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NAVIGATING LAFCO WITH CONFIDENCE

Building Strong Partnerships with Your LAFCO

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Understanding LAFCO

Understanding LAFCO today can prevent surprises tomorrow.

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Planning for Successful LAFCO Projects

The most successful LAFCO projects begin long before an application is filed.

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Building productive relationships throughout the LAFCO process.

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Lessons Learned from the Field

Practical lessons from decades of LAFCO experience.

SECTION

01

Understanding LAFCO

Understanding LAFCO today can prevent surprises tomorrow.

Why LAFCO Matters

Every special district will work with its LAFCO at some point.

Whether your district is planning for growth, considering a boundary change, updating its Sphere of Influence, or participating in a Municipal Service Review, you'll work with your LAFCO. Understanding your LAFCO before you need it helps your district avoid unnecessary surprises and make better-informed decisions.

- Every California county has an independent LAFCO.
- LAFCOs help plan for efficient and sustainable public services.
- LAFCO decisions affect boundaries, services, and future growth.
- LAFCO exercises independent judgment on behalf of the public.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The best LAFCO projects begin long before an application is submitted.

What is LAFCO?

Who LAFCO Is

- Independent local agency
- Exercises independent judgment
- Serves the public interest
- Planning and regulatory agency

Why LAFCO Exists

- Encourage orderly development
- Promote efficient public services
- Discourage urban sprawl
- Preserve agricultural and open-space lands

What does LAFCO do?

LAFCO combines long-range planning with regulatory oversight to support orderly growth and efficient public services.

State law assigns these responsibilities to LAFCO through the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Reorganization Act of 2000, or CKH Act.

PLANNING

- Conducts Municipal Service Reviews (MSRs).
- Establishes and updates Spheres of Influences (SOIs).

REGULATION

- Reviews boundary changes and reorganizations.
- Approves service extensions outside jurisdictional boundaries.

KEY TAKEAWAY

LAFCO's planning and regulatory responsibilities work together to promote orderly growth and efficient public services.

How LAFCO Make Decisions

Independent Judgement

Commissioners exercise independent judgment and do not represent the interests of their appointing authority.

Public Interest

LAFCO decisions are guided by what's best for the community as a whole.

Transparent Process

Public hearings, staff analysis and recommendations, and Commission deliberation support informed decisions.

SECTION

02

Planning for Successful LAFCO Projects

The best LAFCO projects begin long before an application is submitted.

Start the Conversation Early

The most successful LAFCO projects begin with a conversation, not an application.

Early communication with LAFCO staff helps identify issues, clarify requirements, and improve project planning before significant time and resources are invested. Early coordination often results in a smoother review process and fewer surprises.

- Discuss project ideas before filing an application.
- Identify potential issues early.
- Understand application requirements and timelines.
- Strengthen the project before formal review.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Early communication saves time, reduces surprises, and leads to stronger projects.

Remember: LAFCO staff are a planning resource, not just application reviewers.

Planning Tools for Better Projects

Municipal Service Reviews and Spheres of Influence are key planning tools used by LAFCO to evaluate services and guide future growth.

Municipal Service Reviews (MSRs)

Evaluate public services to support informed planning and future decisions.

- Assess current and future service needs.
- Identify opportunities and challenges.
- Encourage collaboration among service providers.
- Inform future LAFCO decisions.

Spheres of Influence (SOIs)

Provide a long-term vision for the logical growth of local government services.

- Identify probable future service areas.
- Support orderly and efficient growth.
- Coordinate planning among local agencies.
- Provide a framework for future boundary changes.

Remember: MSRs evaluate services. SOIs plan for future growth. Together, they support better long-term decisions.

Preparing a Strong Application

A well-prepared application gives LAFCO staff and the Commission the information to evaluate your proposal and make informed decisions.

Preparing your application with assistance from LAFCO staff before formal submittal helps identify questions early, clarify requirements, and support a more efficient review process.

- Clearly define the project and its purpose.
- Provide complete and accurate information.
- Explain how services will be provided.
- Respond promptly to requests for additional information.

KEY TAKEAWAY

A strong application begins long before it is submitted.

Remember: Good decisions depend on good information.

When Should You Involve LAFCO?

Many changes affecting local government boundaries and services fall within LAFCO's jurisdiction.

Not every project requires LAFCO approval, but many do. If a project involves boundary changes, service extensions, or other actions governed by the CKH Act, involve LAFCO early to identify the applicable requirements.

- Annexations, detachments, and other boundary changes.
- Reorganizations involving cities and special districts.
- New or extended services outside jurisdictional boundaries.
- Other actions governed by the CKH Act.

KEY TAKEAWAY

If you are unsure whether LAFCO approval is required, ask first.

SECTION

03

Working Effectively with Your LAFCO

The best projects begin with a conversation, not an application.

Working Effectively with Your LAFCO

Regular communication helps identify issues early, coordinate planning efforts, and keep projects moving throughout the review process.

Working with LAFCO throughout a project's lifecycle helps agencies anticipate issues, understand expectations, and keep projects moving efficiently.

- Communicate early and often.
- Share long-range plans and priorities.
- Keep LAFCO informed as projects evolve.
- Raise questions before they become problems.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The best working relationships are built through ongoing communication.

What Happens After You Apply?

Every application follows a structured public review process before the Commission makes a decision.

After an application is submitted, LAFCO staff review the proposal and may request additional information. The proposal is then presented to the Commission for consideration at a public hearing.

REVIEW PROCESS

1. Staff reviews the application for completeness.
2. Additional information may be requested.
3. Staff prepares an analysis; the Executive Officer makes a recommendation.
4. The Commission considers the proposal at a public hearing and makes a decision.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The Executive Officer provides the recommendation—the Commission makes the decision.

When in Doubt, Contact Your LAFCO

Every proposal is different, and early conversations help identify the appropriate LAFCO process.

Whether a proposal requires LAFCO approval depends on the specific circumstances. If you're unsure how the CKH Act applies to your project, contact your LAFCO before moving forward. A brief conversation can clarify the process, identify applicable requirements, and help avoid unnecessary delays.

- Each project should be evaluated on its own circumstances.
- Requirements vary by project.
- Early conversations help clarify the applicable process.
- Don't assume—contact your LAFCO.

KEY TAKEAWAY

**If you're unsure,
contact your LAFCO
before moving
forward.**

SECTION

04

Lessons from the Field

View LAFCO as a planning partner, not just a regulator.

What Experience Teaches

After decades of working with LAFCOs, a few lessons consistently stand out.

Plan Beyond the Proposal

The strongest projects are shaped during planning—not after an application is filed.

Every Proposal Is Unique

Requirements depend on the proposal, the agencies, and applicable law.

Better Information, Better Decisions

Complete information supports stronger staff analysis and more informed Commission decisions.

Successful LAFCO projects are built through preparation, understanding, and informed decision-making.

Final Thoughts

The best LAFCO projects begin long before an application is submitted.

Early planning, open communication, and a shared commitment to serving the public interest help create better projects and better decisions. Working with your LAFCO early helps identify opportunities, resolve issues, and keep projects moving efficiently.

- Plan early.
- Communicate often.
- Ask questions.

KEY TAKEAWAY

View your LAFCO as a planning partner—not a regulatory agency.

California Association of
Local Agency Formation Commissions

CALAFCO

SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE
COMMUNITY GROWTH

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THANK YOU

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