

Proposed Revisions to Section #5 – Development of a
Public Education and Outreach Campaign

INDIE POLITICS – NOVEMBER, 2011



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**MARIN EMERGENCY RADIO AUTHORITY
(MERA)
STRATEGIC PLAN**

Prepared by

Dan Mullen

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Price Campaign Solutions

November 2011

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President¶
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Dick Nielsen¶
Senior Engineer¶

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Executive Summary

Seven Strategic Directions for MERA

5. Public Education and Outreach Campaign – The Committee discussed developing an education and outreach campaign both for the general public and the community at large, as well as for MERA’s internal constituencies. This campaign would be designed to demonstrate the value of MERA to all of its constituencies and garner support for both MERA’s ongoing activities and the funding needed for the extensive future system replacement.

The Committee recommended developing an Outreach Subcommittee to assist in developing messages that MERA needs to convey. The Subcommittee would oversee a variety of outreach activities. Chief among them will be:

- First, identify and target different audiences. In this case it is divided into to two groups, 1. Internal - MERA members (including elected officials of each member’s governing board), and 2. External – Marin County residents (specifically voters)
- Second, develop unified messaging, prepare presentations and train presenters for appearances before MERA member councils and governing boards with the objective of gaining 100% internal support for MERA’s capital development plans
- Third, craft and execute a Public Education & Outreach Campaign Plan (after resolution of MERA’s governance issues; an agreement is reached on needs, costs and timing of the system upgrade; long-term funding options are determined; and a survey is completed).
The Plan will include:
 - Messaging
 - Presentations and presentation material
 - Educational materials and visual media
 - Media relations
 - Community organizing and partnerships

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<#>Greater use of MERA’s website by adding additional capabilities; ¶
<#>Work with the Community Media Center of Marin (CMCM) to develop PSAs and longer form videos describing what MERA does and its value to the community. It would be especially useful if MERA’s individual members could also develop PSAs that describe how each of the members use and rely on MERA’s system; ¶
<#>Making presentations at community meetings and appearing at community events such as the County Fair; and ¶
<#>Working with press organizations to print press releases and develop positive image feature stories.¶

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- o Training and coaching of presenters
- o Community presentations
- o Direct mail, social media and other outreach methods,
- o Budget, including staffing, materials, mailings, etc.

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The Board approved this recommendation with the stipulation that it be under the Executive Committee. Necessary activities would begin within three months after adoption of the Strategic Plan, starting with development of the Outreach Subcommittee. The Subcommittee would then work continually on both internal and external outreach in advance of and throughout any fundraising initiatives, such as a capital development campaign.

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5. Development of a Public Education and Outreach Campaign to Gather Broad-Based Support for MERA and Its System Replacement

The Committee discussed that it would be beneficial for MERA to develop a communications strategy that would provide education and outreach concerning its value to both the public at large and MERA’s internal stakeholders (members, member jurisdiction officials, allied agencies, etc.). Historically, because MERA is considered a part of general services, there has not been significant external communication about MERA (or most general services in the County, Cities and Towns for that matter). This means that many people do not know what MERA does. Additionally, some that are aware of MERA have a negative impression, because of the previous battles over the placement of towers and their aesthetic impact and prior capacity issues that have arisen during weather events.

The Committee acknowledged that effective communications are the key to shaping the message that MERA wants to convey. There needs to be an understanding of what MERA means to both internal and external constituencies.

This discussion led to development of two central questions:

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- Regarding the public, why do, or should, people care about MERA?
- Regarding internal constituencies, what is in MERA for its members?

Concerning internal communications, there needs to be an understanding communicated to the members regarding the service levels provided. This also means giving the members a better understanding of what benefits flow through MERA to the members' constituencies.

Consistent with this, it will be important to note that economy of scale is a benefit of MERA.

MERA's value is known by other public safety radio and emergency operations entities. For example, the City of Los Angeles wanted to set up a similar operation to MERA based on its perceived benefits and has contacted MERA to discuss certain facets of the operation.

Regarding external constituencies, including the general public and organizational entities throughout Marin, the key point is to educate the public on the fact that in order to get anywhere with public safety communications, you need to utilize MERA's system. This directly impacts them when they make a 911 call, for instance.

Overall, the Committee agreed on three key points.

- The communications plan needs to be inter-relational concerning MERA's various internal and external constituencies and objectives.
- It will be important to have a raised level of awareness concerning the value of MERA prior to the point MERA starts seeking substantial funding for the system replacement.
- When raising the awareness level, it will be important to not raise the alarm level. In other words, the education and outreach campaign must be measured and targeted to desired objectives and the benefits they bring to internal and external constituencies.

