

# South Bay Cities Council of Governments

January 13, 2020

TO: SBCCOG Steering Committee

FROM: Jacki Bacharach, SBCCOG Executive Director

SUBJECT: Review of Marketing Consultant's Report

## Adherence to Strategic Plan:

*Goal D: Organizational Stability.* Be a high performing organization with a clear path to long-term financial health, staffing continuity, and sustained board commitment.

## BACKGROUND

The SBCCOG hired Tripepi Smith in July to review our current communications practices and provide specific actionable steps that could be implemented for improvement. They conducted a full-day review and assessment with SBCCOG staff in September along with distributing questionnaires for SBCCOG Board members. Their report was completed in October. The Executive Summary is attached. It is labeled as a "draft but it is the final product.

The few comments received by Board members were consistent with the recommendations. SBCCOG staff also agree with the recommendations. It has become clear, however, that SBCCOG staff does not have the 'bandwidth' to address the recommendations without additional resources and staff.

## RECOMMENDATION

Discuss the recommendations in the report and direct staff to return with a job description and budget for a communications staff person to be funded primarily from grants, but also from the SBCCOG's general operating budget.

## **South Bay Cities Council of Governments One-Day Communications Review Executive Brief**

### **About the South Bay Cities Council of Governments**

The South Bay Cities Council of Governments (SBCCOG) is a joint powers authority dedicated to improving the quality and efficiency of life in the South Bay region of Los Angeles County. It seeks to advance areas of mutual interest to its 16 member agencies and the County of Los Angeles, reinforcing member agency individuality yet encouraging their collaboration, identifying mutual solutions yet facilitating member agencies' unique efforts. Ultimately, the intent of the SBCCOG is to find power in numbers to advance the region through the united voice of its members.

The SBCCOG's primary areas of focus lie in transportation, economic development and environmental sustainability – the latter primarily through its South Bay Environmental Services Center (SBESC) program. While advancing these three areas, the SBCCOG also views itself as a think tank that expands its member cities' footprint in big-picture innovations, such as its regional municipal fiber network. The SBCCOG continuously balances member city pragmatic priorities with driving innovation.

The SBCCOG adopted a Strategic Plan in 2014 that is available here:

[http://www.southbaycities.org/sites/default/files/SBCCOG\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_Adopted\\_March\\_27\\_2014.pdf](http://www.southbaycities.org/sites/default/files/SBCCOG_Strategic_Plan_Adopted_March_27_2014.pdf).

### **Executive Summary**

SBCCOG leadership engaged Tripepi Smith to evaluate its current communications processes and platforms. Over the course of a one-day onsite meeting, the team interviewed the SBCCOG executive staff and led a discussion with the broader staff to identify opportunities and weaknesses in the SBCCOG's current communications efforts. Discussions focused on how communications can be optimized to achieve goals, which include: facilitating board success, increasing city staff engagement, making current processes more efficient and effective and garnering media attention to advance the SBCCOG's mission of enhancing the quality and efficiency of life across its member cities and the South Bay.

## Board Action Items

As member agency representatives, SBCCOG Board members yield great power both in their cities and in the SBCCOG. A board member acts as a conduit of information between both entities and is a partner in identifying trends and priorities that could benefit from the facilitation and experience of the SBCCOG. Recognizing this authority and responsibility, Tripepi Smith has outlined four action items for board members to further address SBCCOG communications and its engagement with key audiences.

### 1. Share the SBCCOG Mission and Function with Your Council

The SBCCOG's mission lies at the crux of its initiatives, board member structure and vision of success for its member agencies and the region. While board members may be versed in the SBCCOG's function and regional benefits, the rest of the city council members from their city might not be. By sharing the mission of the SBCCOG among peers and city staff, a board member expands the sphere of impact of the SBCCOG and its member agencies and secures the political commitment needed to advance regional priorities.

