



MESCAL J6 FIRE DISTRICT GOVERNING BOARD HANDBOOK

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SEPTEMBER 5, 2025**



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1. INTRODUCTION

The Mescal J6 Fire District Governing Board is responsible for overseeing the operations, finances, and strategic direction of the district to ensure the protection of life and property while enhancing the well-being of the community through strength, integrity, and relentless commitment. Established by the Cochise County Board of Supervisors on January 13, 2009, the Mescal J6 Fire District serves residents in portions of Cochise and Pima Counties, Arizona. This handbook provides guidance for board members to fulfill their duties effectively, ethically, in compliance with Arizona law, and is meant to work in conjunction with the AFDA Governing Board Handbook and the Cochise County Special Districts Governing Board Members Resource Manuel.

2. MISSION AND VISION STATEMENT:

Mission:

To protect life and property while enhancing the well-being of those we serve through strength, integrity, and relentless commitment.

Vision:

To be a trusted, responsive, and innovative fire district that prioritizes community safety, professional excellence, and fiscal responsibility.



3. BOARD COMPOSITION AND STRUCTURE

Membership:

The Mescal J6 Fire District Governing Board consists of five members, elected or appointed in accordance with A.R.S. § 48-802.

Members serve staggered four-year terms, with elections held in even-numbered years (e.g., November 2024 for two seats) and shall take their board positions December 1st after the election, or if appointed, at the beginning of the month after appointment.

Eligibility:

Board members must be registered voters in Arizona and reside within the Mescal J6 Fire District boundaries for at least one year prior to election or appointment.

Officers:

The board elects a Chairperson and Clerk annually.

The Chairperson presides over meetings, and the Clerk oversees minutes and records.

Meetings:

Regular meetings typically occur on the last Wednesday of each month at 6:30 PM, with additional special meetings as needed.

Meetings are held at the Mescal J6 Fire District Administration Office (98 N. Oak Dr., Benson, AZ 85602) or via Zoom, as announced.

Quorum:

A quorum requires three members. No official action can be taken without a quorum.

All electronic communication shall consist of no more than 2 board members.

Email communication shall use the mescalJ6fd.gov email.

The BCC feature may be used for more than 2 board members on an email.



4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Under A.R.S. § 48-805, the board is responsible for:

Policy Development:

Adopting policies for district operations, including fire protection, emergency services, and administrative functions.

Financial Oversight:

Approving budgets, setting tax rates, and ensuring fiscal responsibility.

Hiring and Oversight:

Appointing and evaluating the Fire Chief, who manages daily operations.

Strategic Planning:

Developing and approving long-term plans to meet community needs.

Compliance:

Ensuring adherence to Arizona's Open Meeting Law, public records laws, and other regulations.

Community Representation:

Engaging with residents to address concerns and promote transparency.

Board members must act collectively as a public body, not individually, and avoid overstepping into operational roles reserved for the Fire Chief.



5. OPEN MEETING LAW COMPLIANCE

Arizona's Open Meeting Law:

(A.R.S. §§ 38-431 to 431.09) requires that all board meetings be conducted openly, with proper notice and agendas provided to the public. Key requirements include:

Public Access:

All meetings, except executive sessions, are open to the public. Meetings must be held in accessible facilities or via accessible virtual platforms (e.g., Zoom).

Notice and Agendas:

Agendas must be posted at least 24 hours in advance at the district office and online, specifying items to be discussed or acted upon.

Minutes:

Minutes must summarize discussions, motions, votes. may include public comments, and be approved at a subsequent meeting. Draft minutes are posted online within 72 business hours.

Executive Sessions:

Limited to specific purposes (e.g., personnel matters, legal advice) and must follow strict procedures (A.R.S. § 38-431.03).

Public Participation:

The public may attend and speak at designated times. Reasonable time limits may be imposed.



6. ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER

The Mescal J6 Fire District follows Robert's Rules of Order (Revised) to ensure orderly and fair meetings. Key principles include:

Meeting Structure:

The Chairperson calls the meeting to order, ensures a quorum, and follows the agenda.

