

2016 COMMUNITY OUTREACH STRATEGY
Proactive Public Outreach and Communication
Adopted November 9, 2016

INTRODUCTION

In November 2013, the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, San Diego Region (San Diego Water Board) adopted its Strategic Plan, the [Practical Vision: Healthy Waters, Healthy People](#). Among the core 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 or 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 the public's opportunities to provide input, and to 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 Water Board 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, especially by the State Water Board's Office of Public Participation, to maximize public participation. Previous efforts statewide have identified areas for improvement in outreach, particularly 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 identified the following five general 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 (e.g., outreach, permitting, planning) 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 Water Board's priorities, the Outreach Team identified the following six Outreach Priorities to be addressed by the outreach efforts of the San Diego Water Board Members and staff:

1. Environmental Justice and Disadvantaged Communities (Resolution R9-2015-0020³);
2. Recovery of Wetland, Stream, and Riparian Systems (Resolutions R9-2015-0020 and R9-2015-0041⁴);
3. Tijuana River Valley Recovery Strategy and Five Year Action Plan (Resolution R9-2015-0035⁵);

¹ The Outreach Team includes Board Members Stefanie Warren, Henry Abarbanel, and Tomas Morales; Executive Officer David Gibson; Senior Environmental Scientist Deborah Jayne; and Executive Assistant Christina Blank. Every Board Member participated in one or more of the outreach events held during 2012-2016.

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

³ Resolution No. [R9-2015-0020](#), Resolution in Support of Funding Projects that Further the Practical Vision Priorities with Consideration to Environmental Justice and Disadvantaged Communities and the Recovery of Stream, Wetland and Riparian Systems, dated February 11, 2015.

⁴ Resolution No. [R9-2015-0041](#), Resolution to Support Restoration of Aquatic Ecosystems in the San Diego Region, dated June 24, 2015.

⁵ Resolution No. [R9-2015-0035](#), Resolution Endorsing the Tijuana River Valley Recovery Team Five-Year Action Plan, dated March 16, 2015.

4. Strategy for a Healthy San Diego Bay (Resolution R9-2015-0086⁶);
5. Irrigated Lands Pollution Reduction Program (Resolution R9-2016-0063⁷); and
6. Recycled Water Production and Re-Use for a Sustainable Local Water Supply (Resolution R9-2013-0153⁸)

Priority 1 -- Environmental Justice and Disadvantaged Communities

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 EnviroScreen⁹, which is a web-based tool for identifying and ranking environmental justice communities in California using relevant environmental, economic, and social factors, Barrio Logan is among the worst five percent of communities in the State for cumulative pollution burden.

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, make community contributions, and share useful, timely, and accessible information in multiple languages.

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

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 to inform our priorities and actions;
2. Provide direct support for projects in Environmental Justice and Disadvantaged Communities through grants, Supplemental Environmental Projects, Enhanced Compliance Alternatives, and Cleanup and Abatement Account funding requests;

⁶ Resolution No. [R9-2015-0086](#), Resolution Supporting Implementation of the June 2015 Strategy for a Healthy San Diego Bay, dated June 24, 2015.

⁷ Resolution No. [R9-2016-0063](#), Resolution Supporting Allocation of Resources to Implement the Practical Vision and Operational Plan for Calendar Year 2016, dated March 9, 2016.

⁸ Resolution No. [R9-2013-0153](#), Resolution in Support of the San Diego Water Board Practical Vision, dated November 13, 2013.

⁹ [CalEnviroScreen Version 2.0](#) includes an online mapping tool to identify Disadvantaged Communities and Pollution Stressors.

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 Environmental Justice and Disadvantaged Communities;
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 and concerns of Environmental Justice or Disadvantaged Communities.

Priority 2 -- Recovery of Wetland, Stream, and Riparian Systems

Through Chapter 3 of the Practical Vision and two priority setting Resolutions, the San Diego Water Board 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 of efforts to protect or restore wetlands is contingent on the long-term understanding, appreciation and support of local communities. Outreach and community-based partnerships are mission critical to a meaningful net gain of wetlands.

The Objectives for Recovery of Wetland, Stream, and Riparian Systems Outreach include:

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.

Priority 3 -- Tijuana River Valley Recovery Strategy and Five Year Action Plan

In 2008, at the request of Wildcoast and residents of 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 on 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 to protect water quality, improve flood control, and restore and maintain both the habitats and many uses of the River Valley and Estuary.

The Objectives for Tijuana River Valley Recovery Strategy Outreach 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, Five Year Action Plan, 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. Conduct or participate in at least one public outreach event annually to increase awareness and support for the Tijuana River Valley Recovery Strategy and border trash, sediment, and water quality issues. Examples include Tijuana River Action Month events and the San Diego Earth Day celebration.

Priority 4 -- Strategy for a Healthy San Diego Bay

San Diego Bay is considered one of the most important waterbodies 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 San Diego Bay* include a comprehensive assessment of the monitoring data and information regarding the conditions of 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. We especially want to engage members of 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 Board has an annual "State of the Bay" update on issues related to the key beneficial uses and the implementation of the *Strategy for a Healthy San Diego Bay*.

The Objectives for Outreach regarding implementation of the *Strategy for a Healthy San Diego Bay* include:

1. Continue specific outreach efforts to organizations representing Environmental Justice and Disadvantaged Communities to ensure their community concerns regarding the Bay are understood and represented in the implementation of the Strategy for a Healthy Bay;

2. Identify 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 San Diego Bay conditions and issues.

Priority 5 – 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/ivers 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 community workshops 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 promote 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. Solicit input and information from growers on the implementation and enforcement of the WDRs and opportunities to address their needs and concerns;
2. Identify useful economic incentives and support for the agricultural community and its 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.

Priority 6 -- 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 all 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 elements: 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 outreach efforts beyond typical agency notifications and meetings.

The Objectives for the Sustainable Local Water Supply Outreach include:

1. Conduct outreach throughout the Region in coordination with the State Water Board's 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*¹⁰);
2. Identify partnership opportunities with governmental and non-governmental organizations, academia and corporations that may facilitate the creation and maintenance of 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 No. R9-2016-0063¹¹, will help bridge the gap between indirectly supported traditional outreach through regulatory programs and the ambitious goals and objectives of this Strategy:

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 Operational Plan, staff level participation, staff hours and training needed, and develop a work plan to balance the outreach efforts with core work priorities. In conjunction with stakeholders and partners, the Outreach Coordinator will 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 State Water Board's 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's Division of Drinking Water;

¹⁰ Resolution No. [2016-0010](#), Adopting the Human Right to Water as a Core Value and Directing its Implementation in Water Board Programs and Activities, dated February 16, 2016.

¹¹ Resolution No. [R9-2016-0063](#), Resolution Supporting Allocation of Resources to Implement the Practical Vision and Operational Plan for Calendar Year 2016, dated March 9, 2016.

4. Seek assistance from US EPA and the State Water Board's 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. Continue development of the 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 Members and staff 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, the San Diego Water Board has already made significant improvements to its outreach effort and the exercise of its values of **Stewardship, Transparency, Communication, and Leadership**. This Outreach Strategy sets forth ambitious goals and objectives to guide staff and coordinate our outreach efforts with the State Water Board's Office of Public Participation and other local, state, and federal agencies and academic and community organizations. Most importantly, however, the Strategy represents 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 Community Outreach Strategy is integral to the achievement of our Practical Vision and the Mission of the State and Regional Water Boards.