



PUBLIC AFFAIRS

# STRATEGIC PLAN

Fiscal Years 2020-21 and 2021-2022

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## **Introduction**

The Orange County Sanitation District's (OCSD) Public Affairs Office (PAO) is responsible for creating, organizing, and disseminating all internal and external communication. The primary objective of our Public Affairs team is to deliver messages that are accurate, transparent, and designed to foster public trust and confidence. An integrated Public Affairs Strategic Plan is essential to deal effectively with the variety of audiences we serve.

The Public Affairs staff provides services and tools and implements programs to meet the communication needs of several audiences for OCSD. This includes planning and implementing media relations; website and intranet site content; construction outreach; elected officials, and government relations; internal communications, education, and outreach; and graphic development.

The Public Affairs Office has created a Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2020 - 2022. This Plan is developed based upon the principles of OCSD's Mission of protecting public health and the environment and will support the implementation of OCSD's Strategic Plan. This Plan offers a vision to unify our communication efforts and focus resources to achieve the greatest impact and greatest results.

This plan was created amidst the COVID-19 pandemic thus resulting in modifications to the goals and objectives. Much of what is planned and created by this group is based on external factors and therefore outside of our control. The Public Affairs Office will follow the guidance set forth by Management and the Board of Directors to carry out OCSD's messaging and support our member agencies.

## **Background Information**

The Orange County Sanitation District represents 20 cities, 4 special districts and a portion of the unincorporated County of Orange. This area represents a community of 2.6 million people with approximately 550,000 customer accounts.

Unlike most public agencies where there is direct contact with customers, at the Orange County Sanitation District, billing occurs through the County of Orange property tax bills. Therefore, the Sanitation District, must work through other means to communicate with the public and the rate payers.

We have a 25-member Board of Directors, and over 600 employees within six departments with various goals and objectives. While these groups work independently on a variety of projects, the goal of the Public Affairs Office is to provide support and messaging that is consistent throughout the agency so that we are one voice, representing the same overall goals, and portraying the same brand.

While there are many challenges with serving such a large and diverse customer base, there are also great opportunities working through the strategies laid out in this Plan.

### **Public Affairs Team**

The division is staffed with six full-time employees and overseen by the Manager.

Jennifer Cabral, Administration Manager

Daisy Covarrubias, Principal Public Affairs Specialist

Rebecca Long, Senior Public Affairs Specialist

Kelly Newell, Public Affairs Specialist

Belen Carrillo, Public Affairs Specialist

Gregg Deterding, Graphics Designer

Cheryl Scott, Administrative Assistant

Each of these staff members carry out specific functions to meet the communication goals and objectives laid out in this Plan.

### **Situation Analysis**

- There is a global pandemic occurring which has shifted the way we operate and perform our mission of protecting public health and the environment. As we learn to navigate the recovery phase and move into new social distancing norms, our communication efforts will be modified accordingly to meet the needs of the agency, community, and workforce.
- Due to COVID-19, close to 50 percent of staff is working remotely. The uncertainty of the pandemic creates unknown future work conditions for staff. These circumstances impact the ability and method of communicating and reaching employees, thus alternative communication techniques must be explored and implemented.
- OCSD is in the third year of a five-year rate program, with a scheduled 1.2 percent increase in fees to take effect July 1. Due to the economic impacts of COVID-19 the rate increase for Fiscal Year 2020-2021 will be delayed with no significant financial impacts to OCSD operations.
- There could potentially be a significant turnover of board members in 2020. Succession management and onboarding for the board members is critical for the success of this agency.

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, OCSD has sustained its operational, planning, and preparation efforts to ensure there is no lapse in service today or in the future. As an essential service, OCSD has continued to execute the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) to keep the regional projects on schedule that are enhancing our entire service area. In Fiscal Year 2020-2021 OCSD is on track to bid and issue \$500 million of construction contracts for over 35 projects.

## **Mission**

The Public Affairs Office is committed to communicating information about OCSD in a timely, accurate and accessible way to the employees, the Board of Directors, our member agencies, the public, and the news media.

- We are committed to open, honest, clear, and respectful two-way communication with our audiences.
- We are dedicated to informing others about how OCSD serves the public and protects the environment.
- We are committed to outstanding customer service by responding to requests quickly and efficiently.
- We are dedicated to teamwork and collaboration as well as being creative and taking the initiative to be out in front of issues.