The basis of a successful public outreach effort is to first identify the target audience. In this case it is divided into two groups, 1. Internal - MERA members (including elected officials of each member's governing board), and 2. External – Marin County residents (specifically voters). Before implementation of an external communication and a public education and outreach campaign the following must be in place:

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- The structure of the organization, including decision-making and levels of fiscal commitment by members, must be resolved.
- The need, cost and timing of the upgrades to the system need to be agreed upon.
- The potential funding options need to be identified, analyzed and finalized.

The Outreach Committee will assist with forming a unified, accurate and consistent message by:

- Assisting with formalizing a sign-off process for communications and internal material,
- Development of a Fact Sheet and FAQ to unify messaging and make certain that all MERA members are in complete agreement,
- Help correct organizational fragmentation through participation in joint meetings to coordinate efforts,
- Promote appropriate and consistent MERA governing body and committee representation,
- And, once unified messaging is completed, prepare presentations and train presenters for appearances before MERA member councils and governing boards with the objective of gaining 100% support for MERA’s capital development plans.

Once the above has been achieved, the Outreach Committee will focus on outreach and education of the Marin County residents. A public opinion survey will be commissioned. A Public Education Outreach Campaign Plan will be created by the Outreach Committee that will detail the tasks, staffing and resources needed for a successful effort. The rollout of the campaign will be dependent on the election date decided on by the Governing Board.

a. **Initial Actions Required** - To implement Strategic Direction No. 5, MERA would need to take the following actions:

- Develop an Outreach Subcommittee, as a part of the Executive Committee’s function, along with resources from MERA member agencies (such as Public Information Officers, Outreach Coordinators, etc.) to develop and promote the message(s) that MERA desires to convey. This Subcommittee should be appointed within 90 days of adoption of the Plan.

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<#>MERA’s Website— It is in the process of being upgraded and additional communications tools, such as flash video and links to other entities with similar education and outreach objectives can be included.
<#>A booth at the County Fair— This was suggested as a way to raise positive awareness of MERA before a large segment of the general public and the Marin community.
<#>The Community Media Center of Marin (CMCM) has a PSA day, where they produce PSAs for nonprofits and other entities. It was mentioned that it would be good for MERA and its individual members to become involved in the PSA day.
<#>Working with CMCM or other video production entities, MERA could develop a type of “infomercial” video and show it on both the Access Channels and its website (potentially also uplinked to services such as YouTube). This video would describe in visual terms how when you pick up a phone for a 911 call and it goes to dispatch, from there MERA is critically important to enable first responders to reach you.
<#>MERA’s website could potentially provide a “Wiki” interface for feedback from the public.
<#>MERA representatives could make presentations at community meetings.
<#>MERA could work with press organizations providing press releases and information for feature stories.

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- Over time, implement a public education and outreach effort through the various methods described ~~in this section and detailed in the Public Education and Outreach Campaign Plan.~~
- Receive feedback from the target audiences (internal and external constituencies) regarding the message, and adjust as necessary based on feedback regarding the success of the message, potential confusion over the message, messages having negative rather than positive consequences, and other types of feedback.
- Potentially, use some informal surveys to determine the effectiveness of the messages in developing both internal and external support.
- Retain outside consultation to complete the tasks detailed in this section.

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b. **Timeline for Actions** - The recommended timeline for planning purposes, which may be adjusted by the Outreach Subcommittee, is the following:

- Implement the Outreach Subcommittee within three months after adoption of the Strategic Plan.
- Retain consultation to assist Committee with assessment, planning, organization development, polling, and creation of materials and presentations.
- Assist MERA Executive Committee and Subcommittees with improving internal communications.
- Assist Finance Committee with the development of funding options
- Create a MERA Fact Sheet and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's).
- Create presentations and associated materials to be used to inform and educate MERA members, including governing bodies.
- Conduct a countywide survey to assess community opinions regarding MERA and capital development funding options.
- Develop a Public Education & Outreach Campaign Plan (after resolution of MERA's governance issues, an agreement is reached on needs, costs and timing of the system upgrade, long-term funding options are determined, and a survey is completed). The Plan will include:
 - Messaging
 - Presentations and presentation material

Deleted: <#>Develop and implement generic value and image-based messages about MERA within six months after adoption of the Strategic Plan.¶
<#>Continue delivering value and image-based messages about MERA utilizing the various methods described above through the first 18 months after adoption of the Strategic Plan.¶
<#>Once the near-term and long-term funding plan is determined, develop a message associated with garnering support for the various funding mechanisms to be employed, especially related to a capital development campaign.¶

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at large, as well as for MERA’s internal constituencies. This campaign would be designed to demonstrate the value of MERA to all of its constituencies and garner support for both MERA’s ongoing activities and the funding needed for the extensive future system replacement.

