

Fire Safe Council HANDBOOK



Our goal is to preserve California's natural and man-made resources by mobilizing all Californians to make their homes, neighborhoods, and communities fire safe. The Council works to meet this goal by combining the expertise, resources, and distribution channels of its members.

The California Fire Safe Council
California's leader in community wildfire risk reduction and resiliency



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Fire Safe Council HANDBOOK

INTRODUCTION



Is a Fire Safe Council right for your community?
If your goal is to increase the safety of residents, and better protect homes and businesses from fire, then the answer is YES!

WHY DOES YOUR COMMUNITY NEED A FIRE SAFE COUNCIL?

Fire is a fact of life in California. When we choose to live among nature, we must learn to live with fire. California’s wildland ecosystems are fire dependent; they need fire to survive. Fire thins the vegetation, giving plants room to grow. It cracks seed casings and replenishes the soil, allowing new life to thrive.

Learning to live with fire means protecting our community assets from potential wildfire damage. Here’s what a Fire Safe Council can do:

- ▶ Mobilize people in the community who stand to lose something of value to fire
- ▶ Create a powerful group initiative
- ▶ Save lives, property and money from wildfire

SPEAKING WITH ONE VOICE

A Fire Safe Council is a coalition of public and private sector organizations that share a common, vested interest in wildfire prevention and loss mitigation. Councils are dedicated to saving lives and reducing fire losses by making their communities fire safe.

Over 150 local councils in California have partnered with the CFSC and their local, county, and state fire agencies to make their communities safer, better places to live:

- ▶ Developing an emergency preparedness plan for the community before a wildfire occurs. This proactive measure minimizes loss of life, property, homes, businesses, natural and historic areas, and other valuable assets at risk of being destroyed by wildfire.

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Fire Safe Council HANDBOOK

INTRODUCTION

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- ▶ Providing an opportunity for community residents and organizations to voice concerns about public safety issues, and protect social and economic interests in the community.
- ▶ Increasing the chances that homes in the community will continue to be insured.
- ▶ Seeking funding and implementing fuels reduction and education & outreach projects.



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MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT

Your first step is to recruit members. First, identify the potential public and private partners in your community who are at risk of loss from wildfire. Here are some examples of potential members:

- ▶ **Your Local Fire Agencies** can provide advice and expertise on fire safety.
- ▶ **Utilities**, such as the water district or the electric company, have a vested interest in fire safety because their services may be disrupted when a fire occurs. The electric company is especially concerned about trees growing into power lines and starting fires.
- ▶ **Environmental Groups** are especially concerned about habitat loss for endangered species when fires occur, as well as a number of other fire-related issues.
- ▶ **Insurance Industry Representatives** are interested in insuring and continuing to insure communities that have taken fire safety measures.
- ▶ **Landscapers** can provide information on fire safe landscaping and help educate homeowners about choosing more fire-resistant plants.
- ▶ **Real Estate Agents** are the first people homeowners meet when they are moving into the neighborhood. Real estate agents may educate homeowners about potential fire danger and provide information on how homeowners can protect themselves.
- ▶ **The Parks and Recreation Department** seeks to protect natural areas from damaging wildfire and may educate the community about fire's role in the ecosystem.
- ▶ **Local Political Leaders** can mobilize the community to become fire safe and represent community fire safe concerns/initiatives in government.
- ▶ **Homeowner Associations** have a vested interest in protecting their individual homes, as well as their neighborhoods, from wildfires.
- ▶ **Other Local Groups** that have a vested interest in fire safety; this could and should be just about anyone who lives or works in the area.

Involve the community!

Starting a Fire Safe Council is a grass-roots effort and while it is important to create partnerships with business and organizations, reaching out to and involving the members of your community is key to the success of your Fire Safe Council.



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STARTING A COUNCIL

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SEND AN INVITATION

The next step is to write a letter or send an email to each potential partner explaining the Fire Safe Council's goals and inviting them to a Fire Safe Council meeting.

PREPARING FOR THE FIRST MEETING

Contact Local Fire Officials

As the local fire safety experts, your fire department will have valuable insight about your community's fire environment. The department may be able to provide program ideas that will help you motivate the council to action and create some early successes.

Ask Fire Officials About the California Fire Plan

The California Fire Plan is the state's road map for reducing the risk of wildfire. By placing the emphasis on what needs to be done long before a fire starts, the Fire Plan looks to reduce fire fighting costs and property losses, increase firefighter safety, and to contribute to ecosystem health. <https://www.Fire.CA.gov/Media/4934/Fireplan.pdf>

Contact Local Fire Safe Groups

Contacting members of other Fire Safe Councils is a good way to learn about successful grassroots fire safe programs. Visit the California Fire Safe Council website for a map of local fire safe councils and local FSC contact information.

Select a Meeting Location

Hold the first meeting in a neutral location such as the local community center or library. Try to select a meeting place where everyone will feel comfortable sharing their ideas and concerns.

Create an Agenda

Fire safety can be a complicated issue. At your first Fire Safe Council meeting, keep your agenda simple and uncomplicated. Agenda items should be broad, topical areas that can be used as starting points for productive discussions. The goal of the first meeting is to begin a dialogue and build consensus. Avoid discussing controversial, divisive topics at the first meeting. Allow time for your local fire officials to speak and to respond to questions.



