



STAFF REPORT
7/8/2026

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council Members

FROM: Gustavo Romo, City Manager

PREPARED BY: Cástulo Estrada, Utilities Director

SUBJECT: Professional Services Agreement with Westbound Communications in the Amount not to Exceed \$58,575 for Proposition 218 Public Outreach and Communications Support

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Authorize the City Manager to Execute a Professional Services Agreement with Westbound Communications in the Amount not to Exceed \$58,575 for Proposition 218 Public Outreach and Communications Support.

BACKGROUND:

The City of Coachella through its Water Authority and Sanitary District is completing a comprehensive evaluation of its water and wastewater utility systems and has developed proposed rate adjustments necessary to maintain reliable service, fund critical infrastructure improvements, comply with regulatory requirements, and ensure the long-term financial sustainability of both utilities.

California law under Proposition 218 establishes specific procedural requirements for adopting utility rate adjustments, including public notification, opportunities for public input, and a formal public hearing. To ensure that customers receive timely, accurate, and accessible information throughout this process, staff recommends retaining Westbound Communications to develop and implement a comprehensive bilingual public outreach and education program.

The proposed communications strategy emphasizes transparency, community engagement, multilingual communication, and customer education while ensuring compliance with Proposition 218 outreach requirements.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS:

The City requested informal proposals for Proposition 218 public outreach and communication services from five (5) qualified firms and received four proposals. Staff evaluated each proposal based on the firm's experience with Proposition 218 public outreach, qualifications of the project

team, understanding of the scope of work, experience with public agency communications, and ability to provide bilingual community engagement services.

Westbound Communications brings extensive experience working with water districts and other public agencies throughout California. The firm's project team has successfully developed and implemented public outreach and communications programs for agencies including Eastern Municipal Water District, Western Municipal Water District, Monte Vista Water District, West Valley Water District, Mesa Water District, Central Basin Municipal Water District, and the Mojave River Watershed Group. These projects have included public education initiatives related to water reliability, infrastructure investment, conservation, regulatory compliance, capital improvement programs, and Proposition 218 rate adjustments. This experience demonstrates the firm's ability to communicate complex utility issues in a clear, accurate, and accessible manner for customers and stakeholders.

In addition to its water utility expertise, Westbound has significant experience working with public agencies and regional initiatives throughout Riverside County and the Coachella Valley. The firm's project team has successfully delivered public outreach and community engagement services for the Riverside County Registrar of Voters, Riverside County Transportation Commission, the CV Link, and the CV Rail. Through these projects, Westbound has developed a strong understanding of the Coachella Valley's communities, stakeholder organizations, and effective bilingual communication strategies. This regional experience provides the City with a consultant that is familiar with local audiences and well positioned to implement a comprehensive outreach program that reflects the City's commitment to transparency, accessibility, and meaningful public engagement.

Based on the evaluation of the four proposals received, staff determined that Westbound Communications is the most qualified firm to provide Proposition 218 public outreach and community engagement services. Staff believes the firm's combination of Proposition 218 expertise, extensive water agency experience, and demonstrated success delivering public outreach programs throughout Riverside County and the Coachella Valley makes Westbound uniquely qualified to support the City's public education efforts for the proposed water and wastewater rate adjustments.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The requested \$58,575 will be funded 50% from the Water Enterprise Fund and 50% from the Sewer Enterprise Fund undesignated reserves under professional/contract services.

ATTACHMENT(S):

1. Proposal