions begin with motions to call a vote. The chair should not normally make or second a motion. When the timing is right, the chair can “call for the motion”, that is, invite members to make and second motions, then call for a vote. More on motions and votes follows on the next pages.

# The Basic Format for an Agenda Action Item Discussion

Board and Commission meetings are required by law to have a written and published agenda. The meeting is governed by the agenda and the agenda constitutes the body's agreed-upon road map for the session. The purpose of the agenda, in addition to providing structure and order for the meeting, is to ensure that the business of the public is conducted in public following consistent rules.

The chair should follow this basic format.



1

**The chair should clearly announce the agenda item number and should state the subject.**

The chair should describe the format that will be followed.

**The chair should invite the appropriate people to report on the item, including any recommendation they might have.**

The appropriate person may be the chair, a member of the governing body, a staff person, or any other person charged with providing information about the agenda item.

2

**The chair should ask members of the body if they have any technical/clarification questions.**

At this point, members of the governing body may ask questions of the people who reported on the item, who should then be given time to respond.

3

4

**The chair should then invite public comments or, if appropriate at a formal meeting, open the meeting to public input.**

If numerous members of the public indicate a desire to speak to the subject, the chair may limit the time of each public speaker. At the conclusion of the public comments, the chair should announce that public input has concluded (or that the public hearing, as the case may be, is closed).

5

**The chair should invite a motion from the governing body members.**

The chair should announce the name of the member who makes the motion.

**The chair should determine if any member of the body wishes to second the motion.**

The chair should announce the name of the member who seconds the motion. It is normally good practice for a motion to require a second before proceeding with it, to ensure that it is not just one member of the body who is interested in a particular approach. However, a second is not an absolute requirement, and the chair can proceed with consideration and a vote on the motion even when there is no second. This is a matter left to the discretion of the chair.

6

**7 If the motion is made and seconded, the chair should make sure everyone understands the motion.**

This is done in one of three ways:

1. The chair can ask the maker of the motion to repeat it;
2. The chair can repeat the motion; or
3. The chair can ask the secretary or the clerk of the body to repeat the motion.

**8 The chair should next invite discussion of the motion by the members of the body.**

If there is no desired discussion or the discussion has ended, the chair should announce that the body will vote on the motion. If there has been no discussion or a very brief discussion, the vote should proceed immediately, and there is no need to repeat the motion. If there has been substantial discussion, it is normally best to make sure everyone understands the motion by repeating it.

8

9

**The chair calls for a vote. Simply asking for the "ayes" and then the "nays" is normally sufficient.**

If members of the body do not vote, then they "abstain." Unless the rules of the body provide otherwise or unless a super-majority is required (as delineated later in these rules), a simple majority determines whether the motion passes or is defeated. In the event the meeting is taking place remotely, all votes must be conducted by "roll call" with each member and their vote identified individually.

**10 The chair should announce the result of the vote and should announce what action (if any) the body has taken.**

In announcing the result, the chair should indicate the names of the members, if any, who voted in the minority on the motion. This announcement might take the following form: "The motion passes by a vote of 3-2, with Smith and Jones dissenting. We have passed the motion requiring a 10-day notice for all future meetings of this governing body."

10



## Motions

Motions are the vehicles for decision-making. It is usually best to have a motion before the body prior to discussing an agenda item, to help everyone focus on the topic before them.

### Motions are made in two steps.

- 1 **The chair** recognizes the member.
- 2 **The member** makes a motion by using the words: "I move..."

### The chair usually initiates the motion by:

1. Inviting the members to make a motion: "A motion at this time would be in order."
2. Suggesting language for the motion: "A motion would be in order that we give a 10-day notice in the future for all our meetings."
3. Making the motion – only if other members have not done so.

As noted, the chair has every right as a member of the body to make a motion, but normally should do so only if the chair wishes a motion to be made but no other member seems willing to do so.

