



# California Association of Councils of Governments

Effective Regions Through Partnership

**To:** Newly Appointed Board Members

**From:** Bill Higgins, Executive Director  
Robert Poythress, Board President (Madera County)

**Updated:** January 2024

**Re:** **CALCOG Primer for New Board Members**

Welcome to the Board of Directors of the California Association of Councils of Governments (CALCOG). This memo will orient you to the CALCOG mission and work program. We have written this to be easy to scan in recognition of the multiple demands on your time. This document may not answer all of your questions, so please feel free to contact us. We look forward to working with you to make CALCOG and the regional governments we serve more effective organizations.

A CHECKLIST TO GET STARTED	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Add Us to Your Contacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bill Higgins, <a href="mailto:bhiggins@calcog.org">bhiggins@calcog.org</a>, 916-717-8324</li> <li>• Sabrina Bradbury, <a href="mailto:sabrina@calcog.org">sabrina@calcog.org</a>, 530-864-8544</li> <li>• Robert Poythress, <a href="mailto:robert.poythress@maderacounty.org">robert.poythress@maderacounty.org</a></li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Share Your Contact Info</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We need the best email to reach you, your cell phone information (even if you work with a scheduler). We typically copy anybody you designate on all communications; but occasionally we may need to reach you directly.</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Add to Your Calendar</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board Meeting, Wed., February 7 (3:00 to 5:00 pm) <a href="#">(In Person)</a></li> <li>• Board Meeting, Fri., March 15 (10:00 am – 12:00 pm) (Virtual)</li> <li>• Board Meeting, Fri., April 12 (1:00 pm – 3:00 pm) (Virtual)</li> <li>• Board Meeting &amp; Leg Day, Wed., May 22 (10:00 am – 4:30 pm) <a href="#">(In Person)</a></li> <li>• Board Meeting, Mon., June 24 (10:00 am – 11:30 am) (Virtual)</li> <li>• Board Meeting Mon., August 12 (1:00 to 3:00 pm) (Virtual)***</li> <li>• Board Meeting, Mon., September 30 (2:00 to 3:30 pm) (Virtual)</li> <li>• Board Meeting, Oct. 28 &amp; 29 Fall Board Meeting (Time TBD) <a href="#">(In Person)</a></li> <li>• Board and/or COG Directors Meeting, Friday, December 6 (1:00 to 3:30 pm) (Virtual) ***</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">*** Only if needed for end of legislative session/year policy issues</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Review this Memo</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For a high-level overview of CALCOG and your role on the Board</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Connect with CALCOG</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Like us on Facebook: <a href="https://facebook.com/CALCOG">facebook.com/CALCOG</a></li> <li>• Follow us on LinkedIn: <a href="https://linkedin.com/company/calcog">linkedin.com/company/calcog</a></li> <li>• Follow us on Twitter <a href="https://twitter.com/The_CALCOCG">twitter.com/The_CALCOCG</a></li> <li>• Sign up for CALCOG Newsletter <a href="https://calcog.org">calcog.org</a></li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Orientation Call</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We like to schedule a short call to answer your questions and provide more specifics and context. We often include an executive staff member of your agency.</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Read 5 More Stories</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The “Story Tiles” on the front of our website highlight 60 projects and programs of “Regions at Work” around the state. These stories highlight our messaging that highlights our value of effective regional governance.</li> </ul>

## I. ORGANIZATION BASICS

- **Mission.** Our purpose is not fancy: it's to “*help our members serve their communities.*” The means by which we achieve this mission is outlined in Part II of this memo.
- **We Value Effective Regional Governance.** We believe that “*effective regional governance is an essential element of local control.*” This is because all communities have transboundary problems (like transportation) that are better solved by local officials working together for their region. Without a regional venue, a political vacuum would be created to address transboundary issues that would in all likelihood be filled by stronger state policies. This is one of the reasons why the League and CSAC each have a seat on CALCOG's board of directors.
- **CALCOG's Membership.** Our membership includes 49 regional agencies organized as a council of governments (COGs), regional transportation planning agencies (RTPAs), metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), county transportation commissions (CTCs), and congestion management agencies (CMAs). Many of our members fit several of these definitions. For example, the San Joaquin Council of Governments, is a “COG” that serves as the RTPA, MPO, and CMA. A common thread that binds our members is that they are regional agencies governed by local officials that are engaged in regional planning. Most CALCOG members focus on transportation planning. But some have mandates that are much broader. Our members also range quite a bit in size, from the Lake County/City Area Planning Council (one county, population 64,000) to the Southern California Association of Governments (six counties, population 18 million).
- **A Little “Big Tent” Organization.** CALCOG has been called a little big tent organization because many of our members identify with a subgroup within our membership.
  - 20 of our members are self-help counties (counties that have a sales tax measure supporting transportation) and are members of the [Self Help Counties Coalition](#)
  - 18 of our members are [Metropolitan Planning Organizations](#) responsible for developing a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) within their regional transportation plan;
  - 20 of our members are COGs responsible for the [Regional Housing Needs Allocation](#)
  - Several provide [transit service](#) (and are members of the California Transit Association)
  - Several more are rural members who also meet as part of the [Rural Counties Task Force](#)
  - And almost all of our members belong to a geographical group that seeks to advance policies within their specific region, such as the [Southern California Leadership Group](#), the [Central Coast Coalition](#), the [San Joaquin Valley Policy Council](#), the [Bay Area County Transportation Authorities](#), and the [North State Super Region](#).

