



# STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

---

At the request of the Implementation Committee, the 2017-2018 Work Plan included a small amount of funding for the creation of a Communication Plan for the San Francisco Estuary Partnership (Partnership). Over the course of 2017-2018, SFEP staff developed the Draft Strategic Communications Plan, with input from SFEP staff, Implementation Committee (IC) members, and communications staff from regional organizations and other National Estuary Programs (NEPs). SFEP staff brought the draft plan before the IC in May for feedback. That feedback has been incorporated into this Revised Strategic Communications Plan.

## Context

As the first comprehensive plan for Partnership communications, this Strategic Communications Plan is a living document and will undergo refinement throughout the next year and beyond. The suite of actions ranges from easily implemented to aspirational; in many cases, the actions take a first look at whether a particular communications strategy, such as increasing the Partnership's social media presence, represents a worthwhile use of the organization's limited resources. For the next year, implementation of this plan will focus on generating and coordinating messages, developing schedules, identifying and testing strategies, and evaluating the actions for feasibility and impact. At the end of the year, in Fall 2019, staff will evaluate the plan for achievement of the performance measures and contributions toward longer term outcomes, and prioritize actions for further development or revision.

Current staff capacity to implement this plan is limited (approximately 0.25 FTE); therefore, the actions are designed to maximize impact within existing constraints. This plan leverages the strength of topic-driven communications by IC members and other partners while we also introduce a more deliberate focus on amplifying our partners' work and successes, honing the Partnership's organizational brand, and identifying priority content and audiences.

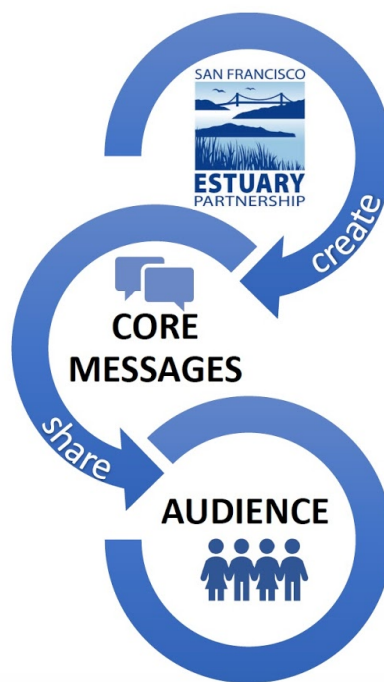
---

## Goal

The Strategic Communications Plan will support the overall vision of achieving a healthy, resilient Estuary, through efforts that contribute toward successful implementation of the key actions identified in the Estuary Blueprint. The plan's actions will result in wider distribution of clear, shared messages; more and deeper partnerships; more coordinated communication of Partnership successes, including those of IC members and other project or program partners; and a broader perception of the value of the Estuary Blueprint, the Partnership, and its products.

## Process

Generally speaking, implementation of the plan will follow an iterative create-share flow process. The Partnership will identify or create core messages with guidance from other organizations. These messages will be driven by the needs and preferences of target audiences and will be shared through messaging outlets appropriate to each target audience. Whenever possible, we will use evaluation tools such as surveys, Google Analytics, and online engagement metrics to assess the efficacy of the process.



---

## Messaging Outlets

The Partnership has a comprehensive set of existing messaging outlets, from the organization's newly revamped website to a well-established, independent news source and even partner materials. Staff is working to build stronger connections between these outlets, and will continue that work through the implementation of this plan. We may find that we need a new tool to reach new target audiences, although if possible, we will focus on the existing suite of outlets.

