

# Application to Fill Vacancy on the SMCCD Board of Trustees

The Santa Monica Community College District is seeking applications from District residents interested in being appointed to a vacant seat on the Board of Trustees until the next regularly scheduled Board election in November 2026 when a new four-year term will be lled.

Applications are due January 10, 2025

Links to SMC websites, click [here](#).

Name \*

Patrick Acosta

Home Address \*

.....

City, State and Zip Code \*

Santa Monica, CA 90404

Home/Cell Telephone Number \*

.....

**Business Telephone Number \***

.....

**Email Address \***

.....

**Occupation \***

Building Systems Technician

.....

**Company \***

City of Santa Monica

.....

**Business Address \***

.....

**City, State, and Zip Code \***

Santa Monica, CA 90401

.....

Please provide the following information. You are also welcome to attach a current resume. \*

\*Education (list degrees or highest year complete and the college/school.

\*Employment History (last ten years)

\*Community Affiliation

I was born and raised here in Santa Monica and continue to live and work here. I have worked for the City of Santa Monica for the almost 11 years now. Mainly in the Public Works Department where I have had experience on the admin team for the City Recycling Division, Facilities Maintenance Division, also as part of the Santa Monica Police Department for several years, and then back to our Facilities Maintenance Division where I am responsible for the day to day fixes and maintenance of all City Facilities and ensuring that the maintenance projects are planned out and seen through. I graduated from SAMOHI in 2011 and went on to receive my AA in Public Policy from Santa Monica College. I then transferred to UCLA where I received my Bachelors Degree in History with a minor in Urban & Regional Studies. I also have trade school experience from LA Trade Tech.

Please check if applicable. I am related to a current employee of the Santa Monica Community College District. \*

Yes

No

I understand that I may not be an employee of the Santa Monica Community College District and serve as a member of the Board of Trustees. \*

Yes

No

To be eligible, an individual must be at least 18 years old; must be a resident of Santa Monica or Malibu; must be a registered voter; and must not be disqualified from holding a civil office by the Constitution or law of the state. \*

I certify that I meet all eligibility requirements.

Yes

No

Please state: \*

1. Why you are seeking appointment to the Santa Monica Community College District Board of Trustees, and
2. The skills, abilities, and experiences you bring to the work of the Board of Trustees

I am seeking appointment to the Santa Monica Community College District Board of Trustees because I would like to contribute to making the college the great place that it is. I also bring 4 years of experience from serving on the SMC Citizen Bond Oversight Committee. As well, I am a homegrown product of the Santa Monica Unified School District, 2011 Graduate of SAMOHI, 3/4 year Student Athlete SMC graduate that was able to transfer to UCLA where I received my BA. This experience of going through our local school system, SMC, and transferring to UCLA is a prime example of what one can accomplish after attending SMC. I am able to work as an individual and in groups, think outside of the box, and listen to others amongst many other things that could positively impact the college.

Describe the public service and community involvement you have had in Santa Monica and Malibu that would inform your work on the Board of Trustees. \*

I have ran two times in prior elections for the SMC Board of Trustees, and both times I received a substantial amount of votes. I think it shows that the community believes that I can perform the duties of what is being asked. As I stated before, I also served 4 years on the SMC Citizen Bond Oversight Committee.

What is your understanding of the mission and purpose of the California Community Colleges? \*

My understanding is that the mission and purpose of the California community colleges are that one can attend and gain an education to enhance their skill sets and expand their knowledge at an affordable price. That person can then better their chances at growing in the workforce and or furthering their education at a 4 year University. While SMC is outstanding in Academics, it is also great for Athletics, Emeritus programs, Music programs, and many other areas for people to explore.

What is the role of the Board of Trustees in relation to its constituencies: (1) the communities of Santa Monica and Malibu; (2) the students, administrators, faculty and staff of the college? \*

The role of the Board of Trustees in relation to its constituencies is that it they should be able to provide planning and financial oversight. As well, this includes community engagement, listening to input from the community, students, and the faculty. They are responsible for working with and listening to administrators and staff and to act in good faith to approve/move projects forward for the better of the college and its community. This includes the Santa Monica and Malibu Communities.

Given SMC's budget for 2024-2025, what would be your priorities for the upcoming Santa Monica College budget? \*

I believe that the college should continue planning to either replace/construct new facilities that are necessary to continue providing the excellent educational services that are offered through the college. As a successful product of SMC, I will bring first hand experience to the table. I also feel that while the current relationship with the school district is a positive one, I would like to continue improving and strengthening that relationship.

What do you see as the major issues currently facing Santa Monica College? \*

The major issues that the college is currently facing is the need to continue its strategic planning of its new construction of facilities and ensuring that they are continuing to offer top tier education and offerings for students to participate in.

It would be a pleasure to work with you all, and having considered the fact that I have received a substantial amount of the votes in prior elections, I feel the people of our community would be satisfied as well. I believe that I can contribute and make a positive impact as a Board Member. Thank you.

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Name \*

Kera Blades

Home Address \*

City, State and Zip Code \*

Santa Monica CA 90404

Home/Cell Telephone Number \*

**Business Telephone Number \***

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**Email Address \***

.....

**Occupation \***

Executive Director

.....

**Company \***

Santa Monica Black Empowerment Association

.....

**Business Address \***

.....

**City, State, and Zip Code \***

Santa Monica CA 90401

.....

Please provide the following information. You are also welcome to attach a current resume. \*

\*Education (list degrees or highest year complete and the college/school.

\*Employment History (last ten years)

\*Community Affiliation

#### EDUCATION

University of South Florida

- Master of Science in Hospitality Management
- Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management

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#### EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Santa Monica Black Empowerment Association (SMBEA) – Co-Founder & Executive Director Santa Monica, CA | September 2021- Present

- Lead initiatives to provide resources and empowerment for underserved communities in Santa Monica.

Blades & Associates – Founder & CEO

Santa Monica, CA | 2017–Present

- Manage a 100% woman- and Black-owned marketing agency specializing in social media marketing, website development, software/app creation, brand development, and management consulting.
- Provide certified business coaching services for startups, assisting entrepreneurs with strategy and growth.

Jahvy International – Co-Founder & Managing Partner

Santa Monica, CA | 2019–Present

- Operate an import-export purchasing and procurement company serving Belize, Jamaica, and the U.S. Caribbean diaspora.

Hemera Distributors – Founder & Partner

Santa Monica, CA | 2016–2019

- Established and managed a product marketing and distribution company in partnership with a Malaysian firm.

Ulrich Communications – Vice President, Sales & Marketing

Miami, FL | 2013–2015

- Developed destination branding strategies for hotels and tourism departments in the Bahamas and Jamaica.
- Designed customer surveys and assessments to identify needs and improve engagement.

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#### COMMUNITY AFFILIATION

Santa Monica History Museum – Director & Gala Committee Chair

Santa Monica College Associates – President

International Society of Black Latinos (ISBL) – Board Member

Santa Monica Rotary Club – Active Member

Dreams Come True (Nonprofit Organization, Belize) – Founder

NextGen Mentorship Program (SMC and SM Chamber of Commerce) – Former Mentor



Santa Monica Travel & Tourism – Former Commissioner and Board Member  
Rotary Club of Wesley Chapel, FL – Former Secretary, Treasurer, and Committee Chair  
Fundraising Boards  
• Served on boards including the Muscular Dystrophy Association and Florida Hospital.

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KEY SKILLS & QUALIFICATIONS

- Expertise in marketing, branding, and business development.
- Extensive leadership experience in nonprofit and community organizations.
- Strong commitment to public education, community service, and fostering entrepreneurship.
- Proven ability to work collaboratively and advocate for diverse communities.

Please check if applicable. I am related to a current employee of the Santa Monica Community College District. \*

- Yes
- No

I understand that I may not be an employee of the Santa Monica Community College District and serve as a member of the Board of Trustees. \*

- Yes
- No

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I certify that I meet all eligibility requirements.

- Yes
- No

Please state:

\*

1. Why you are seeking appointment to the Santa Monica Community College District Board of Trustees, and
2. The skills, abilities, and experiences you bring to the work of the Board of Trustees

Why I Am Seeking Appointment to the Santa Monica Community College District Board of Trustees:

As a long-standing advocate for community empowerment and education, I am deeply committed to ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities for all residents in the Santa Monica and Malibu communities. Santa Monica College is a vital institution that not only provides top-tier education but also serves as a beacon of hope for individuals seeking upward mobility and personal growth. By joining the Board of Trustees, I aim to contribute my expertise and passion for community-building to further the college's mission of academic excellence, innovation, and inclusivity.

Having lived in Santa Monica since 2017, I have seen firsthand the transformative power of education and local support systems. As a business owner, nonprofit leader, and community advocate, I recognize the critical role SMC plays in fostering social and economic progress. I am eager to lend my skills to guide the college's future and ensure its resources reach and uplift all members of our diverse local and international community.

Skills, Abilities, and Experiences I Bring to the Work of the Board of Trustees:

Leadership and Governance Experience:

As the co-founder and Executive Director of the Santa Monica Black Empowerment Association, I have a track record of creating impactful initiatives and working with diverse stakeholders to address community needs.

