

Santa Ynez Community Services District
MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Directors
From: Loch Dreizler, General Manager/Treasurer
Date: January 15, 2026
Subject: General Manager Recruitment: Update on Process, Issuance of Request for Proposals (RFP) for Executive Recruitment Consultant Services Focused Solely on GM Hire, and Use of District Staff with Assistance from California Special Districts Association (CSDA)

Staff Recommendation: Wait to see what insights the RFP responses yield, then make a final determination. RFPs are due on Tuesday, February 3, 2026.

Ad-hoc committee to meet and determine compensation.

Background

At the Special Board Meeting on January 7, 2026, the Board discussed options for recruiting a new General Manager (GM), including potential challenges such as the District's non-participation in CalPERS, a regional housing cost gap, a limited candidate pool due to the agency's small size, and the potential need for flexible work arrangements, such as partial remote work.

The Board directed staff to:

- Investigate hiring a consultant (John D'Ornellas) to assist with the recruitment process.
- Prepare and send a Request for Proposals (RFP) to potential recruitment firms.
- Explore advertising the position through the CSDA website if an RFP is not accepted.

Recruitment Process Update

Pursuant to the Board's direction, staff developed and issued an RFP focused on executive recruitment services for the GM position. The RFP outlines the District's needs, including sourcing qualified candidates with experience in small special districts, wastewater management, financial oversight, and community engagement. It emphasizes advisory services, including candidate screening, background checks, and interview facilitation, with the final hiring decision reserved for the full Board.

The RFP was published and distributed to a list of potential executive search firms specializing in public-sector and special-district recruitment. The list was compiled from industry resources and prior research, including firms with a track record of local-government hires in California.

After that, staff will review submissions and present a summary to the Board for consideration. Two responses have been received to date, and the process remains competitive to ensure cost-effectiveness and alignment with District needs.

Contact Regarding Interim GM/Consultant for Recruitment Assistance

Staff contacted John D'Ornellas, a seasoned professional with extensive experience in California special districts, to discuss his potential availability as a consultant for the recruitment process. Mr. D'Ornellas has served as General Manager for multiple districts, including Ground Squirrel Hollow Community Services District and Heritage Ranch Community Services District, and as Interim General Manager at Santa Ynez CSD and as Interim Harbor Manager for Port San Luis Harbor District. His background includes operational management, financial planning, and experience navigating recruitment challenges like those faced by the District.

Mr. D'Ornellas has not yet responded. His estimated costs for these services would depend on scope and duration but could range from \$5,000 to \$15,000 for target recruitment support, based on preliminary discussions. Further details on terms and availability can be provided if the Board wishes to pursue this option.

Review of CSDA Resources for Recruitment via District Staff Assistance

Staff reviewed available resources from the California Special Districts Association (CSDA) to assess the feasibility of conducting the recruitment internally with CSDA support, as an alternative to engaging a full executive search firm. Key findings include:

- **CSDA Career Center:** CSDA maintains a dedicated online platform (accessible at csda.net/member-resources/career-center) for job postings and resume searches. Member districts can post positions at no or low cost, reaching a targeted audience of professionals in the special districts sector. This includes tools for advertising executive roles, such as GM positions, with options to highlight specific qualifications and challenges (e.g., non-CalPERS status). Job seekers can post resumes for free, allowing districts to access a pool of potential candidates directly.

- **HR and Recruitment Support:** CSDA offers partnerships with organizations such as CPS HR Consulting for HR membership services, including training, legal resources, and advocacy. Additional resources include on-demand webinars on topics such as employment law updates, maximizing employee potential, and best practices for hiring. These resources could help District staff manage the process in-house, potentially reducing costs compared with a third-party firm.
- **Other Tools:** CSDA provides resource pages tailored to job functions, including guidelines for good governance, sample documents (e.g., job descriptions, interview protocols), and networking opportunities at events such as the Santa Barbara County CSDA meeting on January 26, 2026.

Using District staff with CSDA assistance could limit expenses primarily to advertising fees (estimated at \$500–\$2,000) and staff time, while leveraging free or low-cost tools to broaden reach. This approach would maintain Board oversight throughout, but may require more internal effort for candidate vetting. Also, this detracts from other duties.

Next Steps and Considerations

The options presented align with the Board's prior discussions:

- **Option 1: Engage Executive Search Firm via RFP** – Provides professional expertise and requires less staff time.
- **Option 2: Use District Staff with CSDA Assistance** – More cost-effective, utilizing internal resources and CSDA's career center/tools, but may not be able to throw the widest net to attract the best candidates. The maximum amount of staff time required.
- **Option 3: Interim Consultant Support** – Incorporate expertise from individuals like Mr. D'Ornellas, which would be the Hybrid option between Option 1 & 2.