The Committee recommended and the Board approved developing an Outreach Subcommittee to assist in developing messages that MERA needs to convey and also in helping implement new communications tools. Necessary activities would begin within three months after adoption of the Strategic Plan ~~with assessment and planning functions taking place within nine months.~~

~~Background and presentation materials will be developed, including a Fact Sheet and FAQ’s within 12 months. The Outreach Subcommittee, on an ongoing basis and where appropriate, will assist other MERA committees in coming to conclusions on decisions and tasks that are deemed necessary before a Public Education and Outreach Campaign Plan can be fully developed. The Subcommittee will also conduct a countywide survey to assess opinions about MERA and it’s proposed capital development project. A Public Education & Outreach Campaign Plan will be prepared that will include all the elements necessary for a successful outreach campaign. Once the Plan has been adopted the final timing of the campaign rollout will be determined by the election date.~~

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<#>Work with the Community Media Center of Marin (CMCM) to develop PSAs and longer form videos describing what MERA does and its value to the community. It would be especially useful if MERA’s individual members could also develop PSAs that describe how each of the members use and rely on MERA’s system; ¶
<#>Making presentations at community meetings and appearing at community events such as the County Fair; and ¶
<#>Working with press organizations to print press releases and develop positive image feature stories.¶

Deleted: delivering initial messages within six months and more extensive image-based information within 18 months.

Deleted: Thereafter, MERA would continue its outreach throughout any capital development campaign or other fundraising initiatives.

Financial Considerations Related to the Strategic Directions and Initiatives

During the development of the Strategic Planning directions and initiatives, the funding requirements for each one of the directions and the relative budgetary timing were considered. These initial projections are included in Attachment A (MERA Strategic Plan Projected Funding/Resources Needed) to this Report and Plan. Note that all funding projections are in 2010 dollars, so cumulative inflation should be considered at the actual time of expenditure. The following is a summary of the resources needed, categorized by strategic direction.

Note that, especially in the first two to three years after Plan adoption, there will be a significant demand on MERA organizational and member resources if all of the Directions are implemented as recommended. This will include additional staff time, potentially up to one full-time equivalent (FTE) over the first two to three years after Plan adoption, in order to coordinate and be involved in implementation of all the Strategic Directions. Beyond this, note that the greatest level of funding is needed for capital improvement projects revolving around improving coverage and capacity, procurement of new frequencies interface with the new EOF and the future extensive system replacement. After that, funding is recommended for additional legal and accounting services, outside facilitation services, grant writing services, web-site development assistance, and similar types of contract services.

Also note that the actual funding and budget requirements will be established as the MERA Board considers the implementation of the Strategic Plan over time based upon priorities, availability of funding and other resources. The following synopsis and the Attachment will assist the Board as it considers implementation of all of the Strategic Plan directions.

1. MERA's Mission

- a. Current Activities** – Will draw upon existing MERA resources.
- b. Update to the Strategic Plan** - Recommended in Years Three (3), Six (6) and Nine (9) after Plan adoption with outside facilitation assistance projected at \$30,000 in Year Three, \$35,000 in Year Six and \$40,000 in Year Nine.

2. Changes to MERA's Governance Structure

- a. The Board Self-Assessment and Governance/Nominating work group** – Will draw upon existing MERA resources and additional staff time.
- b. Potential outside facilitation services** – If necessary, are projected in Year One at \$20,000 - \$30,000 for both the initial Board Self-Assessment and the work group.
- c. Legal services** – Additional services are projected in Year Two at \$30,000.

3. System Technology/Upgrade and Replacement Plan

- a. Continued work on system replacement by the Operations Advisory Committee** - Will draw upon existing MERA resources.
- b. Outside technical consulting expertise** – Projected in Year One at \$30,000 - \$50,000
- c. Interface with the new EOF** - Projected at \$500,000 plus to \$5 million, beginning in Year One.
- d. Capacity and coverage projects** – Projected at a total of over \$7 million, beginning in Year One.
- e. Procurement of new frequencies** – Projected at \$250,000, beginning in Year One.
- f. Complete system replacement** – Forecast at up to \$50 million plus, beginning in Year Seven (7).

4. Long-Term Funding Plan

- a. Sustainability subcommittee development** – Will draw upon existing MERA resources and additional staff time.
- b. Grant writing services** – If necessary, are forecast at \$15,000 annually in Years One through Six.
- c. Accounting services** – Additional services projected at \$10,000 in Year Two.

