

2026 Municipal Advisory Council Convening





Public Comment





What motivates you to serve?



Advisory Board Handbook

Goal: Increase effectiveness – voice for the community

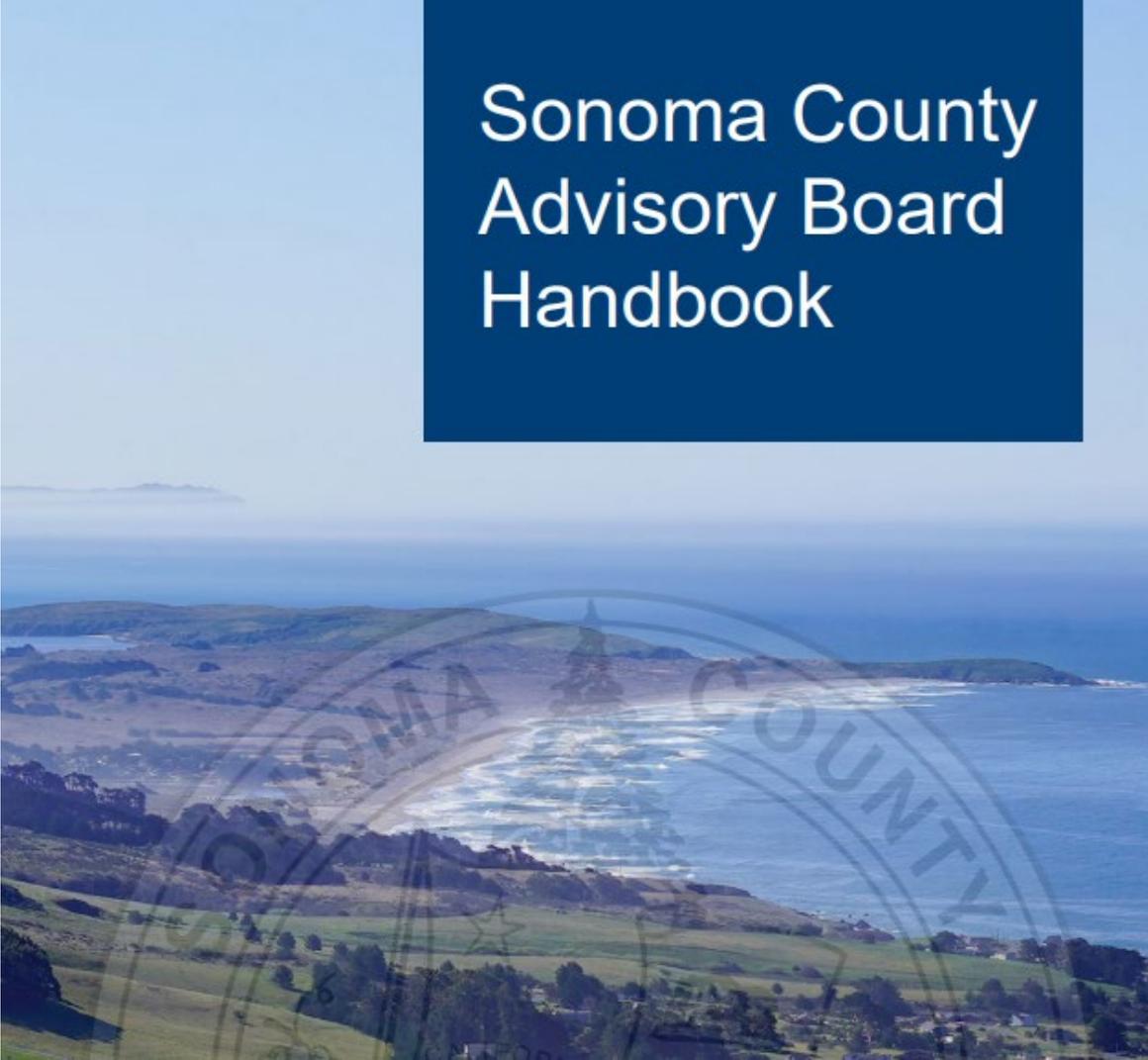
- Clarity
- Efficiency
- Consistency across advisory boards

Contents:

- Overview of County Government
- Advisory Board Roles & Responsibilities
- Best Practices

Updates:

- Visuals and design
- Brown Act changes for meeting participation (SB 707)



Sonoma County Advisory Board Handbook



What MACs need to know: Brown Act Plus





Local Legislation to be Aware of

1. The Brown Act
2. Public Records Act
3. Conflict of Interests





Brown Act – Open Meeting Rule

Open Meeting Rule

- All meetings of a legislative body must be open and public.
- “Legislative body” includes MACs and CACs.
- Exception: Advisory Committees (ad-hocs).