My service as a board member for organizations such as the Santa Monica History Museum, SMC Associates (as President), and Rotary Club and Santa Monica Travel & Tourism has equipped me with the skills to navigate complex governance structures and work collaboratively toward shared goals.

Business and Financial Acumen:

As the founder of Jahvy International, I have built and sustained a successful procurement & purchasing agency that requires strategic planning, financial oversight, and adaptability.

My experience includes managing budgets, developing sustainable business practices, and coaching partners to achieve financial success.

Commitment to Education and Workforce Development:

My professional background includes working with educational institutions, tourism boards, and private-sector organizations to create branding, training, and development programs that drive engagement and growth.

As a certified business coach, I have worked closely with startups and small businesses, helping them achieve their potential.

Community Engagement and Advocacy:

I have been actively involved in local and regional community-building efforts, including co-founding initiatives and serving on boards that prioritize equity, opportunity, and education.

My ability to listen to and represent diverse perspectives will ensure the Board's decisions align with the

needs of our community.

**Strong Communication and Collaboration Skills:**

My experience as a consultant, entrepreneur, and community leader has honed my ability to articulate ideas effectively and build consensus across various stakeholders.

I am eager to contribute these skills and experiences to ensure that SMC continues to be a leader in higher education and a pillar of support for our local communities.

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Describe the public service and community involvement you have had in Santa Monica and Malibu that would inform your work on the Board of Trustees. \*

Since moving to Santa Monica in 2017, I have been actively involved in numerous community organizations and initiatives that have deepened my understanding of the unique needs and aspirations of our residents. My experiences reflect a strong commitment to public service and a focus on creating programs that uplift underserved populations, promote equity, and foster community pride.

**Santa Monica Black Empowerment Association (SMBEA) – Co-founder and Executive Director:**  
Through SMBEA, I have spearheaded initiatives that provide resources, mentorship, and opportunities for underserved residents. Our programs focus on workforce development, financial literacy, and mental health awareness, all of which align with Santa Monica College's mission of empowering individuals through education and support.

**Santa Monica History Museum – Board Member and Gala Committee Chair:**  
As a board member, I help preserve and celebrate the history of Santa Monica while promoting inclusivity and community engagement. My role includes organizing our biggest fundraising event (yearly Gala); to ensure the museum continues to serve as an educational resource for residents and visitors.

**Santa Monica College Associates – President:**  
I lead efforts to strengthen connections between Santa Monica College and the broader community by supporting academic and cultural programming that enriches the lives of students and residents alike. I also work closely with the Black Collegians as a mentor, and organizing career expo and job fairs.

**Santa Monica Travel and Tourism – Former Commissioner:**  
During my tenure, I worked to promote Santa Monica as a welcoming and inclusive destination, ensuring that local businesses and cultural institutions were represented and supported.

**Rotary Club of Santa Monica – Member:**  
As an active member of Rotary International for over 18yrs, I contribute to local and international service projects that address critical community needs, including youth development and education initiatives.

**International Society of Black Latinos (ISBL) – Board Member:**  
I work with ISBL to honor Afro-Latino heritage through education and by uniting the community. The organization is youth-focused, offering scholarships and leadership programs to empower young people while fostering cultural pride and a deeper understanding of Afro-Latino contributions.

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**What is your understanding of the mission and purpose of the California Community Colleges? \***

The mission of the California Community Colleges is to provide accessible, affordable, and high-quality education to a diverse range of students. With a focus on student success, the system offers programs that prepare students for transfer to four-year universities, support workforce development, and promote lifelong learning. The colleges aim to address the educational, economic, and cultural needs of the communities they serve. By fostering an inclusive and equitable environment, the California Community Colleges empower students to achieve their academic, career, and personal goals, contributing to the overall well-being and vitality of local communities.

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**What is the role of the Board of Trustees in relation to its constituencies: (1) the communities of Santa Monica and Malibu; (2) the students, administrators, faculty and staff of the college? \***

1. The Board of Trustees is the governing body of the college and works as a bridge between the college and the communities of Santa Monica and Malibu. They also strive to build partnerships that enrich the community and deepen connections. By representing community interests, the Trustees ensure that the college aligns with the priorities and aspirations of the people it serves, while also creating a balanced approach that addresses diverse perspectives and needs.

2. The Board of Trustees plays a crucial role in supporting and guiding the students, administrators, faculty and staff of the college. As students are the heart of the institution, the Trustee's primary focus is to ensure their needs are met by providing a high standard of education and fostering a supportive learning environment.

For faculty and staff, the Board is dedicated to attracting and retaining high-quality employees who can deliver exceptional education and services. By prioritizing excellence in hiring and supporting professional development, the Board of Trustees help create a strong foundation for the college's success.

Administrators play an essential role in the institution's day-to-day operations, and the Board of Trustees work to ensure they have the resources and guidance needed to maintain efficiency and uphold the college's mission.

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Given SMC's budget for 2024-2025, what would be your priorities for the upcoming Santa Monica College budget? \*

Given the 2024-2025 budget for Santa Monica College, my priorities would focus on ensuring the long-term success and accessibility of the institution for all students, while also strengthening the college's position as a key community resource. First and foremost, I would prioritize student success and support services, such as counseling, career development, and academic advising, to enhance retention and graduation rates, especially for underserved populations, including low-income and first-generation college students. A critical need for many students is affordable housing, and I would prioritize funding initiatives that provide housing solutions or partnerships with local housing organizations, as the high cost of living in Santa Monica and Malibu creates barriers for students. Additionally, I would focus on expanding workforce development and career pathways by investing in vocational and technical programs aligned with local industry needs, ensuring that students are equipped with practical skills for in-demand jobs. Promoting equity and inclusion through funding for programs that support underrepresented groups, such as students of color, women, and non-traditional learners, would also be essential. Ensuring that the campus infrastructure remains modern and sustainable is another priority, with ongoing investments in facilities and technology that provide accessible, safe, and up-to-date learning environments. Finally, I would advocate for sustainability initiatives, including energy-efficient buildings and waste reduction practices, to make the college a model for environmental stewardship. By focusing on affordable housing, student success, workforce development, and sustainability, Santa Monica College can better serve its students and the surrounding communities, preparing individuals for future success while fostering a thriving, equitable campus.

**What do you see as the major issues currently facing Santa Monica College? \***

The major issues currently facing Santa Monica College include affordability, student access, and the need for greater support for underserved populations. The high cost of living in Santa Monica and surrounding areas creates significant barriers for many students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. Affordable housing for students is also a critical challenge, as many struggle to secure safe and reasonably priced accommodations in the area.

Beyond financial constraints, there is a growing demand for more comprehensive support services, including mental health counseling, career guidance, and academic advising. This is particularly important for first-generation college students and those from historically marginalized communities, who often require additional resources to help them succeed academically and professionally.

Another key issue is the need to better align SMC's curriculum with local workforce demands. Santa Monica is a hub for industries like tourism, which generates an estimated \$938 million in revenue annually. However, SMC currently lacks dedicated programs in hospitality management or tourism studies, which are critical fields in the local economy. By expanding and enhancing programs in these areas, SMC can better equip students with the skills needed for high-demand jobs in the region, creating stronger ties between the college, local industries, and the community. Addressing these gaps will provide students with more opportunities for local employment, ensuring that SMC continues to meet the evolving needs of Santa Monica and Malibu.

By addressing affordability, expanding support services, and aligning the curriculum with the local workforce, SMC can create a more inclusive, accessible, and community-focused educational experience.

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Applications are due January 10, 2025

Links to SMC websites, click [here](#).

Name \*

Zach Bruhnke

Home Address \*

City, State and Zip Code \*

Santa Monica, CA 90405

Home/Cell Telephone Number \*



**Business Telephone Number \***

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**Email Address \***

.....

**Occupation \***

Technology Executive

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**Company \***

HM Bradley, Inc.

.....

**Business Address \***

.....

**City, State, and Zip Code \***

Santa Monica, CA 90405

.....

Please provide the following information. You are also welcome to attach a current resume. \*

\*Education (list degrees or highest year complete and the college/school.

\*Employment History (last ten years)

\*Community Affiliation

Huntington High School, Shreveport, LA - 2005

Centenary College of Louisiana - Degree unfinished

Please check if applicable. I am related to a current employee of the Santa Monica Community College District. \*

Yes

No

I understand that I may not be an employee of the Santa Monica Community College District and serve as a member of the Board of Trustees. \*

Yes

No

To be eligible, an individual must be at least 18 years old; must be a resident of Santa Monica or Malibu; must be a registered voter; and must not be disqualified from holding a civil office by the Constitution or law of the state. \*

I certify that I meet all eligibility requirements.

Yes

No

Please state:

\*

1. Why you are seeking appointment to the Santa Monica Community College District Board of Trustees, and
2. The skills, abilities, and experiences you bring to the work of the Board of Trustees

I have been in technology since my Senior year of high school, starting my first software company 2 days after I turned 18. I have built and sold multiple software businesses over the past nearly 20 years and my current company has raised more than 70M in venture capital. We currently build software for banks and financial institutions (<https://www.getmbi.com>).