## **Audiences**

This Public Affairs Plan focuses largely on four primary audiences.

- Internal
  - Board of Directors
  - Executive Management Team
  - Employees
  - Retirees
- The Public
  - Ratepayers
  - Member Agencies
  - Residents, Businesses, Commuters Impacted by OCSD Construction
  - OCSD Neighbors in Fountain Valley and Huntington Beach
  - Schools and Students
  - Tour Groups

- Industry
  - Water/Wastewater Agencies
  - Trade Organizations
  - Trade Media
  
- Influential Public
  - Local, State, and Federal Elected Officials
  - Environmental Groups
  - Local Media

### **Agency Key Messages**

- OCSD is committed to protecting public health and the environment by providing effective wastewater collection, treatment, and recycling.
  
- OCSD is more than a wastewater treatment facility, we are a resource recovery facility making use of all our byproducts.
  
- OCSD is dedicated to exceeding wastewater quality standards used for resource recovery.
  
- OCSD is committed to proper planning to ensure that the public's money is wisely spent.
  
- OCSD's assets are monitored and evaluated regularly to ensure top performance and timely replacement.
  
- OCSD values communicating our mission and strategies with those we serve and all other stakeholders.
  
- OCSD will provide reliable, responsive, and affordable services in line with our customer needs and expectations is a top priority for OCSD.
  
- OCSD focuses on creating the best possible workforce where safety, productivity, customer service, and training are a top priority.
  
- OCSD has worked very hard to create an integrated planning environment which begins with the expectations of its Board of Directors and flows down to the work product of each employee. We have worked hard to assure our staff members are communicating and providing transparent services to each other in support of the plan.

- OCSD has developed an integrated Planning/Asset Management system that allows for intentional, thoughtful decision making to maintain current operations while adding resilience and meeting new challenges.
- OCSD has an organizational structure with informal relationships between employees that allow for collaboration toward common goals.

### **Public Affairs' Goals for Fiscal Year 2020/21 and 2021/22**

1. Optimize communication with our internal audience including those operating in the field with limited time to access online communication.
2. Continue to build OCSD's reputation as infrastructure leaders in the wastewater and resource recovery industry.
3. Cultivate relationships with traditional and social media journalists and influencers to promote OCSD's programs and initiatives.
4. Enhance OCSD's image and branding by utilizing proper messaging in external communication pieces such as OCSD's website, presentation, digital media, and advertising. Maintain a positive experience and image for our visitors.
5. Identify and implement avenues for education and outreach within OCSD's service area to further promote OCSD as a resource recovery agency, promote OCSD's mission and promote career opportunities within the wastewater industry.
6. Develop and implement outreach programs that will engage the communities affected by OCSD construction projects.
7. Participate in proactive engagement in legislative advocacy efforts that could impact OCSD and the wastewater industry.
8. Monitor, track, and apply for grants available and that make business sense to OCSD.
9. Ensure that local elected officials, member agencies, stakeholders, and OCSD Board Members are actively engaged in the work of OCSD.
10. Ensure the Public Affairs Office serves as the primary spokesperson for OCSD during normal business and crisis scenarios and facilitates the dissemination of information.
11. Ensure the General Manager and Assistant General Managers are supported with information necessary to communicate to the varied OCSD audiences.

To achieve these goals, the Public Affairs Office presents the following strategies and tactics, along with the primary staff assigned to that area. While individual staff members are the key contacts for each of the goals, the team works collectively and collaboratively, reflecting our core values. Our staff recognizes the key role we play at OCSD, not only communicating

information, but also teaching and consulting others and serving as a resource to our Board of Directors, employees, the wastewater industry, and our member agencies.

As we navigate through the pandemic recovery efforts, the team will follow this plan, and make necessary modifications to effectively communicate OCSD's strategic direction. Flexibility is implemented into this plan to deal with the dynamic situation we are all in.

## **Public Affairs Strategies and Tactics**

### **1. Category: Employee Communications**

Program Manager: Rebecca Long,

Program Coordinator/Support: Kelly Newell, Belen Carrillo, Gregg Deterding, and Cheryl Scott

Goal (what): Optimize communication with our internal audience including those operating in the field with limited time to access online communication.

