

Shaping the Future of Special District Governance

TSDC Leads from the Frontlines at the Inaugural NSDA Texas Leadership Forum



AUSTIN, TEXAS – July 22-23, 2025

The inaugural NSDA Texas Special District Leadership Forum convened at the Aloft Austin Southwest, drawing special-purpose district leaders from across Texas – including water, library, mosquito control, and emergency services districts.

The event served as a landmark opportunity for representatives to address shared challenges, strengthen partnerships, and coordinate advocacy efforts at both the state and national levels.

A National Association with Local Impact

The NSDA, formed in 2018 as the **National Special Districts Coalition** and formally incorporated as an association in January 2025, exists to unite the national voice for more than 40,000 special districts across the country. Its mission is straightforward yet ambitious: secure federal recognition of special districts, ensure equal access to funding programs, and strengthen governance through education and collaboration.

The inaugural NSDA Texas Special District Leadership Forum highlighted the state's importance in national special district advocacy & awareness. Texas is home to thousands of special-purpose districts – including Special Utility Districts (SUDs), Water Control & Improvement Districts (WCIDs), Mosquito Control Districts (MCDs), and Library Districts (LDs) – many of which face both shared & unique legislative and funding challenges. The creation of the Texas Special Districts Coalition (TSDC) has enhanced statewide collaboration and elevated Texas' role in shaping both state and national policy.



A Legislative Priority: H.R. 2766 / S. 2014

Why H.R. 2766 / S. 2014 Matters

- **Recognition.** Treats special districts as local governments for federal programs.
- **Eligibility.** Opens direct access to grants and emergency relief that were often out of reach.
- **Implementation.** Directs Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to issue guidance and requires agencies to align their rules, creating consistent access across programs.

Central to the forum's policy discussions was **H.R. 2766**, the *Special District Fairness and Accessibility Act*, and its Senate companion (**S.2014**). These bipartisan bills represent a historic step forward for special districts nationwide, aiming to formally recognize them in federal law as local governments.

This change carries significant implications. Federal recognition would open the door to critical funding streams that have historically been out of reach – from emergency relief programs to infrastructure and capital improvement grants. It would also ensure special districts are counted in census data, a foundational factor in determining eligibility for numerous federal programs.

“It makes sense to do it here in Texas because you started your coalition several years ago,” said Ann Terry, President of the NSDA. She explained that uniting libraries, utilities, mosquito control, and water districts gives them the ability to speak with one voice in legislative and policy discussions.

The urgency of this legislation was underscored by the experience of many districts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Without federal recognition, they were shut out of relief funding that flowed to cities and counties, leaving them to shoulder the burden of service delivery without the same level of support. As Chris Boyd, General Manager of Mustang SUD, explained: “People around us were getting millions... we weren’t even eligible.”

If enacted, H.R. 2766 and S. 2014 would require the OMB to issue guidance within six months, confirming that special districts qualify as local governments for federal funding purposes. Federal agencies would then have one year to align their policies with that guidance.

For Texas – with thousands of special-purpose districts serving millions of residents – passage of this legislation would mark a transformational moment, granting access to tools and resources that could strengthen infrastructure, improve services, and enhance resilience in the face of future crises.

Leadership and Operational Excellence

The forum wasn’t only about legislation; it was about leadership. Combat veterans **Blayne Smith** and **Brandon Young** of Applied Leadership Partners delivered a keynote on building trust, embracing healthy tension, and solving problems through clear communication.



“Most real challenges are leadership challenges,” Smith told the room. “It may feel like a budget problem, but it can be solved with good communication.” His point underscored a common thread running through many of the day’s discussions – that operational and legislative hurdles alike often trace back to leadership dynamics.

Expanding on that theme, Young added: “A leader’s first job is to see the world as it really is.” For Texas’s special districts, that means recognizing the realities of legislative cycles, funding limitations, and the need for coalition building to address them effectively.

