

**A REPORT BY
THE 2011-2012 CONTRA COSTA COUNTY GRAND JURY**


725 Court Street
Martinez, California 94553

Report 1215

**Help Wanted – Appointed Bodies
The County Wants You!**

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JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT

Contra Costa County Grand Jury Report 1215

Help Wanted – Appointed Bodies

The County Wants You!

TO: Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors

SUMMARY

Contra Costa County (County) has 70 appointed bodies, committees, and commissions (appointed bodies), each of which was created for a specific purpose.

It is difficult to get information about the missions and achievements of these appointed bodies. Only half of them have websites that include agendas, minutes, and actions taken. Even those that have this information frequently do not also include their mission statements, membership qualifications, membership, and meeting schedules.

These appointed bodies also have a large number of vacancies. Currently, there are 165 vacancies out of 623 positions. In addition, 35 of the 98 appointed alternate positions are vacant. With these high numbers of vacancies, some of the bodies have difficulty even getting a quorum. This makes it difficult for them to formulate recommendations to the Board of Supervisors (Board).

The County can take actions to get more people involved and thereby get more value from these bodies. Improved communication (via websites) and new recruiting efforts may generate enough additional interest to enable these bodies to better fulfill their mission to aid the Board.

BACKGROUND

The Board has declared its intent “to encourage participation of interested citizens in decisions affecting residents of this County.” Toward this end, the Board created appointed bodies to provide guidance and input, and selects citizens to fill these positions.

The County has 70 appointed bodies listed on its website under “Appointed Bodies, Committees, and Commissions.” The number of vacancies on these appointed bodies varies, but remains high. For example, at the time of writing this report there were 623 appointed positions with 165 vacancies. In addition there were 98 appointed alternate positions, 35 of which were vacant. Ten of the appointed bodies had a vacancy rate of over 50%.

The internet has changed the way that we communicate and do business. County staff stated in a report to the Internal Operations Committee (IOC), a standing committee of the Board, that “the

internet can be used to provide greater public access to official communication....”

Of the 70 appointed bodies, 50 have websites. Of these, 35 provide access to their agendas, minutes, and actions taken. Consequently, for half of the County’s advisory bodies, the public has no single online point of access to basic current information about what the appointed bodies do, where and when they meet, and what they have achieved.

County staff and the Board have recently taken some actions concerning appointed bodies. On April 18, 2011, the County Administrator’s Office presented a report to the IOC that included suggestions for updating the Board’s policy governing appointments. In December 2011, the Board approved resolutions directing the Clerk of the Board to implement procedures that included having appointed bodies post their membership and any vacancies either on their own website or on the County’s website. In addition, since May 17, 2011, the IOC has been considering a change to the Better Government Ordinance to require posting of agendas and other policy documents on advisory body websites (advisory bodies are a subset of appointed bodies). After several drafts, a revised version has been referred back to the Board with a recommendation to approve. It has not yet appeared on a Board agenda for action.

The specific items to be posted online through these actions include:

- Agenda
- Staff Reports
- Other material prepared or submitted that provide background information and recommendations regarding agenda items
- Membership
- Vacancies

Not specifically included are:

- Mission statement
- Scheduled meeting time, place, and frequency
- Annual reports
- Membership qualifications/requirements/terms

The County’s website has an area called “Appointed Bodies, Committees, and Commissions” which has pages for each appointed body. It has placeholders for mission statement, membership qualifications, membership, vacancies, and scheduled meeting time, place, and frequency. The Grand Jury found several cases where appointed bodies with their own websites did not have the same information as the County’s website. In addition, the placeholders on the County website are blank in some cases.

Website templates are readily available. Many of them include features that allow users to “drop” a variety of documents onto the website, thereby making this information available to online visitors. The documents can either be viewed or printed.

Appointed body members are currently recruited by posting vacancies in various locations in the County, on the County website, and in newspapers. There are additional means of recruiting volunteers, such as contacting civic organizations and service clubs, Supervisors’ town hall

meetings, and job fairs. Job fairs have been successful in recruiting volunteers and board members for non-profit organizations. The County currently conducts similar events for people seeking employment.

FINDINGS

1. The large number of vacancies in the County's appointed bodies, sometimes exceeding 50% of membership, makes it difficult for them to fulfill their missions.
2. In some cases, the lack of accurate and complete information on available websites, especially accomplishments, makes it difficult for those interested to find out about an appointed body.
3. The absence of easily accessible information about these bodies may make it more difficult to recruit and appoint volunteers.
4. The County's current efforts at recruiting candidates for appointed bodies leave too many positions unfilled.
5. Supervisor town hall meetings as well as job fairs could provide opportunities to recruit citizens for appointed bodies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The County should identify funds within the current budget to create a basic website template for its appointed bodies.
2. The County should identify funds to require each appointed body to post its membership, membership requirements, agendas, minutes, annual report, meeting schedule, mission, and accomplishments on a single location.
3. The County should use additional means for recruiting members for appointed bodies, such as town hall meetings and job fairs.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Findings

Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors 1-5

Recommendations

Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors 1-3