

Marin Emergency Radio Authority Project Oversight Committee (POC)

Next Generation System Outreach Plan 2014 Options & Discussion

Update – October 9, 2013
Presented by Dan Mullen and Terry Price

With Round 1 presentations coming to a close, we wanted to raise some options and discussion items with the POC before finalizing our plans for stakeholder and community outreach for next year. After receiving feedback from various sources, this seemed like a good time to pause and reevaluate our Outreach Plan before moving forward. We seek your direction on these items below.

Here is an overview of the original Outreach Plan Executive Summary to refresh everyone's memory.

Goal – Achieve next generation system funding through the passage of a parcel tax bond measure.

Objectives:

1. Educate our membership and community leaders
2. Obtain unanimous support of MERA representatives
3. Obtain unanimous support from member organizations
4. To the extent possible, educate Marin citizens

Strategy:

1. Finalize project details – to prepare a public opinion survey and promote the project
2. Hire Special Project Manager (SPM) under a part-time contract and an Administrative Assistant (AA) to work with MERA and to implement the outreach plan
3. Educate members about MERA and the project and solicit their support
4. Educate city, town and agency managers about the project and outreach plan
5. Conduct public opinion polling to help finalize outreach and financing decisions
6. Present the project to governing boards
7. Conduct a public education effort to inform residents and various stakeholders about the urgent need to upgrade Marin's emergency communications system

Structure and Activities:

1. **Special Project Manager (SPM) Leads Team Approach** – Pairs up local police and fire leaders with countywide experts in technology and finance to implement the Outreach Plan.
2. **Project Oversight Subcommittee** – New committee created to specifically oversee the project's finance, technology, outreach and education effort. Responsibilities include:
 - a. Provides guidance to Executive Officer, SPM and the overall Outreach effort
 - b. Assists with implementation of Outreach Plan
 - c. Reviews and approves all communications, including FAQ, Fact sheet, and presentation material – this function may be delegated to the SPM and/or a three person "Sign-Off" committee designated by the Oversight Committee

3. **Outreach Communications Consultants** – Charged with assisting MERA and its various subcommittees to coalesce around a comprehensive communications strategy.
4. **Workshop for MERA Members** – Formally launches Outreach Effort on January 16, 2013. Educates members to the technical aspects of the next generation upgrade, the financial side of the proposed parcel tax measure and the outreach effort.
5. **Pollster** – Conducts two surveys; baseline public opinion survey in early 2013 and another shorter “brushfire” poll in 2014.
6. **Local Spokespersons** – While the SPM is expected to act as lead spokesperson for the project, he/she will work with local Police and Fire Chiefs starting in 2013 to determine the best approach to present the project to their local governing boards and media outlets.
7. **Create Next Generation System Informational Material and Media** – Executive Officer and SPM will oversee Outreach Consultants to create: Facts Sheet and FAQs, presentations, project and budget narratives, written endorsements and testimonials, packaging of reports and instructional material for members.
8. **SPM Implements Other Targeted Communications Efforts** – SPM shall use all of the above to outreach to: member organizations, business community, major landlords, grassroots leadership, stakeholders (such as education and neighborhood groups), local media and advertising, website update, and possible citizen education through various distribution channels.

2014 Options and Discussion

While the plan’s goal and going back to members for Round 2 Presentations remain the same, we wanted the POC’s thoughts on some of the feedback we’ve received. This involves how much we want to share with the community and what the timing would be.

We are at a crossroads of whether we involve the community in Round 2, to solicit their active feedback on the project, or if we keep the public outreach at the end as listed in the original plan (see last items of Objectives, Strategy and Structure above). Traditionally, this has been a public “education” campaign where we present how many of their local officials support the project, and that’s how this was conceived in 2012. This year, however, Plan Bay Area became unexpectedly controversial and other housing issues led to a recall effort against a sitting County Supervisor. Both opposition efforts failed, but it leads us to these questions:

1. Can we afford to rely on a traditional public education campaign alone when we need 67% of the vote, and the polling showed this to be a tight election?
2. Or do we need to incorporate more community interaction sooner, expanding our stakeholder presentations earlier in the calendar, soliciting feedback online, more testimonial videos online, etc.?
3. And how much does this cost?

