



Central Contra Costa Sanitary District and Mt. View Sanitary District Consolidation Feasibility Study

Strategic Communications Plan



Table of Contents

Section 1: Setting the Stage 3

Project Overview.....3

About this Strategic Communications Plan3

Plan Goals3

Communicating in Context3

Key Stakeholders/Audiences.....4

Section 2: Communication Strategies 5

Internal Communication Strategies for Employees.....5

External Communication Strategies for Customers.....6

Section 3: Key Message Platform 7

Media Spokespersons7

Guidelines for Message Development.....7

Key Messages8

Section 4: Communications Channels and Materials 10

Communications Materials, Channels and Timing10

Channel Chart11

Section 1: Setting the Stage

Project Overview

Raftelis, with assistance from Woodard and Curran and HDR (the Project Team), is conducting a feasibility study to determine whether a consolidation between the Central Contra Costa Sanitary District and the Mt. View Sanitary District is feasible. For the study, the Project Team will investigate all benefits, costs, issues, challenges, and barriers related to a potential consolidation for both agency's interests and their respective ratepayers.

About this Strategic Communications Plan

The purpose of this Strategic Communications Plan is to provide guidance to both entities about how to communicate about the study, throughout the study. While it places a high priority on internal communications, it acknowledges that external stakeholders, such as customers of each utility, may be interested in the study, so it's important that representatives at each agency speak about it consistently and clearly.

The Study's Steering Committee (Committee), comprising representatives from each agency, were consulted individually on the development of this Plan. The results of these individual meetings have been incorporated into this Plan. Raftelis' communications consultant will assist the Committee as necessary with communications efforts for the study as described in this document.

The Committee members acknowledge that their agencies each have their own communications programs designed to meet the needs of their various stakeholders. This Plan capitalizes on those programs while also creating new opportunities for joint communication on this effort. It is crucial that the Committee members have clear communications roles that are executable and support the goals of this Plan.

Plan Goals

- Build awareness among all stakeholders of the study's purpose, and, in particular, that there are no foregone conclusions
- Demonstrate transparency
- Avoid communication of any misinformation

Communicating in Context

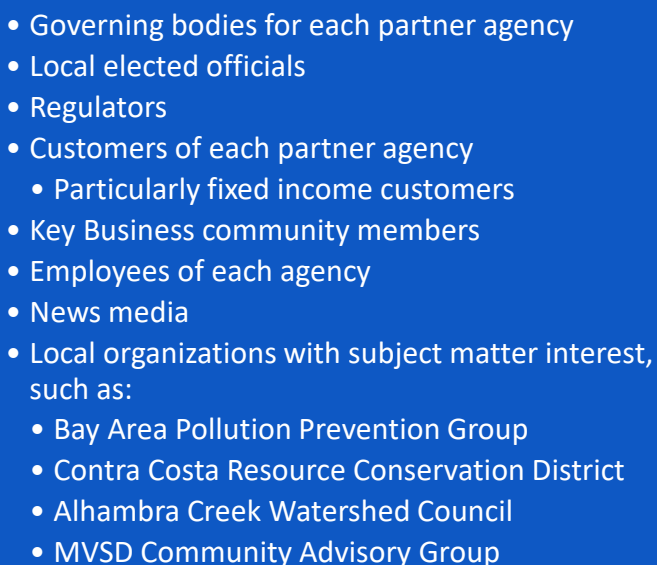
A successful study starts with building an inclusive, highly transparent foundation that involves stakeholders and employees at appropriate levels. Because that transparent foundation is so critical to

communicating effectively, the following observations are important to keep as a frame of reference for this Plan.

- Each agency is highly unique in their management approach, culture, size, and system.
- There is a legacy of independence, and each has a complex history with established norms and expectations among employees, governing bodies and customers. Communication strategies must consider the long operating histories and well-established norms and expectations of each agency.
- There is great awareness at each agency that internal communication needs to be a focus.
- The communication programs for each agency varies greatly as does the staff resources available to implement communications strategies and tactics. Likewise, the communication channels each agency uses are different, yet both report general satisfaction with their approaches to internal and external communication.
- The service populations of each agency are vastly different, with MVSD serving about 9,000 customer accounts and Central San serving about 120,000 customer accounts.
- Differences between customer demographics and customer expectations, including rates, affordability, and desired service levels, must be carefully considered.

Key Stakeholders/Audiences

The agencies have identified stakeholders for the purposes of this Plan as individuals, groups, organizations or entities that have an interest in the study and are assumed to be directly or indirectly affected by the outcome of decisions related to it. The following general stakeholder audiences have been identified:

- 
- Governing bodies for each partner agency
 - Local elected officials
 - Regulators
 - Customers of each partner agency
 - Particularly fixed income customers
 - Key Business community members
 - Employees of each agency
 - News media
 - Local organizations with subject matter interest, such as:
 - Bay Area Pollution Prevention Group
 - Contra Costa Resource Conservation District
 - Alhambra Creek Watershed Council
 - MVSD Community Advisory Group

Section 2:

Communication Strategies

Internal Communication Strategies for Employees

Communicate from the top down

While most employees prefer to hear job-specific tactical information from their immediate supervisor, they expect to hear organizational strategy from leadership. The impetus and purpose of the study should therefore come from the senior levels of their organizations. Leadership is responsible for communicating about the study, listening and responding to feedback, and setting the tone.

Connect to employees directly about the study's meaning

Employees will be most interested in how results of the study may impact them personally. It's important all parties are sensitive to this spectrum as they talk about study outcomes in the coming months. For that reason, it will be important not to speculate on outcomes and share only what's known to date.

Share progress

It's important to provide progress updates on the study periodically as staff will be curious about the study. Raftelis will set the stage with a Study presentation to staff to start, then progress updates should come from leadership to help employees understand the overall goals and phases of the study and understand how their work contributes to this effort.

Meet employees where they are - literally

Work at a wastewater utility is decentralized and occurs quickly. Employees are out in the community, driving vehicles, working both in teams and independently, and trying to be responsive to the needs of customers. That means traditional communication methods like emails and handouts can get lost while prioritizing daily work. Inboxes are often flooded, so emails can be missed. To reach employees, messages should be brought to where employees spend their time. In person meetings should be prioritized as the primary forum for communications about this study, with paper and email secondary.

Establish consistent messaging cadence

To set expectations, establish a consistent way to present information about the study. Setting patterns for information-sharing on the study can help keep messages clear and direct. This strategy involves standardizing messages and potentially using a template. For example, meeting agendas can have a standardized template that reinforces study priorities by connecting the dots between agenda items and the study's main goals. Over time employees will become familiar with this.

External Communication Strategies for Customers

Once agency leadership, employees, and governing boards are aware of the study, there will likely be interest from other stakeholders—especially the customers of both agencies and potentially, area environmental groups.

Be proactive and establish a messaging cadence

In the same way each agency will proactively communicate with employees, they should also talk about the study to other stakeholders and establish a cadence of communication to them. Study milestones or deliverables may serve as key instances for communication. Over time, stakeholders will feel informed so that when the study concludes and a recommendation is put forth, stakeholders are not taken by surprise.

Speak consistently about the study

To maintain trust in each agency by external stakeholders and eliminate speculation or rumors, it's important for both entities to communicate consistently to them. The key message platform in this document is the tool both entities should refer to when developing any materials that talk about the project.

Meet stakeholders where they are

As planned with employee communications, it's important each agency consider where stakeholders are looking for information about wastewater service and ensure their messages are there. This may mean, in many cases, communicating directly to key groups.

Section 3:

Key Message Platform

A message platform provides consistency to study communications. Simple, informative and clear Key Messages have been developed and tailored to internal and external stakeholder audiences based on relevancy.

Media Spokespersons

Though each agency will have a spokesperson to ensure a united, consistent message to their larger community, it is recommended that when speaking to the media specifically, the Committee allow Central San's Planning and Development Services Division Manager Melody Labella to speak for the study because she is the current contract administrator for the study. Ms. Labella is to use the message platform approved by both agencies in this plan.

Guidelines for Message Development

Each agency representative will determine the most effective communication method(s) to reach specific audiences based on their respective needs and feedback provided, and tailor communication delivery appropriately. Messages should be consistent across every communication channel (website, newsletters, presentations, meetings, etc.) When communicating changes or decisions, clearly explain the “why.”

