

San Mateo County Board of Supervisors

Governance Handbook

DRAFT FEBRUARY 2026

Governance Team

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

District 1: Jackie Speier

District 2: Noelia Corzo

District 3: Ray Mueller

District 4: Lisa Gauthier

District 5: David J. Canepa

COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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This Handbook is a living document. The Board will review it annually at the Board retreat and may amend it by majority action to reflect evolving needs, values, and best practices.

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Norms

The behaviors by which the Governance Team is characterized are as follows:

We keep the best interests of our community as a priority.

- Be respectful: We give respect and dignity to every interaction.
- Be prepared: We come to meetings prepared and ready to deliberate.
- Be transparent: We communicate openly and honestly with one another and the community.
- Be inclusive: We commit to representing and empowering the entire community.
- Be collaborative: We work collaboratively towards a common vision and purpose.
- Be unified: We respect and support the decisions of the Board.
- Be bold: We make data driven decisions focused on equity and policy to improve communities' well-being.

1. Purpose, Authority, and Use of the Governance Handbook

The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors Governance Handbook establishes shared agreements, norms, and protocols that guide how the Board governs. It is intended to strengthen Board effectiveness, promote ethical and equitable decision-making, and ensure the Board operates as a cohesive governance body.

This Handbook does not replace the County Charter, ordinances, or state law. Rather, it articulates how the Board chooses to work together within its legal authority. It serves as:

- A guide for current Supervisors
- An onboarding tool for newly elected or appointed Supervisors
- A reference for staff and the public regarding Board governance expectations

2. Foundations of Effective County Governance

Governance is the act of translating the needs, values, and priorities of the community into policies and direction for the County. Effective governance requires clarity of roles, mutual accountability, respect for democratic processes, and stewardship of public resources.

High- performing boards share common characteristics:

- They govern as a body, not as individuals
- They focus on long- term outcomes rather than short- term fixes
- They distinguish clearly between governance and administration
- They model professionalism, integrity, and civility

3. Unity of Purpose for San Mateo County

Mission, Vision, and Values

The Board of Supervisors governs with a shared commitment to improving the quality of life for all San Mateo County residents. Unity of purpose enables Supervisors with differing perspectives to work collaboratively toward common goals.

Equity as a Moral and Governance Imperative

Equity is central to the Board’s unity of purpose. The Board recognizes that historical and structural inequities have resulted in unequal outcomes for many communities. The Board affirms the County’s commitment to addressing issues of inequity within our institution, proactively advancing equity, and promoting a culture of belonging, as permitted by law.¹

Effective governance requires:

- Intentionally examining how decisions impact different populations
- Using data to identify and address disparities
- Ensuring County policies and investments advance fairness, access, and opportunity

Equity considerations are integrated into policy development, budget decisions, and performance oversight. Community impact statements should be included in Board agenda reports.

¹ San Mateo County Ordinance Code Chapter 1.50 “Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Responsibilities.”

4. Governance Principles of the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors

The Board commits to the following governance principles:

Govern as a Team

Authority rests with the Board acting collectively. Supervisors respect majority decisions and support implementation once action is taken.

Strategic and Systems- Focused

The Board maintains a Countywide perspective, recognizing the interconnected nature of policies, services, and communities.

Stewardship of Public Trust

The Board aligns goals, resources, and results, ensuring fiscal responsibility and long- term sustainability.

Equitable and Inclusive

The Board governs in a manner that promotes fairness, inclusion, and belonging, particularly for communities historically marginalized.

Transparent and Accessible

The Board conducts its work openly and invites meaningful public participation.

Accountable and Continuously Improving

The Board holds itself accountable for effectiveness and commits to ongoing learning and improvement.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Governing as a Board

The Board's primary responsibilities include:

- Setting Countywide policy direction and strategic priorities
- Adopting ordinances, resolutions, and the County budget

- Providing oversight and accountability
- Hiring, evaluating, and supporting the County Executive
- Representing the interests of the entire County

Role of Individual Supervisors

Individual Supervisors:

- Prepare for and actively participate in Board meetings
- Respect differing viewpoints and engage in civil discourse
- Avoid directing staff outside of established protocols²
- Represent district interests while governing for the entire County
- Attend meetings of Boards and Committees to which they are assigned

Role of the Board President and Vice President

The Board President:

- Presides over meetings and ensures orderly, inclusive deliberation
- Serves as the primary spokesperson for the Board
- Develops proposed Board member assignments to Boards and Committees
- Supports adherence to Board norms and protocols
- Sets Board meeting agendas in collaboration with the County Executive
- Convenes special or emergency Board meetings in consultation with the County Executive and County Attorney

The Vice President supports the President and assumes duties in the Board President's absence.