CALCOG is the one venue where all these organizations come together. We try to share information between these subgroups, find points of agreement, and focus our association energies there.

- ***A Brief History of CALCOG.*** We believe a group of regional agency executive directors began meeting in the 1970s. Our records that go back to 1984. CALCOG was founded as a non-profit 501(c)(4) organization in 1986. The organization increasingly developed a strong policy voice and, in 1997, was instrumental in passing SB 45, which delegates the primary programming responsibility for the State Transportation Implementation Program (STIP) to RTPAs. For 30 years, CALCOG was staffed under an association management contract that provided executive and administrative duties for the organization. In 2016, CALCOG began to employ its staff directly.
- ***Budget.*** CALCOG has a budget of approximately \$800,000 per year, though this can vary with the number of contracts in any given year. About \$430,000 of this is raised from member dues. We have a seven-tiered dues structure based on population. The remainder of funding comes from contracts and revenues from our Regional Leadership Forum. The major expense is staff to implement the work program and the funds needed to maintain an office.
- ***Staffing.*** We are a small organization. Our budget includes funding for four full time positions and a small number of consultants and contractors.
- ***Executive Director Bio.*** Bill Higgins has served as the Executive Director since 2011 (the first five years under the association management contract). Prior to joining CALCOG, he served as a senior staff attorney and lobbyist for the League of California Cities, and its non-profit affiliate, the Institute for Local Government. There he was the lead negotiator on SB 375, which gave him an appreciation for regional governance. He also worked for two years with a law firm that did city attorney work in the Bay Area. He got his law degree from the University of Minnesota and his undergraduate in Agriculture and Resource Economics from Oregon State University.

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## II. WORK PROGRAM FOCUS AREAS

- ***California Academy for Regional Leaders.*** Started in 2018, our “CARL” provides leadership training for mid and upper-level managers and directors working for regional agencies. Each cohort includes about 25 to 30 people from around the state. The program focuses on teaching soft leadership skills and personal development. Our participants also form relationships that will last a career. We like to think of it as developing “*Espirit de COG.*”
- ***Information Sharing and Best Practices.*** Our most important work is sharing information between members and key partners such as the League of California Cities and California State Association of Counties. Each year, CALCOG facilitates meetings for executives (six), board (four to five) and the Regional Leadership Forum. These are venues to share ideas, exchange information, and improve policy.

- **Targeted, Consensus-Based Advocacy.** CALCOG provides effective, targeted advocacy, often working in concert with members to coordinate messaging. We also monitor and strategically participate in state administrative process, like the development of state transportation plans, funding guidelines, and the programs that require reductions of greenhouse gas emissions.
- **State-Regional-Local Transportation Partnerships.** Many of our members have a significant role in planning, funding, and delivering transportation projects. But with this duty comes a responsibility to work with all levels of government to assure that other goals, such as those for housing, air conformity, and climate change, are also met. CALCOG facilitates this partnership by monitoring developments on behalf of members and facilitating discussions between state, regional, and local officials.
- **Sustainable Communities Planning.** CALCOG is the one agency that represents all 18 MPOs that are responsible for developing a Sustainable Communities Strategy within the Regional Transportation Plan to achieve a greenhouse gas emissions target set by the Air Resources Board. Accordingly, we are in constant contact with the Strategic Growth Council, Air Resources Board, California Department of Transportation, California State Transportation Agency, The Department of Housing and Community Development, and other state agencies. CALCOG also continually meets with and educates members of the State Legislature to provide them information to assure that the best policy outcomes are reached.
- **Communication & Education.** One challenge is that the public—and policy makers—often do not understand the role of regional governments. CALCOG conducts original research and maintains a social media presence that highlights the role and value of member activities and presents it in a way that helps others understand the role and value of regional government. Our “Regions at Work” profiles are spotlighting case studies in an accessible way to improve messaging and education.
- **State Transportation Program and Funding Expertise.** Under SB 45, our members maintain a strong partnership with the state to operate and maintain the transportation system. CALCOG maintains relationships with key personnel from the California State Transportation Agency, the California Transportation Commission, and Caltrans to assure open communications are beneficial and continuous.
- **Monitoring Developments in Washington DC.** CALCOG monitors events, helps coordinate state messaging, and works with national counterparts to ensure that the changes made in Washington are workable and benefit the California’s regions, large and small.

