



News & Risk Management Review

WINTER 2026

S | D | A | O

SPECIAL DISTRICTS
ASSOCIATION OF OREGON

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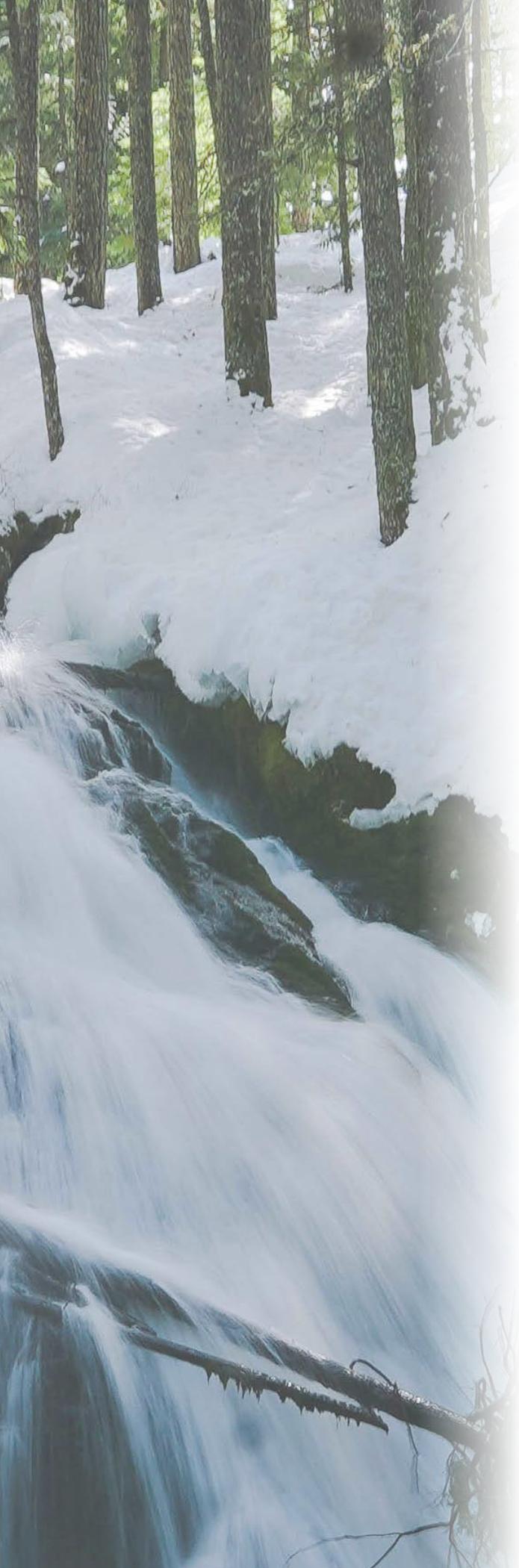
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Next Board of Directors Meeting

February 5th | 1pm | Best Western - Seaside, Oregon

Executive Director

Frank Stratton

Services

Awards, Consulting Services, Education and Training, Internship Grant, Legislative, Research and Technical Assistance, Scholarship and Grant Fund, and SDAO Advisory Services, LLC

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BY: FRANK STRATTON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Join us for the 2026 SDAO Annual Conference, happening February 5-8 at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center in Seaside, Oregon. This year's event will feature an engaging mix of sessions, networking opportunities, and special programs designed to inform, support, and inspire you.

REGISTRATION IS OPEN

Don't miss out! Registration for the conference is open, and spaces are going fast! See below for member and SDIS agent pricing.

• PRE-CONFERENCE SESSIONS:

- » \$75 per half-day session
- » \$150 for the full-day de-escalation training session
- » The cybersecurity tabletop exercise is offered at no charge

• One Day Only (Friday or Saturday): \$195

• Full Conference (Thursday Evening-Sunday Morning): \$295

Pre-Conference Opportunities

We are pleased to offer five pre-conference training sessions this year that will dive deep into specific areas of interest:

- De-Escalation Training with Verbal Judo
- Workers' Comp Demystified
- Paying and Managing Volunteers
- OCCoE Cybersecurity Tabletop Exercise
- Public Meetings Law Training

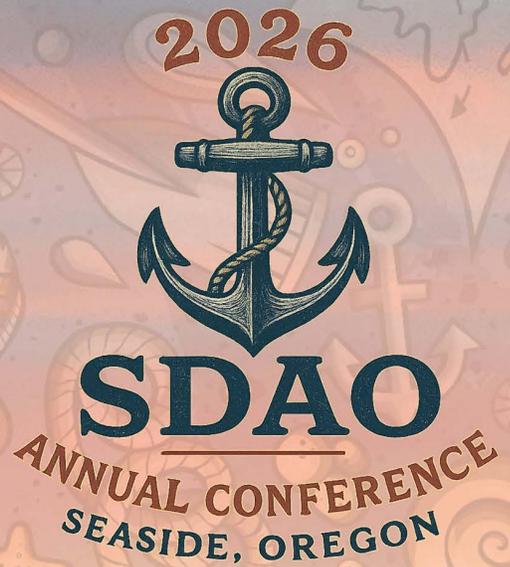
Educational and Training Sessions

In addition to our pre-conference sessions, we are offering over 20 breakout sessions covering topics relevant to special districts. These trainings are designed to provide you with the latest



REGISTER NOW!

www.sdao.com/annual-conference



information, tools, and strategies to help you succeed in your roles.

Special Events and Networking Opportunities

One of the highlights of our conference is the opportunity to connect with peers from across the state. Our networking events are designed to foster collaboration and the sharing of ideas. Don't miss the chance to meet new colleagues and reconnect with old friends.

Awards Banquet and Entertainment

Join us for our annual awards banquet, where we will celebrate the achievements of our members and recognize those who have made significant contributions to our community. This is always a memorable evening filled with inspiration and camaraderie.

Following the banquet will be a masquerade murder mystery show. Eight costumed actors will mingle amongst the crowd, drawing you into a thrilling tale of suspense and surprise.

Hotel Information

As of press time, the conference room blocks are full. However, Seaside offers a wide range of lodging options to accommodate your stay. The following hotels are where we have secured room blocks. You can check with them regularly to see if space has opened.

- Inn at Seaside
- River Inn at Seaside
- Rivertide Suites
- Holiday Inn Express

For booking information, visit www.sdao.com/annual-conference-hotels

I look forward to seeing you in Seaside for what promises to be an outstanding conference. Register online today at <https://cvent.me/dMOIDG> and secure your spot!





