

Orange County
Sanitation District
**Succession
Planning
Engagement**

ORANGE COUNTY SANITATION DISTRICT



April 29, 2026

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Executive Summary

Background

Between February 2025 and April 2026, Macias Gini & O'Connell (MGO) evaluated the Orange County Sanitation District's (OC San) human capital management and workforce succession planning practices. This review was conducted in alignment with the 2025 Enterprise Risk Assessment where talent acquisition, talent retention and succession planning were 3 of 16 identified risks.

To conduct the assessment, MGO met with the general manager, Human Resources leadership and staff, internal customers, reviewed the prior two fiscal years' operating metrics, and current partnership and training programs. We reviewed succession planning through the following criteria:

- **Governance:** Establishing workforce succession planning as an organizational priority, supported by appropriate budget and time resources. This responsibility rests with the Board, General Manager, and Executive Management Team (EMT).
- **Framework:** Aligning HR resources with succession planning priorities, and continuously gather feedback to improve execution and adapt to strategic needs. This is primarily the responsibility of the Human Resources Department.
- **Implementation:** Executing the succession plan through collaborative recruitment efforts, employee coaching, documentation, cross-training, and fostering a culture of growth and continuous improvement. Direct supervisors are primarily responsible for implementation.

OC San's Governance, Framework and Guidance are strong and well established. While a formal succession plan is not documented, there is an established data-informed framework to forecast and plan for potential workforce transitions. Additionally, OC San has prioritized training and education funds to invest in employee development. The Human Resources Department has developed strong relationships with local higher education institutions for a strong internship program and leadership academy. They also manage the performance management, goal setting, and individual development plan requirements.

While governance and framework elements are well established, implementation of workforce succession planning is inconsistent at the department level. While, the operations and maintenance department has well established goal setting criteria, position guides, and ongoing training, other departments are not as advanced in their implementation. Our recommendations for OC San focus on minor improvements at the governance and framework levels, with more consistent application of workforce planning at the implementation level to realize the goals of the workforce planning strategy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Observations and Recommendations

The initial observations and recommendations outlined below are based on the data reviewed and discussions with HR Department leadership, functional subject matter experts, and department hiring managers. These observations represent current practices and opportunities. Observation risk levels are categorized as high (red), medium (orange) and low (yellow) in the table below with corresponding recommendations. Detailed guidance and analysis are provided in the report appendices.

#	Categories	Observations	Recommendations
1	Succession Plan Development	Absence of a modern, documented succession framework – High Inconsistent internal pipelines – Medium	Document OC San’s succession plan to communicate strategy internally and externally.
2	Talent Acquisition & Marketing	Some recruitment timelines remain lengthy – High Inconsistent competitiveness for specialized and trade roles – High	Reconsider including private-sector benchmarks in the classification and compensation study to better compete for hard-to-fill critical positions.
3	Performance Evaluation & Coaching	Inconsistent manager check-ins and coaching practices – High Goal-setting discipline varies across departments – Low	Incorporate coaching requirements as core competencies in performance reviews for position levels, supervisors and above, to reinforce the cultural expectation of a continually growing and training workforce. Require departments to set position goals that align with department goals, appropriate to the position level, within the Cornerstone HRIS system.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank OC San, and in particular the Human Resources and Finance Departments, for their ongoing collaboration throughout this project. Focus group participants and individual interviewees provided well thought-out and candid feedback.

OBJECTIVE

Objective

The primary objective of this assessment was to conduct a comprehensive review of OC San's current succession planning and human capital practices to evaluate OC San's readiness to sustain leadership continuity and meet future workforce demands.