As a lifelong learner and college dropout I bring a unique perspective to a board looking to navigate a complicated and ever changing education system against a wave of new tools like AI that can dramatically disrupt the status quo over the next 5-10 years and beyond.

I believe that my background in software, current positioning at the forefront of the AI movement and deep knowledge of modern computer information systems would be an invaluable asset to the board of SMC.

I also live just a few blocks away on Pearl street so I have a vested interest in seeing the college succeed and continue to evolve to the types of programming that will help it thrive in the coming years.

Change is needed to stay in front of the coming wave of technology and we've yet to see the shifts happen yet, but I believe that there will be a larger need for more skilled workers or can leverage AI in the every day workforce and in traditional trades and vocations and that the schools who prioritize training for these new skillsets with thrive in the next decade.

I've spent my whole career skating to where the puck is going and I'd love to be a part of helping SMC do the same.

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Describe the public service and community involvement you have had in Santa Monica and Malibu that would inform your work on the Board of Trustees.

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I've been engaged in the Friends of Sunset park neighborhood community since moving to Sunset park 4 years ago, I've also lived in Santa Monica for over 12 years now. I've been a part of the Main Street Small Business Community in Santa Monica and have been a small business owner here since moving here over 12 years ago.

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## What is your understanding of the mission and purpose of the California Community Colleges? \*

The California Community Colleges (CCC) system is built around the principle of broad, affordable access to higher education, aimed at serving students from all walks of life. The mission involves:

1. **Open Access and Affordability:** The CCCs maintain an open-door admissions policy, ensuring that a wide range of students—including recent high school graduates, working adults, and those seeking career changes—can pursue higher education. By keeping tuition costs low, the system helps overcome financial barriers that might otherwise limit educational opportunities.
2. **Transfer Pathways to Four-Year Institutions:** The CCCs offer a well-established pathway for students to transfer to California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) campuses. Through structured programs and articulation agreements, these colleges enable students to complete their lower-division coursework close to home and at a lower cost before smoothly transitioning into bachelor's degree programs.
3. **Vocational and Workforce Training:** Beyond academic transfer degrees, the CCCs are committed to providing vocational, technical, and career-focused training. This mission aligns with the evolving needs of local industries and employers. By equipping students with current, in-demand skills, the CCCs help strengthen California's workforce and support the state's economic vitality. I believe this pillar is even more important in the coming years as many of these roles are ones that will not be overtaken, but rather augmented by AI and new technology advancements.
4. **Community and Personal Enrichment:** Finally, the CCC system addresses the broader educational needs of the communities they serve. This includes offering non-credit courses, continuing education, and programs aimed at personal development, civic engagement, and cultural enrichment. In doing so, the CCCs respond flexibly to local community interests and workforce demands, supporting lifelong learning and contributing to the overall quality of life in California's diverse communities.

The California Community Colleges strive to be inclusive gateways to higher education, engines of workforce development, and vital community resources—all while maintaining a strong commitment to accessibility, equity, and quality.

What is the role of the Board of Trustees in relation to its constituencies: (1) the communities of Santa Monica and Malibu; (2) the students, administrators, faculty and staff of the college? \*

The Board of Trustees serves as the governing body responsible for setting the strategic direction and overarching policies of the college.

#### 1. Communities of Santa Monica and Malibu:

- Representation of Public Interests: As publicly elected or appointed officials, Trustees act on behalf of the communities they serve. They ensure that the college's mission, values, and goals are aligned with the educational and workforce development needs of residents and local industries.

- Fiscal Stewardship and Accountability: The Board oversees the use of public funds, ensuring that taxpayer dollars are managed responsibly, budgets are balanced, and long-term financial health is maintained.

- Public Engagement and Transparency: Trustees foster trust and transparency through regular public meetings, open forums, and community outreach. They solicit feedback, remain accessible, and ensure that the college's initiatives reflect community priorities.

#### 2. Students, Administrators, Faculty, and Staff:

- Policy Formation and Oversight: The Board sets broad policies that guide the institution's operations, academic programs, and support services. While they do not manage day-to-day operations (this is the administration's role), they hold the administration accountable for implementing policy and achieving institutional goals.

- Quality and Academic Standards: Trustees ensure that academic programs and student support services meet high standards of quality, rigor, and relevance. They advocate for continuous improvement and accreditation compliance.

- Equity, Access, and Opportunity: The Board champions policies that promote equitable access to education, student success, and supportive work environments. They work to ensure that all segments of the college community—students, faculty, and staff—are treated fairly and have the resources they need to thrive.

- Leadership and Vision: By hiring, evaluating, and if necessary replacing the chief executive (e.g., the Superintendent/President), the Board ensures strong institutional leadership. They set the strategic vision that administrators translate into actionable plans, while also supporting faculty and staff in delivering educational excellence.

Overall, the Board of Trustees bridges the broader public interest with the internal governance of the institution, ensuring that the college remains financially sound, academically robust, accessible, and aligned with the evolving needs of both the communities it serves and the individuals it educates and employs.

Given SMC's budget for 2024-2025, what would be your priorities for the upcoming Santa Monica College budget? \*

### 1. Strengthening Enrollment, Retention, and Flexibility

- Flexible Course Delivery Models: Invest in robust hybrid and online learning platforms, faculty training, and accessible digital tools. This ensures that SMC remains attractive to students who value convenience and modern learning environments, ultimately boosting enrollment and retention.

- Targeted Outreach and Marketing: Dedicate resources to data-driven outreach initiatives that focus on underserved communities, returning adult learners, and career-focused students. By tailoring messaging and delivery, SMC can more effectively broaden its student base.

- Wraparound Student Support Services: Increase funding for tutoring, counseling, mental health services, and academic advising to ensure that students receive the comprehensive support they need to stay enrolled, progress, and complete their programs.

### 2. Enhancing Workforce Relevance and Program Innovation

- Curriculum and Program Modernization: Invest in updating existing programs and developing new ones aligned with current industry demands. Form a local business advisory committee to validate workforce needs, ensuring that the college is training students for in-demand, well-paying opportunities.

- Industry Partnerships and Experiential Learning: Commit funds to internships, apprenticeships, and job placement services. Building strong industry relationships provides students with hands-on experience and positions them for immediate employment after graduation.

### 3. Data-Driven Decision Making and Continuous Improvement

- Institutional Research Capacity: Allocate resources for robust data analytics tools and institutional research capabilities. By gaining clear insights into enrollment trends, student outcomes, and program effectiveness, the college can make evidence-based budget decisions and adapt more swiftly to changing circumstances.

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## What do you see as the major issues currently facing Santa Monica College? \*

The major issues currently facing Santa Monica College (SMC) generally align with the broader challenges affecting community colleges in California and the nation, as well as the unique circumstances of the college's service area:

### 1. Enrollment and Student Retention:

- Post-Pandemic Shifts: Fluctuations in enrollment due to changes in student behavior following the COVID-19 pandemic, including increased interest in online learning and a reluctance of some students to return to in-person classes. As a college dropout I bring a unique perspective on what drives highly motivated individuals to forego traditional education, particularly when you can learn so much online today.

- Competition and Alternatives: A growing number of online-only institutions and alternative credentialing programs offer students flexible and often faster pathways to skills and employment, increasing the competition for potential SMC enrollees. Personal experience as a college dropout underscores how readily available online resources can draw away even highly motivated learners.

### 2. Financial Sustainability and State Funding:

- Uncertain Budgets tied to enrollment: Like many community colleges, SMC faces unpredictable funding streams tied to enrollment and shifting legislative priorities. This uncertainty makes long-term budgeting, resource allocation, and ensuring the quality of academic and support services more complex.

- Strategic Resource Allocation: Ensuring that resources are directed toward modernizing technology, maintaining facilities, and delivering quality support services demands prudent, mission-focused financial stewardship.

### 3. Workforce Relevance and Program Innovation:

- Industry Partnerships and Skill Alignment: Rapid industry shifts require that SMC continuously update its curriculum, cultivate strong employer partnerships, and invest in career and technical education programs that yield job-ready graduates.

- Upgrading classrooms, online platforms, and learning tools ensures that students engage with current technologies, bolstering their readiness for modern workplaces.

In summary, SMC is at a pivotal point, needing to adapt its educational delivery, financial strategies, and student support services to a rapidly evolving environment. By embracing flexible learning models, strengthening equity and basic needs support, and forging tighter connections with industry, SMC can nurture student success and relevance in a changing world.

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Name \*

Dr. Luis Barrera Castañón

Home Address \*

City, State and Zip Code \*

Santa Monica, CA 90403

Home/Cell Telephone Number \*



**Business Telephone Number \***

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**Email Address \***

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**Occupation \***

Self-Employed

.....

**Company \***

LBC+ Consulting & Creative

.....

**Business Address \***

.....

**City, State, and Zip Code \***

Santa Monica, CA 90403

.....

