

JOIN US FOR THE 2026

CALAFCO

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

OCTOBER 21 – 23, 2026

Sheraton Grand Sacramento Hotel ♦ 1230 J St., Sacramento

PROGRAM OF EVENTS

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21

8:00 a.m.–12:30 p.m. | PRE-CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES *(Two options)*

Mobile Workshop — Advance Registration Required

Departure: Sheraton Grand Sacramento

Capacity: 50

Tour: Sacramento History Museum and Presentations on the Importance of Flood Control

Presenters: Scott Brown, District Manager, Reclamation District No. 1000; Lisa Kaplan, Sacramento City Councilmember and Sacramento LAFCO Commissioner; José Henríquez, Executive Officer, Sacramento LAFCO

Sacramento's history and development have long been shaped by water. This mobile workshop will explore how the city responded to devastating nineteenth-century floods and how decisions made then continue to influence land use, development, flood protection, water supply, and regional planning today. Participants will begin with a private tour of the Sacramento History Museum and a private tour beneath the streets of Old Sacramento, where they will see remnants of the extraordinary effort to raise portions of the city above floodwaters during the 1860s and 1870s. Following the tour, attendees will walk through Old Sacramento to the historic Delta King for lunch and presentations connecting Sacramento's past with today's challenges. Speakers will discuss reclamation districts, levees and flood protection infrastructure, changing federal standards, and the role these systems continue to play in protecting communities and California's water supply.

SCHEDULE:

8:00 a.m. — Check-in

8:30 a.m. — Depart Sheraton Grand Sacramento by bus

9:00 a.m. — Old Sacramento Underground & Sacramento History Museum Tours

10:30 a.m. — Walk to the Delta King

11:00 a.m. — Lunch and presentations

12:30 p.m. — Depart for the Sheraton Grand Sacramento



10:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m. | What is LAFCO?: The Game Show

Location: Camellia/Gardenia

Presenters: Paula de Sousa, Partner, Best Best & Krieger LLP and CALAFCO General Counsel; Joe Serrano, Executive Officer, Santa Cruz LAFCO; and Shane Stark, Commissioner, Santa Barbara LAFCO

Put your LAFCO knowledge to the test in this fast-paced, Jeopardy-style game show. Whether you are new to LAFCO or have years of experience, this interactive session will challenge contestants and audience members with questions covering LAFCO fundamentals, history, powers and responsibilities, terminology, and a few surprises along the way. Come ready to play, learn something new, and see how well you know the world of LAFCO. Friendly competition is encouraged, and bragging rights may be at stake.

1:30–1:50 p.m. | Conference Opening

Location: Camellia/Gardenia

Opening Remarks: Wendy Root Askew, Chair, CALAFCO

Welcome: Chris Little, Chair, Sacramento LAFCO

Welcome to Sacramento: Rosario Rodriguez, Chair, Sacramento County Board of Supervisors

Presentation of Colors: Sacramento County Sheriff's Office and City of Sacramento Police Department

Join CALAFCO as we officially open the 2026 Annual Conference in Sacramento. CALAFCO Chair Wendy Root Askew will open the conference, followed by a welcome from Sacramento LAFCO Chair Chris Little and Sacramento County Board of Supervisors Chair Rosario Rodriguez. The opening program will also include the presentation of colors by the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office and the City of Sacramento Police Department.

2:00–3:15 p.m. | Beyond Growth: What's Next for LAFCO?

Location: Camellia/Gardenia

Moderator: JD Hightower, Executive Officer, San Joaquin LAFCO

Presenters: Dr. Thomas Pogue, Executive Director, CBPR, University of the Pacific; Jim Simon, RSG; and Bernadette Austin, CEO, CivicWell

For decades, LAFCOs have helped communities manage growth, coordinate services, and promote orderly development. Today, many parts of California face a different reality, with slower population growth, aging infrastructure, workforce shortages, and increasing challenges to the long-term sustainability of local government services. This session will explore what these changing conditions may mean for LAFCOs and the communities they serve. Through statewide trends and local examples, panelists will discuss the evolving role of LAFCOs in service sustainability, regional collaboration, special district governance, infrastructure planning, and other emerging challenges facing local government.