### III. BOARD OF DIRECTORS & GENERAL GOVERNANCE

- ***Who is on the Board?*** The CALCOG Board has traditionally been a one-member, one vote organization. We currently have 49 regional members in our organization. The League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties may also appoint someone to our board. This means that full attendance would constitute 51 people in attendance. Each representative must be a voting member of the member's governing body.
- ***Bylaws and a Two-Thirds Majority.*** Since at least the early 1990s, the bylaws have always emphasized the need for collaboration and consensus. The reasoning here is that CALCOG has never had enough resources to focus on areas that where there is not consensus. In 2010, the organization replaced a weighted voting alternative with a supermajority (two-thirds) voting requirement for the budget and all policy motions to assure that the organization focused on areas where there was greatest agreement.
- ***Officers and Committees.*** The bylaws provide for four officers and three standing committees. The officers include a president, first and second vice presidents, and immediate past president. The three committees include an Executive Committee that can meet when the entire board cannot (membership is specifically defined), a financial committee, and a nominating committee. We have just initiated a new Legislation Committee that is a combination of board members and executive staff. The president makes appointments and may form ad hoc committees at her or his pleasure.
- ***Frequency of Board Meetings.*** Prior to the pandemic the CALCOG Board met three times a year. As a statewide organization, it's always a challenge to get local officials from every corner of the state to participate. With the growing acceptance of video participation, we anticipate having more frequent, and probably shorter meetings. Our current year calendar is on the first page of this memo.
- ***Board Relationship to Executive Director's Group.*** CALCOG hosts frequent meetings between executive directors (or their designees) to share information and provide updates on policy developments. Often, the discussions at these meetings on legislative and policy developments inform staff recommendations to the board. At times, the Executive Directors Group itself will make recommendations to the board. At times in the past, after setting high level policy and direction, the board has delegated "the details" to the Executive Directors Group who meet more frequently than the Board.
- ***No Form 700 for CALCOG.*** CALCOG is a nonprofit organization, and not a public agency. As a result, elected officials do not have to file a Form 700 related to their service on the CALCOG board. It is also unlikely that you will have to identify CALCOG as a source of income because your member agencies will be reimbursing your travel costs and any

registration to a CALCOG events. But just to be clear, board members should be careful in this area and always double check with their own agency counsel.

- Legal Obligations of Individuals Serving on Nonprofit Boards.** Board members of nonprofit corporations must always act in good faith, in a manner the director believes to be in the best interest of the corporations, and with such care, including reasonable inquiry, as an ordinarily prudent person would use under similar circumstances. See Cal. Corp. Code § 7231(a). Directors may rely on information, opinions, reports, or statements, including financial statements, prepared or presented by officers, employees, and independent counsel and accountants, and any subgroup of the board of which the delegate does not serve. Delegates may rely on such information as long as the delegate acts in good faith after reasonable inquiry and as long as the Delegate has no knowledge that would suggest that such reliance is unwarranted. See Cal. Corp. Code § 7231. Adherence to these standards generally insulates directors, as volunteers, from financial liability for failing to discharge their duties. See Cal. Corp. Code § 7231.5(a).
- More Information.** More information can be found on our website, including:

<b>Board Member Roster:</b>	<a href="https://calcog.org/board-of-directors/">https://calcog.org/board-of-directors/</a>
<b>Calendar of Key Dates:</b>	<a href="https://calcog.org/calendar/">https://calcog.org/calendar/</a>
<b>Leadership Academy:</b>	<a href="https://calcog.org/academy-for-regional-leaders/">https://calcog.org/academy-for-regional-leaders/</a>
<b>Legislative Bill Tracker:</b>	<a href="https://calcog.org/bill-tracker/">https://calcog.org/bill-tracker/</a>
<b>Region at Work Stories</b>	<a href="https://calcog.org/stories/">https://calcog.org/stories/</a>
<b>Member Agency Profiles:</b>	<a href="https://calcog.org/our-members/">https://calcog.org/our-members/</a>