



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

AGENDA ITEM

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

PALOMA AGUIRRE
First District

JOEL ANDERSON
Second District

TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Third District

MONICA MONTGOMERY STEPPE
Fourth District

JIM DESMOND
Fifth District

DATE: April 21, 2026

22

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

PROMOTING INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT IN BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MEETINGS: STRATEGIES ALIGNED WITH SENATE BILL (SB) 707 (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

On October 3, 2025, Governor Newsom signed Senate Bill (SB) 707 (Durazo), which enacted significant amendments to the Ralph M. Brown Act. The changes aimed to modernize public meeting laws, expand access and participation, and address the evolving use of technology in local governance.

This agenda item provides a summary of the feedback received during the outreach to underrepresented communities, including non-English-speaking populations and civic organizations, to identify opportunities to increase their engagement at Board of Supervisors meetings and recommendations for the Board to consider to improve public engagement.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to implement the options selected by the Board of Supervisors to make reasonable efforts to invite groups that do not traditionally participate in Board of Supervisors meetings to attend those meetings. The proposed options for the Board's consideration are:

1. Combine the Board Meeting agenda into a single document that includes only the item title and recommendation(s). Add hyperlinks directly within the agenda to the Board Letters and supporting documents for easy access to supplemental materials.
2. Develop plain-language guidelines for County staff for agenda item titles; include simplified version unless legally required.
3. Publish step-by-step public participation guides in all threshold languages, including simple instructions for eComment, speaking in person/virtually, and preparing public comment. Include a short printable one-page "How to Participate" sheet in the threshold languages.
4. Produce the Public Service Announcement on Speaking at Board Meetings in multiple languages.

SUBJECT: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT IN BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MEETINGS: STRATEGIES ALIGNED WITH SENATE BILL (SB) 707 (DISTRICTS: ALL)

5. Partner with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to host orientation workshops in multiple languages, allowing residents to practice commenting, learn rules of procedure, and gain confidence before attending a Board meeting.
6. Utilizing technology tools, expand live interpretation services during meetings to include the additional threshold languages, subject to funding availability.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The County of San Diego (County) prioritizes transparency and accessibility to improve public understanding of how the County operates and participation in shaping future priorities. These efforts towards accessibility are particularly important to reach those communities that have been previously disconnected from the County civic process. The County continues to ensure that the diverse voices of the community can be heard in an equitable and civilized manner, and as such, can provide input that is vital to a healthy democratic institution.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The analysis provides options for the Board of Supervisors to enhance stakeholder participation to plan for community engagement and identify meaningful ways to continually seek input to foster inclusive and sustainable communities.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for this request are included in the Fiscal Year 2025-26 Operational Plan in the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors. If approved, Recommendations 1-5 would be accomplished with existing staff resources in the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors funded by General Purpose Revenue. If approved, Recommendation 6 would result in ongoing costs and revenue of approximately \$30,000. The funding source for Recommendation 6 would be existing General Purpose Revenue in the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

On October 3, 2025, Governor Newsom signed Senate Bill (SB) 707 (Durazo), which enacted significant amendments to the Ralph M. Brown Act.

SB 707, enacted in Government Code Section 54953.4, requires the County of San Diego (County) to conduct outreach to underrepresented communities, including non-English-speaking populations and civic organizations to identify opportunities to increase their engagement at Board of Supervisors meetings. The legislation requires reasonable efforts to invite participation from groups that do not traditionally attend public meetings. The legislation gives broad discretion for the Board to select what reasonable efforts it will make. These efforts may include media

SUBJECT: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT IN BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MEETINGS: STRATEGIES ALIGNED WITH SENATE BILL (SB) 707 (DISTRICTS: ALL)

organizations serving non-English-speaking communities, as well as civic, civil rights, neighborhood, and community organizations.