## Courtesy and Decorum

The rules of order are meant to create and maintain an atmosphere where the members of the body and the public can attend to business efficiently, fairly and with full participation. And at the same time, it is up to the chair and the members of the body to maintain common courtesy and decorum. It is best for only one person at a time to have the floor, and it is always best for every speaker to be first recognized by the chair before proceeding to speak.

The chair should endeavor to ensure that debate and discussion of an agenda item focus on the item or the policy in question. The chair has the right to cut off discussion that is not related to the item before the body, or that is threatening.

Debate and discussion should be focused, but free and open. In the interest of time, the chair may, however, limit the time allotted to speakers, including members of the body.



## Special Notes about Public Input

The rules outlined here help make meetings understandable and accessible. But in addition, and particularly for the chair, it is wise to remember three special rules that apply to each agenda item:

**Rule One:** Tell the public what the body (Board or Commission) will be doing (such as receiving information, discussing, taking action).

**Rule Two:** Keep the public informed while the body is doing it.

**Rule Three:** When the body has acted, tell the public what the body did.

Public input is essential to a healthy democracy, and community participation in public meetings is an important element of that input. The challenge for anyone chairing a public meeting is to accommodate public input in a meaningful, timely and time-sensitive way, while maintaining steady progress through the agenda items. The rules presented here for conducting a meeting are offered as tools for effective leadership and as a means of developing sound public policy.

## Tips for Conducting Effective Meetings

Members of San Mateo County Boards, Commissions and Advisory Committees have a responsibility for the content and productivity of the meetings they hold. Members should come prepared to take ownership for their contribution to the end result of the meeting. Meetings do matter.

**Here are some ways in which member groups produce a product and make a contribution:**



All participants arrive on time and prepared



There are clear ground rules/group agreements that all agree to honor



Agenda is written and shared



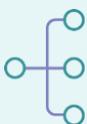
Physical environment is comfortable and seating assigned – members are identified by name placards/tents



Meetings start and end on the times agreed on by the group



All participants contribute



Process advances smoothly and remains focused



Outcome is clear to all



Work to be accomplished is defined



Laughter and fun are encouraged

# Ground Rules

Every group should establish some basic agreements on how meetings will run, how members will interact and what kind of behavior is encouraged to support the work of the group. Because each group member is an individual, each has a different way of accomplishing tasks. At times these different approaches can cause friction between members and slow down the process of the group as a whole. For this reason, the following agreements, if adopted by the group, can be very helpful in supporting positive, productive meetings.

Each group member is expected to respect these agreements, which usually prevent misunderstandings and disagreements. Three to five agreements are sufficient for most groups.

## Some of the most frequently used agreements include



### Attendance

Groups should place a high priority on attendance at meetings. Talk about what would be legitimate reasons for missing a meeting, and establish a procedure for informing the group leader of a member's absence from a scheduled meeting.



### Promptness

Meetings should start and end on time.



### Participation

Everyone's viewpoint is valuable. Every member can make a unique contribution; therefore, emphasize the importance of both speaking respectfully to a topic and listening attentively.



### Basic conversational courtesies

Listen attentively and respectfully to others, do not interrupt, limit the group to one conversation at a time.



### Breaks

Decide whether there will be breaks, when and for how long.



### Agendas, minutes, and records

Decide how the group will handle these requirements.

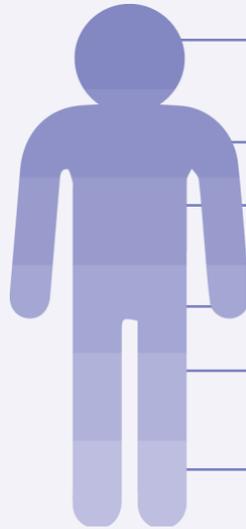
## Group Roles

All members make a unique contribution with their presence and participation, but some members may assume additional roles within the group. Each role has guidelines that help ensure success.