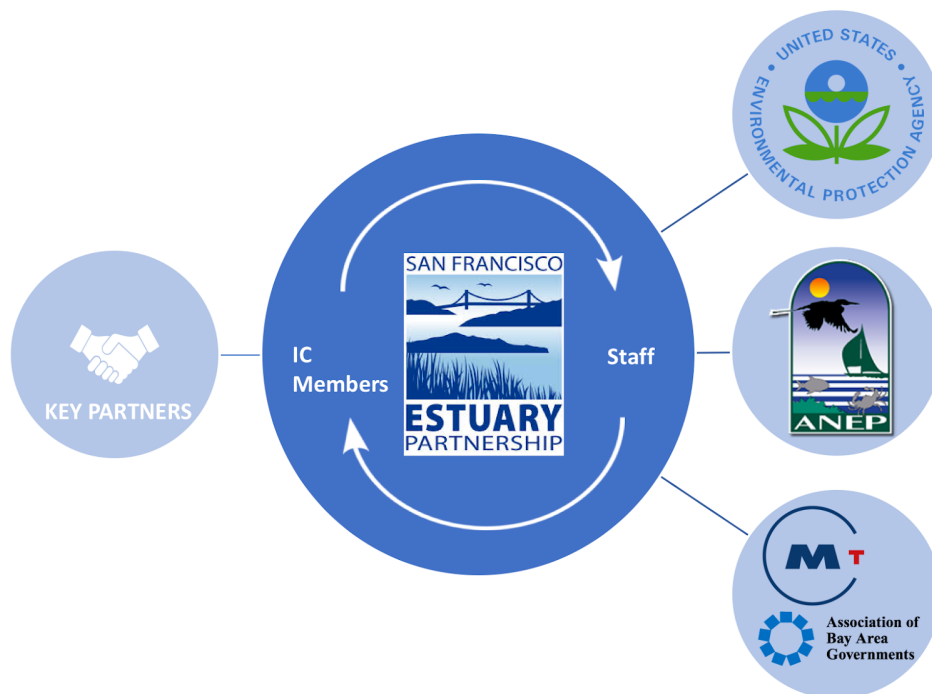
### MESSAGING OUTLETS



---

## Implementers

The San Francisco Estuary Partnership—organizational staff and the Implementation Committee—will work together to implement the plan. As a National Estuary Program, the Estuary Partnership will collaborate with and receive input from the U.S. EPA and the Association of National Estuary Programs. As a program administratively housed by ABAG and staffed by MTC, the Estuary Partnership will also work with ABAG and MTC to implement the plan. Other organizations with a focus on relevant regional communications could provide further guidance and leverage in implementing actions.



## Actions

The Partnership works with a broad range of partners, each with its own communications strategies and key messages. With the development of this strategic communication plan, the Partnership will be aligning shared messages as well as more clearly communicating its own role within the region. For implementation, a range of actions are suggested, some of which will entail minimal effort, and others which will require more staff time and resources. Due to current limited capacity, the plan emphasizes the importance of strategically aligning messages and supporting and building on the communications efforts of partners.

	Action Description	Performance Measure (Output)	Timeline	Implementers
1	Support and develop key national, regionally relevant, and organizational messages with partners.	At least 1 message at each level incorporated into the materials of SFEP and 3 partners.	9/1/2018-8/31/2019	SFEP/IC members with national partners
	Review all messaging outlets and outreach materials regularly for distribution of and consistency with these key messages.	All materials reviewed at regular, appropriate intervals within one year.	8/1/2018 (started) – 8/31/2019	SFEP staff
2	Use IC member survey results to evaluate opportunities to highlight the Estuary Blueprint, relevant topic areas, or the SFEP in partners' materials.	Baseline established through Google survey results and analysis of IC members' and partners' websites.	8/1/2018 - 8/31/2018 (complete)	SFEP staff
	Increase presence of Estuary Blueprint and SFEP in partners' materials (websites, print and online collateral, and newsletters), and vice versa.	Change in number of mentions of SFEP or Estuary Blueprint in partners' materials and number of references to partners on SFEP's website.	9/1/2018-8/31/2019	SFEP staff with IC members and partners
3	Assess needs and preferences of new priority audiences regarding messaging outlets, interests, and messages.	Preferred messaging outlet, interests, and messages identified for one new audience.	10/1/2018-12/31/2018	SFEP staff with IC members and partners
	If a tailored outreach approach to new priority audiences is needed, consider development of a new outlet, contingent on capacity, cost, and benefit.	Identification of new outlet and assessment of benefits and labor costs.	1/1/2019-3/31/2019	SFEP staff
4	Explore with MTC/ABAG staff opportunities for contributions to newsletters, blogs, and social media	At least one meeting with MTC/ABAG communications staff to discuss SFEP contributions.	8/1/2018 (started) – 12/31/2018	SFEP staff with ABAG/MTC staff
	If contributions to MTC/ABAG are a possibility, increase SFEP presence in these channels.	Topics relevant and linked to SFEP or Estuary Blueprint partners on ABAG/MTC materials at least once per month.	1/1/2019 – 6/30/2019	SFEP staff with ABAG/MTC staff
5	For future programs and projects, develop a communication strategy at the outset for expected products or outcomes; write this strategy into grant proposals where possible.	Communications strategy template developed for future grant proposals and projects.	1/1/2019 – 9/30/2019	SFEP staff

