



Training the Trainers

by Marsha Caranci, Training Committee Chair

On April 28, 29, and 30, CGJA's Training Committee held our annual **New Trainer Orientation**, followed by a **Train-the-Trainer Workshop**. All but one of our 19 veteran trainers and 11 of our 12 new trainers for 2023 attended. The three days of workshops took place in Sacramento.



These workshops are held to introduce the new trainers to our program, review our curriculum for the upcoming training season, and clarify and prepare our best practices answers to the many questions we are asked each year. Our first such meeting was in 2008, so this is a well-established event that we believe has helped make the program stronger every year. We missed meeting in person during the pandemic, so it was great getting together again in Sacramento to get to know each other better and work on improving our skills and knowledge.

[Read more.](#)

Ask the Trainer by Marsha Caranci, CGJA Training Chair



This regular column allows the CGJA training team to share with Journal readers our responses to questions we receive from grand jurors. Please remember: Do not take any response as legal advice and contact your local legal advisors to answer any question that might divulge confidential information.

You can submit your questions to me at cgjatraining@cgja.org. Our response to your edited or redacted question might appear in a future edition of the Journal.

Q. Is it okay to conduct exit interviews via telephone or videoconferencing?

A. Yes. Scheduling exit interviews, which are essential for the purpose of confirming findings before your report is released, can be done efficiently by phone or video conferencing (video is preferred so the parties can see each other and assure that no one else is in the room). This can be important if you need time to correct your report before it's released. [Read more.](#)

Q. One of our draft reports is more than 30 pages long. Will it ever be read? Is there a way to make it more reader friendly?

A. This is a great question. Excessive length will weaken a report's impact. Well-organized succinct reports are more likely to be covered by the media and read by the public. [Read more.](#)

Q. If there are no recommendations resulting from our required inquiry into our local jail, can we just report that we conducted the tour and found no problems?

A. No. While a grand jury is required to "inquire" into the management and condition of public prisons in the county (PC §919(b)), the penal code does not require the grand jury to write a report about that inquiry. In fact, no report is allowed unless a full investigation to verify the information gathered during the tour is conducted. [Read more.](#)

April 2023 Multichapter Meeting



Approximately thirty individuals, representing fourteen chapters, participated in the online multichapter meeting on April 26. [Check out the highlights.](#)

How Does Your County Recruit Grand Jurors?



When it comes time to recruit new grand jurors there are a lot of strategies counties and chapters employ. What works in one county does not necessarily work in all.

El Dorado, Santa Cruz, and Shasta chapter members placed yard signs and banners on busy corners, in neighborhoods, etc. Orange County posts announcements in the regular jury room.

Here is a [link](#) to a list of tactics used by some other counties around the state.



Social Media as a Communication and Recruiting Tool

Most everyone is familiar with *Facebook* and *Instagram*. There is another tool you can use to spread the word about grand jury reports and recruiting for new jurors. It's **Nextdoor**. Here is an easy "[How to](#)" to sign up. Nextdoor may not be in every community, but in many it can be a great way to get the word out.



2023 Annual Conference Program Coming Together

The 2023 Annual Conference will be held **October 22-23, 2023**, at the **Embassy Suites in Walnut Creek, California**. Our theme this year is *Building Bridges with Outreach and Awareness*.

We have secured a speaking commitment from Dan Borenstein, editorial page editor and columnist for the *East Bay Times* and strong grand jury supporter. He will share his thoughts on building grand jury awareness. Ethan Rarick, Executive Director of the *Little Hoover Commission* (as reported earlier) remains as the keynote speaker. His theme will be listed later. [Read more.](#)

<p>Nomination Deadline June 30</p>	<p><i>objective methodology response publicity rationale change clarity accurate fair findings significance discussion</i></p>	<p>CGJA Best Grand Jury Report Award <i>California Grand Jurors' Association</i></p>
--	--	--

<p>CGJA Best Media Coverage Award <i>California Grand Jurors' Association</i></p>		<p>Nomination Deadline June 30</p>
---	--	--

News from Around the State

El Dorado County: CGJA's Newest Chapter

by Tom Murphy, President, El Dorado County Chapter, CGJA



The El Dorado County Chapter is excited to have been accepted as the newest chapter of the California Grand Jurors' Association. Previously El Dorado County had an independent Grand Jury Association that performed similar functions as CGJA. It ceased activity during the height of the pandemic. It had been the county's primary recruitment tool for new jurors.

