



RIVERSIDE COUNTY'S NEW CEO HAS BIG PLANS

BY MELISSA MULLER '18

Photo courtesy of Riverside County

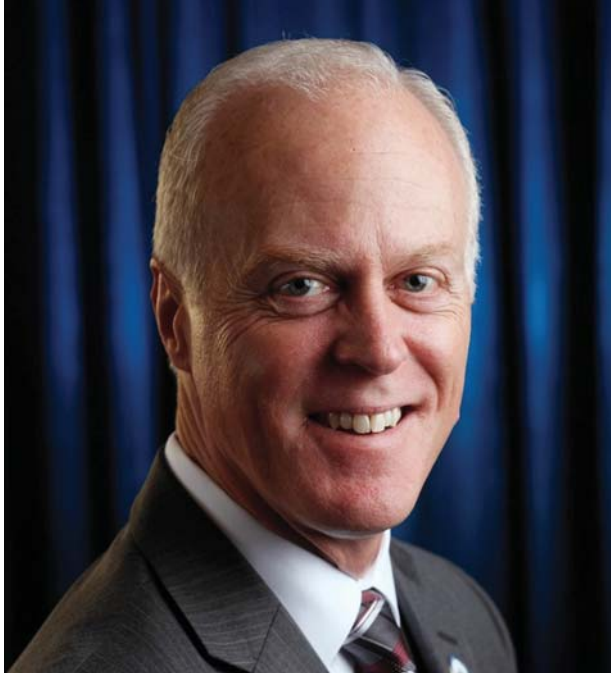
The Riverside County Board of Supervisors promoted George Johnson to serve as the county's new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) during a closed session on May 23, 2017. Johnson boasts a strong public-sector resume, with experience as Deputy CEO as well as in Riverside County's Land Management Agency and transportation department. Prior to his career in the public sector, Johnson worked as a civil engineer in the private sector.

The Board of Supervisors tasks the CEO with managing an organization comprised of 42 departments and over 22,000 employees. The CEO is responsible for a budget of \$5.5 billion for the 2017–2018 fiscal year. Given such a large mandate and variety of tasks to accomplish, the Rose Institute asked Johnson to identify some of his priorities as CEO. He highlighted county efforts to diversify and accelerate the economy, improve

opportunities for education, and streamline county government.

“Riverside County is diversifying the economy to create a thriving destination where families want to locate, buy a reasonably affordable home, work at good paying jobs, raise a family and secure high quality educations for their children. In order to continue serving a growing population, Riverside County is working to draw employers and work wherever it can with education institutions to improve opportunities for education in our county. Improving the economy and making more jobs available will offer residents and their children the opportunity to earn good wages and find affordable housing close to home,” said Johnson.

Riverside County, however, has faced substantial financial difficulties in the past