3:15–3:45 p.m. | Refreshment Break with Sponsors

Location: Grand Nave Foyer

3:45–5:00 p.m. | Balancing Competing Priorities: Housing, Agriculture, Infrastructure, and the LAFCO Perspective

Location: Camellia/Gardenia

Moderator: Wendy Root Askew, Chair, CALAFCO

Presenters: Katie Simmons, Deputy CAO, Butte County; Cheryle Hodge, Principal Planner, City of Sacramento; and Maryam Bral, Ph.D., Assistant General Manager, United Water Conservation District

Few LAFCO decisions involve a single consideration. Proposals may bring together the need for housing, agricultural land preservation, infrastructure and water availability, economic development, and a community's long-term plans for growth and services. Using examples from across California, this session will explore how LAFCOs evaluate proposals when important public interests compete. Panelists will discuss the questions commissioners and staff should consider, how short-term needs can be weighed against long-term impacts, and how LAFCO's unique perspective can contribute to thoughtful and well-informed decisions when there is no simple answer.

5:15–6:45 p.m. | Welcome Reception

Location: Grand Nave Foyer

After 6:45 p.m. | Dinner on Your Own

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22

7:00–8:45 a.m. | Breakfast

Location: Camellia/Gardenia

8:00–9:00 a.m. | Regional Caucuses & Elections

Central Region: Bondi — Caucus Facilitator: Neelima Palacherla

Coastal Region: Tofanelli — Caucus Facilitator: JD Hightower

Northern Region: Beavis — Caucus Facilitator: Gary Thompson

Southern Region: Bataglieri — Caucus Facilitator: Shannon Costa

9:15–10:00 a.m. | CALAFCO Annual Business Meeting

Location: Camellia/Gardenia

Presiding: Wendy Root Askew, Chair, CALAFCO

Association Update: Michelle McIntyre, Executive Director, CALAFCO

Election Results: José Henríquez, Executive Officer, CALAFCO and Sacramento LAFCO

CALAFCO members will come together for the Association's Annual Business Meeting, including an update on the work of the Association, consideration of Association business, and member comments.

CONCURRENT BREAKOUT SESSIONS • 10:15–11:30 A.M. (*Three Options*)

10:15–11:30 a.m. | What Your Reports Are Really Saying: And the Questions You Should Be Asking

Location: Magnolia

Introduction: Shannon Costa, Executive Officer, Butte LAFCO

Presenter: Alicia Meyer, Senior Internal Auditor

A good staff report does more than present information; it should help decision-makers understand the issue, evaluate the evidence, and know where to focus their attention. But lengthy or technical reports can make it difficult to distinguish the most important information from the details surrounding it. This session will explore how to read reports with a more critical eye and identify what matters most. Using practical examples, Alicia Meyer will discuss how to recognize supporting report conclusions, evaluate whether the evidence and analysis are clear and complete, identify missing information, and ask better questions before decision-making. Attendees will gain practical tools for getting beyond the words on the page and using staff reports to support thoughtful, well-informed decisions.

10:15–11:30 a.m. | California Public Utilities Commission 101: Where State Regulation and LAFCO Intersect

Location: Camellia/Gardenia

Moderator & Panelist: Joe Serrano, Executive Officer, Santa Cruz LAFCO

Presenters: Wilson Tsai, Program and Project Supervisor, Water Division, California Public Utilities Commission; and Jennifer Capitolo, Executive Director, California Water Association

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) regulates privately owned utilities throughout the state, while LAFCOs oversee local government boundaries, organization, and service considerations. Although their responsibilities are different, their work can intersect when communities face questions about how essential services are provided. This session will provide an overview of the CPUC's role and explore where state utility regulation and LAFCO responsibilities may come together. Using issues such as struggling private water systems, panelists will discuss the responsibilities of each agency, when coordination may be helpful, and what LAFCO commissioners and staff should understand when regulated utilities become part of a local service or governance discussion.

