



APPLICATION WINDOW:
FEBRUARY 1 - JULY 31

WINNERS AWARDED AT
GSRMA'S ANNUAL
CONFERENCE

THRIVE AWARDS

To recognize member agencies that have implemented creative, practical, and effective approaches to risk management.

GOALS

- Celebrate and amplify the great work happening across our membership
- Encourage continued innovation and sharing of best practices
- Strengthen relationships by highlighting member success stories
- Create a learning platform where agencies can inspire one another

Please submit completed application and any supporting information to:
memberservices@gsrma.org
by no later than
Friday, July 31st.

ELIGIBILITY

- Open to current GSRMA member agencies.
- One submission per agency, per year.
- Agencies of all sizes and member types (fire, cemetery, special district, etc.) are encouraged to apply.

Agency Name

Orland Cemetery District

Applicant Name

Staci Buttermore

Applicant Title

District Manager

Email/Phone #

orlandcemdist@gmail.com

Date

May 12, 2026

RMAP

Participant

Yes

No

Unsure

LPSF/Training
Participation

Loss Prevention
Subsidy Fund

GSRMA
Webinars

GSRMA Annual
Conference

Previous THRIVE Award Recipient;
if so, what year?

Award Recipient Name (if different from above)

Orland Cemetery District

Email/Phone #

orlandcemdist@gmail.com

Title/Project Being Submitted for the THRIVE Award and short description.

"Reclaiming the Past, Securing the Future"

The Orland Cemetery District implemented a legally guided, technology-drive reclamation program to recover long-unused grave spaces, address limited land availability, and created a sustainable model for future cemetery operations. Through innovation, due diligence, and community transparency, the District successfully increased burial capacity, generated significant revenue potential, and created a model process for other public cemetery districts.



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1. Describe the hazard, risk, or challenge.

The Orland Cemetery District has undertaken a comprehensive initiative to reclaim unused grave spaces that have remained inactive. At the outset of this effort, the District identified 481 such graves, the majority of which had no recorded activity for a minimum of 50 years, with the majority exceeding 75 years of inactivity.

Historical records for these plots were often limited to the original owner's name, with no additional contact information, presenting a significant challenge in identifying and locating rightful owners or heirs.

A primary hazard associated with this project is the potential disturbance of unidentified or undocumented interments due to incomplete, inconsistent, or inaccurate historical records. This creates the risk of inadvertently reclaiming or encroaching upon occupied burial spaces, particularly in cases where graves are unmarked or poorly documented.

Furthermore, the District faces the possibility that an owner or heir may come forward after a plot has been reclaimed, resulting in legal, ethical, and community-relations concerns.

Compounding these challenges is the District's limited capacity for physical expansion. Surrounded by active agricultural land, opportunities to acquire additional property are extremely constrained.

As a result, the reclamation of long-unused grave spaces is not only a logistical and administrative undertaking, but also a critical strategy to ensure the District's long-term ability to serve a growing community while maintaining respect for those interred and their families.

2. What did your agency do to address/resolve it? Describe the solution, program, or innovation.

To address this complex challenge, the Orland Cemetery District implemented a strategic, legally grounded, and data-driven approach. The Board of Trustees authorized the initiation of the reclamation project in July 2025, securing funding through the District's budget process and engaging specialized legal counsel to guide compliance with applicable law.

Given the limited case law in California regarding cemetery plot abandonment, the District relied on the framework established under California Health and Safety Code Section 9069 and worked closely with legal counsel to ensure a thorough and defensible process. Under the direction of the District's attorney, staff initiated a comprehensive reclamation program that emphasized transparency, due diligence, and respect for the community. The District presented its petition for abandonment on April 15, 2026, and on April 22, 2026, received a court order granting the petition.

The District fulfilled all statutory noticing requirements by publishing public notices across multiple platforms, including online postings, local newspapers, the District office, and on-site at each cemetery. This multi-channel outreach ensured maximum opportunity for owners or heirs to come forward.

A critical component of the District's innovation was the incorporation of advanced technology to verify the status of each grave. The District retained a ground-penetrating radar survey firm to examine all plots identified for potential reclamation. This step went beyond minimum legal requirements and demonstrated a commitment to accuracy and ethical stewardship. The survey results revealed 101 previously unidentified unmarked graves, including 13 within the group initially considered for reclamation. These findings required the District to reassess and adjust its approach in real time, further underscoring the complexity of the project.

Through a combination of legal diligence, proactive public engagement, and the use of modern technology, the Orland Cemetery District developed a replicable and responsible model for cemetery reclamation. This program not only addressed immediate capacity challenges but also established a new standard for balancing operational needs with respect for those interred and their families.



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3. How could other GSRMA members adapt or benefit from this idea?

This project provides a valuable framework that can be readily adapted by other GSRMA members facing similar space constraints and record limitations. As a result of this effort, there is now relevant and current case law to guide judges, attorneys, and public cemeteries through the reclamation process, reducing uncertainty and legal ambiguity for others pursuing similar initiatives.

To further support industry adoption, the Orland Cemetery District, in collaboration with BBK Attorney Brian Hughes, developed a comprehensive and structured presentation designed specifically for cemetery districts. This resource outlines each phase of the process, including legal considerations, budgeting strategies, project timelines, public noticing requirements, and anticipated challenges. It also provides practical insights and lessons learned to help agencies avoid common pitfalls and implement best practices.

The District's goal has been not only to address its own operational needs, but also to serve as a model for others. By documenting and sharing this process, the Orland Cemetery District is actively contributing to the broader professional community, equipping other GSRMA members with the tools, knowledge, and confidence to undertake similar reclamation efforts.

This approach promotes responsible land stewardship, enhances long-term planning capabilities, and supports the sustainability of cemetery districts facing limited expansion opportunities.

4. Any additional information you'd like for the committee to consider?

Through this initiative, the Orland Cemetery District achieved measurable and meaningful results demonstrating both operational and financial impact. The District successfully reclaimed 469 grave spaces and, through ground-penetrating radar verification, identified an additional 140 unoccupied graves, resulting in a total of 609 available plots.

Based on the District's current fee schedule, this represents an estimated gross revenue potential of \$1,995,945.00. If the additional five interments per grave site are utilized, the estimated revenue potential increases by an additional \$3,149,150.00. After accounting for total project expenses of \$26,674.07, the cost to reclaim each grave was only \$43.80, reflecting a highly efficient use of resources.

Not only did this initiative generate substantial new revenue, it also extended the operational lifespan of the District by an estimated 6.5 years, providing critical additional capacity without the immediate need for expansion or land acquisition.

Beyond the financial benefits, this project highlights the District's ability to successfully execute a complex, multi-phase initiative with limited staffing. At the time of implementation, the District operated with a single office staff member and a team of three groundskeepers. Despite these constraints, the District navigated legal, administrative, and technical challenges to achieve a successful outcome. This effort demonstrates that even small districts, with careful planning, strategic partnerships, and a commitment to innovation, can undertake and complete impactful projects of this scale.

The Orland Cemetery District's experience underscores the value of perseverance, resourcefulness, and leadership in addressing long-term operational challenges while creating sustainable opportunities for the future.



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5. This page is for any additional supporting materials (ie: photos or graphics, policies, procedures, data or metrics showing impact. etc.)

Please see attached files and photos.





