



**TAKE ACTION**

***ENGAGING WITH  
YOUR COMMUNITY  
AND LEGISLATORS***



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*The Commission found some progress but also saw a missed opportunity for special districts – many have a great story to tell. Very rarely are taxpayer dollars so closely tied to services provided in the community. And still people do not seem to know much about these local governments and their locally-elected boards.*



## Take Action: An Introduction

The Take Action Guide was developed as an overview of the many ways you can engage with the individuals and institutions that shape how your district operates and how it is perceived in your community. Local residents, the media, and the State Legislature all play an influential role in the success of your district. This guide is intended to help special districts proactively and effectively take action to engage these important constituent groups.

In his cover letter to the 2017 Little Hoover Commission report on special districts, Chairperson Pedro Nava commented, “The Commission found some progress but also saw a missed opportunity for special districts – many have a great story to tell. Very rarely are taxpayer dollars so closely tied to services provided in the community. And still people do not seem to know much about these local governments and their locally-elected boards.”

Whether you serve a larger district with several hundred employees or a smaller district run by volunteers, there are meaningful ways to take action. It is time for all special districts to tell our story. Special districts provide essential services to millions of Californians every day. The Capitol, the media, and most importantly, the community you serve should understand the difference your special district makes.



### Acknowledgments

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- Marty Boyer, Communication Advantage
- Sloane Dell’Orto, Streamline

### Disclaimer

This publication is provided for general information only and is not offered or intended as legal advice. Readers should seek the advice of an attorney when confronted with legal issues and attorneys should perform an independent evaluation of the issues raised in these materials.





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## Engaging with Your Community

Have you ever heard a public official say that they prefer to “fly under the radar?” When it comes to public agencies, flying under the radar is a flawed strategy that diminishes awareness and fails to build trust with the community you serve. Even worse, it gives others the opportunity to break the silence and tell your story for you in a manner that is not on your terms.

If someone else is telling your story, will it be accurate? Will it be flattering? Will it reflect the heart of your district? Usually not. Who will your voters, taxpayers, and customers believe if you have yet to establish a relationship with the community? People crave information, and if misinformation is all that is available your residents will have no choice but to rely on it.

Keeping your community informed about what you do and asking them for feedback and input is a fundamental responsibility of any public agency. After all, they are the boss. We all understand from personal experience that our jobs are a lot easier and less stressful when the boss knows about and approves of what we are doing.

Community engagement doesn't have to be expensive or labor intensive. However, it does require a well-thought strategy that addresses these basic questions:

- What are your communications goals?
- Who is your audience?
- What is your message?
- How do you get your message out and encourage feedback?



### What are Your Communications Goals?

It is vitally important that you set specific and measurable goals when conducting any public awareness program or campaign. If your district is trying influence a certain outcome within the community, identify the desired results. For example, if your goal is to reduce water consumption by 20 percent, make that clear within your communication plan. Increases and decreases in water use are measurable.

Without measurable outcomes, you cannot assess whether your communications efforts were effective. Conversely, such measuring sticks are critical information that help you determine if you need to change course and try different strategies to raise public awareness and response.

Sometimes public awareness isn't about changing behavior, but instead is about increasing public understanding of an issue or your services. Even here, you need specific goals that can be measured. Are more people using your website because of your efforts? Are more people attending board meetings or connecting with services? Are fewer people protesting a potential rate hike after you've done educational outreach?

***When it comes to public agencies, flying under the radar is a flawed strategy that diminishes awareness and fails to build trust with the community you serve.***





Orange County Cemetery District

## Who is Your Audience?

Before you start talking, it's always best to know who you are talking to. You would probably speak differently with your child than you would your parent, your spouse versus a stranger on the street, or to your boss as opposed to your former roommate. In many ways, how we say something is more important than what we say.

It may seem easy to identify your audience. It's "the public," right? While that may be technically accurate, it's not very personal and it doesn't consider the context. When you are talking about a recreation activity for after school programs, for example, your audience is not the public, it's parents of young children.

Even when you are talking about more global issues, like a revenue proposal, think about which people or groups are most important to communicate with. If you have the time and resources, using sophisticated methods like public opinion polls can be of great value.

Simple, inexpensive cloud-based polling tools are also available.

When it really matters, professional consultation can be well worth the cost. However, that isn't always necessary and sometimes isn't feasible. Consider these factors and design your message to best reach and resonate with the individuals where they overlap:

- Who will be most affected?
- Who will be interested in a conversation and open to considering your perspective?
- Who will be most likely to take action (positive or negative) in response to the situation?
- Who will influence the perspectives and actions of others?

Once you identify your audience, you can begin to think of the public as human beings, with real concerns, needs, desires, and personalities. That will allow you to start a conversation that people can hear and

feel comfortable responding to in a constructive manner.

Effective public outreach and engagement should be structured like a conversation, not a lecture. A conversation is a two-way exchange of ideas; effective communication speaks to a person, not a crowd, and whenever possible, provides ways for that person to contribute and provide feedback. Put another way, you are trying to have a conversation with real people in your target audience with the hopes of calling for an action, or an exchange of ideas.

You may be trying to influence homeowners to reduce lawn watering. You may be encouraging residents to recycle. Or, you may be seeking ideas for spending proceeds from a potential special assessment. Regardless, it is important that your audience feel their input matters and that they are not just getting a one-way sales pitch.

## What is Your Message?

Your basic message or messages should be clear, concise, and understandable. Avoid insider jargon and acronyms, except those few needed to explain an issue. Messages should include a “call to action,” whether it is urging people to turn off their tap, protect against mosquitos, or take steps to support a district goal.

It is important that your message focus on the benefits for your target audience – not about you or the district. Asking for a course of action that will be good for the district isn’t a message that resonates with your audience. Express the district’s goals in terms of how they will help the people who use your services.

For example, asking residents to pay an annual assessment of \$20 to cover increased personnel costs and balance the district’s budget does not persuade taxpayers. Explaining that for \$20 a year they will get more open days at the library, one extra paramedic per engine, or new amenities in the parks is persuasive.

## How do You Get Your Message Out and Encourage Feedback?

Local government agencies have access to a veritable buffet of optional platforms for reaching the public. Technological advancements continue to expand the offerings for connecting with constituents, yet they do not replace the fundamental value of good ‘ole fashion face-to-face interactions. Once you’ve determined your goals, identified your audience, and developed your message, the key is properly matching your message with the medium.

## District Websites

Today’s technology means you are no longer totally dependent on traditional news media. Every district is required by law to maintain a website, and it is the easiest way to inform and receive feedback from your audience.

Even small districts can establish a simple, useful website quite easily. CSDA’s partners provide website services that will match any district’s needs and budget, while complying with the law and better serving your community.

Driving people to your website is fundamental to virtually every message. It’s your “home base” for district communications. The web address for your site should be featured on all news releases, publications, and correspondence.

Your site needs to be user-friendly. It exists to serve your audience, not you. Put yourself in their shoes and try to think like a resident or ratepayer when you are designing the site and adding content.

Not all websites are created equally, but they don’t need to be complicated and time-consuming to be effective. Think about why somebody would visit your site and what they would be looking for. Focus on keeping what you do have on your site current, rather than adding more and more clutter. It’s like a garden: Don’t plant what you can’t maintain. In other words, keep your site simple and keep it updated.