SDAO INTERNSHIP Grant Program

Application Deadline:
5pm on Friday, April 17, 2026

Applications are now being accepted for the 2026 SDAO Internship Grant Program! Essential and critical to Oregon's communities, special districts deliver much-needed services while also supporting their local workforce. In addition, many districts offer summer internships to college-level students in their area who are seeking to learn more about local government careers. SDAO recognizes and supports these efforts by providing matching grants through the SDAO Internship Grant Program.

Through this program, interns must be hired by the district as temporary employees to be in compliance with wage and hour laws relative to compensating student interns. A freshman through junior college-level student will need to be hired to qualify for funding of this grant.

The maximum grant per district is \$3,000; the funding must be matched by the district by 50%. For example, you may be eligible to receive up to \$3,000 on your request for a project that will cost your district \$6,000 or more. You may be eligible to receive up to a maximum of \$2,100 on your request for a project that will cost



"We are extremely grateful to have received funds to support a much-needed project that served the community as well as our firefighters."

Chief Bandon Nicol
Junction City RFPD



“This internship provided a valuable opportunity to apply administrative, regulatory and operational knowledge to real-world EMS and fire service environments.”

Intern

McKenzie Fire & Rescue

your district \$4,200. SDAO may not fund all grant requests. This grant is not intended to fund routine maintenance needs or normal staffing requirements.

The SDAO Awards Committee will review each application to determine which projects are eligible to receive funding. Funds will be disbursed by July 1, 2026.

To be considered, your completed Internship Grant Program application must be received by

SDAO by **5pm on Friday, April 17, 2026**. Submit your completed application by mail to **SDAO, PO Box 12613, Salem, Oregon 97309**; by e-mail to **memberservices@sdao.com**; or **directly on our website**. Attach a separate sheet if necessary. Learn more and download the Internship Grant Program application at: **www.sdao.com/internship-grant-program**.



“This internship helped [intern] apply her academic interests to real operational challenges, strengthening her confidence and preparing her for roles in recreation or sports management.”

Andrew Maeda

Ontario Recreation District

SAVE THE DATE: SDAO REGIONAL TRAINING SUMMITS

Mark your calendar for the SDAO Regional Training Summits! These summits will offer all three of our traditional regional training formats in one comprehensive event. Each summit will feature the same two-day program, offered at four locations across the state, giving you the flexibility to attend where most convenient for you.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Each summit will bring education focused on a variety of topics. These include:

- **Day one** will focus on board member topics, providing insights and tools to strengthen governance and leadership
- **Day two** will cover human resources, legal, and risk management topics, giving participants practical guidance to support effective operations and compliance

REGISTRATION

Registration will be available for one day or both days, allowing you to tailor your participation to your needs.

DATES AND LOCATIONS

- April 14-15 | Pendleton | The Vert
- June 24-25 | Klamath Falls | Running Y
- August 18-19 | Redmond | Eagle Crest
- October 13-14 | Newport | Hallmark Inn

Stay tuned for more details on programming and registration information.



Changes to Government Ethics Law

BY: OREGON GOVERNMENT ETHICS COMMISSION

During the 2025 legislative session, House Bill 2930 passed. This bill changes the definition of the Conflict of Interest provisions in Oregon Government Ethics Law to add public officials' household members.

Change becomes law on January 1, 2026. Here's what to know:

Starting on January 1st, the Conflict of Interest provisions will apply to public officials, their relatives, and members of their household, and any business that a public official, or their relative, or a member of their household is associated with.

In Oregon Government Ethics Law, a member of the household is anyone who lives in a public official's home. Members of the household share an address with the public official.

How does this affect you as a public official?

Public officials are required to make proper disclosures of their conflicts of interest.

HB 2930 means that next year, a public official will be met with a conflict of interest when that public official is taking an official action (a vote, decision, or recommendation).

And:

- The action would or could have a private financial impact
- The financial impact can be a benefit (gain) or a detriment (loss)
- The impact is on the public official, or their relative, or a member of their household, or any businesses that any of them are associated with.

The requirements for declaring conflicts of interest have not changed. They are different for employees than for elected public officials, members of boards, councils, and commissions. See OGEC's Reference Guide on Conflicts of Interest (<https://bit.ly/47T7SwA>) for more details about requirements.

FROM DISPUTE TO DELIVERY:

**A SMALL UTILITY DELIVERS ON A
VITAL WATER PROJECT AND LEARNS
LESSONS ABOUT CONTRACTING
ALONG THE WAY**

BY: ADAM DENLINGER, GENERAL MANAGER, SEAL ROCK WATER DISTRICT AND ROB MILLS, BOARD PRESIDENT, SEAL ROCK WATER DISTRICT

SUMMARY

Seal Rock Water District ultimately completed a high-profile water resource project, but only after a year of schedule overruns, heavy claims activity, and costly arbitration. We were able to mitigate some of our losses by adhering to basic principles of sound project management. But our experience following the traditional Design-Bid-Build contracting format leads us to conclude the model fosters adversarial dynamics among project stakeholders. In future projects, we will take a more collaborative approach to contracting by following underlying principles such as those in the Construction Manager/General Contractor model.

INTRODUCTION

In this era of rising construction costs, workforce shortages, and supply chain unpredictability, public utilities face mounting pressure to deliver infrastructure on time and within budget. For the Seal Rock Water District (SRWD), a small utility serving Oregon's central coast, those pressures became real when our high-profile capital project ran into persistent construction delays, design disputes, and performance challenges.

SRWD's Beaver Creek Water Supply project, intended to strengthen water resiliency and treatment capacity for thousands of coastal residents, ultimately reached final completion in late 2024. But it did so only after a year of delays, claims, and conflicts with our contractor that eventually required formal arbitration to resolve. While we emerged from arbitration with our public funding preserved, we were denied recovery of the portion of our own funding that was at risk. The arbitration process was costly in other ways too, prompting us to eventually question our whole approach to construction contracting. Why did the relationship with our contractor and progress on construction break down to the point that we could not keep the project on schedule and within budget?

THE BREAKDOWN

Our Beaver Creek project was designed to complete SRWD's vision for a secure, high-quality, independent water supply. With funding from public sources and support from engineering partners, SRWD hired a contractor to construct the state-of-art membrane water treatment plant and associated infrastructure. The contract called for substantial completion within 154 days. Ultimately, construction lasted 392 days. Along the way the contractor submitted claims totaling 297 days, citing permitting issues, design changes, delays in material deliveries, heavy rains and even wildfires as reasons for claiming nearly twice the number of days stipulated in our contract.

