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DATE: November 4-5, 2026

TO: SJVUAPCD Governing Board



FROM: Samir Sheikh, Executive Director/APCO  
Project Coordinator: Adriana Myovich

RE: **ITEM NUMBER 13: DISTRICT'S S.T.A.R.  
(SERVICE, TEAMWORK, ATTITUDE AND  
RESPECT) WORK CULTURE**

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Review and discuss the District's *S.T.A.R. (Service, Teamwork, Attitude and Respect)* work culture, including feedback from District staff and stakeholders.

**BACKGROUND:**

The District remains deeply committed to maintaining a workforce that not only produces innovative, effective, and high-quality technical work but also provides exceptional customer service to all those we encounter while conducting District business. To that end, the District has developed and implemented STAR, which stands for Service, Teamwork, Attitude and Respect, as a District-wide work culture program that translates the District's Core Values into daily practice. STAR creates an atmosphere in which providing exceptional service, demonstrating teamwork, maintaining a positive attitude, and showing respect for others are intrinsic to every team member's job.

The continued success of STAR has been made possible through the Governing Board's leadership and support, which have been instrumental in ensuring full engagement and commitment at every level of the organization. This item seeks your Board's reaffirmation of support and any further guidance to strengthen the District's STAR work culture.

### **SUCCESS OF THE STAR WORK CULTURE AT THE AIR DISTRICT:**

The District's STAR work culture is advanced through an ongoing, systematic approach that promotes excellent customer service and continuous improvement while enhancing team member performance, morale, and interpersonal skills. Key elements include empowering team members to identify and solve problems, maintaining high standards for performance and behavior, providing regular staff training and development, and recognizing positive contributions across the organization.

Through your Board's vision, leadership, investment, and ongoing commitment, STAR has achieved remarkable results that reflect both operational excellence and a positive work environment of which the District can be proud. Examples include the following:

- Excellent customer service characterized by accountability and transparency
- Consistent positive feedback from stakeholders
- Open, deliberative, and accessible staff engagement
- Exceptionally high productivity with measurable results
- Greatest staff productivity among air districts, reflected in permits issued, inspections conducted, grants administered, and regulatory measures designed and adopted
- The most efficient and cost-effective incentive grants program in the state
- Creative and innovative problem-solving approaches
- Effective air quality management strategies recognized as models statewide and nationally, and supported by the regulated community
- Consistent achievement of all state and federal mandates
- Strong public and regulated community support for clean-air strategies
- Lower operating costs through efficiency and streamlining
- Successful implementation of zero-based budgeting, allowing the District to absorb significant new mandates and workload without additional staff
- A highly engaged, motivated workforce with strong morale
- A positive and collaborative relationship with the Employees Association
- A workplace culture in which team members feel supported

## **IMPLEMENTING STAR:**

The continued success of STAR is built on a foundation of beliefs, convictions, and commitments that are deeply ingrained in the District's organizational DNA:

- Unwavering belief that employee welfare and well-being are essential to achieving excellence
- Commitment to exceptional customer service for both internal and external customers
- Embracing change with an entrepreneurial and innovative spirit
- Striving to be the best and the first in every endeavor
- Placing high value on positive attitude, initiative, and other STAR attributes in hiring and promotional decisions
- Taking pride in working for the District and serving the Valley

At a high level, the implementation principles of STAR can be summarized as follows:

- Demonstrate through actions and words that employee welfare and well-being are valued
- Communicate expectations clearly and consistently
- Use recognition to reinforce desired behaviors and outcomes
- Foster a sense of pride and ownership in their contributions towards achieving the District mission and in working for the District
- Create a safe environment where team members look to offer suggestions and propose improvements
- Advance and cultivate a culture which respects the diverse perspectives of staff and stakeholders
- Follow through promptly on employee suggestions and ideas
- Provide guidance, training, and tools to assist team members meet and exceed expectations
- Hold District staff accountable for performance and conduct
- Keep STAR energized and relevant through continuous attention and revitalization
- Make STAR an intrinsic part of every team member's job
- Encourage collaboration across departments to break down silos and promote shared goals
- Support constructive feedback and open communication
- Serve as a role model

STAR is designed to be a dynamic and continuously improving work culture that requires investment, attention, innovation, and reinforcement. The District advances STAR principles through a variety of actions, including:

### **Team Member Recognition**

Team member recognition is central to reinforcing STAR values. The District uses various means to recognize team member contributions and the application of STAR principles. These include team member recognition in staff meetings and annual departmental STAR employee awards. Team member recognition is the first agenda item at every internal District staff meeting, and management uses those recognitions to help communicate model behavior and initiative, while also reinforcing expectations.

### **Team Member Suggestions**

STAR encourages team members to contribute ideas for improving operations and services. Within established program boundaries, each suggestion is recorded on a Departmental STAR Suggestion Tracking Chart. Managers oversee the process by assigning staff or teams to research the issues, develop solutions, and recommend implementation strategies. Progress updates are provided regularly at staff meetings.

### **STAR Training**

STAR training begins with new employee orientation and continues through mentorships, formal instruction, and daily interactions. STAR principles are integrated into team member training on customer service, communication skills, and technical skill development, reinforcing these values throughout each team member's career.

### **Recruitment Process**

The District's hiring approach emphasizes positive attitude and initiative as key predictors of success. While technical skills are essential, experience has shown that they can be taught more readily than attitude or initiative. Accordingly, recruitment and promotion processes give significant weight to these qualities while ensuring that candidates have strong technical capacity and the ability to learn District-specific aspects of the job.

### **Performance Evaluations**

The performance evaluation process embeds STAR principles across all categories. Staff are evaluated on how effectively they incorporate STAR values into their daily performance. Supervisors and managers are evaluated on how well they model

STAR principles in their daily interactions with internal and external customers, and on how effectively they foster the STAR work culture and integrate STAR principles within their teams, the daily operations of their department, and the District as a whole.

### **Ongoing Actions to Engage Team Members, Communicate Expectations, and Infuse Positive Energy**

Maintaining an energized and positive work culture requires regular engagement and communication. The District sustains STAR through a variety of approaches, events, and initiatives, such as departmental symposiums, Healthy Air Living events, and cross-departmental team building activities that strengthen teamwork, recognize achievements, identify goals, and encourage innovation. Management also routinely meets directly with staff to highlight successes, discuss challenges, identify opportunities for improvement, and reinforce expectations.

Feedback received from stakeholders, measurable operational results, and high levels of team member engagement all demonstrate the significant success of the STAR work culture. Maintaining a positive and productive work environment requires that these principles continue to be reinforced and refreshed. Consistent with the spirit of STAR, the District will continue seeking new and innovative ways to promote these values and enhance the work culture.

Building on the strong foundation and continued success of STAR, the District will be working in the coming year to identify new opportunities to strengthen its STAR work culture. As part of this effort, District leadership will engage employees throughout the organization to identify opportunities to build on STAR's successes, encourage fresh ideas, and ensure that the principles of Service, Teamwork, Attitude, and Respect remain central to the District's daily operations. These ongoing efforts will help ensure that STAR remains energized, relevant, and deeply ingrained throughout the organization, while further strengthening team member engagement, organizational excellence, and the District's ability to effectively serve Valley residents and businesses.