Objective (measure): Create employee engagement by utilizing the identified communication methods to share agency wide messages. Increase the availability of employee communications by five percent based on previous plan's goals.

Strategy (why): We value open and honest communication with our employees. PAO is committed to various efforts aimed at keeping OCSD employees informed about important topics, increasing the overall quality of communications to our employees while tying the business aspects of the agency with the human-interest side.

Tactics (how):

- Keep information on MyOCSD homepage current, relevant, and useful for OCSD employees by working with the various Departments to gather information that should be shared.
- On a regular basis, staff will continue to support various departments with their communication and outreach needs.
- PAO will produce six *Pipeline* newsletters per year with a goal of circulation by the third week of the publication month.
- PAO will track Volunteer Incentive Program (VIP) points for all participating employees and coordinate the VIP appreciation celebration.
- Create employee recognition and celebratory events throughout the year that comply with new social distancing guidelines, may include small in-person gatherings and virtual events. To include but not limited to the Annual Holiday Lunch, the Harvest Festival, and VIP Celebration, etc.

- Continue with the Honor Walk program which acknowledges retired staff and past Board Members for their contribution to OCSD. The recognition event will be hosted every other year starting in 2021.
- Write and coordinate the *3 Things to Know* email blast to be distributed to all staff each Monday.
- Produce monthly *Digester* bulletin.
- Coordinate and produce two Town Hall meetings (live and/or pre-recorded) to keep employees informed and engaged.
- Host organizational awareness lunch-n-learns monthly to keep staff informed about agency programs and initiatives.
- Research and identify an agency-wide digital message system to provide messages in staff areas across both plants and the Mt. Langley office space. Implementation to occur in Fiscal Year 2021-2022.

## **2. Category: Industry Experts**

Program Manager: Daisy Covarrubias

Program Coordinator/Support: Kelly Newell, Gregg Deterding, and Cheryl Scott

Goal (what): Establish and solidify OCSD's reputation as infrastructure leaders in the wastewater and resource recovery industry.

Objective (measurable): Increase participation in strategic organizations through conferences, networking activities and awards by five percent.

Strategy (why): To build positive public perception and confidence among our various audiences.

Tactics (how):

- Encourage participation and presentation in conferences.
- Encourage and support award application submittals.
- Publicize and coordinate award acceptance logistics.
- Track all awards won by OCSD by keeping a master list.
- Track and promote staff abstract's and publications.

## **3. Category: Media Relations**

Program Managers: Daisy Covarrubias and Rebecca Long

Program Coordinators: Kelly Newell, Belen Carrillo, Gregg Deterding, and Cheryl Scott



Goal (what): Cultivate relationships with traditional and social media journalists and influencers.

Objective (measurement): Increase media coverage with positive stories about OCSD.

Strategy (why): While a presence in the community is important to putting a face on our agency, media (traditional and social) is equally important with a broader reach and a more direct line of communication.

Tactics (how):

- Annually update media list to stay current and fresh.
- Develop a press kit to be online and interactive.
- Build a calendar of news release topics of interest to the public and stakeholders.
- Invite media for a facility tour (virtual or small group).
- Develop media strategies for important events, decisions, or actions.  
e.g. CIP Campaign (see details in Category 6: Capital and Maintenance Outreach)
- Conduct media training for Board leadership, EMT and key staff members.
- Generate weekly (3-5 times) social media posts about the good things happening at OCSD with focus on OCSD's accomplishments and mission.
- Continue with social media campaigns #OCSDatWork, #What2Flush, and those currently supporting ongoing efforts.

#### **4. Category: Agency Branding and Messaging**

Program Manager: Daisy Covarrubias

Program Coordinators/Support: Gregg Deterding, Kelly Newell, and Cheryl Scott

Goal (what): Enhance OCSD's image and branding by utilizing proper messaging in external communication pieces such as OCSD's website, presentations, digital media and advertising, which includes maintaining a positive experience for OCSD visitors.

Objective (measure): Launch a rebranding campaign for a new logo and a modified name over the next two fiscal years. Update collateral material, signage, website, social media accounts, and promotional material as appropriate and as it is used. Include in messaging that OCSD's official name remains Orange County Sanitation District. Maintain the lobby(s) current and informative with relevant information, i.e. displays, awards case, etc.

