

Sonoma County Chapter

By Melissa J. Jones, President

The Sonoma County Chapter (SCCGJA) held its first Annual Meeting on January 11. Seven board members were elected, and the board elected officers:

Secretary, Ellen Stillman; **Treasurer**, Don Johnson; **Vice President**, Rich Klein; and **President**, Melissa Jones. The three at-large members are Ellen Harrington, Jerry Bagger and Dennis O'Reilly.

The initial committee structure for the chapter is designed to ensure support for each major element of the Grand Juror annual cycle:

- Community Outreach (Speakers' Bureau, Marketing Communications)
- Applicant Assessment and Selection
- Onboarding/In-Service Training
- General Administration/Response to Sitting Jury Requests
- Published Report Oversight

The Chapter has held planning meetings with the Sonoma County Superior Court Executive Officer Jose Guillen and will work closely with Mr. Guillen's staff on community outreach. The emphasis will be on attracting a prospective Grand Juror pool that reflects the diversity of the entire community.

The Chapter is in discussion with the State Association about hosting a regional training session for new Grand Jurors in Santa Rosa, and is working to set up a collaborative meeting with the San Francisco Chapter to talk about best practices for Juror selection and training. The timing should work well with the seating of the 2010-2011 Grand Jury. The Chapter also hopes to soon host visitors from Mendocino County who are interested in forming a Chapter.

Self-Evaluation

By Barbara Sommer, Foreperson, Yolo County Grand Jury, 2009-2010
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The thought of Grand Jury evaluation can be a little terrifying. Do we really want to know ... that our leadership skills leave something to be desired, that everyone is angry with Juror X, that the meetings seem interminable? Don't we know that already? Why ask? We ask because a systematic assessment gives a more reliable picture than various bits of observation and comments. A few individuals can set a tone that is not reflective of the group as a whole. In contrast, a systematic survey provides a more clear sense of what we are doing right and what needs to be changed or improved, and in so doing, can increase the effectiveness of our jury efforts. Systematic evaluation also is beneficial in letting individual members learn how their peers feel about the jury. It can be a wake-up call to learn that one's point of view may not be shared.

There are two general types of evaluation: summative and formative. Summative evaluation is like it sounds – summing up. It is generally done at the end of a term, session, or course, and is an after-the-fact study. Formative evaluation refers to making an assessment while the operation is ongoing in order to improve things. At the end of last year's term, the Yolo County Grand Jury evaluated its activities using the following questionnaire:

This anonymous survey is geared toward improving next year's Grand Jury operation. Please be candid in your reply, and do NOT put your name on it.

1. List the 2 or 3 most rewarding things about being on the Grand Jury this year.
2. List the 2 or 3 most challenging or difficult things about being on the Grand Jury this year.
3. What would have made the year's Grand Jury experience better for you?
4. Do you have any suggestions for improving next year's Grand Jury operations?

As this year's Foreperson, I found the responses to be immensely helpful to my present leadership role. I learned the importance of clarifying role, structure, and goals early on in the year. I was warned about the pitfalls (some inevitable) of member turnover, the tedium of producing the final report, variations in motivation, and the constraints on juror time.

As a result, I was able to "hit the road running" by building on the rewards and dealing with the challenges directly early in the year. Then, to determine whether in fact we were on the right track, we did a formative "Early Evaluation" three months into the new term, using this questionnaire:

This anonymous survey is geared toward improving our Grand Jury operation. Please be candid in your reply, and do NOT put your name on it.

1. What do you feel is going well with the Grand Jury?
2. What do you think we need to improve?
3. Do you have a sense of our role/function as a Grand Jury? (circle one)

<i>Yes</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>No</i>
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4. Do you feel we should have a group discussion of our role/function? (circle one)

<i>Yes</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>No</i>
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5. Overall, how satisfied are you with your current Grand Jury experience? (circle one)

<i>Very dissatisfied</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Very satisfied</i>
1	2	3
		4
		5

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6. How satisfied are you with the Foreperson's performance? (circle one)

<i>Very dissatisfied</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Very satisfied</i>
1 2	3	4 5

7. What is she doing right?

8. What could she do better?

9. Other comments

We learned that the Jury had a good sense of camaraderie and working well together, despite there being a few problem jurors who dominated the discussion. The result was that the latter tended to self-monitor and pull back a bit. The one or two less-than satisfied jurors found that they were in the minority.

I learned that my running of the meetings was satisfactory, and that I now can proceed with more confidence. The overall response to the evaluation was very positive with a sense of shared knowledge and involvement. There seemed no negative consequences of doing the evaluation.

Use a formative evaluation for what it is – an assessment of the Grand Jury process, not a personal popularity rating. It can help you to be a more effective leader. You want more than simple ratings of satisfactory and unsatisfactory – you want to find out what can make it better. The questions can be modified to suit the needs of your particular Jury.



In My Opinion

Note: The following was submitted to a local group by Carol Rosenberg, a member of the Mendocino County Grand Jury. It provides another view about the use of the term "Civil" to describe the regular grand jury

I'm currently serving my fourth term on the Mendocino County (CIVIL) Grand Jury. The reason I include "civil" is that we do not review evidence and vote to prosecute wrongdoers as the Grand Juries do in other states. We investigate county, city and other agencies that spend local money, such as special districts and non-profit agencies that contract to provide county services.

We at best cast light on how and why public funds are being spent. We interview lawmakers, department heads, members of the Board of Supervisors and other decision makers or folks that provide services. We search for "Findings," that is, facts that may point to possible truths. We write them up and make practical suggestions as to how the situation can be improved. We make our reports available online or in print. We are a panel of 19 individuals from all over the county and have every possible opinion on politics, social services, what makes good government, etc. That is also why I wrote civil! We try very hard to be at least tolerant if not accepting of each others' differences. We try hard to listen to opinions that differ from our own. We try hard to look for information that we can all agree is valid, that has been triangulated, that comes from more than one source. Information that is not contaminated by falsehood propaganda or our own perverted lens. We do not necessarily like each other, but we can work together to find the truth or make a suggestions to how a problem can be solved. We ask for feedback from those we investigate. Did we understand what you said correctly? Can you do what we asked? Are our suggestions valid and possible?

I would like all intelligent, reasonable county residents with 20 -30 hours a week to volunteer for the rand Jury. I think the process and the reports are important and yes, I think the process is also fun! I personally love the exchange of ideas and seeing how government actually works.

Summary of Board Action

By Joann Landi

**December 15,
2009**



Approved letter to Governor requesting proclamation declaring the month of February as Grand Jury Awareness Month.

Approved Annual Conference dates of October 21-22, 2010

Reaffirmed compliance with approved guidelines for meeting conduct.

January 26, 2010

Approved a protected reserve fund for the Training Committee.

Approved use of surplus 2009 Conference funds as budgeted income for the 2010 Annual Conference.

Approved accounting entries to close the Sol Price and Val Cavey funds.

Approved the 2010 Budget.

Approved letter to Sacramento Chapter.

Approved changes to CGJA Chapter formation document.

Note: Board Agendas are posted on our website seven days prior to a Board meeting, which is usually the third Tuesday of each month at 7:00 PM. Board minutes are posted after approval the month following each meeting.

Help Wanted

**Don't just be a member of CGJA,
become a participating member
All committees will welcome
your involvement as new people
and their ideas is what will keep
our organization moving ahead
in both educating the public and
training grand jurors**