Specifically, the legislation (Government Code Section 54953.4 (b)(3)(C)(i)) mandates that the Board of Supervisors:

Make reasonable efforts, as determined by the legislative body, to invite groups that do not traditionally participate in public meetings to attend those meetings, which may include, but are not limited to, all the following:

- (i) Media organizations that provide news coverage in the jurisdiction of the eligible legislative body, including media organizations that serve non-English-speaking communities.*
- (ii) Good government, civil rights, civic engagement, neighborhood, and community group organizations, or similar organizations that are active in the jurisdiction of the eligible legislative body, including organizations active in non-English-speaking communities.*

To meet this requirement, the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors and the County Communications Office partnered to leverage the Community-Based Organization (CBO) Pilot Program. This included a series of focused small-group community conversations in each of the County’s threshold languages. Additionally, County Communications Offices hosted small group conversations with Youth Sector participants and ethnic media outlets. Public input was also facilitated through the County’s digital platform, allowing individuals to engage at their convenience and in their preferred language.

The following are the results of these engagement efforts and options for the Board to select which reasonable efforts to make to encourage participation from underrepresented groups:

Community-Based Organization (CBO) Recommendations

In summer 2025, the County launched a one-year pilot program to contract with community-based organizations (CBOs) for as-needed support in community engagement and language services. This initiative aims to strengthen community engagement and enhance language access as part of the County's efforts to reduce barriers to participation in County decision-making processes. The goal of the program is to increase accessibility for residents who speak languages other than English, enabling broader participation in County engagement opportunities. The following CBOs were contracted through this pilot program to cover the eight threshold languages:

Organization/CBO	Language(s)
Bayside Community Center	Spanish
Bonita Family Resource Center	Spanish
Mano a Mano Foundation	Spanish
Somali Family Service	Arabic, Somali
Asian Business Association	Chinese, Filipino, Korean
License to Freedom	Persian
Little Saigon San Diego	Vietnamese

The County engaged with the seven CBOs to provide language and community engagement services to support a focus group aimed at improving accessibility to Board of Supervisors (Board)

SUBJECT: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT IN BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MEETINGS: STRATEGIES ALIGNED WITH SENATE BILL (SB) 707 (DISTRICTS: ALL)

meetings. The CBOs prepared and translated materials, managed logistics, conducted outreach to recruit participants with limited English proficiency, and facilitated 60-minute focus groups in the community's threshold languages. Following the sessions, the CBOs documented feedback, translated responses, and delivered a comprehensive report detailing outreach activities, participant input, and recommendations.

Between February 10 and February 26, 2026, the CBOs conducted ten focus groups in the County's eight threshold languages, engaging more than 120 participants across diverse cultural, linguistic, and immigrant communities. The purpose of these sessions was to identify barriers to participation in Board meetings and gather community-driven recommendations for improving access, comprehension, and engagement, consistent with SB 707.

Across all ten focus groups, several consistent themes emerged:

1. Low Awareness of Board Meetings and Limited Access to Information

Participants across all language groups reported limited awareness that Board meetings occur, how to access agendas, or how to participate. Many noted that information is not reaching communities through the channels they regularly use. Community members expressed interest in participating, but indicated that outreach must begin with clear, consistent, and culturally relevant communication.

2. Need for Clear, Concise, and Accessible Agendas

All groups reported that current agendas are difficult to understand due to technical language, length, formatting, and lack of summaries. Participants consistently requested:

- Plain-language summaries explaining agenda items and their community impact
- Dot-point overviews, larger font, and clearer formatting to support readability
- Translated summaries prepared in advance and written in community-appropriate language rather than literal translation

These barriers were especially significant for individuals with limited English proficiency, older adults, and refugee communities unfamiliar with U.S. government processes.

3. Desire for Step-by-Step Participation Guidance

Many residents were unaware of how to sign up to speak, provide written comments, attend remotely, or navigate the County website. Participants requested:

- Step-by-step instructions in their preferred language
- Example scripts for public comment
- Clear timelines for registering to speak
- In-language instructional videos

Several groups, including Somali, Vietnamese and Afghan participants, expressed that they would feel more comfortable participating if they could prepare comments together and/or designate a more English-proficient representative to speak on behalf of the community.