**The following are general guidelines that may vary with the requirements or needs of each group.**

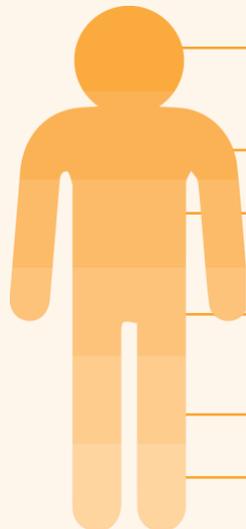
### Chair

As group leader, the chair is responsible for following established directions and goals, and if needed, suggesting updates or modifications to the directions and goals.



- Provides** an inclusive, supportive environment for group members.
- Coordinates** activities of sub-committees.
- Ensures** that agendas are developed, shared with the group and modified as needed.
- Sets** the tone and pace for the group.
- May share** the role of meeting preparation with the staff liaison.
- Usually represents** the group in other settings.

### Group Member



- Arranges** adequate time to carry out responsibilities as a group member.
- Comes** to meetings prepared and engaged.
- Listens** to other group members and follows the agreements of the group.
- Participates** in group discussion and decision-making.
- Helps** to keep the group on track with the process.
- Serves** on appropriate sub-committees

## Assessing the Effectiveness of Meetings

All group members should take responsibility for assessing the effectiveness of meetings and making suggestions for improvement as needed.

The following checklist is helpful for completing that assessment:

- Was the purpose of the meeting clearly stated and understood?
- Did people understand their roles?
- Was the established process followed?
- Was the agenda followed?
- Did all members contribute?
- Were visual aids or written materials used effectively?
- Was the time well spent?
- Was consensus encouraged and, if so, reached?
- If the group could not reach consensus on a topic, was a back-up plan in place?
- How were participants with divergent viewpoints handled?
- Was there a clear understanding of the next steps following each discussion? (Who will do what when?)
- Was there an opportunity for member feedback about the meeting?

What worked?

What didn't?

What needs improvement?

What would you have changed?

## Agenda Development

To develop an agenda for a meeting, the chairperson works with the staff liaison to coordinate the meeting agenda; however, the method by which the agenda is developed varies according to the procedures of the individual Boards and Commissions. In addition, some Boards and Commissions may propose items for the next agenda before they close the current meeting. Some develop the agenda through an executive committee or with department staff. Any Board or Commission member can request that an item be placed on the agenda.



### Upload

The draft agenda and supplemental documents are uploaded to the Board or Commission website prior to the meeting pursuant with the Ralph M. Brown Act. The purpose of the Brown Act is to facilitate public participation in local government decisions and to curb misuse of the democratic process by secret legislation by public bodies. Boards and Commissions exist to aid in the conduct of the people's business, and the meetings must be open to the public.



### Post

The agenda must be posted in an area that is accessible to the public at least 72 hours before the meeting and must include all items which will be discussed or acted upon by the Board or Commission.



### Include

The Board or Commission cannot take action on any item not included on the agenda. The agenda must include time for any member of the public to address the Board or Commission on any item not on the agenda which is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Board or Commission. The agendas will include a statement that such items cannot be acted upon or discussed in depth unless they are included on a subsequent agenda for consideration and possible action.

## Communicating with the Board of Supervisors



It is the Board or Commission responsibility to prepare reports for the Board of Supervisors. The task can be assigned to sub-committees or individual members, who will prepare a draft for review by the full Board or Commission. Once the content is approved by the Board or Commission, the staff liaisons can prepare the final documents and work with the Clerk's Office to add these reports to the Board of Supervisors' meeting agenda.

A member of the Board or Commission should be present at the Board meeting to respond to any questions or concerns the Board may have when the recommendation is considered. Sometimes, the Board will add the item to the consent calendar and approve the recommendation without discussion.

## Roles of County Staff



**Staff Liaisons:** Staff liaisons work for the County Department or Agency that houses the Board or Commission. They are a Board or Commission's biggest resource. These individuals help coordinate Board and Commission activities through providing administrative support, sharing subject-matter expertise and liaising between County staff and the Board or Commission. Staff liaisons work to welcome and train new Board or Commission members, update their websites, spearhead recruitments and much more.