Scope & Methodology

This assessment focused on evaluating key components of OC San's succession planning and broader human capital practices to identify strengths, risks, and opportunities to enhance workforce continuity. The scope included:

- Reviewing OC San workforce planning documents including policies, organizational charts, compensation data, exit interview summaries, and HRIS reports to assess the current state of talent pipelines, role criticality, and workforce demographics.
- Assessing succession planning practices by evaluating identification of skill-gap trends, knowledge-transfer processes, and alignment of current practices with future organizational needs.
- Conducting interviews and focus groups with HR leadership, department managers and selected staff to understand workforce risks, development expectations, operational pain points, and succession-readiness perceptions across the organization.
- Evaluating workforce development programs including leadership development offerings, supervisory training, technical rotations, internships, and continuing education to determine the effectiveness of internal mobility pathways and alignment with long-term talent planning.
- Analyzing recruitment and talent acquisition processes to understand sourcing effectiveness, hiring cycle trends, and the integration of succession considerations into staffing decisions.

The assessment was conducted in three phases: information gathering, analysis, and reporting.

Information Gathering

During this phase, the MGO team:

- Initiated with an entrance meeting in January 2026.
- Requested and reviewed supporting documents including internal forms, procedural documents, and example process documentation.
- Interviewed staff from Collections Facilities O&M, Construction Management, Environmental Services, Financial Management, General Manager's Office, Human Resources, Information Technology, Plant Operations, and Public Affairs to validate and corroborate observations.

SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

Analysis

During this phase, the MGO team:

- Reviewed key policy and procedure documents, including:
 - Human resources performance indicators and retirement eligibility forecasts
 - Bargaining unit contracts and compensation philosophy and structure
 - Employee retirement system eligibility rules and current workforce succession planning tools
 - Performance management, onboarding/offboarding, and leadership and staff development materials
- Documented interview results and identified themes

Reporting

During this phase, the MGO team:

- Conducted meetings with the project sponsor summarizing observations
- Delivered a draft report
- Conducted an exit meeting
- Reviewed and documented any corrective actions taken in response to observations

Current State

While OC San's most recent succession plan document is from 2006, they execute strong supporting operations. OC San has already implemented several major components of effective succession planning, many of which exceed what is typically observed in comparable public sector agencies. These efforts reflect a consistent commitment to long-term talent sustainability, leadership preparedness, and strategic workforce management. Overall, OC San executes well the major component parts of a strong workforce planning infrastructure. Below is a summary of the most notable strengths.

Element	Strengths
Succession Plan Development	• Leaders openly discuss long term workforce continuity needs, creating a strong foundation for a formalized succession planning model. • Retirement trends and development needs are incorporated into annual planning, supporting intentional staffing decisions. • Departments use tools such as standard operating procedures (SOPs) and role matrices to reinforce operational coverage and continuity.
Talent Acquisition & Marketing	• Department leaders are proactively building organizational redundancy by developing talent for critical roles; including executive level and division-specific positions to ensure operational continuity under all staffing scenarios. • HR maintains strong partnerships with local education and vocational institutions to align talent pipelines with OC San needs. Employee applications nearly doubled between FY 2024–25 (15 applications) and FY 2025–26 (28 applications). Since FY 2019–20, 24 employees have submitted multiple applications in competition for six program positions, resulting in the selection of 13 participants over time. • Structured rotational and internship programs effectively support skill development and internal hiring for the operations and maintenance departments. • HR and hiring managers collaborate closely on sourcing strategies, ensuring a consistent recruitment approach. • Process improvements have strengthened hiring timelines and reduced onboarding delays. • Recruitment materials effectively communicate OC San's culture and public service value proposition.
Performance Evaluation & Coaching	• OC San maintains a structured evaluation cycle paired with goal setting and required individual development plans (IDPs). • HR provides consistent guidance to supervisors, supporting clarity and accountability in performance management.

CURRENT STATE

Training & Development

- Leadership, supervisory, and soft skill programs are well received and promote internal career mobility.
- Employees have access to meaningful development resources, including coaching and certifications.
- Teams complete extensive, role-based operations and maintenance training that is tracked quarterly, including web-based training for supervisors and operators, safety and emergency response tabletops, permit compliance training, and required tabletop modules with defined due dates.

Compensation & Benefits

- A 75th percentile compensation target supports the strategy to competitively attract and retain talent.
- Benefits offerings, including tuition reimbursement, contribute to ongoing employee development.

