



Midpeninsula Regional  
Open Space District

R-26-154  
Meeting 26-25  
October 14, 2026

**AGENDA ITEM 9**

**AGENDA ITEM**

Strategic Communications Plan

**GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION**

Receive an informational presentation on the Strategic Communications Plan. No board action is required.

**SUMMARY**

The Strategic Communications Plan guides all Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) communications ensuring they are informed, consistent, measurable and help the organization fulfill its strategic plan goals, vision and mission.

The District's most recent Public Affairs Strategic Communications Plan was prepared in 2019. To refresh the Plan, the District contracted with Civic Edge Consulting (CEC) in Spring 2026. The updated Plan focuses on adaptive communications strategies that strengthen the District's ability to respond to a shifting communications landscape and evolving external conditions.

**DISCUSSION**

The Public Affairs Department's mission is to build trust with the public by making the District's purpose and actions clearly visible. The Department actively encourages public input and involvement in District decision-making processes to build trust and community support for the organization and its mission.

The most recent Public Affairs Strategic Communications Plan was prepared in 2019. It focused on building departmental capacity, engaging a broader audience, and positioning the District as a recognized leader not only in open space preservation and protection, but also in stewardship, restoration and resilience.

Over the past five years, most of that Plan's strategies have been successfully implemented; and since 2019, the communications landscape has shifted significantly. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated changes in behavior and communications, moving many interactions online and increasing the public's reliance on open space as a vital resource for health and well-being. At the same time, media consumption has evolved: social media and short-form content have grown in importance, traditional print media has declined, and the use of artificial intelligence has expanded across platforms. In addition to changes in media consumption, the District's service area has also experienced notable demographic changes, including growth in Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities.

In 2024, the District marked the 10-year anniversary of Measure AA (MAA), a 30-year, \$300 million bond supporting the implementation of 25 Priority Action Portfolios. With approximately 18 years remaining, the District is focused on delivering these MAA projects while maintaining its core commitments to preservation and caring for the land. Welcoming and inviting the public to connect with, experience and enjoy these public lands will be critical to fostering meaningful and lasting connections with current and future community members.

To inform the Plan's refreshed strategies and priorities, CEC conducted a communications assessment that included dozens of stakeholder interviews, positioning research and audience analysis.

The new 2026 Strategic Communications Plan (Plan) is intended to guide the priorities and work of the Public Affairs Department for the next three to five years (3-5 years) in support of the District's mission, vision and board-approved strategic plan. The 2026 Plan identifies the following four communications goals:

**Goal 1: Clarify and Strengthen Public Understanding of the District's Distinct Role and Value**

*Supports Organizational Strategic Plan objectives: G1.1, G1.3, G2.1, G3.1, G3.2, G3.4*

- Strengthen public awareness of the District as a regional leader in science-based land stewardship that protects land forever
- Translate complex science into accessible, compelling stories that connect emotionally and intellectually
- Build trust by showing how decisions are made and why stewardship sometimes means balancing public use with the protection of public lands

**Goal 2: Build Trusted, Two-Way Engagement with New Priority Audiences**

*Supports Organizational Strategic Plan objectives: G1.1, G1.2, G3.1, G3.2, G3.4*

- Invest resources in research and audience insights, and in targeted engagement with two to three new audiences based on organizational goals and demographic data
- Tailor messages, channels and engagement approaches for those audiences

**Goal 3: Diversify the Communications Mix and Tools to Support Expanding Reach**

*Supports Organizational Strategic Plan objectives: G1.1, G2.1, G3.1, G3.2, G3.4, G4.3*

- Align communication channels, staffing and investments with evolving audiences, expectations and resource realities
- Make in-person engagement a core communication strategy
- Balance legacy channels with new opportunities and approaches

**Goal 4: Integrate Public Affairs More Deeply Across the Organization**

*Supports Organizational Strategic Plan objectives: G1.1, G1.3, G2.1, G3.1, G3.4*

- Create consistent mechanisms for rangers and field staff to inform messaging, identify issues and share stories
- Equip all staff, especially frontline staff, with clear, shared language to explain the mission and decisions
- Improve staff and Board understanding of the communications strategy, public sentiment and risk tradeoffs through Public Affairs report outs.

The refreshed 2026 Plan also outlines strategies, identifies key audiences, and provides draft messaging, user journeys, metrics and other guidance to support implementation.

The 2026 Strategic Communications Plan is a living document that will be updated annually to maintain alignment with Board-adopted strategic plan goals and objectives.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

The current fiscal year budget contains sufficient funds for implementation of FY27 plan actions. Costs associated with implementation of plan actions beyond FY27 will be budgeted in future fiscal years budgets as part of the annual Budget and Action Plan process.