	Action Description	Performance Measure (Output)	Timeline	Implementers
6	For current programs or projects without a communications strategy, identify opportunities for increasing visibility of and access to program- or project-specific materials.	Completed review and evaluation of all current program- or project-specific materials; one communication strategy identified for each program or project that needs increased visibility.	1/1/2019 – 6/30/2019	SFEP staff with program or project partners
7	Increase presence on social media.	Social media calendar established with frequency appropriate to staff capacity and outlet.	10/1/2018 – 12/31/2018	SFEP/IC members, partners
	Coordinate social media calendar with ESTUARY News and PEARLS, regional partners, and national partners.	Calendar integrated with 3-5 events, priorities, or messages of partners per month.	1/1/2019 – 3/31/2019	SFEP staff with IC members and partners
8	Incorporate more success stories from Estuary Blueprint partners for inclusion in the e-newsletter.	At least 4 success stories from partners featured in the e-newsletter per year.	8/1/2018 (started) – 8/31/2019	SFEP/IC members and partners
9	Identify opportunities to link ESTUARY News and PEARLS articles to SFEP web pages and Estuary Blueprint actions	1-3 PEARLS articles completed on Estuary Blueprint actions per year, contingent on available funds.	9/1/2018 – 8/31/2019	SFEP staff, ESTUARY News, partners
10	Identify strategies for increasing subscribers to and engagement with the Estuary Blueprint e-newsletter.	1-3 strategies identified for increasing 'opens' and subscriptions to the Estuary Blueprint e-newsletter.	10/1/2019 – 3/31/2019	SFEP staff
	Select and implement at least one identified strategy, and evaluate subscription levels before and afterward.	Before-and-after evaluations of e-newsletter subscription levels.	4/1/2019 – 8/31/2019	SFEP staff
11	Update SFEP website content regularly.	Schedule for review and update of website content created and implemented.	10/1/2018 – 12/31/2018	SFEP staff

---

## Performance Measures and Evaluation

Each action has an associated output-based performance measure to assess implementation. For many of the current actions, which focus on assessments and identification of strategies, a link to longer term outcomes was considered too tenuous to use as performance measures. Where possible, however, evaluation tools will be used to assess overall impacts of the plan.

The evaluation tools consist of the following:

- Google Analytics: captures website visits and use, including aggregated visitor demographics and behavior, traffic, conversion and retention rates, and number of downloads (of reports, for example).
- MailChimp metrics: provide information on the Estuary Blueprint e-newsletter mailing list, including who opens the newsletter and who clicks on links within the newsletter.
- Social media metrics: each social media platform offers information on the visibility of a post and ways in which other users or followers have engaged with the post, such as 'likes,' 'followers,' 'impressions,' and 'clicks'.
- Google Forms and other surveys: the IC member survey provides a baseline for information about the Estuary Blueprint's and the Estuary Partnership's presence in IC members' materials. A similar survey will be administered at the end of a year to assess changes. Implementation of the plan may lead to the development of other survey tools.
- Earned media coverage: number of mentions of the Estuary Blueprint and Estuary Partnership in traditional print/radio/tv outlets may serve as another evaluation tool, although this tool may have a limited benefit since the plan does not have an action dedicated specifically to increasing earned media coverage. Another approach would be to review the number of times that relevant Estuary topics are covered in traditional media outlets over the course of the next year.
- Proxy metrics: to indirectly assess impact of the communications plan implementation, other metrics can be reviewed; however, the value of these metrics in determining impact will be limited. These proxy metrics include:
  - Number of requests for speaking engagements or consultations,
  - Number of mentions or citations of Partnership work products in policy debates or other public forums,
  - Legislation, policies, or funding introduced to support the Partnership or Estuary Blueprint actions.

---

## Appendix

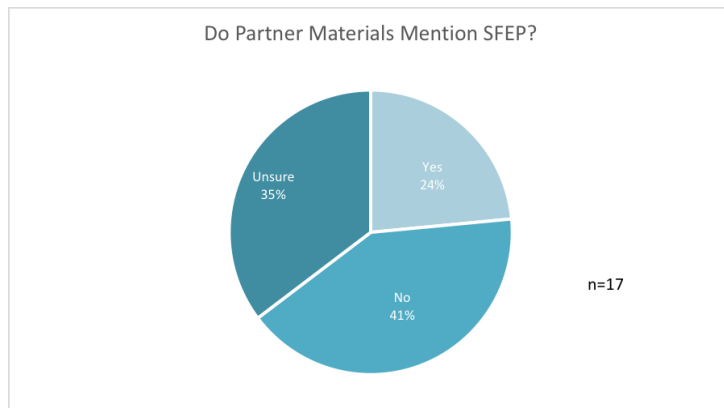
San Francisco Estuary Partnership staff (SFEP) conducted two short, baseline studies on the communications materials of our partners and IC members. The first study consisted of a short survey sent to IC members regarding the presence of our communications materials in their media channels. The second study was an analysis of the websites of partners for the presence of these materials.

The survey assessed for references to SFEP and the Estuary Blueprint and in the communication materials of our partners. The website study analyzed the presence of the SFEP website link, the Estuary Blueprint, the State of the Estuary Report, and the State of the Estuary Conference.

These baseline studies, while not comprehensive in scope, allowed us to better understand our online presence and how our communications materials are being distributed by our partners. Ultimately, they helped refine a number of actions in the Communications Plan.

### I. Survey Results

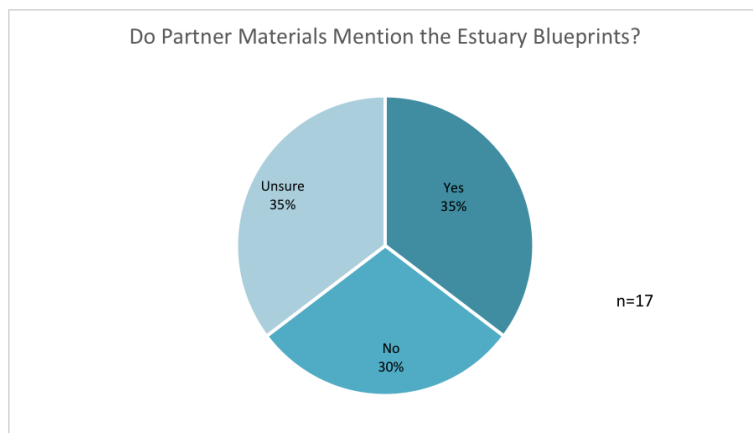
SFEP staff conducted a survey in May 2018 to understand if our two main messaging tools were used in our partner materials, including links to the SFEP website and the Estuary Blueprint. This is a snapshot of the 17 survey results acquired from the survey sent to IC Members.



