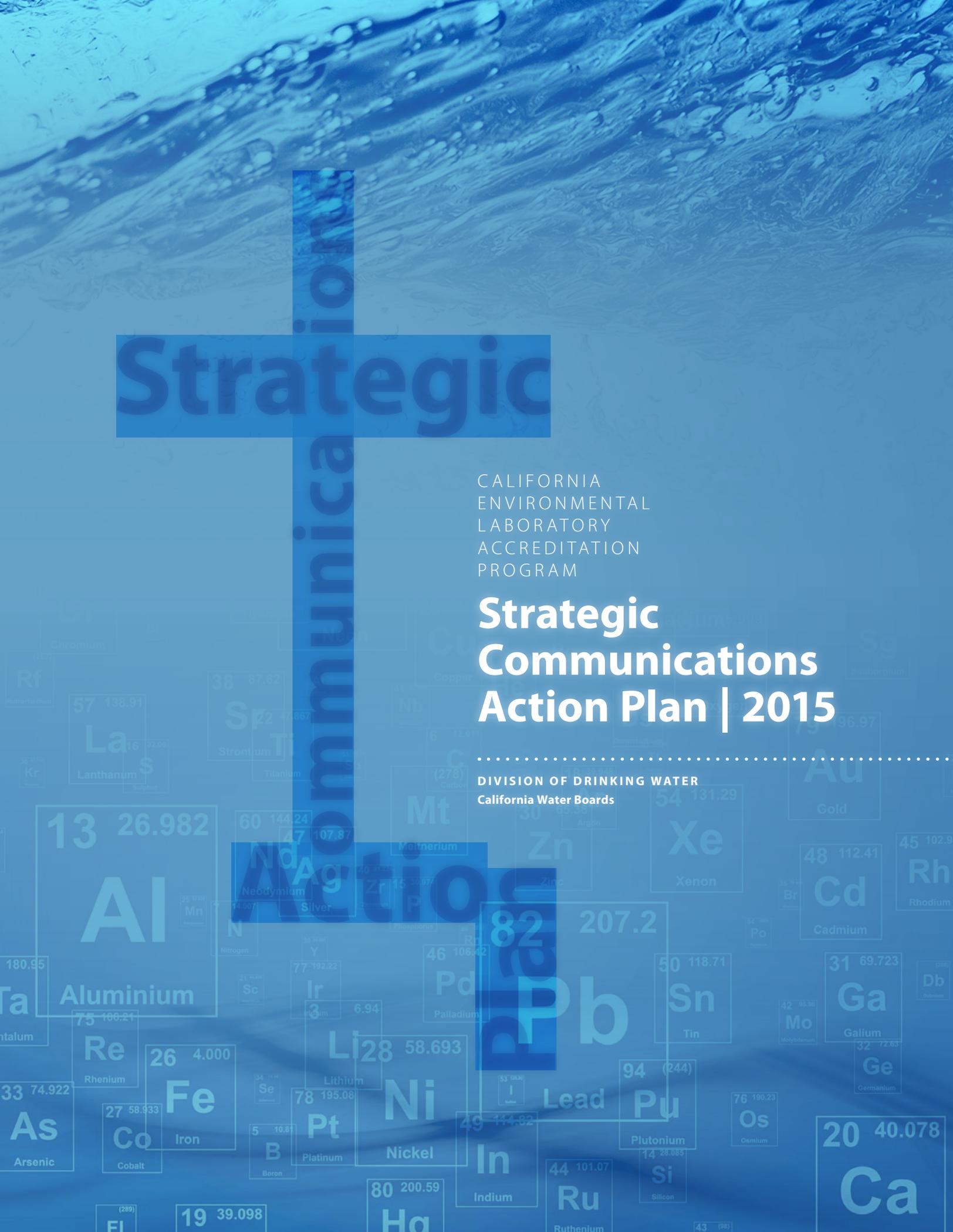


Strategic

CALIFORNIA
ENVIRONMENTAL
LABORATORY
ACCREDITATION
PROGRAM

Strategic Communications Action Plan | 2015

DIVISION OF DRINKING WATER
California Water Boards





BACKGROUND

July 1, 2014 marked the transfer of California's Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (ELAP) from the Department of Public Health (CDPH) to the State Water Boards.

Prior to the move, ELAP's effectiveness had dwindled due to lack of resources and leadership. Constituent confidence in the program echoed this decline. Relationships with its state agency clients were weak, and the program's reputation in the laboratory community had reached an all-time low. Respect for the program as a regulating entity was nonexistent; ELAP was viewed as unprofessional, uncommunicative, and unproductive.