Role of the County Executive

The County Executive is responsible for:

- Implementing Board policies and direction
- Working with Board President to set Board meeting agendas
- Managing County operations
- Advising the Board with professional, nonpartisan expertise
- Fostering an effective and equitable organizational culture

² San Mateo County Charter Section 207 "Communication with Employees." San Mateo County Code of Conduct Section 9 "Meeting Preparation and Staff Communications."

- Providing an orientation for new Supervisors

Role of County Attorney

The County Attorney provides independent legal advice to the Board and ensures compliance with applicable laws and ethical standards. The County Attorney represents the County of San Mateo, its various departments, and the Board of Supervisors.

6. Norms for a Positive Governance Culture

The Board agrees to the following norms:

- Come prepared, informed, and focused
- Assume positive intent
- Engage in constructive, solution- oriented dialogue
- Address disagreements respectfully and directly
- Support Board decisions once made
- Treat all individuals, including County staff, with dignity and respect

The Board sets the tone for the entire County through its conduct.

7. Board Operations and Protocols

Strategic Planning and Priority Setting

The Board engages in regular strategic planning to establish priorities and guide resource allocation. Progress toward strategic goals is reviewed periodically and reported publicly.

Board Assignments and Committees

Board assignments consider workload, expertise, and opportunities for leadership development. Rotations may be used to promote equity and broaden experience. The County Executive will provide the Board President with resources to support determination of appropriate and equitable assignments.

Agenda Development and Board Meetings

Agendas are developed collaboratively and aligned with Board priorities. Meetings are conducted efficiently, respectfully, and in compliance with open- meeting laws. Only the

Board President may attend agenda review; no other Supervisors should attend to avoid potential Brown Act issues. Staff from every district are expected to attend agenda review meetings.

Public Comment and Public Expression

The Board values public participation and provides regular opportunities for comment. Public input is received respectfully and without engaging in debate. The Board President may regulate the order of public comment and limit the time allowed to each person desiring to speak as required under the circumstances.

Electronic Communications

Electronic communications related to County business are subject to public records and open- meeting laws.

Media and Public Statements

Supervisors distinguish personal views from official Board positions and coordinate official communications through appropriate channels. The Board President is the primary spokesperson for the Board.

8. Board Leadership and Continuity

Board President Rotation

In December 2023, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors formally adopted a district-based rotation policy for Board officer appointments, which was first applied in 2024. Under this policy, Board leadership roles rotate by supervisorial district, regardless of when any individual Supervisor was elected or appointed to the Board.

This approach was intentionally designed to promote fairness, predictability, and equal representation among all supervisorial districts. By decoupling leadership rotation from individual tenure or appointment timing, the Board affirms that authority and opportunity for leadership rest equally with each district and the residents it represents.

2026 Board Officer Rotation List:

- Supervisor representing District 2 – President
- Supervisor representing District 3 – Vice President

- Supervisor representing District 1
- Supervisor representing District 4
- Supervisor representing District 5

This framework ensures that every district—and therefore every Supervisor—has a clear, transparent, and equitable pathway to Board leadership over time. The Board may periodically review the rotation framework to ensure it continues to serve the principles of equity, continuity, and effective governance.

9. Code of Conduct

The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors adopted by [resolution](#) the following [Code of Conduct](#) in January 2025 to enhance public confidence in the integrity, effectiveness, respectfulness, and fairness of the Board and of San Mateo County government. This Code provides a framework for Board members’ performance of their official duties and sets forth standards and practices that build trust, collegiality, and positive relations among Board members, County staff, and the public.

Preamble

In adopting and adhering to this Code of Conduct (“Code”), the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors (“Board”) seeks to enhance public confidence in the integrity, effectiveness, respectfulness, and fairness of the Board and of San Mateo County government. The Code supplements, and does not supplant, other existing laws, policies, and procedures that apply to members of the Board of Supervisors.

Standards and Practices

1. Integrity and Public Interest

Board members are committed to the highest ideals of integrity and recognize that advancing the public interest and betterment of the community are their primary concern.

2. Countywide Focus

Board members will focus on what is best for San Mateo County as a whole and strive to represent the entire County, as well as their individual districts.