Thankfully, a small group consisting of both former association members and newer jurors recognized the gap in recruitment efforts, and worked to reestablish an association presence. This time around, the group decided to become a chapter of CGJA. With the support and assistance of CGJA, the El Dorado County Chapter was approved on February 28, 2023. [Read more.](#)



from the San Mateo Chapter

After a three-year hiatus the chapter's scholarship program has been revamped. This year all public high school seniors were eligible to apply for a scholarship. Students must have at least a 2.0 GPA, provide a letter of application which includes background, community service, clubs, offices held, and plans after high school.

Students are directed to the CGJA website where they will find the 4th edition of the book titled *California's Civil Grand Juries – History, Law, How They Operate*. Based on what students have learned from the CGJA website and reading the book they are asked to answer the following questions when writing their 300 minimum word essay

What is the purpose of the civil grand jury system (not to be confused with the criminal grand jury system) in California?

What are its historical origins?

Why do you think the civil grand jury system is important?

This year's recipient of a \$1000 scholarship is Aran O'Sullivan, Carlmont High School, Belmont. Read the essay [here](#).

from the Alameda County Chapter
**In 75 Words: The Urgent Need for Honest,
Unbiased Ballot Language**



by Michael Henn, Implementation Chair, and Janet Clark, President,
Alameda County Chapter

The 2021 Alameda County Civil Grand Jury report, "The Need for Accuracy and Impartiality of Ballot Measure Questions", should be particularly important to all Californians, and we hope that CGJA will support and endorse our good governance efforts. The report showed that partisan ballot wording misleads voters as to what our local ballot measures would do and cost. [**Read more.**](#)

More Celebrating of Grand Juries

We've become aware of three more counties that celebrated Grand Jury Awareness month since the April *Journal*. Sonoma County honored Grand Jury Awareness Month as did El Dorado and Monterey counties.



Sonoma County Supervisor David Rabbitt, presenting the proclamation to Judge Shelly Averill.



READ what good support looks like.

To submit a nomination, see ***Certificate of Special Recognition.***

**from Larry
Herbst**



Once again, as CGJA webmaster, I find myself bringing about a redesign on our website as I did back in 2017. We are in partnership with Elevation Web, a Washington D.C based website design company with nonprofit focus. I anticipate launching the new website sometime in the second half of 2023 and will keep our members updated over the next few months in our CGJA Journal. ***Read more.***

RECENT BOARD ACTIONS

KEEP US POSTED. Send chapter/association news and accomplishments.

Join/Renew your membership

Serve on a committee - fill out our **Volunteer Interest form.**

The mission of the CGJA is to promote, preserve, and support the grand jury system through training, education, and outreach.

STAY CONNECTED



[*Visit our website*](#)

The views expressed in the *Grand Jurors' Journal* are those of the writers unless otherwise stated. The CGJA Board of Directors disclaims any liability arising from errors or omissions. The Editor has the right to accept, edit, or reject submitted articles.
©2023 All rights reserved.

Training the Trainers

This year's summer training season will be getting under way soon and all 31 CGJA trainers will be fanning out all over the state to teach the new grand juries how to best do their job. We expect to train nearly 1200 jurors and alternates this coming year from 55 counties. We also offer five full-day Foreperson and Pro Tem Workshops, nearly 40 full-day Report Writing Workshops, and three Legal Advisor Workshops each year.

Information on all our seminars and workshops may be found on our [website](#), under **Training**.

[Return](#) to *Journal*

Ask the Trainer

Q. Is it okay to conduct exit interviews via telephone or videoconferencing?

A. Yes. Scheduling exit interviews, which are essential for the purpose of confirming findings before your report is released, can be done efficiently by phone or video conferencing (video is preferred so the parties can see each other and assure that no one else is in the room). This can be important if you need time to correct your report before it's released.

All the rules and processes for conducting exit interviews apply whether they are done in person or remotely. Two or more jurors must be present, and confidentiality must be ensured. The interviewee should be admonished at the beginning and end of the interview. A written admonishment can be provided via email.