4. Expanded Outreach Through Trusted Community Channels

SUBJECT: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT IN BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MEETINGS: STRATEGIES ALIGNED WITH SENATE BILL (SB) 707 (DISTRICTS: ALL)

Community groups emphasized the importance of distributing meeting notifications through platforms widely used within their communities, including:

- WeChat (Mandarin), KakaoTalk (Korean), WhatsApp (Spanish, and Afghan), and Facebook (Mandarin, Filipino, Spanish, Vietnamese and Afghan)
- Community hubs such as churches, mosques, ethnic markets, schools, and community centers
- Text message reminders, which were specifically requested by multiple groups

Participants stated that culturally familiar messengers and community organizations are essential to building trust and ensuring information is understood and shared.

5. Strengthening Language Access Services

While existing services such as closed captioning and translated materials were appreciated, participants in every focus group requested expanded and higher-quality language access, including:

- Interpretation services in Vietnamese, Korean, Mandarin, Arabic, Somali, and Dari/Pashto, in addition to Spanish
- Translations reviewed by humans or AI-assisted with human oversight to avoid inaccuracies common with automated tools
- Translated agenda summaries prepared at least several days before the meeting
- More visible presentation of available language services on the website

Some communities, particularly Somali and older adult groups, expressed that written translation alone is insufficient where literacy levels vary, and verbal interpretation may be more effective.

6. Addressing Logistical and Practical Barriers

Across all CBO engagement, participants described concrete barriers that make participation difficult, including:

- Work schedules and long meeting durations
- Transportation and parking challenges
- Childcare responsibilities
- Intimidation or anxiety about public speaking or engaging in formal government settings

Several groups recommended evening meeting opportunities and community-based pre-meeting orientations to build comfort and familiarity.

7. Strong Interest in Future Participation

Despite the barriers identified, participants across all language groups expressed enthusiasm about becoming more engaged once information is made accessible and the process is clearer. Many groups noted that participating in the focus group was their first exposure to the role and responsibilities of the Board, and asked for continued education and communication through community-based organizations.

SUBJECT: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT IN BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MEETINGS: STRATEGIES ALIGNED WITH SENATE BILL (SB) 707 (DISTRICTS: ALL)

Together, the CBO reports highlight the need for:

- Clearer, plain-language communication in multiple languages
- Translated, skimmable agenda summaries
- Expanded outreach through culturally relevant platforms and trusted messengers
- Step-by-step participation guidance
- Enhanced language access and interpretation services
- Practical support like remote options, text reminders, transportation information, and meeting-time flexibility

These findings illustrate the significant opportunity to improve equitable engagement in Board meetings and align directly with the intent of SB 707 to broaden participation from communities historically underrepresented in civic processes.

Youth Focus Group Summary

To supplement the County's SB 707 outreach, the County Communications Office hosted a Youth Sector focus group on February 25, 2026, along with a companion online participant guide. The goal was to better understand how young people receive information about Board of Supervisors meetings and what changes would help make the process more accessible and youth friendly. The feedback received is summarized into several key areas:

Awareness and Understanding

- Many youth were unfamiliar with Board meetings, and some did not know the public is allowed to attend.
- Existing awareness comes mostly through email updates, social media, and County programs.

Notification Channels

- Effective channels: email, Board of Supervisors website, direct communication from Board offices.
- Recommended additions: flyers and QR codes in youth spaces, school-based outreach, and youth oriented social media.
- Youth requested calendar invites and reminder emails sent shortly before meetings.

Email Content and Format

- Emails should clearly show date/time, how to participate, and brief agenda summaries.
- Youth prefer simple, visually clear formatting and a more welcoming tone.

Understanding the Agenda

- Agendas were viewed as difficult to understand due to technical language and dense formatting.
- Youth recommended plain language summaries, a glossary, and clearer layout.

Public Comment Comfort

- Instructional video was helpful but needs clearer deadlines and explanation of comment options.
- Written comments were preferred over in-person or remote verbal comments.

SUBJECT: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT IN BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MEETINGS: STRATEGIES ALIGNED WITH SENATE BILL (SB) 707 (DISTRICTS: ALL)

- Suggestions included youth-led videos, school workshops, and tours to reduce intimidation.