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STARTING A COUNCIL

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Appoint a Facilitator

Choose one person to direct the first meeting. A good facilitator has the ability to work with people and achieve consensus. The facilitator should be neutral and understand the diverse views of members and be able to put them in the context of the larger issue. They should not be easily swayed by opinion and should have the ability to evaluate issues and concerns raised by members.



The California Fire Safe Council has Regional Coordinators to guide you through this entire process, including the facilitation of community meetings. Don't hesitate to access this resource.



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INITIAL COMMUNITY MEETING



Take Meeting Minutes

Written minutes are valuable because the group can refer back to the minutes to recall the events of past meetings. This is an excellent way to keep track of new ideas and responsibilities for projects. Whoever takes meeting minutes should be willing to type them up after the meeting. It may also be a good idea to mail or email minutes to Council members to keep them updated.

Develop a Membership Roster

Circulate an attendance sheet during the meeting and have Council members write down their names, addresses, telephone numbers, and, if available, their email addresses. The person taking meeting minutes should type up a Fire Safe Council roster so that members can get in touch with each other between meetings.

Display a Map of the Community

The map will help the Council identify areas of concern and high fire hazard areas in the community. It will help the Council prioritize potential fire safe projects. Your fire department may be able to help create a map showing specific fire danger areas.

Share Fire Safety Brochures and Materials

Your local fire department may have information it can share. And visit the Fire Safe Council's web site for brochures on **Home Hardening** and **Defensible Space**. The Fire Safe Council is at www.CaFireSafeCouncil.org, or call the statewide Council at 916-648-3600 to request materials.

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FIRST ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING



Elect Board of Directors and Executive Board Members

Your Board of Directors should consist of a President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Committee Coordinators.

Committee Development

Committees should be focused on goals set by Board of Directors. Suggested committees include: Projects, Education & Outreach, and Communications & Fundraising.

Develop a Mission Statement

A mission statement is a statement of purpose and the ideal or basic reason for the existence of the organization. It should be broad in scope and define the organization’s philosophy. In addition, it should be short and easy to understand. Present a *draft* Mission Statement to the Directors’ second board meeting. Once you or another Board member has proposed a mission statement, the Council should review and finalize it.

Consider reviewing mission statements from other Fire Safe Councils. Here is the mission statement for the statewide Fire Safe Council:

“The mission of the Fire Safe Council is to preserve California’s natural and man-made resources by mobilizing all Californians to make their homes, neighborhoods and communities fire safe.”

Determine Overall Objectives

After establishing a mission statement, Council members should think about how the Council will fulfill the mission. Objectives state what will have occurred if the mission is successfully achieved. When determining objectives, make sure they relate to the mission and that they are measurable, achievable and results-oriented.

Consider reviewing the objectives from other Fire Safe Councils. Here are the objectives for the statewide Fire Safe Council:

- ▶ Unite Council members to speak with one voice on fire safety
- ▶ Use marketing expertise and communication channels of Council members to increase distribution of fire prevention education materials

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FIRST ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

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- ▶ Discuss and evaluate legislation pertaining to fire safety
- ▶ Empower grass roots organizations and individuals to create fire safe communities

Choose Fire Safe Council Name

Choose a name for your Council to give it an identity. Most local Fire Safe Councils have chosen to include a specific city or region in their name. For example **Nevada County Fire Safe Council**, or **FIRESafe MARIN**.

Discuss Projects Ideas and Determine Feasibility

Inspire Council members to examine their resources and determine how each member can contribute to a project's success. Many new Councils choose to begin with small projects and work their way up to larger undertakings. Small projects will yield faster results and gratification, which will build momentum for the group.

Assign Responsibility for Projects

Ask for volunteers and be encouraging, as some members may be shy or hesitant because this is a new area of knowledge for them. Some Council members may have a special interest in specific projects or may be able to commit certain resources.

Make sure that all projects undertaken by the Council have been assigned to an individual or group of individuals to ensure that the project gets done.

Target Future Members

Fire safety involves the whole community and the health of your council depends upon constant efforts to involve more people. Enlist volunteers to focus on membership recruitment. Remember, it may take several months to convince certain partners to participate in your Council. In fact, some partners may not join the Council until a fire threatens. During this period of heightened awareness and concern, your Council can attract new members and advance fire safe programs.



Fire Safe Council HANDBOOK

NON-PROFIT STATUS

Filing for an established not-for-profit tax status with the federal government allows local Councils to accept monetary donations without being taxed by the federal government.

Your Council also may consider making a similar arrangement with local organizations such as firefighters associations or local environmental groups who have already established not-for-profit status.



10 BASIC STEPS FOR STARTING A CA NON-PROFIT 501(c)(3)

1. Determine the Name of Your Corporation

- a. You can check the database of existing names on the business search page on the CA Secretary of State website.
SOS.CA.gov/Business-Programs/Business-Entities

2. Appoint the Board of Directors

- a. Most non-profits have anywhere from 3 to 25 directors. For a small FSC we recommend 7 to 12 members.
- b. The Board of Directors provide direction and oversight over the organization's activities, finances, and legal compliance.

