

General Information

Candidate Name: Kera Blades-Snell

Email Address: kerablades@gmail.com

Candidate's Current Occupation: Executive Director

Candidate's Employer: Santa Monica Black Empowerment Association (SMBEA)

Campaign Contact Person (if other than candidate):

1. What qualifications do you bring to this office?

I bring a unique combination of lived experience, business leadership, nonprofit management, and community service. As an immigrant from Belize, I understand firsthand the transformative power of education and the challenges many students face while balancing family, work, and academic responsibilities.

I began my higher education journey at a community college in Belize before immigrating to the United States. At age 35, I enrolled at the University of South Florida, where I completed my bachelor's degree while working and raising a family. After turning 40, I earned a master's degree in Hospitality Management, demonstrating my commitment to lifelong learning and educational advancement.

Professionally, I have founded and managed multiple businesses, secured and managed grants, overseen budgets, and led community-based organizations. As Executive Director of SMBEA, I work directly with students, families, entrepreneurs, and underserved populations, giving me valuable insight into the educational and workforce needs of our community.

2. Why are you running?

I am running because I believe education creates opportunities, and I want to help ensure that 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. At 35, I enrolled at the University of South Florida and earned my bachelor's degree. After turning 40, I completed my master's degree while balancing work, family, and community responsibilities.

That experience taught me that students come to higher education with different life circumstances and challenges. As a Trustee, I want to ensure that Santa Monica College continues to provide accessible, affordable, and high-quality education while supporting students' academic, personal, and career goals.

3. What are the top issues of your campaign, and how do they differ from other candidates in this race? How do you plan to address those issues once elected?

My campaign focuses on four priorities:

- 1. Student Success and Educational Access**
Ensuring students have the support they need to achieve their educational goals, whether that means transferring to a four-year university, earning a certificate, or entering the workforce.
- 2. Workforce Development and Career Readiness**
Strengthening partnerships between Santa Monica College, local employers, nonprofits, and industry leaders to create meaningful pathways to employment.
- 3. Student Wellness and Support Services**
Expanding access to mental health resources, basic needs support, mentorship opportunities, and community partnerships that help students overcome barriers to success.
- 4. Transparent and Responsible Governance**
Ensuring fiscal responsibility, transparent decision-making, and meaningful engagement with students, faculty, staff, and the community.

What distinguishes my candidacy is that I bring the perspectives of an immigrant, entrepreneur, nonprofit executive, and adult learner who understands that education can transform lives at any age and stage.

4. Please list all endorsements received to date (individual and organizational).

Caroline Torrosis: Santa Monica Mayor
Dan Hall - Santa Monica Council Member
Ellis Raskin - Santa Monica Council Member
Barry Snell - Santa Monica Council Member
Rick Zbur - State Assembly
Dr. Antonio Shelton - Superintendent of Schools
Alicia Mignano - School Board
Rob Radar - SMC Trustee
Luis Castanon - SMC Trustee
Anatasia Foster - SMC Trustee
Sion Roy - SMC Trustee
Tom Peters - SMC Trustee

5. How long have you lived in Santa Monica or Malibu? Where else have you lived?

I have lived in Santa Monica for approximately ten years and am proud to call this community home.

Prior to moving to Santa Monica, I lived in Belize, where I was born and raised, and later in Tampa, Florida, where I completed my undergraduate and graduate education. My experiences living in different communities have given me a broad perspective on education, workforce development, and community engagement, all of which inform my approach to public service.

6. Will you pledge to serve on the College Board for your entire four-year term?

Yes. If elected, I am fully committed to serving my entire four-year term.

7. What is your history of watching, attending, or speaking at SMC Board meetings? (If incumbent, prior to your own service.)

I have followed Santa Monica College Board meetings for many years, even before moving to Santa Monica. While living in Tampa, Florida, I regularly watched meetings because my boyfriend at the time served as an SMC Trustee. After relocating to Santa Monica, I continued attending and watching Board meetings to stay informed about College issues. While I have not spoken publicly at meetings, I have engaged in conversations with Trustees and community members about the College's priorities and governance.

Campaign Finance

1. How much money have you raised for your campaign to date?

I have raised \$5000.00 for my campaign to date.

2. How much do you intend to raise by Election Day 2026?

I intend to raise between \$40,000 by Election Day 2026.

3. Candidates for local office often choose not to take campaign contributions from particular types of organizations or industries who are out of step with their own values. Are there any such sources from which you would decline donations? If so, which?

Yes. I would decline contributions from individuals or organizations whose activities are inconsistent with the values of public education, equity, inclusion, and student success.

Party / Activism

1. How long have you been a registered Democrat? Have you ever been registered as a member of another political party, or as Decline To State? If so, which party and why?

I have been a registered Democrat since becoming eligible to vote in the United States. I have never been registered with another political party or as Decline To State.

2. What is your experience with political activism? Have you ever volunteered or worked for a political campaign other than your own, and if so, in what capacity were you involved?