Please provide the following information. You are also welcome to attach a current resume. \*

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\*Employment History (last ten years)

\*Community Affiliation

#### Education

CAL STATE, NORTHRIDGE

Educational Doctorate Degree, 2019

Master of Public Administration, 2015

U.C. BERKELEY

Bachelor of Arts Degree, 2006

SANTA MONICA COLLEGE

Associate of Arts Degree, 2003

#### Work History

LBC+ Consulting & Creative

1/2016 - Present

Develop policy plans, advocacy campaigns, quality assurance policies and processes, operational and organizational change strategies to local educational agencies, for-profit businesses and nonprofits including, but not limited to: Los Angeles Community College District, Los Angeles Unified School District, College of the Canyons, Saugus Union School District, Santa Monica College, Skyline Community College, Laney College, Peralta Community College District, Berkeley Unified School District, Orange Coast Community College District, Santa Ana Unified School District, Saddleback College, San Juan Capistrano Unified School District, Alameda Unified School District, Oakland Unified School District, Alameda County Office of Education, Californians for Safety and Justice, Mayors Fund for Los Angeles, Career Ladders Project, Friend Outside in Los Angeles County, Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, Unite LA, SIKI, & New Venture Fund.

#### Founder & CEO

- Lead strategic planning and design collective impact models around employer, community, and stakeholder engagement.
- Advise and create actionable plans with Chief Executive Officers, Presidents, Executive Directors, Vice Presidents, Superintendents, and Deans on the development of career pathway models, dual and concurrent enrollment, business engagement, and culture change strategies.
- Spokesperson in the community, region, and state for the advancement of best practice models in education, economic, and workforce development.
- Thought partner and leader in areas of criminal justice reform, technology inclusion, data systems development, immigrant integration, and high-road training partnerships.
- Plan and facilitate strategic planning and organizational change meetings with senior leadership and partners.
- Develop and foster relationships with key policy, programmatic, and community stakeholders to advance person-centered services models in California.
- Create and support communities of practice that advance the communication, development, and implementation of integrated systemic change models among identified stakeholders.
- Establish centralized resource hubs for best and emerging practices in education and workforce development reforms, aimed at enhancing outcomes for local stakeholders.

## Goodwill Southern California

1/2018 – 2/2024

## Strategic Impact Officer

- Provide strategic leadership for workforce development programs, ensuring alignment with Goodwill Southern California's mission and goals.
- Collaborate with the executive team and Board of Directors on strategies, budgets, and policies, and deliver quarterly progress reports with recommendations for improvement.
- Direct budget preparation and control, prioritize resources based on trends and priorities, and develop revenue-generating programs.
- Oversee Quality Assurance and Data Departments, achieving three successful CARF accreditations, including a zero-findings result.
- Lead initiatives in Registered Apprenticeships, Veteran Services, CalFresh Expansion, and Homeless Engagement Services.
- Develop strategies to enhance workforce development through case management, barrier removal, job training, and employment placement.
- Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, focusing on underserved populations, including individuals with disabilities, veterans, and formerly incarcerated individuals.
- Build partnerships with businesses, community organizations, schools, and agencies to expand opportunities for participants.
- Manage and mentor a team of directors, managers, staff, and consultants to ensure program success.
- Design a data system to track metrics across 100+ programs serving vulnerable populations.
- Revise policies, procedures, onboarding manuals, and staff development plans to enhance departmental operations.

## Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce (L.A. Chamber)

3/2014 - 1/2016

## K-14 Education Policy and Programs Manager (Smart Justice Program Founder)

- Successfully led the Los Angeles Chamber's policy development and advocacy efforts for education, workforce development, and criminal justice reform, including managing career pathways initiatives, stakeholder engagement, and grant reporting.
  - Spearheaded the business coalition supporting Proposition 47, securing its passage and implementation, and was honored with the Smart on Justice Award by then-California Attorney General Kamala Harris for this achievement.
  - Advanced the Chamber's K-12 education and smart justice policy agenda by analyzing legislation, drafting policy briefs, securing stakeholder support, and testifying at state hearings.
  - Supported the Chamber's participation in national, state, and local task forces focused on accountability, career pathways, and systemic reform in education and criminal justice.
  - Developed awareness campaigns and provided staff training to align organizational goals with advancements in K-14 education, workforce development, and smart justice policies.
- Represented the Chamber as a spokesperson for innovative practices in educational and economic reform throughout the Los Angeles region.

## Community Affiliation

Santa Monica College – Member, General Advisory Board Member	2023 – Present
Santa Monica College – Member, Citizens' Bond Oversight Committee	2002 & 2023 – Present
Santa Monica College – Founding Board Member, Young Alumni Council	2007 – 2016
Santa Monica College – President, Associated Students	2002 – 2003
City of Santa Monica – Vice Chair, Human Services Commission	2023 – Present
Santa Monica Democratic Club – Treasurer, Executive Board	2023 – Present
Santa Monica for Renters Rights – Member	2024 – Present

Wilshire Montana Neighborhood Coalition – Member	2024 – Present
Raza Golf Founding - Executive Board Member	2024 – Present
House of Haven - Founding Board Member	2020 – Present
Executive Latino Leadership Association - Founding Board Member	2014 – 2020
STRIVE-LA - Board Member	2016 – 2018
California EDGE Coalition - Executive Board Member	2010 – 2015
UC Berkeley, Pi Lambda Phi International Fraternity, Member	2006 – 2016

Please check if applicable. I am related to a current employee of the Santa Monica Community College District. \*

Yes

No

I understand that I may not be an employee of the Santa Monica Community College District and serve as a member of the Board of Trustees. \*

Yes

No

To be eligible, an individual must be at least 18 years old; must be a resident of Santa Monica or Malibu; must be a registered voter; and must not be disqualified from holding a civil office by the Constitution or law of the state. \*

I certify that I meet all eligibility requirements.

Yes

No

Please state:

\*

1. Why you are seeking appointment to the Santa Monica Community College District Board of Trustees, and
2. The skills, abilities, and experiences you bring to the work of the Board of Trustees

Twenty-five years ago, I enrolled at Santa Monica College (SMC), marking a transformative moment in my life. Only eight years earlier, my family and I had crossed the border into California as undocumented immigrants, navigating low-wage work from the fields of Salinas to high-rise maintenance in Los Angeles.

Growing up, my understanding of “work” was shaped by my father’s journey from low-skill jobs to a middle-skill plumbing career. I envisioned following in his footsteps until one of his clients suggested pursuing certificates to enhance our family business. Inspired by this idea and daily SMC bus ads along Pico Boulevard, I decided to take a leap toward a different future.

In January 2000, I enrolled at SMC, excelling in placement exams and starting courses that fulfilled IGETC requirements. Initially, I aimed to earn a plumbing certificate, but a counseling session revealed SMC didn’t offer it. By then, my experience at SMC had already sparked a passion for service and engagement.

I joined student clubs, engaged in student government, and discovered new aspirations. Seeing Latino and Latina leaders at SMC inspired me to dream beyond my circumstances. SMC didn’t just provide an education—it changed the trajectory of my life. My success encouraged younger relatives to pursue higher education, culminating in degrees from SMC, UC Berkeley, and advanced degrees from Cal State Northridge. SMC and community colleges play a vital role in inspiring future generations to dream beyond their circumstances while maintaining the public’s trust and commitment to education.

As a proud alumnus of Santa Monica College (SMC), I am committed to ensuring the institution continues to transform lives. My experience at SMC shaped my academic and professional journey, and I am dedicated to giving back by helping the college thrive as an innovative, inclusive institution that prepares students for the future. As a member of the Board of Trustees, I will focus on removing barriers to student success, fostering partnerships with local businesses and community organizations, and promoting fiscal responsibility and sustainability that benefits both the workforce and student access.

With over 15 years of experience in education, workforce development, and public policy, I bring expertise in career pathway development, dual enrollment, organizational culture change, and policy implementation at local, state, and national levels. As a small business owner, I have led strategic initiatives benefiting diverse and high-need populations, including advancing K-14 integration, criminal justice reform, and high-road training partnerships. My work includes building coalitions with policymakers, funders, businesses, and community leaders to drive systemic change, such as Ban the Box and the California Career Pathways Trust fund. I have also managed multi-million-dollar public funds with a focus on quality, performance, and accountability.

Locally, I serve on SMC advisory boards, as Vice Chair of Santa Monica’s Human Services Commission, and remain active in community organizations. My lived experience as a former undocumented student at SMC uniquely positions me to understand and address the challenges many students face. During my time at SMC, I grappled with the complexities of my status, often hesitating to fully engage in student leadership opportunities. This perspective drives my commitment to creating a supportive, inclusive environment for all.

In today's uncertain political climate, with a president-elect promoting mass deportations and targeting vulnerable communities, I am resolved to ensure SMC stands as a beacon of inclusivity, support, and advocacy. My lived experience, combined with my professional skills and local ties, equips me to advance SMC's mission and support its students. These are the reasons I am seeking appointment to the Santa Monica Community College District Board of Trustees.

