



# Create a Strategic Communications Plan that Generates Results

Robin Rockey, APR  
RockSpark Communications + Marketing

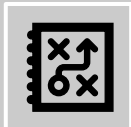
# INTRODUCTION



# TODAY'S AGENDA



Learn the key components of creating a Strategic Communications Plan



Hands-on exercise: Put it all together

# WHO'S IN THE ROOM?

1. How many years of communications experience do you have? (Beginner, intermediate, advanced)
2. Have you created a communications plan?

# LOOK FAMILIAR?

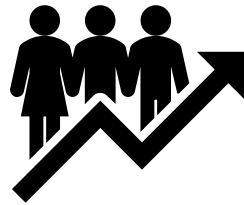


Graphic by  
Maurice  
Chaney

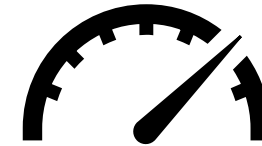
# VALUE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING



Aligns efforts with  
mission



Gain buy-in from  
leadership



Proven, scalable  
process

# THE “CAN YOU JUST” EXPERIENCE?



*Can you just put something together?*

*Can you just make a flyer by Friday?*

*Can you just make a quick video?*

# THE COMMS OFFICE IS NOT A DELI

**ROCKSPARK** 



# Four-step Public Relations Process: RPIE



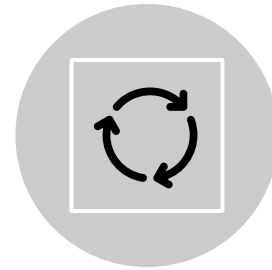
## Strategic Planning Building Blocks



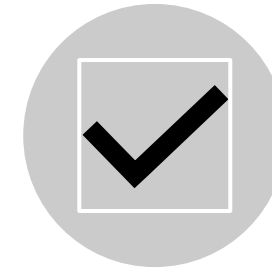
RESEARCH



PLANNING



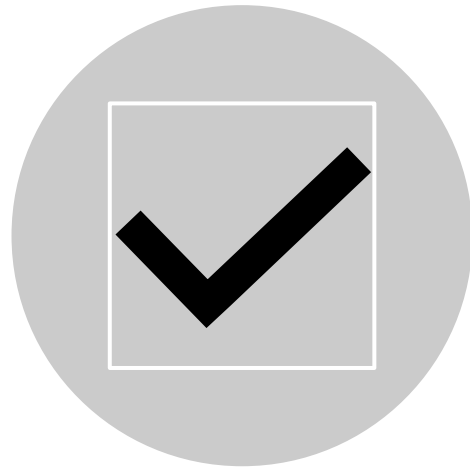
IMPLEMENTATION



EVALUATION



# RPIE IS NOT



A checklist



A form filled out after  
decisions are made



# RPIE IS

- A way of thinking
- A decision-making framework
- The foundation of strategic communications



STEP 1  
RESEARCH

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# STEP 1: RESEARCH

Research enables you to set a baseline to measure results.

1. Primary
  2. Secondary
- 

# RESEARCH – TWO TYPES

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1. Quantitative
  2. Qualitative
- 
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## Drought Emergency Declared



- District customers required to reduce monthly water consumption by 24%
- Failure to comply = \$10,000 daily fine
- Public relations plan needed to persuade customers to use less water (behavioral outcome)

STEP 2  
PLANNING

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# MAIN PLANNING COMPONENTS

1. Target audiences
2. Goal
3. Objectives
4. Strategies
5. Tactics



# TARGET AUDIENCES (PUBLICS)

- Residents in a specific neighborhood
- Community groups
- Teen e-bike riders and their parents
- Agency employees



WHAT IS  
YOUR GOAL?