Public Policy and Intent

- Public agencies exist to conduct the people’s business openly.
- Actions and deliberations must be conducted openly.



What is a meeting?

Meeting

- A majority gathering to hear, discuss, or act on items within the body's jurisdiction.
- Must be publicly accessible and ADA compliant.

Two Types of Meetings

- Regular Meeting
 - Set by bylaws or Chair.
 - Discussion limited to posted items.
 - Public must have opportunity to comment on each item.
- Special Meeting
 - Called as needed.



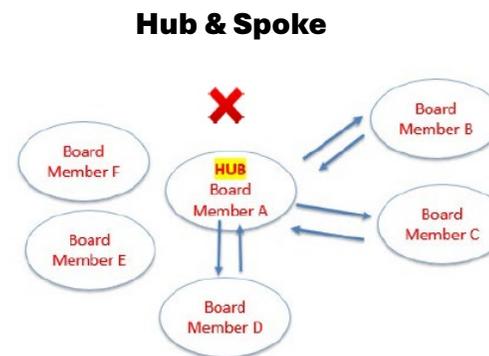
Serial Meeting Prohibition

Serial Meetings

- A majority of members may not use a series of communications to discuss agency business.
- Staff may provide information to members, but may not relay one member's views to another.

Examples of Violations

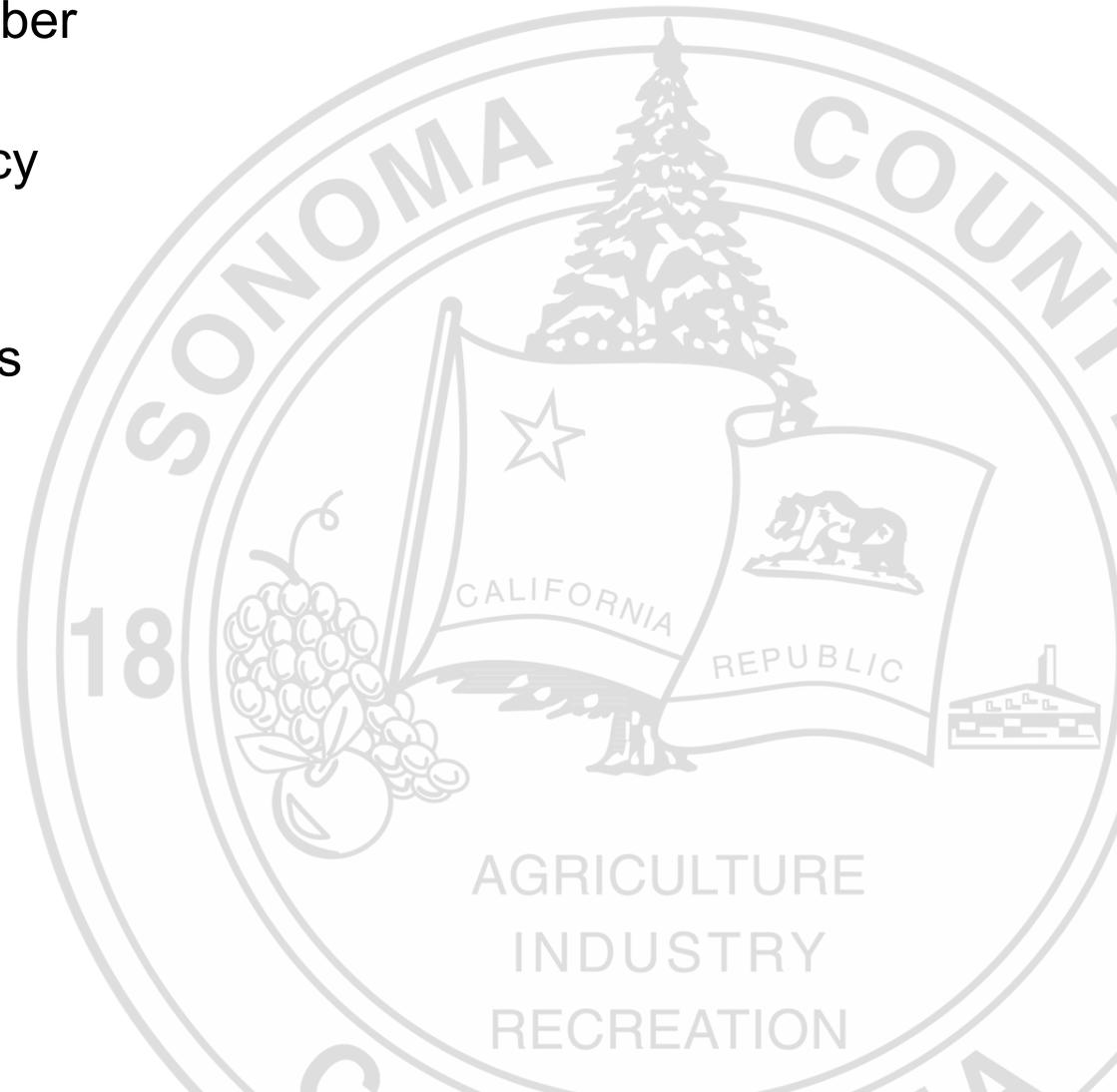
- Daisy Chain: Phone, email, or text chain involving a majority.
- Hub and Spoke: One member acts as a go-between to coordinate a majority.





