

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Strategic Plan

Fiscal Years 2026–2028





Introduction

The Orange County Sanitation District's (OC San) Public Affairs Office (PAO) manages internal and external communications to ensure OC San's messages are accurate, transparent, and aligned with the agency's mission of protecting public health and the environment.

The Public Affairs Strategic Plan (Plan) establishes priorities for Fiscal Years 2026-2027 and 2027-2028 to ensure consistent messaging, meaningful stakeholder engagement, and effective communication that supports OC San's strategic goals.

This Plan aligns with OC San's Strategic Plan and reinforces PAO's role as a strategic partner in achieving agency-wide objectives.

The Plan focuses on measurable outcomes while maintaining flexibility to respond to emerging issues, Board direction, and external factors.

Background

OC San serves 2.6 million people across 550,000 accounts in 20 cities, four special districts, and parts of unincorporated Orange County. Since customer billing is managed through property tax statements, OC San must use alternative methods to communicate with the public and ratepayers.

The agency is governed by a Board of Directors consisting of 25 members, and with nearly 700 employees distributed across seven distinct departments, each dedicated to specific objectives. While these teams operate independently on unique projects, PAO ensures coordinated messaging and unified support for all departments. This integrated approach promotes consistency in brand identity and fosters a shared sense of purpose throughout the agency. PAO plays a critical role in translating complex operational and infrastructure initiatives into clear, accessible information for diverse audiences.

While serving such a large and varied community brings many challenges, it also creates significant opportunities — opportunities that can be met by following the strategies laid out in this Plan.

Public Affairs Team



Jennifer Cabral
Director of
Communications



Daisy Covarrubias
Public Affairs
Supervisor



Rebecca Long
Principal Public
Affairs Specialist



Belen Carrillo
Senior Public
Affairs Specialist



Kelly Newell
Public Affairs
Specialist



Becky Polcyn
Public Affairs
Specialist



Gregg Deterding
Graphics
Designer



Isai Carrillo
Graphics
Designer



Cheryl Scott
Administrative
Assistant

Each team member carries out specific functions to meet the goals and objectives presented in this Plan. PAO is also supported by a Principal Staff Analyst from Engineering who co-leads the Capital Project & Community Outreach, and an intern. Additional support is provided via consulting services for certain efforts as deemed appropriate.

Audiences

This Public Affairs Plan focuses largely on three primary audiences.

- **Internal**

- Board of Directors
- Executive Management Team
- Employees
- Retirees

- **External**

- General Public
- Ratepayers
- Member Agencies
- OC San Neighbors near our facilities (plants and pump stations)
- Media
- Elected Officials
- Environmental Groups

- **Industry**

- Water/Wastewater Agencies
- Trade Organizations
- Contractors and Consultants

Strategic Priorities

The Public Affairs Office will focus on eight strategic priorities during Fiscal Years 2026-2027 and 2027-2028.

1. Internal Communication & Employee Engagement
2. Public Awareness & Education
3. Media & Digital Communications
4. Brand Management & Creative Services
5. Government & Legislative Affairs
6. Capital Project & Community Outreach
7. Crisis and Emergency Communication
8. General Manager & Executive Support

Each priority includes clear objectives, measurable outcomes, and key tactics.

PAO Goals for Fiscal Years 2026/27 and 2027/28

1. Strengthen Internal Communication & Employee Engagement

Foster a well-informed, connected workforce by improving communication channels, increasing participation, and creating opportunities for employee engagement across the organization.

2. Increase Public Awareness & Education

Enhance understanding of OC San's role, services, and environmental impact through expanded outreach, educational programs, and community engagement.

3. Expand Media Presence & Digital Engagement

Grow visibility and public trust by increasing positive media coverage and strengthening OC San's digital platforms, including website and social media.

4. Ensure Consistent Brand Management

Maintain a unified, professional identity across all communications, materials, facilities, and public-facing efforts.

5. Strengthen Government & Legislative Relationships

Build and maintain strong partnerships with elected officials, member agencies, and industry stakeholders while supporting legislative priorities and advocacy efforts.

6. Improve Capital Project & Community Outreach

Provide proactive, transparent communication to communities impacted by construction and infrastructure projects to build awareness and trust.

7. Enhance Crisis & Emergency Communication Preparedness

Ensure readiness to respond quickly and effectively to emergencies or unexpected events with clear, coordinated messaging.

8. Support Executive Leadership Communications

Provide strategic communication support to the General Manager and executive team to ensure clear, consistent messaging to stakeholders and the Board.

Collectively, these goals are designed to improve communication effectiveness, strengthen relationships, increase transparency, and build trust with all audiences—both internally and externally.