# GOAL

- Desired end state
- Encompass your reason for creating the plan
- Reflect your organization's larger goals

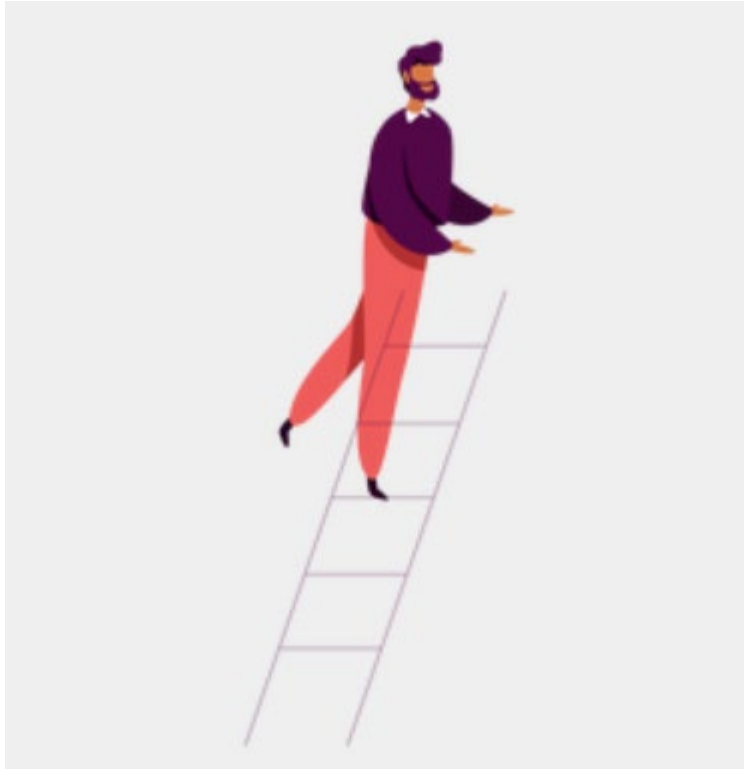
“People who very vividly describe or picture their goals are 1.2 to 1.4 times more likely to successfully accomplish their goals”

— Forbes

# GOAL EXAMPLES

- Water district: Motivate customers to change their behavior to reduce monthly water use by 24%.
- County: Increase public trust in our organization.

- Specific, measurable, attainable, relevant & time-bound
- Example: Generate a 10% increase in the number of employees whose impression of the organization is excellent or good within 12 months
- Evaluation metric: Conduct an employee survey. Administer the survey again in 12 months.



- Strategies outline where you are going
- Tactics spell out exactly how you will get there

# A SIMPLE TEST

- If you can do it tomorrow, it's probably a tactic.
- If it helps you decide what to do tomorrow, it's probably a strategy.

# STRATEGY VS. TACTIC



Social media post



Building trust through early outreach



News release

**Water Smarts 101 Workshops**

LEARN MORE AND REGISTER AT [WesternWaterCA.gov/](https://www.westernwaterca.gov/)

**HOSTED QUARTERS**  
14205 Meridian Place  
Riverside, CA 92518

Learn how to use **efficiently** at our workshop series.

**WESTERN WATER** DRINK AND SERVE

**Bill insert**

@WesternWaterCA

Environmental Utilities  
Communications planning document  
Community-owned utilities value and rate outreach campaign  
Draft – 1/21/2026

**Purpose**

This phased outreach campaign helps customers understand the value of community-owned utilities, what aging infrastructure means for service, and why proactive reinvestment is needed to keep service reliable and affordable.

The approach emphasizes early education and transparency, so future rate conversations are grounded in trust, shared values, and clear information.

Previous research has shown that customers are willing to pay for increased reliability when benefits are clear and impacts are understood. This research recognizes that evolving cost pressures have made context more important.

Recent customer research supports this approach:

- Satisfaction remains high, particularly among customers who have declined
- Most customers still perceive good service
- Fewer customers feel fully informed

These findings reinforce the need for a campaign that builds understanding over time before