OUR ASSESSMENT

At first glance some of the contractor's claims seemed plausible. Covid-19 disrupted supply chain and material deliveries on a global scale. And Oregon's historic wildfire season interrupted transportation schedules and even the availability of workers. But SRWD and our consulting team took none of the claims at face value. Instead, we meticulously examined construction meeting minutes, work change directives, and field activity logs and found major inconsistencies in the contractor's claims. We discovered, for instance, an unexplained two-month delay from the time the building permit was issued until the contractor started work on one facility. In another case, we found a 74-day delay by the contractor in making a simple thousand-dollar design change to a septic system. Our review uncovered other examples of costly delays resulting from the contractor having multiple crews on-site during key phases of construction but underutilizing them in accomplishing parallel tasks.

CONTRACTUAL DISCIPLINE

As construction delays mounted, it seemed inevitable that tension would build between the contractor and SRWD. And it did. But rather than blame and point fingers, SRWD stuck to the terms of the contract to redirect and move construction forward. We issued work change directives when needed, carefully documented each week's progress or lack of, and insisted that the contractor continue work even when prices for materials and supplies were pending. Backed by our engineering partners, we enforced our right to refuse time extensions for non-compensable delays including for major claims that did not actually stop work. Maintaining a clear-eyed distinction between "excusable" and "compensable" delays became essential. And when delays persisted, we sought construction scheduling analyses by outside experts to validate our position. Their work later proved vital in preparing for arbitration.

STAYING PRODUCTIVE

Despite mounting claims and escalating conflict with the contractor, we were determined to be proactive and keep momentum from collapsing. We re-sequenced non-critical work to better utilize crews, keeping them on-site and engaged. We pushed for early procurement of materials and supplies that normally required long lead times, reducing supply chain and delivery wait times caused by Covid. Regular, open communication involving SRWD, the engineer, and the contractor became a high priority, so we held weekly construction meetings and coordination calls. Extra steps were also taken to keep SRWD board members and ratepayers informed of our progress and the scheduling challenges we were facing.

THE RESULTS

Our proactive steps to maintain project momentum paid off. We significantly reduced the number of delay days claimed by the contractor. We reached some compromises on costs and timelines and to some degree stabilized our relationship with the contractor. From the general manager's perspective, maintaining momentum had evolved into "a test of institutional resilience" requiring us to "lean in with process, not politics". By following basic principles of sound project management, we emerged with a completed project along with some key takeaways that will help SRWD and other utilities manage complex capital projects in the future:

- Scrutinize delay claims – don't accept them on face value; insist on critical path validation and independent review.
- Document everything – field memos, meeting notes, directive dates; all can save time and money in dispute resolution.
- Enforce the contract – hold contractors accountable for performance and sequencing.
- Stay focused on delivery – conflict is an inevitable distraction, but project delivery must remain the North Star.
- Invest in advisors – legal and engineering support is not a luxury; it's protection for public trust.



HEADING TO ARBITRATION

To be sure, applying these principles helped keep the project moving forward. And while the fractured relationship between SRWD and the contractor never mended, it held together just enough to achieve final completion. But the fact remained – disputed costs, timeline inconsistencies, and human conflicts had taken their toll. We were headed to formal arbitration to settle our differences.

Over the months as we prepared our case, we asked ourselves “What might we have done differently over the course of the project to make arbitration unnecessary? Could we have avoided this added expense and significant inconvenience involving our staff, management, board, counsel, engineering firm, and construction consultants?” As we reflected on our current case, we began to see similarities to problems we experienced in previous major construction projects – strained relationships with contractors, extended timelines, excessive change orders, shoddy workmanship. And we asked ourselves, “Why does it have to be this way?”

A DIFFERENT APPROACH

An answer emerged in a surprising way – from casual banter around the kitchen table at a holiday social gathering. As conversation turned to our recent problems with the project, the question surfaced again, “Why do we continue to have these problems in contracting for major construction projects?” Our host, a retired construction consultant with years of experience on international water projects, jumped in quickly with his matter-of-fact response: “Because you follow an adversarial model in your contracting.”

He pointed out that the typical process used in construction contracting in the U.S. is inherently adversarial. The model implies that the project owner and contractor are adversaries from the start, that they work in opposition rather than in collaboration with each other. Low-bid contracts, sharply defined terms, rigid negotiation protocols, unforgiving timelines, restrictive communication channels and limited access to decision makers are all reflective of the adversarial contracting model. It’s a one-sided arrangement in which the owner assumes all the risk for performance and budget.

By contrast, European construction contracting is based on a collaborative model. Rather than the owner and engineer designing the project then putting it out for bid, a pre-selected contractor is engaged in the design process from the start. As a participant in the process, the contractor then has first-hand knowledge of the project. He is committed to credible project design, realistic timelines, and accurate cost estimates all developed in concert with the owner and engineer. It is a collaborative arrangement in which success and risk are the shared responsibility of the contractor along with the owner and engineer.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

How might we transition from the adversarial model of contract management to the more partnership-based arrangement of the collaborative model? One solution is to follow the Construction Manager General Contractor (CMGC) model in our future projects. We considered this model prior to starting our project. At the time however, the CMGC model was not approved for use by rural utilities by policy of our public funding source, U.S.

Department of Agriculture-Rural Development (USDA-RD). Since that time USDA-RD has updated its contracting protocols to allow rural utilities to use the CMGC model. This important change is an opportunity for SRWD to use the model in upcoming capital improvement projects. The CMGC approach offers several advantages over traditional

Design-Bid-Build (DBB) methods such as enhanced collaboration, improved risk management, and greater protection from potential litigation. A comparison of the two methods follows:

Contracting Models Compared	
Design-Bid-Build (DBB)	Construction Manager General Manager (CMGC)
<p>Owner & engineer design project; low bid contractor has no input, accepts specs and terms as defined, works in opposition, produces lower quality work as relationship turns adversarial.</p> <p>Contractor may be unable to meet specs and terms as construction proceeds; must negotiate design, schedule, cost changes unacceptable to owner as relationship becomes adversarial.</p> <p>Owner's unilateral approach to the project creates an inherently adversarial relationship with contractor; owner becomes solely responsible for success and risks involved in the project.</p> <p>Owner must identify problems as they arise and direct how to resolve them, a singular perspective and unilateral approach intensifying the adversarial relationship.</p>	<p>Owner, engineer, & contractor design project together, define terms, specs and costs; this collaborative approach attracts quality-focused contractors invested in project's success.</p> <p>Contractor has first-hand knowledge of credible design, construction schedule, cost projections developed with owner and engineer; is committed to perform accordingly without negotiating changes.</p> <p>Collaborative relationship results in owner, engineer, and contractor sharing responsibility for success and risks involved in the project.</p> <p>Owner, engineer, and contractor collaboratively identify in advance potential problems that might disrupt project – scheduling/cost errors, break-downs in communication, etc. – and agree on protocols for correcting them.</p>
<p>Owner relies on strict contract terms and own management skills to ensure performance; has limited flexibility to adopt practices to address unexpected events or changing conditions.</p>	<p>Collaborative relationships of owner, engineer, and contractor enable agreement to practices and protocols to enhance contract performance, i.e. limits on crew/personnel changes during construction, acceptable communication channels, formats for handling conflicts, etc.</p>

