

**Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights
College Board Questionnaire - 2026**



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Did you include the requested Additional Materials? Yes ☒ or No

☐ Please email completed Questionnaire and Additional Materials to
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Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights College
Board Questionnaire - 2026

Your Candidacy

1. What is your understanding of the role of a Santa Monica College board of trustees member?

The role of a Trustee is not to manage the day-to-day operations of the College, but to provide oversight of its governance. This includes hiring and evaluating the College President, setting policies, ensuring sound financial oversight, and making decisions that support the College's mission and students' success.

2. Why are you running to be a trustee of Santa Monica College?

I am running because I believe education creates opportunities, and I want to help ensure Santa Monica College remains a pathway to success for students from all backgrounds.

My own educational journey was not traditional. I attended community college in Belize, immigrated to the United States, and later returned to school as an adult learner. After age 35, I earned my bachelor's degree from the University of South Florida. After turning 40, I completed my master's degree while working full-time, raising my family, building businesses, and serving my community.

That journey taught me that there is no single path to higher education. Some students come straight from high school, while others return later in life because of work, family, financial challenges, or other responsibilities. Every student's journey is different, and every student deserves the opportunity to succeed.

Today, I have the privilege of helping create those opportunities for others. As Executive Director of the Santa Monica Black Empowerment Association, I founded the Empower Her Entrepreneurial Program, developed the curriculum and textbook, and personally teach the ten-week course. Watching women gain confidence, develop new skills, and build businesses has reinforced my belief that education has the power to transform lives.

As a Trustee, I want to help ensure that Santa Monica College remains accessible, affordable, and responsive to the needs of all students while preparing them for transfer, meaningful careers, and lifelong success.

3. What skills, background, and experience do you possess that prepare you for this office?

I believe my experience in nonprofit leadership, business ownership, education, and community service has prepared me well to serve as a Trustee. Throughout my career, I have built programs, managed budgets, raised funding, developed partnerships, and worked with people from many different backgrounds to create opportunities and solve problems.

As Executive Director of the Santa Monica Black Empowerment Association, I oversee programs that provide case management, workforce development, youth services, housing navigation, and mental health resources. Through this work, I've learned how important it is to be fiscally responsible, measure results, and ensure programs truly meet the needs of the people they are designed to serve.

I am also the owner of Jahvy International, an import-export company and manufacturer of Ms. Douglas Fry Jack & Tortilla Mix. As a business owner, I understand the importance of budgeting, planning for the future, making difficult decisions, and being accountable for results.

Education has always been central to my work. I founded the Empower Her Entrepreneurial Program, developed the curriculum and textbook, and personally teach the ten-week course. Watching women gain confidence, develop new skills, and build successful businesses has reinforced my belief that education creates opportunities and changes lives.

I currently serve as President of SMC Associates and have served on several nonprofit and community boards. Those experiences have taught me that good leadership begins with listening, asking thoughtful questions, respecting diverse perspectives, and making decisions that always put the organization's mission first. Those are the same principles I would bring to the Santa Monica College Board of Trustees.

4. What sets you apart from the others running to be a trustee of Santa Monica College?

If there is one thing that sets me apart, it is that I have experienced education from many different perspectives. I have been a community college student, an adult learner, an entrepreneur, an educator, a nonprofit leader, and someone who has spent years working directly with people trying to improve their lives.

I don't just believe education creates opportunities and opens doors; I have dedicated my career to creating those opportunities for others. Through the Santa Monica Black Empowerment Association, I founded the Empower Her Entrepreneurial Program, wrote the curriculum and textbook, and personally teach the ten-week course. Watching women gain confidence, build businesses, and become financially independent has reinforced my belief that education can truly change lives.

I also bring the perspective of both a nonprofit executive and a business owner. Every day, I make decisions about budgets, fundraising, partnerships, and accountability while ensuring our programs are making a real difference in the community. Those experiences have taught me the importance of listening, asking thoughtful questions, and making responsible decisions.

Most importantly, I understand that every student's journey is different because mine was. I believe the Board needs leaders who will listen, work collaboratively, and make decisions that keep students at the center while ensuring Santa Monica College remains a place where opportunity is available to everyone.

5. List each organization other than SMRR whose endorsement you have sought and whether or not you completed a questionnaire for that organization. Provide a copy of any questionnaire(s) you submitted to any other organization(s).

