CGJA’s 2025 Report Writing Workshops

**Possible Answers to the Tab 2 Exercises**

*There are no “correct” answers to the five exercises in Tab 2 of CGJA’s Report Writing Workshop training manual, but here is what CGJA’s trainers have come up with.*

**Exercise 1. Fact or Finding?**

1. Fact. The sentence does not explicitly criticize the entity or identify a problem or shortcoming. It might imply a problem, but it does not state one.
2. Finding. The sentence identifies a problem in the entity’s operations. The words of judgment are “lack” and “has resulted in allegations of misconduct.” The statement is a conclusion because it links the lack of a policy to a negative result.
3. Fact. This is a neutral statement that states what happened, without any judgment.
4. Finding. The sentence contains a criticism; it identifies a problem. The words of judgment are “unreliable” and “only limited service.” The sentence is a conclusion because it links the problem of unreliable funding to the resulting limitation on services.
5. Finding. The phrase “failed to effectively” is a criticism of the entities’ operations.
6. Fact. The sentence is neutral, describing a situation without judging whether it is good or bad.
7. Finding. The phrase “at increased risk” is judgmental, identifying a problem. “Due to the lack” makes the sentence a conclusion, linking the lack of risk management to an increased risk of fire danger.
8. Fact. The sentence is neutral. It does not indicate if the gaps between the cage bars are a problem.

**Exercise 2.** **Evaluating Findings**

**F1.** The City of Garfield’s Public Works Department is understaffed and totally unable to do their job and get the needed funding for road repairs. To make matters worse, its upper management is not very motivated and the condition of the streets is getting worse each day.

*Evaluation and possible changes:*

Compound, with three issues: the department is understaffed, it is underfunded, and the streets are deteriorating. Break it into separate findings.

Vague as to how much the department is understaffed and as to how much funding is needed.

Sounds sarcastic and belittling (“totally unable to do their job” and “to make matters worse”); remove these phrases.

Don’t characterize someone’s state of mind or get personal (“not very motivated”).

“Getting worse every day” sounds like an exaggeration – delete “every day.”

Due to the tone, this finding is not likely to invite a positive response.

**F2.** In our opinion, the Garfield City Council’s failure to provide an easy way for residents to request street repairs has caused enormous frustration for the people who live in Garfield. Further, the department head doesn’t seem to know how to get this problem fixed.

*Evaluation and possible changes:*

A finding is not an “opinion” (a belief not necessarily based on fact.) Omit the first three words.

“Enormous” sounds like an exaggeration. Remove that word.

The second sentence is unnecessary, might indicate bias, and is likely to make the respondent defensive, which could lead to rejection of the recommendations. Drop the second sentence.

**Exercise 3.** **Writing Effective Findings**

Possible findings:

**F1**. Garfield’s failure to conduct a survey of the condition of its streets resulted in the loss of $300,000 in Jefferson Transportation Agency (JTA) funding in 2022 and again in 2023.

**F2**. The condition of the city’s streets has deteriorated since the city lost the JTA funding.

**F3**. The lack of a formal procedure for responding to residents’ requests for street repairs has resulted in public frustration about the Public Works Department’s lack of responsiveness.

**Exercise 4.** **Evaluating Recommendations**

Example: The Grand Jury recommends that the board proceed with the county General Plan update in a timely and comprehensive manner. The Grand Jury further recommends that the process and progress be carefully monitored by future grand juries to assure individual community plans are properly reflected in the final document.

*Shortcomings:*

The “who” should be clear – the Board of Supervisors.

Provide a specific date for finishing the General Plan update (“timely” is vague).

“Comprehensive” is vague. Delete that word.

The jury can’t recommend that the next grand jury do anything (that jury, an arm of the court, is not within this jury’s jurisdiction).

*Improved Recommendation:*

The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors require the completion of the general plan update, including individual community plans, by March 1, 2027.

**R1**. The Grand Jury wants the Board of Supervisors and LC Smith, the Director of Resource Management, to begin work by September 30 to establish specific timelines for implementation of code enforcement activities.

*Shortcomings:*

The word “wants” is too personal. Use the word in the Penal Code, “recommends,” instead.

