

CIRM Communications & Outreach Strategy

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Executive summary

The California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) exists because of the people of California and is funded by California taxpayers. However, lack of awareness of CIRM and our accomplishments within the state remains a challenge. Without greater awareness CIRM risks losing support from the California public, minimizing patient support and participation in clinical trials, lower support for policy measures from lawmakers, and less engagement from scientists and industry members. Each of these could hurt CIRM’s ability to achieve strategic priorities and continue benefiting the people of California.

This communication strategy is designed to help ensure that the people who created and fund CIRM are informed about the tangible outcomes of their investment. This includes scientific advancements achieved and real-world benefits delivered to Californians, including workforce training opportunities, access to clinical trials, and the potential to benefit from future therapies.

This strategy proposes objectives focused on four key audiences: public, patients, scientists, and lawmakers. And we envision four pillars of our strategy to achieve those objectives: Create the story; Tell the story; Deliver the story; Measure the impact.

Current state

SWOT analysis

Strengths • Engaged social media following • Direct access to science subject matter experts • Established CIRM strategic priorities • Engaged patient advocates • Established branding • Updated website • Leadership support • Education and training programs with hundreds of participants across state	Weaknesses • Inconsistent core messaging • Low brand recognition outside scientific and patient communities • Lacking SOPs • Low engagement on some social media channels (Facebook) • Small communications team with competing priorities • Low awareness and understanding of regenerative medicine outside of scientific community
Opportunities • Leverage staff, board members, grantees, students, and patient advocates as ambassadors • Build a content strategy to grow our pool of relevant content and photography • Collaborate with CIRM-funded institution • Develop crisis communication plan • Expand digital tools like Zoom webinars, Facebook Lives, email marketing • Identify new tools to streamline processes • Develop multi-lingual materials • Leverage paid advertising • Create stronger ties and connections to patient advocate organizations • Finalize website accessibility	Threats • Growing distrust of science • Conflicting information reaching the public • No treatments/therapies yet developed by CIRM • Adverse media attention and coverage • Lack of understanding regarding the value of regenerative medicine research • CIRM funding longevity • Evolving and shifting social media landscape • Changes to laws and regulations affecting stem cell/gene therapy research • Major political, legislative or judicial events with adverse impact • Patient injury or death in CIRM-funded research

Framework

The CIRM Communications strategy is audience-centric, and reflects a Think, Feel, Do approach. We define four audiences—CA public, Patients, Lawmakers, Scientists—and map what we want each audience to do based on our communications. From that, we look at what the audiences would need to think and feel in order to invoke that action. Storytelling strategies will focus on emotionally resonant messaging intended to motivate these core audiences.

The audiences are broad, which reflects the breadth of the channels available to reach them. When a particular communication is reaching a subset of the larger audience, for example a specific region of the state or demographic within the state, we will revise the messaging and storytelling accordingly.

	CA public	Patients/ Advocates	Lawmakers	Scientists/ Industry
Do	Support science funding	Participate in clinical trials, Advocate for CIRM, Support science funding	Support CIRM policies, Advocate for CIRM	Apply for funding, Advocate for CIRM
Feel	Proud of CA, Hopeful, Excited, Trusting	Supported, Trusting, Hopeful, Excited, Proud of CA	Proud of supporting CIRM, Confident in CIRM's programs, Confident in CIRM's value to the state	Confident in CIRM programs, Proud of CA, Supported by CIRM
Think	People are benefitting from CIRM programs; Funding medical research is valuable; CIRM has had a beneficial economic impact in the state; CIRM cares	People are benefitting from CIRM programs; CIRM cares about their disease area; CIRM has programs to help them and their loved ones; Funding medical research is valuable	CIRM benefits people in their district with training, clinical trials, and jobs; CIRM has a positive economic impact in the state	CIRM funding is moving science forward in CA; Patients in CA benefit from CIRM; CIRM offers tools and resources that advance research; CIRM is a good investment by CA

Objectives

We define five objectives for motivating our core audiences and managing the team's time, each with measurable metrics for success.

Objective 1: Increase support for CIRM among the CA public

An informed public supports research funding and values CIRM as a benefit to California

Success Metrics

Metric 1: Year over year increased engagement & mentions on CIRM social media platforms geared for public audiences

Metric 2: Survey and focus group sentiment

Metric 3: Increased requests for CIRM participation at public events

Current state

CIRM does not have widespread name recognition in the state and has a relatively small social media following. However, sentiment is overall positive on social channels and in person events. CIRM also has a strong pool of patients and students who can bring our mission to life in stories.

