



# CGJA Journal

Vol. 27, No. 5, October 2025



## 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference CIVIL GRAND JURIES: Cornerstone of Transparency and Accountability

### Regarding the Auction at the Annual Conference

Dear CGJA Members,

As the excitement builds for our upcoming Annual Conference on October 26-27 in San Luis Obispo, it is my pleasure to reach out, share some information with you regarding one of our most anticipated traditions, and ask for your help with the CGJA Auction.

The funds raised through the auction directly support next year's Annual Conference by helping reduce the cost of the registration. We invite each of you to take part to make this year's auction more vibrant, engaging, and meaningful than ever before. [Read more.](#)



### Ask the Trainers by the Training Committee Co-chairs

*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.*

*Please submit your questions to [cgjatraining@cgja.org](mailto:cgjatraining@cgja.org). Our response to your edited or redacted question might appear in a future edition of the Journal.*

#### Questions

**Our jury is now receiving and reviewing required responses to reports issued by last year's jury. What are our options for managing and reporting on these responses?**

**Our grand jury is confused about recusals. For example, if a juror has a family member who is employed by a department that the grand jury is investigating, does that juror need to recuse? What should the committee do if they feel it is a conflict but the juror refuses to recuse?**



Richard Rogers

**We have a committee whose members have agreed on a general topic they want to investigate, but it is too broad. Some research is needed to make it more specific. Could you explain what an inquiry is and provide some direction to help keep us from taking on a too-large topic?**

**[Read the answers.](#)**



Marsha Caranci

## Report Writing Workshops – Schedule Available

Every year CGJA presents a “third day of training” during the time of year when jurors are starting to draft their reports.

These workshops are designed to have the jurors work together in a group setting on developing more effective findings and recommendations and to walk them through the many steps involved in the report review, editing, approval, and release process. The goal is improved quality, readability, and effectiveness of grand jury reports. **[Read more.](#)**

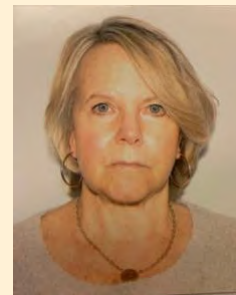
## Congratulations! Newly Elected Directors



**Jon P. Tonsing (North)**



**Karen Jahr (North)**



**Karen Michael (Central)**



**Dan ("Don") Freeman  
(Central)**



**Richard Rogers (South)**



**Lori Macdonald (South)**

## Vote tally

### Northern Region

Karen Jahr: 29  
Jon Tonsing: 20

### Central Region

Bruce Frank: 22  
Dan Freeman 34  
Karen Michael: 35

### Southern region

Lori MacDonald: 31  
Richard Rogers: 35  
Jerry Lewi: 2 (write-in votes)



## Fresno

It has taken just over a year, but with hard work and determination locally and help from the CGJA, Fresno County's chapter has been resurrected. Several Fresno County chapter members, from when activities were suspended in 2020 by the pandemic, began talking with recent and current grand jurors about reviving the chapter. [Read more.](#)



We had an information booth about volunteering as a civil grand juror at a Fresno Blue Run event hosted by the Fresno Police and Fire Chaplaincy non-profit organization. Shown above are **Fred Vongehr, Teri Montellano, and Rudy Zamora.**



Gary Mukai and Darlyne Swenson

## *Placer*



**Carol and Al Witten**, representing the Placer County Grand Jurors' Association, staffed a table at the Placer Protect Senior Resource Fair on Sept. 11 at the Maidu Community Center in Roseville.

# new MEMBERS

| Name                     | County      |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| Mona Sanderson Burglin   | Alameda     |
| Berkeley Kijsriopas      | Humboldt    |
| Shirley Zaragoza         | Los Angeles |
| Sheri Patten Hense Brown | Mendocino   |
| Helen Simms              | Mendocino   |
| Dave Frost               | Nevada      |
| Barbara Douglass-Scherer | San Benito  |
| Chrystena Rockett        | San Joaquin |
| Brian Altman             | San Mateo   |
| Marie Pease              | San Mateo   |
| Judy Keenan              | Santa Cruz  |
| John Rible               | Santa Cruz  |
| Elaine Saulter           | Santa Cruz  |
| Jill Wynn                | Santa Cruz  |
| John Mitchell            | Sierra      |

Recent Board Actions - click [here](#)

## *Keep us Posted*

Format articles in Word and send as email attachments to Barbara Sommer, [editor@cgja.org](mailto:editor@cgja.org). For more details see [How to submit an article](#).

**DEADLINE for submitting media for publication in the next issue.**

**November 24, 2025**

Please [update](#) your contact information (if needed).