NEXT STEPS

The CMGC model aligns well with the European model described earlier and emphasizes the collaborative element in contracting that is missing in our adversarial model. The distinctive feature of the CMGC model is that the contractor is pre-selected. The owner and engineer enlist a contractor of their choice as a first step in the project. As a partner from the start, the contractor is a co-designer and designated builder of the project. There is no competitive bidding and that alone reduces the adversarial element inherent in low bid contracting.

The CMGC model is the different approach we're looking for to develop future construction contracts that fully engage our contractors in delivering quality work. Other contracting models are available that have similar emphases, such as the Engineers Joint Contract Documents Committee (EJCDC) form of construction contracting. Or, if for some reason the

CMGC model is not a viable format to use in a project, stipulations could be embedded in the traditional DBB format to support a more collaborative owner-contractor relationship. We would consider the following:

Require principals/project managers of firms bidding on our project to be present at the bid opening, a first step to establishing the personal relationship vital in the collaborative model. No personal presence, no contract.

Require the principal/project manager of the winning bid to spend a half-day at SRWD facilities prior to contract signing to meet staff, tour facilities, and to learn about our operation. Does he see a “good fit”? Do we?

Require qualification-based screening of bidders that weighs past performance, competencies of key personnel, and relevant project experience to filter out “low bid, high change order” contractors and provide more owner control over contractor staffing and jointly managed scheduling.

Require the principal/project manager to agree to SRWD’s expectations about communication, access, and responsiveness of key personnel including executive level project reviews. Face-to-face communication in real time builds trust; emails, phone messages, memos, and even videoconferencing lack immediacy and engagement.

Institute a standing Dispute Review Board with a defined process for escalating disputes, conflicts, and emerging issues for executive level resolution before arbitration; the process to include principal-level Risk Register Reviews with “lessons learned” log.

Emphasize that SRWD considers the contracting principal to have final responsibility for his firm’s performance of the contract. Starting with his/her presence at the bid opening through final completion of the project, the principal is our “go to” partner who shares in the success and risk of the project.

There are more construction projects in SRWD’s future as we continue to develop infrastructure to deliver high-quality water to our coastal communities. Much of our success will depend on finding and working with contractors who can thrive in the collaborative relationship with SRWD we hope to instill using the CMGC contracting model. We have learned some important lessons about construction contracting over the course of our recent project, all of which underscore how collaboration among the project stakeholders best serves the interests of all. And for now, we’ve answered our question, “What could we be doing differently?”



LOCAL ELECTION TURNOUT HOLDS STEADY AS **SPECIAL DISTRICT MEASURES LEAD** IN PASSAGE RATES

BY: HASINA WITTENBERG, GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

Preliminary results from the November local elections show voter participation hovering around one in three registered voters statewide, with roughly 479,000 ballots cast across 15 counties. While turnout varied significantly by community, special district measures again demonstrated strong support from voters who continue to value direct, service-specific investments.

TURNOUT

Statewide participation reached approximately 35%, according to initial returns from the Secretary of State's office. Most ballot activity occurred in the Willamette Valley, particularly in Multnomah, Clackamas, and Washington counties, which averaged 38% turnout.

Rural counties—Morrow, Umatilla, Baker, and Klamath—reported similar turnout rates at nearly 43%, despite smaller voter populations. Marion County posted the lowest turnout so far, at 22%, in limited elections held in Stayton, Woodburn, and St. Paul.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT SUCCESS RATE

The November general election featured a modest number of local measures—just 28 total across cities, counties, special districts, and school districts. Among them, special districts once again recorded the strongest overall passage rate.

2025 LOCAL ELECTION RESULTS SUMMARY

- Special Districts: 10 measures | 80% pass, 20% fail
- Cities: 11 measures | 55% pass, 45% fail
- Counties: 3 measures | 100% pass
- School Districts: 4 measures | 50% pass, 50% fail

SPECIAL DISTRICTS LEAD WITH TARGETED, SERVICE-FOCUSED MEASURES

Special districts advanced 10 measures and secured an 80% approval rate, the highest among all local government types. This includes every tax-related measure, continuing a long-term pattern in which voters show confidence in limited, purpose-driven proposals directly tied to essential services.

Fire protection, emergency response, cemetery districts, and rural law enforcement districts were among those earning voter trust this cycle—consistent with typical May/November patterns where residents clearly connect their dollars to special district community outcomes.

CITY AND OTHER LOCAL OUTCOMES

Cities placed 11 measures on the ballot but experienced more mixed results. Municipal tax proposals struggled, achieving only a 25% passage rate, though charter amendments and levy renewals fared better.

Counties referred just three measures but passed all of them. School districts split evenly, passing half of their four measures.

The November results reinforce what we typically see: special districts continue to perform well when asking voters to support focused, mission-specific investments. Even amid modest overall turnout, communities consistently back measures that directly support public safety, emergency services, and other core local functions.

Click the links below to view individual detail sheets for November election results:

- [Local Library and Park Measures](#)
- [Public Safety Measures](#)
- [Local School Measures](#)
- [Miscellaneous Measures](#)

Congratulations

TO OUR RECENT ACADEMY CERTIFICATE RECIPIENTS!

SDAO Academy

HEATHER ESTRADA

UMATILLA COUNTY SPECIAL LIBRARY DISTRICT



Board Leadership Academy

RICK SMITH

FALCON COVE BEACH WATER DISTRICT



LESLIE SMITH

FALCON COVE BEACH WATER DISTRICT



Fire District Directors Academy

MARK BOREN

LANE FIRE AUTHORITY





SPECIAL DISTRICTS CONSULTING SERVICES PROGRAM

We are truly grateful for our members and the incredible work you do to serve your communities. It's been a great year for the Consulting Services Team, and we look forward to assisting our members even more in 2026! Please take advantage of the many services we provide and remember many of our services are included in your district's free eight hours of consulting time, so let us help you succeed.

