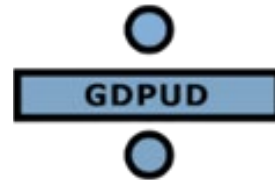


REPORT TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Board Meeting of February 23, 2026.

Agenda Item No. 15



AGENDA SECTION: Action Items

SUBJECT: Discuss CSDA District of Distinction Application Process

PREPARED BY: Taylar Jones, Executive Assistant

Approved By: Nicholas Schneider, General Manager

BACKGROUND

The California Special Districts Association offers District of Distinction Accreditation through the Special District Leadership Foundation (SDLF). The Accreditation recognizes the District for three years and highlights the District's operations, governance, and fiscal practices. There are multiple levels of Accreditation to achieve through continued training. The purpose of this accreditation is to demonstrate to legislators and other stakeholders The District's commitment to operating in a sound and financially responsible way.

DISCUSSION

Achieving this Accreditation for the District would set us apart from other Districts, especially when applying for grants and goes along with the District having the District Transparency Certificate.

The required training to receive this accreditation includes completing AB 1234 Ethics, AB 1825 Harassment Prevention Training, and governance training. AB 1234 Ethics and AB 1825 Harassment Prevention Training are already provided by the District.

There are different levels of accreditation, starting with Basic and ending with Platinum as the highest. In order to achieve Platinum, the required people must have completed the above trainings, the General Manager must have the designation of Certified Special District Manager (CSDM) and the District must have the District Transparency Certificate. The District currently has the District Transparency Certificate, and the General Manager is a CSDM. (See attached program flyer and application).

There are in-person and virtual options for obtaining the required Governance training certificates for this accreditation:

In Person Training

- Special District Leadership Academy (SDLA)
 - o May 11-14, 2026 in San Diego;
 - o July 19-22, 2026 in San Rafael;
 - o September 13-16, 2026 in San Luis Obispo; and
 - o Two workshops on March 18, 2026 in Sacramento
 - o August 24, 2026 in Palm Desert.

Virtual training:

- SDLA Modules
 - o March 4-5, 2026 9am-12pm each day;
 - o September 2-3, 2026 9am-12pm each day;
 - o December 9-12, 2026 9am-12pm each day.

FISCAL IMPACT

Potential training class costs and accreditation fee.

CEQA ASSESSMENT

Not a CEQA Project

RECOMMENDED ACTION

None.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Virtual and In-person training offered by the Special District Leadership Foundation (SDLF) for the 2026 year.
2. District of Distinction Program Flyer
3. District of Distinction Application

Governance Training

The Governance requirement must be fulfilled within the past 5 years for any new Board Members, GM, and/or Executive Staff. If the district's Board and staff have remained the same since their last renewal, they do not need to complete this requirement again.

**Districts with boards larger than 7 need at least a majority of total board members completing this training requirement.*

Option #1

Attend ANY module of the Special District Leadership Academy (virtual or in-person in 2026)

- Virtual Workshop: SDLA Module 1: Governance Foundations: Wednesday and Thursday, February 11 and 12, 2026, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. each day
- Virtual Workshop: SDLA Module 2: Setting Direction / Community Leadership: Wednesday and Thursday, March 4 and 5, 2026, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. each day
- Workshop: SDLA Module 1: Governance Foundations, Wednesday, March 18, 2026, in Sacramento
- Virtual Workshop: SDLA Module 3: Board's Role in Finance: Wednesday and Thursday, September 2 and 3, 2026, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. each day
- Virtual Workshop: SDLA Module 4: Board's Role in Human Resources: Wednesday and Thursday, December 9 and 10, 2026, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. each day
- Workshop: SDLA Module 1: Governance Foundations, Monday, August 24, 2026, in Palm Desert (a pre-conference workshop)

Option #2

Attend the [**Special District Leadership Academy Conference \(SDLA\)**](#):

May 11 – 14, 2026 in San Diego, CA

July 19 – 22, 2026 in San Rafael, CA

September 13 – 16, 2026 in San Luis Obispo, CA

**Completing all four modules of the Special District Leadership Academy, either as standalone workshops OR completing the first-time attend track of the Special District Leadership Academy, counts toward the Certificate in Special District Governance, which is also a requirement for higher levels of District of Distinction*

Option #3

Can't make it to one of CSDA's scheduled governance training? Would your district prefer internal training at your location? We have you covered! With CSDA's "Governance to Go" program, you can complete an online request for training that works for you and your district. All of our governance training options also meet the requirement for six hours of governance training for the District of Distinction program from the Special District Leadership Foundation. Details, fees, and request forms are available here: [Workshop Requests - California Special Districts Association \(csda.net\)](https://www.csda.net/workshop-requests)

Option #4

Other courses may qualify as well, however, will need to be submitted for review by SDLF.