Describe the public service and community involvement you have had in Santa Monica and Malibu that would inform your work on the Board of Trustees. \*

I have a deep-rooted commitment to public service and community involvement in Santa Monica that would greatly inform my work on the Board of Trustees. As an alumnus of Santa Monica College, I served as President of the Associated Students and was a Founding Board Member of the SMC Young Alumni Council, working to strengthen student engagement and foster alumni connections. Currently, I serve on the General Advisory Board and the Citizens' Bond Oversight Committee, ensuring accountability and transparency as well as providing feedback on performance and improvement areas.

Beyond my work with the college, I am deeply invested in the Santa Monica community as both a parent and a resident. My two-year-old son was born and is being raised in Santa Monica, which has given me a profound sense of responsibility for the safety, education, and prosperity of this city. As Vice Chair of the City of Santa Monica's Human Services Commission, I contribute to policies and programs that support the well-being of our residents. I also serve as Treasurer on the Executive Board of the Santa Monica Democratic Club and am an active with Santa Monica for Renters' Rights and the Wilshire Montana Neighborhood Coalition, advocating for housing equity, educational access, and community development.

As a small business owner, I have firsthand experience navigating the challenges of upskilling through public institutions rather than turning to for-profit online educational and training providers. Running a business in Santa Monica, balancing fiscal responsibilities, community expectations, and sustainable practices gives me a unique perspective about the role of public institutions particularly those that are tasked with supplying the needed skills for these businesses to grow and thrive. This perspective helps me understand the critical role of education in preparing students for the workforce, fostering and sustaining entrepreneurship, and ensuring economic resilience in our city.

These roles, coupled with my responsibilities as a parent, give me a unique perspective on the importance of building a safe, thriving, and inclusive community. My professional experience, combined with my personal stake in the future of Santa Monica, positions me to effectively serve the Santa Monica Community College District Board of Trustees with a focus on equity, access, and long-term sustainability for all.

## What is your understanding of the mission and purpose of the California Community Colleges? \*

The mission and purpose of California Community Colleges are to provide accessible, high-quality, and affordable education that serves the diverse needs of students and communities across the state. These institutions play a critical role in encouraging, supporting, or promoting academic achievement for a variety of learners, including those who were unsuccessful in prior academic settings.

Community colleges advance career development by offering customized training programs, in-demand certificate opportunities, and clear pathways to employment in high-demand industries. These programs ensure that students are equipped with the skills needed to succeed and advance in a competitive workforce. Furthermore, they create partnerships with local businesses and organizations to meet the real-time needs of the labor force. Community colleges are vehicles for innovation and practices that bridge the gap between education and meaningful employment.

The California Community College system provides a unique pathway to four-year universities for students who may not have succeeded within their traditional educational timeline. By offering transfer opportunities to the four-year system and encouraging the idea of continued learning, community colleges create and foster lifelong learners. At the heart of the community college system lies a commitment to bridging the gap between individuals and opportunity, with an intentional focus on delivering services that are not always available at the high school or four-year university level.

California Community Colleges are uniquely positioned to advance equity and inclusion by offering opportunities to historically underserved populations. Some of these populations include low-income individuals, immigrants, first-generation college students, and those facing the greatest barriers to education and employment. The college system serves as a powerful engine of social mobility, equipping learners with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in a rapidly evolving workforce and to contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Lastly, community colleges play an indispensable role in our society and state, driving positive economic growth that benefits both our communities and the nation. They represent a beacon of hope and opportunity, providing a second, third, or fourth chance for individuals to create meaningful change, embrace new beginnings, or completely restart their journeys. By fostering personal growth and societal progress, community colleges ensure that education remains an option at any point in a person's life.

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What is the role of the Board of Trustees in relation to its constituencies: (1) the communities of Santa Monica and Malibu; (2) the students, administrators, faculty and staff of the college? \*

The role of the Board of Trustees is to serve as a bridge between the communities of Santa Monica and Malibu and the college while advancing the college's mission and strategic vision as it meets the needs of the region. For the communities of Santa Monica and Malibu, the Board is tasked with fostering strong mutually beneficial partnerships and maintaining transparency and accountability to the residents. This includes ensuring that the college remains a vital community resource by providing relevant educational programs, in-demand workforce training, and culturally relevant enrichment that align with the unique needs of the local population. The Board of Trustees also plays a critical role in promoting equity, economic development, and community engagement by supporting initiatives that benefit the broader community and ensuring the college operates as an inclusive and accessible institution.

For the Students, Administrators, Faculty, and Staff of the College, the Board of Trustees is responsible for ensuring a supportive and collaborative environment where students can thrive academically and personally, and where faculty and staff have the resources and support to excel and develop in their roles. This involves providing strategic oversight, setting institutional priorities, and ensuring fiscal responsibility to maintain the college's long-term sustainability. Additionally, the Board of Trustees advocates for policies and practices that advance student success, uphold academic excellence, and promote equity, inclusion and enrichment within the campus community. Carefully balancing these responsibilities with stakeholder input ensures that the Board of Trustees serves as an honest community broker and a community leadership institution.



Given SMC's budget for 2024-2025, what would be your priorities for the upcoming Santa Monica College budget? \*

The Board of Trustees must prioritize strategies that address revenue stability, operational efficiency, campus safety and security, employee wellbeing and support, and student enrollment and retention that align with Santa Monica College's 2024-2025 budget fiscal outlook and challenges. Key priorities include aligning college programs and initiatives with the Student-Centered Funding Formula (SCFF) goals by investing in programs that enhance degree completions, transfer rates, and completion of transfer-level math and English, while expanding basic support services for underrepresented students. Similarly, long-term innovative resource development should be explored through legislative and community supportive networks, which can include ideas such as a legislative select committee on SCFF impacts on the 62 community college districts, endowment fund campaign, increasing fee-for-service models, leveraging local corporate partnerships/sponsorships and soliciting foundation partnerships that are aligned with the goals of the college.

The college must also prepare for the phase-out of the hold harmless provision in 2025-2026 by developing contingency plans and monitoring enrollment trends. This also means planning for worst-case scenarios through institutional budget updates and planning. Addressing declining domestic non-resident and international student enrollments through expanded outreach, robust retention strategies, and leveraging technology for student support is crucial. This effort must similarly be aligned with meeting the basic and evolving needs of the student population through community-based partnerships and philanthropic support.

The college must also evaluate programs and identify new funding sources through aggressive and system-coordinated advocacy to state legislators. Rising costs for salaries, benefits, and utilities require careful management through sustainable union agreements and energy-efficient infrastructure investments. The student housing project on the Bundy campus must also be balanced in these decisions to ensure the college's general fund does not become impacted by this project. Furthermore, the bond that residents voted clearly stipulates that this project was intended for housing homeless or at-risk of homelessness students. As honest promise keepers to our community we must ensure that this bond addresses the issues the voters approved.

Enhancing access to higher education for underrepresented students remains a priority, accomplished through increased financial aid outreach and expanded pathways for workforce development. The looming fiscal uncertainty at the federal level will also need to be considered and planned through each reporting cycle. Building long-term reserves through strategic funding allocation and implementing cost-saving initiatives can prepare the college for future uncertainties. Similarly, enhancing governance and accountability through data-driven decision-making and stakeholder engagement will ensure transparency and alignment with community needs. Lastly, campus culture must be of the utmost priority of the college to ensure there is a culture of respect that permeates through the college community and into the future students and employees of the college. The result of all these actions must result in a stronger college community and a campus culture that will serve as a beacon to the larger system we belong to. In my opinion, the only way to accomplish this will be through a clear focus on transparency and honest stakeholder engagement.

## What do you see as the major issues currently facing Santa Monica College? \*

Recent events at the college, particularly the tragic incident of workplace violence on October 14, 2024, have highlighted several critical concerns. The campus community has called for independent investigations into safety incidents to identify gaps in policies and practices. Specific issues, such as non-functional security cameras, inadequate lighting, and inconsistent emergency preparedness training, emphasize the need for immediate improvements to campus safety measures.

In addition to safety concerns, deeper systemic challenges related to workplace culture have emerged. Employees, including classified staff and faculty, have expressed concerns about low morale, a lack of trust in administration, and feelings of being undervalued. Criticisms of Human Resources practices, including perceived biases and retaliation against employees who voice concerns, underscore the need for greater transparency and consistency in applying policies. While senior leadership has acknowledged these issues, more decisive and visible action is necessary to rebuild trust and create a supportive work environment.

During my tenure as the Strategic Impact Officer at Goodwill Southern California, I encountered similar challenges following significant budget cuts. Through data analysis, I discovered that additional duties from departing staff had been absorbed by remaining team members. Over time, these tasks became permanently embedded in job descriptions, leading to expanded workloads, burnout, and declining morale. To address this, I conducted a comprehensive review of staffing plans, reallocated tasks, and ensured job descriptions reflected realistic expectations. These efforts reduced strain on staff, rebuilt morale, and restored trust.

SMC could adopt a similar approach by assessing current staffing plans to identify whether additional duties and responsibilities are overburdening staff, potentially impacting morale. College leadership should also consider implementing a leadership framework that equips managers with the tools to support their teams effectively. Providing training on best practices in management and fostering a culture of respect and collaboration can empower managers to address staff concerns and enhance workplace satisfaction.

