



# Official Memorandum

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To: SLDMWA Board of Directors and Alternates

From: Scott Petersen, Water Policy Director

Date: April 9, 2026

RE: Board of Directors to Consider Adoption of Communications Framework and Communication Action Plan for FY 2027

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## Background

As part of implementation of the San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority's (Water Authority) 2023 Strategic Plan, a number of Goals and Objectives were put in place regarding improving public awareness of Authority activities and to implement various policy outcomes associated with the improvement of Central Valley Project operational reliability, restoration of member agency water supplies, and public and policy-maker awareness.

In response, Water Authority staff evaluated existing communications platforms, content, and capacity, identified areas for improvement, and moved forward with the selection of a public affairs consultant(s) to assist with 1) Water Authority rebranding, 2) Website redesign and development, and 3) Communications Framework development and implementation.

## Communications Framework

The Communications Framework (Attachment 1) details strategic communications that will guide the Water Authority's Communications, in coordination with Water Authority Policy Framework and Science Plan. The Water Authority has chosen three pillars, or themes, that communications activity is designed to advance – the need for **reliability** in water supplies, the need for **affordability** for water ratepayers, and the need for **accountability** in project operations.

These communications pillars will be advanced through three different types of communications, as described in the Framework: foundational communications, project communications, and policy communications.

## Communications Action Plan

The Communications Action Plan (Attachment 2) details the annual activities, audiences, and types of communications that will be developed and delivered to implement the Communications Framework and advance the Communications and Policy goals in the Strategic Plan.

## Issue for Consideration

Whether to adopt the Communications Framework and Communications Action Plan for Fiscal Year 2027.



## Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends adoption of the Communications Framework and Communications Action Plan for Fiscal Year 2027.

## Budget Implications

Sufficient resources were included in the Fiscal Year 2027 budget for implementation of this Communications Action Plan and the contract with Lucas Public Affairs is structured in a retainer framework and scaled to use available resources to avoid budget overruns.



# ATTACHMENTS



Date: March 17, 2026  
To: Scott Petersen, Water Policy Director, San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority  
From: Lucas Public Affairs  
Subject: Water Authority Strategic Communications Framework

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Overview**

The San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority (SLDMWA) enters 2026 from a position of significant communications strength and institutional credibility. Interviews with member agencies, partners and stakeholders reflect high confidence in SLDMWA's leadership, technical expertise and communications effectiveness. SLDMWA is widely viewed as a trusted and respected voice on complex water management, infrastructure and regulatory issues - with communications that are timely, accurate and influential among technical and policymaking audiences. Leadership accessibility, responsiveness and transparency reinforce trust and alignment across SLDMWA's diverse membership.

SLDMWA has demonstrated a strong ability to balance California's interconnected water needs—supporting environmental stewardship, agricultural productivity and urban water reliability. This reflects a broader mission centered on ensuring reliable water supplies for California's wildlife, farmers and communities within its member agencies' service area - recognizing that water reliability underpins ecosystems, local economies and the long-term public good. SLDMWA's work is essential to sustaining communities, protecting environmental resources and supporting economic stability across the Central Valley and beyond.

Looking ahead, stakeholders view SLDMWA as well-positioned to help advance greater alignment across state and federal water policy. There is strong support for pursuing policy pathways to improve water supply reliability and ratepayer affordability, while ensuring regulatory frameworks are accountable – that they reflect current scientific understanding and operational realities. By grounding its leadership in credible science, data and operational expertise, SLDMWA can help inform sound decision-making, modernize outdated regulations and increase funding opportunities, and continue serving as a trusted, solutions-oriented leader advancing water reliability as a shared statewide priority.

### **Assessment**

This strategic framework is guided by a comprehensive communications assessment consisting of a materials audit and in-depth stakeholder interviews to evaluate strengths, identify opportunities and guide strategic priorities.

### **Communications Materials Audit**

A detailed review of SLDMWA's communications platforms and materials—including SLDMWA's website, presentations, briefing materials, board communications, printed collateral, and public-facing materials—demonstrates a strong foundation characterized by:

- High technical credibility
- Consistent emphasis on core themes of reliability and stewardship
- Clear articulation of infrastructure investments and operational responsibilities
- Effective communication with member agencies, regulators and technical audiences

These materials reinforce SLDMWA's role as a capable infrastructure operator, project implementer and responsible steward of public water resources.