### STREAMLINE WEBSITE PARTNERSHIP

**Streamline offers flexible, powerful website tools that help special districts connect with their communities. The software is updated regularly to meet state and federal guidelines as they change over time – so you can rest assured this CSDA partner has your back.**

Answers to Common Initial Questions:

- The Streamline platform is free to try
- There are no up-front costs, RFPs, or contracts required
- CSDA member districts can sign up with no obligation or commitment.
- One low monthly fee includes unlimited hosting and support



*Find out more at [getstreamline.com](http://getstreamline.com)*





## Social Media

Various social media platforms serve different audiences and needs. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Nextdoor, and others appeal to a variety of audiences and allow you to “push” newsworthy messages out to users.

Social media can be valuable in urgent times. When crisis or disaster strikes, they are the fastest route for providing residents with breaking news and updates. Most notably, social media allows for at least some form of two-way conversation with your community.

Consistent engagement is critical to the success of a social media account. Therefore, you should only take on the platforms you are confident can be kept up-to-date. For example, a Facebook page and/or a Twitter feed are more effective than five or six platforms that are not regularly updated.

Anyone who follows social media in their personal life knows that maintaining an account can become a full-time job. You don't need to spend all day monitoring your district's social media account, but you do need to check it regularly and respond to comments and messages, which can get tricky in a world filled with Internet “trolling.”

When responding to social media comments, be careful not to get into a back-and-forth with your critics. As the George Bernard Shaw quote goes, “I learned long ago, never to wrestle with a pig. You get dirty, and besides, the pig likes it.” The most snide, negative postings should be ignored, while those that may be substantively damaging warrant a response. When you do respond, stay positive, give an honest answer, and then stop. Be thoughtful, stay calm, and protect your sanity. Especially during difficult times, reading all the ugliness one can find on social media is not a healthy use of your time or mental health.

Note that you are not legally permitted to delete comments from posts or block access to social media content maintained by a public agency. Doing so with public resources can be interpreted as an infringement of First Amendment rights to free speech.

What is more important than quantity of posts is the quality and consistency of posts. Consistent, high-quality posts will receive more attention, views, clicks, and shares – and translate into more traffic back to your website.

When using social media, a best practice is the 70-20-10 method. It is a guideline to concentrate about 70 percent of content on the services the audience receives from the district; about 20 percent should discuss or promote related external content; and, no more than 10 percent of posts should self-promote the district (such as awards, recognitions, historical facts, or fun features).

So how many posts are too many or too few? You can spend months debating the analytics, and by the time you settle on the perfect number, the platform will change its algorithms. Some experts suggest posting frequencies in the ranges below:

- **Facebook:** 1-2 posts per day (one if you have under 10,000 followers and two if over)
- **Twitter:** 1-5 posts per day (more posts will reduce engagement per tweet but increase total responses)
- **Instagram:** 1-2 posts per day (but more is okay if they're high quality and consistent)
- **LinkedIn:** 1 post per day

If you can't keep up with this schedule, but can consistently manage a few great posts per week, that's better than nothing, and better than posting junk content just to post a certain number of times per day.

One thing to consider: the more time you spend writing tweets and posts, the less time you are investing in other forms of productive public outreach and engagement efforts. So, it's important to keep perspective, maximize your time, and look for balance.

Above all, remember it's not about you, it's about your audience. Social media may seem like the most self-promotional activity on the planet, but people who do it best have the same qualities and techniques as people who network well in-person. Namely, they talk about you instead of talking about themselves.

To succeed in social media, you must talk about your audience, promote others in your community, ask questions of others, and look for common interests to connect. Similar to in-person settings, people who spend most of their time talking about themselves end up talking to themselves.

*Whether paying to advertise on a billboard, in a newspaper, or via social media, you cannot substitute more spending for a thoughtful communications plan.*



While printing and postage can be expensive, many districts find ways to save on costs by combining newsletters with utility bills, annual reports, or other communications. Alternatively, you can disseminate a digital or eNewsletter via email and/or social media.



### *Paid Advertising*

Paid advertising can be an effective method of outreach when available, appropriate, and affordable. There are legal limitations on when and how a local agency can advertise, so it is advisable to establish a district policy before doing it.

Advertising works best in situations where you are trying to launch a sustained message to change behavior, like recycling or decreasing water use, and when a program has an earmarked fund for advertising. Social media platforms now offer one of the most affordable means of paying to get out your message to a target audience. It may be worth exploring opportunities to “boost” your posts when it counts.

Boosting means paying the social media platform to ensure your post is seen by more people. Posts on Facebook, for example, can be boosted for as little as one dollar per day and it goes up from there. The more you pay the more people a post will reach. Before you finalize a boosted post, Facebook will outline how many people you will reach based on your budget. It is also possible to target a boosted post based on demographics and geographic location. While all of this may sound complex or intimidating, it is designed to make advertising easy and accessible. Fortunately, it’s affordable enough that you can learn through small trials.

Whether paying to advertise on a billboard, in a newspaper, or via social media, you cannot substitute more spending for a thoughtful communications plan. Paid advertising, done well, can enhance your public outreach and engagement, but it will not replace it.

### *Newsletters and Direct Mail*

If you can get them to read it, there is no better opportunity to tell your story than to write it directly to your audience. That is what a well-done newsletter offers. While printing and postage can be expensive, many districts find ways to save on costs by combining newsletters with utility bills, annual reports, or other communications. Alternatively, you can disseminate a digital or eNewsletter via email and/or social media.

The best newsletters read like actual news, not just self-promotional advertisements. Don’t be afraid to address challenging issues, concerns, and questions related to your community, the district, and the services it provides.

Expert tips and tools on things like conservation or mosquito prevention are also popular to include in a newsletter, as are calendars and save-the-dates for important upcoming meetings, events, programs, and deadlines.

Also, make your newsletter personal. Let the readers get to know the individuals serving at the district as people. Tell them who you are, what you believe, and why you do what you do. Board member and employee profiles are an easy way to do this, but try to make them warm and enjoyable, rather than cold, hard resumes.

## *Community Groups*

There's an old saying that if you want something to get done, ask someone who is busy. The same can be said for community engagement. The folks who are already engaged in the community are likely to become most engaged with your district. Places like the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, and other community organizations are often a good place to start for public outreach. Your district should become a member of these groups and make presentations to them regarding noteworthy projects, programs, and decisions.

## *Advisory Bodies*

Some special districts have created their own commissions, task forces, working groups, or other advisory bodies to study, analyze, or otherwise help vet certain issues for the district's governing board. This approach can be advantageous as it develops surrogates who become passionate about the district. Appointees may have social networks within different subsets and demographics of the community than those of the governing board.

A few notes of caution with advisory bodies: They take time and can evolve in unintended ways. Before creating one, a district should ensure it has the bandwidth to properly staff and facilitate these bodies. Additionally, a district should establish a clear mission or purpose for the body with well-defined parameters. It may be helpful to include a sunset date, meaning the advisory body will expire at a date certain unless otherwise acted upon. That way, participants come in with appropriate expectations and there is no perception the district's governing board is terminating the body for political purposes.

One side benefit to establishing advisory bodies is their potential to help grow a "farm team" of future candidates for the governing board. Some districts find it difficult to recruit knowledgeable replacements for vacant seats. Regardless of the primary purpose of the advisory bodies your district establishes, you may end up enlisting your next board president.