As a reminder, the SBCCOG's mission is to:

*Provide a leadership forum for South Bay local governments to act collaboratively and advocate for regional issues with a focus on improving transportation and the environment and strengthening economic development.*

### 2. Report to Your Council

Parallel to the previous item, board members can also fulfill their SBCCOG board member role by reporting on SBCCOG meeting activities to the rest of their council. Ongoing reporting will ensure that non-SBCCOG board councilmembers benefit from the knowledge and regional insights that the SBCCOG shares with its board members.

### 3. Urge City Staff Participation

SBCCOG member city involvement is vital to the organization's health and sustainability. By hearing from and engaging with its members, the SBCCOG learns about each organization's priorities. City staff engagement keeps the SBCCOG tuned to member agency needs so it can best serve them as well as push the envelope to guide the South Bay's innovation. Additionally, city participation enriches the SBCCOG's programming and offerings, assembling member agency thought leaders for idea sharing.

### 4. Raise SBCCOG Priorities to City Manager

Just as the SBCCOG can't pursue its initiatives without the board's support, it cannot do so without city staff support. City staff are instrumental in leveraging SBCCOG programming and

services for their cities, making them a vital part of the SBCCOG ecosystem, none more important than the city manager. Active city manager involvement with the SBCCOG programs and executive director ensure clear and consistent communications and raises the probability of regional projects achieving success when there is executive buy-in on the programs.

The role of board members as priority-setters becomes even more important when facilitating the relationship between the SBCCOG and their city managers by sharing SBCCOG priorities.

## Additional Communication Priorities

In addition to the specific actions that Tripepi Smith identified in partnership with SBCCOG senior leadership for specific actionable steps by board members, Tripepi Smith also identified general categories of improvement that the SBCCOG should address with staff regarding communications. These areas included:

- **Curate Relationships with Communications Staff at Each Member Agency** - Cities can help carry and deliver information from the SBCCOG, so the SBCCOG should coordinate with City Staff charged with managing communications for their respective agencies.
- **Execute Editorial Calendar Planning** - SBCCOG Staff should look into the future to plan communications across the board and how those communications should be distributed (via website, social media, press releases, articles in City member agency publications, etc.).
- **Cultivate Relationships with Local Media** - The SBCCOG has not actively engaged with local media nor does it routinely push press releases. There is room to improve in collaborating with media outlets to address SBCCOG policy objectives and execute on resident outreach programs.
- **Develop Market Intelligence Assets** - One of the most significant audiences of the SBCCOG is its own member agencies. To better connect with this cohort, the SBCCOG should develop clear information files on all member agencies and ensure all SBCCOG Staff have a thorough understanding of the member agencies to increase customer service and better deliver personalized communications.
- **Solidify Brand Strategy** - The SBCCOG has a wandering brand aesthetic that lacks consistency in both color scheme and quality of design. The SBCCOG should review all its communications and prioritize branding to ensure clarity in the publications and materials it produces. Additionally, the SBCCOG should develop a style guide and standard templates to make it easy to stay on brand.
- **Develop a Holistic Communications Strategy** - While this one-day evaluation process helps guide areas of focus for the SBCCOG to address with communications, the scope does not include details on the deliverables and definitions of communication success that can be foundational to long-term communications success. This is a long term

project that should be considered after more fundamental elements are addressed by SBCCOG staff.

- **Add Professional Communications Talent** - Communications are a central aspect of the COG's work with member agencies. As an example, the SBCCOG's list of 16,000+ individuals who have opted in or engaged with the SBCCOG on environmental sustainability is one of its most valuable assets - not just valuable asset for communications, but a valuable asset for the entire organization. Advancing ideas, thinking big and building regional sentiment all hinge on strong communications. Tripepi Smith's review found fundamental shortcomings in SBCCOG communication efforts that an identified communications professional (whether contracted, hired or otherwise sourced) could address, adding major value to the operational effectiveness of the SBCCOG.
- **Implement Technical Fixes on Digital Platforms** - Tripepi Smith identified several basic issues around technical configurations and setup of core SBCCOG communications platforms that should be addressed as soon as possible.