What is Not a Meeting?

- Individual conversations between a member and another person.
- Social or ceremonial events where agency business is not discussed.
- Public events (forums, other government meetings, conferences), if a majority does not discuss agency business.



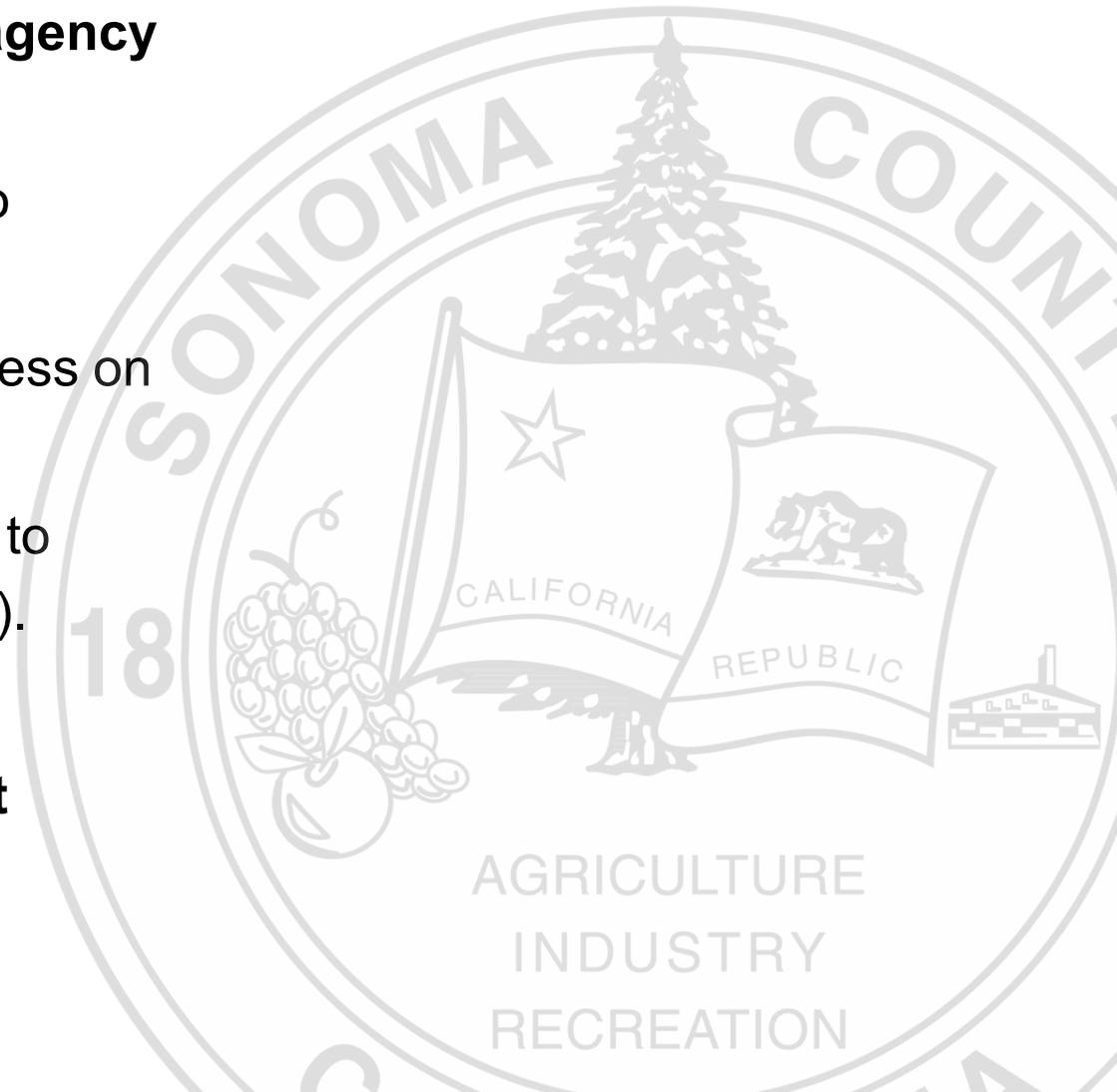


Social Media Under the Brown Act

No member-to-member engagement on agency business online.

- Members may post on public platforms to provide or solicit information.
- A majority may not discuss agency business on social media.
- Do not respond to, comment on, or react to another member's post (including emojis).
- Platforms must be publicly accessible.

Social media does not replace Brown Act noticing requirements.

