

IRVINE RANCH WATER DISTRICT POLICY PRINCIPLES ON
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY
August 2011

Current efforts are underway by the California State Legislature, state agencies, industry associations, and local governments to improve government transparency and accountability. The recent revelations of fiscal abuse and breach of public trust in several Southern California cities has led to increased interest in and awareness of issues including public agency compensation and benefits, contracting, and meetings, among other things.

In 2010, the California State Controller began collecting compensation information from all cities, counties, special districts and school districts in California. This information was collected in four phases and posted to the Controller's website. Information collected included job titles, salary ranges, actual salary and benefits including pensions, health/dental and vision, and deferred compensation. While there may be opportunities to improve the Controller's program, it provides a solid framework for public compensation transparency in California.

The Irvine Ranch Water District is dedicated to transparent government and providing our customers' with straightforward and timely access to important information. IRWD's ongoing transparency practices reflect this commitment including:

- A wide array of easy to access information posted to the IRWD website including:
 - General information about IRWD including scope of services, history, projects and programs, organization, etc.
 - Compensation information on the IRWD website including on Board and employee compensation, Board actions related to compensation and benefits, salary schedules, and a links to the information the California State Controller has collected from IRWD.
 - District finances including the annual IRWD Comprehensive Annual Financial Report detailing the IRWD operating and capital budgets.
 - Board and Committee meeting agendas and minutes on the District website and providing electronic notification of upcoming meetings to customers and stakeholders who sign up to receive them.
 - A large variety of other pertinent documents and information.
- Providing compensation information to the Controller's office in a timely manner.
- Encouraging public participation by holding publicly-noticed, bi-monthly evening public board meetings.
- In addition to access through the website, making documents and information available to the public through requests to the District.
- Providing education and outreach programs to the community including information about IRWD operations, organization, budget/finances, services and programs.
- Participating in a variety of community events and organizations including education, environmental, business/professional, non-profit and local government entities.
- Providing access to customer service and public relations staff during business hours and ways to contact staff in case of emergency during non-business hours.

The following policy principles have been developed to guide the District in advocacy efforts related to government transparency and accountability reform efforts.

General Transparency and Accountability:

New statewide government transparency and accountability laws and requirements should:

1. Apply equally to all levels of government including cities, counties, special districts, state agencies and the state legislature.
2. Be simple and avoid redundancies. Complex and duplicative public transparency laws can lead to confusion, misinformation, and funnel valuable public resources toward complex reporting procedures rather than toward providing valuable public services.
3. Maintain local control and authority to the greatest extent possible to allow local governments to adjust to the unique needs of their residents.
4. Protect and build upon existing laws that protect the public interest such as the Brown Act and the Public Records Act.
5. Be predictable and stable so government entities can comply with accurate and timely information.

Compensation Transparency:

1. A single state agency should be responsible for developing and collecting compensation reporting requirements to avoid duplicative and confusing information. The California Controller's Office should remain the lead agency for collecting and posting compensation information on-line in a centralized location.
2. Reporting requirements should include consistent and comparable data to provide for an "apples to apples" comparison to the greatest extent possible.
3. To the greatest extent practicable, local and state governments should post the same information submitted to the Controller's office to their own websites. The compensation information should be posted with information about each individual agency's services provided, service area, budget and other relevant issues to put the compensation information in context.
4. Reimbursable expenses should not be included as part of compensation. While expenses, like all government expenditures, are public money and subject to public disclosure, they are not a part of an individual's compensation, but rather a part of the cost of doing business. Reporting expenses as part of compensation information is misleading and does not effectively communicate the importance of these expenditures to the public. Reporting of an agency's expense reimbursement policies is a more accurate way to capture and communicate how these funds are used.

5. Information should be collected and reported in such a way that protects public employee privacy to the greatest extent possible under the law.
6. To ensure accurate, uniform and timely information, responsibility for collecting and reporting compensation information should lie with the government entity not with the individual.

Public Auditing and Contracting

1. New public auditing requirements should be consistent with and not duplicative of existing state and federal auditing standards and encourage timely reporting and disclosure to further transparency and accountability.
2. New state laws and requirements should not limit local governments' ability to negotiate complex public works construction contracts including liability, payment retentions and other provisions to protect public funding and investment.