

Indie Politics

Marin Emergency Radio Authority (MERA) Phase 3 – Internal Communications

To: MERA Outreach Subcommittee and Executive Officer Maureen Cassingham
From: Dan Mullen & Terry Price
Date: October 19, 2011
Re: MERA's Internal Communications

Overview:

Nearly seven months after our original proposal to assess and recommend communications strategies to MERA's Outreach Subcommittee, we along with MERA have made significant progress. In this last phase of our contracted work, we're attaching the following documents for your review:

1. Revised Strategic Plan – Draft
2. Fact Sheet – Draft
3. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Sheet - Draft

In addition, MERA as an organization has taken positive steps on the following matters in which we've had active involvement:

1. Refined and Updated Public Outreach Plan
2. Governance Restructuring
3. Sign-Off Process
4. Fixing Organizational Fragmentation

While we've gained ground, there is still much work to do before we reach MERA's ultimate goal of financing a next generation technology system upgrade. We'd like to have a discussion with the Outreach Committee before we finalize our proposal for additional consulting services.

Attachments:

1. Revised Strategic Plan – Draft
Following up on our Phase 2 Memo, we've incorporated color-coded changes into the Strategic Plan, green for new text and dark red for deletions. As stated previously, we're making these recommendations so that they may eventually be adopted by the full MERA Executive Board. While we initially proposed doing a separate Marketing Plan for the Outreach Subcommittee, we now believe it is more important to keep MERA reading from one unified plan. Therefore, what we would have recommended as a Marketing Plan has now been incorporated into this Strategic Plan Revision.
2. Fact Sheet – Draft
This is our first draft of FACTS for MERA. Once approved, it is intended to encapsulate the major points MERA should be making to the public, both local officials and residents. This will need to be signed-off by MERA prior to use.

3. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Sheet – Draft

One of the most effective ways to educate people about a major project such as MERA is undertaking is to anticipate questions that will be asked, especially by elected officials who we will be asked to spearhead the effort. Our collective job is to anticipate those questions and answer them in advance. We see this as a living document, changing to meet this project's needs as the communication effort moves from an internal to external audience. Some questions may eventually fall off the sheet, but it is more likely this list will increase in size substantially as public presentations are made, new questions and developments arise, etc. In other words, don't be surprised by the shortness of the first draft – it will grow dramatically over time.

The FAQ's will need to be signed-off by MERA prior to use, and subsequent updates will need to be signed off as well, something to keep in mind when finalizing the sign-off process.

Other Internal Communications Related Issues:

Without repeating ourselves and our recommendations from the last memo, or what's in the Strategic Plan Revision attached, there are a few items to consider when planning how best to move forward:

1. Governance Restructuring

Maureen, along with CBG Communications and the Governance Subcommittee, are leading all of MERA towards its next generation governance structure. This will not only impact how decisions are made within MERA, but the public will want to know how decisions are being made about their tax dollars. We'll need to explain in simple terms who makes what decisions, how much money is involved, and how all the stakeholders are at the table and have a voice in the process.

The public will need to trust our Governance Structure. Therefore, a relatively simple and understandable process is preferred from a public outreach standpoint.

2. Ongoing Subcommittee Meetings

The joint subcommittee meeting we had on September 20 was a major success in our view. It was an opportunity for all the major players to sit at one table and quickly run through a variety of issues. Certain election assumptions from the Finance Subcommittee, for example, were quickly dispelled and corrected. That enabled those members to go back to their subcommittee and move in a better direction on Finance issues that will help a possible election in the future.

We support the agreement to hold the Joint Subcommittee Meetings on a quarterly basis.

3. Combined Funding & Public Outreach Campaigns

With your approval at the last meeting, we are combining the Funding and Public Outreach Campaigns (which were separate campaigns in the original Strategic Plan, now revised) into one consolidated effort to save time and money. Right now we're in a holding pattern in our planning because certain pieces require input from the Finance and Technology Subcommittees for us to begin attaching dates and new deliverables to a larger plan. Different subcommittees have different bricks of the foundation and they all need to be in place before we can construct the final plan and proceed.

We will be including planning of a unified, phased Outreach Campaign, first to internal stakeholders and elected officials, then externally to voters, as part our proposed services for the next period of work.

Summary and Next Steps:

In our last Memo in July, we outlined a Timeline Program to Move Forward that would require 19-33 months (1½ to nearly 3 years) of planning. Much of that planning allowed for stretches of time where other subcommittees were scheduled to complete their work. With the new governance structure coming online, and more Joint Subcommittee meetings planned, there may be opportunities to move up the timeline. We'd like to discuss this possibility with you.

We will be making a proposal for a larger and more comprehensive communications services plan as proposed in the revised Strategy Plan, possibly to all of MERA, in the next few weeks, but we want to get your feedback before submittal.

We look forward to your feedback at the meeting.