Motions require a second, discussion, and a majority vote to pass.

Public comment periods are designated, typically at the start or end of meetings, and generally follow a 3-minute maximum time limit per person. The chairman can elect to change this during the meeting if the need arises.

Motions and Voting:

Main motions introduce business requiring a second and discussion period before vote is taken.

Amendments modify motions, following the same process.

Votes are recorded in the minutes, with roll-call votes for significant actions.

Decorum:

Members speak only when recognized by the Chairperson.

Interruptions are prohibited except for points of order or privilege.

Debate is focused on the agenda item, avoiding personal attacks.

Adoption:

The board may adopt simplified rules based on Robert's Rules, provided they comply with Arizona law.



7. HANDLING COLLUSION AND DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Collusion between a board member and members of the public to disrupt board or district business undermines the integrity of the governance process and violates the public trust. The following guidelines address such behavior, with steps to mitigate and prevent it, while adhering to Arizona law and Robert's Rules of Order.

Definition:

Collusion is defined as a board member coordinating with members of the public to intentionally disrupt meetings, spread false information, or interfere with district operations.

Examples include:

Orchestrating disruptive outbursts during meetings.

Sharing confidential information to incite public unrest.

Using social media to coordinate harassment or false accusations against other board members, or staff.

Identification Signs of collusion may include:

Coordinated disruptions during public comment periods, such as synchronized outbursts or signage.

Social media posts aligning board member statements with public attacks on the district.

Repeated violations of meeting decorum targeting specific agenda items or individuals.

Mitigation Steps:

Immediate Response During Meetings (Using Robert's Rules):

Chairperson's Authority:

The Chairperson may call for order and warn disruptive individuals (board members or public) that continued behavior will result in removal from the meeting. Robert's Rules permits the chair to enforce decorum (RONR, 12th ed., §61).

Motion to Censure or Remove From Meeting:

A board member may move to censure or remove a fellow member from the meeting for disruptive behavior or suspected collusion, requiring a majority vote. This is a formal reprimand and signals accountability. All disciplinary actions of a board member are to be documented.

Recess or Adjournment:

If disruptions prevent orderly conduct, the Chairperson may call a recess or move to adjourn the meeting (RONR, 12th ed., §21).

Removal of Disruptive Public Members:

Per A.R.S. § 38-431.01, disruptive conduct (e.g., booing, slanderous remarks) that impedes the meeting may result in removal of individuals by the Chairperson or security. Signs or placards causing disruption are prohibited.



Investigation of Collusion:

Internal Review:

The board may appoint an ad hoc committee (excluding the suspected member) to investigate allegations of collusion, reviewing communications, social media, or witness statements.

Legal Counsel:

Consult the district's attorney to assess whether the board member's actions violate Arizona law (e.g., Open Meeting Law violations, A.R.S. § 38-431.01) or ethical standards.

Third-Party Involvement:

If evidence suggests criminal activity (e.g., coordinated harassment), refer the matter to local law enforcement.

Disciplinary Actions:

Board Member Removal: Under A.R.S. § 38-291, a board member may be removed for cause (e.g., malfeasance) by the Cochise County Board of Supervisors. Evidence of collusion may justify a petition for removal.

Censure or Sanctions:

The board may censure the member or limit their participation pending investigation.

Public Statement:

Issue a public statement clarifying false information and reaffirming the board's commitment to transparency and order.

Preventive Measures:

Training:

Require annual training on Open Meeting Law, ethics, governance and Robert's Rules to reinforce proper conduct. Training may be ongoing as needed or agreed upon by the board, throughout the year.

Social Media Policy:

Adopt a policy prohibiting board members from using social media to coordinate with the public in ways that undermine district operations.

Meeting Protocols:

Establish clear rules for public participation, including time limits and prohibitions on disruptive signage or behavior. Post rules at the meeting venue and online. and enhance community trust.



8. CODE OF ETHICS AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Ethics:

Board members must act in the best interest of the district, avoiding personal gain or favoritism. They must adhere to A.R.S. § 38-503 (Conflict of Interest) and disclose any financial or personal interests that may influence decisions.