Language Access

- Participants emphasized multilingual materials and videos, especially for families relying on youth for interpretation.

Barriers to Participation

- Common barriers: intimidation, transportation, scheduling conflicts, and limited awareness.

Strategies to Increase Youth Involvement

- Recommended: school workshops, youth-serving organization partnerships, youth ambassadors/internships, engaging videos, and facility tours.

Overall, youth emphasized that clearer communication, simplified materials, and intentional, youth centered outreach are essential to making Board meetings more accessible and inviting.

Media Focus Group Summary

On March 25, 2026, the County Communications Office also hosted a SB 707 Media Focus Group, along with responses collected in an accompanying online participant guide. The purpose of this effort was to understand how non-English speaking media outlets across San Diego County learn about Board of Supervisors meetings, the challenges they and their audiences experience with accessing and engaging in the process, and the strategies they believe would strengthen awareness and participation among non-English speaking communities.

Collectively, the feedback pointed to several overarching themes. Themes included the need for accessible communications, timely and digestible content, culturally relevant outreach, clearer more approachable agenda formats, improved language access, and stronger partnerships with ethnic media. The feedback received is summarized into several key areas:

Improve Communications

- Develop bilingual templates, send earlier notifications, and provide direct Spanish-language links.

Enhance Agenda Accessibility

- Create plain language digests and explainer videos in the threshold languages.

Strengthen Community Engagement Initiatives

- Offer shareable toolkits and consistent direct outreach.

Clarify Public Comment Options

- Provide clear, step-by-step guidance and privacy assurances.

Expand Language Access Tools

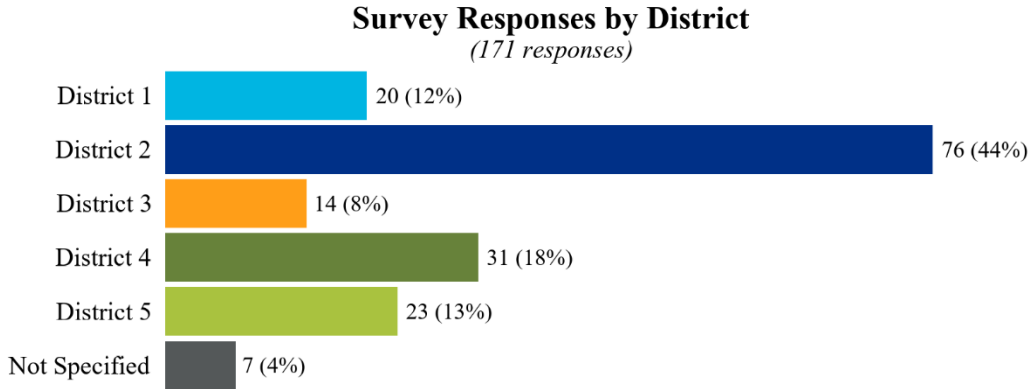
- Improve visibility of translation resources and produce multilingual videos.

Online Survey

An online survey was available through the County’s digital platform, Engage San Diego, from January 23, 2026, to February 27, 2026. The survey had 18 possible questions and took approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. A link to the survey was distributed to all those that

SUBJECT: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT IN BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MEETINGS: STRATEGIES ALIGNED WITH SENATE BILL (SB) 707 (DISTRICTS: ALL)

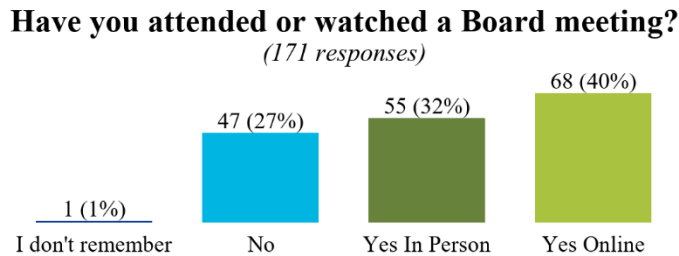
receive the Board of Supervisors agendas, over 8,500 individuals, as well as posted in social media. The County received 171 responses that were analyzed by the Office of Evaluation, Performance, and Analytics and summarized below. Residents from all districts participated, with almost half (44%) from District 2.