## *Community Events*

Hosting booths or tables at county fairs, career fairs, health and wellness fairs, concerts in the park, art festivals, and the like are another way to demonstrate a presence in the community. To make these events successful a district should invest in signage such as table cloths and banners or other displays, as well as educational materials and swag. Most people walking by your booth won't have a reason to speak with you unless you give them one.

How do you get somebody's attention? First, ensure the staff or volunteers hosting your booth are motivated to engage the public in a friendly manner. Somebody sitting behind a table looking at their phone all day is not inviting. You want people who will stand up and even come out in front of the booth to meet people and get to know them.

Second, consider an activity that visitors can do at your booth, whether it's related to your district or it's just something fun like a game of beanbag toss. Perhaps you are a healthcare district or fire protection district and you teach people CPR. Maybe you are a water district or mosquito abatement district and you let people look at lab samples through microscopes.

Lastly, give people a prize or some type of handout that drives them to your website or preferably to a specific call-to-action. Think about what you want them to do when they get home and what will help them remember to do it. Recreation and park districts might provide a calendar with the dates pre-marked with events and athletic seasons. Airport districts may hand out little balsa wood airplanes with their website printed on them.

## *Traditional News Media*

Some may argue that only a small percentage of people still get their news through local television outlets, radio, and newspapers. Although traditional news media is diminishing in number and in many cases struggling to survive, it is still an important voice in your community. Rest assured, traditional news viewers, listeners, and readers tend to be highly-engaged residents, including those who make policy decisions at both the local and state levels.

Don't ignore familiar news outlets – they continue to speak to some of your most important target audiences. Be responsive when they call; make the effort to reach out to news outlets even when it seems they ignore your district. Remember: Time is their most precious resource, and you must respond promptly when a reporter calls.



### *District Events and Tours*

Perhaps the best way to be transparent, hospitable, and trustworthy, is to open the doors of your district and proactively invite in the people you serve. After all, when it comes to special districts, your office and your facilities are owned by the public—making it all the more pertinent to be open and invitational with the space.

District-hosted events are a lot like attending other community events, except you control the entire format. These events can be simple, like an open house at your district headquarters where you provide coffee and snacks or desserts. Let the public chat with your board and staff, ask questions, and get to know one another in a casual environment. Alternatively, districts can put on tours of infrastructure and equipment.

Water districts and wastewater districts commonly host tours of treatment facilities. Fire protection districts often let families and school groups visit the local firehouse. Airport districts usually hold an annual airshow. Sometimes special districts get creative. The Goleta Sanitary District earned CSDA's Exceptional Public Outreach Award for putting on "Jurassic Plant" day at the district.

One standard event opportunity is to hold a ground-breaking ceremony to kick-off the construction of a new facility, or a

ribbon-cutting to celebrate the completion of a big project. Since infrastructure is one of the main things special districts do that people can see and be proud of, this is your opportunity to shine. Invite the public to witness these moments and be sure to include the press. This is also great content to post to your website and social media, especially to let the community follow along as the project progresses.

These are the type of opportunities you don't want to waste when it comes to building relationships with legislators and other political leaders. Even if they had nothing to do with it, inviting your State Senator and Assemblymember to have their picture taken in front of your brand-new park, recycled water plant, or firehouse doesn't cost you anything. They will appreciate the opportunity, and they might even bring a shiny resolution you can hang on the wall.

Event planning may not be what your district specializes in. Therefore, it is important you take a little extra time to think through the details before sending out an invitation. Make sure you've thought through the essentials like parking, bathrooms, security, and emergency planning.



### **EXCEPTIONAL PUBLIC OUTREACH AWARD WINNER**

**The Goleta Sanitary District held a Jurassic Plant Tour Open House to the delight of 1100+ visitors. Guests arrived through a gate built in front of the District's regular entrance designed to look like the ominous gates welcoming visitors in the Jurassic Park film.**

The Goleta Sanitary District is not known for dinosaurs of course, but for its collection and treatment of wastewater. In fact, most people do not think about what happens once they flush water away from their home. But the story of water on Earth is as fascinating as the story of the dinosaurs. The Jurassic Plant Tour Open House was an attempt to engage and entertain visitors about the same water that's been on Earth since the before the time of the dinosaurs.

If you would like to nominate a special district program, project, or individual for a CSDA award, visit [csda.net/awards](http://csda.net/awards).

58%

of special districts surveyed offer internships, seasonal work, or part-time work to local students

### Schools and Colleges

Students are the best learners and, as experts in their field, special districts have so much to teach. Partnering with your local school district, college, or university is a great way to grow public awareness and engagement with your district at an early age. As an added benefit, special districts offer a variety of great careers that students may aspire to. From entry-level, to career technical, to senior-level professional positions, special districts depend upon a diverse workforce.

Special districts interact with schools through a variety of avenues such as field trips or presentations to school classrooms or assemblies. What's important is that you make the presentation or tour relatable to the age group and interests of the students. It's usually a lot of fun hearing the kids "ooh," "ahh," and "eew" during tours of treatment plants and other facilities.

If an in-person interaction is not the right fit for your district, or if you are trying to scale your outreach to touch more students, you may try providing schools with educational materials or sponsoring competitions or scholarships. Poster contests and video contests are popular methods of spreading the word about special districts.



### SPECIAL DISTRICT EXAMPLES OF SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

Some districts invest in truly innovative ways to engage their local students. If you're looking for ideas, look to your fellow members of CSDA. Below are just a few of dozens of examples you can find at [DistrictsMakeTheDifference.org](http://DistrictsMakeTheDifference.org)

#### Orange County Cemetery District

At two of the cemeteries, students from the Orange County School of Arts are used to portray individuals who are interred in the cemetery as part of a community historical walk. In addition, the district offers local film or photography students the ability to use the cemetery grounds for short films, photography, or other art related projects. They also offer educational tours to local schools as part of their history classes.

#### Shasta Mosquito and Vector Control District

An education program includes both field trips to the district and classroom visits. Presentations for elementary grades utilize their mosquito mascot, Missy Keeto, in the learning adventure. An Activity Book is designed to reinforce the classroom presentation and support the K-2 curriculum.

#### Ventura Port District

Through a collaboration with the Ventura County Office of Education, the district connects with students interested in hospitality, tourism, recreation, and public service. They do presentations at local colleges to inspire students to consider career opportunities at the district. They also do a program in the summer for children called "Seaside Kids Club" at Ventura Harbor Village. It includes sea-themed crafts, entertainment, and educational components.

#### Mt. View Sanitary District

The district just completed its 20th year of providing award-winning, environmental education opportunities to Contra Costa County students through its Wetlands Program. Developed and performed as a partnership between the district and the Lindsay Wildlife Experience, the four-hour program allows students to explore a marsh, dip net for aquatic animals, tour the treatment plant, and learn about water pollution prevention and aquatic animal adaptations. There is a field trip program as well as an in-class program.

You don't have to start with an elaborate, time-consuming program. Start with just talking to your local school principal, a teacher, or the PTA, and find out what they need that your district could help with.

### DISTRICTS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE STUDENT VIDEO CONTEST

**Through its Districts Make the Difference public outreach campaign, CSDA facilitates an annual video contest for high school and college students and your special district is encouraged to participate by promoting it to your local schools and colleges.**

Districts are welcome to co-brand the contest and talk about your own district as part of your outreach. For information visit [www.DistrictsMakeTheDifference.org/video-contest](http://www.DistrictsMakeTheDifference.org/video-contest).