***Join/Renew your membership***

**Serve on a committee - see the [committee descriptions](#).**

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

Contacts: [Officers and directors](#), chapter and association [presidents](#).

The views expressed in the *CGJA 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.

©2025 All rights reserved.

## Annual Conference Auction

We encourage chapters and individual members to donate items and services that are unique to your area.

We have had very good luck with baskets from chapters including items of local interest as well as unique items that represent what your county is known for. We will be adding a live auction as well as a "barrel" of wine to this year's program. The contributions showcasing your county's character are very popular and have helped the auction grow into real support of our Annual Conference attendees.

Popular donations in the past have included:

- Artisan crafts and fine art
- Gift certificates to local restaurants and businesses
- Themed gift baskets
- Tickets to concerts, sporting events, or theatre performances
- Travel packages and weekend getaways
- Wine
- Unique collectibles

If you wish to donate, please contact the **Auction Committee** at the earliest opportunity. Provide a brief description of your contribution, any relevant background or story, and a suggested value. If logistics are a concern, the committee will happily assist with arrangements for delivery. We will provide the bid sheets and set up the display.

We encourage you to join us in making this year's auction the most successful yet. Whether you donate, bid, volunteer, or simply cheer on your fellow members, your presence and engagement are what make the Annual Conference – and CGJA itself – so special. Please reach out if you are interested in joining the **Auction Team**.

Every year, the auction has grown in enthusiasm and generosity. The variety and quality of items donated reflect the kindness and ingenuity of our members.

Thank you for your ongoing support, your generosity, and your commitment to our mission. We look forward to welcoming you at the conference, celebrating our shared achievements, and raising the resources necessary to continue our vital work.

With warmest regards,

The CGJA Auction Committee Gwen Usher  
**[Gausher2024@outlook.com](mailto:Gausher2024@outlook.com)**

**[Return to Journal](#)**

**Q. Our jury is now receiving and reviewing required responses to reports issued by last year's jury. What are our options for managing and reporting on these responses?**

**A.** Under Penal Code §933, governing boards and elected county officials must respond to grand jury reports within a specified time limit and with specific language. Your jury has several options, one of which is to do nothing; there is no legal requirement for a grand jury to do anything with responses to previous reports. You should, however, at least make sure the responses get posted on the grand jury website because they are public records.

CGJA recommends that juries review all required responses to determine whether they are in compliance with the Penal Code. Monitoring and publicizing the responses to grand jury reports helps maintain pressure on local governmental entities to respond properly to the reports. In cases where there is serious non-compliance, some grand juries release a response compliance report, previously referred to by CGJA as a "compliance report." A response compliance report should address only whether the mandated responses of the boards and elected county officials complied with the timeliness and language requirements of the Penal Code. The report should not comment on the responses of invited respondents – only required responses. The grand jury's report must include findings that indicate whether the responses were submitted on time and included the specific language, explanation, or timeframe required by law. A sample response compliance report may be found on CGJA's website [here](#) or in Tab 6 of CGJA's Training and Reference Manual, pages 19-21.

Some juries produce a comprehensive compliance report (sometimes called a "continuity report") recording all responses to all findings and recommendations from the previous jury's reports, even when most responses are compliant. This is unnecessary and can take valuable time away from more worthwhile investigations that lead to improvements in government operations. Instead, the jury can issue a press release when the responses are posted with a link to the website.

If a board or elected county official agreed to implement one or more recommendations, the grand jury can conduct an investigation to see if the respondent did what they said they were going to do. This is sometimes referred to as implementation review and can lead to a new investigation and report.

**Q. Our grand jury is confused about recusals. For example, if a juror has a family member who is employed by a department that the grand jury is investigating, does that juror need to recuse? What should the committee do if they feel it is a conflict but the juror refuses to recuse?**

**A.** Conflicts of interest and recusals are covered during our CGJA Training seminars, but this is a difficult area of the law that many grand juries struggle with. Questions need to be asked, such as: 1) How close is the family member? 2) Does this person work in the same division of the department, or is it a huge department with many divisions and hundreds of employees? 3) Would the family member even have knowledge of the topic that the jury is looking into.

We recommend using the “common law test” for determining if a perceived conflict exists by asking “*Could a person who is informed of the relationship or association between the juror and the topic, entity, or official under investigation reasonably conclude that the juror is biased for or against that topic, entity, or official?*”

Note that the test is not whether the juror feels they can be fair and unbiased, but whether a reasonable person might have the perception that the juror might be biased. Even the perception of a conflict is enough for recusal.

Assuming that the members of the investigating committee are reasonable people who have concluded that a conflict or perception of a conflict exists, this juror should recuse. If they refuse, the full panel can vote to ask them to recuse, or they can vote to discontinue the investigation based on the belief it would be tainted. Another option is to consult with your judge, who can order a recusal, or with your legal advisor, who may have other suggestions.

