



ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Agenda Report

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File #: 2026-4986

Agenda Date: 6/24/2026

Agenda Item No: 18.

FROM: Robert Thompson, General Manager
Originator: Jennifer Cabral, Director of Communications

SUBJECT:

BIOSOLIDS DEEP WELL INJECTION COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT, SPECIFICATION NO. CS-2026-716BD

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION:

- A. Approve a Professional Consultant Services Agreement to S. Groner Associates, Inc. (SGA) as a strategic communications consultant for the Biosolids Deep Well Injection Project, Specification No. CS-2026-716BD for a total amount not to exceed \$903,421 for a three (3) year Agreement with two (2) one-year renewal options;
- B. Approve a contingency of \$90,342 (10%); and
- C. Approve an optional one time add on of \$61,436 for the STEM-Integrated Schools Outreach Program.

BACKGROUND

The Orange County Sanitation District (OC San) is proposing the Biosolids Deep Well Injection (DWI) Project, a proposed approach to managing biosolids generated through the wastewater treatment process. The proposed project would be located at OC San's Plant No. 1 in Fountain Valley, CA and would inject biosolids approximately 5,000 feet underground into a confined geologic formation separated from the Orange County Groundwater Basin by multiple impermeable rock layers, including a protective caprock.

Due to the project's technical nature, and anticipated public interest regarding groundwater protection, environmental impacts, and emerging contaminants such as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and microplastics, OC San requires a comprehensive, multi-year public education and stakeholder engagement program.

RELEVANT STANDARDS

- Use all practical and effective means for resource recovery
- Build brand, trust, and support with policy makers and community leaders
- Maintain collaborative and cooperative relationships with regulators, stakeholders, and

neighboring communities

PROBLEM

The DWI Project involves highly technical scientific and environmental concepts requiring clear and accessible communication to the public, stakeholders, elected officials, and regulatory agencies. Without dedicated communications support, OC San may face increased public misinformation, reduced stakeholder engagement, and diminished public confidence regarding the project and its environmental safeguards.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

Approve a Professional Consultant Services Agreement with S. Groner Associates, Inc. (SGA) to serve as the communications consultant for the DWI Project.

Under the agreement, SGA will develop and implement a multi-year communications program that includes strategic messaging, stakeholder outreach, community engagement, media relations, multilingual materials, and performance evaluation.

SGA will work collaboratively with OC San's Public Affairs team to support transparent communication regarding project objectives, environmental safeguards, and long-term biosolids management planning. The Consultant will also support outreach to elected officials, community organizations, businesses, environmental groups, and residents throughout OC San's service area.

RAMIFICATIONS OF NOT TAKING ACTION

Without communications support services, OC San may be limited in its ability to effectively communicate technical project information and respond to stakeholder concerns regarding groundwater protection, subsurface injection, and emerging contaminants. Insufficient public communication could reduce stakeholder understanding and confidence in the project.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The SGA proposal includes an optional technical enhancement service related to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education and school outreach that was not included in the total base agreement cost.

These optional services include the development of STEM-integrated school outreach modules, consisting of approximately 100 hours of work for a subtotal cost of \$16,448, and the execution of STEM school outreach presentations, consisting of approximately 338 hours of work for a subtotal cost of \$44,988.

If authorized by OC San, these optional educational outreach components would provide additional opportunities to engage students and schools throughout the service area while increasing awareness of wastewater treatment, sustainability, and the DWI Project. The total cost for the optional service is \$61,436.

On February 9, 2026, OC San issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) and on March 12, 2026, OC San received five (5) proposals.

An Evaluation Committee was formed consisting of an OC San Public Affairs Supervisor, Principal Public Affairs Specialist, Senior Engineer, Jacobs Engineering Contractor, and the Water Resources Manager from Moulton Niguel. The team was chaired by a Purchasing representative as a non-voting member. Proposals were individually scored based on the following criteria:

CRITERION	WEIGHT
1. Qualifications & Experience of Firm	25%
2. Staffing & Project Organization	20%
3. Work Plan	30%
4. Presentation	5%
5. Cost	20%

The evaluation committee first reviewed and scored the proposals based upon the criteria listed above, other than Presentation and Cost.

Rank	Proposer	Criterion 1 (Max 25 %)	Criterion 2 (Max 20%)	Criterion 3 (Max 30%)	Subtotal Score (Max 75 %)
1	Bodewell Group	22.8%	16.6%	25.8%	65.2%
2	S. Groner Associates, Inc.	19.5%	15.0%	23.7%	58.2%
3	Arellano Associates	19.0%	14.6%	23.7%	57.3%
4	Tripepi Smith	15.0%	10.8%	16.8%	42.6%
5	Redwood	13.5%	10.6%	17.4%	41.5%

The three highest ranking firms: Bodewell Group, SGA, and Arellano Associates were selected for round 2, Presentations. The Presentations were conducted on April 22, 2026, and scored by the evaluation committee.

Rank	Proposer	Subtotal Score (Max 75%)	Presentation (Max 5%)	Total Score without cost (Max 80%)
1	Bodewell Group	65.2%	1.5%	66.7%
2	S. Groner Associates, Inc.	58.2%	5.0%	63.2%
3	Arellano Associates	57.3%	1.4%	58.7%

All proposals were accompanied by a sealed cost proposal. The cost proposals for the three highest-ranked firms were opened and negotiated.

Rank	Proposer	Subtotal Score without cost (Max 80%)	Cost (Max 20%)	Total Weighted Score (Max 100%)
1	S. Groner Associates, Inc.	63.2%	15.8%	79.0%
2	Arellano Associates	58.7%	20.0%	78.7%
3	Bodewell Group	66.7%	11.9%	78.6%

COST INFORMATION FOR OPENED PROPOSALS:

Rank	Proposer	ORIGINAL COST	BAFO
1	S. Groner Associates, Inc.	\$1,095,919.00	\$903,421.00
2	Arellano Associates	\$765,037.00	\$712,351.87
3	Bodewell Group	\$1,194,215.00	\$1,194,215.00

SGA received the highest overall weighted score after consideration of technical qualifications, presentation, and cost. Based on these results, staff recommend approving a Professional Consultant Services Agreement to SGA.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

This request complies with the authority levels of OC San's Purchasing Ordinance. This item has been budgeted (Budget Update FY 2025-26, Page A-6, Solids Deep Well Injection Facility, Project No. J-143. The budget is sufficient for the recommended action and will be funded from the Capital Improvement Program budget.

ATTACHMENT

The following attachment(s) may be viewed on-line at the OC San website (www.ocsan.gov) with the complete agenda package:

- Professional Consultant Services Agreement, Specification No. CS-2026-716BD