**Board Liaisons:** Board liaisons are staff members for the County Board of Supervisors. They ensure communication between the various Boards and Commissions and our Board of Supervisors. Nearly all Boards and Commissions are assigned to a Supervisor. The Boards and Commissions with Board member assignments are listed on the annual "[Board of Supervisors' Committee Assignments and Responsibilities](#)" memorandum. Board liaisons assist their Board members with application review and the interview process when vacancies arise on Boards and Commissions. They also can act as a conduit of information between their Supervisor and a Board or Commission by attending meetings and building relationships with County staff liaisons and Board and Commission members.



**Clerk of the Board:** The Clerk's Office assists mainly with the vacancy-filling process for Boards and Commissions. The Clerk's Office works to post vacancy notices, prepare Board agendas for appointments and reappointments and importantly, administer the Oath of Office to new Board and Commission members.



**County Counsel:** The County Counsel's Office is staffed with a team of attorneys. Each Board and Commission is assigned to one of these attorneys. Their role is to provide legal support and counsel to our County's Boards and Commissions. Most notably, they help Boards and Commissions maintain compliance with the Brown Act, including by clarifying specific rules and by providing general training.



**Boards and Commissions Coordinator:** The Boards and Commissions Coordinator is located in the County Manager's Office. Their role is to provide general support to all County Boards and Commissions, including both members and staff. They work to provide ongoing training, onboarding, coordination and administrative support.

## Legislation and Lobbying

The County Manager's Office Intergovernmental and Public Affairs (IGPA) Unit develops the County's Legislative Program, which outlines the County's legislative priorities, budgetary priorities and policy statements at the State and Federal level. The Program can be found at <https://cmo.smcgov.org/intergovernmental-and-public-affairs>. The Unit regularly informs the Board of Supervisors about ongoing legislative actions at the State and Federal level through informational items at Board meetings and coordinates County advocacy as directed by the County Legislative Program, the Board of Supervisors and the County Manager.

Boards and Commissions may be interested in legislative activities at the State or Federal levels. If a Board or Commission wishes to advise the Board of Supervisors about taking a position on State or Federal legislation, the Board or Commission must vote to recommend a particular position to the Board of Supervisors. This activity must be communicated with the Intergovernmental and Public Affairs Unit in advance to determine alignment with the County's Legislative Program and through your staff liaison.

Boards and Commissions may obtain information on upcoming legislation by contacting the Intergovernmental Affairs Unit through your staff liaison. The departmental staff working with your commission can also work with IGPA to keep you informed of legislation pertinent to the work of your Board or Commission. State legislative information is available online at: <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/index.html>



### The Oath of Office

A formal Oath of Office is required, as provided in California law, for public officials in California. The Clerk's Office will contact new Board and Commission members to schedule a time for them to take their Oath.

# The Equity Lens

Equity is just and fair inclusion into a society where all can fully participate, prosper and reach their full potential.<sup>1</sup> The County of San Mateo is committed to creating the conditions that allow all to reach their full potential to ensure a person's identity—including race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, immigration status, sexual orientation or expression—does not determine their life outcomes or opportunities. The County is working to educate itself, acknowledge challenges, and build structures and systems to advance equitable policies, practices, and procedures that result in a more just and fair society.



## Role of Boards, Commissions and Advisory Committees in Advancing Equity

Boards and Commissions play an important role in the creation of an equitable community as the formal and permanent infrastructure for community voice in County decision-making. A diverse and representative Board or Commission can identify challenges, opportunities, and recommend solutions based on their unique experiences, perspectives, and expertise that key decision-makers in County governance may not otherwise have access to. A board member or commissioner has the opportunity to bring the voices of our most impacted communities to the table as they advance the goals of the Board or Commission.