Recognizing the program as crucial to the assurance of environmental and public health and seeing an opportunity for improvement, Governor Brown relocated ELAP to reside under the California State Water Boards. The transition has initiated a time of crucial program review and rebuilding. With the appointment of a new Program Chief and the commission of an Expert Review Panel, ELAP has embarked upon a mission to implement an effective and sustainable accreditation program and drastically change the perception of itself in the communities it serves.

OBJECTIVES

A deficit of the former program was the absence of a centralized and structured communications plan. The California ELAP Strategic Communications Action Plan is designed to fill that gap. The immediate objective of the implementation of this policy is to communicate critical structural and procedural changes to internal and external stakeholders. ELAP's long-term objective is to increase regulatory agency partner and laboratory community trust in the efficacy and responsiveness of California's Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program. Our commitment to frequent and consistent communication will support a higher level of program operations and allow us to better meet stakeholder needs.

AUDIENCES

ELAP communications are directed primarily at the program's stakeholders. We differentiate between internal and external stakeholders, and identify important targeted subgroups. The target audience will affect the key message we convey and the communication method we use. Below is a list of stakeholders targeted in the California ELAP Strategic Communications Action Plan.

External Stakeholders

- California Partner Agencies
- ELAP-Accredited Laboratory Community
- Regulated Communities and Associations
- National Laboratory Accreditation Community
- Environmental Laboratory Technical Advisory Committee (ELTAC)

Internal Stakeholders

- ELAP Staff
- Division of Drinking Water Staff
- Other Water Board Division Staff
- CalEPA Boards, Divisions and Organizations

The methods for contacting each subgroup are identified in the Communications Matrices.

KEY MESSAGES

The messages included in this policy address ELAP's immediate objective of notifying stakeholders of important changes in the program.

New Agency: ELAP has been transferred from the California Department of Public Health to the California State Water Boards. This move provides the program with resources and expertise it did not have access to under CDPH. The Water Boards has the infrastructure to support ELAP at a higher level of program operations and is committed to making ELAP a successful program.

- Fee Branch – dedicated and professional fee and billing branch that sends invoices.
- Accounting Branch – dedicated and professional accounting branch that processes and credits payments.
- Division Drinking Water IT support for staff
- Technical resources and state-of-the-art trainings
- Direct line of communication with Water Board Executive Director

New Leadership and Expert Staff: The program has been reinvigorated by the vision of our new Program Chief and the hiring of expert staff to fill vacancies. Staff is working diligently to make ELAP a national leading laboratory accreditation program.

New Priorities: ELAP's ultimate end is to assist in assuring environmental and public health. It does this by working to ensure that the data used by regulatory agencies comes from competent laboratories. Better coordination with our partner agencies is an important priority for ELAP moving forward.

New Communication Practices: We recognize that the Program's past communication practices were inconsistent and unclear and have a plan and necessary staff in place to rectify these problems.

- **Responsiveness:** We will respond to inquiries we receive as soon as possible. An initial email/phone call will be made to communicate that someone has received the request and it is being processed.
- **Clarity:** Each ELAP staff member must be knowledgeable about new processes and able to clearly communicate the same message or information.

- **Consistency:** We strive to achieve consistency at multiple levels- consistency in prompt responses to inquiries, and consistency in the information we are conveying.
- **Point of contact:** Initial point of contact should be through elapca@waterboards.ca.gov, ELAP main telephone line, or the Program Chief.
- **Consultation with ELTAC:** ELAP will consult with ELTAC on the technical content of communications.

New Certification Processes: Improvements in program operations have affected the way that laboratories apply for certification. It is imperative that we communicate the procedural changes to laboratories to get applications flowing and certifications processed.

- **Electronic applications:** ELAP now prefers electronic submission of applications as email attachments directed to elapca@waterboards.ca.gov.
- **Proficiency Testing (PT) Results:** Results of a laboratory's most recent study are now required as part of an application package. Vendor contacts should be updated to Christine Sotelo or elapca@waterboards.ca.gov.
- **Broadened criteria for certification:** ELAP will now review additional accreditations a laboratory holds from other recognized Accrediting Bodies as basis for California certification.

New Inspection Processes:

- Any changes to the inspection procedures will be communicated to regulated laboratories.

New Monitoring Practices:

- Proficiency Testing results are reviewed by a specialized team.

New Enforcement Activities: ELAP will be performing unannounced inspections. ELAP is now working with the Office of Enforcement at the Water Boards to define penalties for violators.

