

The following governing boards are required to respond within 90 days pursuant to Penal Code sections §933 and §933.05:

Board of Supervisors: F1, F2, F3, F4, R1, R2, R3, R4, R5

The following appointed officials are invited to respond within 60 days:

Chief Administrative Officer: F1, F2, R1, R2, R3

Assistant CAO/Human Resources: F3, F4, R4, R5

Per Penal Code §933.05(a)(1) and (2), responses must include acceptance, refutation, and/or clarification of the findings, and a commitment to implementing the recommendations, as appropriate, per Penal Code §933.5(b)(1)(2)(3) and (4).

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Perception of County Government and Importance of Transparency

How the community views County government is crucial for maintaining public trust and ensuring effective governance. Transparency is key to shaping this perception, as it creates an environment of openness and accountability. When County operations are transparent, citizens are better informed about how decisions are made, how resources are allocated, and how their local government functions overall.

Transparency means making information readily available to the public – like financial reports, meeting minutes, and policy decisions. This openness allows residents to engage in the governance process, provide feedback, and hold officials accountable. By promoting transparency, the County government shows its commitment to ethical practices and responsible management of public resources.

Transparency helps prevent corruption, reduces misunderstandings, and builds a stronger community. It enables citizens to see how their tax dollars are spent and ensures that government actions align with the community's needs and values. This fosters greater public confidence in county government, leading to increased civic participation and collaboration. How people perceive County government is greatly influenced by its transparency. By prioritizing openness and accountability, the County can enhance public trust, promote good governance, and build a more engaged and informed community.

One area that requires greater transparency is the roles, scope, and work of various County departments. Misunderstanding of identified departmental scope leads to confusion and a gap in communication between the government and the community. County departments are responsible for a wide range of services that impact daily life, from public health and safety to infrastructure and social services. However, many citizens are unaware of the specific functions and responsibilities of these departments, which can lead to unrealistic expectations and misconceptions about what the County can and cannot do. For example, residents might not fully understand the specialized nature of certain

departments, such as public health or social services, leading to confusion about the processes and limitations they face.

To address these issues, it's important for the County to improve communication and outreach efforts. Providing clear, accessible information about the functions and responsibilities of each department can help bridge the knowledge gap. Public forums, informational campaigns, and user-friendly online resources can all play a role in educating citizens about how their government works.

By increasing awareness and understanding, the County can foster a more informed and engaged community. When citizens have a clearer picture of how County departments operate, they are better equipped to interact with the government, seek appropriate services, and provide meaningful feedback.

Addressing the lack of awareness about County departments' roles and work is essential for improving the relationship between the government and the community. Through better communication and educational efforts, we can ensure that citizens have the knowledge they need to navigate and utilize County services effectively.

Understanding the Roles of the County Auditor, Assessor, and Tax Collector

All County government functions are vital to the well-being of our community. Each office of the County Auditor, Assessor, and Tax Collector plays a crucial part in maintaining financial integrity and supporting the County's fiscal health.

County Auditor

The County Auditor is responsible for overseeing the financial operations of the County. This includes conducting audits of County departments to ensure proper use of public funds, preparing, and maintaining accurate financial records and reports, monitoring, and reviewing financial transactions and expenditures, ensuring compliance with state and federal regulations, and providing financial analysis and recommendations to support County decision-making. One of the main functions of the Auditor's Office is to prepare the levy for all taxable properties in the County once assessed values have been provided by the Assessor's Office. The Auditor's Office calculates the tax rate for voter approved debt (considering debt service amounts), multiplies these rates times the assessed values and then adds any direct charges. This levy is used to create the tax bills mailed by the Tax Collector. In Mariposa County the Auditor an elected position that serves four years.

County Assessor

The County Assessor is tasked with determining the value of properties within the County for tax purposes. This role involves assessing the value of real estate and personal property, maintaining property records and assessment rolls, implementing property tax laws to ensure fair and equitable assessments, assisting property owners with assessment questions and appeals, and providing data on property values to other County departments and the public. In Mariposa County this is an elected position that serves four years and is a combined role with the County Recorder, who is responsible for recording documents like deeds and other documents into the County Official Record and ensuring that all documents comply with California law.

County Tax Collector

The County Tax Collector is responsible for collecting taxes and other revenues owed to the County. Their duties include issuing tax bills and collecting property taxes, administering the collection of other County revenues such as business licenses and permit fees, enforcing tax laws to ensure timely payment of taxes, managing delinquent tax accounts, conducting tax sales, and providing taxpayer assistance and information. In Mariposa County, this is an elected position that serves four years. The County Tax Collector is a position that is combined with the County Clerk and Treasurer positions and includes the responsibilities of those roles, as well.

Explanation of Assessor/Auditor/Tax Collector Creation of the Yearly Tax Roll

The Assessor is responsible for assessment, assigning the value of how much to bill for tax collection, for all County property. This information is used to create a yearly tax roll. The Auditor assigns the amount of tax due based on assessment information from the Assessor. These billable property tax amounts are recorded into the tax roll. The Tax Collector is responsible for billing property tax based on the information in the tax roll. Usually in Mariposa County, property tax bills are sent out by the end of October.