Challenges

Gaining recognition will be challenging in a time when people's attention is divided among many high priority issues nationally and globally. In addition, CIRM is currently operating in an environment where there is public distrust of higher education and of science. Given that most of our communications hinge on advances in science and higher education, we will need a strong narrative about CIRM's benefits to California.

The Communication team's time is split between activities that gain external interest, such as storytelling, and those that help internal teams, such as updating and maintaining the website. The team will need to be efficient with their time, and focused on metrics to ensure time is spent on activities that are meeting objectives. This need to be more efficient is the purpose behind Objective 5, which directs the team to streamline operational tasks.

Objective 2: Increase support for CIRM among lawmakers

Knowledgeable lawmakers serve as advocates for CIRM and support the agency's mission, vision, and policy priorities

Success Metrics

Metric 1: Lawmakers advocate for CIRM to constituents, or on social channels

Metric 2: Lawmakers engage with CIRM and support activities that advance CIRM's mission

Current state

CIRM has little name recognition among lawmakers in CA, or national lawmakers focused on science, health, or medicine. In the past year, the office of the Vice-Chair has increased outreach to individual lawmakers and plans to extend that work. In addition, the Communications team has begun working more closely with the Board Governance team to ensure communication outputs reach relevant lawmakers.

Challenges

Whether or not the Communications team can meet this objective depends on work by the office of the Vice-Chair and Board Governance team. If those teams de-prioritize this work due to other competing priorities the Communications team will need to delay or reduce focus on this objective.

Objective 3: Position CIRM as a leader in driving discoveries towards therapies

Scientists and industry members who see CIRM as a leader will be more likely to partner with CIRM, apply for funding, and advocate for CIRM

Success Metrics

Metric 1: Increased requests for CIRM speakers at scientific meetings

Metric 2: Year over year increased engagement & mentions on CIRM social media platforms geared for scientific audiences

Metric 3: Reduced requests for consultation about new programs or policies

Current state

CIRM is well regarded amongst scientists and industry members. However, CIRM has not always communicated clearly and consistently with this audience about priorities and funding strategies. That confusion could reduce support for the organization.

Challenges

The Communications team can drive some activities to reach this group more effectively, but that work will rely on collaboration from other teams within CIRM, which also have limited bandwidth. Strategies for better reaching these audiences will need to

take into account time constraints both within CIRM, and for the scientists and industry members we are hoping to reach.

Objective 4: Increase support for CIRM's accessibility programs among patient advocates

Patients and patient advocates who know about and support CIRM's accessibility programs will be more likely to access clinical trials and advocate for CIRM

Success Metrics

Metric 1: Increase in people asking about CIRM- funded clinical trials, including links to the clinical trial dashboard on the CIRM website.

Metric 2: Increase advocacy groups requesting CIRM presence at events or patient-focused activities

Current state

CIRM has an outreach program that actively engages with patients and patient advocates through public events and speaking opportunities. CIRM also has pool of very dedicated patient advocate supporters who speak on behalf of CIRM at events and in their communities. In the future, CIRM will also be partnering with CBOs through the CCCEs, who will be reaching a large patient audience.

Challenges

CIRM has no approved therapies on the market, making it harder to generate enthusiasm. In addition, we don't have much in our portfolio in some disease areas where we would like to gain support. Clinical trials are a huge step, particularly in diseases where there is little else in the pipeline, but are more difficult to explain than approved therapies.

Objective 5: Streamline communication processes around objectives

The communications team needs to be able to work efficiently to meet the needs of the organization while also expanding awareness of CIRM in California

Success Metrics

Metric 1: Reduce time spent on tasks that don't directly meet communications goals

Metric 2: All work for other teams directly supports that team's objectives

Current state

Teams from across CIRM come to the Communications team with requests for the website, for flyers, and for other materials. Many of these requests are essential for CIRM's mission, while others are helpful for another team's needs but not critical. These less essential tasks take up Communications time.

Challenges

The Communications team will need to communicate clearly with other teams what tasks might start being deprioritized, and create a clear workflow for other teams to follow in making requests. Reclaiming some Communications bandwidth should not come at the expense of other teams' ability to get critical work done, and should avoid creating confusion.

