
Strategic Communication Plan



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U.S. Marine Corps

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“The future success of the Marine Corps depends on two factors: first, an efficient performance of all duties to which its officers and men may be assigned; second, promptly bringing the efficiency to the attention of the proper officials of the Government, and the American people.”¹

—Major General John A. Lejeune

“Next to doing the right thing, the most important thing is to let people know you are doing the right thing.”²

—John D. Rockefeller

INTRODUCTION

The Marine Corps relies upon the support of the Nation for its very existence. America will invest her resources in our Corps only if she perceives that we are ready, successful, and affordable.

To echo the remarks of our 13th Commandant, Major General John A. Lejeune, and the great American industrialist John D. Rockefeller, it is not only necessary that we continue to fulfill our unique role in national security, but also essential that we ensure our Nation knows we will always be where she needs us, when she needs us, and that we will prevail over whatever challenges we face.

- The Nation must view us as successful, or she will not call on us in times of crisis.
- The Nation must perceive us as “always ready,” or she will see us as having no value.
- The Nation must believe the Marine Corps has value, or she will view us as a luxury she cannot afford.
- The Nation must see that we create quality citizens who are better for their service as a Marine, or she will not entrust us with her sons and daughters.

Telling Americans who we are and what we do is therefore critical to ensuring we achieve our objectives.

This is the purpose of Marine Corps Strategic Communication: To build and retain our Nation’s support and ensure the Corps’ prosperity.

OVERVIEW

The term *strategic communication* is often misunderstood and misrepresented, both in concept and in practice. Consequently, it is useful to first establish a common meaning for Marine Corps Strategic Communication.

Strategic Communication is a *process* by which we integrate activities across all informational functions and engage key audiences to achieve effects consistent with Marine Corps interests, policies, and objectives. These informational functions extend well beyond those Headquarters staff agencies with principal communications missions (Legislative Affairs, Public Affairs, and Recruiting) to include leaders across the Corps.

Strategic Communication activities are planned and conducted at the Service level. This plan therefore constitutes the capstone document from which all Marine Corps communication

planning and action will be derived. Subordinate communication planning will support the themes and overall purpose of this plan. These might take the form of regional information campaign plans, organizational communication plans, or issue-based public information plans. While these plans may often require “strategic” thinking or employ strategic communication concepts, they do not constitute a “Strategic Communication Plan.” **There is only one Strategic Communication Plan for the United States Marine Corps.**

This plan is derived from the *34th Commandant of the Marine Corps, Commandant’s Planning Guidance*. The plan has no end date; it continues in effect so long as its objectives remain unchanged. While it is expected that any alteration to Marine Corps strategy would require shifts in communication themes, the larger purpose of our Strategic Communication Plan is enduring.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLANNING

The Marine Corps Strategic Communication Council (SCC) is the lead agency responsible for Marine Corps Strategic Communication Planning. By consolidating planning activities at the Headquarters level, the SCC is able to continually develop communication objectives and identify effective approaches to key audiences in order to focus Marine Corps communication efforts. Simply stated, the SCC enhances our ability to be proactive and speak with one voice.

The SCC organization and standing membership is outlined in Annex A.

KEY ELEMENTS

Assuring Marine Corps success requires effectively articulating what we stand for, what we do, who we are, and what we aspire to be. It is opening a window to our culture. These are its key elements:

- ***CORE VALUES – Honor, Courage, and Commitment***

The Marine Corps Strategic Communication Plan is rooted in our Core Values. In communications terms, our values are our most important attribute.
This is what we stand for.

- ***MISSION – Make Marines, Win Battles, Create Quality Citizens***

Our Mission is the foundation of our reputation; we are judged on our success in each task.
This is what we do.

- ***PRIORITY #1 – Our Marines and Sailors in Combat***

Our top priority is a reflection of our warrior ethos; “... *the stuff of which legions are made.*”³
This is who we are.

- **BRAND VISION – Elite Warrior**

The Marine Corps and the individual Marine should be viewed as the epitome of military virtue; a group of smart, tough, warriors who gain strength of mind, body, and character through membership in an elite and proud Corps.

This is what we aspire to be.

