

Civil Grand Jury 2025-2026



El Dorado County Civil Grand Jury Website

Bringing Clarity to the Public Process



Downtown Placerville with Grand Jury recruitment banner displayed – Robert Mathis

Case No. 26-03

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SUMMARY

Imagine that you have been invited to an interview with the El Dorado County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury). What can you anticipate? What information are they seeking? Are there any concerns regarding your involvement? You visit the County website to find information but have difficulty navigating the Grand Jury web pages.

The Grand Jury was informed of these concerns resulting in a thorough review of its website, focusing specifically on sections related to investigative procedures, interviews, confidentiality, and contact information.

BACKGROUND

The El Dorado County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) is a citizen-based investigatory body established under the California Constitution and Penal Code. It serves as an independent watchdog of local government operations — including county departments, cities, school districts, and special districts — and reports on matters of public concern to promote accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness in government.

As part of its investigative responsibilities, the Grand Jury conducts interviews to assist in fact-finding. Interviews are one of the primary methods the Grand Jury uses to gather information on a wide range of subjects affecting the county. For many individuals, an invitation to be interviewed may be their first interaction with the Grand Jury.

A concern was raised during interviews that individuals invited to participate were anxious about the process, resulting in uncertainty prior to their appearance. It was also reported that publicly available resources describing the Grand Jury's interview procedures were unavailable, leaving some interviewees without clear guidance regarding what to expect.

METHODOLOGY

- Review of existing website content
- Identification of information gaps
- Comparative review of other California county civil grand jury websites

DISCUSSION

The Grand Jury was informed that individuals invited to participate in interviews are primarily referred to the El Dorado County Civil Grand Jury website to obtain information about the process. It was reported that the website did not provide sufficient detail to address questions or alleviate concerns regarding what to expect during an interview.

The County of El Dorado hosts a website for the Civil Grand Jury under the Public Safety and Justice Division at <https://www.eldoradocounty.ca.gov/Public-Safety-Justice/Safety-Justice/Grand-Jury>.

The Grand Jury conducted a comprehensive review of its website, with particular attention to sections describing investigative procedures, interviews, confidentiality, and contact information. The review assessed whether the content was clear, complete, and understandable to individuals unfamiliar with the Civil Grand Jury process.

The Grand Jury compared the existing website content against commonly expressed concerns and questions. Criteria for evaluation included:

- Clarity of explanation regarding the purpose of interviews
- Description of what interviewees should expect (format, duration, setting)
- Explanation of legal obligations and protections

- Accessibility and ease of navigation on the website
- Availability of contact information for additional questions

The Grand Jury evaluated websites from selected California counties to identify best practices in communicating general information and specifically interview procedures and expectations. This comparison focused on the presence of dedicated interview guides, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), resources, and overall transparency.

This approach provided a structured and objective framework for determining if additional information and resources would benefit the public, prospective interviewees, and improve overall transparency.

The evaluation of the El Dorado County Civil Grand Jury website revealed that the site contains basic information in four sections, also called pages: Apply to Join, Reports and Responses, How to File a Complaint, and How to Contact the Civil Grand Jury. The Grand Jury determined that the website does not fully address the needs of the public, prospective jurors, or individuals invited for interviews. The Grand Jury determined that gaps in clarity, accessibility, and comprehensiveness could lead to confusion, unnecessary anxiety, and reduced engagement with the Civil Grand Jury process.

Several areas where the site could be improved to better inform the public and prospective interviewees were identified. It was determined that a comprehensive update to the website would be necessary to include additional pages to provide more information and resources. The shortcomings of the website were identified as follows:

1. Definition of the Civil Grand Jury – The website does not provide a clear explanation of the Grand Jury's role, authority, and function.
2. Clarification on How to Submit a Complaint – Instructions for submitting complaints are unclear, and the process could be better outlined for the public.
3. What to Expect from a Grand Jury Interview – There is insufficient information describing the interview process, including what participants can expect and their legal rights.