According to the survey, 24% of our partners' outreach material reference SFEP. The majority (41%) of our partners do not mention SFEP and 35% were unsure if they mentioned SFEP. n=17



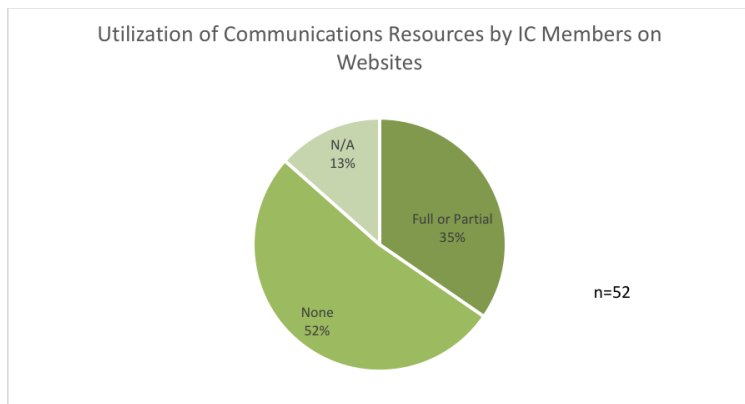
According to the survey, 35% of partner outreach material mentions or aligns their message with the goals, objectives, and tasks of the Estuary Blueprint. Similarly, 35% of our partners are unsure if their outreach material aligns with the Blueprint. 30% of our partners do not have information regarding the Blueprint in their outreach information. n=17



Because the survey shows that most of the communications work is done through the website, SFEP staff conducted research on 52 partner websites to investigate how many websites include the four main messaging tools including the SFEP website link, the Estuary Blueprint, the State of the Estuary Report, and the State of the Estuary Conference.

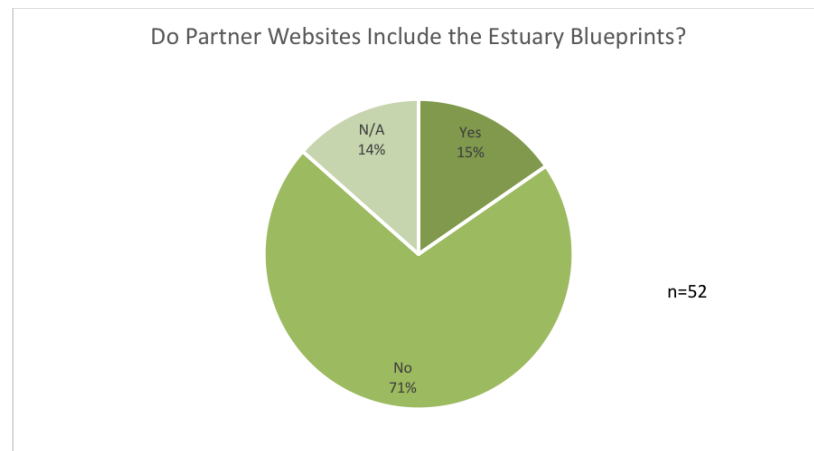
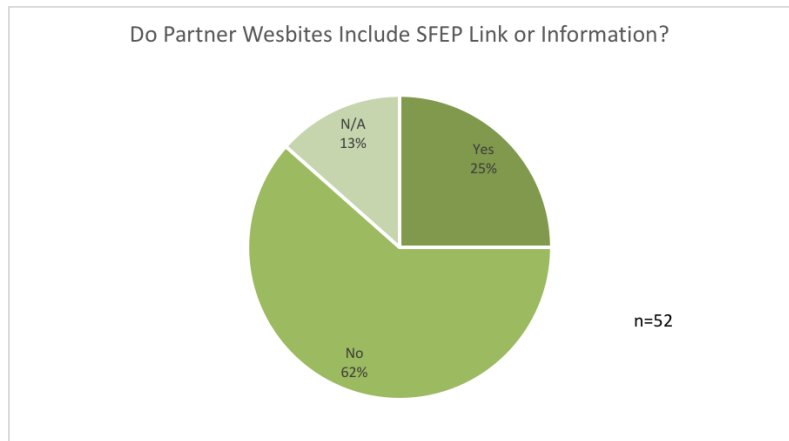
## II. Website Study Results