Schedule the interview with the department or district manager responsible for the function being investigated as soon as the plenary and county counsel have approved the report for release. Read each finding that pertains to the interviewee's function and ask for comments on the accuracy of the finding. Ask the interviewee for suggestions for solving the problems identified in the findings. If they disagree, ask why (then ask follow-up questions that will help you verify your facts).

You may not read or give the interviewee a copy of any other part of the report, including the facts and recommendations. Following the interview, make any needed revisions and resubmit the draft to the plenary and county counsel for final approval before submitting it to the judge.

[Return to Journal](#)

Ask the Trainer

Q. One of our draft reports is more than 30 pages long. Will it ever be read? Is there a way to make it more reader friendly?

A. This is a great question. Excessive length will weaken a report's impact. Well-organized succinct reports are more likely to be covered by the media and read by the public.

One effective way to control report length is to use CGJA's "Report Logic Matrix" (see slide 15 of Tab 7 in your 2022-2023 training manual and page 11 of Tab 3 in your Report Writing Workshop manual). This tool limits report content exclusively to verified facts that lead to findings that in turn lead to recommendations. All else should be deleted. Avoid overkill. Include only the most significant facts needed to make a solid finding. Consider that it may not be necessary to include all potential findings to make strong recommendations. Weak findings and recommendations dilute impact. When deleting weak findings and recommendations, re-check the Discussion section to eliminate any of the information that supported them. Editing with this Report Logic Matrix should result in a well-organized, succinct report that packs a more powerful punch.

Sentence and word length is also important. Shorter is better. In the CGJA Report Writing Workshop manual, we talk about "Readability Statistics" (Page 24-25, Tab 3). Writing with fewer words per sentence and fewer syllables per word is usually clearer. Rewrite long, unwieldy sentences. Find and use shorter words. Change passive sentences to active sentences. As a general rule, CGJA advises writers to avoid using words with four or more syllables. Writers should limit sentences to about 15 to 20 words, 25 to 33 syllables and 75 to 100 characters. These readability statistics are available in most word processing programs.

One other way to avoid overly long reports is to limit endnotes, footnotes, bibliographies, and appendices to only the resources that would be needed by the reader to better understand the report. Grand jury reports are not thesis papers or professional journal articles. They are for local government officials and members of the public to read so they know what an entity could be doing better.

[Return to Journal](#)

Ask the Trainer

Q. If there are no recommendations resulting from our required inquiry into our local jail, can we just report that we conducted the tour and found no problems?

A. No. While a grand jury is required to “inquire” into the management and condition of public prisons in the county (PC §919(b)), the penal code does not require the grand jury to write a report about that inquiry. In fact, no report is allowed unless a full investigation to verify the information gathered during the tour is conducted.

If a jury conducts a jail tour and finds no problems, they would have to further investigate before releasing a report with a finding commending the sheriff’s department for their jail operations because that would be a finding that would need to be based on verified information. CGJA suggests that juries focus their limited time on producing reports that identify and recommend solutions to problems in local government entities.

Jail tours can be listed as activities of the grand jury in the part of a consolidated end-of-term report that does not include actual grand jury reports based on investigations.

[Return to Journal](#)

April 2023 Chapter/Membership Meeting Highlights

CGJA President Gibbons provided an update on CGJA activities.

Two new chapters: San Benito and El Dorado.

Members in two additional counties, Nevada and Los Angeles are applying for chapter status.

Loydyne Lane (Nevada) and Carina Lister (Los Angeles) were present.

Juliana Jones, Public Relations Committee Chair, will be sending an eBlast regarding recruitment activities.

The Santa Cruz yard signs for promoting grand jury recruitment were a hot topic. The chapter's next goal is to put it on city buses.

Sonoma has established a good working relationship with the county communication staff that has led to increased outreach. Also, collecting statistical data to target underrepresented groups and areas.

Sonoma's Letter to the Editor of the local newspaper led to three juror applications.

All chapters agreed that solid relationships with the media can truly make a campaign successful.

Shasta County has developed a recruitment calendar that has been helpful with the tasks involved, as in who does what and when.

Many weighed in on their relationships with the court, many of them quite positive. There were lively contributions concerning the level of support that the court allows the chapters to provide.