Overall, OC San's workforce programs, including leadership development, technical rotations, internships, clerical pathways, and education reimbursement form a comprehensive development ecosystem that supports internal mobility and strengthens pipeline reliability. Combined with a competitive 75th-percentile compensation target and stable union partnerships, these elements position OC San well for future succession planning maturity and workforce continuity.

The observations and conclusions summarized above were developed through a review of available documentation, workforce data provided by OC San, and structured interviews with executive leadership, department leaders, and Human Resources staff. This work was not intended to function as a formal audit or detailed attribute level testing of each workforce program area. Rather, conclusions reflect consistent themes identified across interviews, corroborated by policy documents, program descriptions, and operational practices shared during the review. Taken together, these sources provide reasonable support for the conclusions regarding OC San's current succession planning and workforce management strengths.

Observations and Recommendations

OC San's current state reflects an organization with strong foundational building blocks, with opportunities to further enhance structure, documentation, and formalized strategy. Key opportunities for improvement include establishing a documented succession plan strategy to guide future resource allocation and ensuring more consistent adoption of training and development practices across departments. Addressing these gaps will be essential to sustaining service continuity, strengthening internal mobility, and ensuring organizational resilience in the years ahead.

The following observations and recommendations outline targeted actions OC San can take to build a more robust, proactive, and sustainable succession planning approach. Together, these recommendations are designed to help the organization develop a clear roadmap, reinforce leadership development, and support strategic talent decisions that ensure long-term organizational strength. Additional supporting sample templates, analysis and guidance are provided in the appendices.

Succession Planning Element	Observations	Recommendations
Succession Plan Development	Absence of a modern, documented succession framework. OC San's succession plan is from 2006 and has not been updated, leaving the organization without a documented philosophy, governance structure, or standardized process to assess readiness or build candidate pools. While the core components of a succession plan are executed, this creates vulnerabilities in leadership continuity, especially for executive and technical roles.	Document OC San's succession plan strategy. Include the key HR functions that comprise workforce succession planning. This can be completed through updating the 2006 document or identifying succession planning components in board presentations to note workforce succession planning components when providing HR updates. An outline of workforce succession planning component elements with metric measurement options is provided in <i>Appendix A</i> .
	Inconsistent internal pipelines. While some departments have tools like responsibility matrices, the organization lacks a unified method for developing candidate pools or tracking readiness for critical roles. Newly introduced IDPs in June of 2025 are required but not widely accepted across employees. However, for FY 2025-26, 94.6% or 610 of 645 IDPs have been entered in Cornerstone.	
Talent Acquisition & Marketing	Some recruitment timelines remain lengthy. Despite improvements in background checks and a variety of flexible recruitment approaches to increase applicant responses (continuous recruitment, eligibility lists, internal	Reconsider including private-sector benchmarks in the classification and compensation study during the next

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Succession Planning Element	Observations	Recommendations
	operator certification training, acting pay and under-filling positions) some recruitment processes can extend 3 months. This contributes to lost candidates and vacancy risk in critical roles. Inconsistent competitiveness for specialized and trade roles. Compensation benchmarking against local public agencies does not reflect private-sector or sanitation-industry realities, reducing competitiveness for engineering, construction, technical, and trade classifications. Notably, five positions have remained vacant for more than 200 days. MGO's review of the Recruitment Strategy Forms (RSF) revealed a clear contrast between a streamlined recruitment cycle and a significantly delayed one. The efficient process moved from initial RSF meeting to offer letter in 46 days, supported by a one-day subject matter expert review, early confirmation of interview dates, and an internal promotion pathway that minimized sourcing time. In contrast, the delayed process spanned 214 days from initial request to offer. Several factors contributed to the extended timeline: posting delays driven by slow responses on job-posting language that required repeated follow-ups; the decision to coordinate Electrical and Civil/Mechanical interviews on a single date, which created scheduling bottlenecks; large interview panels (five for Electrical, four for Civil/Mechanical), further constraining availability; and interview dates that had to be shifted to accommodate both panel schedules and the department's transition into headquarters.	negotiation window. Many hard-to-fill positions compete directly with the private sector. Using private-sector benchmarks would enable OC San to strategically set compensation based on market competition at the position level, while still maintaining internal equity. Additional option includes classification adjustments for hard-to-fill positions, referral incentives, and recruitment incentives.