In July 2018, we conducted a study of our partners' websites to analyze the presence of four of SFEP's communication streams including the SFEP website, the Estuary Blueprint (CCMP), the State of the Estuary Report, and the State of the Estuary Conference. The study analyzed 52 partner websites. It is important to mention that if a question does not apply to our partners it is marked as N/A on the pie chart. A question does not apply to partners if they have websites, such as national regulatory agencies, that do not have the option to include SFEP links.



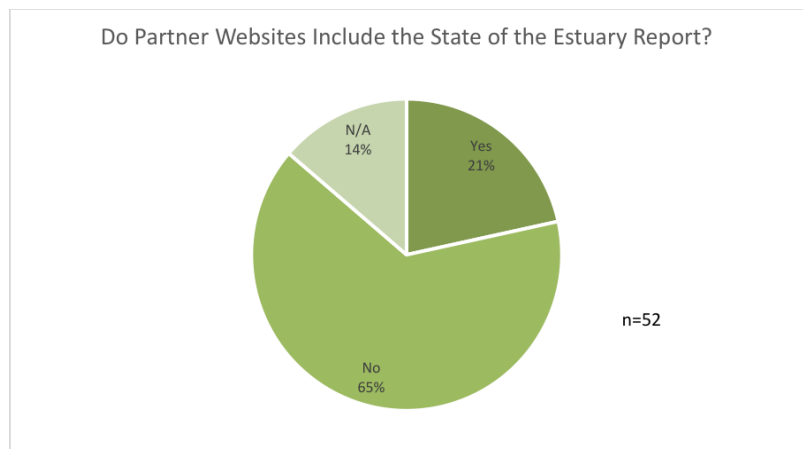
In general, 35% of our IC members are including at least one of our communication resources on their websites. About half of our members do not mention any of SFEP resources on their websites. 13% of our partners are not using SFEP resources. These resources include: the SFEP website, the Estuary Blueprint, the State of the Estuary Report, and the State of the Estuary conference.

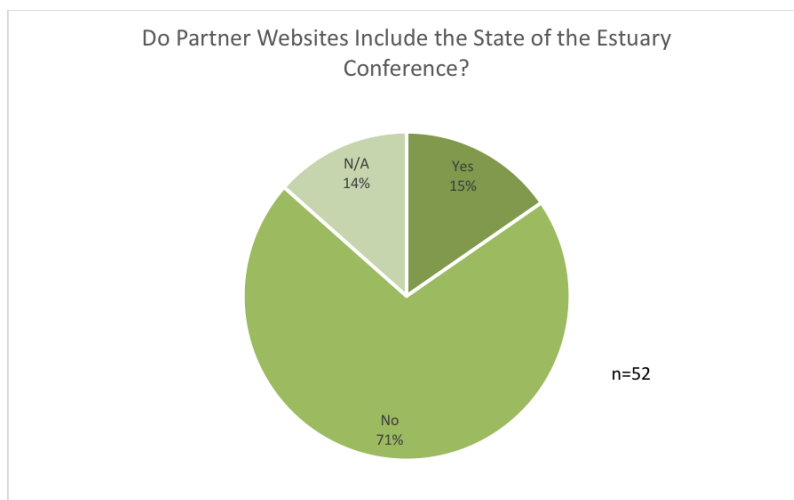
25% of our partners mention SFEP in their website; the majority (62%) do not. This question does not apply to 13%. n=52



Only 15 % of our partners included the Blueprint (CCMP) on their website while the majority (71%) did not include it. This question did not apply to 14% of our partners. n=52