As mentioned previously, each of these positions are elected for four-year terms in Mariposa County. Of these, the Assessor/Recorder position is the only one mandated by law (California Constitution Article 11) to be elected. These positions are all elected on the same four-year cycle, meaning that it could be possible for three brand new individuals to be elected to serve in these positions in one election. Additionally, because these positions are elected, they have no direct supervision. As discussed above, the lack of training and support for County leadership positions, means that turnover is a cause for concern regarding the management of the County's finances.

The Importance of Timely Audits

Audits are essential to ensuring the financial health and transparency of County operations. They hold County departments accountable for their financial practices, ensuring that public funds are used appropriately and effectively. Regular audits provide transparency, allowing citizens to see how their tax dollars are being spent and fostering trust in County government. Audits ensure compliance with state and federal regulations, preventing legal issues and potential penalties. They also help identify financial irregularities, inefficiencies, and areas for improvement, contributing to the overall financial health of the County. The absence of a fiscal year audit can affect budget projections, which can lead to undetected deficit outcomes midyear.

Impact on Grants and Funding Mechanisms

Timely completion of audits is critical for securing and maintaining grants and other funding mechanisms. Many grants require up-to-date financial audits as a condition of eligibility, so delays can result in the County being ineligible for important funding opportunities. Existing grants often require periodic financial reporting and audits; failure to meet these requirements can result in the loss of ongoing funding, impacting County programs and services. Additionally, delayed or incomplete audits can harm the County's financial reputation, making it harder to secure future funding and negotiate favorable terms with lenders and grantors.

Understanding the roles of the County Auditor, Assessor, and Tax Collector is essential for understanding how County government manages public funds and maintains financial integrity. Timely audits are crucial for accountability, transparency, compliance, and the financial health of the County. They also play a vital role in securing and maintaining grants and other funding mechanisms that support County operations and services. By ensuring these processes work effectively, we can foster a more transparent, accountable, and a financially stable County government, ultimately benefiting all citizens.

Analysis of Fiscal Year 2023-2024

The MCCGJ was able to identify a couple areas that contributed towards the necessary budget adjustments that occurred during the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023-2024. Adjustments were necessary to accommodate accounting mistakes, roughly in the amount of \$6.8 million dollars.

One contributing factor is the installation of the Oracle software system for Mariposa County in 2022, which required all departments to learn how to enter their own budget information. Prior to this time period, all financial journal entry for the County was completed by the Auditors Office using AS400 and paper tracking. The change in software systems led to the Auditor's Office stepping in to cross-train County departments for the new system, see the "Technology" section below. Consequently, the Auditor's Office was required to designate limited personnel and time to training, leading to the hiring of additional Payroll Specialists. Ultimately, this led to the Auditor's Office falling behind on daily and essential tasks, such as financial reporting, specifically the Fiscal Year audit for the year 2021-2022.

A second component of the FY 23-24 budget issues is that two (2) contributions were made from the general fund to the County reserve accounts, roughly in the amount of \$6.8 million. While the contributions were recorded on a balance sheet, these contributions were not correctly recorded on County operating sheets.

The precedent for creating a fiscal year budget for Mariposa County has been to establish a budget prediction for anticipated funds that will be available the first three (3) months of the fiscal year. The lack of a completed audit for FY 2021-22 and an error in reporting the transfer of reserve contributions, led to incorrect budget predictions.

FINDINGS		RESPONSES
F1	The annual financial audit for FY 2021-22 has not been completed for Mariposa County leading to incorrect fiscal year budget projections for FY 2023-24.	
F2	Incorrect FY 2022-23 budget projections and untimely communication led to a later than normal mid-year budget review.	
F3	The accounting error of reserve contributions resulted in necessary emergency budget reconciliation and redistribution across County departments.	
F4	Daily activities not completed and left incomplete over a long time put the County at risk, as shown with the lack of a completed audit for FY 2021-22.	
F5	Working relationships between the Auditor's Office and County Administration were negatively affected by the combination of miscalculated budget for FY 23-24 projections and lack of completed FY 21-22 audit.	
RECOMMENDATIONS		RESPONSE
R1	The Auditor should establish written procedures for how audits for the fiscal year shall be completed on a timely basis within the next three (3) months.	
R2	The Auditor should complete two (2) management/leadership trainings totaling a minimum of 16 hours within 12 months. Successful completion of this activity shall be documented with the 2024-25 Civil Grand Jury within 30 days of completion.	
R3	Board of Supervisors should establish procedures for regular financial review, including "check ins," for the completion of annual fiscal year audits within six (6) months.	

R4	Within six (6) months, the Auditor and Assistant CAO/Finance should participate in a facilitated debrief of activity and decisions reached between their offices over the last two (2) years.	
R5	After completion of R4, the Auditor and Assistant CAO/Finance will develop a plan to continue a strong working relationship	

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Assessor: Section Narrative

Auditor: F1, F4, F5, R1, R2, R4, R5

Tax Collector/Treasurer: Section Narrative

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Continued Technology and Software Lessons

County uptake in current technology and purchasing of various software systems was a topic of research for the previous 2022-2023 Mariposa County Civil Grand Jury. Their report described a digital divide that affects different generations, as well as rural and urban communities. However, “while technology is a tool to help accomplish goals and to work more efficiently, it is only as good as those who manage and use it.”²