

**TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM**

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SENT VIA: EMAIL

TO: SRWA TAC

FROM: Patti Ransdell, Circlepoint

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SUBJECT: Stanislaus Regional Water Authority Surface Water Supply Project  
Public Outreach Plan

**PROJECT OVERVIEW AND GOALS**

For a number of years, the Cities of Ceres and the Turlock have been working together with Turlock Irrigation District (TID) on development of a Surface Water Supply Project (Project) and associated facilities (i.e., wet well, raw water supply pipeline, treatment facilities, treated water transmission pipelines, storage tanks, booster pumps and interface with local distribution systems), that would pump water from the Tuolumne River, treat it to drinking water standards, and then deliver it to the service area boundaries of the two cities for municipal and industrial uses.

The Project will provide existing water purveyors with a long-term, reliable water supply source that will allow for the conjunctive use of groundwater and surface water supplies, diversify the cities' water supply portfolios and help keep pace with the projected future development and economic growth of the participating Cities in the south County area (the portion of Stanislaus County south of the Tuolumne River).

This Public Outreach Plan (Plan) for the Project will initially address outreach during the first phase of this Project, Project Definition and facilities planning, and identify different outreach tools to keep stakeholders, groups, and the public consistently informed.

This Plan is a living document; as tactics are implemented, the outreach team will make updates and adjustments to the Plan so that it is relevant throughout the life of the Project.

## IDENTIFIED CONCERNS AND BENEFITS

Benefits that are specific to different stakeholder groups must be considered – while the Project will benefit all, stakeholder groups prioritize benefits differently. While residents will be most concerned about potential rate increases, water aesthetic and taste impacts, and drought preparedness, regulators will be interested in meeting regulations while protecting the environment. It is important that the concerns and benefits are openly communicated to the audiences in order for them to understand the need for the Project, and the benefits it provides.

### Concerns

The Stanislaus Regional Water Authority (SRWA) Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) identified some potential stakeholder concerns. They include:

- Customer rate impacts and what is being done to decrease the impacts (i.e., grant and low interest loans, Project phasing, designing the Project for the needs of the two cities, etc.);
- Water quality impacts when the new surface water source is introduced to the current groundwater (GW) supply source;
- Difference in taste and odor from existing GW supply;
- Allocations are fair from a cost sharing perspective;
- Traffic impacts due to construction of finished water and local distribution pipelines;
- Impacts to the environment; and,
- Agricultural communities' concerns about the reliability of their water supply portfolio.

### Benefits

One of the keys to countering concerns is to share information about the Project benefits. An initial assessment of Project benefits includes:

- Groundwater aquifer replenishment,
- Diverse water supply portfolio,
- Reliable conjunctive-use system,
- Drought preparedness water supplies,

- Ability to meet water quality regulations (i.e., the groundwater system is struggling to meet pending water quality regulations),
- Decrease in hardness and mineral content in both delivered water quality and in wastewater effluent discharges,
- Benefits to ag community associated with “make-up” water (i.e., recycled water from the wastewater treatment plants), and
- Increased flows in the Upper Tuolumne River will benefit aquatic species.

We will use these identified Project benefits as we develop our messaging.

### **OUTREACH PLAN GOALS**

The primary goal of the Plan is to increase the public’s overall awareness of the Project, as well as the need for the Project and the benefits it will bring the communities it serves. The public outreach program will build recognition and awareness by providing honest, up-to-date information as it is happening. The outreach messages will be consistent, concise, and easily recognizable. It is also important for the messages to be bilingual to reach a greater audience and be culturally relevant to each customer. To meet this primary goal, the following objectives must be met:

- Reinforce where stakeholders get their Project information (squell rumors) to ensure that each city shares a consistent and concise message about the project,
- Explain the costs of reliable and clean water in a clear and concise manner,
- Support the Proposition 218 process with clear and easy to understand materials,
- Provide support for the SRWA Board decision making process, and
- Increase awareness of the Project prior to construction to help mitigate potential construction disruptions.

### **KEY AUDIENCES**

We will work with the SRWA team to identify Project stakeholders. The development of a stakeholder list is underway. It can be helpful to categorize stakeholders using tiers. Some tiers will have a higher level of Project engagement than others. Stakeholder groups will have different concerns and will perceive the Project benefits differently. Identifying different groups and tiers will help us identify potential problems and concerns that may arise from different points of view. This will also help clarify messaging points by helping to individualize messages when possible. The following is a suggested break down of tiers:

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### **Tier 1 (Key Decision Makers, Project Partners, Funding Agencies, Affected Rate Payers)**

These stakeholders will likely get more “touches” from Project team members in the form of small group meetings. Stakeholders from Tier 1 will be part of the group we draw from for Opinion Leader interviews. This group will likely have involvement of some sort throughout the life of the Project.