These insights are at the heart of TSDC’s mission and are strengthened through the contributions of dedicated members such as Mustang SUD, Benbrook Library District, and Roach & Associates, PLLC. By combining strong leadership, legislative, and operational expertise,

these members work to advocate for the interests of special districts, ensuring their voices are heard at the Capitol and their needs are addressed in policy discussions. Together, this partnership empowers districts to navigate complex regulatory landscapes, advocate effectively for their communities, and capitalize on opportunities for growth and innovation.

Financial Strategy

One of the forum's most actionable takeaways focused on strategies for managing district financial resources. **Travis Zander** of Texas CLASS noted that many entities receive the bulk of their annual revenue in a single installment. "Many districts receive their money once a year – this forum helps them learn how to leverage it."

His session highlighted the importance of proactive investment and cash-flow management strategies to ensure that available funds continue working effectively throughout the year.

Collaboration

Beyond finances, the summit reinforced the importance of building relationships across different types of special districts. **Erica Richardson** of the Benbrook Library District highlighted that the communities served by libraries, utilities, and other districts often overlap – making cooperation not just beneficial, but necessary.

"Libraries, utilities – we all serve the same people. Let's help each other," Richardson urged. This mindset reflects the broader purpose of the forum: breaking down silos so districts can share resources, solve problems together, and present a unified voice when advocating at the state and federal levels.

This face-to-face interaction allowed attendees to compare approaches to governance, funding, and community engagement in a way that rarely happens outside of their own sector. By understanding how other districts operate – and the hurdles they face – leaders can better align strategies, find areas of shared advocacy, and strengthen their collective voice at both the state and national levels.

Roach & Associates PLLC: Advocacy Beyond the Boardroom



A highlight of the Forum was a post-session legislative update from Jonathan Roach, Managing Attorney at Roach & Associates PLLC and a founding member of the TSDC. Jonathan walked attendees through the outcomes of the 89th Texas Legislature, summarizing the most significant bills affecting special districts and explaining how these new laws shape the operating landscape for utilities, libraries, emergency services, and other local government entities. The discussion offered participants not just a recap of the session, but

a clearer understanding of how new state policy will impact the work they do every day in their communities.

“TSDC was created in 2025, in part, to ensure that special districts of all types throughout Texas remain informed and have a chance to actively participate in the legislative process. Beyond the 89th Texas Legislature (2025), TSDC will continue to be a resource and shared voice to advocate for Texas special district interests in the coming years” said Roach.

For TSDC and its members, attending the NSDA Texas Leadership Forum was more than a networking opportunity. It was a chance to actively shape the policy landscape on behalf of local governments and the communities they serve.

Looking Ahead

The NSDA Texas Special District Leadership Forum proved that when leaders from every sector come together – from utilities and libraries to emergency services and mosquito control – the results are immediate and lasting. In just one day, districts shared solutions, built partnerships, and strengthened a unified voice that can make a difference at every level of government.

Looking ahead, TSDC will carry that momentum into the months to come. In the near term, the Coalition is focused on three priorities:

- **Growing the statewide network**, inviting more districts to join in and strengthening ties between sectors.
- **Advancing federal recognition and funding access**, so Texas districts are counted, eligible, and positioned to receive their fair share of resources.
- **Equipping districts with tools for advocacy**, providing clear information, training, and collaboration opportunities that help local leaders navigate policy challenges with confidence.

These goals build directly on the lessons of the forum: collaboration across sectors not only makes districts stronger at home, it also gives them the unified voice they need to be heard in Austin and Washington.

Together, these efforts reflect more than an agenda—they represent a commitment to building a stronger voice for Texas special districts. By staying engaged between sessions and working across sectors, the Coalition is ensuring that local communities are not only heard but also equipped to thrive. The momentum from the Forum is just the beginning, and the TSDC is ready to carry it forward.

The Texas Special Districts Coalition exists to unite, strengthen, and amplify the voice of Texas special districts. By bringing various special district types across the state of Texas, the Coalition works to ensure that every district has a seat at the table in state and federal policy conversations. To learn more about the Coalition or to join, visit texassdc.com or contact us at Admin@TexasSDC.com.

View the full event photo gallery [here](#).