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Succession Planning Element	Observations	Recommendations
Performance Evaluation & Coaching	Inconsistent manager check-ins and coaching practices. Although policies outline expectations, actual frequency and quality of manager interactions differ across teams, limiting consistent growth and accountability.	Incorporate coaching requirements as core competencies in performance reviews for position levels supervisor and above to reinforce the cultural expectation of a continually growing and training workforce.
	Goal-setting discipline varies across departments. Cornerstone provides structured tools, but some departments do not fully leverage the platform, resulting in inconsistent goal clarity and misalignment.	Require employees to set individual goals in Cornerstone HRIS system that directly align with the department goals established by department managers. Implementing this consistently across OC San will strengthen goal-setting discipline, support clearer alignment of priorities, and create a more uniform coaching and performance environment organization-wide.

Additional Considerations

The table below summarizes information gathered during the project that did not warrant formal observation but is relevant to overall employee support and identifies opportunities for additional HR involvement.

Succession Planning Element	Observation	Recommendation
Talent Acquisition & Marketing	Entry-level staffing variability. Some divisions report insufficient entry-level candidates and greater difficulty filling experienced roles, while Operations notes that adding a small number of true entry-level roles would cushion vacancy impacts and strengthen long-term pipelines; OC San's internship program and automatic progression of Operators in Training to Operators upon achieving required certification and hours already serves as a feeder within the one-year OCERS eligibility limit.	Conduct a targeted, division-specific assessment of entry-level staffing needs to determine where additional roles would meaningfully support internal pipelines. Establish a consistent framework for identifying which operational functions benefit most from added entry-level capacity and where underfilling or reclassification strategies remain more effective.
Training & Development	Training budget planning challenges. Training relies on a two-year budget cycle, but actual training costs (especially vendor-led programs) fluctuate significantly, making planning difficult and sometimes delaying course delivery.	Create an HR training support services checklist for HR Analysts to review to accompany the existing agenda during the quarterly meetings. Share the checklist with managers as a reminder of the centralized services offered.
	Soft-skills training not required for frontline staff. Leadership and soft-skills programs are well-received but are not consistently promoted by managers across all employee groups, limiting district-wide culture development.	Implement soft-skills training for individual contributors to feed into the leadership training program.
	Inconsistent tracking of learning engagement. Training hours and transcripts are tracked, but the organization does not yet measure learning program impact or participation disparities across divisions.	Create a centralized list of approved training vendors informed by departmental experience and implement a feedback loop that captures vendor performance to guide future selection and ensure consistency in training quality.
Termination	Institutional knowledge loss risk for administrative departments. Inconsistent knowledge transfer prior to	Require employees complete position guides and begin with critical positions. Emphasis should be placed on

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Succession Planning Element	Observation	Recommendation
	departures is resulting in institutional knowledge loss for some departments. While checklists exist, structured knowledge capture processes (e.g., documented transition plans, cross-training plans) are not consistently used, increasing operational risk.	professional positions, as operations and maintenance personnel have implemented this practice. A sample position guidance is provided as a position profile template under separate cover.

Conclusion

OC San's workforce succession planning is well executed in relation to other public sector entities, supported by prioritization and strategic direction from the general manager, structured guidance and framework provided by the Human Resources Department, and formal documentation and continual training within the operations and maintenance departments. The observations identified in this review reflect common challenges seen across California public entities such as candidate competition with the private sector and time constraints limiting employee availability for documentation.

Implementing these observations will build upon OC San's strong foundation. Documenting workforce succession planning in a formal plan will serve as both a communication tool for the Board and public and a strategic guide for future EMT members. Incorporating private-sector compensation benchmarks will provide a more complete view of labor market competition, particularly for hard-to-fill positions. Additional options include classification adjustments for hard-to-fill positions and implementing recruitment referral incentives. Lastly, aligning individual goals with departmental objectives enhances employee purpose, documenting job guides reinforces OC San's collaborative, organization-first culture and both put employee development and growth directly in the hands of supervisors and employees.

Implementing the targeted improvements outlined in this report will help OC San build upon its solid foundation, streamline processes, and enhance long-term employee workforce resilience. Doing so will position OC San to better navigate staffing fluctuations while continuing to reliably support mission-critical operations and program delivery.

Appendix A – Succession Planning Framework

1. Definition of Succession Planning

Succession planning is a strategic, systematic process that identifies critical organizational roles, defines the competencies and experiences required for success, and develops internal talent capable of assuming these roles within a 12–36-month time horizon. This process mitigates operational risk, ensures leadership continuity, preserves institutional knowledge, and aligns workforce capabilities with OC San’s long-term strategic priorities.

2. Succession Planning Philosophy

OC San’s succession planning philosophy is centered on long-term sustainability, leadership continuity, and intentional investment in talent. The organization prioritizes the identification and development of successors for critical positions, ensuring that resources for talent acquisition, learning and development, and knowledge transfer are focused where they have the highest impact.

Key principles:

- **Prioritization of Critical Positions:** Resource allocation for recruitment, development, and knowledge transfer is driven by the identification of positions that, if left vacant, pose significant operational or strategic risk.
- **Future-Focused Development:** Successors are developed to meet both current and future organizational requirements.
- **Shared Accountability:**
 - HR designs and maintains the framework.
 - Managers and supervisors execute development actions and evaluate readiness.
 - Leadership/GM sets priorities, authorizes investment, and monitors progress.
- **Transparency and Engagement:** Individuals identified as high-potential or successor candidates are informed, engaged, and provided clarity about expectations and development opportunities.

3. Identification of Critical Positions

Definition of a Critical Position

A critical position is a role essential to OC San’s business continuity, regulatory compliance, operational performance, or institutional knowledge retention. These positions require technical expertise, leadership responsibility, or highly specialized knowledge that is difficult to replace quickly.

APPENDIX A – SUCCESSION PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Criteria for Identifying Critical Positions

- Operational impact if left vacant
- Strategic importance to OC San’s mission and long-term goals
- Difficulty of replacement internally or externally
- Specialized knowledge concentration within the role
- Recruitment lead time and onboarding complexity
- Retirement risk within 1–5 years

Department	Critical Positions	Retirement Eligible	Total Employees	Percent Eligible
Engineering Division				
Operations Division				
Financial Management Division				
Human Resources				

4. Methodology: Annual Succession Planning Process

This section outlines *how* succession planning is conducted at OC San, integrating SHRM methodology and OC San’s annual talent processes.

Step 1: Identify and Validate Critical Roles (Annual Review)

- Review organizational charts, workforce data, and retirement eligibility.
- Conduct annual retirement and vacancy risk analysis (current + 5-year outlook).
- Leadership/GM finalizes the official list of critical roles for the cycle.

Step 2: Develop or Update Role Profiles

- HR collaborates with department leadership to define competency-based profiles.
- Profiles include current competencies and future-state expectations aligned with OC San’s mission, regulatory environment, technological changes, and strategic plans.

Step 3: Bench Strength Analysis & Talent Assessment

Managers evaluate employee performance and potential using:

- Current-year performance evaluations
- Potential and leadership capability ratings
- 360-degree feedback (if used)

APPENDIX A – SUCCESSION PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Successor readiness categories:

- **Ready Now** (0–12 months)
- **Ready Soon** (1–2 years)
- **Ready Later** (3–5 years)

HR leads a calibration session to ensure consistent evaluation across divisions.