George Johnson. Photo courtesy of Riverside County Executive Office

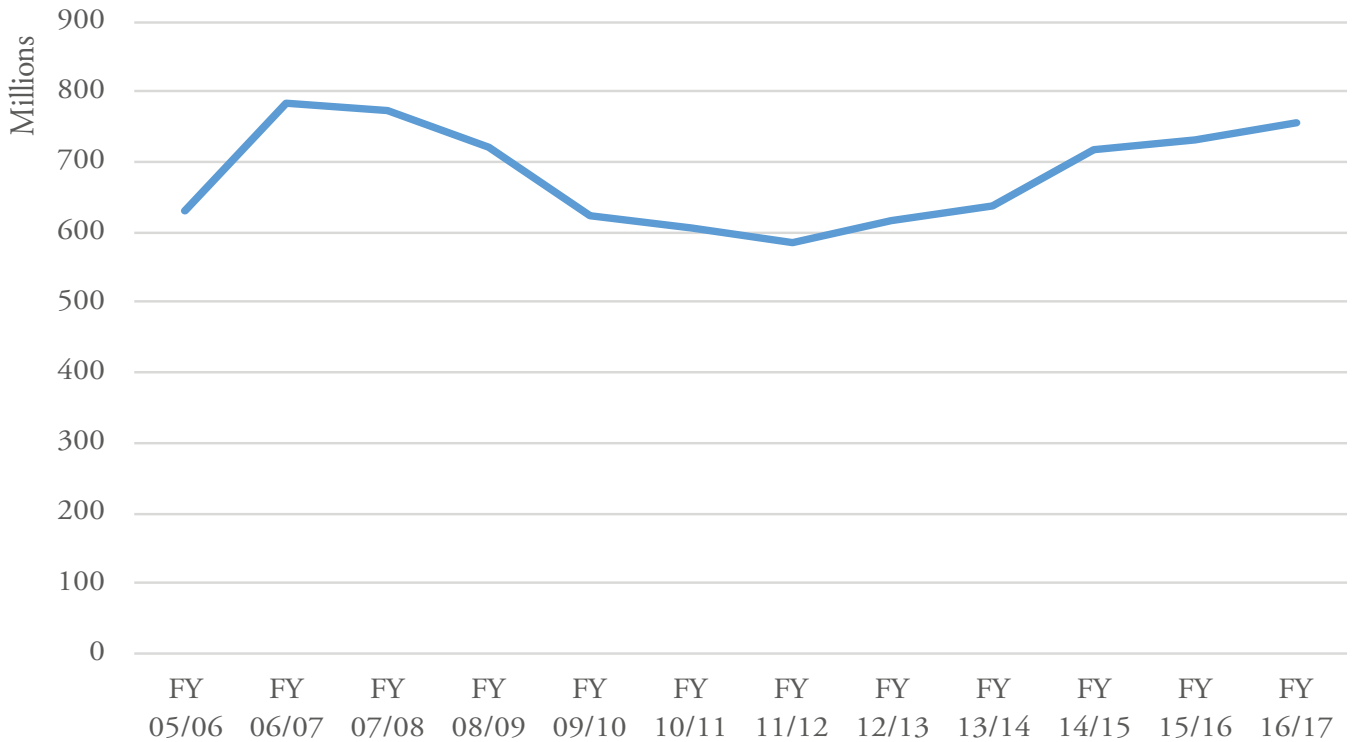
few years. From settlements that could add as much as \$40 million to the annual budget to \$22 million in revenue shortages, the county budget presents some challenges.

Johnson identified six steps to help achieve his vision for Riverside County. The first three are administrative and budgetary reforms. First, Johnson will lead a robust reorganization of the Executive Office, with the goal of implementing new structures and initiatives with organization-wide communication and commitment-building plans. Second, Johnson is committed to a structurally balanced budget, focusing on delivering services. The goal is to have a budget with resilience to adverse fiscal circumstances, using data-driven budget decisions to maximize and diversify revenue sources. Third, Johnson seeks to launch organizational and cultural change to train the county's workforce in digital skills and to focus on a service-friendly approach.

The second half of Johnson's agenda is aimed at economic development. First is an effort to showcase Riverside County as a thriving place by publicizing the benefits of living there. Second is to make the county more business friendly by providing appealing business incentives, and developing a community profile to assist with business cycle sustainability. The final component is a focus on education and training to raise the caliber of the county's workforce. This will involve strengthening employee retention and potential successors and creating an overall countywide strategy to transect education with future workforce needs. As Riverside County's population more than doubled since 1991, with an annual growth rate today of over 50,000 residents, workforce development will prove a key feature of CEO Johnson's economic development plan. In attracting businesses today and training the workforce for future years, CEO Johnson seeks to address key challenges in the short-term, while keeping an eye for the long-term.

Members of the Board of Supervisors expressed enthusiasm for Johnson's appointment. Board Chairman John Tavaglione noted to the *Anza Valley Outlook*, "George knows the organization well and brings stability as we work to transform county operations during difficult financial times. I could not be happier with his selection." In a Facebook post, Supervisor Kevin Jeffries congratulated Johnson, while noting some of the challenges facing Riverside County. He wrote, "George has [been] serving as the Deputy CEO for a number of years, and while I personally wanted to perform an outside search for new leadership at the county, and was willing to compromise with an interim (one year)

RIVERSIDE COUNTY GENERAL FUND DISCRETIONARY REVENUE



Source: Riverside County Executive Office

appointment to see if we could break free of the old established way we have been doing business, the Board felt it was best to stay the course and provide stability. George is a gentleman and very honest. He takes the helm at a very difficult time for our county – which is deficit spending at roughly \$1 million per week and undergoing significant cut backs to our public safety budgets. I wish him the best.”

A public official with a truly local background, Johnson earned a B.S. in civil engineering from

California State Polytechnic University in Pomona and an M.A. in leadership and organizational studies from California Baptist University in Riverside. Johnson has drawn from his experience as an engineer to approach problems analytically. He says he “has learned how to engineer teams, departments, agencies, and now [has] the opportunity to engineer and lead the county organization.”

We are excited to see what CEO Johnson has in store for Riverside County. ♦