Relationships with sitting grand jurors were also discussed, concluding that the foreperson is key.

Some chapters invite sitting grand jury members to attend chapter meetings.

One participant suggested that there be training for new chapters.

Note: There is also much information available for chapters on the CGJA website under [Chapter Resources](#).

The next meeting will likely be in late August. Be there!

[Return](#) to *Journal*

This is what the **Contra Costa** County Chapter reported that it did this year.

- Wrote an Op Ed (sent to the CGJA Journal) for the Bay Area News Group (BANG) papers - both digital and physical
- Placed an ad in the BANG papers
- Put ads in Next Door and other local newsletters
- Sent a full information packet to the League of Women Voters of Diablo Valley. It was publicized in the personal LWVDV President's letter and in the chapter's monthly newsletter
- Several association members spoke at meetings of other organizations, i.e., NAACP, SIRS, etc.
- Made a presentation to the Board of Supervisors when it declared February Grand Jury Awareness Month
- Included recruitment information on our Facebook page
- Worked with the sitting Grand Jury on public awareness
- Presented an applicant orientation session, including what it means to be foreperson
- The court had **70 applicants - a significant increase over last year!**

This is what the **El Dorado** County Chapter did this year.

- Recruitment materials were updated. The recruitment portfolio included: an updated trifold, a "short" recruitment article for newsletters, a 1 page in-depth article, a flyer detailing upcoming public informational meetings, and newly designed colorful yard signs with matching banners.
- Overall, the executed recruitment plan included these steps:
 1. Publishing recruitment articles and our Public information Meeting Flyer in/on:
 - a. Local mainstream newspapers (*Mountain Democrat, Village Life, etc.*)
 - b. Weekly trade publications (*The Windfall, Gold Panner, The Clipper*)
 - c. HOA newsletters, and on their social media platforms plus provided yard signs
 - d. Facebook groups in our County postings
 - e. Local NEXTDOOR neighborhoods postings
 - f. Post offices and on public bulletin boards
 - g. The County's extensive distribution lists
 - h. The County's website main page and on the Grand Jury page
 2. Set up public informational meetings
 - a. Various libraries, rotary clubs, and a tax payer's association, on different dates/times, ensuring each the event was posted on social media and local calendars
 - b. Utilized all the outreach efforts above to get the word out about these meetings.
 3. Had former grand jurors' "Letters to the Editor" published in the local newspaper
 4. Hung and rotated Grand Jury Recruitment banners (25 - 20 and 10 foot banners) – across Placerville's main street, in South Lake Tahoe, and at high traffic corners.

5. Placed yard signs along streets and even at the 15th hole at the local golf course (it's been hit a lot but it remains standing!)
 6. Hosted a Grand Jury information table at local events
 7. Worked with the County Board of Supervisors to declare March – Grand Jury Awareness Month
- Overall, the response has been tremendous, and our Chapter has enjoyed the opportunity to meet local residents. So many of our residents simply did not know what their Civil Grand Jury did and once informed have provided many positive comments and inputs and submitted a lot of applications.

This is some of what **Marin** County Chapter did this year.

- Asked those with experience as grand jury members to reach out to friends and contacts
- Conducted an annual social event with outgoing and incoming jury members
- Worked with the judge to get an advertising budget for a recruitment campaign

This is what the **Santa Cruz** County Chapter did this year.

- Purchased and posted yard signs (to be reused each year)
- Arranged for radio spots
- Asked the Presiding Judge to write an Op-Ed that was published locally
- Posted on Craig's List
- Sent out 10,000 postcards to voters
- Posted TV PSAs
- Posted on NEXT DOOR
- The chapter is considering ads on buses and banners for next year

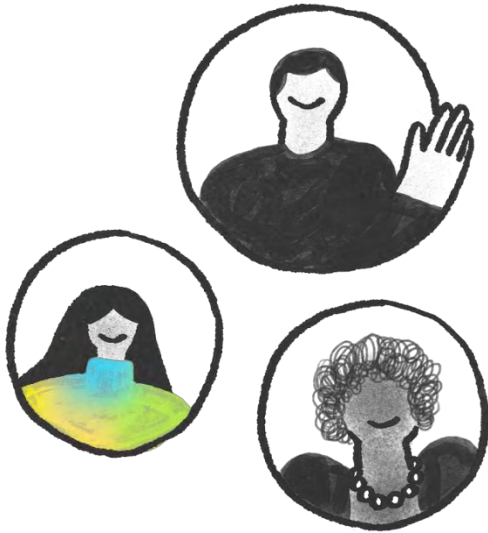
This is what the **Shasta** County Chapter did this year.