10:15–11:30 a.m. | Legal Counsel Roundtable

Location: Compagno

Facilitators: Clark Alsop, Partner, Best Best & Krieger LLP; and Paula de Sousa, Partner, Best Best & Krieger LLP and CALAFCO General Counsel

Join Clark Alsop and Paula de Sousa for an informal discussion of current and emerging legal issues affecting LAFCOs. This roundtable for LAFCO legal counsel provides a venue for comparing notes, sharing experiences, and discussing the legal issues they are encountering in their work.

12:00–1:15 p.m. | Lunch & Keynote Address — California Senate Majority Leader Angelique Ashby

Location: Camellia/Gardenia

Introduction: José Henríquez, Executive Officer, Sacramento LAFCO

Keynote Speaker: Senate Majority Leader Angelique Ashby (8th District)
California's local governments are navigating changing community needs, evolving state priorities, and an increasingly complex policy environment. Senate Majority Leader Angelique Ashby brings a perspective shaped by experience in both local and state government.

In this keynote address, Senator Ashby will share her perspective on the issues shaping California's future, priorities emerging from the State Capitol, and what they may mean for local governments and LAFCOs. Attendees will hear directly from one of California's legislative leaders about the challenges and opportunities ahead and the important role local government continues to play in serving communities across the state.



CONCURRENT BREAKOUT SESSIONS • 2:00–3:15 p.m.

2:00–3:15 p.m. | Strategic Public Engagement: A Plan for Any Scenario

Location: Magnolia

Moderator: Rob Fitzroy, Executive Officer, San Luis Obispo LAFCO

Presenter: Whitney Szentesi, Public Communications Manager, City of San Luis Obispo

Significant policy decisions require more than meeting noticing requirements; they call for thoughtful, well-coordinated public engagement. Whitney Szentesi will share how the City of San Luis Obispo prepares its elected officials and executive staff to lead and set expectations during these moments, using practical tools like the City's five-step engagement playbook and targeted staff training. The session walks through what public engagement is, why it matters, and common challenges, while highlighting real examples of both successful outreach and missed audiences. Participants will explore four guiding principles for strong engagement and discuss how leaders can reinforce planning, quality, and community connection. Attendees will leave with actionable takeaways to strengthen engagement efforts within their own agencies.

2:00–3:15 p.m. | Fire Services Under Pressure: What Should LAFCOs Be Watching?

Location: Camellia/Gardenia

Moderator: Kurt Latipow, Senior Advisor, AP Triton

Presenters: Lewis Broschard, Fire Chief (ret.), Contra Costa Fire Protection District; Joe Serrano, Executive Officer, Santa Cruz LAFCO; Gay Jones, Commissioner, Sacramento LAFCO; and Jeffrey Small, General Manager, Capitol Public Finance Group, LLC

Fire agencies throughout California face rising costs, staffing shortages, aging infrastructure, increasing service demands, and growing expectations for emergency preparedness and wildfire response. While these pressures affect communities differently, LAFCOs may increasingly face questions about the long-term sustainability of fire protection services. How do you recognize when an agency is beginning to struggle? And when should LAFCO start asking questions? Panelists will discuss the issues affecting fire service delivery, the early signs that an agency may be under strain, and how communities are responding. The session will also look at how municipal service reviews, spheres of influence, and other LAFCO tools can help identify issues early and give communities an opportunity to consider their options before challenges become crises.

3:15–3:45 p.m. | Refreshment Break with Sponsors

Location: Grand Nave Foyer

CONCURRENT BREAKOUT SESSIONS • 3:45–5:00 p.m.

3:45–5:00 p.m. | Telling It Straight: Delivering Tough News About a Project Concept

Location: Magnolia

Moderator: Rob Fitzroy, Executive Officer, San Luis Obispo LAFCO

Presenters: Kai Luoma, Executive Officer, Ventura LAFCO; Adriana Romo, Deputy Executive Officer, Los Angeles LAFCO; José Henríquez, Executive Officer, Sacramento LAFCO

Not every project concept is ready—or appropriate—for a formal LAFCO application. Long before a proposal reaches a commission agenda, early conversations can help potential applicants understand requirements, identify obstacles, and consider legal, financial, operational, and policy issues before significant time and resources are invested. This session will explore how LAFCO staff can approach these conversations constructively while providing clear and candid information about potential challenges. Using real-world examples, panelists will discuss managing expectations, communicating difficult messages, and lessons learned from proposals that changed course—or never moved forward. Attendees will gain practical approaches for helping applicants better understand the LAFCO process and make informed decisions about whether and how to proceed.