3. Compliance with Laws and Policies

Board members will comply with all local, state, and federal laws and will support and model County policies. They will strive to avoid even the appearance of impropriety and comply with State-mandated gift reporting policies.

4. Workplace Culture

The Board is committed to maintaining a workplace and organization that is free from unlawful harassment, discrimination, and retaliation.

5. Orderly Governance and Respect

Board members' conduct will further the ability of the Board and County to carry out business in an orderly and uninterrupted manner. Board members will refrain from behavior that brings the County government or the Board into disrepute — including, but not limited to:

- a. Abusive conduct toward staff, the public, or other Board members;
- b. Unsubstantiated personal charges or allegations;
- c. Use of inappropriate or abusive language during Board meetings;
and
- d. Unsubstantiated or intemperate verbal or written attacks on the character or motives of others.

6. Collective Authority and Representation

Board members will respect the collective authority of the Board and accurately represent the official policies and positions of San Mateo County. When expressing individual opinions, Board members will explicitly state that they are not speaking on behalf of the entire Board.

7. Confidentiality and Legal Compliance

Board members recognize their obligation to protect confidential information received in the course of their work, including in closed session, and are committed to compliance with the Brown Act, the Public Records Act, and other applicable laws.

8. Agenda and Meeting Preparation

When working with the County Executive to set agendas, the Board President will collaborate with other Board members to ensure items within the Board's jurisdiction are agendaized at the earliest feasible time. Board members recognize the obligation to comply with agenda standards and procedures.

9. Meeting Preparation and Staff Communications

Board members will be adequately prepared for meetings and will communicate with staff primarily through the County Executive, deputies, or department heads, focusing on policy issues and refraining from operational direction.

Enforcement

The Board may censure a Board member or take any other action within its legal authority in response to a violation of this Code.

10. Ethics, Conflicts of Interest, and Accountability

Supervisors comply with all state and local ethics laws, including completion of mandatory ethics training every two years. Potential conflicts are disclosed promptly, and advice from the County Attorney or appropriate authorities is sought as needed.

11. Board-Staff Relationships and Professional Boundaries

The Board governs through the County Executive. Individual Supervisors do not direct staff outside established protocols.³ Respect for staff roles and expertise is essential to effective governance.

12. Board in the Community

Supervisors serve as community leaders, engaging residents, educating the public about County roles, and listening to community concerns. No individual Supervisor has authority to commit County resources or bind the Board to any particular action.

³ A Supervisor shall communicate recommendations or instructions to officers and employees under the County Manager's supervision only through the Manager. This section does not limit a Supervisor's right to obtain information. San Mateo County Charter Section 207 "Communication with Employees."

13. Governance Self- Assessment and Continuous Improvement

The Board conducts regular self- assessments to evaluate effectiveness and adherence to governance principles, including participating in at least one annual self-evaluation and review of this Handbook. Findings inform improvements to practices and protocols.

14. Orientation and Development of Supervisors

New Supervisors receive comprehensive orientation including governance norms, County operations, and equity principles. The Board affirms the importance of new member training and its expectation that new members will attend such training. New member training is provided by the County Executive, County Attorney, and outside organizations such as the California State Association of Counties. Ongoing training is encouraged.

New Board Member Orientation

- The first 100 days are a critical time and learning period for newly elected Supervisors and the development of a cohesive governance team.
- The Board recognizes the importance of welcoming and helping transition newly-elected Board members into the public experience, and thus, current Supervisors are encouraged to send welcome letters and reach out to new Supervisors.
- The County Executive and County Attorney will prepare orientation materials for new Supervisors and schedule an initial meeting with Supervisors-elect to establish early and direct communication, and select orientation options based on past experience.
- Department Heads, or their designees, will offer orientation to newly-elected Board members regarding the departments' key responsibilities and functions.
- The Board will provide opportunities for new Supervisors to spend time with veteran Supervisors, visit districts and share information about Board assignments.
- The Board will schedule a governance discussion meeting to provide an opportunity to share personal aspirations and to review, discuss and reconfirm the adopted governance protocols as documented in the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors Governance Handbook.
- In December or January, new Board members will be offered a variety of assignments based on interests and opportunities to collaborate with veteran Supervisors.

15. Future Additions

Proposed enhancements include:

- Formal community impact statements in all Board agenda reports
- Clear protocols for crisis and emergency governance
- Structured engagement with advisory bodies and commissions
- Annual public reporting on Board priorities and outcomes