### **Stakeholder Interviews**

Seventeen in-depth interviews with member agency leaders, partners and stakeholders identified several consistent themes of strength:

- High satisfaction with SLDMWA's communications quality, credibility and responsiveness
- Strong trust in executive leadership and decision-making processes
- Clear recognition of SLDMWA's role in coordinating complex projects and regulatory matters
- Appreciation for SLDMWA's effectiveness in representing diverse member interests

### **Strategic Opportunity**

SLDMWA has a strong communications foundation. The primary opportunity is to build on that foundation by expanding reach, strengthening storytelling and increasing proactive engagement with external audiences.

Specifically, this communications framework seeks to:

- Expand SLDMWA's visibility beyond technical audiences to policymakers, media and the broader public
- Translate technical expertise into clear, accessible and compelling narratives
- Elevate understanding of SLDMWA's role across its three core pillars: agricultural, environmental and urban water interests
- Strengthen SLDMWA's position as a trusted, credible voice on water reliability, affordability and scientific and regulatory accountability
- Increase proactive communications around infrastructure investments, policy decisions and project milestones
- Identify and leverage strategic opportunities to elevate SLDMWA's leadership team and expertise

## **COMMUNICATIONS PRIORITIES & FOCUS AREAS**

SLDMWA's communications program during this period will focus on the following four integrated priorities that guide strategic direction and tactical implementation.

**Priority I: Message & Narrative Clarity**

Establish and reinforce a clear, consistent and accessible narrative that reflects SLDMWA's role, impact and value, building on its strong technical foundation to improve understanding and awareness among policymakers, media and broader public audiences.

**Priority II: Internal Alignment & Early Engagement**

Maintain strong internal alignment and strengthen proactive, early engagement with members and partners around major communications, policy decisions and project milestones to ensure continued trust, cohesion and coordinated external messaging.

**Priority III: Proactive External Visibility**

Increase SLDMWA's visibility and leadership presence among policymakers, media, partners, and key stakeholders through proactive, strategic communications that elevate understanding of SLDMWA's infrastructure investments, policy leadership and operational responsibilities, and reinforce its role as a trusted leader advancing water reliability, affordability and public value.

**Priority IV: Modernization of Platforms and Materials**

Modernize SLDMWA's communications platforms and materials to improve accessibility, usability and storytelling while maintaining technical credibility, ensuring SLDMWA's information is more accessible and engaging for broader audiences beyond technical stakeholders.

**TARGET AUDIENCES**

To effectively advance the SLDMWA's mission and policy priorities, our communications strategy focuses on engaging the following key internal and external audiences:

**Internal**

- SLDMWA Employees
- SLDMWA Member Agencies and Member Agency Leadership

**External**

- Elected Federal and State Officials and Staff
- Appointed Federal and State Agency Officials and Staff
- Business and Community Leaders
- Academic and Research Partners
- Community Leaders
- Water Industry Professionals
- Non-Governmental Organizations
- Media/Reporters
- California Residents

## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS APPROACH: THREE PILLARS

SLDMWA's communications strategy will operate across three integrated pillars:

- I. Foundational Communications
- II. Project Communications
- III. Policy Communications

These pillars reflect SLDMWA's role as:

- Project implementer
- Policy leader
- Trusted external voice

### **Pillar I: Foundational Communications**

Establish and maintain core messaging, platforms and communications channels that ensure consistent, accessible and effective communications across all SLDMWA activities, strengthening narrative clarity, improving public accessibility to information and enhancing SLDMWA's visibility and leadership positioning.

#### **Core Initiatives:**

- Messaging and Narrative Framework - Develop and implement a unified messaging framework emphasizing the following core themes:
  - Reliability
  - Affordability
  - Accountability
- Materials Development - Create a coordinated suite of external materials that articulate SLDMWA's policy priorities, infrastructure investments and measurable outcomes, such as:
  - Project fact sheets
  - Infographics
  - Op-eds and digital articles
  - FAQs
  - Presentation decks
  - Visual assets and graphics
  - White papers and briefings
- Website Modernization - Refresh the website to serve as a central communications platform featuring:
  - Accessible project information
  - Educational resources
  - Visual storytelling
  - Media and policymaker resources

- *External Newsletter* - Launch a bimonthly external newsletter highlighting:
  - Project updates
  - Infrastructure milestones
  - Member agency initiatives
  - Leadership activities
  - Policy developments
  