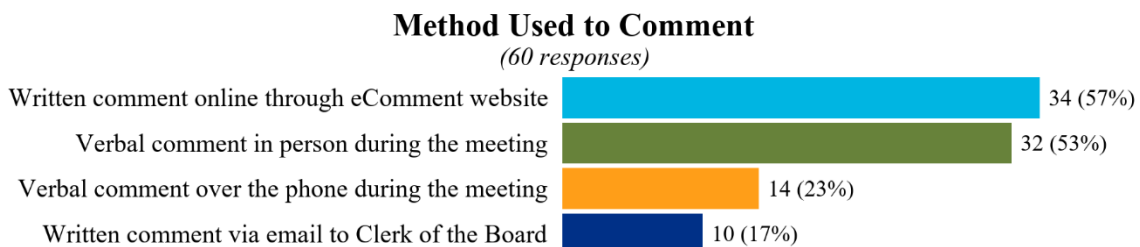
Below is a summary of each survey section:

Public Comment Behavior

123 respondents (72%) said that they had attended a Board meeting in person (32%) or watched a meeting online (40%). Of those, 73% said they had attended or watched a meeting in the last two years. About half (49%) said that they provided a comment on a Board meeting agenda item.



The most common methods used to provide comments were written through the eComment website (57%) and verbal comments during the meeting (53%). Less common methods reported were providing verbal comment over the phone (23%) or emailing the Clerk of the Board (17%).



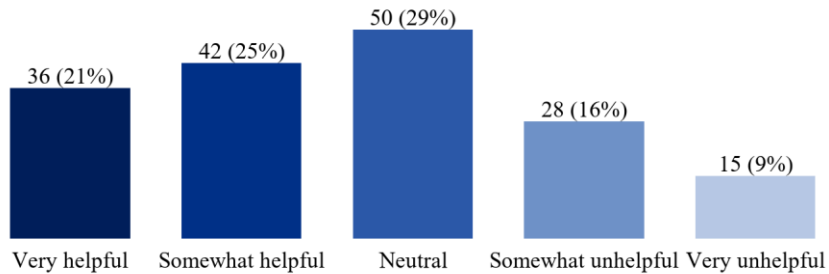
Note: respondents could select more than one option, so categories do not add up to 100%

SUBJECT: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT IN BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MEETINGS: STRATEGIES ALIGNED WITH SENATE BILL (SB) 707 (DISTRICTS: ALL)

Website Experience (Information and Materials)

78 residents (46%) thought that the County website was helpful for finding the information that they needed about Board meetings, 50 (29%) were neutral, and 43 (25%) found it unhelpful.

Helpfulness of Website for Board Meeting Information
(171 responses)



Respondents generally agreed that the website contains a substantial amount of relevant information, including current and past Board meeting agendas and supporting materials. While some felt this information was easy to access, others reported difficulty navigating the site and locating what they needed.

Key challenges that were highlighted include:

- **High effort to access materials:** Several respondents described the site as hard to navigate and overly reliant on clicking through multiple links. The search function was especially challenging when trying to find supplemental documents or materials from previous meetings.
- **Overwhelming volume of information:** Some respondents felt that the sheer amount of material was difficult to manage and suggested providing shorter, more digestible summaries.
- **Inaccessible legal language:** The legal tone of many Board materials was seen as confusing or difficult to interpret. Respondents recommended adding plain-language summaries of agendas and key documents.