3. Draft and file Articles of Incorporation

- a. Organization Name
- b. Purpose or purposes of the non-profit
- c. Agent for service of process
- d. Any limitations on corporate powers

Sample articles can be found on the Secretary of State website:
SOS.CA.gov/Business/Corp/PDF/Articles/Arts-PB.pdf

4. Draft By-Laws and Conflict of Interest Policy

For an Annotated Form of Bylaws for a CA Non-Profit visit the Public Counsel website: publiccounsel.org/publications?id=0060

Sample Conflict of Interest Policy can be found in Appendix A of the Instructions to IRS Form 1023: irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/i1023.pdf

5. Take initial board actions

- a. Adopt By-Laws and Conflict of Interest Policy
- b. Elect officers
- c. Adopt fiscal year
- d. Approve establishing a bank account
- e. Approve applying for state and federal tax exempt 501(c)(3) status

NON-PROFIT STATUS

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6. Obtain an Employer Identification Number
irs-ein-forms-gov.com/c-corp
7. File the initial registration form (Form CT-1) with the California Attorney General's Registry of Charitable Trusts. This annual registration is required.
oag.ca.gov/charities/forms
8. File the Statement of Information Form with the California Secretary of State (Form SI-100)
businesssearch.sos.ca.gov/?filing=corp
9. Apply for federal tax exemption with the IRS and receive determination letter (Form 1023)
irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/i1023.pdf
10. Apply for California tax exemption with the California Franchise Tax Board and receive an Affirmation of Exemption Letter (Form 3500)
ftb.ca.gov/forms/misc/3500a.pdf

FORM A 501(c)(3) OR ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT FOR FISCAL SPONSORSHIP?

Fiscal sponsorship is an agreement between an established 501(c)(3) charity and a relatively new, unincorporated organization that lacks its own tax exempt status but is interested in **soliciting donations and grants**. Under this arrangement, a tax-deductible contribution and/or grant award can be given using the sponsoring agent's exempt status. The fiscal agent for an organization then agrees to accept and be responsible for monies on your behalf. Under the law, the sponsoring agent and the new start-up nonprofit are considered one legal entity, and likewise both can be held responsible for each others' actions. The National Council on Nonprofits recommends that you look for an organization with a mission that is similar to yours. *For more information, please refer to the **Questions to Ask a Potential Fiscal Sponsor** pages within the **RESOURCES** section of this handbook.*

A fiscal sponsor is a nonprofit organization that provides fiduciary oversight, financial management, and other administrative services to help build the capacity of charitable projects.

NON-PROFIT STATUS

CONTINUED

It is often useful to refine the first, basic mission statement. Add or delete a sentence or a word from the mission statement until your team feels that the wording accurately describes the purpose of the new nonprofit organization. If you have any people in mind to serve as your initial group of Board members, then have them review the wording of the mission statement.



WHAT IS THE PURPOSE, OR MISSION, OF THE NONPROFIT?

Begin by carefully clarifying what the purpose of the nonprofit is—what its mission is. The mission is all about meeting a need in the community—it is the most important reference point for Board members when doing their jobs. For now, when starting your nonprofit, write an initial, basic mission statement.

At this point, the mission statement needs to be generally descriptive. Note that later on, during strategic planning, the mission statement should be refined so that all key stakeholders have input to, and complete understanding of, the mission.

The following guidelines may be helpful to your team when writing the first, basic mission statement.

1. **The mission statement describes the overall purpose of the organization.** *It addresses the question “Why does the organization exist?” If it is primarily to meet a public need in your community, then starting a nonprofit is indeed a good idea.*
2. **The statement can be in a wide variety of formats and lengths.** *It can range from a few sentences to a few pages. At this stage in the development of the nonprofit, it might be best to keep your mission statement to at most about a quarter page.*
3. **Write a brief mission statement.** *Consider at least these specific aspects of the mission:*
 - a. The primary benefits and services to clients—the difference in the community that the nonprofit aims to make
 - b. The groups of clients who will benefit from those services
 - c. The values that will guide how the nonprofit will operate
 - d. How you would like others to view the nonprofit?

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Sustaining momentum is vital to maintain enthusiasm and interest in the Council among members. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

Recruit New Members

New members will bring new ideas to the Council. Review the original invitation list you sent to the community. Identify invitees who do not attend Council meetings and invite them to come to the next meeting. Is there anyone missing from the list?

Ask Each Member to Bring An Idea For a Fire Safe Project

Different members have different areas of expertise. Tap the diversity of Council members by encouraging members to think of creative projects that interest them and their organizations. Members will devote more time and energy to a project when they can see a direct benefit.

Continue to Communicate With Existing Fire Safe Councils

More established Councils have already experienced many of the growing pains your Council may experience and can provide insight on what works and what doesn't. Invite members of another Council to attend your Council meeting and speak.

Participate in Community Events

Gain visibility by setting up a booth at a community fair and handing out fire safe information. Educate the community about fire safe landscaping by creating a small fire safe garden for fair-goers to enjoy.





IN-KIND SUPPORT IS VALUABLE

Spreading the fire safety message to the community does not have to be costly. Throughout this handbook we have provided many examples of partnerships that can help get your Council off the ground without a lot of money.

Your Fire Safe Council should always be looking for ways to stretch existing resources and maximize partnership opportunities. Partnerships give your Council the chance to provide organizations and businesses with programs and activities that extend their mission. Cooperative programs also can secure their long-term commitment to fire safety.

Partnerships can be as simple as asking a local business to display a fire safety poster. And small-scale partnerships with local government or a neighborhood merchant can be just as effective as partnerships with large companies.

INITIATING SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

Asking companies, local businesses, community groups, or government offices to form partnerships involves going through the proper channels. Although each organization has different protocols, here are some tips to initiate a fire safety partnership:

- ▶ **Choose a specific topic or project.** Don't ask to form a partnership based on the broad topic of fire safety. Target a specific area such as encouraging homeowners to clear brush; teaching children about stop, drop and roll; or hosting a spring clean-up program.
- ▶ **Develop an angle.** Think about partnering with groups that will benefit from the partnership.
- ▶ **Outline the benefits in a proposal.** Write down every reason the target organization will benefit from this partnership. Present your case as an opportunity that cannot be missed.
- ▶ **Contact the organization.** Partnerships do not have to be made with strangers. Consider approaching friends or acquaintances with your ideas.
- ▶ **Be flexible. Be patient.** Like any relationship, building a partnership takes time and compromise.



ENGAGE THE MEDIA

Once a fire safe project is underway, share your good news! Call the local daily or weekly newspaper, and radio and television stations. Tell the editors about the Council's fire safe project and how it will benefit the community. Write a news release about the project, send it to local media and follow up with a phone call to determine if they will cover it.

Media coverage can educate the community, gain recognition for the Council, and build excitement. In addition, publicity gives the Council credibility when you are appealing to public and private partners for support.

WHAT IS NEWS?

There are basically two types of news: "hard" and "soft." A hard-news story is centered around an actual event such as a community chipper day. Hard-news stories also can be "late-breaking" stories that imply urgency, such as a wildfire outbreak that threatens 100 new homes in your area.

Soft or feature news stories are more conversational and "evergreen" in nature. They often include factual observations rather than explicit facts and data (which are the basis of most hard-news stories). For example, a story about tips for making your home and property fire safe that contains comments from the Council chairperson can appear any time and still have an impact on homeowners and wildland residents in your area.

WHO ARE THE MEDIA AND HOW DO THEY DIFFER?

To successfully communicate with your audiences, it is Imperative to understand the full range of media outlets available to you. Through your local public relations efforts, you will probably deal with radio, television, newspapers and newsletters.

Each media outlet tells stories differently. You will need to tailor your messages to fit the specific format of the media outlet in a way that preserves the integrity of the message you are trying to get out.



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PUBLICIZING YOUR COUNCIL

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Using Newspapers/Printed Materials for Community Outreach

The weekly and daily newspapers in your community are more likely to highlight stories with local angles. Newspapers have more space available than other media, providing you with more opportunities to elaborate on your subject.

The city or metro desk editor should receive all hard-news press releases about late-breaking news. Some small community newspapers request that hard-news and late-breaking news stories be directed to the editor or managing editor who will assign the story to a reporter.

Late-breaking news stories have short lead times, ranging from 24 hours before a specific event to a few minutes in the case of urgent information about uncontrolled fires. Hard-news stories also have short time frames, the length of which is determined by the timing of the story.

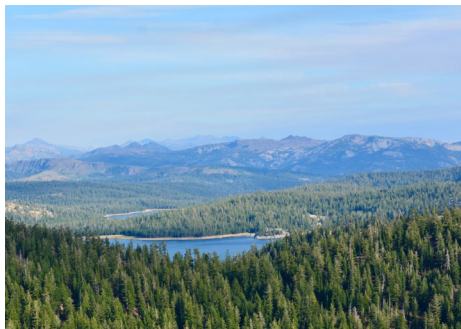
Soft or feature stories are generally written by editors of any of the following sections: Features, View, and Lifestyle. Small weekly newspapers normally have one editor assigned to writing feature stories. As a general rule, soft stories do not have pressing deadlines.

Using Television for Outreach

Television news and talk show programs reach a broad range of viewers in your area. But most television hard-news, late-breaking news and features stories are limited to one- to two-minute segments, which don't allow you much time to provide extensive information about your subject. That means all messages conveyed must be short and concise.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. It's this ability—to bring things to life—that makes television such a powerful and persuasive medium. Stories that can be told with several visual elements are more likely to be used since this is television's unique attribute. Keep this in mind as you approach the assignment editor or news director at your local television stations.

In addition to being a powerful persuasion device, television news is a business. Remember that the stations in your area compete for breaking news stories and viewers, which makes your ability to



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PUBLICIZING YOUR COUNCIL

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adhere to deadlines and lead times particularly important. If your Council chairperson plans to make an important statement at an event in your community, notify the assignment editor or news director approximately two to three days in advance. Direct all late-breaking news to the assignment desk.

In addition to news programs, television talk shows and public affairs programs are excellent vehicles that your spokesperson(s) can use to communicate your messages to residents in your area. Most interviews or feature segments average about 15 to 30 minutes. Lead times for these programs are critical, since most talk shows book guests six to eight weeks in advance.

Using Radio for Community Outreach

Radio has been referred to as the most “personal” medium because it reaches listeners in their homes, cars and at work.

Most radio news stories are limited to 30 to 60 seconds since the average newscast lasts only a few minutes. Direct all publicity materials to the news director or assignment editor. Some smaller stations require that news releases and news alerts be forwarded to the program director or station manager. Check with each station to determine what it prefers.