Confidentiality:

Board members must maintain confidentiality of executive session discussions, and avoid sharing sensitive information with the public.

Conduct:

Members must treat colleagues, staff, and the public with respect, avoiding harassment or defamation.



9. PUBLIC RECORDS AND TRANSPARENCY

Access:

Public records are available for inspection during regular office hours (Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, 8:00 AM–4:00 PM, by appointment).

Confidential information may be redacted per A.R.S. § 39-121.01.

The Adopted Mescal J6 Fire District Public Records Request Policy shall be followed.

Requests:

Respond to public records requests within a reasonable time, balancing accessibility with operational needs.

Online Posting:

Agendas, minutes, and other official records are posted online within 72 business hours, maintained according to Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records (ASLAPR) A.R.S. § 41-151 through § 41-151.24



10. FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT

Budget Approval:

The board adopts an annual budget per A.R.S. § 48-805, ensuring funds support fire protection, emergency services, and reserves.

Tax Rates:

The board sets property tax rates, balancing community needs and fiscal responsibility.

Audits:

When the Department's budget is over \$500,000 an annual financial audit is conducted, with results made available to the public within 180 days of the fiscal year-end.



11. STRATEGIC PLANNING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Strategic Plan:

The board oversees the development and implementation of a strategic plan, as demonstrated by the 2025 Strategic Plan Rollout.

Community Involvement:

Host public forums, such as the Strategic Plan Rollout meetings, to gather input and build trust.

Communication:

Use social media, the district website, and public notices to share updates and solicit feedback.



12. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Statutory Training:

New board members and Fire Chief must complete at least six hours of training on fire district management within their first year, per A.R.S. § 48-803. Continuing education will also be done according to A.R.S 48-803.

Open Meeting Law:

Review the Arizona Attorney General's Open Meeting Law materials before taking office.

Ongoing Education: Attend professional enrichment training on governance, ethics, and Robert's Rules to enhance skills.



13. EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Fire Chief Absence:

In the absence of a Fire Chief, the Board may assume limited operational duties (e.g., budget management).

The Chairman will be the point of contact for the Operations Officer for day-to-day operational issues.

The Chairman will report all communication to the board until a replacement Chief is appointed.

Crisis Response:

Coordinate with local law enforcement and fire personnel during emergencies as directed through [the](#) Fire Chief.

Public Safety Alerts:

Use social media and community platforms to issue timely alerts, such as flood watches or fire restrictions.



14. RESOURCES AND CONTACTS

Mescal J6 Fire District Administration:

98 N. Oak Dr., Benson, AZ 85602, (520) 586-4690.

Cochise County Elections:

1415 Melody Lane, Building E, Bisbee, AZ 85603, (520) 432-8970, elections@cochise.az.gov

Pima County Elections:

6550 S Country Club Road Tucson, AZ 85756-7100, (520) 724 6830

Cochise County Treasurer's Office:

1415 Melody Lane, Building E Bisbee, AZ 85603, (520) 432 8400, trsweb@cochise.az.gov

Arizona Attorney General:

www.azag.gov (<https://www.azag.gov/complaints/omlet/omlet-info>)

Robert's Rules of Order:

www.robertsrules.com

Arizona Fire District Association <https://azfiredistricts.org>

15: ADOPTION

The Governing Board Handbook is adopted by the Mescal J6 Fire District Board of Directors on September 5, 2025, and shall take effect immediately.

Dana Law

Dana Law
Board Chairman

Deborah Wise

Deborah Wise
Board Clerk

Notes

This handbook is a living document and should be reviewed annually to reflect changes in law, district needs, or board policies. This handbook works in conjunction with the AFDA's comprehensive Fire District Handbook that can be found at Arizona Fire District Association <https://azfiredistricts.org> under the Member Resource Center, and the Cochise County Special Districts Governing Board Members Resource Manual.

Board members are encouraged to consult legal counsel for complex issues, such as suspected collusion or Open Meeting Law violations. Recent challenges underscore the importance of clear protocols and ethical conduct.