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To: Board of Directors  
 From: Steven Farrell  
 Date: Aug 14, 2019

Subject: SDLF Academy Conference Report – July 8-10, 2019

## Promoting good governance

The conference I attended is a component of a larger, broader set of programs sponsored by the Special District Leadership Foundation (SDLF). 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.

More specifically, the conference is part of the following program:

## Recognition in Special District Governance

The Recognition in Special District Governance was designed to honor special district board members and trustees, and is comprised of two distinct parts: the completion of the Special District Leadership Academy and 10 hours of continuing education. *(Note: I anticipate I will be able to complete the continuing education requirement via my participation at ACWA.)*

The Special District Leadership Academy is comprised of four courses:

- Governance Foundations,
- Setting Direction/Community Leadership,
- Board’s Role in Human Resources, and the
- Board’s Role in Finance and Fiscal Accountability.

*(From the SDLF website): The four courses are unique from any other courses on special district governance in that they are curriculum that has been created by special districts and agreed upon as what governing officials of special districts should know. SDLF has endorsed the Academy as the core special district governance training in California.*

Personally, I found each of the program modules to be an effective combination of overview and interactive exercises exploring “real-world” examples. As almost always happens in seminars like this, it is frequently the discussions engendered by participant questions that most stimulate learning.

### **Governance Foundations**

Though I was familiar with much of the material already, it was a very good refresher (and framing for the other three modules.) It would be an excellent standalone course for any new boardmember, especially if attending a full 3 day conference would be a challenge.

### **Setting Direction/Community Leadership**

This seminar was helpful from the perspective of challenging members to re-think their expectations, personal agendas, and responsibilities to the community they serve

### **Board’s Role in HR**

More admonitions: Set the policies, pay attention to them, work with the GM, but essentially stay out of it, especially day to day. Still a good topic with details and suggestions about policies and policy requirements and considerations.

### **Board’s Role in Finance**

This was probably the module I appreciated the most. Accounting standards and practices always seem to merit my review. Further, this training emphasized that the finance and planning responsibilities of the board are primarily meant to be strategic, and long term, in spite of the constant pressures of year over year performance considerations.

You recall that I applied for and was approved for an SDLF scholarship to attend the 3 day conference with no registration charges. (normally \$700). I am grateful the board supported my attendance as I found this to be a very worthwhile conference, with topics very much focused on boardmember training and excellence.

Of course, as always, I will be pleased to share additional insights and answer any questions you may have about from the conference at our upcoming meeting.