Public affairs and news talk shows provide opportunities for your spokesperson to develop your key points in depth. Call-in format programs also provide you with one of the best opportunities to have your spokesperson(s) interact with your target audience. Four weeks is the average lead time for booking guests on these programs.

At many large radio stations, one producer or contact person books the interviews for each program. The public affairs director normally schedules the interviews at small radio stations.

Newsletters/Mailers/E-News

Design educational mailers, newsletters, and postcards to announce upcoming events and keep community members informed of the Council’s activities.

PUBLICIZING YOUR COUNCIL

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Remember to take advantage of opportunities to include articles in community newsletters such as those published by your local Homeowner Associations, PTA, and Chamber of Commerce. These are excellent media vehicles for reaching stakeholders in your area. Depending on the nature of the publication, newsletter articles can be technical or conversational.

The lead time and deadline of each specific newsletter depends on the frequency of the publication. Most newsletters are published monthly or quarterly. Direct your releases and correspondences to the editor or the communications department of the organization.

LOCATING THE MEDIA

Media contacts change often. Call each newspaper or station each time you contact them to verify their mailing address and to find out to whom to send your materials. Sending information to the wrong person or to a person who is no longer there can land your hard work in the wastebasket. Here are some key questions to ask when you do call the media:

Questions for Print Media:

- ▶ Who is the city desk editor, the features editor and the metro editor?
- ▶ If it is a weekly newspaper, magazine, or Sunday magazine, what is the lead time for the publication and when is the issue published?
- ▶ Are there HOA or other community newsletters that might publish Fire Safe Council information?

Questions for Television Media:

- ▶ Who is the news director and/or assignment editor?
- ▶ Ask the programming department at television stations the following questions: Does the station air any talk or public affairs programs? What is the general subject matter? When does the program air? Is the program live or taped? Who is the contact person?

PUBLICIZING YOUR COUNCIL

CONTINUED



Questions for Radio Media:

- ▶ Who is the news director and/or assignment editor?
- ▶ Who is the public affairs director? What is the lead time for public service announcements? What format is best—audio cassette or scripts?
- ▶ Ask the programming department whether the station airs any public affairs or talk shows. Find out the format of the program. Does the program have a call-in format? Does the station permit telephone interviews versus in-studio interviews? Is the program live or taped? What is the lead time for booking guests? Who is the contact person?

CALENDAR LISTINGS

Newspapers and radio stations often feature calendar of event listings. Send information about upcoming community events that you would like the public to attend to the calendar editor at least two to six weeks prior to the event to maximize the chances of its inclusion in the news.

NEWS RELEASES

News releases are the most common form of communication with the media. News releases are brief, factual, informative materials that are meant to assist an editor or reporter with writing a story.

The lead, which is the first paragraph of the release, is the most critical element. In most cases, the lead is a synopsis of the news and should contain the five Ws and one H—who, what, where, when, why, and how. The succeeding paragraphs should be written in declining importance and should enhance the lead. Feature stories can be more creative. The overall style of a news release should be like that of a newspaper—factual and concise. Be sure to verify data and spelling of words in the release.

Following is a list of things to consider when writing a news release:

- ▶ Identify the news release with a headline—make it thought-provoking and concise
- ▶ Double space
- ▶ Include the following at the top of the release: contact name, title, affiliation, telephone number, and date of release



Fire Safe Council HANDBOOK

PUBLICIZING YOUR COUNCIL

CONTINUED



- ▶ Write in news style—keep sentences simple and forget flowery writing
- ▶ End each page with “more” and close the release with “# # #”
- ▶ Limit the release to two pages if possible
- ▶ Remember to include the five Ws and one H in the lead
- ▶ Don’t break paragraphs between lines or pages
- ▶ Don’t break proper names between lines or pages

SOCIAL MEDIA

Website

Home Page—Include: Fire Safe Council Name, Logo, Mission Statement, Goals, Newsletter Sign up, and Link to Fire Safe Council Brochure.

Post—your meeting minutes, upcoming events and programs, news stories, fire safe/defensible space/home hardening brochures for download.

Links—to sites with relevant fire safe information.

- ▶ www.CaFireSafeCouncil.org
- ▶ www.Fire.CA.gov
- ▶ www.NFPA.org

Facebook & Twitter

Facebook and Twitter are great for keeping information fresh. Featuring upcoming events, news stories, and pictures of projects in process, etc., on these social media platforms keeps community members informed in real time.

YouTube

Consider developing a YouTube Channel featuring short videos on topics such as: defensible space clearance and home hardening strategies; workshops and trainings featuring fire safe landscaping & evacuation procedures; workshops & trainings; projects in process; and current news stories that feature your Fire Safe Council.

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When it comes to wildfire, no single person alone can protect a community. Residents throughout California are joining forces to create local Fire Safe Councils to effectively reduce and prevent wildfire losses.

Fire Safe Councils are grassroots, community-led organizations that mobilize residents to protect their homes, communities, and environments from catastrophic wildfire. A local Fire Safe Council is often sparked by a specific catalyst—perhaps a recent fire or neighbors who want to be better prepared. Once organized, a Council can build synergy, and that initial spark becomes an engaged, empowering tool for residents to do their part to make the community safer.