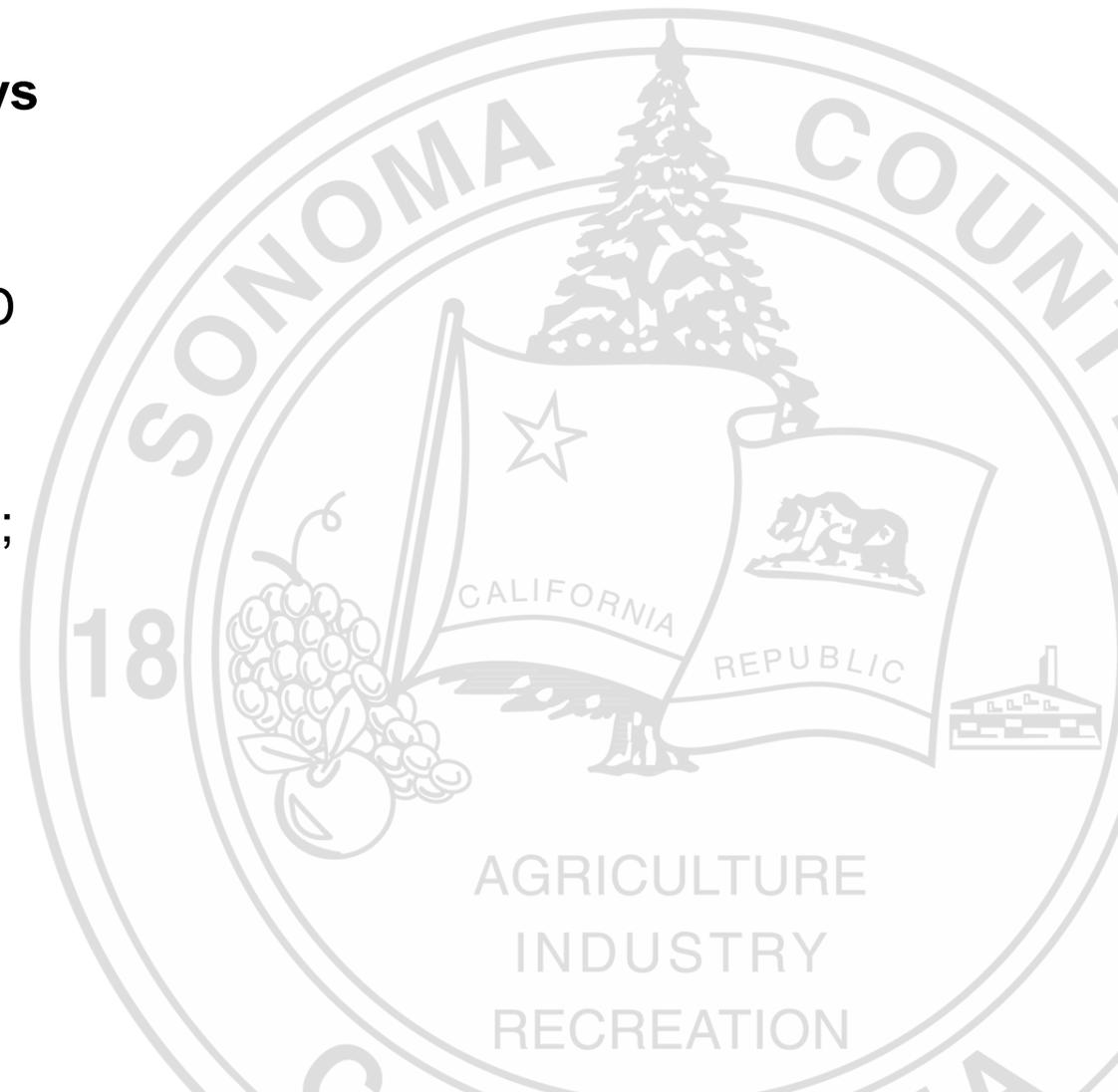




Teleconferencing Under the Brown Act

Specific rules apply to different teleconferencing circumstances — always check the Brown Act before teleconferencing.

1. Traditional teleconferencing: Pre-COVID rules.
2. Remote participation (COVID-era): Temporary rules adopted during COVID; later repealed.
3. Alternate teleconferencing (SB 707): Effective January 1, 2026; expands flexibility under certain conditions.





SB 707 – Alternate Teleconferencing

SB 707 authorizes:

- Remote participation as an ADA accommodation (counts as in-person).
- Hybrid meetings with an in-person quorum (“Just Cause”).
- Teleconferencing for “eligible subsidiary bodies” (advisory bodies), if authorized by the Board.

County Counsel is reviewing which County bodies qualify.

A copy of the Brown Act must be provided to all elected or appointed members.



Land Use Project Considerations

Constitutional Fair Process - Basic Requirements:

- Serve as a fair and unbiased decision-maker (including in an advisory role).
- Be free of personal bias.
- Provide notice and an opportunity to be heard.
- Disclose on the record any project-related information obtained outside a noticed meeting, with enough detail for the applicant to respond.





Housing Project Considerations

SB 330 (Housing Crisis Act):

- The County is limited to **5 hearings** for eligible, objective-compliant housing projects deemed complete.
- “Hearing” is broadly defined (workshops, meetings, continuances, appeals — including MACs and ad hocs).
- Do not hold a hearing on a housing project without clearance from Permit Sonoma.