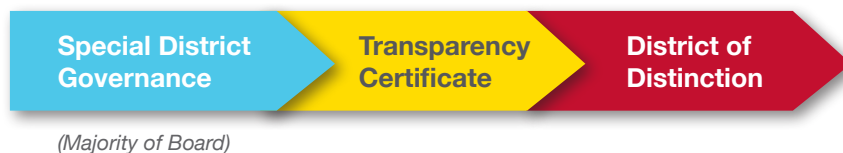
Take Your District to the Next Level! Is Your District a District of Distinction?

The District of Distinction is an accreditation program that enables districts to demonstrate to their communities, legislators, and other key stakeholders, their commitment to operate in a sound, responsible manner. Districts apply for designation as a District of Distinction by submitting financial audits, policies and procedures, and proof of training received by directors and executive staff. Showcase your district's efforts to be among the best and take your district to the next level!

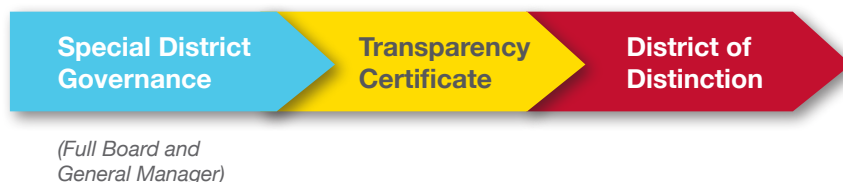
SDLF's base level accreditation confirming core administration and governance best practices.



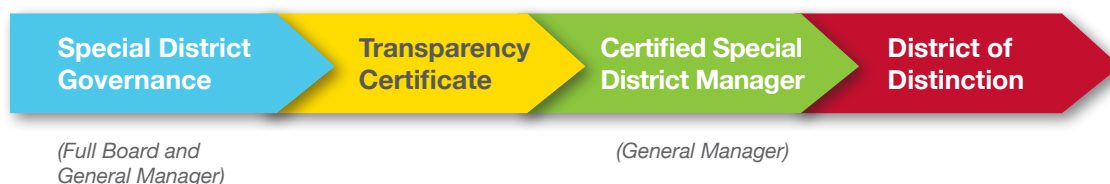
Demonstrates a district's commitment to take their district to the next level by also incorporating governance training as a core value.



Demonstrates a district's commitment to transparency, sound operating practices, and comprehensive governance training for the entire Board.



SDLF's highest level of recognition for a district. Incorporates completion of all SDLF programs demonstrating a comprehensive approach to excellence in district management and governance.



The Special District Leadership Foundation (SDLF) is an independent, non-profit organization formed to promote good governance and best practices among California's special districts through certification, accreditation, and other recognition programs. The SDLF and its activities are supported by the California Special Districts Association and the Special District Risk Management Authority.

Certificate in Special District Governance

Designed to honor special district board members and trustees that have taken the time to receive specific professional development training to include core governance curriculum through completion of the Special District Leadership Academy plus 10 hours of other related continuing education.

PROGRAM	RECIPIENT	REQUIREMENT	RECOGNITION	RENEWAL/FEE
Special District Governance	Individual (Board Member/ Administrator/General Manager/Others)	Experience, education, professional development courses	Certificate	1x \$65; No Renewal

Certified Special District Manager (CSDM)

A voluntary professional designation that helps document and recognize an individual's knowledge, skills, experience, and capabilities as a special district manager.

PROGRAM	RECIPIENT	REQUIREMENT	RECOGNITION	RENEWAL/FEE
CSDM	Individual (Administrator/ General Manager/ Other Managers)	Experience, education, professional development courses, exam, community service	Certification	Every 4 Years \$300 App Fee \$150 Exam Fee \$50 Re- Certification Fee

District Transparency Certificate of Excellence

Created in an effort to further promote transparency in the operations and governance of special districts to the public and to provide special districts with an opportunity to showcase their efforts in transparency.

PROGRAM	RECIPIENT	REQUIREMENT	RECOGNITION	RENEWAL/FEE
Transparency Certificate	District	Legal, website, best practices requirements	Certificate	Every 3 Years \$0

District of Distinction Accreditation (*Transparency Certificate is a required component*)

Designed as a way for districts to strive to be among the best through a comprehensive approach to implementing governance, management, transparency, and fiscal best practices.

PROGRAM	RECIPIENT	REQUIREMENT	RECOGNITION	RENEWAL/FEE
District of Distinction	District	Transparency certificate, policies/procedures best practices, board/staff professional development, 3+ years clean audits	Accreditation platinum, gold, silver, base levels	Every 3 Years \$125 - \$250 (initial and reaccreditation)



SDLF Scholarships

Annually, SDLF awards thousands of dollars in professional development scholarships to individuals (board members & staff) in districts. Visit sdlf.org to learn what is available and apply!

Contact SDLF and get involved

1112 I Street, Suite 200, Sacramento, CA 95814
t: 916.231.2909
www.sdlf.org
e: info@sdlf.org



SHOWCASE YOUR COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

District of Distinction Application

The District of Distinction is an accreditation program that enables districts to demonstrate to their communities, the media and legislators their commitment to operate in a sound, responsible manner. Districts apply for designation as a District of Distinction by submitting financial audits, policies and procedures and proof of training received by directors and executive staff.