Fire Safe Councils throughout California educate homeowners about community wildfire preparedness activities while working with local fire officials to design and implement projects that increase the wildfire survivability of their communities. Many Fire Safe Councils have successfully implemented such projects as hazardous-fuel-reduction projects, Community Wildfire Protection Planning, and homeowner training.

By mobilizing the community members who stand to lose the most, Fire Safe Councils create a powerful group initiative that can:

- ▶ Minimize risks to life, homes, and natural and human-made resources.
- ▶ Increase the insurability of property by increasing community safety.
- ▶ Forge strong partnerships with first responders.
- ▶ Acquire resources that can assist in fire prevention efforts.



RESOURCES

The California Fire Safe Council is ready to assist you with establishing your community Fire Safe Council. Regional Coordinators are focused on assisting you through each step of the process.

Contact the California Fire Safe Council:
www.CaFireSafeCouncil.org
ELamar@CaFireSafeCouncil.org
916-648-3600
5834 Price Avenue McClellan, CA 95652

LINKS TO MORE INFORMATION

- ▶ For a list of FAQ, including a glossary to terms most commonly used in regards to starting your own Fire Safe Council, please visit:
cafiresafecouncil.org/grants-and-funding/grants-clearinghouse/frequently-asked-questions/
- ▶ For a comprehensive publication of best practices for nonprofits that operate or fundraise in California, please visit:
oag.ca.gov/sites/all/files/agweb/pdfs/charities/publications/guide_for_charities.pdf?
- ▶ For comprehensive information regarding IRS Form 1023, including instructions and checklist, please visit:
irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-1023
- ▶ For more information on 501(c)(3)s, please visit:
calnonprofits.org/resources/starting-a-california-nonprofit

QUESTIONS TO ASK A POTENTIAL FISCAL SPONSOR

Before contacting a potential sponsor, go to [Guidestar.org](https://www.guidestar.org) and download the organization's form 990s to review their financial information.

Specifically, you want to look at their balance sheet and make sure that their Unrestricted Net Assets represent at least 3 months of their expenses, which is a measure of financial health. Also, make sure that their Cash represents about 3 months of their expenses so that you know your funds will be available as needed and won't cover shortages of the sponsor. You'll also want to make sure that the sponsor's budget is large enough (about twice your anticipated budget is a good starting guideline but it could be lower) so that there won't be any tipping point issues, Tipping means that your combined sources of revenue would be so concentrated in only a few foundations that you would fail the public support test from the form 990 and be tipped into private foundation status. You must show at least 33.3% support from sources outside your largest funders.

1. Do you currently sponsor other groups?

If **yes**, can you talk to one about their experience?

If **no**, have you sponsored groups in the past?

Here you are looking for an organization that has a good track record of administering a fiscal sponsorship program.

2. Are there any restrictions on your ability to seek donations from foundations, government, or individuals? Do they need to review proposals before they are submitted?

Most sponsors will at least want to know from whom you are soliciting funds so there are no conflicts such as you and the sponsor applying to the same funder.

3. How are you notified when funds are received (if they go directly to the sponsor) and what is the system for keeping your funds segregated from the sponsor's funds? Will they use a separate bank account and if so, does your project keep the interest if there is any?

Most sponsors do not keep a separate bank account for fiscally sponsored projects because it can be cumbersome to administer.



RESOURCES

CONTINUED

QUESTIONS TO ASK A POTENTIAL FISCAL SPONSOR, (cont.)

If they do, however, you should be clear about where interest from the account goes. It's not unreasonable for the sponsor to keep the interest generated so it's really a bonus if your project does keep it. Most sponsors will use a Class or Department coding system in their accounting software to keep track of your funds. You do want to make sure that they have a system that can track your remaining funds at the end of the year and carry that balance forward for you.

4. Are they able to track your funds by funding source?

Not all sponsors are set up to do fund accounting. This may not be a problem if you receive mostly foundation funding but if you receive any government support you will need it to be tracked by funding source.

5. Do they have a system for invoicing for government grants/ contracts and what documentation will you need to provide?

If you receive government support, you should look for a sponsor who does as well. Government contracts and grants can be difficult to administer so you want someone who has a good track record.

6. How do they handle the grant reporting process and what parts are you responsible for? How much advance notice do they need to get you financial reports for funders?

Most sponsors will expect you to write the narrative reports to funders and some might expect you to do the financial reporting as well based on the reports that they submit to you on a regular basis. It's a good idea to clarify on the front end what pieces, especially for the financial reports, the sponsor can provide.

7. Do you have to fit your expenses and budget into their existing categories (also known as the Chart of Accounts) or can they modify their Chart of Accounts to accommodate how you want to track your income and expenses?

Most sponsors will want you to use their Chart of Accounts whenever possible but you should be able to negotiate to have

QUESTIONS TO ASK A POTENTIAL FISCAL SPONSOR, (cont.)

accounts added if they are important for your budgeting and tracking purposes. At the very least, you should be clear about how the items you track in your budget line up with their accounts so you know where expenses in your budget will end up on your reports.

8. What is the process for submitting bills and expenses to be paid? And how long does it take once you submit a bill for the check to go out?

Most sponsors have a set schedule of when they pay bills, which could be as little as once a month. You want to find out if there's a process to handle emergency payments between cycles if necessary.