- *Internal Communications* - Strengthen internal communications through:
  - Daily water news report
  - Weekly Operations Update
  - Monthly staff newsletters
  - Monthly Executive Director update to Board members, staggered mid-point between Board meetings
  - Monthly newsletter to SLDMWA member agency Board members
  
- *Social Media Strategy* - Develop a targeted and strategic social media presence to maximize reach with limited staff engagement, with an emphasis on LinkedIn, to:
  - Share project updates and milestones
  - Highlight infrastructure investments, including member agency investments
  - Amplify leadership visibility and thought leadership
  - Support educational outreach
  
- *Earned Media Outreach* – Implement a fact-based media engagement program that positions SLDMWA as a credible, data-driven source of information for policymakers, stakeholders and the broader public by:
  - Maintaining a targeted media list that includes (and categorizes) Washington, D.C. and California water policy reporters, agricultural writers and journalists covering national security/food policy
  - Proactively pitching press releases and stories tied to project milestones, infrastructure investments and policy developments
  - Coordinating media briefings, editorial board meetings and background sessions
  - Securing op-eds and thought leadership pieces
  - Supporting project-based media events, site tours and milestone announcements
  - Preparing rapid-response statements and media materials during emerging issues
  - Providing spokesperson preparation and message development for interviews
  - Monitoring daily media coverage

## **Pillar II: Project Communications**

Demonstrate the public value of SLDMWA’s infrastructure investments through proactive, strategic communications that increase visibility of project outcomes and strengthen understanding among policymakers and stakeholders.

LPA will work closely with SLDMWA’s Executive and Government Relations teams to identify priority projects, key milestones and engagement opportunities, and develop coordinated communications plans aligned with major infrastructure and scientific lines of evidence initiatives. These efforts will

highlight measurable progress and clearly connect policy priorities to real-world results. Priority initiatives will include:

- Delta-Mendota Canal Subsidence Correction Project
- B.F. Sisk Dam Raise and San Luis Reservoir Expansion Project
- Regulatory Action Accountability Plan initiatives, including Science Program activities
- Other conveyance, storage and modernization projects of regional note, including member agency projects

Through milestone-driven communications tied to funding, construction and operational advancements, SLDMWA will demonstrate how these investments enhance water supply reliability, improve system efficiency and deliver long-term value to California's communities and economy.

#### **Core Initiatives:**

- *Delta-Mendota Canal Subsidence Correction Project Groundbreaking Event* – Plan and execute a high-visibility groundbreaking that brings together federal and state agency partners, elected officials, member agencies, and stakeholders to formally launch construction, highlight funding partnerships, and reinforce the project's role in strengthening water supply reliability.
- *Project Site Tours and Field Briefings* – Facilitate targeted site tours and on-site briefings for policymakers, regulatory officials, media, coalition partners, and key stakeholders to provide firsthand understanding of infrastructure needs, operational complexity and tangible public benefits.
- *Progress-Driven Media and Stakeholder Outreach* – Coordinate proactive communications tied to key project phases and deliverables, including:
  - Major project milestones and approvals
  - Construction launches and phase completions
  - Infrastructure investment announcements and funding commitments

#### **Pillar III: Policy Communications**

SLDMWA's communications strategy is designed to proactively advance its policy priorities and shape the broader water policy narrative through disciplined, strategic engagement. By educating stakeholders, clarifying regulatory impacts and elevating fact-based dialogue, SLDMWA will reinforce its position as a trusted, credible voice on water reliability, infrastructure investment and regulatory accountability.

Communications efforts will be aligned with and designed to advance the following Board adopted Policy Framework and aligned with the annual Board adopted Policy Action Plan:

1. **Water Supply Reliability** – Advocacy for infrastructure investment, regulatory flexibility, and operational improvements to enhance reliability of water deliveries from the Central Valley Project and other sources.

2. **Water Quality and Resource Management** – Policies related to salinity control, groundwater management, drainage, and habitat restoration.
3. **Environmental and Regulatory Compliance** – Engagement in policies affecting implementation of the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, and related state and federal laws.
4. **Climate Adaptation and Resilience** – Support for science-based adaptation strategies that prepare for hydrologic variability and climate change.
5. **Energy and Conveyance Efficiency** – Promotion of policies that improve water conveyance and power cost efficiency within the SLDMWA’s operations.
6. **Funding and Finance** – Advocacy for equitable and practical mechanisms to finance infrastructure, habitat, and water management investments.
7. **Stakeholder Engagement Communication** – Coordination with federal and state agencies, water users, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the public to promote understanding and build coalitions around shared objectives.

#### **Core Initiatives:**

- *Executive Visibility* - Position executive leadership as a trusted resource for media and policymakers to promote and advance SLDMWA’s policy priorities
  - Secure strategic speaking opportunities at conference panels, industry roundtables, policy forums, and water infrastructure discussions
  - Support these efforts with targeted media training and message preparation
  - Elevate executive profiles via LinkedIn and other external channels
- *Webinars/Educational Briefings* - Develop and host targeted virtual and in-person briefings to educate legislators, policymakers, agency officials, stakeholders, and coalition partners on priority projects, regulatory developments and infrastructure investments
  - Issue-focused webinars explaining complex policy and regulatory topics
  - Project-specific briefings tied to key developments and construction phases
  - Technical updates highlighting operational improvements and system performance
  - Legislative and agency staff briefings to support informed decision-making
- *Strategic Partnerships and Coalition Engagement* – Engage internal and external coalition partners and allied/championed organizations to advance SLDMWA’s policy priorities through coordinated partnership and advocacy efforts.
- *Water Operations Accountability* – Launch a coordinated public-facing communications effort to increase awareness and understanding of regulatory impacts on water supply cost, reliability, affordability, and environmental outcomes, and to build support for practical, science-based project operations.
  - Develop clear, accessible messaging that explains the true cost of water supply and regulatory drivers, leveraging current science and data to reinforce messaging and inform decision-making, incorporating information developed through advancement of studies of various lines of evidence
  - Produce fact sheets, infographics and digital content translating complex regulatory issues into understandable public impacts

- Support release of a white paper with coordinated outreach, briefings and media engagement
- Engage coalition partners and allied organizations to amplify messaging and broaden reach – such as State Water Contractors, ACWA, Coalition for a Sustainable Delta, and CalChamber.
- Deploy targeted member advocacy tools, including a potential letter campaign demonstrating broad-based support
- Promote consistent framing around reliability, accountability, transparency and balanced water management

## **TIMELINE & IMPLEMENTATION**

Following feedback and approval, the next phase will include development of a detailed implementation roadmap outlining:

- Specific communications priorities and tactics
- Timeline sequencing
- Roles and responsibilities
- Priority milestones and key dates



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To: SLDMWA Board of Directors and Alternates

From: Scott Petersen, Water Policy Director

Date: April 9, 2026

RE: Communications Action Plan – FY 2027

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## Communications Action Plan

This document serves as the Communications Action Plan to guide execution of the San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority (SLDMWA) Strategic Communications Framework for the 2026–2027 fiscal year.

The plan translates the Authority’s communications strategy into a defined set of initiatives, activities and deliverables to be implemented over the coming fiscal year. These efforts are designed to strengthen SLDMWA’s visibility, enhance stakeholder engagement and support advancement of the Authority’s policy and infrastructure priorities.

All communications activities are aligned to advance SLDMWA’s core pillars — **reliability, affordability, and accountability**—to ensure communications efforts directly support organizational priorities.

SLDMWA’s communications program will be implemented across three integrated areas of focus:

- **Foundational Communications** – Core messaging, materials, platforms and media engagement
- **Project Communications** – Strategic communications tied to infrastructure investments and milestones
- **Policy Communications** – Proactive engagement to support policy priorities and stakeholder understanding

## Key Audiences

SLDMWA’s communications efforts are designed to engage a defined set of internal and external audiences critical to advancing the Authority’s mission, infrastructure priorities and policy objectives. Each communications initiative and activation will be tailored to the most relevant audiences to ensure messages are delivered effectively and resonate with intended stakeholders.

The following represents the range of audiences identified as part of the broader communications strategy:



## Internal Audiences

- SLDMWA employees
- SLDMWA member agencies and member agency leadership

## External Audiences

- Elected federal, state, local officials and staff
- Appointed federal and state agency officials and staff
- Business and community leaders
- Academic and research partners
- Community leaders
- Water industry professionals
- Non-governmental organizations
- Media
- California residents

## Scope of Communications Work

SLDMWA’s communications efforts are designed to engage a defined set of internal and external audiences critical to advancing the Authority’s mission, infrastructure priorities and policy objectives. Each communications initiative and activation will be tailored to the most relevant audiences to ensure messages are delivered effectively.

## Foundational Communications

Establish and maintain consistent messaging, modern communications platforms and proactive engagement strategies to improve accessibility, transparency and visibility among key audiences.