Do not include names, only titles.

Use “complete work” rather than “begin work” (the latter doesn’t obligate the board and director to actually complete the timelines, only begin them).

It is unclear if this is a reasonable due date for the corrective action to be completed. It’s six months after the report was released, but just three months after the board is required to respond to the findings and recommendations.

*Improved Recommendation:*

The Grand Jury recommends that by October 15, 2026, the Board of Supervisors instruct the Director of Resource Management to adopt specific guidelines for the implementation of code enforcement activities, to be completed by December 15, 2026.

**R2**. The Board of Supervisors must provide comprehensive Brown Act training to the governing board members and administrators of all independent special districts in the county by November 1, 2026.

*Shortcomings:*

Recommendations are suggestions, not orders; use “should” rather than “must.”

A county board of supervisors has no legal obligation to pay for the training needed by other, independent entities. The jury must direct its recommendations to the “responsible” board or official, per PC §933. Each entity should pay for its own training.

If the grand jury were to recommend that several districts provide training, it would need to investigate each district – it is unclear that the jury did so.

It is questionable whether the jury has given enough time for the district boards to plan, develop, and give the training programs.

*Improved Recommendation:*

The grand jury recommends that the governing boards of the following special districts *(the grand jury should list only those it fully investigated)* should provide Brown Act training to their boards and administrators by December 15, 2026.

**R3.** The grand jury recommends that the Sheriff’s Office execute a contract with a private contractor to install an updated alarm system in the county jail; to be completed by November 30, 2026. This is an urgent problem, so the Board of Supervisors should fund all costs for the project by cutting either welfare entitlements or staff salaries.

*Shortcomings:*

Recommendations are carried out by boards or elected county officials (here, the Sheriff), not an office or entity (“the county” or “the city”). State the board or the elected official’s position when indicating who should take the corrective action.

Whether to have county staff or a contractor do the work is a policy determination; that choice should be left up to the Sheriff or the Board of Supervisors.

Don’t insert judgmental comments like “this is urgent” in a recommendation, although that might be part of a finding.

It is not clear if the time given for implementation is reasonable.

The jury should not recommend that the board transfer money set aside for state welfare payments, because that would violate state law.

The jury should not recommend the board cut employee salaries, because setting salaries is a policy determination, outside the jury’s purview, and salaries are set by way of binding labor agreements.

*Improved Recommendation:*

The Grand Jury recommends that the Sheriff arrange for the installation of an updated alarm system in the county jail, which should be operational by December 30, 2026.

**R4.** The City Building Department Manager should consider instituting a policy whereby the Development Division will take all appropriate action by the end of the fiscal year to significantly shorten the current average of 51 days needed to issue residential building permits, which is too long.

*Shortcomings:*

Avoid using “consider.” It allows the respondent to comply by merely thinking about instituting a policy. Instead, recommend concrete action.

“Appropriate action” and “significantly” are both vague.

A manager is not a mandated respondent, so the jury should also recommend the city council direct the manager to institute the policy. This will ensure that a response will be given.

There is no due date. Allow at least 30 days after the end of the city council’s 90-day response period for the council to give its directive to the manager. This recommendation also needs a reasonable date for the manager’s completion of the corrective action.

How should success be measured? The recommendation can specify a particular percentage or numerical decrease in the time taken to issue permits.

*Improved Recommendation:*

The Grand Jury recommends that by October 15, 2026 the City Council direct the Building Development Manager to reduce the average time for the issuance of residential building permits from 51 days to no more than 28 days; to be completed by June 30, 2027.

**Exercise 5.** **Writing Effective Recommendations**

The Jefferson County Grand Jury recommends that:

R1. The Garfield City Council should require the Director of Public Works to update the paving management plan and submit it with an application for funding to the Jefferson Transportation Agency by the November 1, 2026, deadline. *[This covers both F1 and F2.]*

R2. The Garfield City Council should adopt a formal procedure for the handling of residents’ requests for street repairs by October 15, 2026. *[This covers F3]*

R3. *[No recommendation is needed for F4 because it is a commendation.]*