When serving on a Board or Commission, members can consider equity in their priorities, decisions, and recommendations by asking key questions such as: Who is at the decision-making table? Whose perspective and interests are represented? What do the various data tell us about the need for the proposed recommendation, specifically considering race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, income, languages spoken, ability, immigration status, age, and neighborhood? What additional data do we need to assess the above? Who would benefit or be burdened by the proposed recommendation? What inequity is being addressed?

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<sup>1</sup> PolicyLink.

## Cultural Humility

San Mateo County is a diverse place. Over sixty percent of the County are people of color from many backgrounds and cultures, speaking different languages, and espousing different political and religious beliefs. The County also has a vibrant LGBTQ+ community and a population of varying educational levels, professions, ages, and more. Given our diversity, it is impossible to be fully competent in all these cultures. For this reason, it is important to approach every individual with an open mind, considerate of the complex multicultural experiences of others.

Cultural Humility, a concept developed in the late 90s by two Bay Area doctors of color, is defined as the ability to maintain an openness in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to another person or group. This requires us to:

**Approach** people with humility and an openness to learn

**Be aware** of unfair or unnecessary power imbalances between people or groups, and work to rebalance power equitably

**Partner** to improve the understanding and power of all cultures, especially those that are not part of the dominant culture.

Members of Boards and Commissions can use a culturally humble approach to engage with other members, the public, and the work of their bodies. Bringing a cultural humility lens to Boards and Commissions increases the chance for everyone to feel respected, heard, and seen. Importantly, cultural humility can help maximize the outcomes of Boards' and Commissions' work by effectively incorporating all culturally identities and learnings.

San Mateo County's Chief Equity Officer, Shireen Malekafzali is available to answer your questions and provide additional information related to equity, and can be reached at [smalekafzali@smcgov.org](mailto:smalekafzali@smcgov.org)

**The County of San Mateo is committed to fostering an equitable community where all people can fully participate, prosper and reach their full potential. To achieve this, we must all work to create the conditions that ensure a person's identity—including race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, immigration status, sexual orientation or expression—does not determine their life outcomes or opportunities.**

SAN MATEO COUNTY EQUITY STATEMENT

# The Ralph M. Brown Act

Boards and Commissions are subject to certain legal requirements that are based on the public's right to know how decisions are made. These include the Brown Act (open meeting law), and the Public Records Act. If your group would benefit from legal advice about the Brown Act, the Public Records Act, or any other legal issue, the Chair or your groups' staff liaison may contact the County Counsel's Office at (650) 363-4250.

The Brown Act applies to advisory Boards and Commissions created by the Board of Supervisors. All meetings of Boards and Commissions must comply with the notice and agenda requirements of the Brown Act, and all members must adhere to the provisions and requirements of the Brown Act.



## What Is a Meeting?

Per California state law, any congregation of a majority of the members of a Board or Commission at the same time and place to hear, discuss or deliberate on any matter within its jurisdiction is considered a meeting.

*What this means:* A majority of the members of a Board or Commission may not gather (physically or virtually) outside of a properly-noticed public meeting.

## Brown Act Illegal Meetings

A majority of members may not "develop a concurrence as to action" on business through serial meetings, intermediaries, electronic or telephonic communication, or other means of subterfuge.

Caution is warranted to avoid the possibility of creating an illegal meeting when using social media. Recent changes to the Brown Act clarify that a Board member or Commissioner may communicate on social media platforms to answer questions, provide information to the public, or to solicit information from the public regarding a matter within the Board or Commission's jurisdiction. But those communications are only allowed if Board members or Commissioners do not use social media to discuss official business among themselves. "Discuss among themselves" means making posts, commenting, and even using digital icons that express reactions to communications (i.e., emojis) made by other Board members or Commissioner.