Strategy (why): A cohesive voice, message, look, and feel are critical to the public perception that an organization holds with its community. A positive and pleasant in-person experience reinforces OCSD's culture and Core Values as well as showcasing OCSD as industry leaders, and a well-run organization, leaving behind the stigma of typical government agencies.

#### Tactics (how):

- Update and maintain the corporate identity manual to provide guidance on use of the logo, name, use of fonts, and graphics.
- Keep website current with informative news stories posted weekly.
- Provide presentations, consultation, and advice on the branding and image of OCSD.
- Develop new key messages focused on new branding logo and name.
- Develop new collateral materials around the key messages.
- Incorporate OCSD's messaging and branding into all external presentations.
- Explore advertising options to inform public of agency efforts and role in economic development.
- Fulfill all requests for graphics, photos, and logos.
- Conduct second phase of community poll to determine name recognition and reach.
- Develop an online community newsletter for digital distribution within our service area to increase awareness of OCSD, our programs, and initiatives.
- Develop a branding plan for the new Headquarters Building.
- Maintain the lobby wall in the Administration Building at Plant No. 1 and the Operations Center at Plant No. 2 with OCSD's current branding and messaging.
- Rotate flags on light poles along Street Parkway on a biennial basis.
- Keep the award display cabinet up to date by rotating awards.
- Keep the retiree display in the Administration Building hallway up to date. On an annual basis collect the names of the retirees and update the display board.
- Maintain and coordinate the installation of Honor Walk bricks on a biennial basis.
- Display collateral material in a neatly and organized manner displayed with current and relevant information.

#### **5. Category: Educational Outreach**

Program Manager: Rebecca Long

Program Coordinators/Support: Kelly Newell, Belen Carrillo, Gregg Deterding, and Cheryl Scott

Goal (what): Identify and implement avenues for education and outreach within OCSD's service area to promote OCSD's mission and vision.

Objective (measurement): Create and identify new educational opportunities including virtual events and webinars to promote and educate the community on OCSD's work and the essential service provided.

Strategies (why): To further promote OCSD as a resource recovery agency, promote OCSD's mission and promote career opportunities within the wastewater industry.

#### Tactics (how):

- Execute the Inside the Outdoors contract for Fiscal Year 2020-2021 to continue OCSD's educational program including the Sewer Science program to 500 students within Orange County and introduce them to OCSD's pilot virtual tour program.
- Implement virtual tour program in lieu of physical tours of the plant which are temporarily suspended due to COVID-19. An estimated 1,000 participants will take part in the virtual tour program per year.
- Evaluate the participation of community events due to COVID-19 restrictions. Once events are rescheduled within OCSD's service area, participation will be evaluated to determine safety for staff, and overall impact and reach.
- Continue to encourage and promote the Volunteer Incentive Program to have a pool of staff that volunteer for events and speaking engagements that OCSD participates in.
- Expand OCSD's speaker's bureau to provide a wider set of speakers available.
- Create a Public Service Announcement (PSA) Contest – work with local colleges and high schools in our service area to create a promotional PSA for OCSD on a biennial basis. Obtain a minimum of 20 individual and/or group entries.
- Implement a Wastewater 101 Academy for our ratepayers, fellow agencies, and influential public to showcase OCSD operations and initiatives. Host a minimum of four (4) sessions per cycle.
- Research and obtain a Mobile Educational Unit utilize at public events that helps generate greater understanding of the wastewater process and OCSD's messaging.

#### **6. Category: Capital and Maintenance Outreach**

Program Managers: Daisy Covarrubias and Tanya Chong from Engineering,  
Program Coordinators/Support: Belen Carrillo, Kelly Newell, Gregg Deterding, and Cheryl Scott

Goal (what): Develop and implement outreach programs that will engage the communities affected by OCSD construction projects.

Objective (measurement): Develop, implement, and provide outreach support for over 20 capital projects scheduled to break ground in fiscal years 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 within 12 cities.

Strategy (why): Form a positive presence in the community prior to the start of construction projects or maintenance activities that is personal and proactive. Provide impacted community with information ahead of construction activities. Inform them of the benefits and need for the project to gain support and understanding of the necessary construction.

