

Communications Strategy for the Southern California Stormwater Monitoring Collation

March 2019 draft

Introduction

The Southern California Stormwater Monitoring Coalition (SMC) is a 14-member partnership of stormwater management and regulatory agencies from across coastal southern California that work collaboratively to advance the science of stormwater management. The mission of the SMC is to develop the technical foundation necessary to better understand stormwater mechanisms and impacts, and then develop the tools that will effectively and efficiently improve stormwater decision-making. The SMC Steering Committee, which meets quarterly and includes representation from each SMC member agency, develops and funds cooperative projects that inform the development of best-practices for regional stormwater management.

The SMC does not currently have a formal Communication Plan to maximize the impact of its work and communicate its goals, progress, and accomplishments. The SMC Steering Committee at its June 2018 meeting elected to develop a communication plan to articulate strategies and tools for strengthening the effectiveness and impact of SMC communications. This communication plan is meant to empower Steering Committee members, project leads, and members of working groups with the information and perspectives they need to optimally advance the SMC's research agenda, and to enhance the overall level, quality and consistency of SMC communications. This document consists of a communications strategy that the SMC organization could use to increase its management impact among both internal and external audiences.

Communications Vision

The SMC's communications vision is that the timely, comprehensive transfer of SMC news and information to target SMC audiences will increase the organization's effectiveness in promoting:

- the mission and history of the SMC
- the support NPDES compliance
- the value of SMC member agencies' unique, cross-sector discussions
- the positive, long-term management impacts emanating from SMC projects
- the transition of research projects to the execution in member's programs
- the SMC's effectiveness in collaboratively leveraging funding

- enhanced sharing of information and best practices both inside and outside the stormwater management community
- facilitate feedback from end users of SMC projects

Target Audiences

The SMC has a vested interest in communicating with multiple target audiences both inside and outside the organization. In particular, external stakeholders can both benefit from the outcomes of SMC projects and provide funding to support SMC projects. Six categories of SMC audiences have been identified as the target of SMC communications. These target audiences are ranked in order of priority:

Target Audience #1: SMC Steering Committee members

- **Profile of this audience:** Representatives from each SMC member agency who set and manage SMC's research agenda.
- **Goal of SMC communications:** Enhance Steering Committee members' understanding of the SMC's purpose, value, and maximize Steering Committee members' effectiveness in extending SMC's visibility and reach.

Target Audience #2: Funding authorities within each SMC member agency

- **Profile of this audience:** Supervisors, governing boards and other decision-makers within each SMC member agency that allocate and approve funding for SMC projects.
- **Goal of SMC communications:** Quantify for SMC member agencies the return on their investment in SMC research.

Target Audience #3: SMC member agency co-permittees not represented on the SMC Steering Committee

- **Profile of this audience:** Member agencies' MS4 co-permittees that contribute funding to SMC projects.
- **Goal of SMC communications:** Quantify for co-permittees the return on their investment in SMC research.

Target Audience #4: Southern California industrial (IGP), construction (CGP) and agriculture organizations

- **Profile of this audience:** Organizations not represented on the SMC Steering Committee that are subject to NPDES permits and that could benefit from SMC research and/or provide funding/in-kind contributions to SMC projects.
- **Goal of SMC communications:** Provide background and accomplishments on the SMC, and quantify the value of investing in SMC projects.

Target Audience #5: Southern California POTWs

- **Profile of this audience:** Wastewater treatment agencies not represented on the SMC Steering Committee that are subject to NPDES permits and that could benefit from SMC research and/or provide funding/in-kind contributions to SMC projects.
- **Goal of SMC communications:** Provide background and accomplishments of the SMC, and quantify the value of investing in SMC projects.

Target Audience #6: MS4 permittees outside coastal Southern California

- **Profile of this audience:** Agencies elsewhere in California and nationwide that could benefit from SMC research.
- **Goal of SMC communications:** Explain the impact and influence of SMC research within the broader stormwater management community and strengthen external partnerships that could lead to co-funding opportunities.

Target Audience #7: The General Public

- **Profile of this audience:** This broad category includes constituents of member organization as well as media outlets.
- **Goal of SMC communications:** Explain the value and impact of SMC research and collaboration. This can include public education to promote SMC efforts or broader water quality issues.

Elements of the Communications Strategy

The SMC's communications strategy will play an essential role in building a long-term culture of communications excellence that supports and enhances SMC's ability to achieve its mission, including supporting effective and efficient management decision making, and achieving stable financial or in-kind support from SMC member agencies and outside collaborators. Under this communications strategy, the SMC will work to accomplish the following:

The SMC will provide more frequent, enhanced communications to Steering Committee members to help them optimally extend the reach and visibility of SMC research.

- Steering Committee members will be periodically provided with talking points – either in verbal or written form – that will help them effectively communicate key SMC messages to decision-makers in their organization.
- New Steering Committee members will receive resources – in verbal or written form, or both – that orient them to the mission and value of the SMC, as well as their roles, responsibilities and opportunities as representatives of their member agency.
- Outgoing Steering Committee members will receive resources – in verbal or written form, or both – that help avoid lapses in continuity and loss of institutional knowledge.

The SMC will provide more communications to Steering Committee members to improve their ability to shape an SMC research agenda that is optimally responsive to member agency needs and priorities.

- Steering Committee members will receive training in how to prepare for – and follow through on – Steering Committee meetings to maximize effectiveness.
- Steering Committee members will receive training in how to generate ideas for priority SMC research projects, and how to evaluate, rank and prioritize among priority SMC projects.
- Steering Committee members will provide training to the SMC in how to most effectively support funding authorities in their organization.

The SMC will develop polished communications products that extend the reach and visibility of SMC research beyond SMC member agencies.

- The SMC will explore opportunities to revamp its signature Annual Report to be more enticing and of interest to a broader audience.
- The SMC will pursue development of new, periodic communications products – verbal and/or written – that reinforce the value of SMC research and providing financial support for SMC research.
- The SMC will pursue development of new communications products – verbal and/or written – that explain how the SMC partners and collaborates with other organizations to optimally advance the science of stormwater management.

The SMC will develop protocols to provide guidance for both internal and external communications and publications.

- The SMC will provide guidance on use of the SMC name logo and branding.
- The SMC will provide protocols for communications expressing the consent, approval, support, or other stances of the SMC organization
- The SMC will define responsibilities for members, officers, collaborators, and the administrative officer in communications with external audiences as well as lines of communications between SMC interests.

Priority SMC Messaging

Across all of its communications, the SMC will seek to drive home the following priority messages:

- The SMC provides the technical foundation for stormwater management in the South Coast region.
- The SMC is highly adept at leveraging funding and in-kind support to create robust, regional research projects.
- SMC-sponsored research influences management decision-making and improves the way that managers do their jobs.
- The SMC is a collaborative partnership that focuses on building trust bridges among diverse groups, including regulated and regulatory parties.
- The SMC is a neutral organization that uses science and interaction – not advocacy/lobbying – to advance stormwater management.

Communications Channels

The SMC has a number of communication channels at its disposal that can support the effective and timely distribution of SMC communications. These include:

- SMC website
- Webinars
- Social media (proposed)
- Listserves/email blasts
- Regional workshops/special symposia
- National and regional scientific conferences
- Annual Report
- CASQA updates
- SMC newsletter (proposed)