- Created a recruitment calendar beginning in February through June
- Updated the court's on-line application for citizens interested in grand jury service
- Hung banners throughout the county
- Created a new Public Service Announcement (PSA) featuring the Presiding Judge
- Started a NEXT DOOR account
- Made postings on Facebook
- Arranged for two informational meetings for prospective jurors
- Extended our contract with the court to provide recruitment services (available on [CGJA website](#))

This is what the **Sonoma** County Chapter did this year.

- Coordinated a digital application with tracking to manage statistics
- Coordinated Grand Jury Awareness Month recognition
- Worked with the Board of Supervisors
- Participated in regular meetings with Court Staff
- Scheduled CGJA Training at the Court's request
- Wrote a letter to the Editor

How to join Nextdoor



Nextdoor is where you connect to the neighborhoods that matter to you so you can belong. Neighbors around the world turn to Nextdoor daily to receive trusted information, give and get help, get things done, and build real-world connections with those nearby — neighbors, businesses, and public services.

You can join and [verify](#) in a neighborhood if you:

- rent or own a home,
- [own a second home](#),
- own property where you are planning to build a home, or
- [own a rental property](#) in the neighborhood.

Get started in five easy steps:

1. Join your neighborhood

To connect with your neighbors, you'll need to create an account on Nextdoor. You do not need an invitation to join Nextdoor. If you did receive an invitation, please follow the instructions below and enter your code when requested.

- **Android, iPhone, Web**

1. Visit www.nextdoor.com.
2. Enter your **residential street address*** and **email address**.
3. Select **Find your neighborhood**. At this point, one of two things will happen:
 1. If there is already a Nextdoor website for your neighborhood, you will automatically be assigned to that neighborhood.
 2. If there is not yet a Nextdoor website for your neighborhood, you'll be given the option to create one.
4. Complete all of the required fields.
5. If you received an invitation to join Nextdoor, select [Have an invitation code?](#) and enter the code on the invitation letter in order to give your neighbor credit for inviting you.
6. Click **Sign up**.
7. Finally, confirm your address.

If you own multiple homes, follow our instructions to [join Nextdoor at your second home](#).

PLEASE NOTE

Nextdoor does not support the use of P.O. Boxes. Neighbors must join using their physical address.

2. Confirm your email address

When you join Nextdoor, you must [confirm your email address](#) by clicking on the confirmation link that we send you in an email. Email confirmation is separate from [address verification](#).

If you do not [confirm your email address](#) right away, a red banner will appear at the top of your Newsfeed as a reminder. Eventually, you will stop receiving emails from Nextdoor altogether if you do not confirm your email address.

You can [change your email settings](#) at any time.

3. Get Nextdoor on any device

Some of Nextdoor's best uses, such as [posting Crime & Safety news](#) you just witnessed, [sharing photos](#) of items you're giving away, and looking for dinner [recommendations](#) happen when you're away from your desk.

Download the **Nextdoor app** on your [iPhone](#), [Android](#), or [iPad](#) to take the power of Nextdoor wherever you go.

4. Introduce yourself

After you verify your account and are granted access to your neighborhood's Nextdoor site, you will be given the opportunity to [post](#) an introductory message, like the one below.

Hi neighbors! My name is Sally Smith and I just moved to the neighborhood. My husband, Trent, and I have 3 kids and 2 loving dogs. We love hiking and cooking. Hope to see you around the neighborhood!

You can [choose which neighborhoods can see your posts](#) on Nextdoor.

[Return](#) to *Journal*

2023 Annual Conference Program Coming Together

New this year will be breakout sessions where members can learn about topics of interest. A table or two will be set up in the main conference room for each of the tentative topics below from which attendees may choose. Each topic will have a pre-designated leader who will lead the discussion for about 35 minutes. After that, Juliana Jones, who will lead the programming with assistance from other committee members, will call on a representative from each group to report out a summary of their discussion.