Santa Monica Democratic Club
Community for Excellent Public Schools

6. Please list your main funders, endorsers, and supporters, and provide an overview of your campaign's financial progress to date.

Endorsers:

Mayor Caroline Torosis
Councilmember Barry Snell
Councilmember Dan Hall
Councilmember Ellis Raskin
Councilmember Natalya Zernitskaya
Ex Mayor Nat Trives
Ex Mayor Gleam Davis
Assemblymember Rick Zbur
Alicia Mignano - SMMUSD
Laurie Lieberman - SMMUSD
Trustee Nancy Greenstein
Trustee Rob Radar
Trustee Luis Castaneo
Trustee Anatasia Foster
Trustee Sion Roy
Trustee Tom Peters
Former Trustee: Louise Jaffe
Kay Ambriz - Rent Control Board

I have approximately \$5000 in combined commitments.

7. Will you accept donations from developers and/or their paid lobbyists for your campaign?

NO

8. Please provide a list of all organizations with which you are a member, along with a description of leadership positions held, whether related to your civic, community or professional endeavors.

Santa Monica Rotary Club: Past Board Member
Santa Monica College Associates: President
Santa Monica History Museum
Santa Monica Breakfast Club
International Society of Black Latinos

SMRR

1. How long have you been a member of SMRR? Please outline the extent of your relationship and engagement with SMRR.

I have been a member of SMRR for approximately 7 years, supported their candidates with my vote, and relied on their mailers to help educate myself on the candidates best positioned to support and protect renters in Santa Monica.

2. Do you pledge, if elected, to attend SMRR's monthly Steering Committee meetings to provide the College Board report (in rotation with other SMRR supported College Board members)?

YES

3. Do you pledge, if elected, to discuss major policy issues related to your office with SMRR leaders prior to making decisions?

YES

Issues Relating to the College

1. What are the top 3 goals you want to achieve during your term on the SMC Board? How do you think you can achieve these goals?

If elected, I think there are three areas where I can make the biggest impact.

First is student success. Every student comes to Santa Monica College with a different story. Some come straight from high school, while others are working adults, parents, veterans, or students returning to school later in life. I understand that because my own educational journey was not traditional. I returned to college as an adult, earned my bachelor's degree in my late 30s, and completed my master's after 40 while balancing work and family. I want every student to have the support they need to stay in school and reach their goals.

Second, I want to strengthen workforce and transfer opportunities. Through the Empower Her Entrepreneurial Program that I created and teach, I have seen how education can give people the confidence and skills to change their lives. I would support partnerships with universities, local employers, and industry so students have strong pathways, whether they choose to transfer, earn a certificate, or enter the workforce.

Finally, I want to help ensure Santa Monica College remains financially strong. As a nonprofit executive and business owner, I know that every dollar matters. Good governance means asking thoughtful questions, making informed decisions, and being accountable to the community. I would work collaboratively with my fellow Trustees to make decisions that support students today while protecting the College's long-term future.

2. The College's fiscal status is difficult. What is your plan to improve it?

I recognize that Santa Monica College is facing serious financial challenges, and I don't believe there is a single solution. It will take difficult decisions, careful planning, and a Board that is willing to ask tough questions while keeping students at the center of every decision.

Running a nonprofit and owning businesses has taught me that you can't spend money you don't have, but you also can't cut your way to success. We have to be responsible with every dollar while continuing to invest in the programs and services that help students succeed.

I also think we should continue looking for ways to strengthen partnerships with the Santa Monica College Foundation, SMC Associates, alumni, local employers, labor organizations, and philanthropic partners. Those relationships can help create more scholarships, internships, workforce opportunities, and other resources for students. They are not a replacement for public funding, but they can help expand opportunities and strengthen the College.

As a Trustee, I will do my homework, ask thoughtful questions, listen to diverse perspectives, and make decisions in the best interests of both our students and the long-term financial health of Santa Monica College.

3. Given the fiscal pressures experienced by the college, particularly since the beginning of the second Trump Administration, do you think the Board of Trustees made the right decision in laying-off significant number of classified staff? What can you point to in order to assure SMRR that you are capable of being a good steward of the fiscal health of the college?

I believe the Board made the right decision, even though it was an incredibly difficult one. Layoffs are never easy, and my heart goes out to the employees and families who were affected. However, one of the Board's primary responsibilities is to ensure the College's long-term fiscal health. Sometimes that means making difficult decisions today to protect the institution and the students it serves tomorrow.

