CIRM
CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE FOR REGENERATIVE MEDICINE

Memorandum

To: Members of the Communications Subcommittee
From: Communications Team
Re: Communications metrics, priorities, and budget
Date: June 08, 2026

Executive Summary

CIRM's communication channels have encountered a rapidly shifting landscape in the past year shaped by AI search and audience fragmentation. To maintain existing areas of strength and expand reach in FY26/27 we will focus on continued high quality storytelling, which has improved blog readership. We will expand reach into new audiences by increasing video on both YouTube and Instagram, which are areas of growth in social media, and by expanding statewide outreach. We will also increase PR efforts, which both improves CIRM's presence in AI engines and reaches new audiences in the state. Our proposed budget (Appendix A) supports this focus.

I. Current Landscape

Website

Increased use of AI for discovering answers rather than traditional search is driving web traffic down across all sectors. CIRM's website traffic is similarly mostly flat. In the next year we will focus on updating the website to better position CIRM information to appear accurately in AI engines. These changes include content designed with AI in mind as well as moving the blog within the primary website where it is more discoverable by AI.

Blog

CIRM's blog traffic rose roughly 60% year over year with improved readership across all stories, not just those written during the past year. The blog's placement in a platform separate from the main website limits our ability to identify traffic sources and reduces benefits from future website/AI improvements. Over the next year, the team will continue focusing on high-readership content and on moving the blog into the main website framework where we can better position stories for increased readership.

Social Media

CIRM has seen significant growth and engagement on LinkedIn, where CIRM messages seem to resonate, and strong engagement on Instagram particularly with video. CIRM has made limited use of YouTube recently despite that channel's dominance across demographics. Next year, the team expects to expand video across all channels and shift some content away from blog-first to social-first placement. Planned California focus groups will help inform demographic-specific content.

PR

The team hired the PR firm Fors Marsh in October, supporting dual priorities of reaching new audiences not served by existing channels, especially outside major metropolitan areas and among multilingual communities, and of improving AI search visibility through AI engines that draw on earned media for third-party validation. Fors Marsh secured significant placements primarily around CCCEs and the RAPID program, including Spanish speaking media, with follow-up interest from journalists. These placements coincide with an uptick in blog traffic, perhaps driven by increased awareness of CIRM. Next year, the team expects to deepen relationships, particularly with community and multilingual outlets, and leverage PR to expand CIRM's presence in AI models.

Outreach

Public outreach during the past year focused mainly on San Francisco and Los Angeles areas, with some Central Valley events, reaching >50 groups total. Outreach materials also supported legislative visits in Sacramento and D.C. Going forward, priorities include expanding beyond major metropolitan areas and reaching multilingual audiences. The proposed budget includes two additional outreach contractors to reach broader audiences, collaborating with the Patient Access team and CCCE-supported community organizations, expanding opportunities for CIRM ambassadors (board, patient advocates), and extending a new webinar program.

II. Future Plans

In the coming year the team expects to expand Californian's awareness of CIRM by improving the reach of our existing channels while also exploring additional strategies including statewide focus groups to understand the needs of different demographics, expanded use of video, increased outreach capacity, and increased Spanish-language communications. Improved visibility for CIRM in AI engines will be a significant focus.

The proposed FY26/27 budget aligns resources with these priorities.

Appendix A: FY 26/27 Budget

The Communications and Outreach budget retains several vendors at existing levels. It adds resources for a one-time state-wide effort to hold surveys and focus groups. It also expands the existing Outreach budget to include contractors in parts of the state not currently well represented in CIRM outreach efforts and to support additional events. It also supports one additional 2-year fixed-term FTE intended to streamline communications with CIRM awardees and applicants.

Item	Description	Change
Valvespring	Replaces former creative agency: Annual report, extending CIRM's story across branded materials (including video), messaging support	None
Fors Marsh	PR agency: Media placements with a focus on CA, communities, multilingual; Earned media to improve AI optimization	Increased budget to scale up to full year
Dowitcher	Website vendor; Security & technical updates, remediation support, Program updates (i.e. posting new PAs), blog transition, AI engine optimization	None
Creative services	Writing support: Could also be used for video support or other communication services	None
California focus groups	Survey demographics across the state to assess priorities and awareness of CIRM	One-time increase
Outreach contractors	Assist with outreach activities throughout the state. This budget adds two new contractors (one existing)	Increased
Outreach events	Pays for sponsored events, booths, etc.	Increased
Translation services	Translate CIRM materials into other languages to reach broader demographics	None
Personnel	Supports the existing FTEs plus one 2-year fixed-term position	Temporary increase

Appendix B: Personnel

The Communications and Outreach team evolved throughout the year, with Aditi Desai rejoining the team from Patient Access in July, and two members leaving during the winter. We replaced one FTE with Scott Hadly as Director of Content Strategy. He brings journalism experience, strong storytelling skills, and expertise gained through more than a decade in communications roles at 23andMe. Scott's experience supporting earned media will help the team with the dual goals of reaching more people in the state through earned media, and of gaining AI visibility. We also brought in Carly Chillmon, a 2-year fixed-term FTE intended to streamline communications with CIRM awardees and applicants. Carly also brings website expertise that will support the team's shift to curating content for AI visibility.

June 2025

- Amy Adams – Senior Director of Communications
- Esteban Cortez – Director of Marketing and Communications
- Christina Smith – Social Media Specialist
- Katie Sharify – Communications Coordinator

January 2026

- Amy Adams – Senior Director of Communications
- *Vacant*
- Christina Smith – Social Media Specialist
- *Vacant*
- Aditi Desai – Community Outreach Manager

June 2026

- Amy Adams – Senior Director of Communications
- Scott Hadly – Director of Content Strategy
- Christina Smith – Social Media Specialist
- *Vacant*
- Carly Chillmon – Communications Specialist, Operations
- Aditi Desai – Community Outreach Manager

Appendix C: References

Impact of AI on web traffic

- The Economist: AI is killing the web. Can anything save it?
- Medium: The Great Traffic Collapse: Why Fewer People Are Visiting Websites — And What It Means for the Future of the Web
- Kellog Insight: As AI Eats Web Traffic, Don't Panic—Evolve
- Forbes: AI Is Destroying SEO. Rank Now Requires Answer Engine Optimization

Role of earned media in AI visibility

- MuckRack: What is AI reading? Takeaways from a report on AI brand visibility
- Fast Company: In the AI era earned media is king, and content its queen

Social media trends

- Pew Research Center: Americans' Social Media Use 2025