Tentative topics are

- Building Bridges with Technology.
- Techniques and Strategies for Building Awareness.
- Your Association – Attracting, Motivating, and Recruiting Members.
- Filming Your Chapter.
- Creating Awareness Through the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute Program.

We encourage readers to submit other ideas by emailing Juliana, jolinka.pgi@gmail.com.

There is still one open time slot that remains to be filled. The Annual Conference Committee is actively looking for a topic that would be of interest to our members that can be presented by a speaker or roundtable discussion. Readers are encouraged to submit their ideas for a topic by emailing annualconference@cgja.org.

The committee believes that this program has the potential for a more engaged experience on the part of our attendees. We will also celebrate significant achievements of our members and chapters, receive an update on the status of the association, and renew old acquaintances and make new friends over the gala Sunday evening dinner.

We hope you'll save the date on your calendar and join us for our next fun and informative gathering.

Watch for registration information on our website in July.

[Return](#) to *Journal*

El Dorado County – CGJA’s Newest Chapter

Working together with the superior court and the sitting grand jury, the chapter has restarted its recruiting efforts for the 2023-24 El Dorado County Civil Grand Jury. The chapter’s efforts have been extensive. It has included placing a banner across Main Street in Placerville, staffing a booth at a popular local chili cook-off, presentations to several community groups, as well as articles in local publications and posting yard signs throughout the county. Local informational meetings for the public have been scheduled in April at the local libraries. Our chapter looks forward to leveraging CGJA resources and knowledge to assist in continuing our growth.

A little county history: James W. Marshall discovered gold in Coloma on January 24, 1848. Not long after, El Dorado County became one of the original 27 counties of the state, formed by an act on February 18, 1850. Placerville, the county seat, was established in May 1854. As past and present jurors, we wondered, when the first El Dorado County Civil Grand Jury report was published. With the help, encouragement, and a lot of research from Mary Cory, Director of the El Dorado County Historical Museum, we learned the first grand jury report was published in the *Placerville Mountain Democrat* just a few months later, in August 1854. This timeline makes the El Dorado County Grand Jury one of the oldest institutions in the county.

What did this first Grand Jury investigate? Well, as required by California Penal Code, the first grand jury in 1854 inspected the jails, and reported that the prisoners were comfortable. They inspected the roads and bridges and found them to be in good condition, and audited the county’s finances, and found no corruption or fraud but did find the county’s budget to be \$1 out of balance. Specifically, as to the county’s finances, the report read, “The grand jury would therefore say that since the administration of the present incumbents in office, they can find no defect or fault in the management of the county affairs.”

The chapter conducted further research, to find out more about the first jurors. There were 18 jurors listed in the article. Our research showed the jurors included the El Dorado County sheriff from 1852, a store owner, two mine owners and a saloon owner. Our research journey continues and we hope it might encourage every chapter to take the time to discover their own history.

We are very proud to be a CGJA chapter and look forward to making a positive contribution to El Dorado County, and to this distinguished organization. The Civil Grand Jury’s work is vitally important in bringing impactful reports to the residents of our respective Counties. We encourage every chapter to continue to keep up the good work!

[Return to Journal](#)

San Mateo Winning Essay

by Aran O'Sullivan, Carlmont High School, Belmont

Civil grand juries play an invaluable role in the California political and legal system, commonly referred to as the "Watchdog" function. For each of the state's 58 counties, a group of 19 (or 11 in smaller-population areas) carefully selected county citizens are empowered by state law to investigate the actions/operations of the various officers, departments, and agencies of local government. An important distinction to note is that civil grand juries are only granted jurisdiction over *local* government – not state or federal associations – with the only exceptions being investigations into state prison management and non-profit corporations. Furthermore, grand juries cannot make normative judgments about an agency's policy decisions; their reports are solely focused on the methods and systems by which local government agencies perform their actions, not the efficacy or wisdom of said actions. In this way, it is reasonable to assert that civil grand juries serve as a third-party, objective check on the actions of local government. Should a government official or agency be engaged in some sort of corrupt behavior, these 19/11 ordinary citizens ensure – through investigation and report – that the general public is informed on such issues and the offending individuals are brought to justice.

