



Midpeninsula Regional  
Open Space District

# Memorandum

DATE: July 24, 2019

MEMO TO: Board of Directors

THROUGH: Ana Ruiz, AICP, General Manager *AR*

FROM: Korrine Skinner, Public Affairs Manager

SUBJECT: District-wide Strategic Communications Plan

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## SUMMARY

The Public Affairs Department has been working with a consultant over the past six months to create a District-wide strategic communications plan. This plan identifies strategies, key message themes and target audiences to provide an organizational roadmap for District communications. The plan will be revised as necessary each fiscal year in conjunction with changes to the Board's Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives. The Board plays an important role in this strategic communication plan by setting the District's annual strategic goals and objectives at their regular January retreat to which the communication strategies are matched. Board members will also play a role in thought leadership and will receive training on key message themes and media relations in 2019.

## BACKGROUND

The District-wide strategic communications plan is a natural and necessary next step in the District's organizational shift towards a more balanced delivery of our three-part mission. The plan has been developed to support and remain consistent with the following District policies and plans.

**2012 Vision Plan:** The District embarked on an 18-month public visioning process to chart a course for the next 40 years and beyond. The resulting Vision Plan articulates community values and the results of extensive scientific study to focus, inspire and coordinate the District's work.

**2014 Measure AA:** Voters reaffirmed their support for the District's mission and funded the top 25 Vision Plan priority projects by passing this 30-year, \$300 million bond measure.

**2014-15 Strategic Plan:** The Board of Directors adopted an annually updated strategic plan articulating organizational goals and objectives.

**2015 Organizational Study:** The District evaluated its structure, capacity and financial sustainability to ensure efficient and effective implementation of Measure AA projects while maintaining ongoing operations and programs. The resulting Financial and Operational Sustainability Model (FOSM) Report identified recommendations that the District has been implementing.

## OVERVIEW

The District-wide strategic communications plan was created using existing data and strategic plans. With consultant help, 13 stakeholder interviews were conducted with board members, management, staff, and partner agencies. The resulting strategic communications plan identifies target audiences, key message themes, and the following five foundational communications strategies:

- 1. Realign public affairs department to mirror the District’s project delivery process.**
  - Make public affairs staff communication generalists through professional development, cross-training and collaboration, while maintaining focus areas of expertise.
  - Increase proactive communications by assigning a public affairs staff member to manage communications for each action plan project.
  - Increase efficiency by standardizing communication processes and templates.
- 2. Make external communications more engaging and impactful.**
  - Shift message focus from what and how, to *why* Midpen fulfills its mission.
  - Connect “why” messages to clear calls-to-action supported by data.
  - Refer to ourselves as a public agency and shift into first person voice (“we” and “our”) to better connect with constituency.
- 3. With “protect” and “access” messaging already well represented in District communications, as well as by other organizations, shift the focus of our communications toward “caring for the land” and the reciprocal benefits of healthy habitats.**
  - Educate the public about District expertise in, and the importance of, caring for the land and wildlife, including climate change resiliency.
  - Connect constituency to stewardship messaging and build support through new and existing programs.
  - Demonstrate thought leadership by leveraging expertise.
- 4. Leverage additional opportunities to increase the reach and frequency of District messaging.**
  - Increase proactive media relations.
  - Develop a robust digital content marketing program, including social media, search engine optimization and email.
  - Redesign openspace.org website to align with messaging, voice and storytelling.
- 5. Engage a broader base of advocates to prepare for the future of open space.**
  - Engage nontraditional audiences by leveraging new partnerships.
  - Expand reach of current youth-oriented partnerships, focusing on stewardship education.
  - Build and leverage partnerships to empower others as District ambassadors.

The successful implementation of these communication strategies will be tracked via metrics identified in the plan including a benchmark awareness study, e-newsletter list growth, website traffic, and earned media.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Public affairs staff have already begun the realignment identified in the first strategy. Standardized communications processes and templates are currently being created to streamline communications for all key Fiscal Year 2019-20 action plan projects. The next step is conducting a benchmark survey in FY 2019-20 to create a baseline for measuring the successful implementation of the District-wide strategic communications plan. Moving forward, the Public Affairs Department will review the strategic communications each late winter/early spring, following Board adoption of the new fiscal year Strategic Goals and Objectives, and make any revisions as necessary to remain aligned with Board direction.