PUBLIC MEETINGS LAW

Our training ensures your board operates with full compliance and transparency. We cover notice requirements, executive session rules, quorum and voting procedures, and best practices for meeting minutes. This service helps your team avoid costly mistakes and maintain public trust.

BOARD ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES TRAINING

This training clarifies the essential duties of board members, including fiduciary responsibilities, ethical standards, and effective governance practices. It helps boards understand their role in policymaking versus management and promotes collaboration for better organizational outcomes.

BOARD PRACTICES ASSESSMENTS

We offer a structured, facilitated self-assessment designed to strengthen governance. Through a guided session, your board evaluates roles, responsibilities, and accountability, identifies strengths and areas for improvement, and receives recommendations for better decision-making and communication.

MANAGEMENT RECRUITMENTS

Finding the right leader is critical. Our recruitment support includes position scoping, job description development, application screening, and interview facilitation. We ensure a fair, efficient process that fits your district's culture.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Our consultants help you chart a clear path for your district's future. We guide vision and mission refinement, goal-setting workshops, and inclusive planning sessions that produce actionable strategies and measurable outcomes. The result is a practical plan your team can implement with confidence.

EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK DEVELOPMENT

A clear, well-structured employee handbook is essential for consistency and compliance. We assist with creating or updating your handbook to reflect current laws, district policies, and best practices. This service helps ensure employees understand expectations and your district minimizes risk.

We look forward to hearing from you soon. Have a safe and happy holiday season.

Have a service in mind that we don't yet offer? Chances are we can help. Shoot us an email at [**consultingservices@sdao.com**](mailto:consultingservices@sdao.com) to tell us what new services you'd like to see. Our goal is always to be of service to our special district members!

Please visit [**https://www.sdao.com/consulting-services-program**](https://www.sdao.com/consulting-services-program) to learn more about the other services we provide.





Grants are a valuable resource for special districts to expand funds and complete meaningful projects. Between private foundations, state funds, and federal grants, there are a wide variety of grants that can help meet your needs – from capital projects to programmatic changes and beyond. Grant writing can feel daunting however, or at least time-consuming, especially when it is not a regular part of your job. It does not have to be though.

PARC Resources is a 40-year-old employee-owned consulting firm that has provided community development services, from grant writing to planning to feasibility studies and beyond. We have worked with over 400 local government institutions, Tribes, and nonprofit organizations throughout our history, over 70% of which have been in Oregon, predominantly in rural communities. One of the most accessed services we provide is grant writing support. With 40 years of experience doing this work for Oregon’s communities, we wanted to share some tips with you on how to get started in grant-writing.

When writing a grant application, **start with the budget**. Most often people want to start with the narrative, the project description, the details of what the grant will go to. PARC always starts with the budget because it is necessary to shape the rest of the project. Indeed, starting with the budget usually makes writing the rest of the grant application easier. Decide on a budget, and use that to fill in the context. This will also make updates easier if/when there is a change to the budget later on.

Determine if the grant is a good fit before starting the application. Basic eligibility is good to look for – who can receive the grants. It is also good to look for things like match

requirements, projected number of awards, grant requirements or limitations, and the application timeline itself.

- **Many grants require the applicant to provide some match to it** – either with direct matching dollars or in-kind through things like donations or volunteer hours. If you cannot meet the match requirements, it is likely not a good fit.
- **Grants often provide an estimated total number of awards that will be funded.** If it is a federal grant that will be providing five awards across the entire country for example, consider how competitive your project might be. Look to any previous grant recipients and how previous funding preferences might align with what you are working on.
- **Look at the purpose, priorities, and goals of a grant as well as any unallowable costs.** Sometimes there are elements in these that either do not align with your project or do not align with your district's values or practices.
- **Plan appropriately for the grant timeline.** Many grants require you to submit it in a distinct platform. Many federal grants, but not all, are submitted through grants.gov. Many state grants in Oregon are through the E-Grants system. Many foundations require you to use their own platform. Make sure you are setting up the appropriate accounts as early as possible. Simultaneously begin collecting the supplemental materials as soon as you can. Board letters, letters of support, job descriptions, resumes, and more may be things you need to submit with a grant application.

As you write the grant, try to **make sure you are answering each question that the application asks**, in the section that it is asking it. It is ok if you repeat yourself. This makes it easy to review and for reviewers themselves to find each required element in the application itself.

Finally, **ask for help when you need it.** Each special district has varying capacity to take on grant-writing. This is exactly why supports like PARC Resources exist and why we are listed as a Vendor in SDAO's Vendor Solutions Network. We are here to help you accomplish your funding and broader community development needs. We provide a discount to all SDAO members. We also work to meet you where you are at. Maybe you need support with exploring funding opportunities, training your staff grant writers, reviewing grant applications, or writing applications themselves; and sometimes all of these things. We are one resource that can serve as a tool in your toolbox to make grant writing easier for you, and in turn make it easier for you to achieve your visions and projects for your communities. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us today at **info@parcresources.com** and happy grant writing!





SENATE BILL 179

OPT-IN IMMUNITY FOR SPECIAL DISTRICTS

Oregon's trail-use immunity statute, ORS 105.668, offers targeted protection against negligence claims arising from the use of trails and similar structures located within public easements or unimproved rights of way by non-motorized users. Beginning January 1, 2026, Senate Bill 179 expands the authority to opt into this immunity to all local governments (including special districts), complementing the statute's automatic coverage for certain large cities and related parties. This overview explains when the immunity applies, who can benefit, and why districts with any connection to trail use should evaluate opting in as a practical way to reduce liability exposure – without creating any new duty to build, improve, maintain, or allow public access.

OVERVIEW

ORS 105.668 provides limited protection from lawsuits for personal injuries or property damage resulting from the use of a trail or other structure located within a public easement or unimproved right of way by users who are on foot, on an equine, or using a bicycle or other non-motorized conveyance. In those circumstances, users are barred from bringing a “private claim or right of action based on negligence.”

ORS 105.668(2) automatically extends this trail-use immunity to:

- (a) cities with a population of 500,000 or more;
- (b) officers, employees, or agents of such a city to the extent they are entitled to defense and indemnification under ORS 30.285;
- (c) owners of lands abutting public easements or unimproved rights of way in cities with a population of 500,000 or more; or
- (d) nonprofit corporations and their volunteers who work on the construction or maintenance of trails or the structures in a public easement or unimproved right of way in a city with a population of 500,000 or more.