## What Is Not a Meeting?

- Individual contacts between a board member and non-board members. However, beware of intermediaries or serial meetings. This can occur when a non-board member contacts several board members and communicates the position, thoughts or reactions of one board member to the others.
- Communications or discussions between members of the board that do not make up a majority of the board. For example, if a board consists of five members, two of the members can communicate outside of the public meeting. However, if either of those members then communicates with a third member on the same topic and shares the position, thoughts or reactions of the other board member, that could constitute a discussion by the majority of the board and may violate the Brown Act.
- Majority of board at conferences that are open to public (as long as majority does not discuss board business).
- Majority of board at social or ceremonial occasions (as long as majority does not discuss board business).
- Majority of board at a public meeting on topic of local community concern.

## Agenda Requirements

**Subject to rare exceptions, every meeting of a Board or Commission must be preceded by a posted agenda that advises the public of the meeting and the matters that will be transacted or discussed.**



Regular meeting—  
Agenda posted  
72 hours in advance.

Special meeting—  
Agenda posted  
24 hours in advance.



Limited exceptions where  
business not on the agenda  
may be transacted. (See below)

Must contain a brief description  
of every item to be discussed.

Closed session items  
must be listed (refer to section on  
“Permissible Closed Meetings”).

Must include time for  
public comment.



There will be no  
consideration of matters not properly  
agendized unless:

- A majority vote of the board determines an emergency, as defined in the law, exists.
- A two-thirds vote of the board determines there is a need to take immediate action if the matter came to the agency’s attention after the agenda was posted.

## Rights of the Public

### The public has the following rights:

- Right to attend without identifying oneself.
- Right to record the meeting.
- Right to speak before or during consideration of an item.
- Right to see Board agenda materials.
- Right to say anything, even if unrelated to agency business.

### Under limited circumstances members of Boards and Commissions may speak to an item not on the agenda, including:

- When briefly responding to statements or questions.
- When briefly announcing or reporting on their own activities.
- When clarifying questions asked.
- When referring to staff for information.



## Permissible Closed Meetings

The Brown Act allows Boards and Commissions to meet without public access in certain circumstances, and only following specific procedures. It would be extremely rare for Boards and Commissions to be involved in the types of activities that would justify a closed session. Therefore, we advise that Boards and Commissions check with County Counsel when considering whether to conduct a closed session.

## Standing and Ad Hoc Committees of a Board or Commission

If a Board or Commission wishes to establish a standing or ad hoc committee of certain members, check with County Counsel as to establishing such a subcommittee and the applicability of the Brown Act.

## Violation of the Brown Act

The consequences for violations of the Brown Act include:

- Lawsuit brought by the District Attorney or any interested persons
- Violations may be stopped by civil lawsuit
- Some actions, if not "cured" may be declared void
- Criminal sanctions for intentional violations (up to 6 months in jail/\$1,000 fine)
- Attorney's fees

# Public Records Act

## Principle Behind the Public Records Act

"Implicit in the democratic process is the notion that government should be accountable for its actions. In order to verify accountability, individuals must have access to government files. Such access permits checks against the arbitrary exercise of official power and secrecy in the political process"

*CBS Ins. v Black, (1986) 42 Cal. 3d 646, 651*



## What Is a Public Record?

Records include any writings containing information relating to the conduct of the public's business that are prepared, owned, used, or retained by any state or local agency regardless of physical form or characteristics.

- Board reports and files of boards or commissions are open to the public under Public Records Act.
- Materials distributed to the Board or Commission, except privileged items, are public records and must be made available for inspection and copying "without delay."
- Assume that e-mail and text messages sent among members of the Board or Commission and/or staff are public information. (Don't send anything you don't want to read in the newspaper.)

## Information on a Phone or "Smart Phone"



Information kept on a personal computer or "smart phone" related to government business is subject to disclosure unless exempt. This includes e-mail, text messages and appointment calendars.

Personal information is not subject to disclosure and may be redacted to protect privacy interests.

If the County pays for the device, it is subject to County computer policy. There is no "personal" information on a County computer.

Requests for public records can be made orally or in writing.

Public records shall be open for public inspection.