70%

of special districts surveyed offer educational resources or programs for local schools

24%

of special districts surveyed offer scholarships to local students

## Some Direction on News Releases

Social media communications are enhancements and supplements to traditional outreach methods, not replacements for those familiar methods. There is still a place for news releases and other traditional forms of reaching out to the media.

News releases have the power to tell the story, grab attention, and have a better control over the narrative desired, but they should be carefully crafted with quality in mind over quantity. A good news release is one sent only for newsworthy events and issues. A standard method for determining the value of news is to think “TIPCUP.”

TIPCUP is an acronym used to recall the six elements of newsworthiness: Timeliness, Impact, People, Conflict, Uniqueness and Proximity:

- **Timeliness:** News is new, not old. Make sure the news release is sent after an announcement is made, an achievement is accomplished, or ahead of an event.
- **Impact:** Does the issue or event have the potential to affect many of the residents the district serves? Will the issue change the way district services are administered in a way the community will feel? If so, a news release could be warranted.
- **People:** Is a prominent member of the community involved in the matter? It could be a retirement of a long-time board member or hiring of a new general manager. News regarding individuals in leadership and of high stature in a community is generally public interest, especially in smaller communities.
- **Conflict:** Special districts should tread lightly on conflict and take an awareness approach to this element. The media and the community will seize opportunities to chase conflict. Districts should be mindful and stay one step ahead of any conflict that could arise, such as a proposed rate increase may generate. Address conflict with transparency and accountability through a timely and empathetic news release.

- **Uniqueness:** Is the district piloting a unique program or taking part in a special research study? Anything making the district stand out and shine among the rest is deserving of attention.
- **Proximity:** Districts should focus on promoting matters and events relevant to and occurring within the communities they serve.

Using the TIPCUP method allows districts to deliver higher quality news to the community and its stakeholders. It also reduces the clutter of less-important news releases, making the district’s releases that matter more likely to get picked up.

Other basic qualities of news release content include:

- **Use a strong lead:** Follow journalism’s “inverted pyramid” format, meaning the lead sentence should contain the most important information in the release.
- **Answer fundamental questions:** Don’t forget to address the traditional pertinent questions: “who, what, when, where, why, and how?”
- **Include visual appeal:** All forms of media want video or photography to accompany their stories. For example, a story about water in an agricultural region is not very compelling if you invite the media to announce your news from a conference room at headquarters. The same story told near a treatment plant or source stream is far more appealing.

Special districts should push traditional news releases directly to mainstream media outlets that have long been relied upon by their residents and repackage the same stories for social media, multiplying outreach efforts and connection points to the community.

***A good news release is one sent only for newsworthy events and issues. A standard method for determining the value of news is to think “TIPCUP.”***





## New Release Inverted Pyramid



**Lead - Summarize entire story in 1 or 2 sentences with most important information first.**



**Quote from spokesperson you would like to see in the news.**



**Background information and key facts, making sure to provide the reader with the "who, what, when, where, why and how" of your story.**



**2nd quote from spokesperson.**



**Standard paragraph about your organization, where it is, what it does and who it serves.**



## The Difference Between Public Meetings and Public Engagement

Posting an agenda on the door of an office building and unlocking the door may be a legal requirement, but it is not “public outreach.” Similarly, allowing for two minutes of public comment during a board meeting is not “public engagement.”

Public outreach and engagement are more than one-way publications like newsletters and press releases, and even more than social media platforms that offer a degree of back-and-forth. Unfortunately, some people confuse public outreach with fundamental governmental transparency requirements like following the Brown Act and the California Public Records Act.

Effective public outreach takes the message to the public and meets people where they are in a manner they can hear, understand, and respond. Your boardroom at 2:00 p.m. on a Tuesday might not be the most convenient time and place for residents in your community. Moreover, it might not be the most comfortable setting to elicit honest public input. Can we expect the public to come to us if we do not make an effort to go to them?

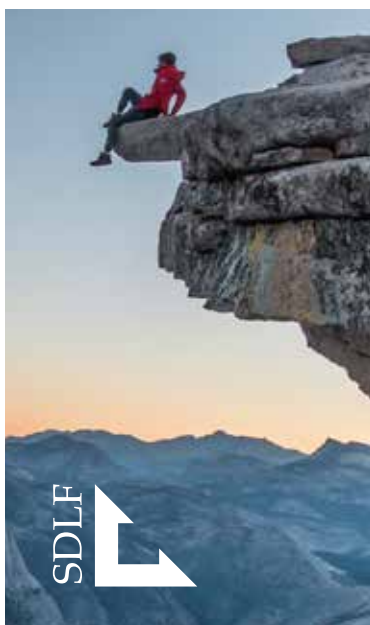
Reaching out and engaging the community does not have to be expensive. One recreation and park district decided to rotate meetings in neighborhood parks throughout its district. Parks and playgrounds were how the residents knew and understood the district, and that’s where the public using district services

was already going. If you want to talk to your constituents, why struggle to get them to come to your district office when you can just move your meeting to them?

Could you go to the mall or town square? What about the movie theater, a popular restaurant, or an ice cream shop on a summer day? Maybe the reservoir, the firehouse, or the docks? Where are the people who use your services? Meet them there. It doesn’t have to be a formal meeting, just an opportunity to communicate, to tell your story and listen to your constituents’ feedback.

Once you’ve secured an audience with people, make sure you use it well. A lot of people are intimidated by public speaking and the formalities of public hearings. Furthermore, the dynamics of board meetings promote speeches at the board or to the public, rather than conversations between and among the public and the board. Fortunately, there are alternatives.

Formal board meetings will always be a fact of life for public agencies, but that doesn’t preclude your district from organizing public conversations, workshops, and planning sessions. Special districts can seek training on how to administer these types of meetings or can seek the help of third-party facilitators.



*Learn more  
about SDLF  
Programs &  
Scholarships  
at [sdlf.org](http://sdlf.org).*

Usually, intentional public engagement-oriented meetings involve coffee and snacks, roundtables, small groups, and other methods of personal interaction. Sometimes they include technology like voting with smartphones. Other times, they might employ old-fashioned sticky notes and butcher block paper. Each district should do what fits the resources, needs, and culture of its community.

Following a public engagement meeting, a district should debrief and consider adjustments for the next meeting. It's also wise to try different methods to ensure your district isn't always hearing from the same people that gravitate to, and may dominate, a particular approach.

***Usually, intentional public engagement-oriented meetings involve coffee and snacks, roundtables, small groups, and other methods of personal interaction.***



## **TIERS PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK AND LEARNING LAB**

**Think Initiate Engage Renew Shift, or TIERS, is a five-pillar framework created by the Institute for Local Government (ILG) that any special district can use to plan and execute public engagement efforts.**

The TIERS Public Engagement Framework and its companion program, the TIERS Learning Lab, provide a step-by-step approach to public engagement at any level. For more information about ILG's TIERS Learning Lab check out [www.ca-ilg.org/tiers-public-engagement-framework](http://www.ca-ilg.org/tiers-public-engagement-framework) or contact [publicengagement@ca-ilg.org](mailto:publicengagement@ca-ilg.org).

Along with the League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties, CSDA is a parent organization of ILG, whose mission is to promote good government at the local level with practical, impartial, and easy-to-use resources for California communities.