Additionally, we’ve had feedback from a few Round 1 presentations, notably from the Board of Supervisors, who want us to find testimonials of the public using the system, solicit citizen support, add the video to cable access channels, etc.

Managing Shifting Public Expectations

Part of the push back we have heard (albeit limited) is that the project is a “done deal.” While that is not totally the case, it is how it seems to people who don’t attend meetings or read the minutes of MERA meetings. Our strategy to counter this accusation from members and stakeholders has been to address them immediately before they take root. Unfortunately, this strategy becomes more difficult to execute on

a countywide basis where a Facebook page and/or posts could be like a turbo-charged letter to the editor that can reach thousands of voters every hour.

Some members of the public, like stakeholders, now want to be brought in before decisions are finalized so they can have an impact on what is being decided. This is part of the shifting public expectations generated by social media and digital connectivity. The public meeting has been replaced by the digital one.

That said, the practical effects of shifting the public outreach from in-person to online, and to earlier in the campaign need not be overwhelming. The strategy would be more proactive, seeking out public allies before any opposition emerges, and doing the occasional rotary-type meeting intermingled with the Round 2 presentations to councils. Reviewing the SPM's Round 2 presentation slides, I don't think we'd have to change the PowerPoint presentation greatly, if at all, for these public presentations.

Conducting the Public Outreach Sooner

The objective would be to share the current information we have with the public, ask for their thoughts and answer their questions. Not too different than the public education phase originally conceived, but it would be before we have local electeds approving the plan. There is a risk that some opponents of the project would apply pressure and try to peel off select council members to oppose the project, but judging by early reports from Round 1, this seems like a limited possibility which would not negatively impact council votes on endorsing the project.

Possible Action Items and Budget:

We don't expect this to impact Round 2 presentations significantly, but it would impact the time required from the SPM and AA to feed social media outlets with content. We've updated the budget for the rest of the FY2013-14 as follows, including some costs already planned for:

a. Consulting & Graphic Design (9 mo. X \$5k/mo) (usual services, plus creation of Facebook & Twitter accounts and plans)	\$45,000
b. Website (with feedback forms & video hosting)	\$5,000
c. Video 2: Testimonials of Survivors	\$5,000
d. Digital Advertising (produce for local outlets, sponsored Facebook ads, etc)	\$5,000
e. <u>Public Survey (Poll)</u>	<u>\$16,000</u>
TOTAL	\$76,000

Prior Approved Budget:

Our budget for this FY was \$132,000, approved in May. We've spent just under \$15,000 from July through September, making this new budget total for this FY about \$91,000, or about \$41,000 less than

approved. Most of the savings comes from revised estimates of consulting hours. Below is the prior approved budget for comparison.

a. Consulting	\$102,000
b. Print Materials Graphic Design	\$4,000
c. Website Management	\$5,000
d. Video Editing (as needed)	\$5,000
e. "Brushfire" Public Survey (2 nd Poll)	\$16,000
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>\$132,000</u>

Immediate Impacts

One of the biggest impacts a shift in strategy would have is on how we organize the website upgrade. We're overdue to give the current site an update, but this fork in the road has caused us to pause. If we continue on our current track, then we would make the website a little easier to navigate for members and add a home page which is more attractive to the public visitor, while retaining much of the back-office documents of minutes, members, etc. If we kickoff our public outreach sooner, we would update more of the pages and content to appeal more to the average resident, encouraging more public interaction sooner. The minutes and other member docs would remain, but they would not be given the same prominence they have for members.

The other major impact is in how the SPM and AA organize their time the next 8-12 weeks getting ready for Round 2 presentations. They need to know if they're spending the winter and spring of 2014 mainly going in front of members and councils, or if they will spend time also reaching out to the public.

This different direction we will affect how we finalize the PowerPoint, handouts, website, video, etc. The Project Oversight Committee's input is critical to how we proceed.