Requirements:

FINANCIAL AUDITS

Districts must demonstrate they undergo regular financial audits, have no major deficiencies and apply any recommendations to future years.

What to submit:

- ☐ Copies of the three most recent district audits, including financial statements (3 letters) SAS 114 - *The Auditor's Communication with Those Charged with Governance*, SAS 115 - *The Auditor's Communications on Internal Control Related Matters*, and management letter. Each audit, including findings and recommendations, will be reviewed by a member of the Certification & Audit Review Advisory Committee. Committee members are volunteers from the special district community, including district controllers, directors of finance and CSDM certified general managers.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Districts must demonstrate that their operations conform to all statutes and regulations under state law as reflected in a policies and procedures manual. Policies and procedures should focus on governance, ethics, board conduct, district finances, reserves, reimbursement/compensation, etc.

What to submit:

- ☐ Copy of your district's current approved policies and procedures manual.
- ☐ Copy of your district's Board minute action adopting and/or having reviewed the policies and procedures manual within the past year.

TRAINING

What to submit:

Documentation showing class attendance, such as certificate of completion for each board member, general manager and other executive staff members (as identified by the board) in the following areas:

- ☐ **Governance Training:** Six hours of basic governance training. (New board members and executive staff must complete within the past 5 years) *Governance Foundations*, offered by CSDA's Special District Leadership Academy, satisfies this requirement. Other courses may qualify as well, however will need to be submitted for review by SDLF. Also, *Board Member Best Practices* (3 hours) plus 2 approved webinars will satisfy that requirement. Approved webinars are:
Board Member and District Liability Issues, and Who Does What? Best Practices in Board Staff Relations.
**Districts with boards larger than 7 need at least a majority of total board members completing this training requirement.*
- ☐ **Ethics Training:** Documentation verifying completion of AB 1234 ethics compliance training within the last two years.
- ☐ **Harassment Prevention Training:** Documentation verifying completion of AB 1825 harassment prevention training within the last two years.

OTHER

Districts must also include the following items with the accreditation/re-accreditation application:

What to submit:

- ☐ Board of Directors roster
- ☐ List of executive staff, including titles
- ☐ Completed application for accreditation/re-accreditation
- ☐ Accreditation/re-accreditation application fee
- ☐ Completed SDLF District Transparency Certificate of Excellence

Who should apply to be a District of Distinction?

Any California special district that wants to demonstrate publicly the effectiveness of its operations. Applying for this designation shows that your district understands and respects the responsibilities inherent to providing essential public services in a fiscally responsible manner.

What does a district receive for completing the program?

Districts of Distinction earn the right to use the program's seal on district materials and a plaque honoring their accomplishment. SDLF will also send a letter to a local publication and notify legislators on a district's behalf.

How does a district apply?

Districts interested in earning the Districts of Distinction designation must complete the application and submit it along with the required documentation. Applications must also be accompanied by an application fee.

If my district is a member of the Special District Risk Management Authority (SDRMA), will getting a District of Distinction accreditation save me money on my premiums?

Yes. SDRMA offers Credit Incentive Points (CIPs) if your district earns the District of Distinction accreditation which can provide significant premium discounts. For more information, contact SDRMA at 800.537.7790 or visit www.sdrma.org.

RE-ACCREDITATION**How long is the designation valid?**

The Districts of Distinction designation is valid for three years and a district may be re-accredited by submitting the application and all current required documents for review along with the re-accreditation fee.

Fees

The fees are on a sliding scale, based on a district's budget:

INITIAL ACCREDITATION & RE-ACCREDITATION

Annual operating budget	Fee
\$0-299,999	\$175
\$300,000-749,999	\$200
\$750,000-999,999	\$225
\$1,000,000--2,999,999	\$300
\$3,000,000 or more	\$450

Submit this application along with all required documentation and payment to:

Special District Leadership Foundation
1112 I Street, Suite 200
Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: 916-231-2909 • Fax: 916-442-7889 • sdlf.org

Electronic filing is preferable.

info@sdlf.org.

District:	
Mailing Address:	
City:	State: Zip:
Contact Name:	Title:
Phone:	Fax:
Email:	Website:
Assembly Member(s)*:	
Senator*:	
Local Newspaper(s):	
I certify that the information submitted is accurate and complete to the best of my knowledge.	Signature:
SILVER, GOLD OR PLATINUM RECOGNITION	
Board Members who have received Certificate in Special District Governance: (attach additional pages if necessary)	
	Date:
	Date:
	Date:
General Manager:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Has completed Certificate in Special District Governance	<input type="checkbox"/> Has completed Certified Special District Manager (CSDM)
PAYMENT	
Total: \$	<input type="checkbox"/> Check <input type="checkbox"/> Visa <input type="checkbox"/> Mastercard <input type="checkbox"/> Discover <input type="checkbox"/> American Express
Acct. Name:	Acct. Number:
Expiration Date:	Authorized Signature: