

Community Outreach Strategy

Proactive Public Outreach and Communication

October 12, 2016

INTRODUCTION

In November 2013, the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board (San Diego Water Board) adopted its strategic plan, the ***Practical Vision: Healthy Waters, Healthy People***. Among the values the San Diego Water Board identified were **Leadership, Transparency, Communication, and Stewardship**. Chapter 4 of the Practical Vision is Proactive Public Outreach and Communication, which includes a project to develop an Outreach Strategy that includes traditional communication mechanisms as well as the concepts of community outreach, enhanced communication, enhanced public participation, and collaboration with partners.

Between 2012 and 2016, the San Diego Water Board engaged in outreach to many municipalities, districts, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to inform the development of the Practical Vision, initiate a new culture of community engagement, and guide development of this Community Outreach Strategy (Outreach Strategy). That effort is ongoing and will continue throughout the Practical Vision implementation. This strategy encompasses and extends beyond our traditional communication mechanisms.

Through this strategy, we are seeking to inform, improve, and reshape our relationships with the communities we serve. Among the overarching goals is making the San Diego Water Board more readily accessible to the public that otherwise might not choose to or be able to participate in the policy setting and decision making actions of the San Diego Water Board, to significantly increase their opportunities to provide input, and develop relationships that are mutually informative and beneficial. The primary audience of this document, however, are the Board Members and staff of the San Diego and State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) and its purpose is to shape and guide our outreach efforts over the next four years of the Practical Vision throughout our organization from our most recently hired staff member to the Chair of the Water Board.

WHY IS PUBLIC OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATION IMPORTANT?

As stewards of the public trust in protecting and restoring the waters of the San Diego Region, the San Diego Water Board by original design, is required to solicit and consider public comment and participation in its formal decision making. Laws such as the Bagley-Keen Public Participation Act and the Public Records Request Act are intended to ensure that the stakeholders and public are allowed to make their voices heard and participate meaningfully in the San Diego Water Board's decision making process. We are only able to truly give careful consideration to community concerns when a broad cross section of the community knows what matters are pending, how to bring forward their own issues about water quality, and can genuinely participate in the decision making efforts. Accordingly, significant efforts have been made statewide to maximize public participation and efforts especially in the State Water Board's Office of Public Participation. Previous efforts statewide have identified areas for improvement in outreach, especially improved listening practices, demonstrably using information learned from outreach events, breaking away from agency jargon, and adapting communication content and style to the particular issues and needs in our communities.

OUTREACH STRATEGY GOALS

Drawing upon the Practical Vision, information gathered through previous outreach efforts, and the priorities of the San Diego Water Board, the Outreach Development Team¹ has identified the following five goals for this Outreach Strategy:

1. **Awareness** –to expand awareness of the San Diego Water Board, its Mission and Practical Vision and the opportunities to participate and share in our work;
2. **Accessibility** – to increase accessibility of the public to the San Diego Water Board, its staff, and its policy setting and decision making actions;
3. **Identification** – to engage our communities and identify their water quality needs and concerns, the messages we want to convey, and include their contributions in the work of our agency;
4. **Information**- to share timely and useful information with the public and learn from the communities we serve to better inform San Diego Water Board priorities and decisions; and
5. **Partnerships** –to develop partnerships and other opportunities for collaboration in multiple aspects of our work (outreach, permitting, planning, etc.) to extend the effectiveness of those efforts.

OUTREACH PRIORITIES

In each of the five chapters of the Practical Vision², enhanced public participation and outreach was identified as a critical component to the success of the proposed projects and the Practical Vision itself. To achieve the goals of this strategy and address the priorities of the San Diego Water Board, the Outreach Team has identified the following six Outreach Priorities to be addressed by the outreach efforts of the staff and Board Members of the San Diego Water Board:

1. Environmental Justice and Disadvantaged Communities (Resolution R9-2015-0020);
2. Recovery of Streams, Wetlands, and Riparian Systems (Resolutions R9-2015-0020 and R9-2015-0041);
3. Achieving the goals and objectives of the Tijuana River Valley Recovery Strategy: Living With the Water and the Tijuana River Valley Recovery Team Five Year Action Plan (Resolution R9-2015-0035);
4. Protecting and Restoring the Key Uses of Recreation, Human Consumption of Fish and Shellfish, and Healthy Habitats and Ecosystems in San Diego Bay (Resolution R9-2015-0086);
5. Developing and Implementing an Effective Irrigated Lands Pollution Reduction Program (Resolution R9-2016-0063); and
6. Enhancing Recycled Water Production and Re-Use for a Sustainable Local Water Supply (Resolution R9-2013-0153).

¹ The Outreach Team included Board Members Stefanie Warren, Henry Abarbanel, Tomas Morales, and Executive Officer David Gibson and Senior Environmental Scientist Deborah Jayne and Executive Assistant Christina Blank. During the Outreach efforts from 2012-2016, every Board Member participated in the outreach events.

² The [Practical Vision](#) includes 1) Strategizing for Healthy Waters; 2) Monitoring and Assessment; 3) Recovery of Streams, Wetlands and Riparian Systems; 4) Proactive Public Outreach; and 5) Strategy for Achieving a Sustainable Local Water Supply.

Environmental Justice and Disadvantaged Community Outreach

In the San Diego Region, Environmental Justice and Disadvantaged Communities include communities along the US/Mexico Border, South San Diego Bay (i.e. Barrio Logan, Chula Vista and National City), and portions of El Cajon and San Marcos. For primarily socioeconomic reasons, these communities often have a greater burden of pollutant or contaminant exposure than most other communities in the Region. For example, according to CalEPA's EnviroScreen³, which is a web-based tool for identifying and ranking environmental justice communities in California using relevant environmental, economic, social factors, Barrio Logan ranks as the fifth worst community in the State for cumulative pollutant exposure.

Since 2014, the San Diego Water Board Members and staff have reached out to NGOs active in local Environmental Justice and Disadvantaged Communities to better understand the needs of these communities and to seek recommendations on how to make the San Diego Water Board more accessible and responsive to their needs. This outreach includes entities with whom we have had little or no engagement in prior years and whose mission or work may not be directly related to water quality or supply. Our outreach to individuals, organizations, and agencies in these communities will continue to be focused on asking them what issues are important to them and building relationships and partnerships. We will also realize opportunities to participate in community forums and events and share useful, timely, and accessible information in multiple languages with community contributions.

The Objectives for Public Outreach for Environmental Justice and Disadvantaged Communities are to:

1. Enhance community access to the San Diego Water Board, its staff, programs, and decision-making and create opportunities to learn about the needs, issues and concerns of these communities and inform our priorities and actions;
2. Provide direct support for outreach projects in Environmental Justice and Disadvantaged Communities through grants, Supplemental Environmental Projects, or Enhanced Compliance Alternatives, and Clean Up and Abatement Account requests for projects in these communities;
3. Provide technical, administrative and financial information and support to agencies and NGOs serving these communities;
4. Establish at least one partnership with an agency, academic, or NGO supporting an Environmental Justice and Disadvantaged Community;
5. Conduct a workshop in early 2017 to explore novel approaches to issues in Environmental Justice and Disadvantaged Communities; and
6. Develop Fact Sheets about water quality issues tailored to inform and address the needs or concerns of Environmental Justice or Disadvantaged Communities.

³ [CalEnviroScreen Version 2.0](#) includes an online mapping tool to identify Disadvantaged Communities and pollution stressors.

Recovery of Wetlands, Streams, and Riparian Systems

Through Chapter 3 of the Practical Vision and two priority setting Resolutions, the San Diego Water Board has expressed its strong support for the restoration of natural aquatic ecosystems throughout the Region and its commitment to the goal of achieving **a meaningful net gain** in the quantity, quality, acreage, and functionality of aquatic resources and associated services. The success or failure to protect or restore wetlands is contingent on the long term understanding, appreciation and support of local communities and outreach and community based partnerships are mission critical to a meaningful net gain of wetlands.

The Objectives for Recovery of Wetlands, Streams, and Riparian Systems Outreach are to:

1. Engage community input regarding the recovery of wetlands, streams, and riparian areas to identify issues and opportunities;
2. Identify at least one agency institutional, academic, or NGO partnership to support public outreach and education regarding the value of wetlands, the services and functions they provide our communities, and the role of our communities in protecting and restoring them to achieve a meaningful net gain in wetlands; and
3. Support the priority projects identified by the Water Board in Resolution R9-2015-0041 at appropriate community meetings, local or State agency public meetings or hearings, and ask local communities for their input regarding potential projects for the priority list for restoration.

Achieving the goals and objectives of the Tijuana River Valley Recovery Strategy: Living with the Water and the Tijuana River Valley Recovery Team Five Year Action Plan

In 2008, at the request of Wildcoast and residents of the Imperial Beach and San Ysidro, the San Diego Water Board made addressing binational pollution issues of trash, sedimentation, water quality, and flood control in the Tijuana River Valley a top priority. To address these issues, it chose a collaborative, community based framework. Engagement with all levels of governmental agencies and NGOs on both sides of the Border, and the elected officials and residents of Imperial Beach, San Ysidro, Tijuana, and Tecate has been the hallmark of this approach. In 2012, this diverse group of over 30 organizations developed the **Tijuana River Valley Recovery Strategy: Living with the Water**. The Recovery Strategy was adopted by the San Diego Water Board as the guiding document for its work in the Tijuana River watershed and coastal waters. In 2014, to refine and focus the efforts of the Recovery Strategy, the Board organized a binational summit and a community based discussion on priorities that resulted in a **Five Year Action Plan**, approved in 2015. The collaborative approach has resulted in progress several issues in the binational watershed, but many challenges and significant water quality impairment remain. Expansion of the ongoing engagement and outreach on both sides of the border will be necessary protect water quality, improve flood control, and restore and maintain both the habitats and many uses the River Valley and Estuary.

The Objectives for public outreach in the Tijuana River Valley Recovery Strategy efforts include:

1. Conduct special outreach to individuals or NGOs representing Environmental Justice or Disadvantaged Communities to ensure their needs are addressed in the Recovery Strategy and implementing projects;
2. Identify and add at least one additional agency or binational advocacy NGO to the Tijuana River Valley Recovery Team Steering Committee specifically to address Environmental Justice and Disadvantaged Communities; and
3. Conducting or participating in at least one Tijuana River Action Month event and the San Diego Earth Day event(s) annually to increase awareness and support for the Tijuana River Valley Recovery Strategy and border trash, sediment, and water quality issues.

Protecting and Restoring the Key Uses of Recreation, Human Consumption of Fish and Shellfish, and Healthy Habitats and Ecosystems in San Diego Bay

San Diego Bay is considered one of the most important water bodies in the San Diego region due to its ecological value and because it supports tourism, commercial and subsistence fishing, and a variety of recreational, maritime, industrial, commercial, and military uses. Because the San Diego Water Board devotes significant resources to protect and restore the health of the Bay, it was chosen for pilot-scale implementation of Practical Vision Chapters 1 and 2. The San Diego Water Board conducted multiple outreach meetings with stakeholders and regulatory agencies and a public workshop to inform the development of the Strategy for a Healthy San Diego Bay, especially the identification of the key Beneficial Uses and Areas for recreation, human consumption of fish and shellfish, and habitats and ecosystems.

The next major steps in implementing the Strategy for a Healthy Bay include a comprehensive assessment of the monitoring data and information regarding the conditions on the water in the watersheds, water column, and littoral and benthic habitats of the Bay. As the comprehensive assessment and subsequent steps of the Strategy for a Healthy Bay are implemented, there will be several important opportunities to engage the public, especially those in Environmental Justice and Disadvantaged Communities, and ensure that they know how and when to contribute and participate in the decision making actions of the San Diego Water Board and other agencies or organizations that are implementing the Strategy for a Healthy Bay. In addition, the San Diego Water has an annual “state of the Bay” update on issues related to these key beneficial uses and the implementation of the Strategy for a Healthy Bay.

The Objectives for outreach regarding the implementation of the Strategy for a Healthy Bay include:

1. Continuing specific outreach efforts to organizations representing Environmental Justice and Disadvantaged Communities to ensure that their concerns regarding the Bay and their communities are understood and represented in the implementation of the Strategy for a Healthy Bay;
2. Identifying at least one partnership opportunity with an agency, academic institution, or NGO to expand and facilitate water quality monitoring and assessment, education, and information sharing with the communities in and around San Diego Bay;
3. Conduct at least one well publicized public workshop at a day and time amenable to broad public participation regarding the process and results of the comprehensive monitoring and assessment of San Diego Bay; and
4. Convene regular, public meetings with agencies and NGOs regarding the condition and issues in San Diego Bay.

Developing and Implementing an Effective Irrigated Lands Pollution Reduction Program

Since 1983, the San Diego Water Board has sought to regulate and minimize pollution discharges associated with irrigated lands agriculture. An estimated 43 miles of streams/rivers and 1,244 acres of lakes/reservoirs are suspected of being impaired at least in part by discharges of pollutants associated with agricultural activities in the San Diego Region. Agricultural activities have also been identified as causing or contributing to nitrate impairment of groundwater in some areas of the San Diego Region like the San Pasqual groundwater basin. The San Diego Water Board is developing a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to reducing pollution associated with agriculture. In this approach, we have already conducted extensive outreach to the grower community in the form of workshops in the communities, and hearings to solicit grower input and inform both the process and content of the Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs) for Irrigated Lands. When the Irrigated Lands WDRs are adopted, the work of implementation will include significant outreach to growers, agencies, local municipalities, and members of the community to ensure not only compliance with the WDRs, but attainment of effective pollution reduction that ensures the region

continues to benefit from a robust, diverse local agriculture community and source of food, fiber, and economic opportunities it provides.