Previously, only smaller cities and counties could “opt in” to this immunity by adopting an ordinance, resolution, rule, order, or other regulation. Beginning January 1, 2026, Senate Bill 179 extends this opt-in authority to all “local governments,” as defined in ORS 174.116, which includes special districts.

Although the ORS 105.668 immunity only applies in limited circumstances, all special districts should evaluate whether opting in would provide meaningful protection. Districts that manage or maintain trails, paths, stairs, bridges, or related structures located within public easements or unimproved rights of way should strongly consider opting in. For example, a park district that constructs and maintains trails situated within public easements granted by subdivision developers or homeowners associations would not be covered simply because the city has opted in. Similarly, an irrigation district that has granted (or consented to) easements allowing the public to walk or bike along ditch-rider roads located on property the district does not own would not be protected unless it separately opts in.

It is important to note that opting in does not create any new duty to construct, improve, or maintain trails or to allow public access. Rather, it may reduce liability exposure where public use already exists.

When applicable, ORS 105.668(3) offers significant protections, and in some respects is broader than the recreational immunity available under ORS 105.682 because (1) it applies to all users, not just those engaged in “recreational purposes”, and (2) it extends beyond the owner of the land where the injury occurred. In short, for most districts with no public access or exposure, the benefit may be minimal, but districts with any connection to trail use should consider opting in. Your district may use (or adapt into an ordinance, rule, order, or regulation) ***this sample resolution*** when opting into the trail-use immunity.

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER IS GOING DIGITAL!

Beginning in **January 2026**, our quarterly newsletter, News and Risk Management in Review, will be going fully digital and will no longer be automatically mailed. We feel this transition will allow us to deliver updates more efficiently and reduce waste. You’ll continue to receive the same valuable information – available online at any time.

If you have any questions or find that there is an issue you would like a printed copy of, please don’t hesitate to reach out to us at ***memberservices@sdao.com***.

*Providing reasonable, stable rates, and
broad coverage to Oregon's public entities*

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Next SDIS Board of Trustees Meeting

February 5th | 10am | Best Western – Seaside, Oregon

WINTERTIME TUNE UP

BY: JENS JENSEN
DIRECTOR OF PC CLAIMS
SDAO



Snow in the mountain passes is a clear sign that colder weather is on the way. With the National Weather Service forecasting a wet winter, now is the time to make sure your gutters are cleared of fall leaves and properly unplugged. It's also a good opportunity to tidy up defensible space around your buildings to help prevent damage from falling trees during ice or windstorms.

With it being cold and wet outside, it's also time to move inside and check the building for any places where the cold can get in. Consider expandable foam insulation for those cracks where cold air billows in and heat flows out.

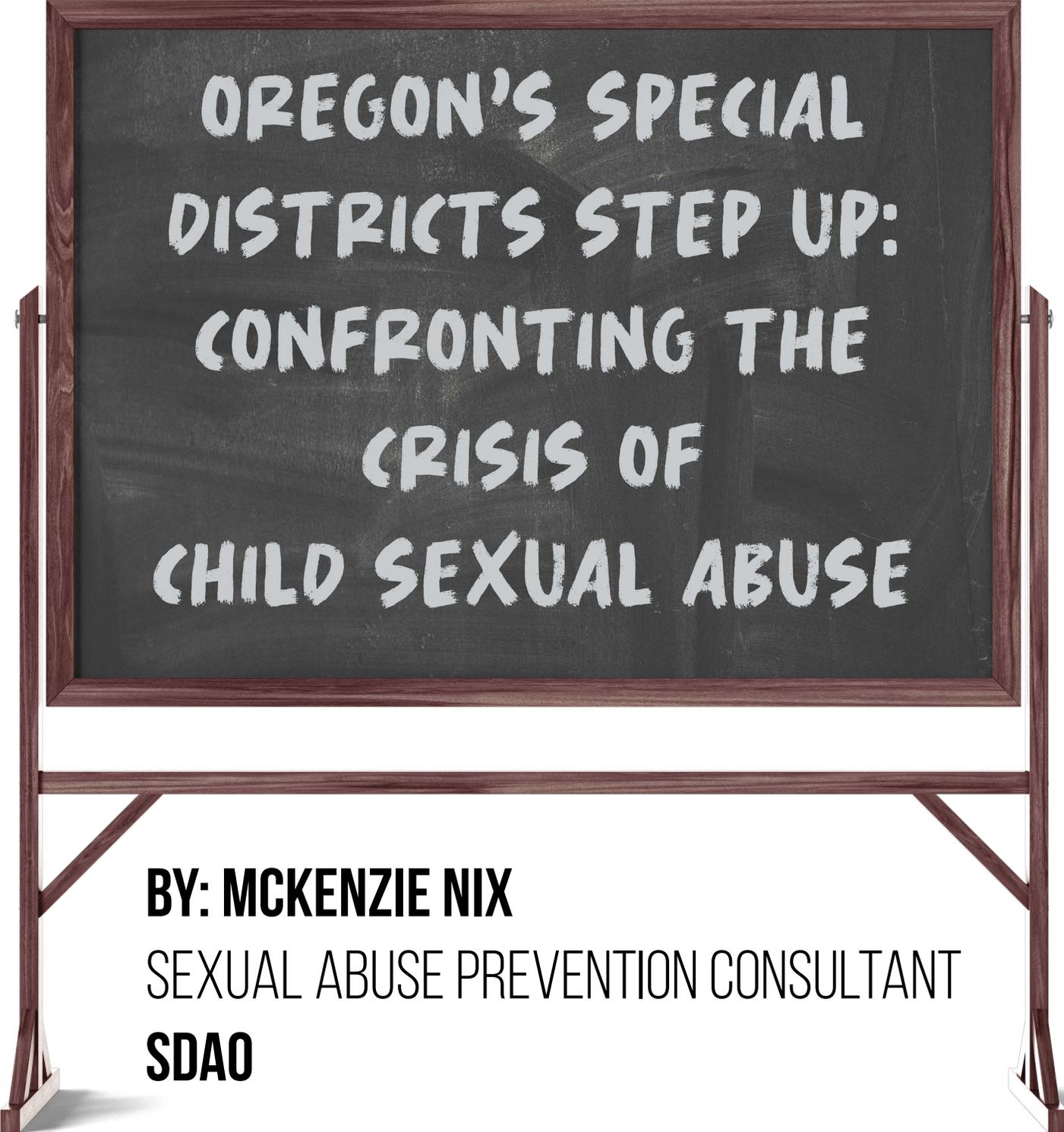
Don't forget to insulate any exposed pipes and consider using heat tape for pipes in cold areas.