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Securing America's investment in our Corps requires that she consider us worthy of her treasure. While articulating our culture is an important part of this, we need also demonstrate that the Corps is unique and valuable to the Nation in a very practical and tangible sense. This is our competitive advantage.

The Marine Corps fulfills a vital role in national security as an amphibious, expeditionary, air-ground combined arms task force, capable of forcible entry from the sea and air. We are always ready when called and successful when employed.

THEMES

The 34th Commandant's planning guidance described a way ahead that includes seven major areas of focus for the Marine Corps. The areas of focus outline our priorities and present a strategic vision for our Corps, effectively setting down the strategic communication themes that all subsequent communication efforts will support. These themes provide the structure and consistency necessary to maintain our Nation's support and ensure the Corps' prosperity.

Within each of the strategic communication themes are key messages that describe our principle efforts and unique contributions as a Corps. It is essential that communication activities across all lines of operation employ these messages as we "mass fires" to achieve the desired effects.

- ***Achieve Victory in the Long War.***
 - *We are the Nation's "shock troops," always ready and always capable of forcible entry.*
 - *We have answered our Nation's call, and we will remain engaged.*
 - *The resourcefulness and versatility of our Marines have enabled our success in combat operations, stability and security operations, and counterinsurgency operations.*
 - *No other military formation is more prepared to execute the full range of counterinsurgency tasks than the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF)—our fundamental fighting organization.*

- **Right-size our Corps to achieve a 1:2 deployment-to-dwell ratio.**
 - *The Long War is a generational struggle; a long-term fight borne on the shoulders of our most precious asset—the individual Marine. Building a force that can support the 1:2 deployment-to-dwell ratio goal relieves the strain on these superb Americans who have volunteered to fight the Nation's battles.*
 - *The Marine Corps is a “two-fisted force”; that is, we must not only train for irregular warfare, but also for combined-arms maneuver, mountain warfare, amphibious operations, and jungle warfare. Achieving 1:2 deployment-to-dwell ratio will help ensure we are most ready when our nation is least ready.*
- **Provide our Nation a naval force that is fully prepared for employment as a MAGTF across the spectrum of conflict.**
 - *The Navy-Marine Corps team has the unique ability to provide forward-deployed expeditionary combat forces in response to crises.*
 - *The “Arc of Instability” is a substantially maritime domain, and the Marine Corps is uniquely suited to respond.*
- **Reset and modernize to be “most ready when our Nation is least ready.”**
 - *To meet the demands of the Long War, we must reset the force in order to simultaneously fight, train, and sustain our Corps.*
 - *We are responsible stewards of our Nation's resources; we will continue to be prudent in our modernization efforts, making conscientious decisions as we replace aging equipment and procure next generation capabilities.*
 - *Our reset and modernization efforts will allow us to continue to provide lethal MAGTFs—fully equipped, trained, and ready to engage now and in the future.*
- **Improve the quality of life for our Marines and our families.**
 - *We will be aggressive in our support for Marines and Sailors who bear the scars of battle; including those who suffer visible wounds as well as those who bear the less visible wounds of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or Traumatic Brain Injury. Our commitment to our wounded warriors will not falter.*
 - *Our Nation is at war—therefore, our Family & Quality of Life programs must also be on a wartime footing. We have an enduring commitment not only to our Marines and Sailors in combat, but to their families as well. In the process of caring for our warriors, we will make certain they have no reason to worry about the welfare of their families at home.*

- **Rededicate ourselves to our Core Values and warrior ethos.**
 - *The transformation of becoming a United States Marine is a national treasure that the Marine Corps guards carefully—our standards remain high.*
 - *Wherever our national interests are threatened, the Marine Corps will be there.*
 - *Our Nation may continue to have high expectations of her Marines—we will deliver.*
 - **Posture the Marine Corps for the future.**
 - *We will plan and prepare with forethought and prudence; what we do today must ensure success in the decades to come.*
 - *The Marine Corps historically has produced respected leaders who have demonstrated intellectual agility in warfighting. We will continue to train and educate a multi-dimensional force prepared for employment in all forms of warfare.*
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TARGETING

Strategic communication targeting is similar in form to fire support targeting in that both processes seek to identify targets based upon their importance to the success of the plan. Much like the modern battlefield, today's information environment presents numerous targets of different types, as well as an ever increasing arsenal of engagement modes. This requires us to prioritize targets relative to our overall purpose, and identify the most effective means by which to engage those targets.