## What Is Not a Public Record

**There are a wide variety of specific exemptions where records may be withheld and not disclosed to the public. The most often specific exemptions include:**

- Some preliminary drafts that are not retained in the ordinary course of business.
- Legal advice.
- Some private personal information if disclosure would constitute unwarranted invasion of personal privacy (e.g., social security number, medical information, tax information).
- Some law enforcement records.

## Public Records Requests

**If a Board or Commission receives a public records request it should immediately forward the request to County Counsel and work with County Counsel to:**

- Respond to the request in writing within 10 days.
- Assist the member of the public in making a focused and effective request, if the request is unclear.
- Turn over copies of documents within a reasonable time.
- If the public record is in an electronic format, the agency may be required to turn the record over in an electronic format.

**The consequences for failing to turn over public records are serious and may include:**

- Lawsuit
- Paying plaintiff's court costs
- Paying plaintiff's attorney's fees

For further detail, the full text of the Public Records Act, or advice on application in a particular instance, contact:

**San Mateo County Counsel**  
400 County Center, Sixth Floor  
Redwood City, CA 94063  
Phone (650) 363-4250  
[countycounsel.smcgov.org](http://countycounsel.smcgov.org)

# Ethics and Form 700

A key responsibility of Board and Commission membership is maintaining a high standard of ethics. Members are expected to demonstrate the highest degree of principle and integrity.



## Core Concept

An ethics code is a framework for day-to-day actions and decision-making by officeholders and, depending on how the code is written, an entire agency.

## Ethics Code Goals

An agency usually has three ethical goals:



**Encouraging high standards of behavior by public officials**



**Increasing public confidence in the institutions that serve the public**



**Assisting public officials with decision-making.**



## Ethics Training

All members of Boards and Commissions that are paid a stipend for attending meetings and/or are reimbursed any expenses (e.g. parking, attending a conference, mileage etc.) must receive ethics training every two years. All members of such Boards and Commissions must receive the training even if they did not personally receive a stipend or reimbursement. If you are unsure if you need to complete ethics training, please contact staff liaison. Online ethics training is available at the Fair Political Practices Commission website at [fppc.ca.gov](http://fppc.ca.gov),

Ethics training covers topics like:

- Laws relating to personal financial gain by public servants, including laws prohibiting conflicts of interest;
- Laws relating to limits on accepting gifts and travel, use of public resources or gifts of public funds, and mass mailing restrictions;
- Government transparency laws such as financial interest disclosure requirements, the Brown Act and the Public Records Act.

## Conflict of Interest

Under the Political Reform Act, a public official has a disqualifying conflict of interest in a governmental decision if it is foreseeable that the decision will have a financial impact on their personal finances or other financial interests. In such cases, there is a risk of biased decision-making that could sacrifice the public's interest in favor of the official's private financial interests. To avoid actual bias or the appearance of possible improprieties, the public official is prohibited from participating in the decision and may recuse themselves from discussing, hearing or voting on the specific item.

The Political Reform Act defines "public official" broadly, and in the standing rules for Boards and Commissions, the Board of Supervisors has specified that **all members** of Boards and Commissions are subject to its provisions.

All four of the following conditions must be met for a conflict to exist:

- The individual makes, participates in or uses their official position to influence a governmental decision;
- It is foreseeable that the decision will affect the individual's economic interest;
- The effect of the decision on the individual's economic interest is material;
- The effect of the decision on the individual's economic interest is distinguishable from the effect on the general public.

In addition, members of Boards and Commissions that are listed as "designated employees" on the County of San Mateo's Conflict of Interest Code (see below) shall comply with the filing requirements in the Political Reform Act, such as the Form 700 (Statement of Economic Interests form).

## Acknowledgment of Financial Conflict of Interest Laws Form

Members of Boards and Commissions who are not required to file Form 700 are still required by the County to sign the Acknowledgment of Financial Conflict of Interest Laws form. This form serves as acknowledgment to a member of a Board or Commission that financial conflict laws do apply to them and cautions them against participating in decisions where they do have such a conflict.