- Failure to act within five hearings may result in penalties.



The Public Records Act

WHY: Access to information about the conduct of the public's business is a fundamental right.

WHO: Any member of the public may request agency records.

WHAT: Public records include any writing related to public business — regardless of format (emails, texts, documents, photos, etc.). Location does not change the record's status.

HOW: Requests may be made orally or in writing — no special wording required.

WHEN: The agency must respond within 10 days to confirm whether responsive records exist (up to 14 additional days in unusual circumstances).

WHERE: Public records may exist on any device used to conduct agency business, including personal email accounts and cell phones.



Conflicts of Interest

Two primary sources:

- **Financial conflicts of interest**
- **Common law conflicts of interest**

If a conflict exists, the member must recuse and leave the room before the item is considered.

Even the appearance of a conflict may warrant recusal.

Best practice: Review the agenda in advance to identify potential conflicts.



Financial Conflicts of Interest

Governed by the **Fair Political Practices Act (FPPC)**.

A public official may not participate in or influence a decision in which they have a financial interest.

A financial interest exists when a decision is reasonably foreseeable to materially affect:

- The official or immediate family
- A business entity or real property
- Income, gifts, or personal finances

MAC members are not currently required to file financial disclosures.

Best practice: Recuse if you have a financial interest in an agenda item.