My political involvement has primarily focused on education, community engagement, and advocacy. Through my work with the Santa Monica Black Empowerment Association, we have helped communities of color overcome systemic barriers to achieve justice. I have also worked on Barry Snell's campaigns, assisting with marketing, graphic design, voter outreach materials, and community engagement efforts.

3. Which political candidates and/or ballot measures have you endorsed or supported publicly in the past? Please list as many as possible, especially where you endorsed during a contested primary.

I have not formally endorsed political candidates or ballot measures in contested races, due to my role as the Executive Director of a non-profit. My community involvement has focused primarily on nonprofit leadership, civic engagement, and community service rather than political endorsements.

4. Have you ever signed for or publicly supported efforts to recall a public official from office? If so, please list the name(s) of the officials and why you felt they should be recalled.

No, I have never signed or publicly supported an effort to recall a public official from office.

5. Please list any organizations with which you are a member, including any leadership position you have held in each organization.

SMC Associates – Current President
Rotary Club of Santa Monica – Member (served on the board in several capacities over the past 25 years)
Santa Monica History Museum – Board Member
International Society of Black Latinos – Member
Santa Monica Breakfast Club - Member
Santa Monica Black Empowerment Association (SMBEA) – Executive Director
Santa Monica Travel and Tourism - Board Member

6. Please confirm that you have read the latest version of the California Democratic Party Platform, as found below. List any items in the CDP Platform with which you disagree.

<https://cadem.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/CDP-Platform-2026-FINAL-Platform-Adopted-2.22.26.pdf>

Yes, I have read the latest California Democratic Party Platform. Overall, I support its core principles and values and currently have no disagreements with the platform.

SMC Governance & Finance

- 1. What are your top priorities for Santa Monica College over the next four years?**

My top priorities are improving student success and completion, strengthening workforce development programs, expanding student support services, including mental health resources, and ensuring responsible fiscal stewardship and transparent governance.

2. How do you assess the College's current financial and enrollment outlook, and what steps would you take to ensure long-term stability?

Santa Monica College, like many community colleges, faces ongoing enrollment and budget challenges. Long-term stability will require strategic enrollment growth, responsible fiscal management, and stronger partnerships with the broader community.

I believe SMC has an opportunity to collaborate more closely with the City of Santa Monica, the tourism and hospitality industry, local businesses, and community organizations to create workforce pathways that attract and retain students.

As someone with a background in hospitality and workforce development, I see tremendous potential for partnerships that connect students to internships, career opportunities, and industry-recognized training programs. By aligning academic programs with workforce needs while maintaining strong fiscal oversight, SMC can strengthen both enrollment and long-term financial sustainability.

3. How would you approach working with the College administration to effectively implement Board policies and ensure accountability?

As a Trustee, my role is not to manage the day-to-day operations of the College, but to provide oversight, set policy, and ensure accountability. I would work collaboratively with the administration through regular meetings, clear performance expectations, and measurable outcomes tied to Board priorities.

By maintaining open communication and regularly reviewing progress, I would help ensure that policies are implemented effectively while supporting transparency and continuous improvement.

4. How do you assess Santa Monica College's current approach to transparency, public engagement, and community trust? What specific steps would you take to ensure accountability and meaningful public input in Board decision-making?

I believe Santa Monica College has made efforts to maintain transparency and community engagement through public meetings, outreach activities, and collaboration with community stakeholders. I often assess transparency by an organization's willingness to share information, engage with the public, and participate in community events and discussions.

As a Trustee, I would support regular engagement with community leaders, residents, students, faculty, and staff to better understand their concerns and priorities. I would encourage periodic listening sessions, participation in community events, clear communication regarding Board decisions, and accessible opportunities for public input. Accountability is strengthened when stakeholders feel informed, heard, and included in the decision-making process.

5. Santa Monica College recently faced a significant budget shortfall that led the Board to approve layoffs, prompting substantial public debate over the College's financial management and long-term planning. What is your assessment of how the Board handled the situation? How would you balance fiscal responsibility, workforce impacts, educational quality, transparency, and long-term institutional stability when making difficult governance decisions?

Budget shortfalls of this magnitude do not happen overnight, and I believe they require ongoing oversight, planning, and accountability. While I understand that difficult decisions had to be made to address the College's financial challenges and ensure long-term stability, I also recognize the significant impact layoffs have on employees, students, and the campus community.

As a Trustee, I would advocate for stronger Board engagement in budget planning, regular financial reviews, and early identification of potential fiscal challenges. My goal would be to balance fiscal responsibility with the protection of educational quality and the support of employees whenever possible. Transparency, stakeholder engagement, and clear communication are essential when making difficult decisions so that the community understands both the challenges and the rationale behind the actions taken.

Students & Learning

1. What specific steps would you take to improve student outcomes at SMC, including transfer rates, completion, and workforce readiness? How should success be measured?