## **SPECIAL DISTRICT LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION**

**The Special District Leadership Foundation (SDLF) is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization formed to provide recognition and certification opportunities to special districts to enhance the level of service to the public.**

To promote excellence in local government, SDLF offers the following programs:

- District Transparency Certificate of Excellence
- District of Distinction Accreditation
- Special District Administrator Certification (SDA)
- Recognition in Special District Governance

Obtaining SDLF recognition provides third party verification of the steps your district is taking to go above-and-beyond in your service, transparency, and accountability. SDLF also offers scholarships for obtaining the trainings and building the websites necessary to meet its requirements.

Visit [sdlf.org](http://sdlf.org) to learn more!





*Rancho Cordova Recreation & Park District*

### **“Small Districts” Versus “Large Districts”**

Some special district leaders may read this publication and think, “sure, big districts with big budgets and large staffs can do all of that, but how is our district with one or two paid staff members – or maybe none – supposed to accomplish any of this?” The truth is that public engagement doesn’t have to be expensive or time-consuming. In fact, while there are advantages to having more resources, there are also advantages to being a small district.

A large special district serving half a million customers may be able to afford multiple communications professionals, field representatives, and paid advertising, but they must get the attention of half a million customers. If you are a district serving a couple hundred, or even a couple thousand

households, your board could probably divide up the neighborhood and walk door-to-door to personally speak to everyone over the course of one or two weekends. How is that for public outreach and engagement? When is the last time a member of Congress knocked on your door to ask how he or she could better serve you?

It’s also much easier as a small district to organize a neighborhood event, whether you host an open house at your district office or you do a family barbecue or ice cream social at the local park. You could call it a customer or resident appreciation event, or it could be an anniversary celebration reminding the community that they formed the district, they own the district, and they ultimately oversee the district.

## Districts Make the Difference Public Outreach Campaign

Districts Make the Difference is a public outreach campaign sponsored by CSDA to raise public awareness and understanding of special districts throughout the State of California. Using a web-based toolkit at [DistrictsMakeTheDifference.org](http://DistrictsMakeTheDifference.org) the campaign seeks to empower California's nearly 2,100 special districts with effective tools and messages for communicating with their communities.

## The Bottom Line

Engaging your community needn't be expensive, but it does have to be well thought-out and managed. To succeed, adhere to these principles:

1. Make sure your call to action is clear and concise;
2. Keep your messages relevant and updated as the issue evolves; and
3. Ensure the results of your efforts can be measured.



[DistrictsMakeTheDifference.org](http://DistrictsMakeTheDifference.org)



[Facebook.com/YourCADistricts](https://www.facebook.com/YourCADistricts)



[@YourCADistricts](https://twitter.com/YourCADistricts)



[www.youtube.com/CASpecialDistrictsDMTD](https://www.youtube.com/CASpecialDistrictsDMTD)

At the Districts Make the Difference website, the public can find information and background about special districts, descriptions about how districts serve communities, and news and compelling videos. The campaign works to drive visitors to the site through social media platforms including:

In addition to social media efforts, an online campaign toolkit provides special districts with resources they can spread to their community. Materials include downloadable Districts Make the Difference logos, fact sheets, posters, infographics, and more.



*Legislators always find time to listen to the voters they represent locally. Just as you serve your community, your legislators were also elected to serve.*





*The Honorable Christy Smith (left front), who represents 38th Assembly District, meets with CSDA members.*

## Engaging with Your Legislators

Since the California State Legislature writes the laws that govern special districts, engaging with your legislators and other stakeholders in the Capitol is a necessary part of leading your district. Legislators always find time to listen to the voters they represent locally. Just as you serve your community, your legislators were also elected to serve. By providing information, cultivating relationships, and becoming a valuable resource, you can ensure your district's perspective is understood at the state level.

## Understanding the Legislative Process

Before you can effectively engage with your legislators, it helps to know a little about how they create new laws. You don't need to be an expert, but understanding the big picture can help you determine the best times to take action and make your district's voice heard in the Capitol.

With 120 legislators each introducing a couple dozen bills, the State Legislature must consider about 2,500 bills every year including the annual State budget. While there might be one bill that is most important to your district, it is helpful to remember that it is just one of hundreds of bills your legislators might be voting on—sometimes in a single day. It is also important to realize that each bill a legislator votes on is important to somebody.

With so many bills introduced every year, it is not surprising that the legislative process is deadline-driven. It is also worthwhile to note that the California State Legislature serves in a biennial, or two-year, legislative session. Bills introduced in the first year, or the odd year, of a session have two years to navigate the Legislature and receive the governor's signature. Therefore, any bill failing passage in the first year can be reconsidered in the second year. These are known as "two-year bills."

To pass the Legislature, every bill must be approved by both the State Senate and Assembly. Bills introduced by Assemblymembers are considered Assembly Bills or ABs, while those introduced by Senators are called Senate Bills or SBs. Each bill starts in its house of origin, also known as the first house. Assembly Bills begin in the Assembly and Senate Bills in the Senate. Once a bill clears the house of origin, it moves to the second house. If there are any amendments in the second house it must return to the first house for concurrence in the amendments.

Policy committees weigh in on the merits of legislation in each house. A bill is typically referred to at least one policy committee in each house. Every bill with substantive cost is then referred to a fiscal committee, known as the Appropriations Committee, before going to the floor of the house for vote by the full body.

Knowing the legislative calendar will help your district understand when it can influence the introduction, analysis,



and passage or defeat of legislation. The updated legislative calendar for any given year can be downloaded from the State Assembly or State Senate websites (assembly.ca.gov or senate.ca.gov). However, the calendar and legislative process looks roughly as follows:

**First (Odd) Years:**

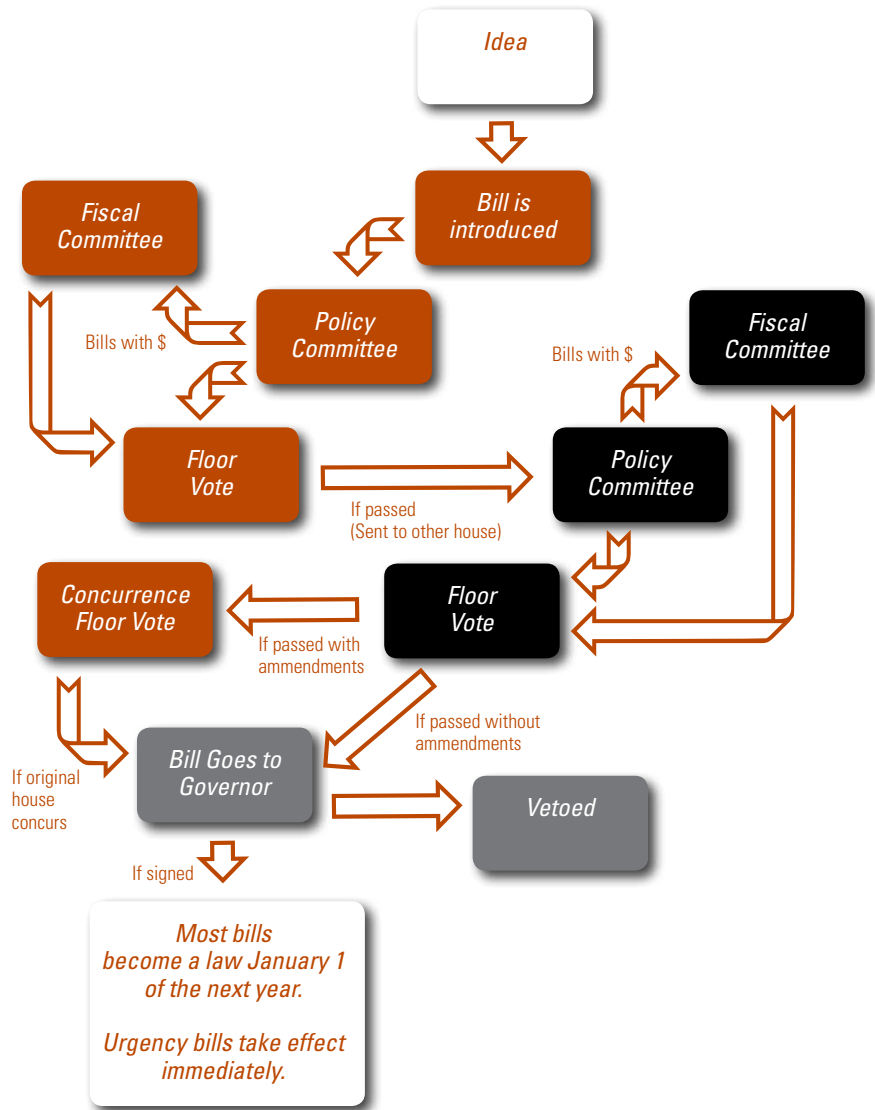
- **January/February:** Bill introductions
- **March/April:** First house policy committee hearings
- **May:** First house fiscal committee hearings and house of origin deadline
- **June/mid-July:** Second house policy committee hearings
- **Mid-July/mid-August:** Summer recess
- **Mid-August/mid-September:** Second house fiscal committee hearings and final deadline