Common Law Conflicts of Interest

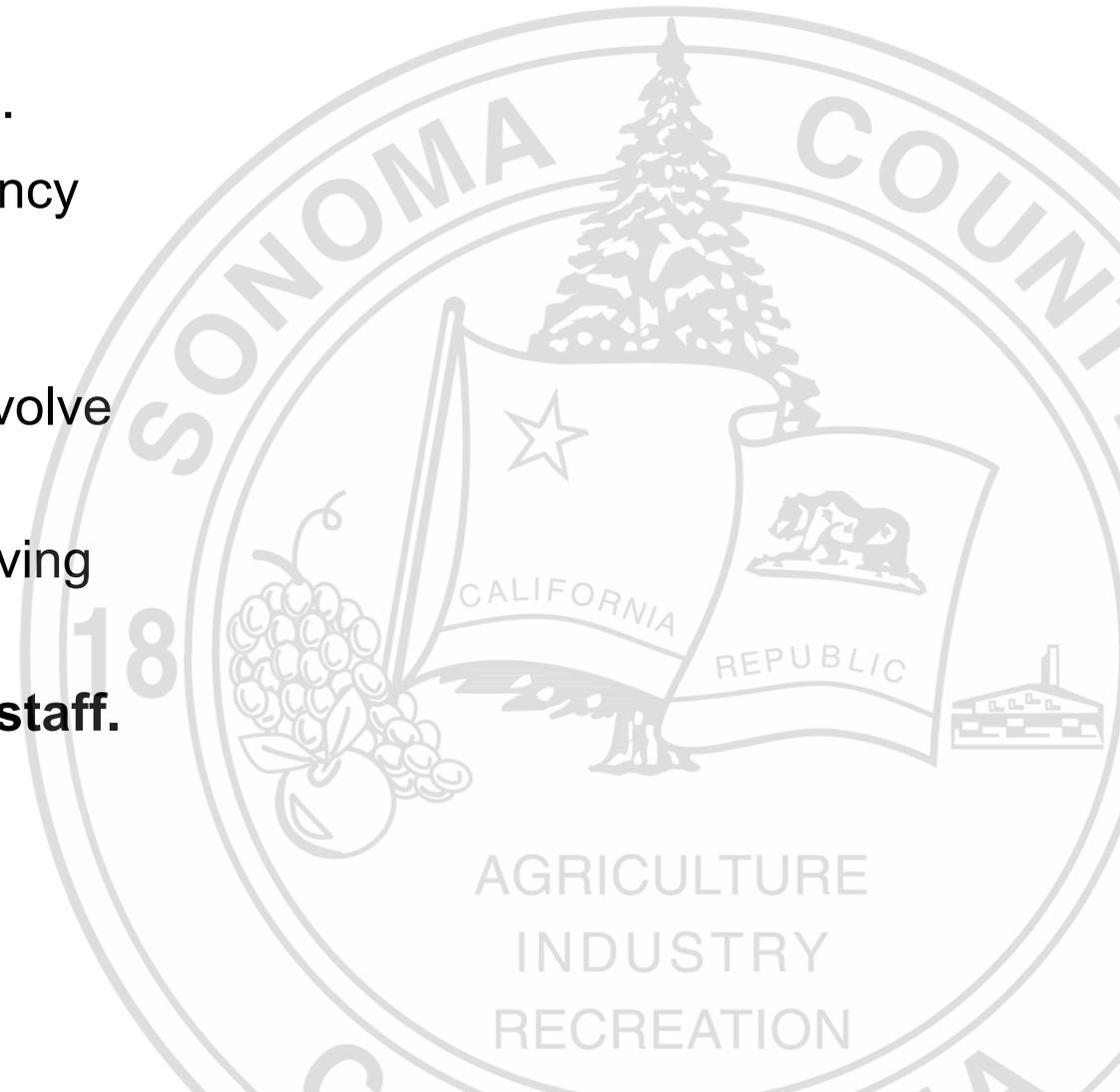
Public officials must avoid situations where personal interests conflict with official duties.

Requires undivided loyalty to the public agency and avoidance of even the appearance of impropriety.

Based on case law (not statute) and may involve non-financial interests.

Example: Do not participate in matters involving close family members.

Best Practice: If unsure, consult District staff.





Closing and Questions





District Formation Advisory Services

- Technical assistance for unincorporated communities exploring district formation opportunities to improve local services.
- Participants:
 - Dry Creek Citizens Advisory Council
 - Graton Community Services District
 - Lower Russian River Municipal Advisory Council
 - Moorland
 - North Sonoma Valley Municipal Advisory Council
 - Penngrove
 - Occidental
- Next Steps:
 - Governance Toolkit
 - Findings report





Boards and Commissions Assessment

Objective: Assess the Sonoma County Boards and Commissions (B&C) infrastructure and develop recommendations to strengthen the County's capacity to support these bodies.



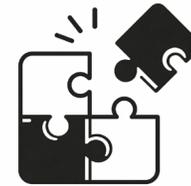
PHASE 1: RESEARCH

- Comparable Jurisdictions Analysis
- Landscape Analysis
- B&C membership survey
- B&C staff liaison survey



PHASE 2: ENGAGEMENT

- Focus Groups:
 - Staff Liaisons
 - County Department Heads
- Interviews with Board of Supervisors and District Staff



PHASE 3: DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Present draft recommendations to key stakeholders, including the Board of Supervisors, for feedback and direction



PHASE 4: PRESENT FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Present final recommendations for the Board's consideration & adoption