Naturally, the concept of grand juries is nothing new. Dating all the way back to 12th century England, a system akin to criminal grand juries was put in place wherein groups of citizens would bring charges against those accused of crimes and determine if criminal cases should go to trial. By 1215, grand juries were officially recognized by the Magna Carta. At this time, the notion of civil grand juries was beginning to take hold as well; excerpts from the Grand Inquest reveal how English grand juries investigated officials responsible for overseeing infrastructure projects and managing public jails. Given the value this system brought to English governing bodies, it should come as no surprise that grand juries eventually began to surface in the nation's North American territories – by 1683, grand juries of some form could be found across all the American colonies. Despite the United States' eventual break from its parent country, this aspect of the English government stuck: the country's 5th Amendment to its new Constitution required that all felonies be charged by a grand jury indictment. As such, as all 50 states were ratified, each added some form of grand jury system to their state constitution – California's, for instance, was adopted with the drafting of the original 1849-1850 constitution. Though grand juries continued to gain more investigatory powers throughout much of the US's early history, following WWII, most states stopped employing the grand jury for civil matters. In fact, today, California is the only remaining state with a comprehensive, ongoing civil grand jury watchdog function!

Thus, with the decline of civil grand jury systems throughout the United States, it has become all the more important to recognize and reflect on the value that these groups of citizens bring to our local government here in California. In an age proliferating with gross reputation politics, empty promises, and violent partisanship, there truly is a dire need for an objective, third-party review body that only has the best interests of the general public in mind. With political engagement diminishing and apathy on the rise, we need to preserve systems that ensure that the voice of everyday Americans – that democracy itself – is not lost. Civil grand juries do just this – they throw back the curtains on the actions of local government and hold our elected officials accountable when they engage in corrupt behavior. The title "watchdog", then, cannot be dismissed as a symbolic one. Members of civil grand juries are truly the public's watchdogs who embody the principles of American democracy – government for the people, by the people.

[Return to Journal](#)

In 75 Words: The Urgent Need for Honest, Unbiased Ballot Language

In every California election, voters are asked to approve ballot measures proposed by local officials. While their subject matter may be wide-ranging, all ballot measures have one thing in common: a 75-word maximum ballot question required to be “a true and impartial synopsis of the purpose of the proposed measure and shall be in language that is neither argumentative nor likely to create prejudice for or against the measure”. Clearly, the law is not being followed.

As compared to state measures, local ballot measures don't require approval by anyone other than the jurisdiction desiring it to pass. Many voters don't read the pro and con arguments in the Voters' Handbook. They decide from the words on the ballot question alone. The Alameda County Civil Grand Jury investigated how local governments' ballot questions are prepared. The investigation focused exclusively on the accuracy, transparency, and impartiality of ballot questions, not the merits of the ballot measure.

The Grand Jury found ballot questions suffer from a significant “proponent's bias”. For example, tax increase measures regularly tout popular public benefits like improving roads, police, or homelessness. But such benefits are not actually contained in the official ordinance raising the tax. The money could be spent elsewhere. Or, the tax is stated in a purposely obscure way, or they exaggerate the benefits and gloss over costs. Sometimes just the amount of the specific tax increase is cited, but the existing rate, to which the new tax will be added, is not mentioned. For example, from the November 2022 election, Livermore School District's Measure G says the tax would only cost 6 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation (tax rates should be expressed in dollars per \$100,000 of valuation). Few would know how to quickly figure what this means, and there's no mention of the existing tax to which the new rate would be added.

Given each agency's inherent self-interest in promoting voter approval, this issue won't fix itself. No checks exist on how local governments write the ballot question. Most ballot questions are drafted by the agency's attorney, whose livelihood depends on pleasing that same agency. This situation should be changed to provide a truly independent analysis of the 75-word ballot question.