<b>Program/Initiative</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Purpose/Outcome</b>	<b>Strategic Pillar Alignment</b>
Messaging & Narrative Framework	Develop and implement unified messaging across communications materials	Ensure consistency and clarity in SLDMWA’s narrative	Reliability, Affordability; Accountability
Materials Development	Develop fact sheets, infographics, presentations, FAQs and briefing materials	Translate complex technical and policy issues into accessible formats	Reliability, Affordability; Accountability



Website Modernization	Redesign and enhance website with project, policy and educational content	Improve accessibility, usability and transparency for external audiences	Reliability, Affordability; Accountability
External Newsletter	Distribute bimonthly external newsletter	Increase visibility of projects, policy developments and leadership activities	Reliability, Affordability; Accountability
Internal Communications	Continue to enhance internal updates including newsletters and Board communications	Maintain alignment across staff, leadership and member agencies	Reliability, Affordability; Accountability
Social Media Strategy	Establish and maintain a LinkedIn presence focused on projects and leadership visibility	Expand reach and reinforce SLDMWA's role as a thought leader	Reliability, Affordability; Accountability
Earned Media Outreach	Conduct proactive media engagement, including press outreach, op-eds, and briefings	Position SLDMWA as a credible, data-driven voice on water policy and infrastructure	Reliability, Affordability; Accountability
Media Monitoring	Monitor daily media coverage and develop regular summary reports	Track media narratives, inform communications strategy and support rapid response	Reliability, Affordability; Accountability

### Project Communications

Demonstrate the public value of SLDMWA's infrastructure investments through milestone-driven communications and stakeholder engagement.

Program/Initiative	Activity	Purpose/Outcome	Strategic Pillar Alignment
Delta-Mendota Canal Subsidence Correction Project	Plan and execute groundbreaking event	Highlight infrastructure investment, partnerships and project significance	Reliability, Affordability



Priority Infrastructure Projects	Develop communications plans tied to key projects (e.g., B.F. Sisk Dam Raise, reservoir expansion)	Increase awareness of project benefits and long-term system improvements	Reliability; Affordability
Project Site Tours & Briefings	Facilitate tours and on-site briefings for policymakers, media and stakeholders	Provide firsthand understanding of infrastructure needs and public benefits	Reliability, Affordability; Accountability
Milestone Communications	Coordinate communications tied to funding announcements, construction phases and project completions	Maintain visibility and demonstrate measurable progress	Reliability, Affordability; Accountability
Member Agency Project Amplification	Highlight member agency infrastructure and regional investments	Reinforce collective impact and regional coordination	Reliability, Affordability

### Policy Communications

Advance SLDMWA’s policy priorities through strategic communications that educate stakeholders, support informed decision-making and reinforce SLDMWA’s leadership role.

<b>Program/Initiative</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Purpose/Outcome</b>	<b>Strategic Pillar Alignment</b>
Executive Visibility	Secure speaking engagements, media opportunities and leadership positioning	Elevate SLDMWA leadership as trusted policy experts	Reliability, Affordability; Accountability
Webinars & Educational Briefings	Develop and host briefings for policymakers, agency staff and stakeholders	Increase understanding of complex regulatory and infrastructure issues	Reliability, Affordability; Accountability
Regulatory Action Accountability Plan Communications	Implement public-facing communications campaign including white paper, fact sheets and outreach	Build awareness of regulatory impacts and support for science-based reforms	Reliability, Affordability; Accountability



Coalition Engagement	Coordinate messaging and engagement with partner organizations and stakeholders	Amplify policy priorities and strengthen external alignment	Reliability, Affordability; Accountability
Stakeholder Communications	Conduct targeted outreach to agencies, NGOs and community stakeholders	Build understanding and support for SLDMWA priorities	Reliability, Affordability; Accountability

### Timing & Implementation Approach

Implementation of these activations will occur over the FY 27 period, with activities sequenced to align with ongoing communications needs, project milestones and key policy developments.

- **Foundational Communications** activities will be implemented on an ongoing basis and maintained at a regular cadence throughout the year. This includes core communications functions such as media engagement, content development, digital communications and internal and external updates.
- **Project Communications** will be timed around key infrastructure milestones, including project approvals, funding announcements, construction phases and major project events. These efforts will be coordinated in alignment with priorities and direction provided by the SLDMWA Executive team.
- **Policy Communications** will be developed and executed in coordination with the Government Relations team and aligned with key policy windows, legislative activity and regulatory developments to support SLDMWA’s policy objectives.