3:45–5:00 p.m. | Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities: What Have We Learned?

Location: Camellia/Gardenia

Moderator & Panelist: Paul Novak, Executive Officer, Los Angeles LAFCO

Presenters: Shannon Costa, Executive Officer, Butte LAFCO; Phoebe Seaton, Co-Director, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability

More than a decade after California established requirements for disadvantaged unincorporated communities (DUCs), LAFCOs have gained considerable experience putting them into practice. Experiences vary widely across the state, and questions remain about identifying DUCs, available data and methodologies, acreage thresholds, routine annexations, and how the requirements apply in different communities. This session will look at what has been learned from more than a decade of implementation. Panelists will share practical experiences, discuss where the current framework has worked well and where challenges remain, and explore whether changes to LAFCO practices, available guidance, or the law itself may be worth considering.

6:15–6:45 p.m. | Reception with Sponsors

Location: Grand Nave Foyer

6:45–8:30 p.m. | CALAFCO Awards Banquet

Location: Camellia/Gardenia

Emcees: Wendy Root Askew, CALAFCO Chair and Conference Planning Committee Co-Chair; Commissioner, Monterey LAFCO; Virginia Chang Kiraly, CALAFCO Board Director, Conference Planning Committee Member, and Awards Committee Member; Commissioner, San Mateo LAFCO

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 23

7:30–9:00 a.m. | Breakfast

Location: Camellia/Gardenia

7:30–8:45 a.m. | CALAFCO Board of Directors Meeting + Breakfast

Location: Compagno

9:00–10:15 a.m. | AI and Local Government: What LAFCO Leaders Need to Know

Location: Camellia/Gardenia

Moderator & Panelist: Jennifer Stephenson, Executive Officer, Calaveras, Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, and San Benito LAFCOs

Presenters: Joe King, Technical Director, George Mason University Rapid Prototyping & Research Center; and Paula de Sousa, Partner, Best Best & Krieger LLP and CALAFCO General Counsel

Artificial intelligence is becoming part of local government operations, with public agencies exploring its use for research, report preparation, public communication, and other administrative functions. Along with these opportunities come important questions about accuracy, transparency, public records, privacy, accountability, and public trust. This session will examine AI from a LAFCO and local government perspective, with an emphasis on the policy and governance issues surrounding its use. Panelists will discuss practical applications and limitations, emerging legal considerations, agency policies and safeguards, and the oversight questions public officials and staff should understand as these tools become more widely used. Attendees will gain a practical framework for evaluating both the opportunities and risks of AI in public agencies.

10:30–11:30 a.m. | Legislative Update: What LAFCOs Should Be Watching

Location: Camellia/Gardenia

Moderator: Paul Novak, Executive Officer, Los Angeles LAFCO

Presenters: Anton Favorini-Csorba, Chief Consultant, Senate Local Government Committee; Jimmy MacDonald, Consultant, Assembly Local Government Committee; Kai Luoma, Executive Officer, Ventura LAFCO and Vice-Chair, CALAFCO Legislative Committee; and Geoff Neill, Senior Legislative Advocate, Nielsen Merksamer, LLP

Each year brings new legislation, emerging policy issues, and shifting priorities that can affect LAFCOs and the communities they serve. This session will provide an update on the 2026 legislative session while looking beyond individual bills to the broader issues and trends taking shape in Sacramento. Drawing on perspectives from the Senate and Assembly Local Government Committees and CALAFCO's Legislative Committee, panelists will discuss the issues receiving attention at the Capitol, what may be on the horizon, and what these developments could mean for LAFCOs statewide.

11:30 a.m. | Closing Remarks & Conference Adjournment

Location: Camellia/Gardenia

Closing Remarks: Wendy Root Askew, Chair, CALAFCO