9. If they will handle payroll for you, how often do they run payroll and when do you need to submit changes to have them included in a payroll run? Are there any other employee benefits that they will be administering for you?

10. Do they have a system for entering your budget into their accounting software? Can it be entered by funder? Is there a process for updating the budget during the year?

Not all sponsors are set up to track your budget. If they aren't, you will have to take the information you receive and cut-and-paste it to be able to compare to your budget. Also it's not unreasonable for a sponsor to only allow you to submit your budget once, but it's good to negotiate the ability to update your budget with the sponsor at least at mid-year.

11. What reports will you receive from the sponsor and how frequently and timely are the reports?

Ideally, you should receive reports by the end of the month for the previous month, so February's reports would be received at the end of March. You should receive an Income and Expense report that compares actual income and expenses for the year-to-date with your budget. If they are tracking by funder then you should receive actuals vs budgets for each funder as well as a total of all



RESOURCES

CONTINUED

QUESTIONS TO ASK A POTENTIAL FISCAL SPONSOR, (cont.)

income and expenses compared to budget. Most importantly, you should also receive a report that shows the remaining funds by funder and a total that includes any unspent funds from previous years. This is critical information because, if you decide to become independent in the future, your remaining funds are what the sponsor would need to pay out to you at that time.

12. What is their fee and when is it assessed?

Most sponsors will charge between 9-12% of any income for your project, depending on how many services they are providing like payroll, tracking by funder, etc. Usually, the fee is assessed as each grant or check is deposited but some sponsors may assess it monthly or quarterly.



RESOURCES

CONTINUED

SAMPLE CORE LEADER MEETING AGENDA



Establishing a Fire Safe Council Agenda

(This is a “core leaders” meeting and not a community meeting.)

- I. Welcome
- II. Introductions
- III. Why a Fire Safe Council?
 - a. Why is it important?
 - b. How will this benefit your community?
- IV. Community Fire Hazards
 - a. Brainstorm possible fire prevention projects to address community fire hazards. Start with projects that are easy to implement that will bring you high exposure and create interest in your organization.
 1. Education and Outreach are good places to start
 2. Chipping program. Partner with a local fire agency to hold a community chipping day.
 3. Host a community clean up event. Focus on defensible space and home hardening and provide dumpsters in prime locations for green waste collection.
- V. Process
 - a. Identifying leaders
 - b. Initiating partnerships
 - c. First Community Meeting
- VI. Non-profit vs Fiscal Sponsor (or N/A)
- VII. Q & A
- VIII. Next Steps
 - a. Set a date, time and location for your first community meeting
- IX. Adjourn

If necessary, add Zoom link or Conference Call link with instructions at the bottom of your announcement/agenda.

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RESOURCES

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SAMPLE COMMUNITY MEETING AGENDA



Fire Safe Council Community Meeting Agenda (Date)

- I. Sign In (Collect name, phone number, and email for each attendee)
- II. Welcome
- III. Introductions
- IV. California's Fire Problem / The California Fire Plan
 - a. Map of (NAME OF COMMUNITY / COUNTY) fire danger
- V. The Fire Safe Council Concept
- VI. Goals and Objectives
- VII. High Fire Hazard Areas
- VIII. Fire Safe Projects
- IX. Appointment of Executive Officers
- X. Open Forum
- XI. Next Meeting
- XII. Adjourn



RESOURCES

CONTINUED

SAMPLE ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING AGENDA



Fire Safe Council Organizational Meeting Agenda (Date)

- I. Welcome
- II. Introductions
- III. Appointment of Executive Officers & Board Members
- IV. Choose Fire Safe Council Name
- V. Establish Committees
- VI. Review
 - a. Mission Statement
 - b. Goals and Objectives
 - c. Sample By-Laws
 - d. 501c3 Process
- VII. Next Steps
- VIII. Adjourn



RESOURCES

CONTINUED

SAMPLE MEETING MINUTES



Fire Safe Council Minutes

Date:

Place:

Time:

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at

2. ATTENDANCE

3. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF PRIOR MEETING MINUTES

4. COMMITTEE REPORTS

- Fundraiser
- Education, Outreach and Trainings
- Fuels Projects

5. NEW BUSINESS

6. ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

7. NEXT STEPS

Adjourned at

Signed



RESOURCES

CONTINUED

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE



Sample Press Release

The following news release will serve as a guide to help you announce new programs, meetings and updates on your community's fire problem. News releases should be concise, specific and convey a clear message. Once the release is written, it can be sent to local print, television and radio via fax, mail or e-mail. Be sure to include your name as the contact. The contact should also place follow-up calls to gauge the media's interest and commitment to writing or broadcasting the story.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Your Name
Phone Number

FIRE SAFE COUNCIL TO HOST SPRING CLEAN UP DAY Fire Department Says Brush Clearance Will Increase A Home's Ability to Survive Wildfire

(City, Month, Day, Year)—The first paragraph should announce the fire safe project and its goal. Keep this paragraph as short as possible; two sentences or fewer is the general rule.

The second paragraph should go into more detail about the project including the date and time for the event. It may be helpful to determine the most interesting aspect of the project and include it here. For example, is this a public-private partnership? Has a prominent area business contributed to this project?