4. How to Apply to Join the Civil Grand Jury – Eligibility criteria, application procedures, and timelines are not clearly presented.
5. Reports and Responses – Information about Grand Jury reports and required responses is limited and is not easily accessible.
6. Resources Page – Insufficient information to provide resources, such as brochures, links to relevant legal references, and links to state Grand Jury organization, are lacking or difficult to find.
7. How to Contact the Civil Grand Jury – Contact information and guidance for inquiries are not prominently displayed or clearly explained.

The Grand Jury found that adding or revising the following sections to the website would provide comprehensive information for the public:

1. About the Civil Grand Jury

- Provide a clear and concise explanation of the Civil Grand Jury's role, authority, and function within El Dorado County.

2. How to Submit a Complaint

- Develop step-by-step guidance, including forms, submission methods, and timelines for response.

3. What to Expect from a Grand Jury Interview

- Create an informational guide for interviewees outlining the purpose, format, duration, confidentiality, and legal protections.

4. Apply to Join the Civil Grand Jury

- Include eligibility criteria, application procedures, deadlines, and contact information for questions.

5. Reports and Responses

- Ensure reports and agency responses are easily accessible, searchable, and explained in plain language.

6. Resources Page

- Include information and links to Civil Grand Jury brochures, relevant statutes, and links to additional state or local Grand Jury resources.

7. Contact the Civil Grand Jury

- Make contact information prominent and clear. Provide guidance for inquiries, including secure methods for submitting questions or concerns.

The Civil Grand Jury completed a comprehensive update of the Grand Jury's website to ensure transparency, enhance public understanding of the Grand Jury's role, avoid confusion and anxiety for interviewees, and strengthen trust in the Civil Grand Jury's oversight of local government.

FINDINGS

- F1. The El Dorado County Civil Grand Jury website does not provide information that explains the interview process.
- F2. The El Dorado County Civil Grand Jury website does not provide a comprehensive explanation of the Grand Jury's role, authority, and function.
- F3. The El Dorado County Civil Grand Jury website does not provide comprehensive eligibility criteria for individuals interested in joining the Civil Grand Jury.
- F4. The El Dorado County Civil Grand Jury website does not provide information about application procedures for joining the Grand Jury and timelines are not clearly presented.
- F5. The El Dorado County Civil Grand Jury website does not prominently display or clearly provide contact information, or guidance for inquiries.
- F6. The El Dorado County Civil Grand Jury website does not provide a separate section for additional resources for those individuals seeking information about the Civil Grand Jury.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. The Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors direct the IT department to consult annually with the sitting Grand Jury and the Court to review and update the Civil Grand Jury website as necessary to maintain current information and relevancy.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

A Civil Grand Jury report details a single investigation. Each report lists FINDINGS and RECOMMENDATIONS. The organization responsible is notified and is required to respond to the report.

The California Penal Code Section 933(c) specifies response times.

- *PUBLIC AGENCIES. The governing body of any public agency (also referring to a department) must respond within 90 days from the release of the report to the public.*
- *ELECTED OFFICERS OR AGENCY HEADS. All elected officers or heads of agencies/departments must respond within 60 days of the report's release to the public.*
- *FAILURE TO RESPOND. Failure to respond to a Grand Jury report violates California Penal Code Section 933.05 and is subject to further action that may include additional investigation into the subject matter of the report by the Jury.*
- *The following responses are required pursuant to Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05:*

From the following governing boards within 90 days:

- *El Dorado County Board of Supervisors*
 - *All Findings*
 - *All Recommendations*

For more information refer to [How to Respond to an El Dorado County Civil Grand Jury Report](#) available on the El Dorado County Grand Jury webpage at <https://www.eldoradocounty.ca.gov/Public-Safety-Justice/Safety-Justice/Grand-Jury>.

Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code Section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury do not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.