**Q. We have a committee whose members have agreed on a general topic they want to investigate, but it is too broad. Some research is needed to make it more specific. Could you explain what an inquiry is and provide some direction to help keep us from taking on a too-large topic?**

**A.** When a very broad topic comes up, the committee should try to narrow it through focused research on where the problem and solutions might take them. It must be related to the operations of a local government entity – a city or county department or a special district. Using homelessness as an example, the committee might find something during their research that takes them to a specific concern (drug abuse, mental health, or lack of affordable housing, for example), which might lead to such entities as a drug task force, the county mental health department, or the city or county housing authority. That's the easiest way to try to narrow a broad topic. That initial research can be considered an inquiry or just part of the topic selection process. But once the committee determines that they want to interview someone or request documents or take a tour, it becomes a public action and must be approved by the full panel.

A topic can be presented to the full panel for approval as either an inquiry (a preliminary look to see if a full investigation is warranted) or an investigation. A report cannot be based on an inquiry alone; it must be based on a full investigation that includes multiple sources and verified information. Sometimes an inquiry leads to a full investigation and sometimes it does not. If the jury approves only the inquiry, then the committee will need to go back for approval of the full investigation, which usually includes blanket authority to conduct whatever interviews are needed. By then the topic should have a fairly narrow focus, and if the focus changes during the course of the investigation, it needs to go back to the full panel again.

Tab 2, page 5 of the CGJA Training and Reference Manual has a description of an inquiry vs. an investigation. There is also a discussion about approval of either an investigation or inquiry in Tab 4, page 10. Any work by the committee on the topic other than online research requires approval by the supermajority of the full panel.

**[Return to Journal](#)**

## Report Writing Workshops

If your county has not already scheduled a workshop for your grand jury, they can do so now by contacting [cgjatraining@cgja.org](mailto:cgjatraining@cgja.org). If the full grand jury cannot attend together on the same day, jurors can be registered individually for multi-county workshops held on Zoom on the dates listed below.

The fee for an in-person workshop for your county is \$1,850, which includes all workshop materials. The fee for the same workshop presented remotely on Zoom is \$900. The workshop fee for individuals to attend the multi-county workshop remotely is \$60 per juror.

Find out [more or register](#).

*(All workshops are from 9 am to 4 pm, with a lunch break)*

Multi-county Report Writing Workshop dates (all on Zoom):

Tuesday, November 18  
Wednesday, December 10  
Thursday, January 8, 2026  
Tuesday, January 13, 2026

Registrations for Zoom multi-county workshops will be accepted up to 10 days prior to the workshop to allow time to ship workshop materials.

[Return to Journal](#)

## Report from Fresno

Those talks led to assembling an email list of folks from past chapter rosters and recent grand juries – about eighty in all – and asking them to come to a meeting in October to figure out the breadth of interest.

Nearly half of the people on that list have been involved in the effort, with about two-dozen forming the core of meeting attendees.

To head in the right direction, we asked the CGJA Membership and Chapter Relations Committee for guidance, which was generously provided.

We wrote new bylaws that were approved by CGJA, elected officers and directors, collected dues, set a monthly meeting schedule, and created committees to focus on:

- Making the public aware of the civil grand jury
- Supporting the sitting grand jury
- Increasing grand juror applications

Our startup accomplishments included:

- Service club and media appearances following development of a talking-points list.
- Tabling at community events, which included creating an attention-getting banner.
- Recruiting grand jury applicants from areas unrepresented for decades.
- Lunch after meetings to build rapport and discuss new ideas.
- Planning new activities for the future.
- Establishing a relationship with the court in recruiting; helping the sitting grand jury; and exploring other ways the chapter can serve.

Ahead is growing membership, supporting a closer relationship with the sitting grand jury, increasing public and media outreach, strategizing with the court, and scheduling informational and socializing events.

We are confident our patient, persistent re-establishment – and encouragement from CGJA – have created a sustainable chapter whose members' skills and experiences will influence civil grand jury participation and public awareness.

***[Return to Journal](#)***

## Recent Board Actions

08-26-25

Approved MCRC proposing the draft concept included in the board packet to the chapters for their input and, if the response is favorable, fine-tuning it in time for the October/November renewal campaign.

08-27-25

Executive Committee approved LLRC response letter to the request from M.K. O'Donnell regarding CGJA information claimed to be covered by the Public Records Act.

09-23-25

Approved the budget, location, and dates for the 2026 Annual Conference and 09-23-25.

Approved distribution of "Talking Points" document.

Accepted and approved all electees to the CGJA Board.

***[Return to Journal](#)***