Internal Communication and Employee Engagement

Program Lead: Rebecca Long

Goal

Build a highly informed, engaged, and connected workforce by delivering timely, relevant communication and creating meaningful opportunities for employee participation and feedback.

Key Outcomes

- Increase employee engagement participation by 10 percent by FY 2028
- Achieve ≥65 percent employee participation in annual internal communication surveys
- Maintain consistent and timely internal communications distribution
- Implement an employee art contest using OC San's infrastructure
- Conduct periodic surveys following employee events to allow for improvements

Key Strategies

Enhance accessibility, consistency, and relevance of internal communications while creating structured opportunities for two-way engagement between employees and leadership.

Key Tactics

- Maintain and update The San Box intranet with current information.
- Publish six Pipeline newsletters annually.
- Distribute weekly "3 Things to Know" internal emails.
- Continue implementation of new employee welcome program.
- Conduct follow-up employee engagement surveys and event feedback surveys.
- Promote employee participation through the Volunteer Incentive Program (VIP).
- Host employee engagement events including the Holiday Luncheon and Halloween Luncheon, this is to include Community Corner events.
- Continue the Honor Wall recognition program on a biennial basis beginning 2027 including coordination of dedication ceremony.
- Support agency departments with communication needs.



Public Awareness & Education

Program Lead: Rebecca Long and Belen Carrillo

Goal

Increase public understanding of OC San's role in protecting public health and the environment.

Key Outcomes

- Reach at least 5,000 community members annually through outreach activities
- Participate in 6-8 community outreach events per year
- Deliver Wastewater 101 Citizens' Academy annually
- Deliver Proposition 218 notification per established schedule

Key Strategies

Provide accessible education programs that explain OC San's services, environmental stewardship, and career opportunities.

Key Tactics

- Continue the Inside the Outdoors Sewer Science Program reaching at least 500 students annually.
- Expand facility tours to include career awareness.
- Participate in 6-8 community events annually.
- Expand the OC San Speaker's Bureau.
- Fulfill the requirements of Proposition 218 to welcome new constituents and introduce them to OC San.
- Expand the Library Program to reach additional cities within our service area.
- Produce and distribute community newsletters quarterly.
- Create and implement a bus grant program to support schools' ability to tour OC San.
- Continue hosting the Wastewater 101 Citizens' Academy on annual basis.
- Audit the various educational programs offered to assess value.
- Promote and support the Pretreatment Honor Roll Program.
- Create and implement a communications campaign for the Deep Well Injection project.



Media and Digital Communications

Program Lead: Belen Carrillo

Goal

Expand positive visibility of OC San through media relations and digital communication platforms.

Key Outcomes

- Maintain website content and update with new posts weekly.
- Maintain 3–5 social media posts per week.
- Achieve 10 percent annual growth in social media reach and engagement.
- Increase positive earned media coverage annually.

Key Strategies

Proactively share OC San stories, innovations, and infrastructure investments with media and digital audiences.

Key Tactics

- Maintain an active presence on social media focused on increased engagement.
- Ensure website is current and relevant.
- Maintain and update the media contact database annually.
- Develop a news release calendar highlighting major initiatives.
- Maintain a digital press kit.
- Facilitate targeted media engagement opportunities (in-person or virtual), including site visits, briefings, or one-on-one outreach tied to key initiatives.



Brand Management and Creative Services

Program Lead: Rebecca Long

Goal

Achieve full compliance and measurable brand recognition improvements across all communication platforms.

Key Outcomes

- Ensure 100 percent compliance with agency branding standards.
- Ensure signage across OC San facilities is appropriately branded and current.

Key Strategies

Ensure messaging, visuals, and communication materials consistently reflect OC San's mission and values.

Key Tactics

- Plan and execute the christening of new ocean monitoring vessel.
- Maintain and update agency collateral materials.
- Provide design and branding support across departments.
- Promote newly developed video library of OC San programs.
- Develop and implement branding plan for OC facilities and fleet including displays, signage, and visitor experience at both plants, headquarters, and new warehouse facility.
- Create and implement new OC San mascot for educational and awareness purposes.
- Manage award submittal & application process.
- Monitor and maintain records for abstracts, publications, and presentations.
- Monitor and consult on presentations to external groups.
- Manage use of all graphics, photos, and logo.



Government and Legislative Affairs

Program Lead: Rebecca Long

Goal

Strengthen relationships with elected officials, member agencies, and industry partners. The PAO supports OC San's legislative priorities by coordinating with advocates, lobbyists, tracking state and federal legislation, and facilitating engagement with policymakers.