Messages will follow the seven Cs of communication:

- **Clarity**—Be clear with the message, keep it simple, remove industry jargon and acronyms
- **Concise**—Least possible words
- **Correct**—Accurate facts and figures, spelling, grammar and language
- **Complete**—Convey all the facts required by the recipient
- **Consideration**—Consider the different audiences and tailor messages to their requirements
- **Concrete**—Use specific language, do not be vague
- **Courtesy**—Think about the recipient and their viewpoint and be respectful

The study goals should be the leading focus of every committee member when communicating about the study. Since the employees and customers of each agency are top priorities, the connection to customer service should be top of mind in message development. The following themes will help guide message development and maintain consistency as the study progresses:

Key Messages

1. As your wastewater service providers, Central Contra Costa Sanitary District (Central San) and Mt. View Sanitary District (MVSD) are experts at what we do and provide a valued service that keeps our communities thriving.

- A. Our employees work 24/7/365 every day to run complex systems that deliver high quality, reliable wastewater service to over half a million people in our region.
- B. Our agencies have been providing high quality, reliable services for our customers for many decades.

2. We are voluntarily and jointly participating in a study to determine the best path for managing wastewater in our region for the future, and specifically, to determine whether combining or consolidating Central San and MVSD may be advantageous.

- A. The study builds on our history and each agency's excellent track record of high-quality, reliable wastewater service. We'll continue to focus on this throughout the study.
- B. As we both face increasing regulations, we must explore all options for continuing to serve our region efficiently by examining what potential solutions exist to improve our customers' experience.
- C. This study will consider trends that affect both of our agencies and will include analysis to help address all potential opportunities and challenges, including changing demands, affordability of customer rates, and regulatory changes.

3. This study is being developed with data and input from leadership and governing boards of both agencies.

- A. A study committee comprises a mix of leadership and management at both wastewater agencies.
- B. The governing boards of each agency have reviewed and formally approved of our efforts to develop the study.
- C. Both agencies have provided the key data needed to complete a comprehensive study.

4. This study is being conducted impartially and without bias toward any particular outcome; both agencies have agreed to a set of guiding principles, regardless of study recommendations.

- A. High quality customer service, keeping rates affordable, meeting the needs of our customers, and protecting the environment are at the heart of our work. Any solution must benefit both agencies' customers in terms of service levels and affordability.
- B. Employees' jobs, their compensation, and their benefits will be maintained.
- C. The MVSD Moorhen Marsh shall remain intact and operational. Any study conclusion or result shall not cause the quality of the marsh to be diminished.

5. The study is anticipated to take approximately one year, with a final report on its findings available in spring of 2026.

- A. A three-consultant agency team is conducting the study, which includes Raftelis, Woodard and Curran, and HDR.
- B. Though Central San is funding the study, leadership from both agencies comprise a committee that is overseeing the study and will jointly decide whether and which solutions, if any, may be appropriate for implementation.
- C. Both agencies are committed to on-going, transparent communications about the study; as such, all stakeholders will be updated on the progress of the study at a regular frequency or at key study milestones.

Section 4:

Communications

Channels and Materials

Communications Materials, Channels and Timing

The following lists communications materials that are recommended to be developed to support the goals of the study. All items are to be approved by the Steering Committee.

Material	Description	Channels	Development Timing	Frequency of Distribution
Study summary	Brief description of study	Websites Newsletters	Complete at project launch; Update at project milestones	At launch and study results
FAQs	Answers common questions about the Study	Websites Employee and community meetings	Create at project launch. Update at project milestones.	As needed
Handout	Describes what the study is and why it was initiated	Websites Bulletin boards Employee and community meetings	Create at project launch. Update at project milestones.	As needed
Presentation	10-15-minute PowerPoint presentation	Employee and community meetings	Create at project launch. Update at project milestones or monthly.	Two rounds to each audience.
Social Media/ Infographics	Graphic representation of the process for the study	Websites Employee and community meetings Social media	Create at project launch. Update as needed.	Monthly posts
Press release	To inform the media of the study taking place and study results	Local media	Study start and completion	At launch and study results

Channel Chart

The following chart shows which channels will reach the key audiences interested in the Study.

Audiences	Website	Newsletter	Social Media	Presentation/ Meeting	FAQ/ Handout
Governing bodies for both agencies				X	X
Local elected officials				X	X
Regulators				X	
Customers of each agency; particularly fixed income customers	X	X	X	X	X
Key business community members	X	X		X	X
Employees of each agency	X			X	X
News media	X		X		
Bay Area Pollution Prevention Group	X	X	X	X	X
Contra Costa Resource Conservation District	X	X	X	X	X
Alhambra Creek Watershed Council	X	X	X	X	X
MVSD Community Advisory Group	X	X	X	X	X