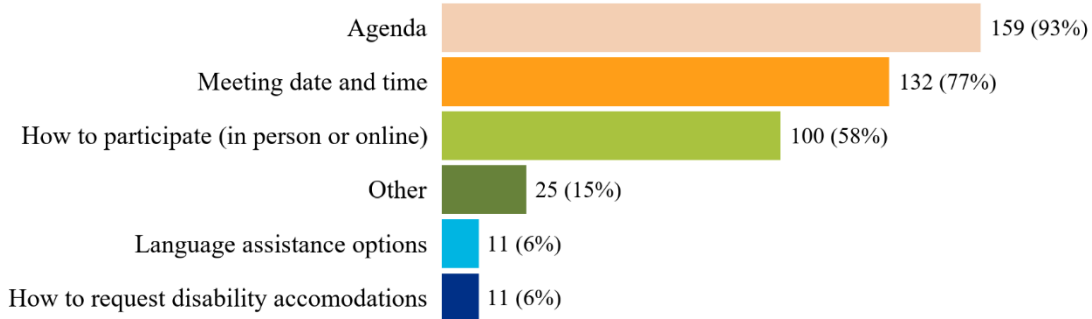
SUBJECT: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT IN BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MEETINGS: STRATEGIES ALIGNED WITH SENATE BILL (SB) 707 (DISTRICTS: ALL)

Notifications and Pre-meeting information

Respondents selected multiple preferred notification methods. Most chose email (91%), followed by County website updates (29%), local media (22%), text messages (19%), and flyers in community spaces or updates at other local meetings (both 14%). The most helpful information that the County could provide before a meeting is the agenda (93%), meeting date and time (77%), and information about how to participate (58%).

Most Helpful Information Before a Meeting

(171 responses)



Note: respondents could select more than one option, so categories do not add up to 100%

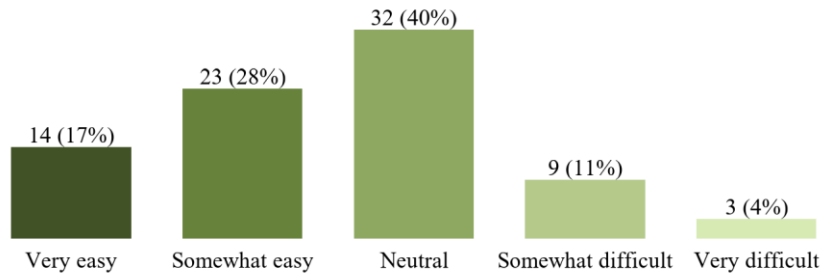
Barriers to Participation

The barriers to participating in meetings – whether in person or virtually – were similar. The most common were work conflicts (55% in person, 53% virtual) and not knowing when meetings would occur (22% in person, 23% virtual).

Beyond meeting attendance, respondents also shared perspectives on the eComment website. Of the 81 residents who said that they had used the eComment website, 37 (45%) thought that it was easy to use, 23 (40%) were neutral, and 12 (15%) found it difficult. While many said the site was generally easy to navigate, some felt that their comments were not read or considered in the Board’s decision-making process. A few noted that the site could be challenging to navigate with limited technical skills.

Ease of Use of eComment Website

(81 responses)



When asked what would improve access to information and participation, residents provided the following suggestions:

- **Provide clearer summaries of agenda items:** Create plain-language summaries and include for/against arguments for key items.

SUBJECT: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT IN BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MEETINGS: STRATEGIES ALIGNED WITH SENATE BILL (SB) 707 (DISTRICTS: ALL)

- **Expand communication channels:** Share meeting info across news outlets, send more reminders, offer downloadable calendars, and provide custom notifications to residents when their topics of interest will be discussed.
- **Improve meeting accessibility:** Hold meetings on nights/weekends, rotate locations around the County, offer parking, and give estimated agenda times with alerts to speakers.
- **Provide non-meeting engagement options:** Use other public meetings, boards, and regional committees to share updates and issue-specific information.
- **Show how public input shapes decisions:** Acknowledge comments, actively listen to all public input, incorporate feedback into deliberations, and make eComments publicly available or read them aloud into the record.