- Administrative fines
- Decertification of specific methods/fields of testing
- Complete Decertification
- Criminal charges

COMMUNICATIONS METHODS

Internal Matrices

Action	Objective	Audience	Medium	Implementation Frequency	Performance Measure
Management Meeting	Ensure consistent communication	ELAP management staff	Teleconference	Weekly	On target
Auditor Roundtable	New staff draws on expertise of veteran auditors; discuss technical issues	ELAP management and technical staff	Face-to-face meeting	Three times per year	Completed 5-19-2015; Scheduled 9-21-15
Employee Individual Performance Review	Increase staff productivity	Employee	1:1 meetings with supervisor	Bi-monthly	On target
All-staff meeting	Promote unity and flow of communication; disseminate information	All ELAP Staff	Face-to-Face; Teleconference	Quarterly	Scheduled 7-9-15
Team building Event	Promote unity and flow of communication	All ELAP Staff	Face-to-face event	Once per office	Scheduled 8-10-15 Sacramento; others TBD
Division of Drinking Water Program Management Branch meetings	Promote flow of internal communication	Program Management Branch Staff	Teleconference	Quarterly	On target
Division of Drinking Water Executive Management Meetings	Promote flow of internal communication	Division of Drinking Water Executive Management Staff	Teleconference	Monthly	On target

External Matrix

Action	Objective	Audience	Medium	Implementation Frequency	Performance Measure
General Outreach	Inform stakeholders of ELAP's new identity	All identified audiences	Varies	As needed	Ongoing
Initial Announcement	Inform stakeholders of changes	All identified audiences	Lyris message	Once	Completed March 2015
Meet and Greet Events	Introduce new staff, establish open line of communication	All identified audiences	Face-to-face; webcast	Twice- once in Southern CA, once Northern CA	Completed April 20th (Costa Mesa) and April 29th (Sac)
By-Laws Workshops	Obtain community input on contents of new by-laws	Laboratory Community; Agency Partners	Face-to-Face; webcast	Twice- once in Southern CA, once Northern CA	Completed 7-20-14 (Sac), 7-31-14 (San Diego)
Surveys	Obtain information from community that will aid in policy development	Laboratory Community; Agency Partners	Lyris; email correspondence for interagency surveys	As needed	Perchlorate- Completed 5-20-15; Lab size- Completed 6-4-15
Postcard	Disseminate critical information	ELAP-Certified Laboratories	Mailer	Once	TBD
Newsletter	Inform about program updates and events	All identified audiences	Electronic newsletter	Quarterly	TBD
Compliance Workshops	Outreach and Education, Compliance Assistance	Laboratories	Face-to-face; webcast	TBD	TBD

External Matrices (... continued)

Action	Objective	Audience	Medium	Implementation Frequency	Performance Measure
Enforcement Activities	Convey that ELAP is not a lax regulator	All identified audiences	Unannounced inspections; press releases	As needed	TBD
Preliminary Stakeholder Advisory Committee meeting (formerly ELTAC)	Obtain support for new vision of ELTAC; solicit assistance in rewriting charter	Stakeholder Advisory Committee	Face-to-face meeting	Once	Completed April 22, 2015-Sacramento, CA
ELTAC Meetings	Obtain technical input from ELAP's advisory committee	ELTAC; Laboratory Community	Face-to-Face meeting; minutes distributed	Three times annually	TBD
Preliminary Partner Agency Meetings	Identify agency needs to guide ELAP certification offerings	Partner Agencies	Face-to-face meetings	Once per agency, with follow up as needed	Completed DTSC 4-15-15; ARB 5-18-15, DFW 6-14-15; CDPH 7-8-15; others TBD
Inter-Agency Workgroup	Technical problem solving workgroup; promote interagency communication	Agency leadership; program management	Face-to-face meeting	As needed	TBD
State Assessor's Forum	Gain knowledge from other State accreditation programs	Other State AB's; program management	Face-to-face conference	Annually	TBD 2016
TNI Program Management Meetings	Gain knowledge of national accreditation program	NELAP ABs; program management	Conference Call	Monthly	TBD
TNI Conferences	Gain knowledge of national accreditation program	NELAP ABs; program management	Face-to-face conference	Biannually	Scheduled 7-13-15
Region 9 US EPA Meetings	Gain knowledge of the US EPA regulatory perspective	State authorities from EPA Region 9; program management	Face-to-face meeting	Biannually	TBD

Strategic Communications Action Plan



PERFORMANCE MEASURES

ELAP is committed to routinely evaluating our progress by setting goals/deadlines and evaluating our ability to meet them. The Communications Methods matrices in this Strategic Communications Action Plan include a Performance Measure column to list completed tasks and gauge our success.

We believe that through our commitment to consistent communication we can drastically change the perception of CA ELAP. We hope to instill community confidence in our mission and open the lines of communication with our stakeholders.



STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARDS

For more information, please visit our website at:
http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/certlic/labs/