**Second (Even) Years:**

- **January/February:** Bill introductions for second year bills and house of origin deadline for first year (“two-year”) bills
- **March/April:** First house policy committee deadline for second year bills
- **May:** First house fiscal committee deadline for second year bills
- **June:** House of origin deadline for second year bills and second house policy committee hearings
- **July:** Summer recess
- **August:** Second house fiscal committee hearings and final passage deadline

*Note that spring is the busiest time of year in the State Capitol because it is when major policy deadlines converge with the most critical State budget deadlines. The governor’s May Revision to his or her budget proposal is released in mid-May and the Legislature must pass the budget by June 15. During this period, legislators and their staff will want to focus on the most urgent issues that are on deadline. Keep this in mind when contacting them or scheduling meetings.*

**The Legislative Process**



**Knowing the legislative calendar will help your district understand when it can influence the introduction, analysis, and passage or defeat of legislation.**



*The Honorable Jay Obernolte (far right), who represents 33rd Assembly District, meets with CSDA members.*

## **Appreciating the Role of Legislative Staff**

Since legislators are responsible for voting on a high volume of complicated legislation, they depend on their staff to provide information about specific legislation and how it will impact the communities they serve.

Legislative staff are important gatekeepers for legislators and often influence policy issues as well as help to foster relationships for the legislator.

Developing strong relationships with the legislative staff in both the district office and Capitol office of your legislators can help your district build lasting, working relationships with the legislators themselves. Therefore,

never take your legislators' staff for granted. You may even find that they will become your next legislator one day.

Legislators also serve on various committees to discuss, amend, and advance or halt legislation. Committee staff analyze the technical policy and fiscal impacts of every bill and, in their analyses, often include background information provided by stakeholders such as CSDA and your district. The period after a bill is set for hearing is one of the most opportune times to influence the legislative process. This is when your expertise and first-hand experience is crucial to the legislative process and to CSDA.

## **JOIN CSDA'S EXPERT FEEDBACK TEAMS**

**CSDA maintains six Expert Feedback Teams to quickly analyze and gauge the potential effect of legislation.**

CSDA relies on the facts, data, anecdotes, opinions, and other information provided by our members. If you have firsthand experience in one or more of the areas below, please join an Expert Feedback Team by completing the online form at [csda.net/get-involved](https://csda.net/get-involved):

- Environment
- Governance
- Public Works and Facilities
- Formation and Reorganization
- Human Resources and Personnel
- Revenue



## Writing Bill Position Letters

Submitting a letter of support or opposition for a specific piece of legislation is an easy and effective way to take action for your district, and it is the primary way you can participate in a CSDA Call to Action.

Special districts have the authority to lobby the State Legislature, other agencies, and individual decision makers on legislation and other matters of interest to your district. With a letter from your district, you can encourage your legislators to support your district's position.

Even in this age of web-based communications, legislators and their staff pay special attention to the mail they receive from their constituents. Many offices will tag these letters and include them, along with bill analyses in the binder the staff prepares for the legislator to take to committee or floor sessions.

Not only are you a constituent yourself, but you and your district likely serve and represent hundreds or thousands of the legislator's constituents. By virtue of your position, you and your district's letterhead have a high-level of credibility to speak on behalf of your community and the many voters who live there.

To be able to effectively submit position letters in the fast-moving legislative environment, your district should adopt a legislative advocacy policy that governs its process for registering support or opposition on matters of interest.

As discussed earlier, legislation is assigned to committees where it is reviewed and analyzed. The committees will list within the analysis those organizations that have formally registered support or opposition for each bill. If you submit a letter to the committee when it is considering a bill, your district's position will be noted in the written analysis supplied to legislators. Therefore, in addition to

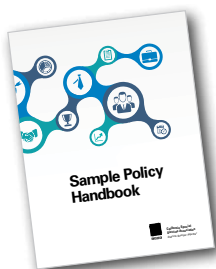
sending position letters to your legislators, you should consider sending a copy of the letter or a separate correspondence to any committees to which the bill has been referred.

Note that to be reflected in a committee analysis you must submit your letter in a timely manner. Bills are often heard within weeks of referral to a committee and most committees impose a deadline for receiving letters no later than one week prior to the bill's hearing. Therefore, in some cases, your district may have little more than one week to draft and submit a position letter on important legislation.

In addition to sending your position letter to the assigned committee, it is worthwhile to copy the minority party's policy office. While the committee analysis is a public document written by committee staff under the oversight and supervision of the committee chair, the minority party's policy office provides a private analysis to the members of the minority caucus.

Committee analyses and caucus analyses often weigh heavily on legislators' decision-making in policy committees. A letter from your district has the potential to influence your legislators' votes. Even once a bill has passed the Legislature, you can request a signature or veto from the governor; you can also weigh in on the implementation of new laws or development of related regulations.

Keeping up with all of this and tracking the journey of a bill through the legislative process can feel a little overwhelming. That is why, for CSDA Calls to Action, we recommend you simply address your letter to the bill's author and copy CSDA ([advocacy@csda.net](mailto:advocacy@csda.net)). When CSDA receives letters from you related to a formal Call to Action, we will keep them on file and make sure copies are properly submitted to appropriate committees as the bill makes its way through the legislative process. If amendments are taken to the bill and updates are needed to your letter, we will notify you.



### SAMPLE POLICY ON LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

**Download a free sample policy on legislative advocacy at [csda.net/take-action](https://csda.net/take-action). Special districts can purchase a subscription to CSDA's full Sample Policy Handbook, complete with quarterly updates, by visiting the CSDA Knowledge Base at [csda.net/knowledge-base](https://csda.net/knowledge-base).**

When writing a letter of support or opposition to your legislator, a committee, or the governor, remember these tips:

- Write your letter on your district's letterhead.
- Identify what regions and communities your district serves.
- Be brief but thoughtful about the issue. Plan key message points that frame your content and emphasize the most important information.
- Explain how the issue impacts your district and the community you serve with meaningful examples, facts, statistics, or cost estimates, but avoid excessive detail, jargon, or clutter.
- Explicitly ask for support or opposition.
- Do not make any unreasonable requests or use an aggressive or passive-aggressive tone.