Additionally, the college faces declining enrollment, particularly among domestic non-residents and international students, adding financial and operational pressures. Addressing staff morale is crucial, as unresolved dissatisfaction could hinder the college's ability to implement necessary fiscal decisions. Transparency and clear communication from the Board of Trustees and senior leadership will be essential in fostering trust and collaboration during this challenging period.

As a Board of Trustee member, my goal is to collaborate with my colleagues to support campus leadership in addressing these challenges. I bring a deep commitment to innovation, a steadfast focus on student success, and an unwavering dedication to transparency. Together, we can guide the college through these difficult times, ensuring it emerges stronger, more unified, and better prepared to serve its students and community.

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Google Forms

# Application to Fill Vacancy on the SMCCD Board of Trustees

The Santa Monica Community College District is seeking applications from District residents interested in being appointed to a vacant seat on the Board of Trustees until the next regularly scheduled Board election in November 2026 when a new four-year term will be lled.

Applications are due January 10, 2025

Links to SMC websites, click [here](#).

Name \*

Dr. Karen S Gunn

Home Address \*

City, State and Zip Code \*

Santa Monica, CA. 90405

Home/Cell Telephone Number \*

**Business Telephone Number \***

.....

**Email Address \***

.....

**Occupation \***

Psychologist, Community and Organizational Consultant

**Company \***

Gunn Consulting Group (DBA)

**Business Address \***

.....

**City, State, and Zip Code \***

Santa Monica, CA. 90405

Please provide the following information. You are also welcome to attach a current resume. \*

\*Education (list degrees or highest year complete and the college/school.

\*Employment History (last ten years)

\*Community Affiliation

See Attached

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Please check if applicable. I am related to a current employee of the Santa Monica Community College District. \*

Yes

No

I understand that I may not be an employee of the Santa Monica Community College District and serve as a member of the Board of Trustees. \*

Yes

No

To be eligible, an individual must be at least 18 years old; must be a resident of Santa Monica or Malibu; must be a registered voter; and must not be disqualified from holding a civil office by the Constitution or law of the state. \*

I certify that I meet all eligibility requirements.

Yes

No

Please state:

\*

1. Why you are seeking appointment to the Santa Monica Community College District Board of Trustees, and
2. The skills, abilities, and experiences you bring to the work of the Board of Trustees

I am applying for appointment to the SMC Board of Trustees to support and serve its Mission of "Changing Lives in the Global Community Through Excellence in Education." My 25 years as a tenured faculty member during which I also worked as a mentor and adviser to students, trusted colleague across the spectrum of employee groups, and active volunteer with extracurricular activities would inform my work, oversight, and contribution as a Trustee. The last 10 years of post-retirement consultation for SMC have given me an even deeper appreciation and understanding of the organizational dynamics that must be fully grasped to help guide and oversee the college.

Having worked under every SMC President since 1985, I have had the opportunity to witness innovative ideas each administration brought forward as well as the challenges associated with implementing innovative ideas and change. I am grateful for the trust each leader placed in me to guide key campus projects, initiatives, and to represent SMC externally. Over the years, I've faced adversity alongside the campus community, from the devastation of the 1994 earthquake, which left our campus in ruins, to the tragic mass shooting in 2013, and more recently, a fatal workplace violence incident. In addition to these tough times, I have also had the privilege of celebrating remarkable milestones: the expansion of our programs and services, the construction of LEED-certified buildings, and the growth of our academic offerings to over 200 degrees and certificates serving 30,000+ students.

For over 95 years, SMC has continually reinvented itself, evolving into the cutting-edge institution it is today. I believe the Board of Trustees would benefit from someone who understands the college's rich history, and current dynamics, but also deeply values the mission and vision generated by the students, administrators, faculty, and professional staff. I fully embrace the nine core values of SMC and see them as instrumental to the Mission. I am especially invested in democratic processes, communication and collegiality, academic integrity, data-informed planning and evaluation, and ethical behavior. My educational training as a Community and Organizational Psychologist, my experience as a consultant, and my avocation as a community volunteer elevate the importance of these specific values. My desire to serve as a Trustee is driven by my core values, including equity, social justice, accountability to those who elect us, and a commitment to empowerment.

I bring a skill set (training, facilitation, coaching, research), orientation to engagement and interpersonal communication, facility for strategic planning, commitment to community participation, and humility that would make me a helpful, productive Board member. It could be particularly useful that I am able to effectively shape safe spaces to facilitate discussions around critical incidents and controversial, polarizing topics. Being able to lead and help navigate the difficult conversations that are hallmarks of academia - including SMC - is a distinct asset I could bring to this role during a challenging and politicized time for higher education.

Describe the public service and community involvement you have had in Santa Monica and Malibu that would inform your work on the Board of Trustees. \*

I have been an active volunteer, leader, and member of various community organizations for three decades. I have served on non-profit boards and as a City Commissioner, been a member of community-based organizations and assisted the City of Santa Monica in its work, e.g., Office of the City Manager, Cultural Affairs, Wellbeing, Police Department and Public Safety Reform Oversight Commission, Equity, and Inclusion division.

The Santa Monica Bay Area Human Relations Council (HRC) has been a significant platform and purpose-driven area of my community involvement. The HRC is actively involved in advocacy, education, community building and engagement, and collaborative projects propelled by a social and economic justice mission. Those activities rely upon finding partnerships with local institutions, organizations and leaders, cooperation and mutual respect, and commitment to our vision. I have created a blueprint of who, what, and how the community knits itself together and engages in the public square. This will inform my work on the Board of Trustees.

What is your understanding of the mission and purpose of the California Community Colleges? \*

The California Community College system, the largest system of higher education in the U.S. with 2 million students, is the great equalizer in terms of access to educational opportunities. The open door, low-cost 116 colleges in the system stands out to me in particular because it supports social and economic mobility, affirms the importance of DEIA, and serves a multi-ethnic student body. Whether a recent high-school graduate, lifelong learner, employee who desires to build their career, you have affordable, innovative, world-class options.

SMC reflects and represents one of its best. SMC has students from over 116 countries, "Dreamers," people from marginalized (racially, gender, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+) groups, professionals across the occupational continuum, and those who are simply curious. It has maintained its "1st in Transfers" status for 25 years. That is a testament to the strength of the college's academic programs. The college demonstrates a commitment to nurturing student life, resilience, self-care, and efficacy.

What is the role of the Board of Trustees in relation to its constituencies: (1) the communities of Santa Monica and Malibu; (2) the students, administrators, faculty and staff of the college? \*

I believe the role of the Board of Trustees, as it relates to all its constituents, is to be a liaison, to listen, learn, remember, and represent the institution. I offer some perspective on what the critical issues or listening points could be for each group below.

(1) The communities of Santa Monica and Malibu

The Santa Monica and Malibu residents appreciate the contribution SMC makes to families, our students from the SMMUSD, the cultural milieu and quality of life. The support for SMC is evident in the bond measures the electorate has consistently approved for many years. The Board has the responsibility to be attuned to what the voters desire and their aspirations for a healthy college-community relationship. The Board might explore the ways to imbue that connection with expanded access to facilities, events, resources that are in place?

(2) The students

The Board would serve the students well by understanding their needs from a full 360-degree spectrum. That involves ensuring that policies are in place that create a physically and psychologically safe environment for learning, growth, and success. Further, the Board should build its awareness of what is needed to provide an institutional climate that addresses social, racial, gender and economic injustices.

(3) Administrators

The point of view, work demands, and ambitions of SMC administrators and middle-managers should be incorporated into the oversight work of the Board. As is the case with other employee groups, people thrive and perform when best practices, support from senior staff, and fair professional options are available.

(4) Faculty

The world-class faculty at SMC needs the support for their intentions and efforts to bring forth innovative, equity-based pedagogy. The Board should have a clear, accurate perspective of what is needed to accomplish those goals.

(5) Staff

The Classified Professionals provide administrative support, maintain the campus infrastructure and physical plant, and assist students. Their career goals, promotional opportunities, training, and development require sustained attention. Our Board must make that a priority and clear policies and procedures an important part of institutional operations.

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Given SMC's budget for 2024-2025, what would be your priorities for the upcoming Santa Monica College budget? \*

A fundamental responsibility of the Board is to monitor and ensure the fiscal stability of SMC, with due diligence and equanimity. Revenue streams and expenditure must be managed for the college to meet its obligations and comply with accounting and legal requirements. We must keep the boat afloat. To that end, my priority as a Board member would ensure the fiscal stability of SMC. Without fiscal stability, our students cannot be served, and other institutional initiatives cannot move forward.

Many factors impinge on budget priorities (see my answer below regarding "major issues"), and they should be determined in collaboration with Board members, stakeholders, and the President/Superintendent. While I have my priorities, they are a small piece of the larger deliberative process. I would argue that salaries and benefits, enrollment levels, costs, student needs, new sources of revenue, and partnerships will be, in my opinion, a weighty part of Board focus. What I must learn from fiscal managers, and others, is the full picture and the extent of possibilities. To that end, I believe wholeheartedly in the input and guidance from fiscal managers with expertise to guide Board deliberations and decision making.