### **PRIOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW**

None

### **PUBLIC NOTICE**

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

### **CEQA COMPLIANCE**

This item is not a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Public Affairs staff have begun implementation planning, including identifying Year 1 activities and sequencing for future years. The 2026 Strategic Communications Plan will proceed over the next three to five years, after which it will be evaluated and refreshed.

Attachment:

1. Executive Summary, Districtwide Strategic Communications Plan (July 2026)

Responsible Department Head:

Lori Low, Public Affairs Manager, Public Affairs Department

Prepared by/contact person:

Lori Low, Public Affairs Manager, Public Affairs Department



# **Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Strategic Communications Plan**

**July 2026**

## Purpose of This Document

This strategic communications plan is intended to guide the priorities and work of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpen) Public Affairs Department for the next three to five years. The plan focuses districtwide communications on supporting Midpen's mission, vision and board-approved strategic plan.

Civic Edge Consulting (CEC) provided consulting services, including a robust [Communications Assessment](#) which included dozens of stakeholder interviews, positioning research, audience analysis and messaging methodology used to develop the initial strategies and recommendations in this plan. These were then refined and finalized through the General Manager's Office by the Public Affairs Department.

## Executive Summary

This document outlines Midpen's strategic communications goals for the next three to five years, including strategies for achieving those goals, key audiences to reach and draft messaging. It also shares the "user journey" for newer audiences with recommendations for moving people from unaware to engaged Midpen supporters.

## Background

The Public Affairs Department's mission is to build trust with the public by making Midpen's purpose and actions clearly visible. The Department also actively encourages public input and involvement in Midpen's decision-making processes to build trust and community support for the organization and its mission. Midpen's stakeholders include residents, preserve visitors, volunteers and docents, elected officials, families and future generations.

Midpen's most recent Public Affairs Strategic Communications Plan was adopted in 2019. It focused on building departmental capacity, engaging a broader audience, and positioning Midpen as a recognized leader not only in open space preservation and protection, but also in stewardship, restoration, and resilience. Over the past five years, most of the plan's strategies have been successfully implemented. Civic Edge Consulting was engaged in 2026 to "refresh" the plan to better reflect changing communications, social and demographic landscapes.

Since 2019, these landscapes have shifted significantly. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated changes in behavior and communications, moving many interactions online and increasing the public's reliance on open space as a vital resource for health and well-being. At the same time, media consumption has evolved: social media and short-form content have grown in importance, traditional print media has declined, and the use of artificial intelligence has expanded across platforms.

In addition to changes in media consumption since 2019, Midpen's service area has also experienced notable demographic changes, including growth in Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities.

In 2024, Midpen marked the 10-year anniversary of Measure AA, a 30-year, \$300 million bond supporting the community-approved Vision Plan, including expanded public access. With approximately 20 years remaining, Midpen is focused on delivering these access projects while maintaining its core commitments to preservation and caring for the land. Welcoming and inviting the public to connect with, experience and enjoy these public

lands will be critical to fostering meaningful and lasting connections with current and future community members.

## Public Affairs Strategic Plan Goals

To support Midpen's [FY27 Organizational Strategic Plan](#), the Public Affairs Department identified the following four communications goals.

### **Goal 1: Clarify and Strengthen Public Understanding of Midpen's Distinct Role and Value**

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- Translate complex science into accessible, compelling stories that connect emotionally and intellectually
- Build trust by showing how decisions are made and why stewardship sometimes means balancing public use with the protection of public lands

### **Goal 2: Build Trusted, Two-Way Engagement with New Priority Audiences**

*Supports Organizational Strategic Plan objectives: G1.1, G1.2, G3.1, G3.2, G3.4*

- Invest resources in research and audience insights, and in targeted engagement with 2-3 new audiences based on organizational goals and demographic data
- Tailor messages, channels, and engagement approaches for those audiences

### **Goal 3: Diversify the Communications Mix and Tools to Support Expanding Reach**

*Supports Organizational Strategic Plan objectives: G1.1, G2.1, G3.1, G3.2, G3.4, G4.3*

- Align communication channels, staffing and investments with evolving audiences, expectations and resource realities
- Make in-person engagement a core communication strategy
- Balance legacy channels with new opportunities and approaches

### **Goal 4: Integrate Public Affairs More Deeply Across the Organization**

*Supports Organizational Strategic Plan objectives: G1.1, G1.3, G2.1, G3.1, G3.4*

- Create consistent mechanisms for rangers and field staff to inform messaging, identify issues and share stories
- Equip all staff, especially frontline staff, with clear, shared language to explain Midpen's mission and decisions
- Improve other department and board understanding of communications strategy, public sentiment and risk tradeoffs through Public Affairs report outs