**Goals**

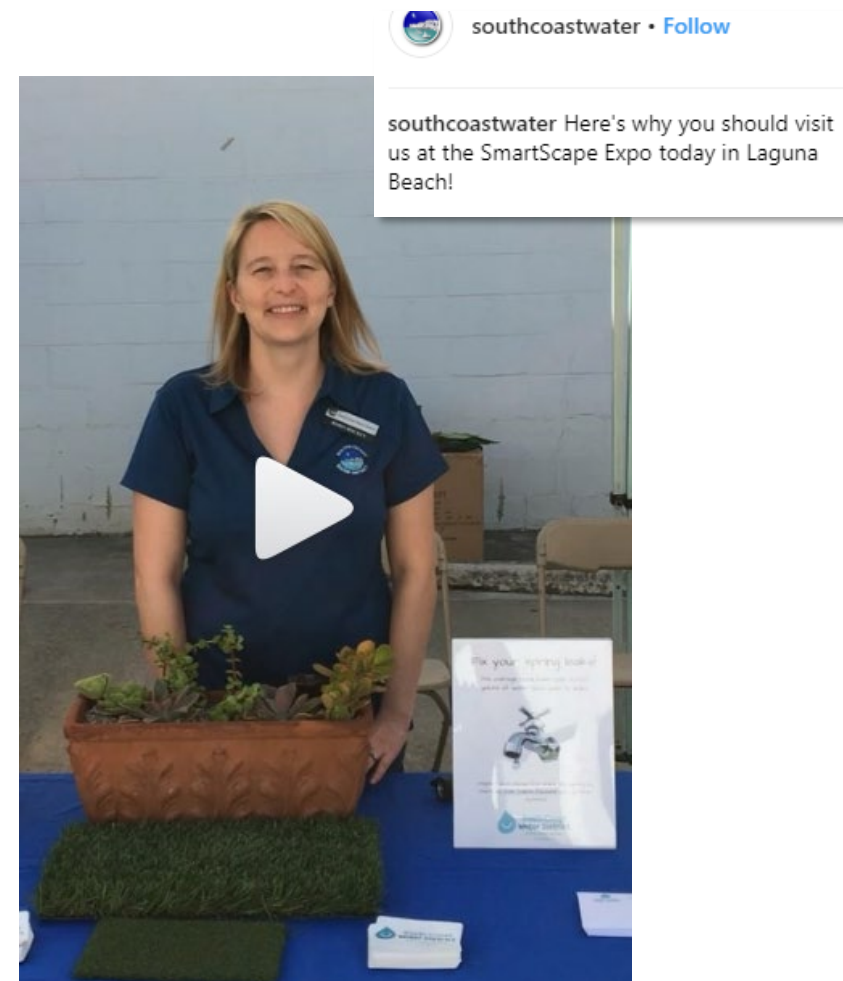
- Increase webpage performance above government benchmarks
- Achieve a 10-15% increase in pageviews for reliability and rehabilitation-related content, while meeting or exceeding government benchmarks of 1.00+ average time on page and <65% bounce rate, by end of 2026.
- Drive sustained traffic to key messaging
- Ensure campaign-related news stories consistently rank within the top of City webpage traffic, based on internal analytics comparisons, throughout the campaign period.

Developing a campaign to increase awareness

# COMMUNICATIONS ROLES

## Identify your spokespeople

- Leadership
- PIO
- SME



# LEVERAGE COMMUNICATIONS THEORIES



## Social Learning Audience Theory

- People learn by watching others & will adopt opinions and behaviors they see rewarded.

STEP 3

# IMPLEMENTATION

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# KEY MESSAGES

- Develop high level campaign messages
- Support each message with “proof points” that can be used throughout collateral

# TIMELINE

FIRST-YEAR ROAD MAP			
Objective	Tactic	One-time	Ongoing
Branding and Messaging	Brand Refresh	✓	
Branding and Messaging	New Color Palette	✓	
Branding and Messaging	Message Platform	✓	
Digital Communications	Website		✓
Digital Communications	Social Media		✓
Print Communications	Bill Inserts		✓
Print Communications	Event Materials and Project Signage		✓
Community Relations and Partnerships	Community Events		✓

# BUDGET

- Overall budget
- Cost breakdown per tactic
- Staff time and \$\$

# STEP 4 EVALUATION

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- Objective achievement
- Outcomes – change in knowledge, attitudes, behaviors
- Output – work products produced
- Outtakes – reach, attendees, impressions etc.

# OBJECTIVE EVALUATION EXAMPLE



Objective 1	Outcome
Increase the number of customers who replace irrigated turf with water-wise plants to qualify for rebates by 20% compared to the previous year.	Exceeded the desired behavioral outcome with a 25% increase in qualified applicants.