#### Tactics (how):

- Proactively offer briefings and community meetings to impacted neighborhoods, civic groups, businesses, schools, churches, and other institutions within the project area on an as needed basis.
- Launch CIP Campaign to highlight the efforts of the program and the financial contributions to the local economy.
- Explore the option of placing advertising pieces in communities/areas impacted by construction.
- Respond to inquiries within a 24-hour period.
- Provide project description and notifications to impacted residents at least two weeks before construction begins.
- Update collateral materials, fact sheets and website with current construction information on an as needed basis.
- Maintain ongoing communications with city staff and Board Members on current and upcoming construction outreach projects in affected cities.
- Maintain ongoing communications with impacted residents within the project area through collateral material (e.g., flyers, door hangers, emails, text alerts, social media posts, etc.).
- Measure customer satisfaction through a construction outreach survey to be distributed at the close of construction programs.

#### **7. Category: Legislative Affairs**

Program Manager: Rebecca Long

Program Coordinator/Support: Kelly Newell, Gregg Deterding, and Cheryl Scott

Goal (what): Proactive engagement in legislative advocacy efforts that could impact OCSD and the wastewater industry.

Objective (measure): Continue positive relationships with local, state, and federal officials through facility tours, meetings, and bill tracking as stated in the Legislative Plan.

Strategy (why): Legislative advocacy is an important aspect of our business. Having relationships and being actively involved, providing input and OCSD's perspective on potential legislature can and does directly affect OCSD and our business.

The Public Affairs Office is responsible for executing the Board approved Legislative Plan, which is updated on an annual basis. In addition, staff is responsible for tracking state and federal legislation, managing the Sanitation District's legislative advocates, and seeking appropriations and grants.

Tactics (how):

- Develop and implement Annual Legislative Plan in the second quarter of each fiscal year.
- Track bills and maintain a priority list of key legislation.
- Provide regular updates to the Legislative and Public Affairs Committee on state and federal matters.
- Host legislative tours.
- Engage in Advocacy Days in Sacramento and Washington DC twice a year.
- Take positions on bills that could affect OCSD or the industry.
- Work with industry organizations on state and federal issues to ensure OCSD's positions are communicated.
- Partner with industry organizations to co-host virtual events and activities.
- Manage the legislative advocates' contracts and facilitate regular communication between lobbyists, staff, and the Board of Directors.

#### **8. Category: Grants Coordination**

Program Manager: Rebecca Long

Program Coordinator/Support: Kelly Newell, Gregg Deterding, and Cheryl Scott

Goal (what): Monitor, track, and apply for grants available to OCSD.

Objective (measure): Apply and obtain grants for qualified OCSD projects and programs.

Strategy (why): Outside funding is important in moving OCSD projects and programs forward. With ongoing attention to government spending, it is vital for OCSD to apply for and secure grants to offset costs when available.

Tactics (how):

- Apply for two grants a year based on availability.
- Develop Grant Policy during fiscal year 2020-2021.
- Research grant opportunities and report out to the Legislative and Public Affairs Committee.
- Seek appropriations and grants and provide support to other divisions seeking grant funding.
- Secure letters of support.
- Publicize grant awards received.
- Create and measure outcomes.

## **9. Category: Local Government Affairs**

Program Manager: Daisy Covarrubias

Program Coordinators/Support: All PAO staff

Goal (what): Ensure that local elected officials, member agencies, stakeholders, and OCSD Board Members are actively engaged in the work of OCSD.

Objective (measure): Provide at least two communication tools per month.

Strategy (why): Keeping OCSD's influential public engaged in OCSD's projects and accomplishments are critical to the support and success of our agency.

Tactics (how):

- Provide Board of Director's with speaking points following every OCSD board meeting that can be used when reporting back to their respective councils and community groups.
- Facilitate an orientation for new Board members.
- Develop and keep a current list of monthly informational presentations.
- Maintain an informational presentation video library for the Board of Directors on key agency topics.
- Provide regular reports to the Legislative and Public Affairs Committee.
- Develop OCSD's Annual Report.
- Publish a *Five Minutes Per Month*, each month.
- Coordinate presentations to each member agency.
- Participate in government affairs committees.
- Invite new council members within OCSD's service area to take a tour of OCSD.
- Create and distribute quarterly outreach tool kits for member agency PIOs to help them easily share and disseminate information about OCSD.
- Host a "State of the District" event for influential leaders throughout the infrastructure and water/wastewater industry, including virtual option.