Strategy & Tactics

The Communications team has a four-part strategy for achieving these five objectives, with specific tactics associated with each portion of the strategy.

Strategy 1: Create the CIRM Story



Define a unified, emotionally resonant narrative that reflects CIRM's mission, values, and impact.

Key Actions

- Develop a core narrative that captures CIRM's identity
- Create audience-specific versions that vary in tone, language, and emphasis
- Develop case studies that act as proof points for the CIRM story
- Incorporate a mechanism for tracking/reporting on CIRM's progress into the story

Tactics

- Hire a vendor to generate a multi-layered CIRM story
- Develop audience-specific versions of that story
- Develop a framework for depicting progress
 - Show progress on the website
 - Incorporate progress slides in the CIRM deck

Strategy 2: Tell the CIRM Story



Leverage diverse storytelling formats to bring the CIRM story to life.

Key Actions:

- Embed the CIRM story in existing and new storytelling formats
- Refine storytelling formats to meet target audiences
- Empower CIRM staff, board members, grantees, trainees, patient advocates, and others to tell CIRM's story
- Ensure our story is accessible to people in California
- Develop a visual framework for conveying the story

Tactics

- Carry out a gap analysis on existing storytelling formats to identify needs or redundancies
- Develop a content strategy that encompasses all storytelling formats
- Develop a visual strategy that encompasses audiences and messages
- Map storytelling formats and topics to each core audience
- Expand capacity for written and video storytelling
- Prepare materials with messaging and proof points to help staff, board members, grantees, trainees, and patient advocates tell CIRM's story
 - Toolkits
 - Flyers
 - CIRM story deck with narrative
 - Incorporate links to the proof points in messaging
- Make website fully accessible by remediating all documents

Strategy 3: Deliver the CIRM Story



Ensure emotionally resonant stories reach target audiences

Key Actions

- Ensure channels exist to reach all key audiences
- Empower advocates (CIRM employees, board members, patient advocates, lawmakers, others) to tell CIRM's story to their audiences
- Expand community outreach efforts
- Integrate communications across CIRM Team activities (new concepts, policies, etc)

Tactics

- Carry out a gap analysis of communication channels to identify gaps and redundancies
- Where gaps or redundancies exist, eliminate or expand channels
- Map storytelling formats and themes to channels that reach the appropriate audience
- Hire a PR firm to reach the CA public
- Train staff, board members, and trainees to use the storytelling toolkit
- Create a patient advocate ambassador program
- Incorporate the CIRM story, proof points, and progress metrics into Board and Team presentations
- Ensure CIRM programs, concepts, policies, and other updates are effectively communicated to the right audiences

Strategy 4: Measure Impact



Evaluate the effectiveness of storytelling efforts and refine strategy based on data

Key Actions

- Develop a baseline for awareness
- Define success metrics
- Report impact measurements to CIRM leadership and board

Tactics

- Hire an agency to carry out listening sessions or focus groups
- Report quarterly to staff and board on aggregate reach (social media, PR, blog, newsletter readership, etc)

- Review data yearly to modify storytelling and channels as needed

Implementation timeline

FY 2025/26

Q1

- ✓ Hire PR firm
- ✓ Hire storytelling firm (Valvespring)
- ✓ Expand storytelling capacity (Holly)

Q2

- Present CIRM story
- Fully remediate the website and implement strategy for maintaining remediation
- Launch PR efforts

Q3

- Begin audit of existing communication channels, ensuring channels exist for reaching all key audiences
- Develop content strategy and workflow incorporating the CIRM story
 - Ensure strategy includes storytelling appropriate for each audience
 - Map stories to channels reaching each audience
 - Create internal workflow for tracking stories
- Begin regularly featuring CIRM progress toward cures in communication with staff and Board
- Launch webinar pilot program
- Develop training toolkit for staff, board members, students, patient advocates for telling CIRM's story
- Launch efforts to communicate CIRM programs, concepts, policies and other updates to applicants and grantees

Q4

- Begin quarterly metrics reporting
- Finalize SOPs for communications activities
- With Programs team, begin including updated CIRM success metrics in communications
- Begin training staff, board members, students on telling CIRM's story using the toolkit

FY 2026/27

- Conduct CA focus groups/listening sessions
- Pilot a patient advocate ambassador program
- Review metrics from previous 6 months and pivot strategy as needed
- Expand storytelling capacity