This is a good time to change the batteries in the thermostats and smoke detectors, if applicable. Most furnaces and heat sources don't turn on without a signal from the thermostat. While checking those batteries, take note of the settings as well, making sure the heat will come on and push warm air to the colder areas during cold temperatures.

Even with the best of intentions and taking all of these measures into account, accidents and damages can still happen. This is a great time to make sure you know where the water turnoffs are for the building just in case something happens.

Winters are generally tough in Oregon; hopefully following these tips will make things run smoothly until those warmer spring temperatures roll back around.





OREGON'S SPECIAL
DISTRICTS STEP UP:
CONFRONTING THE
CRISIS OF
CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

BY: MCKENZIE NIX

SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION CONSULTANT

SDAO

In Oregon, the responsibility to protect children from sexual abuse and misconduct is shared by every adult who interacts with minors in schools, parks, libraries, and other public programs. Recent updates to state law and best practices, as outlined by SDAO, have placed renewed emphasis on prevention, mandatory reporting, and the creation of safe environments for children. This article explores the scope of the problem, the legal and ethical obligations of employees, and the proactive steps special districts are taking to ensure the safety and well-being of Oregon's youth.

The problem of child sexual abuse extends far beyond high-profile cases, revealing a disturbing reality supported by national data. Studies show that approximately one in four girls and one in thirteen boys will experience sexual abuse before turning 18 (Positive Childhood Alliance, 2024). Research from Darkness to Light (D2L, 2025) further shows that one in five children faces unwanted online sexual exposure, highlighting the growing risks in digital spaces (D2L, 2025). Alarming, more than 20% of victims are under eight years old, and 93% of children know their abusers, with less than 7% harmed by strangers (RAINN, NSVRC). Additionally, 30–40% of survivors are abused by a family member, while 60% are abused by someone outside the family whom they know and trust (D2L, 2025). These statistics underscore the urgent need for comprehensive prevention strategies and robust reporting mechanisms to protect vulnerable children.

BEHIND THE MASK: WHO ARE THE OFFENDERS?

Predators rarely fit the stereotypes. Research consistently shows that offenders often seek positions of trust within youth-serving organizations, where they can gain access to vulnerable children. Studies by Abel and Harlow (n.d.), Bourke and Hernandez (2009), and Jensen (n.d.) reveal that many offenders are charismatic, well-liked, and outwardly responsible, sometimes even regarded as pillars of their communities. This ability to manipulate, rationalize, and build emotional connections makes them particularly dangerous.

Offenders frequently present themselves with a “nice guy” persona, appearing trustworthy and responsible to those around them. While both men and women can commit these crimes, men account for approximately 90% of offenders (Abel & Harlow, n.d.). Beneath this facade, they are skilled liars and manipulators, adept at rationalizing and minimizing their actions to avoid detection or accountability. Critically, these individuals often form emotional bonds with children, which they later exploit to maintain control and perpetuate abuse.

It is also important to note that not all offenders are pedophiles. Many are adults experiencing vulnerabilities in their own lives who make poor decisions, cross boundaries, and develop inappropriate relationships with minors (Jensen, n.d.). Understanding these dynamics is essential for prevention and early intervention.

THE GROOMING PROCESS: HOW ABUSE UNFOLDS

Abuse rarely happens without warning signs, and grooming is often the first step in this deliberate process. Grooming is designed to erode a child's defenses and blur boundaries, making it difficult for victims to recognize what is happening or feel safe speaking up. Offenders typically present themselves as caring and supportive, gradually crossing professional and personal lines while building trust and dependency.

The process often begins by targeting vulnerable children—those with low self-esteem, unstable home lives, or limited support systems. From there, offenders work to establish trust and create an emotional connection through attention, affection, gifts, and excessive emotional support. They then push boundaries by acting like a peer, encouraging secrecy, and introducing sexually explicit topics. Over time, they isolate the child from loved ones, escalate to physical contact and exposure to explicit content, and maintain control by exploiting the child’s vulnerabilities or personal information to ensure silence and compliance.



Children often do not speak out because the person harming them is someone they care about. Offenders build relationships that feel positive or meaningful, which makes the abuse confusing and difficult to process. For many kids—and even adults—it is hard to accept that someone they like can also cause harm. In that confusion, staying silent can feel safer than confronting the painful reality.

CHILD ABUSE VS. SEXUAL CONDUCT: YES, THERE IS A DIFFERENCE

Child abuse and sexual conduct are related but distinct concepts under Oregon law. **Child abuse** refers to any act that causes harm or poses a substantial risk of harm to a child’s health or welfare. This includes physical assault, mental injury, rape, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, negligent treatment, and exposure to dangerous environments such as drug manufacturing sites. Abuse can also involve unlawful restraint, corporal punishment, or failing to provide basic necessities like food, shelter, and medical care.

Sexual conduct, on the other hand, focuses on inappropriate interactions between adults and minors that are sexual in nature but may not rise to the level of criminal abuse. Although sexual conduct only applies to school associated adults, as a best practice we would highly encourage our special districts to follow the same protocol. Sexual conduct includes verbal, physical, written, or electronic communication that involves sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or creates a hostile or intimidating environment. While necessary physical contact for job duties is excluded, any behavior with sexual intent—such as grooming, romantic gestures, or sexualized conversations—falls under this category. Both require immediate reporting, but sexual conduct emphasizes boundary violations that can lead to abuse if unchecked.

MANDATORY REPORTING

Mandatory reporting is a fundamental element of Oregon’s child protection framework. Anyone who has reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused—including employees, contractors, agents, and volunteers, must immediately report the concern to the Department of Human Services (DHS) 855-503-SAFE (7233) or local law enforcement. This obligation applies whether an adult or another child commits abuse. In cases of suspected sexual conduct involving minors, the report must also be made to a supervisor, who is responsible for

documenting, and taking appropriate action. Oregon law safeguards individuals who report in good faith from retaliation or negative consequences.

The scope of mandatory reporters is broad, encompassing doctors, attorneys, counselors, law enforcement, and staff of child-serving programs. Since 2022, city, county, and state elected officials have also been included, and even roles in programs such as job shadows or youth workshops may trigger reporting duties. The guiding principle is clear: if you suspect abuse, assume you are required to report.