The Outreach Strategy Objectives for the Irrigated Lands Program include:

1. Soliciting input and information from growers on the implementation and enforcement of the WDRS and opportunities to address their needs and concerns;
2. Identifying useful economic incentives and support for the agricultural community for water quality protection Best Management Practices; and
3. Investigate and develop at least one interagency or organization partnership including “Third Party Groups” to achieve the goals of the irrigated lands and non-point source pollution reduction programs.

Enhancing Recycled Water Production and Re-Use for a Sustainable Local Water Supply

In order to maintain and improve water quality and provide sufficient water to meet the demands of the Region, the San Diego Water Board must use its leadership and regulatory authority to achieve a sustainable local water supply while concurrently ensuring that water quality supports beneficial uses. Reducing the Region’s dependence on imported water is needed to improve water quality within and outside of our Region and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with the transport of water. The creation of a sustainable local water supply includes three aspects: the environmentally responsible use of groundwater and surface water, the creation of new sources of fresh water such as, desalination, indirect potable reuse and direct use of recycled water, and conservation efforts to reduce water demand. Soliciting and sustaining public support for measures to increase conservation and recycled water reuse including potable reuse, development of additional desalination supplies, and expansion of local groundwater storage or utilization requires additional efforts beyond typical agency notifications and meetings.

The Objectives of the Sustainable Local Water Supply Outreach include:

1. Conduct outreach throughout the region in coordination with the State Water Board Office of Drinking Water to identify and promptly address any communities that may lack universal access to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water (i.e. **Human Right to Water**)⁴;
2. Identify partnership opportunities with governmental and non-governmental organizations, academia and corporations that may facilitate creating and maintaining sustainable local water supplies; and
3. Engage agencies, districts, and communities through outreach efforts to identify San Diego Water Board programs, orders, or policies that can be used or modified to increase a sustainable local water supply and ensure the needs are being met throughout the region.

OUTREACH STRATEGY TOOLS AND REQUIREMENTS

Although outreach and increased public participation in the work of the San Diego Water Board is highly desirable, statutorily mandated, and publicly expected, there are no specific resources either in funded positions or contract dollars identified for us to carry out the goals and objectives of this Outreach Strategy. The following ministerial actions, supported by the San Diego Water Board in Resolution R9-2016-0063, will help bridge the gap between indirectly supported traditional outreach through regulatory programs and the ambitious goals and objectives of this strategy:

⁴ *The Human Right to Water Law in California: An Implementation Framework for State Agencies*

Staffing

1. From existing budget authority, identify 1 Personnel Year (PY) for Outreach Coordination in the San Diego Water Board budget;
2. The Outreach Coordinator will identify outreach projects and tasks in the annual Practical Vision Operations Plan, staff level participation, staff hours and training needed, and a workplan to balance the outreach efforts with core work priorities. Develop a tracking approach to evaluate the effectiveness of outreach efforts and report annually on the work and efforts to implement this strategy;
3. Support efforts by the Office of Public Participation to develop funding, position authority or other measures to further outreach statewide and seek placement of 1PY from Office of Public Participation in the San Diego Water Board Office to support or augment outreach efforts among the several southern California Regional Water Quality Control Boards and local offices of the State Water Board Division of Drinking Water;
4. Seek assistance from US EPA and the State Water Board Office of Public Participation to engage the Tribal nations in the San Diego Region to include them in our outreach efforts;
5. Implement the Social Media Outreach Plan developed in 2016 to achieve the above goals and objectives;
6. Develop a website improvement project to make the San Diego Water Board website more user friendly with special focus on the outreach areas described in this strategy; and
7. Identify opportunities for San Diego Water Board staff and Board Members to participate in public events (e.g. Earth Day, the Tijuana River Action Month, and the San Diego Watershed Summit).

REALIZING THE POWER OF OUTREACH

Despite significant constraints and many competing priorities, we have already made significant improvements to its outreach efforts and the exercise of our values of **Stewardship, Transparency, Communication, and Leadership**. This Outreach Strategy sets forth ambitious goals and objectives to guide our staff and coordinate our outreach efforts with the State Water Resources Control Board Office of Public Participation and other local, state, and federal agencies and academic and community organizations. Most importantly, however, are the opportunities to reshape how we interact with the communities we serve and form lasting partnerships that transcend any one issue of the moment and offer the benefits of mutual learning and collaboration. For all the foregoing reasons, this strategy is integral to the achievement of our Practical Vision and the Mission of the State and Regional Water Quality Control Boards.