5. Public Education and Outreach Campaign

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a. **Development of the Outreach subcommittee** - Will draw upon existing MERA resources and additional staff time.

i. **Retention of consultation** - \$10,000 year 1 (completed), projected ~~\$30,000~~ year 2.

b. **Potential PR Firm assistance**

c. **Potential Website development assistance** – Projected at ~~\$5,000~~ year 2.

d. **Potential Media Production/Air-time costs** – Projected at ~~\$10,000~~ year 2.

e. **Conduct Survey** – Projected at ~~\$30,000~~ year 3.

6. Expanding Partnerships

a. **Current partnership development activities** - Will draw upon existing MERA resources and additional staff time.

b. **Additional legal services to develop new partnership agreements** – Forecast at \$20,000 in Year Two.

c. **Additional accounting services to ensure financial compliance of terms partnerships** – Forecast at \$10,000 in Year Three.

Such legal and accounting services, although not shown to continue in the Attachment beyond the initial years projected, would need to be expanded as additional partnerships may be developed beyond Year Three.

7. Strengthen Common Bonds of MERA Membership

a. **Develop work group** - Will draw upon existing MERA resources and additional staff time.

b. **Potential outside facilitation assistance for work group** – Projected at \$10,000 to \$15,000 in Year One.

A survey of the membership – To determine effectiveness of the common bond strengthening activities would potentially use an outside survey firm in Year Three at a projected \$15,000.

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Attachment A - MERA Strategic Plan Projected Funding/Resources Needed

MERA Strategic Plan Projected Funding/Resources Needed¹

Strategic Direction/Initiative	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
1. MERA's Mission										
- Current activities	Existing MERA resources	Existing MERA resources	Existing MERA resources	Existing MERA resources	Existing MERA resources	Existing MERA resources	Existing MERA resources	Existing MERA resources	Existing MERA resources	Existing MERA resources
- Update to Strategic Plan					Existing MERA resources					Existing MERA resources
- Outside facilitation assistance for Strategic Plan update			\$30,000			\$35,000			\$40,000	
2. Changes to MERA's Governance Structure										
- Board self-assessment	Existing MERA resources			Existing MERA resources			Existing MERA resources			Existing MERA resources
- Potential outside facilitation assistance with 1 st self-assessment	\$10,000 - \$15,000									
- Governance/nominating work group	Existing MERA resources plus additional staff time									
- Potential outside facilitation assistance for work group	\$10,000 - \$15,000									
- Legal services to craft any necessary JPA, changes and changes in agreements with member jurisdictions		\$30,000								
3. System Technology/Upgrade and Replacement Plan										
- Technology work group development	Existing MERA resources									
- Outside technical consulting expertise	\$30,000 -									

¹ Note: All funding projections are in 2010 dollars. Accordingly, cumulative inflation will need to be taken into account during the actual year of expenditure.

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Strategic Direction/Initiative	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
	\$50,000									
- Interface with new EOF	\$500,000+ - \$5 M*									
- Coverage and Capacity projects	\$7 M+*									
- Procurement of new frequencies	\$250,000*									
- Complete system replacement							Up to \$50 M+*			
4. Long-Term Funding Plan										
- Sustainability subcommittee development	Existing MERA resources plus additional staff time									
- Legal services		Covered in Strategic Direction #2, governance changes (above)								
- Grant writing services		\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000				
- Accounting services		\$10,000								
5. Public Education and Outreach Campaign										
- Outreach subcommittee development	Existing MERA resources plus additional staff time									
- Outside consultant to assist with assessment and planning	\$10,000									
- PR Firm assistance for the capital development campaign										
- Consultants to develop PE&O Plan, conduct survey, internal & external communications		\$30,000								
- Website development assistance to		\$10,000								

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Strategic Direction/Initiative	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
implement additional communications tools										
- Video/audio production and development of visual presentations		\$10,000								
- Conduct Survey			\$30,000							
6. Expanding Partnerships										
- Current activities	Existing MERA resources plus additional staff time									
- Legal services to develop new partnership agreements as necessary		\$20,000								
- Accounting services to ensure financial compliance with terms of partnerships			\$10,000							
7. Strengthen Common Bonds of MERA membership										
- Develop work group	Existing MERA resources plus additional staff time									
- Potential outside facilitation assistance for work group	\$10,000 - \$15,000									
- Survey of the membership			Existing MERA resources							
- Potential outside survey firm assistance			\$15,000							
Total potential additional monetary cost to implement the Strategic Directions shown in each Year (not including additional MERA staff costs)	\$7,840,000-\$12,375,000*	\$135,000+	\$80,000+	\$25,000+	\$25,000+	\$60,000+	Up to \$50M+*		\$40,000	

*These expenses may be spread out over multiple years. The year shown is the initial expense year.

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