## **10. Category: Crisis Management**

Program Manager: Rebecca Long

Program Coordinators/Support: All PAO Staff

Goal: Ensure the Public Affairs Office serves as the primary spokesperson for OCSD during normal business and crisis scenarios and facilitates the dissemination of information.

Objective: Ensure that the PIOs in the PAO can respond in a crisis. Provide a crisis communication training course every two years by an outside consultant and an annual refresher course by staff.

Strategy: It is imperative during a crisis that OCSD be proactive and provide clear and effective messaging to employees, public, and the media.

Tactics (how):

- Maintain an updated crisis communication plan including regular briefings with staff to identify possible issues and responses.
- Maintain and update PAO's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP).
- Work with Risk and Safety Management on Public Affairs' role in an emergency, including our role via the Integrated Emergency Response Plan.
- Ensure proper procedures are in place for Board, employees, and public notification.
- Maintain updated contact lists for resource, member, and partnering agencies to coordinate and assist during crisis.
- Develop protocols on everyday PAO tasks to facilitate the operations of the group in a time of crisis.

## **11. Category: General Manager Support**

Program Manager: Daisy Covarrubias

Program Coordinators/Support: All PAO Staff

Goal: Ensure the General Manager and Assistant General Managers are supported with information necessary to communicate to the varied OCSD audiences.

Objective: Develop monthly communication pieces on behalf of the General Manager. Ensure General Manager (or designee) is participating and involved in promoting OCSD's initiatives.

Strategy: Collaborate with the General Manager to prepare communication and messaging that reflects the mission and vision of OCSD.

Tactics (how):

- Assist the General Manager and the Assistant General Managers with keeping the Board Members informed and up to date with OCSD activities.
- Assist in the development of the General Manager's Monthly Report.
- Develop talking points for Board and Committee meetings.
- Develop material and speaking points for presentations and speaking engagements.
- Support the development of the OCSD Strategic Plan.
- Assist in the development of the General Managers Annual Work Plan.

- Manage *Ask the GM* questions submitted.
- Coordinate and support VIP tours guided by General Manager and Assistant General Managers.

### **Closing Comments**

This plan is a broad outline of the Public Affairs Office program. As new issues arise, new functions and duties will evolve as well. The role of the Public Affairs Office is to stay ahead of issues, be responsive and flexible to meet the needs of the agency. We will adjust our program accordingly.

### **Appendix**

- A. Highlights of Performance Results from Fiscal Years 2018/2019 -2019/2020
- B. Public Affairs Portfolio Fiscal Year 2019/2020



## **Appendix A: Highlights of Performance Results from FY 2018/2019 and 2019/2020**

- Over 75 construction outreach pieces distributed regarding specific CIP projects reaching over 155,0000 people
- 800 internal communications publications: 3 Things to know email, Digester, Pipeline and MyOCSD
- 11 internal events
- 18 published news releases
- Over 30 articles mentioning and/or focusing on OCSD
- 1,350 Social Media posts reaching over 400,000 people
- 85 Website posts
- 17 Community Events reaching nearly 12,000 people
- 54 Speaking Engagements (8 career days)
- 283 Tours reaching approximately 4,534 guests
- 1,700 students reached via Sewer Science Program
- 22 Agency Awards Received
- 2 State of the District events reaching 215 guests
- 2 grants were successfully applied for and received totaling \$42,000 for Headquarters Project and Tour Signage
- 40 legislative bills monitored and tracked
- 4 Federal Position letters and 12 State Position letters issued
- Governor agreed with 2 of our bills/positions:
  - SB 212: Jackson. Solid waste: pharmaceutical and sharps waste stewardship.
  - SB 1440: Hueso. Energy: biomethane: biomethane procurement

### **New Tactics Introduced**

- Member Agency Outreach Toolkit
- Board Member Speaking Points
- Virtual Town Hall
- Orange County Polling
- Communications Audit
- Paid Advertisement – OC Register Water Insert
- Regional Outreach Program (CIP)
- Tour signage



**Public Affairs Division**  
10844 Ellis Avenue  
Fountain Valley, CA 92708