A quote should be inserted here. The quote should come from someone who is working closely on the program, the chairperson of the Council or a member of the fire department (if applicable). The quote should not repeat the information already mentioned in the release, but enhance it. The spokesperson(s) can talk about why your organization felt there was a need for this project and why it is important.

The fourth paragraph should detail three primary benefits or goals of the project as it specifically relates to your community. You may want to think about tying the project into the fire history/problem of the community and how the project will help alleviate the problem. In this paragraph, briefly mention future plans (if any) for the Council.

—more—

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RESOURCES

CONTINUED

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE, (cont.)

Fire Safe Council To Host Spring Clean Up Day

The final paragraph should act as either a boilerplate or should include the least important information. For example: (NAME OF COUNCIL) is a coalition of public and private sector organizations that share a common, vested interest in wildfire prevention and loss mitigation. The Council's goal is to preserve (NAME OF COMMUNITY/COUNTY)'s natural and manmade resources by mobilizing the public to make their homes, neighborhoods and communities fire safe. For more information on how to get involved, call (PHONE NUMBER).

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RESOURCES

CONTINUED

SAMPLE CALENDAR LISTING



Sample Calendar Listing

ATTENTION CALENDAR EDITOR

Contact: Your Name
Phone Number

FIRE SAFE COUNCIL TO HOST SPRING CLEAN UP DAY

WHO: (NAME OF FIRE SAFE COUNCIL)

WHAT: (PROJECT; FOR EXAMPLE, COMMUNITY CLEAN UP PROJECT)

WHEN: (DATE AND TIME)

WHERE: (LOCATION ADDRESS)

CONTACT: For further information, call (YOUR NAME AND PHONE NUMBER)

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RESOURCES

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SAMPLE PARTNER INVITATION LETTER



Sample Partner Invitation Letter

Date

Name (NAME OF ORGANIZATION)
Address (STREET, CITY, STATE, ZIP)

Dear (NAME),

We are all concerned about the potentially devastating effects of wildfire on our families, our homes, businesses and neighborhoods. As we enjoy living and working in the scenic surroundings of [NAME OF COMMUNITY], we must realize that our beautiful community could be destroyed in a wildfire. To help protect ourselves from this threat and minimize our potential losses, I invite you to attend an informational meeting of the [YOUR CITY/ COUNTY] Fire Safe Council.

The purpose of the meeting is to bring together public and private organizations to discuss fire safety in our community. This community-based fire safety concept was born out of the statewide Fire Safe Council whose goal is to preserve California’s natural and manmade resources by mobilizing all Californians to make their homes, neighborhoods and communities fire safe. There are approximately 150 local councils throughout the state.

Our Fire Safe Council can be used as a forum to share information, solve problems and link related programs in ways that can save money and time. The public safety issues we discuss may even extend beyond fire safety, to earthquake preparedness, emergency medical response, etc.

The success of the council depends upon the willingness and participation of PEOPLE/ ORGANIZATIONS like YOU/YOURS. Your participation is essential to protecting what you value most. Your views will be shared with local decision-makers, as well as private companies.

The Fire Safe Council meeting is scheduled for [DATE and TIME] at [LOCATION] in [CITY]. Attached is a brochure on the Council for your review, as a well as an overview of some of the statewide Council’s accomplishments. In addition, if you’d like to explore the Council concept further, please visit the Fire Safe Council’s web site at www.firesafecouncil.org.

I hope you can join us in this valuable community service. I will contact you in a few days to determine your attendance. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to call me at [YOUR PHONE NUMBER]. I look forward to seeing you at the meeting.

Best Regards,

(SIGNATURE)

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SAMPLE MEETING FLIER



Join Fire Safe Sonoma, the California Fire Safe Council, and local Fire Safe Councils for a collaborative workshop:



How to Create a Local Fire Safe Council!

When: June 1, 2019, 1PM-5PM

Where: Healdsburg Community Center,
1557 Healdsburg Ave, Healdsburg

Objective: Learn how to launch a successful Fire Safe Council

Sonoma County residents are highly motivated to mobilize our communities for wildfire safety, yet no single person or fire agency alone can protect a community.

Fire Safe Councils are grassroots, community-led organizations that mobilize residents to protect homes, communities and environments from wildfire. A local Fire Safe Council works with neighbors to find ways to empower residents to make the community safer.

Fire Safe Sonoma is the County-wide Fire Safe Council. Our Mission:

To promote wildfire fire safety through education, information exchange, resource sharing and community cooperation.

Helping form new local fire safe councils and providing a platform for existing fire safe councils to exchange ideas, share resources, and collaborate to better achieve their missions is one of our most important goals.

In conjunction with existing Sonoma County Fire Safe Councils (FSCs), we will cover:

- Do we have to be a Fire Safe Council? *Hint, no! An existing group can act as a FSC.*
- Do we have to have non-profit status?
- How do we get grants?
- How big an area should a FSC Cover?
- What is the difference between a FSC and a FireWise Community?
- What resources exist to help us get going?
- Who do we need to involve in our FSC?
- What is a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), and how do we get one?

Format for the meeting will be a combination of presentations, and collaborative round table discussion that will allow existing councils to share their successes and challenges.

To Register: info@firesafesonoma.org or by phone at (707) 206-5467
Please register so we have sufficient materials for all!