



San Francisco
ESTUARY
PARTNERSHIP
sfestuary.org

MEMO

DATE: November 15, 2022

TO: SFEP Implementation Committee

FROM: Caitlin Sweeney, Director

RE: Estuary News Magazine

Background and Recommendation

Estuary News Magazine (Estuary News) is the 30-year-old regional magazine of the Estuary Partnership and its myriad partners around the Bay and Delta. Published by the Estuary Partnership, Estuary News has always retained an independent editor and is written by professional, independent journalists.

Ariel Rubissow Okamoto has been the on and off editor of Estuary News since its inception. As reported to the IC in the August 17, 2022 Director's Report, Ariel will not be renewing her current editorial contract when it ends on June 30 2023. As such, it is a critical time to consider the future of Estuary News.

I recommend the following:

- 1) Terminating Estuary News in its current form as of June 30, 2023;
- 2) Releasing a final extensive issue in the spring of 2023 focusing on 30 years of restoration in the Estuary, and:
- 3) Archiving and posting select stories from previous issues as existing funding allows.

The following provides background information to support my recommendation.

1. Distribution and Readership

Estuary News Magazine has a singular dedicated, if small, audience of environmental practitioners, academics, agency staff, community members, and others.

Distribution by mail has declined over time, with a current print distribution list of about 1800. During COVID-19, bulk mailings to offices were largely halted, leaving the current smaller distribution list of individuals.

Email subscription numbers fluctuate between issues but are typically around 5000-5500. The open rate for emails is about 25% which is somewhat low. However, once emails are opened, the "click interactions" are at around 20%, which is considered very good. In other

words, we have a fairly small distribution and low number of people opening the newsletter, but many more of those openers are clicking on a link to get to a story once they do open the email, which reflects the small, but dedicated audience of Estuary News.

2. Cost and Funding

Estuary News is funded by a combination of contributions from partners, donations, and SFEP staff time and direct financial support. The current business model requires the editor to continually raise funds needed to support the magazine, and it requires the editor and SFEP to manage complex and onerous contracting procedures to support multiple fund sources with varied conditions on use.

Over time, the costs of producing Estuary News have risen while partner support and donations have declined.

The following table provides a rough current cost estimate per year to produce 4 print issues of Estuary News, as well as smaller online “Pearls” stories. The costs are broken down between costs borne by partners and costs borne by SFEP.

Estuary News Magazine – Estimated Cost Per Year (Four print issues, four Pearls issues, cross-posting all stories on website, plus limited extended online content)		
	Fund Source	COST
Editor/Producer	Partners	\$30,000
Copy Editor	Partners	\$1,000
Writers	Partners	\$65,000
Art/Photos	Partners	\$2,000
Design/Layout	Partners	\$18,000
Social Media	Partners	\$4,000
TOTAL need – partner contributions		\$120,000
Printing	SFEP	\$10,000
Mailing	SFEP	\$6,000
Website maintenance (SFEI)	SFEP	\$5,000
Web Postings/Emails/Mailing List mgmt	SFEP	\$7,000
Admin (contract mgmt, oversight)	SFEP	\$20,000
TOTAL need - SFEP contribution (NEP EPA funds)		\$48,000
	TOTAL COST PER YEAR	\$168,000

The following table is a snapshot of partner contributions from 2022. Partner contributions fluctuate slightly from year to year, but the gap between contributions and need is consistent.

2022 Partner Contributions	
DSC	\$30,000
Bay RMP	\$16,000
RA	\$10,000
SFEI	\$12,000
DWR	\$5,000
BCDC	\$5,000
SFPUC	\$5,000
Valley Water	\$2,500
Sonoma Water	\$2,500
NBWA	\$500
	\$88,500

Adding to the gap between contributions and funding need are additional costs not shown in the above table, including the ongoing need for increased social media and more attention to dedicated fund development. In addition, the Estuary News website is currently out of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as is the digital archive of past issues. Bringing the website into compliance with ADA would require a complete overhaul, including a revised approach for providing formatted printed content online. Digitally archiving the past 30 years of Estuary News in an ADA compliant format is cost prohibitive, though formatting a selection of key stories from past issues as ADA-compliant posts would provide an important online archive of Estuary News.

Conclusion

Estuary News Magazine is a well-respected long-standing product with a loyal, though small, audience. Written by professional, independent journalists, the long-format in-depth approach of Estuary News has provided a unique vehicle for people interested in learning about the Estuarine environment, and the activities, policies, and people that shape the Estuary. However, journalism is evolving along with expectations of readers in terms of content delivery. The current business model of Estuary News Magazine is not sustainable and does not allow the flexibility needed to evolve with the times.

Closing down production of Estuary News provides an opportunity to assess current communications needs and audiences of SFEP and our partners and to potentially repurpose the most relevant parts of Estuary News. Future communications could include a joint newsletter on a regional topic, new social media campaigns, podcast series, or any of a variety of options. Incoming funding to SFEP through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will support a communication needs assessment, the results of which will be discussed at a future IC meeting.