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## What do you see as the major issues currently facing Santa Monica College? \*

Many factors over the last few years – the COVID-19 pandemic and shutdown, travel ban and visas for international students, population migration, and economic uncertainty – have had an impact on many aspects of institutional operations and infrastructure. Enrollment levels seem to have plateaued which impacts funding and, thus the College budget. These same issues may have also affected employee recruitment, retention, performance, satisfaction, and considerations across all segments of the workforce.

Additionally, the social-political environment around the college has been and will continue to be influential as it moves forward. There was the supposed reckoning following the death of George Floyd (and others) that pushed DEIAB to the forefront in key areas such as business, higher education, and police-community relations. Local, national, and global situations have prompted community unrest, protests, intergroup conflict, traumatization, distrust, and disinformation or ‘truth decay.’ Student life, program development and sustainability, institutional priorities, and the investment in diversity, equity and inclusion are subject to rearrangement, if not, degradation. The institution may have to grapple with its growth, recalibrate its trajectory and redefine organizational pathways in the interest of stabilization.

Entering 2025 and looking beyond, SMC must continue to address any of the above that remain consequential. Further, the incoming Federal administration and its stated intentions portend that major changes are coming for colleges and universities. Many of the expressed goals are, at least, challenging and at best, potentially calamitous for the campus environs, student life and success, SMC as a workplace, and funding streams. Proposals related to citizenship and mass deportation, changes to or elimination of the Department of Education, threats to existing protections for women’s health and LGBTQIA+, and taxation plans that may exacerbate economic disparities all foreshadow an unpredictable future. As a Hispanic Serving Institution, with an Equity Student Center, multi-ethnic student body, faculty committed to excellence, counselors devoted to student support and success, and classified professionals who desire to bring their best, what looms on the horizon is concerning for everyone.

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Google Forms

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Applications are due January 10, 2025

Links to SMC websites, click [here](#).

Name \*

Patricia Nakao (Patti)

Home Address \*

City, State and Zip Code \*

Santa Monica, CA 90405

Home/Cell Telephone Number \*

**Business Telephone Number \***

None

**Email Address \***

.....

**Occupation \***

Retired

**Company \***

Not applicable

**Business Address \***

Not applicable

**City, State, and Zip Code \***

Not applicable

Please provide the following information. You are also welcome to attach a current resume. \*

\*Education (list degrees or highest year complete and the college/school.

\*Employment History (last ten years)

\*Community Affiliation

Education:

Master of Social Welfare, June, 1980.

University of California, Los Angeles

Bachelor of Arts, Sociology Major, June, 1977.

University of California, Los Angeles.

Ten-Year Work History:

2014-2017: Faculty, Counseling Department, Santa Monica College

August, 2017-Present: Retired

Community Affiliations:

SMC General Advisory Board

Santa Monica Democratic Club

Santa Monica Renters' Rights

SMC Bond Advisory Committee

Please check if applicable. I am related to a current employee of the Santa Monica Community College District. \*

Yes

No

I understand that I may not be an employee of the Santa Monica Community College District and serve as a member of the Board of Trustees. \*

Yes

No

To be eligible, an individual must be at least 18 years old; must be a resident of Santa Monica or \* Malibu; must be a registered voter; and must not be disqualified from holding a civil office by the Constitution or law of the state.

I certify that I meet all eligibility requirements.

Yes

No

Please state:

\*

1. Why you are seeking appointment to the Santa Monica Community College District Board of Trustees, and
2. The skills, abilities, and experiences you bring to the work of the Board of Trustees

1. My desire to join the SMC Board of Trustees first starts with my love for the college. I was a counselor there for 25 years, and I have lived in Santa Monica for most of my adult life--and I'm no spring chicken. I believe in its capacity to reach and support students in a compassionate way, and its consequent ability to change lives, which has rippling consequences to communities and our society as well. Also, I know that the college is a real gem to the community. As a true SMC AND student advocate, I would be deeply invested in the successes of the college and the community, and I would like to offer a fresh, yet steady voice in the college's direction.

I am also concerned about the college. While it remains an outstanding resource for students and the community, it's a challenging time for various reasons. I was at the college during an exciting, innovative period, yet I am optimistic that the best days of the college are ahead. I would like to contribute my perspective to the mix, where I can be a bridge between the college's successful past and a future of solid excellence.

Further, since I was an undergrad, I have consistently advocated for low income and underrepresented students—you might say it has informed my career, every step of the way. It's critical to have diverse voices at the table, and I would be committed to upholding the college's legacy of representing and serving students from all backgrounds.

Lastly, politically, I do not anticipate that Trump and his wealthy cabinet will be kind to higher education specifically, and broadly to the diverse segments of the population who typically pursue their SMC educations. As someone who is concerned about more than just the academic needs of the students, I would like to be a small part of the process that keeps community colleges strong and relevant, as their roles will be critical more than ever.

2. Skills and abilities: I am a hard worker, a good listener, a problem solver, a team player, and a good collaborator. I like to think that I am able to be open-minded and fair. I am also a social worker by training.

Experiences: Most importantly, in my 25 years in the Counseling Department, I worked closely with many, many students. I was hired to work with international students, but I did most of my work in the Transfer Center, working with students of all backgrounds and with almost every academic goal imaginable. I was also the department chair for a year; and I taught the Student Success course for many years, both on-ground and online, and oversaw the instructors and the textbook.

As I mentioned earlier, I worked at SMC at a time when SMC was the crown jewel of the California Community Colleges. We were known across the state for its excellence, and students regularly drove past other schools to attend SMC. I saw the potential of the college up close, and also experienced its many dynamics as a faculty member.

Also, I have called Santa Monica my home almost consistently since the late 1970's as both a renter and a homeowner. My daughter attended the local public schools, and I was an active PTA member. I've attended many, many SMC events, from Broad performances, to the student art sales, to the annual MLK celebrations,

for example; and I've been an Emeritus student since I retired. I am proud that the college is a wonderful resource to the community, and I have gladly supported the bond measures over many years for both K-12 and the college district.

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Describe the public service and community involvement you have had in Santa Monica and Malibu that would inform your work on the Board of Trustees. \*

The most important experiences that would inform my work on the Board would be my 25 years of work at the college. I learned firsthand the opportunity and hope that SMC can offer.

At the same time, I saw how many, many students have a “one-toe-in-and-one-toe-out” mindset, meaning they could be quick to drop out. They may face multiple challenges: typically, financial; family pressure to work; self-doubt, questioning if they belong in college; a lack of a role model or guidance to help them understand and navigate college, especially for first generation students; not yet possessing skills to be a successful student, e.g., study strategies, how to ask for help. As a board member, I would see my most important role as a student advocate, supporting practical and innovative ways to decrease barriers to student success and increase student access to a welcome, supportive environment for their educational achievements.

Also, on a personal note, I am fully aware that my face represents an educationally privileged group. Even though or perhaps because my parents’ educations were cut short during World War II when they were put into concentration camps—my father was in community college and my mother was in high school—they encouraged me to pursue my education. I am eternally grateful for this, and needless to say, my education changed my life. (On a side note, my father never finished college, but my mother completed her high school diploma in the camp.)

Growing up in Los Angeles, I became well aware that many, many individuals have had less access to higher education--due to challenging conditions related to income, ethnicity, ability/disability, age, sexuality, family conditions, for example--yet they are just as capable as me and also deserve the opportunities that education can provide. This was a driving force in my pre-SMC career in public educational settings working with low-income and underrepresented students with the UCLA Academic Advancement Program (their Educational Opportunity Program--EOP) while in college; the UCLA Educational Opportunity Center after my undergraduate graduation; and the EOP at Cal State Los Angeles right before SMC. This, too, would inform my work on the Board, as I would not only advocate for the Asian and Pacific Islander student population (which also includes underrepresented groups in higher education, as you likely know), but just as critically, I would honor my career-long values and advocate for SMC’s important work toward equity in the campus-wide mindset and programs to increase student success for all students.

Since 2016, I have also been active with numerous political organizations including Field Team 6, Grassroots Dems, and last year, the Westside Democratic Headquarters in Santa Monica. I’ve worked to increase voter registration, especially with college students; and I’ve advocated for numerous propositions and campaigns that addressed income inequality, voter suppression laws, and abortion rights, for example. I am deeply invested in increasing the voices of students and young people and advocating for their futures, and this too, would inform my work on the Board.

Lastly, most recently, I joined SMRR, the Santa Monica Democratic Club, the SMC General Advisory Board, and the SMC Bond Oversight Committee. Although I am relatively new to these organizations, I recognize the interconnectedness with SMC and the many groups representing the residents across the city. As a

board member, I would see the importance of maintaining strong relationships and support with the numerous community stakeholders. I address this a bit more below.

### What is your understanding of the mission and purpose of the California Community Colleges? \*

The mission and purpose of California Community Colleges is to provide students with accessible and true pathways to success with a high-quality education and college experiences. Critically, they especially focus on providing opportunities for low income students, students of color, and other students historically underrepresented in higher education. The college system also prioritizes programs for veterans, students with disabilities, and foster youth, for example. Student successes in the community colleges raise up students individually, as well as their families, communities, and ultimately the state of California, whether students get a certificate, job training, an Associate degree, or transfer to a four-year school.