I've had to make difficult financial decisions myself. As Executive Director of the Santa Monica Black Empowerment Association and as a business owner, I've learned that you can't spend money you don't have, but you also can't cut your way to success. Good leadership means being responsible with every dollar while continuing to invest in the programs and services that have the greatest impact.

I've also learned that good stewardship is about planning ahead, asking tough questions, and making decisions based on facts rather than hope. If elected, I would bring that same approach to the Board of Trustees. I would carefully review the College's financial information, listen to different perspectives, and work with my fellow Trustees to make decisions that protect the College's long-term financial health while keeping students at the center of every decision.

I also believe we should continue strengthening partnerships with the Santa Monica College Foundation, SMC Associates, alumni, local employers, labor organizations, and philanthropic organizations to expand scholarships, internships, workforce opportunities, and other resources that benefit students. These partnerships should complement public funding and help strengthen the College for the future.

4. With all of the stress and strife in the world and on college campuses today, what will you do if elected to help alleviate tensions that may arise and keep SMC from being a hostile environment?

One thing I've learned through my nonprofit work is that people don't always have to agree, but they do have to feel heard. I've worked with people from many different backgrounds, cultures, beliefs, and life experiences, and I've found that listening with respect goes a long way.

College campuses should be places where people can express their ideas, challenge one another respectfully, and learn from different perspectives without fear or intimidation. I believe we all have a responsibility to help create an environment where students, faculty, and staff feel safe, respected, and valued.

If elected, I would encourage open communication, support opportunities for respectful dialogue, and listen before reaching conclusions. I don't believe every disagreement requires people to pick sides. Often, the best solutions come from bringing people together, finding common ground, and focusing on what we all want: successful students and a strong college.

That has been my approach throughout my career, and it is the same approach I would bring to the Santa Monica College Board of Trustees.

5. What specific steps will you take to reduce achievement gaps and increase both enrollment and completion rates of students from socio-economically challenged backgrounds?

As Executive Director of a nonprofit, I see firsthand how housing instability, transportation challenges, food insecurity, caregiving responsibilities, and financial pressures affect people's ability to complete their education. While a trustee does not manage programs directly, I believe the Board has a responsibility to ensure the college's policies, budget priorities, and strategic plan address these barriers and that we measure whether our efforts are making a difference.

As a trustee, it would be helpful to support public-private partnerships with the travel and tourism, hotel, and restaurant industries to strengthen workforce development in collaboration with these organizations. It would also be beneficial to work with the City and housing partners to support initiatives that help students overcome housing challenges.

6. What can you point to in order to assure SMRR that you are truly committed to reducing achievement gaps and increasing both enrollment and completion rates of students from socio-economically challenged backgrounds?

As a nonprofit leader who has spent years working directly with students and families facing housing and food insecurity, I've seen firsthand that these, not academic preparation, are often the real barriers between enrollment and completion. Many SMC students are renters or rent-burdened, and that instability shows up directly in our retention numbers.

As trustee, I'm committed to closing gaps at both ends of the pipeline: expanding outreach and enrollment support for students who might not otherwise see college as accessible or affordable, and strengthening completion support through resources like the Basic Needs Center, emergency aid, and childcare for student parents. I'll work with fellow trustees to revitalize the Student Equity Plan and hold the college accountable to its targets through public, disaggregated reporting, and I will push to direct resources where the data shows students are actually falling out of the pipeline, not just where it's politically easy to fund.

7. SMC was once known for having a higher percentage of full-time vs adjunct faculty members as compared to other community colleges. Has this changed? If so, please explain why, and what you think can and should be done (if anything) to reverse this trend.

Santa Monica College has long been recognized for the strength of its faculty, and I understand that over the years the balance between full-time and adjunct faculty has shifted, largely because of enrollment fluctuations, retirements, and financial pressures facing community colleges across California. While I don't believe there is one perfect percentage, I do believe we should understand why the change occurred and whether it is affecting student success, faculty engagement, or the college's long-term goals.

As a trustee, my responsibility is to make sure the college has a plan that supports both student success and long-term financial stability. I would review the data, ask questions, and work with the Superintendent/President, faculty, staff, and my fellow trustees to determine whether changes are needed. If the college is in a position to do so, I would support increasing full-time faculty where it makes sense while continuing to recognize the important contributions of our adjunct faculty.