# Conflict of Interest Frequently Asked Questions

## Q What is the Purpose of Filing a Statement of Economic Interests (Form 700)?

A The purpose of financial disclosure is to alert public officials to personal interests that might be affected while they are performing their official duties, i.e., making government decisions. Disclosure also helps inform the public about potential conflicts of interest. The Statement of Economic Interests (Fair Political Practices Commission Form 700) form must be filed annually, as well as when assuming or leaving office. Filed forms are public documents that must be made available to anyone who requests them. Online forms are available from the Fair Political Practices Commission [here](#).

In San Mateo County, only members on decision-making Boards and Commissions who are "designated employees" on the County's conflict of interest code must file Form 700.

These Boards and Commissions are:

- Assessment Appeals Board
- Board of Building Permit Appeals
- Civil Service Commission
- Design Review Committee
- Treasury Oversight Committee
- Licensing Board
- Parks and Recreation Commission

Planning Commission members are specifically mandated by state law to file Form 700.

The fact that a member of a Board or Commission is not required to file a Form 700, however, does not relieve that member from the obligation to comply with state conflict of interest laws when carrying out their duties. Filing a Form 700 reminds Boards and Commission members that they should be aware of financial conflicts of interest during their tenure.

## Q Where Can I File My Form 700?

A San Mateo County Boards and Commissions members may file their form 700 at:  
County Manager's Office/Clerk of the Board  
400 County Center, 1st floor  
Redwood City, CA 94063  
Phone (650) 363-4123  
Fax (650) 363-1916 | [bnc.smcgov.org](http://bnc.smcgov.org)

Board and Commission liaisons help facilitate this process for members.

## Q When Do I Have to File My Form 700?

- A
- Within 30 days of assuming office.
  - Annually, typically by April 1. Please check with your Board or Commission staff liaison to determine the exact date.
  - Within 30 days of leaving office.

## Q Where Do I Go for Help with My Acknowledgment of Financial Conflict of Interest Laws Form?

A Questions regarding this form should be directed to:

County Manager's Office/Clerk of the Board  
400 County Center, 1st floor  
Redwood City, CA 94063  
Phone (650) 363-4123  
Fax (650) 363-1916 | [bnc.smcgov.org](http://bnc.smcgov.org)

# Conclusion

We hope that you have found this handbook useful. If you have any questions that are not addressed here, please direct your questions to the San Mateo County Manager's Office at (650) 363-4123. Thank you for your service to our County of San Mateo.



[Agricultural Advisory Committee](#)

[Arts Commission](#)

[Assessment Appeals Board](#)

[Bayside Design Review Committee](#)

[Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee](#)

[Board of Building Permit Appeals](#)

[Business License Board](#)

[Charter Review Committee](#)

[Child Abuse Prevention Council](#)

[Child Care Partnership Council](#)

[Civil Service Commission](#)

[Coastside Design Review Committee](#)

[Commission on Aging](#)

[Commission on Disabilities](#)

# San Mateo County Boards and Commissions Handbook

[Commission on the Status of Women](#)

[Community Corrections Partnership Council](#)

[Confined Animal Technical Advisory Committee](#)

[Deferred Compensation Committee](#)

[Domestic Violence Council](#)

[Emergency Medical Care Committee](#)

[First 5 Commission](#)

[Health Care for the Homeless/ Farm Workers Health Program](#)

[Housing and Community Development Committee](#)

[Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council](#)

[Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention Commission](#)

[Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer \(LGBTQ\) Commission](#)

[Measure K Oversight Committee](#)

[Mental Health and Substance Abuse Recovery Commission](#)

[Midcoast Community Council](#)

[North Fair Oaks Community Council](#)

[Parks and Recreation Commission](#)

[Pescadero Municipal Advisory Council](#)

[Planning Commission](#)

[Public Authority Advisory Committee](#)

[San Mateo Medical Center Board of Directors](#)

[Treasury Oversight Committee](#)

[Veterans Commission](#)

[Youth Commission](#)



**COUNTY OF  
SAN MATEO**