# GOAL EVALUATION EXAMPLE



## GOAL EXCEEDED

The campaign achieved the goal by generating a behavioral shift in customer water consumption during the state-mandated reduction period.



**HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE**

**CREATING A**

**STRATEGIC PLAN**

# EXERCISE EXPECTATIONS

- Work as a group
- Review the handout: Animal Shelter Incident Scenario





# USE YOUR WORKBOOK AS A GUIDE



Workbook digital version

# YOUR MISSION

- Define the communications problem
  - Identify research needed before planning
  - Identify 2-3 target audiences
  - Draft 1 goal and 1 SMART objective
  - Propose 1 primary strategy
  - Recommend 2-3 supporting tactics
  - Identify 2 evaluation metrics
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# STRATEGIC PLAN ELEMENT EXAMPLES

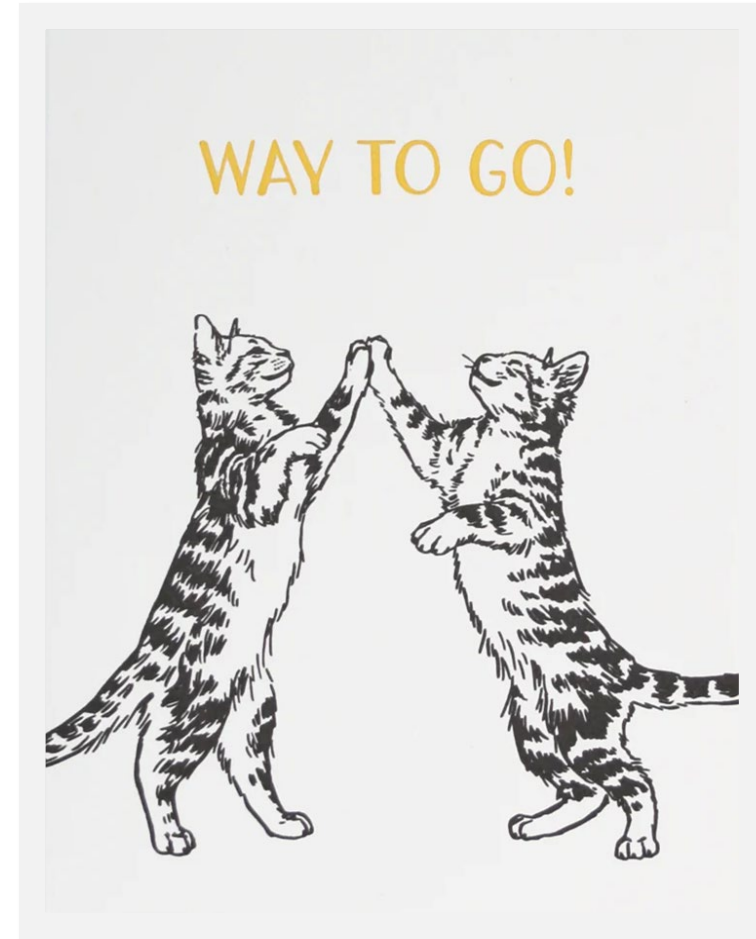


Element	What It Answers	Level	What It Should Sound Like	Public-Sector Example
Goal	Where are we trying to go?	Broad, long-term	Directional and aspirational	Increase public trust in the agency.
Objective	What measurable result defines success?	Specific, time-bound	Quantifiable and deadline-driven	By December 2026, increase positive perception of rate transparency from 48% to 60%.
Strategy	How will we approach this?	Conceptual approach	Describes the path, not the tools	Improve transparency through proactive education and consistent messaging.
Tactic	What exactly will we do?	Action step	Specific deliverables or activities	Host town halls, launch FAQ microsite, distribute bill inserts.

# CONGRATS

ROCKSPARK 

You just created a strategic communications plan!





## Questions?



LinkedIn

Contact:

[Robin@RockSpark.com](mailto:Robin@RockSpark.com)

[www.RockSpark.com](http://www.RockSpark.com)