Efforts Underway to Improve Engagement

To strengthen transparency and encourage public participation, the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors has implemented several initiatives that make Board meetings more accessible, informative, and engaging for the community:

1. **Short Video Highlights of Upcoming Meetings:** When the agenda is published, the County Communications Office posts a 1–2 minute video on social media with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors providing key highlights about the upcoming meeting. While the video does not cover every agenda item, it offers a concise, engaging overview of meeting details. Sharing these videos on social media helps increase public awareness of County initiatives and encourages community involvement. Short, visually appealing content is particularly effective in breaking down complex topics into accessible, shareable information that informs and empowers residents.
2. **Public Service Announcement on Speaking at Board Meetings:** In 2025, the County Communications Office produced a video explaining how to participate in Board of Supervisors meetings. The video walks viewers through each step of the process for providing public comments and outlines rules for engagement and appropriate conduct. This resource has earned multiple awards, including second place nationally in the 2025 National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors (NATOA) awards and an Edward L. Bernays Mark of Merit Award from the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) San Diego/Imperial Counties Chapter.
3. **Accessible Agenda Format:** The Clerk of the Board of Supervisors introduced a new HTML-based “Accessible Agenda” format on the agenda web site (<https://sdcounty.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>). This format enhances transparency and ADA compliance by making agendas easier to navigate and interact with through voice readers. Integrated features such as Google Translate allow non-English speakers to view agendas in their preferred language, promoting inclusivity and equitable participation.
4. **Text Message Reminders for Public Speakers:** To assist individuals who have signed up to speak, the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors will be implementing a text messaging feature that sends reminders when public comment begins for their selected agenda item. This ensures constituents are notified at the right time to provide input on issues that matter to them.
5. **Enhanced Online Records Search:** In partnership with the County’s Information Technology Outsourcer, the Clerk of the Board is launching a new online search tool for past Board meeting records. The tool will use artificial intelligence (AI) to allow users to

SUBJECT: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT IN BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MEETINGS: STRATEGIES ALIGNED WITH SENATE BILL (SB) 707 (DISTRICTS: ALL)

ask questions and receive summaries of past Board actions, dramatically improving the ease and accuracy of research for the public.

Together, these initiatives reflect the County’s commitment to transparency, accessibility, and meaningful community engagement, ensuring residents have the tools and information they need to actively participate in local governance.

Recommendations for Consideration

Based on the results of the feedback and engagement efforts, the following are reasonable options for the Board’s consideration that would help to invite groups that do not traditionally participate in Board of Supervisors meetings to attend those meeting:

#	Issue	Recommendations
1	Agenda is lengthy and includes multiple sections, making it hard to navigate	Combine the Board Meeting agenda into a single document that includes only the item title and recommendation(s). Add hyperlinks to the Board Letters and supporting documents directly within the agenda for easy access to supplemental materials. This approach eliminates the need for a separate agenda index and an agenda detail document.
2	Agenda item titles are complex and hard to understand	Develop plain-language guidelines for County staff for agenda item titles; include simplified version unless legally required.
3	Lack of clear instructions on how to participate	Publish step-by-step participation guides in all threshold languages, including simple instructions for eComment, speaking in person/virtually, and preparing public comment. Include a short printable one-page “How to Participate” sheet in the threshold languages.
4	Desire for visual and verbal learning tools	Produce the Public Service Announcement on <u>Speaking at Board Meetings in multiple languages.</u>
5	Trust and comfort concerns in formal meeting settings	Partner with CBOs to host orientation workshops in multiple languages, allowing residents to practice commenting, learn rules of procedure, and gain confidence before attending a Board meeting.
6	Expand language interpretation	Utilizing technology tools, expand live interpretation services during meetings to include the additional threshold languages, subject to funding availability. Costs are estimated to be approximately \$30,000 annually for a technology solution.

The Board may choose to direct the Chief Administrative Officer to implement any combination of the recommendations. Some recommendations may require amendments to the Board’s Rules of Procedure or other Board policies to ensure consistency and compliance.

SUBJECT: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT IN BOARD OF
SUPERVISORS MEETINGS: STRATEGIES ALIGNED WITH SENATE
BILL (SB) 707 (DISTRICTS: ALL)

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

The proposed action supports the Strategic Initiative of Community Engagement in the County of San Diego's 2026-2031 Strategic Plan by providing information, programs, public forums or other avenues that increase access for individuals or communities to use their voice, their vote, and their experience to impact change.

Respectfully submitted,



EBONY N. SHELTON
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT(S)

Attachment 1: Online Survey Results

Attachment 2: Community Based Organization (CBO) Feedback Comparison Matrix