

GENERAL PLAN LANGUAGE

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Land Use Fact Sheet Series

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The following verbs signify different levels of commitment to a particular goal, objective, principle, etc.

Require denotes a mandatory action

Should means something that is expected to occur but is not mandatory

May is used for discretionary actions

Encourage or recommend describes a desired but discretionary outcome

NOTE: The Governor's Office of Planning and Research, a clearinghouse for planning information, warns that "using 'should' to give the impression of more commitment than actually intended is a common but unacceptable practice." In other words,

a General Plan can not just pay lip service to a goal, objective, policy, proposal, or measure.

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General Plan Language

Each city and county in California must prepare and adopt a comprehensive, long term **general plan** to guide its future. The general plan has been called the "constitution for future development."

The General Plan document contains text and a set of maps and diagrams. These should be clearly written and easy to interpret, without jargon, acronyms, or overly technical language.

That said, a plan uses certain words in specific ways. The text will include goals and objectives, principles, standards, and proposals.

It is important to understand what these terms mean in the context of a General Plan. The following list moves from the general to the specific.

A **goal** describes an ideal future end. It is a general expression of community values and may therefore be abstract. Goals are expressed as ends, not means.

An **objective** is a specified end, condition, or step that is an intermediate step toward attaining a stated goal. Objectives should be achievable, measurable, and time specific.

Principles are assumptions, doctrines, or fundamental rules. While they underlie the planning process, they are usually not expressed explicitly.

A **policy** is a specific statement that guides decision making; it commits a local legislative body—a city council or board of supervisors—to a particular course of action. It is based on and helps implement the plan's objectives.

Standards are rules or measures establishing a level of quality or quantity that must be met.

Plan proposals describe intended development in an area.

An **implementation measure** is an action, procedure, program, or technique that carries out plan policy. Each policy must have at least one corresponding implementation measure. That means a plan can't set a goal without describing how to reach it.

See other Fact Sheets for more Land Use Info

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