

GRAND JURY SUPPORT

INTRODUCTION

Each year in July a new civil grand jury is sworn in and charged with the responsibility of monitoring and investigating the functioning of local government entities throughout Humboldt County. During the course of the ensuing year, members of the grand jury conduct approximately 350 meetings, numerous interviews and inspections, and review dozens of documents and records pertaining to the operations of local government.

To insure the proper functioning of the grand jury, officials of Humboldt County are required by California State law to provide adequate support for grand jury operations. Although California counties vary in population, all counties, except Los Angeles, have a civil grand jury of nineteen members which requires basically the same support.

Key elements of support needed by the grand jury include, but are not limited to, the following: 1) space for meetings and administrative/clerical functions, 2) furniture and equipment, 3) security and privacy, 4) clerical support, and 5) compensation sufficient to help defray financial costs born by members of the lay public who volunteer for this important civic duty.

PROCEDURE

Grand jury members completed an assessment of current needs and levels of support provided for the Humboldt County Grand Jury. This information was compared with data obtained from two recent statewide surveys of grand jury operations in other counties throughout California. Based on these surveys, the Humboldt County Grand Jury submits the following findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

FINDINGS

Security and Safety:

The grand jury is provided with two small offices for its exclusive use. These offices are provided with specially keyed office doors, accessible to only grand jury members. The two meeting rooms the grand jury must use for the vast majority of its meetings are open to use by all other county departments. All records, materials, and equipment used by the grand jury must be removed from these meeting rooms at the end of each grand jury meeting.

F-1 No security equipment is in place at any of the publicly used entrances to the courthouse.

F-2 No security personnel are routinely assigned to the areas of the courthouse where the grand jury conducts its business.

F-3 There is no "panic button" type alarm system provided for any meeting rooms or office space used by the grand jury.

F-4 There are no fire-resistant, locking file cabinets provided for storage of confidential grand jury records.

Facilities and Equipment:

Facilities and equipment provided for the grand jury are very modest. The furniture and equipment is mainly of an older vintage which was surplus from other county departments. The grand jury needs one large meeting room which will accommodate at least twenty people and at least two committee meeting rooms that will accommodate up to ten people each, with the grand jury designated as the first priority user.

F-5 The grand jury office on the third floor of the courthouse provides a meeting area approximately 7 feet by 16 feet; it currently houses the grand jury library.

F-6 The grand jury office on the first floor of the courthouse is presently used as the foreman's office and as a

meeting storage room. The office space is 7 feet by 9 feet, with an ante-room measuring 4 feet by 9 feet.

F-7 Conference Room B, used by the grand jury, is only available when the Board of Supervisors is not using it.

F-8 Conference Room A, used as a full grand jury meeting room, provides 464 sq. ft. of space for nineteen or more people; handicap access and movement of people within the room is quite cumbersome when the full jury meets.

F-9 No coat racks are available for use in inclement weather.

F-10 The message recording equipment used for incoming calls to the grand jury is not accessible from a remote location.

F-11 Neither grand jury office has a room number on the door and the offices are not listed on the building directories in the courthouse, making it difficult for witnesses or member of the public to locate the grand jury offices.

F-12 The computer supplied to the grand jury has a 13-inch monitor screen which is difficult to use with any of the newer graphics-based programs.

F-13 Grand jury members are not provided with designated parking or permits for county parking lots; however, they are provided with extended-time parking permits but must compete with the general public for available parking spaces.

Clerical Support

The operation of the grand jury requires a considerable amount of clerical work which is assumed each year by incoming jurors. Maintaining the continuity of its reports, records, manuals, and protocols from year to year is an ongoing challenge for the grand jury with ever-changing grand jury personnel. For similar reasons, it is difficult for the grand jury to maintain continuous and stable working relationships with the county departments upon which it relies for support.

F-14 In addition to time spent for meetings, interviews, and inspections, grand jury members collectively average over five hours of time each week devoted strictly to clerical and support duties. These figures do not include time spent by jurors reviewing documents and reports after hours.