### **Tier 2 (Interested Parties, Regulatory Agencies, etc.)**

These stakeholders will likely check in and out of the Project as it progresses. While they will not serve as opinion leaders or key stakeholders, their support is vital. It is important to keep these groups informed through less personal and individual means (unlike Tier 1).

A summary of stakeholder tiers is included below.

#### Tier 1 Stakeholders

- Stanislaus Regional Water Authority (Board)
- City of Ceres Officials
- City of Turlock Officials
- Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors
- Turlock Irrigation District
- Stanislaus County Farm Bureau
- Agricultural Center County Farm Advisors
- Agricultural Commissioner
- Stanislaus County Groundwater Forum
- Stanislaus County Agricultural Advisory Board
- Stanislaus County Groundwater Issues Forum Technical Advisory Committee
- Turlock Irrigation District Customers
- Residents within the proposed service area (cities of Ceres and Turlock and any other future project partners)
- Manufacturers and Food Processors within the proposed service area
- Railroad Companies
  - BNSF

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## Tier 2 Stakeholder

- CA Department of Water Resources
- Central Valley Flood Protection Board
- State and federal funding agencies
- Other regulatory agencies
- State Water Resources Control Board
- Educational Institutions
  - California State University, Stanislaus
- Neighborhood Associations
- Taxpayer groups
- Business Groups
  - Turlock Chamber of Commerce
  - Ceres Chamber of Commerce
- Media
  - Ceres Courier
  - Turlock Journal
  - Modesto Bee
- Other potential partners
  - Denair
  - Hughson
  - Hilmar
- Elected Officials Representing
  - Federal
  - State
- Religious Groups
- Latino Community
  - Latino Community Roundtable of Stanislaus County

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH TACTICS**

A number of different tactics can be used to reach the Project stakeholders, but not all tools will work effectively with all audiences – targeted outreach is more effective. The audience and message should always be taken into account when choosing an outreach tool. Also, outreach work should always sync with technical work (example: a public workshop should not be held without new information for the public). The Project needs to be represented consistently in all messages and materials. The color, logo, and font should always be similar and the story should be told in the same way every time in order to reinforce the benefits of the Project in the minds of the public. All outreach should be truthful and clearly identify impacts or potential impacts and provide information on what is being done to mitigate them. Circlepoint will work to develop a Public Outreach calendar that identifies timing and implementation of different tools based on the Project schedule. The following tools are available for use throughout the Project and should be strategically chosen based on Project milestones:

### **One-on-One Interviews with Opinion Leaders**

As part of the Project public outreach planning, feedback from key stakeholders will be sought to ensure that community issues and concerns are incorporated into the process. The stakeholder responses will help to identify community issues related to the Project and the most effective ways to outreach to the public. The information gathered through the stakeholder interviews will be used to further prepare and enhance the Project's Public Outreach Plan.

These interviews will be completed by SRWA Board Members and Circlepoint staff at the beginning stages of the Project. Circlepoint will help develop 10-15 questions to ask the Opinion Leaders and will provide these to the SRWA Board Members. A summary of the interviews will be used to guide the outreach efforts, and will allow the team to make adjustments as needed to our strategy.

The one-on-one interviews will take place well before the Proposition 218 process begins. Feedback gleaned from the interviews will inform the outreach needed before and during the Proposition 218 process.

### **Messaging**

High-level messages should be simple, meaningful, and have personal relevance. These high-level messages are designed to serve as the overarching narrative for general audiences. The Core Messages outlined in this Plan encompass the purpose and need for the Project and provide a high-level overview of how implementation of the proposed Project will provide benefits for residential, municipal/industrial and agricultural customers.



These messages are delivered using a variety of communications channels, including the following:

### Collateral Materials

This includes newsletters, bill inserts, and fact sheets. The type of materials distributed will be determined by the technical milestone and will vary throughout the Project process. Ideally, a fact sheet will be developed early in the Project. Fact sheets can be placed at the public counters in both Turlock and Ceres, can be taken to public meetings, and be handed out at presentations given by SRWA staff. This can be updated as technical milestones are achieved. The first fact sheet should be developed early in the Project, after the one-on-one stakeholder interviews are conducted, and before any public meetings are held. Fact sheet topics could include: Project description (including Project benefits) and water quality and water supply/drought preparedness.

Newsletters can be done on a bi-annual basis, and will provide an update on the overall process. Newsletters can be printed, or developed as an e-newsletter, or both. Because newsletters tend to be more labor intensive to develop, they should be the second choice of collateral materials to be developed.

Bill inserts can be developed later in the Project and can be used to reinforce project message points, or direct readers to the Project website for more detailed information about specific items like water quality or taste.

These materials must be clearly written, and should be developed for both English and Spanish speakers.

### Traditional and Social Media

Traditional media still plays an essential role in educating the public on important local issues and recent events. SRWA should continue to issue press releases, submit op/ed pieces in local print media and pursue traditional press coverage with local news channels and newspapers, including articles in local homeowner association or other community generated newsletters.

Social media will also play a role in engaging broader audiences. SRWA should provide content to the existing Turlock Facebook page and should consider establishing a Twitter feed when construction is in the planning stages. If Ceres sets up a Facebook page, Project focused content should be provided as well. Ideally, SRWA could set up and maintain its own Facebook page after the Proposition 218 process is completed.

Another venue to consider is providing information to NextDoor, a neighborhood-based private social network, which should also be utilized for sharing meeting announcements, Project updates, and general Project information.

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## Website

The online presence for the Project should be enhanced. The existing SRWA website should be updated during Phase 1 of the Project. The website is an important channel to provide Project information and should be updated as often as possible for it to maintain relevancy. It is recommended that the website be modified so that it is immediately engaging, interactive, and intuitive. Users should be able to quickly identify the information they are seeking and additional features, such as graphics, photos, schedules and Project maps should be utilized to invite users to further explore the site. To keep the website current, we advise developing a six-month “look ahead” editorial calendar that outlines opportunities for information updates, new photos, meeting announcements, and progress updates. Circlepoint will provide Content Management Systems (CMS), navigation, and Search Engine Optimization strategy recommendations

In addition to making recommendations for improving the website, Circlepoint has the capability to update the current website. After the website improvement recommendations have been made to, and approved by the SRWA Board, we would develop a schedule to develop and roll out the updates, and provide regular content and site maintenance.

## Workshops, Public Meetings and Community Events

We recommend an ongoing series of community meetings, workshops, and attendance at local events. In order to reach a broader audience, it is important to use tools other than printed or electronic materials. The core objectives of the Plan are to engage broader audiences and educate the public about the Project. Community events built around education and discussion can meet these objectives simultaneously. Our experience shows that delivering messages in-person makes the project more real and personal as it allows attendees the opportunity to ask the questions most important to them.

These meetings are described below.

### Traditional Community Meetings/Workshops

Throughout the life of the Project, SRWA should continue to host community meetings and workshops. SRWA should consider non-traditional meeting formats, similar to the open house format, in order to promote ongoing public dialogue and agency collaboration. These meetings can be tied to City Council meetings, initially used as a means to provide past research and other options to explain the current Project decisions. As the project design progresses, public workshops can be held to allow attendees an opportunity to learn more about project elements such as the pipeline alignments and construction activities that may have an impact on residents. These workshops provide both Project designers and residents an opportunity to discuss the potential, temporary effects of the Project and the best way to address those impacts.

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These meetings will keep the public informed and can be announced through news releases, advertisements, and social media platforms. Informational sessions can be held to inform the public of upcoming Project milestones.

### Stakeholder Group Meetings

These meetings will target specific interest groups such as the agricultural community as a means to provide information on topics which are of interest to them. These will be more focused and also tied to milestones or key technical decision points. We recommend providing periodic presentations by West Yost to the Ceres City Council, Turlock City Council, and TID Board to discuss various Project elements and/or progress.

### Speakers Bureau

A speaker's bureau pairs local stakeholder groups with people who can attend their meetings and speak about the Project. A speaker's bureau is ongoing and requires that key SRWA staff or TAC members attend stakeholder groups' meetings to provide an update on the proposed Project and to address specific issues and questions that the group might have. We recommend that SRWA develop a list of key stakeholder groups such as the Rotary, Kiwanis, homeowners' associations, chambers of commerce and farm bureau or similar organizations, and reach out to them to determine if they would be interested in learning more about the Project. We would prepare a toolkit that includes a master PowerPoint presentation, audience specific messaging and talking points, and relevant Project materials (e.g., fact sheets or FAQs) for the presenters to use at the meetings.

Ideally, the speaker's bureau would be implemented later in Phase 1, after appropriate materials have been developed, and the stakeholder interviews have been conducted to better tailor and add further definition to the outreach efforts.

### Tabling Sessions at Public Events

Tabling sessions provide outreach to stakeholders that might not engage otherwise. Collateral information can be shared at public events such as fairs and community events. Circlepoint will create a calendar of events, for TAC approval, at which to have an SRWA presence.



## Survey

SRWA could consider completing a public survey at the beginning of the Project outreach process to set a benchmark for public awareness and perception of the Project. A survey done in the middle of the Project allows us to make necessary adjustments to our outreach strategy. Surveys can be done online via services like Survey Monkey and a link can be included on the SRWA website, as well as the websites for both Turlock and Ceres. The survey can be advertised via email blasts, news releases, and Facebook and other social media platforms. Intercept surveys could be considered and conducted at public places such as grocery stores, drug stores, parks, and public events in order to reach residents we might not otherwise engage in the Project.