

# Behind the Scenes

## Executive Director's Report

Access held its Annual Meeting on Monday, November 24, 2025 at the California Endowment Center in downtown Los Angeles.

Over 100 participants, including stakeholders, member agencies and Access' Board of Directors, heard presentations from staff on the agency's FY25 operational and financial performance.

The Spotlight and Spirit of Accessibility award winners were also honored (please see the adjacent article).

The next Board of Directors meeting will be held on Monday, December 8, 2025.

**Andre Colaiace**  
**Executive Director**

**access**



## Celebrating our award recipients: Canine Companions and John Kuusto

This year, we are proud to recognize two outstanding contributors whose dedication and impact have made a real difference in our community.

### Spirit of Accessibility Award: Canine Companions



Founded in 1975, Canine Companions is one of the nation's largest and most respected providers of service dogs. With a regional center in Oceanside serving Southern California, the organization has provided more than 7,500 assistance dogs —free of charge — to children, adults, and veterans with disabilities. Each service dog is carefully bred, trained, and matched to meet the unique needs of its partner, performing tasks such as retrieving items, opening doors, and providing steady support. Beyond practical help, these dogs offer friendship and emotional stability.

Canine Companions' work extends into the community through partnerships with hospitals, veterans' groups, and advocacy organizations, as well as through volunteer puppy-raiser programs that involve thousands nationwide. Their commitment to ongoing support ensures that every team thrives long after the initial match.

### Spotlight Award: John Kuusto

We are delighted to honor John Kuusto, nominated for the 2025 Spotlight Award. Since joining Alta Resources in 2015 and becoming a Customer Service agent with the Access Program in 2023, John has consistently demonstrated excellence. He has ranked among the top 10% of performers for nine



consecutive years, thanks to his technical expertise, positive attitude, and dedication to customer service.

John's impact is reflected in more than 40 customer commendations. One customer shared, "After speaking with John, I felt a lot better and more optimistic about my day." John also supports his team by stepping up as a leader during meetings and offering guidance in complex situations. His professionalism and kindness set a high standard for all.

We celebrate Canine Companions and John Kuusto for their remarkable achievements and the positive difference they make every day.

**Matt Avancena**  
*Director, Planning and Coordination*

## Sensitivity Workshop promotes inclusive practices

Access recently hosted a Sensitivity Workshop at its headquarters in El Monte, California, bringing together representatives from all six regional contracts, including Road Supervisors, Trainers, and Dispatchers.

The workshop was led by Carlos Benavides, President, and Ramon "Ray" Pizarro, Vice President, of the Los Angeles County Commission on Disabilities. Their leadership set the tone for an engaging and insightful session focused on fostering empathy and inclusiveness in transit operations.

### Key Takeaways

- > Empathy and respect for individuals with disabilities
- > Clear, effective communication tailored to individual needs
- > Awareness that disabilities are not always visible

Participants explored practical scenarios for assisting riders who use mobility aids and learned best practices for asking riders about their preferred assistance methods. The emphasis was on listening and adapting to each person's unique needs.

Real-life examples were discussed, such as guiding a visually impaired rider through the boarding process—underscoring the importance of patience, clear instructions, and sensitivity.

Access extends its appreciation to the contractors for their active participation and to the County Commissioners for their ongoing advocacy and commitment to ensuring inclusiveness in public transportation.

**Rogelio Gomez**  
*Senior Manager of Operations*



## Commendations

### ALTA

"Tiffany helped me get signed up with Access, and she was wonderful. I would like to thank Tiffany for her excellent customer service."

***Felicia Runnels***

***Rider since December 2011***

### West/Central Region

"I called for an ETA and spoke to Arlene, who remembered me and my son. I appreciate Arlene taking the time to ask how my son and I were doing. It was very nice of her."

***Michelle Smith***

***Rider since July 2006***