### CSDA BILL TRACKING

To see what positions CSDA has taken on bills affecting special districts, visit the CSDA Bill Tracking service available at [csda.net/bill-tracking](http://csda.net/bill-tracking). You can also review CSDA's summaries and support and opposition letters for bills upon which the association has adopted a position.

## Sample Bill Position Letter

*Printed on Your Special District's Letterhead*

[Date]

The Honorable [Bill Author's Name]  
California State [Senate or Assembly]  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: [Senate or Assembly Bill XXX (Author's Last Name) – Support or Oppose]**

Dear [Senator or Assemblymember Bill Author's Last Name]:

On behalf of the [Name of Your Special District], I am writing to [Support or Oppose] [Senate or Assembly Bill XXX]. [Brief description of your district].

[Brief but thoughtful explanation of your position. Try to keep to one page.].

[Be sure to explain how the proposed legislation will help or hurt your community and the constituents you share with the legislator.].

For these reasons, the [Name of Your Special District] [supports or respectfully opposes] [AB or SB XXX]. Should you have any questions regarding our position, please contact me at [phone number] or [email].

Sincerely,

[Your Signature]  
[Your Name]  
[Your Title]

CC: [Committee Chair if the bill has been referred to a committee]  
[Your Legislators]  
California Special Districts Association via [advocacy@csda.net](mailto:advocacy@csda.net)



### *CSDA Calls to Action*

Special districts have a number of resources available to help you take action for your district. Among the most important resources is the *CSDA Take Action* page available at [csda.net/take-action](http://csda.net/take-action).

CSDA understands that you may not be able to submit a letter of support or opposition for every bill for which CSDA has a position. To make it as easy as possible for your district to respond to the most significant bills affecting all types of special districts, CSDA announces Calls to Action via our eNews and posts a sample letter and background information to our *Take Action* page.

*Calls to Action* are crucial opportunities to influence public policy affecting all special districts. CSDA only issues *Calls to Action* about two to five times per year, and only when a show of force from hundreds of special districts will help achieve the best outcome. Over the years, *CSDA Calls to Action* have successfully blocked revenue diversions, prevented unfunded state mandates, and retained local control. They have led to hundreds of millions of dollars in special district savings.

Each *Call to Action* is a chance to show the Capitol community the collective strength of special districts working together.

### **Connecting with Your Legislators**

As valuable as letters are for sharing your district's voice, it is just as important to foster a personal relationship with your legislators and their staff. Legislators want to hear directly from the communities they represent, and you should strive to be a resource for your district's legislators.

The more your district's legislators know about your agency, the better the chances that they will understand the needs and value of all special districts when it comes to decisions in the State Legislature.

Serving on a special district board may be the first public office you've ever held; working as a general manager or other staff position may be the first public position in your career. Nevertheless, your legislators want to have a relationship with you. Remember, by virtue of your position you are a community leader too. More so, if you were elected to your office, you have your own base of support in the community that is noteworthy to a legislator seeking those same votes.



#### **WHERE DO I SEND MY SUPPORT AND OPPOSITION LETTERS?**

**For CSDA Calls to Action, we recommend you address your letter to the bill's author and copy CSDA.**

We will then forward your letter to the appropriate committees as the bill makes its way through the legislative process. However, if your district is looking to weigh in on other legislation, it is important to be aware of the new California Legislature Position Letter Portal, which many committees now require for accepting and processing position letters submitted by outside organizations.

The letter portal can be accessed at [calegislation.lc.ca.gov/Advocates](http://calegislation.lc.ca.gov/Advocates). After completing a one-time registration to obtain a username and password, users must log in to submit position letters as a registered lobbyist, organization, or individual seeking to communicate views to the bill author's staff as well as the committee that will be hearing the bill.



### *Phone Calls to Your Legislator*

Initial contact with your legislator's office will often begin with a phone call to introduce yourself, your district, and your role. However, you should also be prepared to educate your legislator about an issue that is particularly significant to your district.

Lawmakers and their staff notice when you make the effort to call and explain your district's views about an issue. Encourage your district to develop talking points on important issues so you can be clear and effective when speaking with your legislators.

When you call your legislator, remember these tips:

- Make sure to identify yourself as a constituent, and provide your name, title, and name of your district.
- Briefly explain what services your district provides, what communities your district serves, and how many people benefit from the services your district provides.
- Identify a specific issue or bill that impacts your district and be prepared to thoughtfully discuss that issue.
- Unless you have a strong, pre-established relationship with the legislator, request to speak with the legislative staff member who covers the issue. Ask the staff member to relay your phone call and your request/position directly to the legislator.
- Ask about the legislator's position on the issue. If they are not sure, respectfully ask them to follow up with you, after they further analyze the issue, and ask when you can expect to hear back from them.
- Don't forget to thank them, provide your contact information, and reiterate that you want to serve as a resource for the legislator on any issues related to local government or your district's type of services.

### *Meetings with Your Legislator*

The best way to build a relationship is face-to-face. To cultivate a relationship with your district's legislators, ask them to meet with you at least once a year. Putting a face with your name and district will make your relationship with your legislator even more meaningful. A meeting can be scheduled at a legislator's Capitol office or their district office. You can also invite them to your agency's office or host them during an event at one of your facilities.

When requesting a meeting with your legislator, ask to speak to the scheduler or send a written meeting request to the scheduler. Legislators run an exceedingly busy schedule, and the scheduler's position is one of the hardest jobs in the Capitol. They also control the calendar, so be nice and be helpful by providing the who, what, when, where, and why for your meeting.

Keep in mind the legislative calendar when requesting meetings. Legislators work in their Capitol office Monday – Thursday from January – August with a one-month recess in the summer. They work in their district office on Fridays and all week from September – December. Saturdays are often spent at community events. Also, remember that legislators must dedicate many hours to campaign activities, such as precinct walking and fundraising, throughout the year—especially during election years.

Legislators receive hundreds of meeting requests. Therefore, it may take time before a meeting can be scheduled and you may need to follow up on your request. Taking a positive, polite, and patient approach will help foster your relationship with your legislator and ultimately secure your meeting. Legislators' first impression of you and your district will likely come from this initial stage, so start your relationship-building off on the right foot by respecting the staff and the procedures they follow to do their jobs effectively.

## **CSDA GRASSROOTS MOBILIZATION PROGRAM**

**While many special district leaders have developed a relationship with at least one of their legislators, nobody has a relationship with all 120 legislators. Since it takes 41 votes in the Assembly and 21 votes in the Senate to pass a bill, special districts need to work together. That's what CSDA's Grassroots Mobilization Program is for.**

By identifying your legislative relationships through a 30-second Grassroots Mobilization Survey at [csda.net/take-action](https://csda.net/take-action), you can help make Districts Stronger Together. CSDA will contact participating members when an important bill is facing a key vote in a policy committee where one of your legislators is a sitting member. You will then be briefed on the bill and given the opportunity to contact the legislator to voice your perspective and encourage their support.

You should anticipate that a typical meeting with a legislator in their Capitol office will be scheduled for a 15-minute time-slot, and around 13 or 14 minutes into the meeting, the staff will knock on the door to inform the legislator that the participants for the next meeting have arrived. Meetings in a legislator's district office are often afforded a bit more time, usually about 30 minutes.