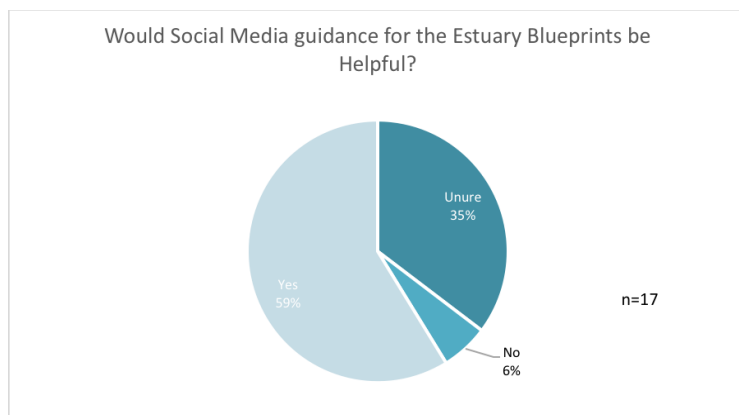
Our results show that 21% of our partners included the State of the Estuary Report in the website. The majority (65%) did not include it. This question does not apply to 14% of our partners. n=52





15% of Partners include the Estuary Conference Link in their website while the majority (71%) do not. This question does not apply to 14% of our Partners. However, it is important to keep in mind that the Estuary Conference is a biennial event and we expect to see fluctuations in the percent of partners that include this link from year to year. This analysis was done on an off year.

### III. Key Takeaways



The IC Survey demonstrated that the majority (59%) of our members would welcome social media guidance for the Estuary Blueprints while only 6% did not think guidance would be helpful. 35% were not sure if guidance would be helpful.

Both the survey and website study data show that there is an opportunity to improve our presence in the communication materials of our partners. We have decided to formulate suggestions on how to include SFEP in partner websites. This focus comes from the fact that the information regarding the websites is more complete and allowed us to understand this media channel in a fuller scope.

## IV. Suggestions

SFEP staff viewed the results of this study this as an opportunity to incorporate suggestions for partners on how to include information about SFEP in their website, where appropriate. However, we understand that for some websites, such as national regulatory agencies for example, adding SFEP or our other information isn't an option.

1. Recommendations for **integration of the SFEP website:**
  - a. Include SFEP in your About Us section
  - b. Include SFEP in your Partner section
  - c. Include SFEP in your Additional Resources or Other section
2. Recommendations for **inclusion of the Estuary Blueprints (CCMP), the State of the Estuary Report, and the State of the Estuary Conference**
  - a. Include these resources in your Research section
  - b. Include these resources in your Additional Resources section

We have developed suggestions specific to each IC member's website, and would be happy to share those with you. Please contact Yeymi ([yrivas@bayareametro.gov](mailto:yrivas@bayareametro.gov) until 8/28/20018) or Darcie ([darcie.luce@sfestuary.org](mailto:darcie.luce@sfestuary.org)) for those suggestions.

## V. Sample Language

In the IC member survey, we asked participants to give us short, one-sentence descriptions of the Partnership. This messaging can be incorporated into partner communication materials to promote the Partnership and core documents such as the Estuary Blueprints.

Highlighted below are some descriptions collected from the survey:

- SFEP is a diverse set of organizations, supported by a talented and dedicated staff, collaborating to enhance the Bay-Delta watershed.
- Intergovernmental and non-profit partnership that promotes collaboration and management for healthy ecosystems throughout the SFBay and Delta region.
- Group brings together representatives of state/federal agencies, NGOs and public for strategic planning and implementation of restoration actions related to SF Bay.
- SFEP's primary mission is to implement priorities outlined in the Estuary Blueprint, a regional plan to improve the estuary as well as providing key administrative and technical support to partners across the Bay Area.
- SFEP is a broad, regional partnership program whose partners work collaboratively to improve the health and resiliency of the SF Estuary
- The SFEP has created a blueprint for the Estuary's future conservation and is the key forum for the conservation community to build upon that blueprint into the future.