I would focus on strengthening academic advising, mentorship opportunities, transfer support services, and workforce partnerships that connect students to internships, apprenticeships, and career opportunities. I also believe mental health and basic needs support play an important role in student success and completion.

Success should be measured through transfer rates, graduation and completion rates, job placement outcomes, enrollment persistence, and student satisfaction surveys.

2. How should SMC address student housing insecurity, and how should access to any new student housing be prioritized?

Student housing insecurity is a significant barrier to academic success and should be addressed through a combination of on-campus housing, community

partnerships, and supportive services. I believe SMC should work closely with the City of Santa Monica, affordable housing providers, and organizations such as Community Corporation of Santa Monica to identify additional housing opportunities and resources for students.

Access to any new student housing should be prioritized based on demonstrated need, with consideration given to low-income students, homeless or housing-insecure students, former foster youth, and students who face the greatest barriers to completing their education.

3. What role should Santa Monica College play in supporting student mental health and well-being?

Student mental health is essential to academic success, retention, and overall well-being. Santa Monica College has already demonstrated leadership through its counseling services, student clubs, wellness programs, and collaborations with organizations such as CalMHSA and the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health.

As a Trustee, I would support continued investment in these programs, expand awareness of available resources, and strengthen partnerships with community organizations to ensure students have access to the support they need both on and off campus. A healthy student is better positioned to succeed academically and achieve their educational goals.

4. How should Santa Monica College balance the use of digital learning tools and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, with concerns about academic integrity, student engagement, and educational quality? What guidelines or limitations, if any, should the College adopt?

We need a clear policy on AI integration. Our students need to understand how to use AI as a tool and not as a replacement for critical thinking and research.

This is a very dangerous time for education. Santa Monica should look at what other states, professors, and teachers are doing to develop guidelines around AI.

The American Federation of Teachers released a 10-point plan to boost teaching and learning in the AI era. We should strongly consider implementing some of these principles locally.

Campus & Community

1. In light of increasing political tensions surrounding public education nationwide, how should SMC balance academic freedom, free expression, inclusive learning environments, institutional neutrality, and disruptive campus protests?

We must not allow fear of fascists to dictate our policies. The constitution is clear on freedom of speech, and while Trump may act like a king and republicans treat him as one, I will not.

2. How should the College adapt its programs to meet evolving workforce and economic needs?

We need a clear policy on AI integration. Our students need to understand how to use AI as a tool and not as a replacement for critical thinking and research.

This is a very dangerous time for education. Santa Monica should look at what other states, professors, and teachers are doing to develop guidelines around AI.

3. Do you support the Club's resolution calling for a citywide ban of artificial turf on locally owned public land?

Yes.

4. In what ways should SMC strengthen pathways between K-12 education, community college, and career opportunities?

SMC should continue to play a large role in supporting Santa Monica's Cradle to Career. We need to work with industries in Santa Monica to develop internships and entry-level career pathways, and to expand apprenticeship programs with trade unions.

5. What role should Santa Monica College play in the broader Santa Monica community and regional economy?

We are a large employer with massive procurement needs. We need to double down on supporting local businesses with procurement. Our money should stay local and support a thriving small business economy in Santa Monica.

Ballot Measures

1. Do you support the California Billionaire Tax Act, which would impose a one-time emergency 5% tax on those worth more than \$1B? Why or why not?

Yes, we are witnessing the accumulation of wealth at a level unknown in human history, while students in our colleges and schools are homeless and hungry. This is a crisis, and I have no sympathy for those billionaires who cry poverty in their private jets while the rest of us struggle to pay rent.

2. Do you support the state ballot measure which would require voters to present government-issued identification when casting ballots? Why or why not?

No. We have the safest elections in the world, and the only danger they face is Trump and his army of racists, who are determined to stop black and brown people from voting.

3. Do you support the proposed state taxpayer initiative which would limit the ability of local governments to raise revenue through certain taxes and fees including real estate transfer taxes? Why or why not?

No, what we need is for billionaires and corporations to pay their fair share, and local governments would not need to raise taxes locally.

4. Do you support the proposed ballot measure which would set aside 25% of the airport land for 3000 units of affordable housing, in addition to the remainder which would become a Great Park? Why or why not?

No. Voters were very clear on this: they want a park.

5. Based on results from the first few years of implementation, do you believe that 2022's Measure GS should be amended? If so, how and why?

As of right now, no. I am always open to changing my mind if I am presented with clear evidence that Measure GS is killing housing development.

Additional Questions

1. If elected, how would you attempt to interact with the Santa Monica Democratic Club and other political organizations to ensure community buy-in on new proposals?

Of course.

2. What is the most important topic that was left off of this questionnaire?

I think everything was covered.

3. Please describe whether and how you used generative AI tools in preparing your responses. If elected, how would you use these tools in governance, if at all?

I used AI as an editing tool, and spell checker.

If elected I would use AI as a tool to improve research, efficiency and conciseness and as an editing tool.