Step 4: Identify Successor Candidates & Pipeline Vulnerabilities

- Primary and secondary successors identified where possible
- Gaps and high-risk roles documented
- HR compiles a cross-organizational view of bench strength

Step 5: Individual Development Plans (IDPs)

For each successor or high-potential employee, IDPs include:

- Technical skills training
- Leadership development and behavioral competencies
- Mentoring, coaching, or job shadowing
- Cross-functional rotations
- Project-based developmental assignments

Step 6: Transparent Engagement and Ongoing Development

- Managers hold quarterly development check-ins
- Employees participate in goal-setting and self-assessment
- HR facilitates career discussions and learning opportunities

Step 7: Monitor Progress & Adjust Annually

Succession plans are reviewed annually with updated metrics such as:

- % of critical roles with identified successors
- Successor readiness distribution (Now/Soon/Later)
- Internal mobility and promotion rates
- Development plan completion rates
- Overall organizational bench strength trends

HR compiles this information into an Annual Succession Planning Report for executive leadership.

5. RACI Matrix: Roles & Responsibilities

R = Responsible | A = Accountable | C = Consulted | I = Informed

Activity	HR	Leadership/GM	Managers/Supervisors	Employees
Identify critical roles	R	A	C	I

APPENDIX A – SUCCESSION PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Develop competency profiles	R	A	C	I
Conduct talent assessments	C	A	R	I
Identify successors	C	A	R	I
Create IDPs	C	A	R	R
Quarterly check-ins	I	C	R	R
Annual reporting	R	A	C	I

6. Three-Year Rolling Prioritization Plan

OC San will maintain a rolling 3-year focus that evolves annually based on:

- Critical roles with immediate vacancy or retirement risk
- Roles with limited or no internal successors
- Roles that are high-cost or high-difficulty to recruit
- Roles undergoing technological, regulatory, or organizational change

Three-Year Focus Areas:

Year 1: Address immediate vulnerabilities; accelerate development for Ready-Now or Ready-Soon talent.

Year 2: Strengthen the pipeline and expand cross-training/rotational development.

Year 3: Build leadership capacity aligned with long-term organizational strategy and future skill needs.

Progress and priorities will be updated annually based on organizational changes, workforce trends, and leadership directives.

Appendix B – MGO Ratings Definitions

Observation Risk Rating Definitions		Report Rating Definitions	
Rating	Definition	Rating	Explanation
Low	Process improvements exist but are not an immediate priority for OC San. Taking advantage of these opportunities would be considered best practice for OC San.	Low	Adequate internal controls are in place and operating effectively. Few, if any, improvements in the internal control structure are required. Observation should be limited to only low risk observations identified or moderate observations which are not pervasive in nature.
Medium	Process improvement opportunities exist to help OC San meet or improve its goals, meet or improve its internal control structure, and further protect its brand or public perception. This opportunity should be considered in the near term.	Medium	Certain internal controls are either: - Not in place or are not operating effectively, which in the aggregate, represent a significant lack of control in one or more of the areas within the scope of the Assessment. - Several moderate control weaknesses in one process, or a combination of high and moderate weaknesses which collectively are not pervasive.
High	Significant process improvement opportunities exist to help OC San meet or improve its goals, meet or improve its internal control structure, and further protect its brand or public perception. This opportunity should be considered as soon as possible.	High	In consideration of the magnitude of risks to the Program, significant reporting and internal control deficiencies exist, are not in place, or are operating ineffectively in the category area within the scope of this Assessment. Business risks exist which have the potential to create situations that could significantly impact the Authority. - Critical control weaknesses (breakdown) in the overall control environment in part of the business or the process being assessed. - Significant non-compliance with laws and regulations. - Mid to High-risk observations which are pervasive in nature.
Not Rated	Observation identified is not considered a control or process improvement opportunity but should be considered by management or the Board, as appropriate.	Not Rated	Adequate internal controls are in place and operating effectively. No reportable observations were identified during the Assessment.

APPENDIX B – MGO RATINGS DEFINITIONS

- (1) *Risk ratings assigned by the MGO Team are based on professional judgement. Professional judgement is generally defined by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) as the application of the accumulated knowledge gained through training and experience and by making use of the ethical standards, which results in making informed decisions about the level of risks and the courses of recommended actions that are appropriate in specific circumstances.*

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