When meeting with your legislator, remember these tips:

- Be mindful of the legislator's time and be clear about why you're meeting, whether it is just a meet-and-greet or it is concerning a specific issue.
- Know some points about the legislator's background and policy interests.
- Always be objective and polite and never bring up campaign matters, such as who you are endorsing or contributing to, during a policy discussion or any meeting in a public office.
- Be thoroughly prepared with concise talking points and fact sheets.
- Avoid overloading the legislator; make a specific "ask," and be prepared to follow up with more details and background as necessary.
- Leave a business card with the legislator and staff, offer to serve as a resource, and follow up with a thank you card.

## Sample Legislator Meeting Request Letter

*Printed on Your Special District's Letterhead*

[Date]

The Honorable [Your Legislator's Name]  
California State [Senate or Assembly]  
[Legislator's District Office Address]  
[City], CA [Zip Code]

### RE: Meeting Request

Dear [Senator or Assemblymember Your Legislator's Last Name]:

I would like to request a meeting in your district office to introduce myself, update you on [Name of Your Special District] and provide an understanding of how our district serves the community of [Name of Community or Region Served].

As you may know, the [Name of Your Special District] was formed by our residents in [year of formation] to provide [type(s) of services]. We now serve [approximate quantity of families/households or population].

As a special district, we specialize in local services. We were formed to deliver a service the community wants, wants done well, and wants done with local control. We are a public agency that is owned and overseen by the residents we serve.

*[Provide any additional details about programs, projects, or infrastructure that might be relevant in offering a snapshot of who your district is and what it does. Keep the letter to one page.]*

My best available dates are [dates] during the hours of [time]. Please let me know if any of these times work for you. If they do not, I would be happy to work with your scheduler to find a date and time that accommodates your schedule.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I very much look forward to meeting with you and discussing ways we can better serve the constituents we share. If you or your staff have any questions or need to contact me, I can be reached at [phone number] or [email].

Sincerely,

[Your Signature]  
[Your Name]  
[Your Title]

## Advocacy Resources

In addition to CSDA's *Take Action* page ([csda.net/take-action](http://csda.net/take-action)) and Bill Tracking page ([csda.net/bill-tracking](http://csda.net/bill-tracking)) discussed previously, CSDA will keep you informed of the most pressing legislative information through multiple communication channels including a weekly eNews and the Advocacy News blog ([csda.net/advocacy-blog](http://csda.net/advocacy-blog)).

CSDA's eNews provides weekly updates about major advocacy efforts, professional development opportunities, and member resources. The Advocacy News blog allows you to receive more frequent communications from the halls of the Capitol by signing up for real-time notifications or daily summaries.

As a CSDA member, you also have access to CSDA's advocacy and public affairs team. Your local contact is the public affairs field coordinator serving each of CSDA's six networks or regions. This individual attends all CSDA-affiliated chapter meetings and conducts over 100 district site visits every year. They also meet with the LAFCO executive officers throughout the network and many of the legislative district offices each year. If you have a question about legislation, the legislative process, or need to meet with your legislator, CSDA is here to help.

Outside of CSDA's resources, the State Legislature offers public resources, such as through the California Legislative Information website ([leginfo.legislature.ca.gov](http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov)). This site allows users to look up bill language, committee analyses, and vote results on legislation dating back to 1999. It also includes electronic copies of all State statutes. You can even create a free account to track the progress of specific bills and receive related email updates.

By visiting [assembly.ca.gov](http://assembly.ca.gov) or [senate.ca.gov](http://senate.ca.gov), the public can find legislative schedules and video archives as well as a full roster of all legislators, their biographies, their district boundaries, and committee memberships. If you do not know who your legislator is, you can search by inputting your address at [findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov](http://findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov). You can also look up every legislator whose legislative district overlaps with your special district's boundaries by visiting your profile page at [csda.net](http://csda.net).

The California Channel ([calchannel.com](http://calchannel.com)) is another useful site for viewing legislative proceedings and video recordings.

### CSDA-AFFILIATED CHAPTERS

**Formed and governed by special district leaders within a specified region, typically a county, chapters provide a forum for networking, training, public outreach, and grassroots legislative advocacy at the local level.**

Chapters typically meet four to six times per year and often feature a keynote speaker like a legislator or other prominent official. They usually provide an agenda item for CSDA legislative updates, Calls to Action, and other announcements. Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) commissioners or executive officers and redevelopment agency oversight board members will sometimes provide updates as a regular agenda item as well. Some chapters even facilitate LAFCO elections or candidate forums.

Find out which CSDA Network you belong to, who your public affairs field coordinator is, and how to get involved in a chapter by visiting [csda.net/chapters-networks](http://csda.net/chapters-networks). If no chapter currently exists in your area, contact CSDA to get one started!



### SPECIAL DISTRICTS LEGISLATIVE DAYS

**Attend Special Districts Legislative Days each May when all types of districts come together with one voice in the State Capitol.**

Don't miss the chance to meet with legislators and their staff as well as hear the latest policy changes affecting your district. Look for details at [legislativedays.csda.net](http://legislativedays.csda.net).





## Seasons of Advocacy Checklist

Throughout the year, there are many ways for you to take action for your district. Here are a few of the most important opportunities to engage with your legislators and advocate for your district.

### Spring

- Ensure your district has adopted a policy governing the process for adopting positions on legislation (download a sample policy at [csda.net/take-action](http://csda.net/take-action)).
- Attend Special Districts Legislative Days in Sacramento in May.

### Summer

- Request a meeting with your legislators in their district offices while the Legislature is on summer recess (mid-July to mid-August in odd years and July in even years).
- Set up a meeting or facilities tour for your local news reporter or editor.

### Fall

- Host your legislators and their staff for tours of your district facilities while the Legislature is on fall recess (interim study recess is mid-September – December in odd years and final recess is September – November in even years).
- Attend your legislators' community events and invite them to yours.

### Winter

- Attend the swearing-in ceremonies of your newly elected legislators (December of each even year).
- Request a meet-and-greet with your newly-elected legislators.
- Sign up for the eNewsletters of your newly-elected legislators and sign them and their staff up for your eNewsletter.
- Update your CSDA Grassroots Mobilization Survey at [csda.net/take-action](http://csda.net/take-action) with any new legislative relationships you have developed.

### Year-Round

- Participate in CSDA Calls to Action and submit letters in support or opposition on significant bills affecting special districts.
- Watch for opportunities to share positive stories in the news and on social media.



## In Conclusion

Engaging your community and your legislators is the responsibility of every special district leader. Everyone has a role to play, not just your board president, not just your general manager, not just your association.

CSDA's stated mission is to be, *“the voice for all special districts, providing members with the resources necessary to best serve their communities.”* Serving as the voice of special districts does not mean that each district has no voice, it means that special districts come together at CSDA to present a stronger voice on the issues that affect all of us. Our telling the story of special districts together in Sacramento and across the State begins with you telling your story in your community.

As this guide reflects, there are a host of opportunities to tell your district's story. If you have yet to take a proactive approach to engage your community and your legislators, it might feel overwhelming. What's most important is to start.

A relationship starts with an introduction. Consider starting today by registering for Special Districts Legislative Days, sending a meet-and-greet request to your legislators, or writing a letter-to-the editor telling readers about why your district was formed and what you do to serve the community you love.





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