F-15 It is not possible to provide the public with a telephone number answered by a live person, or a public contact point for walk-in visitors without a staff support employee assigned to the grand jury.

F-16 The grand juries of all California counties with more than one million population are supported with 1-2 full-time clerical employees.

F-17 The grand juries of all but one California county with a population of 200,000 to 1,000,000 are supported with a paid employee, averaging sixteen hours per week for this group of counties.

F-18 The grand juries of most smaller California counties are without clerical support. However, El Dorado, Mendocino, and Lake counties are provided with part-time paid clerical staff.

Compensation

F-19 Compensation provided to Humboldt County grand jurors for general meetings and for mileage appears to be at parity with other counties.

F-20 Compensation provided for scheduled committee meetings and related committee work outside of scheduled meetings is one-third below the average rate reported for other California counties.

CONCLUSIONS

Security and Safety

C-1 Although grand jury proceedings and records are defined by law as highly confidential, only minimal provisions have been made by the county to protect this confidentiality.

Facilities and Equipment

C-2 The meeting area provided on the third floor (7 feet by 16 feet) is not adequate to accommodate a typical grand jury committee meeting.

C-3 The grand jury office on the first floor is not adequate for the multiple purposes for which is now being used.

C-4 Conference Room B (first floor) is not always available for the grand jury because it is often needed by the Board of Supervisors during scheduled grand jury meetings.

C-5 Conference Room A (first floor) is not adequate to accommodate a full grand jury meeting.

C-6 Grand jury offices should be provided with message recording equipment that can be accessed from remote locations.

C-7 Grand jury offices should be provided with identifying room numbers to accommodate the public and witnesses and facilitate grand jury operations.

C-8 Grand jury office locations should be displayed on the building directories to accommodate witnesses and the public.

C-9 The grand jury computer should be provided with a monitor screen commensurate with prevailing business office standards.

C-10 The lack of designated parking for grand jurors creates a hardship.

Clerical Support

C-11 Grand jury operations require several hours per week of clerical and related support activities, which detract from the jury members' primary purpose of interviews, inspections, and investigations.

C-12 The continuity and uniformity of grand jury procedures, records, working relationships, protocols, and general service to the public would be greatly improved with the addition of a permanently appointed clerical support staff.

Compensation

C-13 Humboldt County grand jurors are not adequately compensated for committee meetings and committee work outside of scheduled meetings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

THE HUMBOLDT COUNTY GRAND JURY RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING:

The Board of Supervisors provide sufficient funds and authorization in FY 2001-2002 to accomplish the following:

Security and Safety

R-1 Provide two fire-resistant, five-drawer, legal-size, locking file cabinets for exclusive use by the grand jury.

Facilities and Equipment

R-2 Identify sufficient space in the courthouse to provide the grand jury with one large meeting room (600 sq. ft.) and two conference rooms (200 sq. ft., each) for which the grand jury would be given first priority assignment.

R-3 Provide coat racks for the grand jury.

R-4 Provide the grand jury message recording equipment that can be accessed from remote locations.

R-5 Approve a maintenance order to place a room number on each grand jury office door and list the grand jury on building directories.

R-6 Provide the grand jury computer with a monitor screen which meets prevailing business standards.

R-7 Provide grand jury members with access to permitted county parking lots.

Clerical Support

R-8 Explore funding and staffing resources to identify and provide a staff support person to be assigned to the grand jury on a part-time basis.

Compensation

R-9 Explore funding options to bring juror compensation for committee meetings and related work to parity with other California counties.

RESPONSES

THE FOLLOWING RESPONSES TO REPORT 01-10 ARE REQUIRED PURSUANT TO P.C. 933 AND THE STANDARD FORMAT FOR RESPONSES.

1. The Board of Supervisors respond to all findings and recommendations.

COMMENDATION:

The Grand Jury would like to commend and thank the Board of Supervisors and the County Administrative Office for promptly providing improved message answering equipment, office room numbers, and the listing of the grand jury on the courthouse directories.