More specifically, I believe income inequality is a key underlying reason for many of our state's social challenges. Why not give more folks access to a better life? Education can play a central role toward income and social mobility, as well as a more thoughtful voting population, and more critical thinkers representing the wider population in positions of power. Also, because California Community Colleges have minimal admission requirements (age 18 or older) and a relatively low cost with opportunities for financial aid, again they are well-positioned to benefit students, their families and communities, and ultimately the state of California by squarely addressing income inequality. We "just" need to reach and support the students! In any event, I believe education is a game changer, and I can't state enough how much I believe in the mission of community colleges.

What is the role of the Board of Trustees in relation to its constituencies: (1) the communities of Santa Monica and Malibu; (2) the students, administrators, faculty and staff of the college? \*

Board and communities: The college relies on the support of the Santa Monica and Malibu communities, and the Board needs to be sure the college is conscious and overt in maintaining and nurturing these relationships. For example, in addition to knowing about the great lectures and performances available, does the community know that students can take college classes while in high school at SMC? Take a career class, complete a high school diploma, or that it is truly never too late to go back to school at SMC? Can we partner with community groups to increase voter registration on campus? What are the current needs of renters that SMC might address? In any event, this means having relationships with clear outreach and communication, understanding the needs of the communities and how we are perceived, staying responsive, and ensuring that the college's products and services are relevant, within its possibilities and limitations. The Board must be sure that the college is "crisp" in these efforts.

Board and students: I think student success should be the driving force behind the Board. The college must welcome students from all backgrounds, address their differing needs, and support their access to their educational goals. Given the parameters, possibilities, as well as budget and other limitations, how can the college best serve the students?

Board and administration: Ideally, SMC should be a place that students want to attend; the faculty and staff should feel respected, valued, and proud to work at the college and invested in its success; and overall, the college should be a place of excellence, no matter the limitations, or in spite of the limitations. I believe the administration must work toward these goals, and the Board must be encouraging and supportive while expecting this from the administration. I also think the Board should encourage the administration to have a clear and communicated vision for the college and one that the Board can and should support.

Board and faculty and staff: Again, the faculty and staff must feel invested in the success of the students and college, and also have high standards for themselves and their work. The Board needs to advocate for this point of view.

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Given SMC's budget for 2024-2025, what would be your priorities for the upcoming Santa Monica College budget? \*

Clearly, SMC is facing difficult and challenging budget constraints. It's easy to speak without knowing the details, but here are some thoughts on priorities:

#1: I personally prioritize being fiscally responsible and sound for myself and my family. Just as importantly, I work hard to look for choices and possibilities to maximize what I can do with our money. Broadly and ideally, I would take a similar approach with the college budget. While still staying fiscally responsible, what steps can be taken to maximize the budget so SMC can be its best version for the students and community?

#2: As much as possible, advocate for legislative support, including extending the Hold Harmless provision and modifying the Student Centered Funding Formula (SCFF). What is being done, and what more can we do in these areas?

#3: As the second largest revenue stream, attract more international students through targeted outreach and relevant support. Examine the outreach program and the International Student Center services to see what is going well, what can be tweaked, and how to support that. Does the program continue to be culturally relevant? How do we gather more information to improve this critical part of the college? What opportunities will still be possible with the upcoming Trump administration's limitations? Focusing on what can be done well for international student outreach and retention is a win-win on all sides.

#4: I'd imagine this low-hanging fruit has already been addressed in many ways, but focus on the SCFF categories and make these student groups and goals a priority in Financial Aid, Admissions, Counseling, in the classrooms, and in the culture of the college. This would be a win-win for the students AND funding for the college. Specifically, from outreach to admission to enrollment to the student experience to graduation, what can be done to ensure all students apply for financial aid; support the AB 540 students; support the students in their goals of completing certificates, degrees, and/or transfer; support the students in the other SCFF categories.

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## What do you see as the major issues currently facing Santa Monica College? \*

SMC faces numerous issues and challenges.

#1: Funding, funding, funding, and a related decrease in student numbers. So many issues will affect SMC's funding: the prospective shift in the funding formula to SCFF only, which was mentioned earlier; decreasing high school enrollment and consequent numbers of possible SMC students; a potential international student population wary of coming to SMC; the many other options available, especially with online learning, so SMC isn't the only game in town. How will the college continue to uphold its core values and mission nimbly and efficiently as it works to balance the needs of the college with the realities of financial limitations? How will it address the decreasing pool of students?

#2: Higher education may be threatened in one way or another with the upcoming Trump administration, for example with funding and DACA. Can SMC maintain a solid structure with leadership that can overtly articulate and advocate for the college as an outstanding resource? In one way or another, most faculty and staff support SMC and its students. Can we advocate for campus leadership that will rally the troops and support the faculty and staff so the college can strategize to work together and weather this storm? Are the ties and collaborations with other colleges and organizations strong?

#3: On a similar note, a nationwide anti-education wave of thinking—for example, that higher education is indoctrination—is threatening students' desires to pursue higher education. This needs to be addressed, perhaps in collaborative work with K-12 and/or other higher education groups. Do we need to rethink higher education's image? At the least, how is SMC being perceived by potential students?

#4: Badmouthing and dismantling DEI is a trend. It goes without saying that racism and sexism have been a part of our country since its inception, and segments of the population still maintain that not all people are created equal. Criticizing DEI is the current iteration, but the college must not be deterred from its work to advocate for DEI in the areas in, for example: equitable special programs, faculty education, and hiring. I applaud the college's work to unify the campus-wide plans of action.

#5: I submit this while devastating fires are still uncontained across our county, and they are a reminder that we won't always know what issue or crisis the college will be facing next, only that there will always be something around the corner. Broadly, addressing what's ahead without knowing the specifics will require thought, good will, compassion, and communication. It will also require careful consideration and balance of the mission and values of the college; the current and future needs of students and the campus personnel overall, including the emotional needs (imagine what some folks are going through with the fires!); the needs of the community; and the college's fiscal situation.

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On a final note, I end with a quick bit of optimism. I volunteered at the college's Giving ThanksGiving event in November, which showcased what was outstanding about the college. This thoughtful and organized program addressed students' differing (food) needs in a respectful and welcoming way; it was a joyful collaboration of SMC and the community; and it was a smashing success. I was proud to be a small part of the event, and obviously I would be honored to be appointed to the open Board position and represent SMC.

# Application to Fill Vacancy on the SMCCD Board of Trustees

The Santa Monica Community College District is seeking applications from District residents interested in being appointed to a vacant seat on the Board of Trustees until the next regularly scheduled Board election in November 2026 when a new four-year term will be lled.

Applications are due January 10, 2025

Links to SMC websites, click [here](#).

Name \*

Peter R. Taffae

Home Address \*

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City, State and Zip Code \*

Santa Monica, CA 90402

Home/Cell Telephone Number \*

.....

**Business Telephone Number \***

.....

**Email Address \***

.....

**Occupation \***

Retired

.....

**Company \***

Executive Perils, Inc.

.....

**Business Address \***

.....

**City, State, and Zip Code \***

Santa Monica, CA 90402

.....

Please provide the following information. You are also welcome to attach a current resume. \*

\*Education (list degrees or highest year complete and the college/school.

\*Employment History (last ten years)

\*Community Affiliation

BS Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY

Sold my company in Oct 2022

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Please check if applicable. I am related to a current employee of the Santa Monica Community College District. \*

Yes

No

I understand that I may not be an employee of the Santa Monica Community College District and serve as a member of the Board of Trustees. \*

Yes

No

To be eligible, an individual must be at least 18 years old; must be a resident of Santa Monica or Malibu; must be a registered voter; and must not be disqualified from holding a civil office by the Constitution or law of the state. \*

I certify that I meet all eligibility requirements.

Yes

No



Please state:

\*

- 1. Why you are seeking appointment to the Santa Monica Community College District Board of Trustees, and
- 2. The skills, abilities, and experiences you bring to the work of the Board of Trustees

- 1. I like supporting my community. Higher education is dear to me
- 2. My tenure on Ithaca College's board of trustees has provided an excellent education on current issues. I have learning disability and know how it effects students.

Describe the public service and community involvement you have had in Santa Monica and Malibu that would inform your work on the Board of Trustees.

\*

serve on Ithaca College's Audit and Building/ Grounds committees and Simon Wiesenthal Center's Audi and Nominee/Governance committees

What is your understanding of the mission and purpose of the California Community Colleges? \*

CCC is the chief provider of higher education and must address current environment.

What is the role of the Board of Trustees in relation to its constituencies: (1) the communities of Santa Monica and Malibu; (2) the students, administrators, faculty and staff of the college? \*

We provide over sight and responsible for the college's longevity

Given SMC's budget for 2024-2025, what would be your priorities for the upcoming Santa Monica College budget? \*

investment in our people and physical structure

What do you see as the major issues currently facing Santa Monica College? \*

Enhancing our community, expanding the make up of the students we serve.

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