The League of Women Voters, Taxpayers Association, East Bay Times, and local newspapers have applauded the Grand Jury report. After careful examination of the problem, combined with the unwillingness of local governments to fix the problem, the Alameda County Civil Grand Jury Association has developed an effective solution, styled after the popular YELP 5-star rating system. Active members of the Alameda County Civil Grand Jury Association have stepped up to take on this important task of rating upcoming local ballot measures, beginning with the 2024 elections. This impartial and experienced civic organization provides the necessary expertise to evaluate upcoming local ballot measures in a timely fashion and in a manner consistent with the time limits and procedures required by state election law. Other counties have shown interest which would add clout to our efforts. Please read the full 2021 report and consider your county chapter joining this good governance effort in addition to State Association endorsement and support.

See the [full report](#).

Recipient Toli Lubos: CGJA Certificate of Special Recognition

by Karen Kennard, Juror, 2022-2023 Civil Grand Jury, City and County of San Francisco

As the liaison between the grand jury and the Court, Toli manages all administrative aspects of the civil grand jury. She serves as the liaison between the grand jury and the supervising judge; coordinates grand jury recruitment and juror candidate interviews; and arranges and facilitates grand jury training (including CGJA training but also local training, doing some of the training herself and bringing in city personnel for other aspects of our training). At the end of our term, she coordinates judicial review of our reports, oversees the publication process on the civil grand jury website; transmits the final reports to the identified respondents; and tracks the responses. Another of Toli's significant contributions is the preparation, maintenance, and dissemination of our *SF Jury Handbook*. Toli updates the *Handbook* every year to ensure that its guidance about civil grand jury procedures and local city government resources is current and accurate.

For the sitting grand jury members, Toli manages the jury's day-to-day needs. She administers our secure online workspace and sets up court-provided laptops and grand jury accounts for individual jurors. She administers and tracks the grand jury budget (including managing all attendance, per diem payments, and individual expense reimbursements). She oversees the process of collecting and reviewing our Forms 700 three times per juror per term. She receives and logs all citizen complaints and other correspondence. Toli also stocks our jury room with supplies and coordinates with SF city hall staff to arrange for availability of our plenary meeting room for our weekly meetings.

Personally, Toli works closely with me on all issues that arise during our term. I had never been a grand juror before joining the jury this year as a foreperson. Toli gave me an early orientation at the start of our term and meets with me every week to go over issues as they arise. The foreperson's role can be challenging and at times frustrating. Toli is unfailingly encouraging and upbeat and is always ready with a proposed solution to a problem or, failing that, a sympathetic and supportive ear. I simply could not do my job without her.

I realize that Toli has many other responsibilities in her position with the San Francisco Superior Court. Her work as the Grand Jury Administrative Analyst is just one of many demands on her time. But she is somehow able to be immediately responsive to our needs, consistently polite, and a cheerleader for the important role the Civil Grand Jury plays in seeking to improve the operations of City government.

[Return to Journal](#)

CGJA Website Redesign

This redesign was primarily motivated by our wish to migrate the underlying software referred to as the Content Management System or CMS – in this case, WordPress. Solidifying the website foundation will extend maintainability for the long term.

Website visitors will experience a completely revamped home page with more graphics reflecting current design trends. All the existing content will be migrated using the same navigation menus used in our current website making it convenient for our current users familiar with our website to locate items of interest in the same way. The website will continue to facilitate training workshop registrations, annual conference registrations, and support our annual elections. The very heavily used section in place for empaneled grand juries (Jury Resources) containing a document library of sample documents, links to local government websites, examples of well-written reports, and statewide grand jury contact information will migrate intact.

Membership renewals and the forms for becoming a CGJA member will continue to exist on the new website. One major change will be the removal of user accounts and the option of logging into our website. All our content will be accessible, as it is today, without logging in. Existing user accounts will not be migrated as they are not necessary. Resources supporting chapters will also come over intact.

A new section, Get Involved, is being implemented and is where Join and Renew memberships will be found, along with volunteer opportunities, guidance on becoming a grand juror, and how to join or form chapters.

CGJA is pleased to continue to support our members, grand juries, chapters, and volunteers with up-to-date technology oriented specifically to serve the needs of all involved parties in California's unique civil grand jury system.

[Return to Journal](#)

CGJA Recent Board Actions

04/25/23 AB 78 Grand Jurors Per Diem Increase – CGJA Review Support to Jahr

05/23/23 Approved the formation of the Nevada County chapter.

05/23/23 Approved the formation of the Los Angeles County chapter.

[Return to Journal](#)