Key Outcomes

- Conduct legislative briefings and facility tours for elected officials annually.
- Provide monthly communication tools for Board members.
- Track and respond to priority state and federal legislation.
- Create and publish the Annual Report and Legislative and Regulatory Plan.

Key Strategies

Maintain proactive engagement with government leaders and industry organizations to support OC San priorities.

Key Tactics

- Create and implement the Annual Legislative and Regulatory Plan.
- Track and report on state and federal legislation.
- Participate in advocacy days and industry forums.
- Partner with industry organizations on legislative issues
- Provide Board meeting talking points following each meeting.
- Produce the Annual Report.
- Host an annual State of OC San event for key stakeholders.
- Support new Board members orientation as needed.
- Create and distribute outreach toolkits to member agencies biannually.
- Identify and pursue grant opportunities supporting OC San initiatives.
- Maintain Grant Policy to support OC San initiatives.



Capital Project and Construction Outreach

Program Lead: Belen Carrillo

Goal

Provide proactive communication and outreach for capital and maintenance projects.

Key Outcomes

- Support outreach for 10+ construction projects across multiple cities.
- Respond to community inquiries within 24 hours.
- Begin construction communication with the affected community at least two weeks prior to project start.

Key Strategies

Engage impacted communities early to build awareness, understanding, and support for infrastructure investments.

Key Tactics

- Conduct community briefings and neighborhood meetings.
- Provide construction notifications via mail, email, and digital channels.
- Maintain regular communication with city staff and elected officials.
- Update project information on the OC San website.
- Conduct post-construction community satisfaction surveys.
- Provide outreach training to engineering staff.



Crisis and Emergency Communication

Program Lead: Rebecca Long

Goal: Ensure PAO is prepared to respond to a variety of emergencies or unplanned situations.

Key Outcomes

- Maintain PAO's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP).
- Update and cross train staff on protocols for responding to emergencies and urgent events.

Key Strategies

Provide PAO staff with necessary communications training and preparation to adequately respond to a variety of situations impacting operations, reputation or stakeholders.

Key Tactics

- Maintain and update the Crisis Communication Plan and COOP.
- Conduct periodic staff readiness briefings.
- Maintain updated emergency contact lists.
- Create redundancy in response efforts ensuring coverage is always maintained.



General Manager and Executive Support

Program Lead: Daisy Covarrubias and Rebecca Long

Goal: Ensure the General Manager and Assistant General Manager are prepared and supported in sharing vital information with OC San stakeholders.

Key Outcomes:

- The General Manager's Work Plan.
- Produce monthly communications for the General Manager.
- Prepare talking points and briefing materials for presentations and Board meetings.

Key Strategies

Collaborate with the General Manager to capture key topics to be communicated and identify appropriate approaches.

Key Tactics

- Support the development of the Strategic Plan.
- Assist in the development of General Manager's Work Plan, including mid-year and year-end reports.
- Assist in creation on monthly General Manager Memo to Board.
- Support All-Hands employee meetings biannually.
- Manage Ask the GM questions.
- Draft messaging and presentation material.
- Coordinate and oversee VIP tours guided by General Manager and Executive Management Team.

Implementation and Evaluation

Progress toward strategic goals will be tracked through:

- Engagement metrics.
- Outreach participation numbers.
- Social media and website analytics.
- Survey feedback.
- Legislative outcomes and policy impacts.

The PAO will review performance biannually and adjust tactics as needed.

Conclusion

The Public Affairs Office plays a critical role in communicating OC San's mission and maintaining public trust. Through strategic engagement, proactive outreach, and transparent communication, the Public Affairs Office will continue to strengthen relationships with employees, stakeholders, and the communities OC San serves.

This plan provides a clear and measurable framework to guide communication efforts through fiscal years 2026-2028 while maintaining the flexibility necessary to respond to emerging challenges and opportunities.

New Initiatives

- Establish a bus grant program to support schools' ability to tour OC San.
- Plan and execute the christening of new ocean monitoring vessel.
- Develop and implement branding plan for OC facilities and fleet including displays, signage, and visitor experience at both plants, headquarters, and new warehouse facility.
- Create and implement new OC San mascot for educational and awareness purposes.
- Create and implement a communications campaign for the Deep Well Injection project.

Ten Year Proposed Schedule

2026: Take Your Kid to Work Day

2027: Honor Wall

2028: Family Event/Take Your Kid to Work Day

2029: Open House 75th Anniversary/Honor Wall

2030: Take Your Kid to Work Day

2031: Family Event/Honor Wall

2032: Take Your Kid to Work Day

2033: Honor Wall

2034: Open House 80th Anniversary/Take Your Kid to Work Day

2035: Family Event/Honor Wall

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