8. Higher education in California (and beyond) is changing a lot. What does the future of higher education at the College look like to you? What will you do if elected to facilitate your vision for the future of higher education at the college?

Higher education is changing as students' needs have changed: rising basic-needs pressures and a growing demand for career-connected pathways. SMC must evolve without losing what makes it distinctive: its number-one transfer rate to UC and USC.

I believe SMC needs to expand workforce and career education partnerships with local employers in the healthcare, tech, and tourism industries, so students who don't plan to transfer still walk away with real value and a good-paying job. Second, technology, including AI, will change both how we teach and the skills students need; SMC should be proactive in integrating these tools thoughtfully rather than reacting to them. And finally, the college of the future has to treat basic needs as core infrastructure, not an afterthought. Housing, food security, and access to childcare will increasingly determine whether students can even show up to take advantage of everything SMC has to offer.

My commitment is to make sure SMC evolves in a way that widens access rather than narrowing it; protecting affordability and completion for local, working-class students even as the college competes and adapts to continuous change.

9. Do you support the College building student housing? If so, what will you do if elected to assure that it happens?

Yes, I strongly support building student housing. If elected, I will work with the college to enhance the master facility plan to help establish a clear development and building timeline. I will also work to make sure the planning process is transparent and includes real community input, so the project reflects both SMC's goals and the needs of Santa Monica renters and neighbors.

10. If and when the College builds student housing, what percentage would you like to see devoted to affordable student housing, including housing for unhoused students and students at risk of becoming unhoused?

I would like to see 50% devoted to affordable student housing, including housing for unhoused students and students at risk of becoming unhoused.

11. Among its other important obligations, what obligations do you believe the College has to the communities of Santa Monica and Malibu? What goals and plans do you have for the College vis-à-vis the Santa Monica and Malibu communities?

First, SMC needs to be a good neighbor to the communities of Santa Monica and Malibu. Second, SMC needs to stay engaged with community members through forums, tabling events, and partnerships with the local schools. My goals and plans are to ensure the college continues to work closely with these communities in order to share ideas on common issues such as housing and jobs.

12. The college has a remarkable music program. Do you have ideas for taking that program more visibly into the community of Santa Monica?

With my background in fundraising and event planning, I know how to build partnerships that actually get off the ground, not just proposed. I'd bring that experience to help SMC's music program partner with local nonprofits and community organizations that already host events, offering student performers as a built-in resource rather than something they have to create from scratch. I'd also push for stronger ties with the city, which is now adding yearly musical festivals to the city/beach, and lastly, I would develop a partnership with Downtown Santa Monica Inc. to create a summer/fall music series on Third Street Promenade.

State Ballot Measures

1. Do you support the Howard Jarvis measure (or any substitute for that measure) to require a two-thirds vote on any and every form of new local tax? Why or why not? Will you actively encourage your supporters to vote the same way as you on this measure?

No, I don't support the Howard Jarvis measure. With the Trump administration attempting to kill education funding at every level, healthcare, and any federal program that levels the playing field for working class families, our local governments need to have a wide range of funding opportunities available to improve our education system, provide public safety, and build a more affordable country.

2. Do you support the measure to require that any ballot measure imposing a new super-majority vote requirement must itself pass by that same super-majority in order to become effective? Why or why not? Will you actively encourage your supporters to vote the same way as you on this measure (assuming it appears on the ballot)?

While I support the ballot measure process, it is too often abused by well-funded corporations, developers, and billionaires to undermine public funding, hurting our education system and public safety. A perfect example is the above-mentioned Howard Jarvis measure. If Howard Jarvis and future

organizations want to require a 2/3 majority for all new tax increases, they need to secure that vote from 2/3 of voters.

3. Do you support the measure to condition the right to vote on new voter identification requirements? Why or why not? Will you actively encourage your supporters to vote the same way as you on this measure?

No, I do not. Our elections across the country are remarkably safe with near-zero voter fraud, yet we have a sore loser in the White House who will stop at nothing to undermine fair and free elections because his corruption and record as President are so unpopular, the only pathway he has to win is to lie, cheat, and steal.

This ballot measure is an insult to election workers and an insult to our ancestors and veterans who have fought and died to protect the right to vote. I will not be supporting this ballot measure, built on lies and a fragile ego.