BEST PRACTICES FOR PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

Maintaining professional boundaries is one of the most effective ways to prevent inappropriate interactions and protect both minors and staff. Perpetrators love to operate in “gray space.” By adhering to the following best practices, we eliminate the ability for these people to engage in grooming behaviors. This first starts with communication: employees should use only approved electronic methods and keep conversations professional, limited to district-related topics. Supervisors must have administrative access to all district-related social media accounts to ensure transparency and accountability. When capturing photos or videos of minors, staff should follow district policies, use district-owned devices, and confirm that all images are appropriate.

Physical boundaries are equally important. Employees should avoid one-on-one meetings with minors whenever possible, opting instead for visible areas with uncovered windows and clear lines of sight. Comments on a child’s appearance and oversharing personal details should be avoided, as these behaviors can blur professional lines. Additionally, transportation should always follow district-approved methods to ensure safety and compliance.

Creating an inhospitable environment for predators goes beyond individual behavior, it requires systemic safeguards. Special districts are encouraged to implement rigorous background checks, provide ongoing training, and enforce clear policies for reporting and investigating concerns. A culture of vigilance and accountability is essential, where staff and community

members trust their instincts and act promptly. The guiding principle is simple: if you see something, stop it and say something. Trust your gut—because protecting children is everyone’s responsibility.

A COMMUNITY UNITED FOR CHILDREN

Protecting children from harm is a shared responsibility that requires vigilance, compassion, and unwavering commitment. Oregon’s special districts are leading the way by implementing robust policies, comprehensive training, and fostering a culture of accountability. At SDAO, we are dedicated to ensuring our members are fully equipped to



tackle this difficult and sensitive topic with confidence. From understanding the scope of the problem to recognizing warning signs and taking decisive action, we will be here every step of the way to help our members navigate these challenges. Together, we can protect the future of Oregon's children and create environments where perpetrators cannot thrive.

RESOURCES & TRAINING

- Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) Reporting Child Abuse: <https://www.oregon.gov/odhs/report-abuse/pages/mandatory-reporting.aspx>
- SDAO Resources: <https://www.sdao.com/>
- SDAO Training: email riskmanagement@sdao.com
- RAINN <https://rainn.org/>
- NCSRV <https://www.nsvrc.org/>
- Darkness 2 Light: <https://www.oakland.edu/Assets/upload/docs/Youth-Protection/7-Steps-to-Protecting-Our-Children.pdf>
- *The Abel and Harlow Child Molestation Prevention Study*, by Gene G. Abel, M.D., and Nora Harlow
- *Sex Offenders: Keeping Children, Schools, and Churches Safe*, by Cory Jewell Jensen, M.S.





SETTING THE STAGE FOR SUCCESS: ONBOARDING NEW EMPLOYEES

BY: MONICA SCHULTZ, HR MANAGER, SDAO

Bringing new employees into your district is more than just paperwork and introductions, it's about creating a foundation for long-term success. Effective onboarding ensures that new team members feel welcomed, supported, and prepared to contribute meaningfully from day one.

Successful onboarding begins before the employee's first day. Clear communication about expectations, schedules, and resources helps reduce anxiety and sets a positive tone. Providing a structured plan, whether it's a checklist, timeline, or orientation program, shows that the organization values the employee's time and growth.

Equally important is building connections. New hires should have opportunities to meet colleagues, learn about the culture, and understand how their role fits into the bigger picture. Assigning a mentor or "buddy" can make the transition smoother by giving employees a go-to person for questions and guidance.

Training is another critical piece. Onboarding should include not only job-specific instruction but also broader education about district policies, values, and goals. When employees understand both the technical and cultural aspects of their role, they are more likely to feel engaged and committed.

Finally, onboarding doesn't end after the first week. Regular check-ins during the first 90 days help identify challenges early and reinforce support. Feedback should be a two-way street; new employees often bring fresh perspectives that can improve processes and strengthen the workplace.

Organizations that invest in thoughtful onboarding see higher retention, stronger performance, and more satisfied employees. It's not just about filling a position; it's about cultivating a thriving team.

I'll be diving deeper into this topic at the 2026 SDAO Annual Conference in Seaside, where I'll be joined by Angela Smith and Ashley Calvo from SDAO. Together, we'll share strategies, tools, and real-world examples to help districts create onboarding programs that truly set employees up for success. I hope to see you there!

Convenient, covered mental health care

Talkspace provides mental health support privately and conveniently online. Receive therapy, psychiatry, or couples counseling from highly qualified licensed providers with no wait, covered by your insurance plan. Talkspace stands out by offering messaging therapy, giving you the ability to share your thoughts and feelings with your therapist 24/7 and receive feedback without waiting for an appointment.



The Talkspace network of therapists and psychiatric providers can treat a variety of mental health conditions and needs, including:

- STRESS
- ANXIETY
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- TRAUMA & GRIEF
- EATING DISORDERS
- SUBSTANCE USE
- IDENTITY STRUGGLES
- CHRONIC ILLNESS
- AND MORE

Therapy

- Get matched with a licensed therapist based on your needs and preferences and start communicating within days.
- You'll exchange messages with your therapist (text, voice, or video messages) over the secure Talkspace platform, and schedule appointments for live virtual sessions (video, audio, or live chat).
- Messaging therapy allows you to share with your therapist 24/7 and receive feedback and advice, and is proven to be as effective as traditional therapy.

Teen therapy (13+)

- Teenagers will be paired with a therapist who specializes in teens
- Support for navigating the emotions and changes of the adolescent years
- Treatment for anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions

Couples therapy

- Counseling for both married and unmarried couples
- Receive counseling through messaging and live sessions
- Couples can participate in therapy sessions from the same location or separate ones

Psychiatry (18+)

- Schedule a video appointment with a psychiatric provider, no referral needed, for an evaluation and prescription for mental health medication, if appropriate
- Appointments typically occur within two weeks
- Prescriptions are filled at your local pharmacy

Note that Talkspace doesn't prescribe controlled substances.



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REPORT AN SDIS P/C CLAIM

Toll-Free: 800-305-1736
Email: claims@sdao.com
Fax: 503-620-9817

MEMBER CALENDAR

January 1	<i>New Year's Day – SDAO Closed</i>
January 19	<i>Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – SDAO Closed</i>
February 5-8	<i>SDAO Annual Conference – Seaside</i>
February 6	<i>SDAO Board of Directors Meeting – Seaside</i>
February 6	<i>SDIS Board of Trustees Meeting – Seaside</i>
February 6	<i>HR Alliance Roundtable – Seaside</i>
February 6	<i>Finance Alliance Roundtable – Seaside</i>
February 16	<i>Presidents' Day – SDAO Closed</i>

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