KEY AUDIENCES

In fire support terms, *High-Payoff Targets* (HPTs) are those targets whose loss to the enemy will most contribute to the success of the friendly course of action.⁴ In communication terms, HPTs are most often referred to as *Key Audiences*—that is, those audiences who can appreciably affect the success or failure of the Marine Corps as an institution.

- **Our Marines and Their Families**

Our Marines and their families—to include those no longer serving on active duty—are entitled to be the first to know their Corps' interests, priorities, and objectives. As our most precious asset, they are without question our most important audience.

Our Marines are also the Corps' best spokespersons, and must possess the information necessary to be effective in that role. Whether speaking to members of the press, interacting with elected officials, or simply having a conversation with friends and family, interpersonal contact is the most effective means of communicating our values and priorities.

- **Prospective Marines and Their Families**

The young men and women who will ultimately choose to become Marines are fundamental to securing the future of our Corps, as are the mothers and fathers who will agree to entrust us with their children and become part of our Marine Corps family. Long before a recruiter enters the picture, these Americans must know what the Marine Corps

stands for, must have confidence that we will always remain true to our Core Values, and must believe that those who serve in the Corps of Marines will ultimately return to society as better citizens.

- **Congress**

The full support of our Congress is required to secure the prosperity of the Marine Corps. Building and maintaining a right-sized force, resetting and modernizing, taking care of our Marines, posturing the Corps for the future, and achieving victory in the Long War all necessitate an informed body of legislators with confidence in the Marine Corps. It is essential our lawmakers understand that the Corps provides the Nation with critical capabilities under sound fiscal accountability.

- **Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD)**

OSD shapes Department of Defense decisions in the areas of policy, finance, force readiness, and purchasing. Advisors to the Secretary formulate national security policy, oversee budgeting, manage personnel requirements, and direct testing and purchasing of material. It is necessary that we ensure these advisors are fully aware of the Marine Corps' unique capabilities and requirements, remain assured of our readiness, and hold our organization in the highest regard.

TARGETED AREAS OF INFLUENCE

In fire support targeting, the best places to engage HPTs are called *Targeted Areas of Influence* (TAIs). In communication planning, these points or areas where the organization can best influence a target are not only geographic, but modal as well. That is, organizational communication engages key audiences regionally and through various targeting modes to include traditional news media, so-called "new" media, and interpersonal transactions that encourage supportive behavior.

- **Mass Media**

As a class, this is the collection of the media specifically envisioned and designed to reach a very large audience such as the population of a nation-state. It is the sum of the public distributors of news and entertainment across mediums such as newspapers, television, radio, broadcasting, and publishing.

The term *mainstream media* has recently begun to be used in discussion of the mass media and media bias in contrast to the conceptual "independence" of new media.

- **New Media**

These continually developing media contextualize new technologies and communication methods relative to their effects on the established mainstream media. Because emerging technologies tend to be Internet-related, *new media* is generally considered a reference to second generation web offerings (often called *Web 2.0*.)

Although definitions vary, new media generally have two consistent characteristics. The first is uniquely individualized information that can simultaneously be delivered or displayed to a potentially infinite number of people. The second is that all players involved, from source to consumer, share equal or reciprocal control over content.

- **Third-Party Spokespersons**

In public relations shorthand, these are often referred to as "surrogates." In the case of the Marine Corps, they are influencers within key audiences who are informed enough to be able to articulate our priorities or positions on specific issues and programs.

Examples might include retired general officers, industry and business leaders, or office-holders in veterans' service organizations such as the *American Legion*, *Veterans of Foreign Wars*, and *Marine Corps League*.

Potential surrogates exist within every key audience, and developing relationships with influencers for the purpose of broadening our base of third-party spokespersons is an important aspect of integrating communications efforts.

- **Academia**

Educational institutions and "think tanks" possess the ability to influence key audiences, especially those involved in law-making and policy-making. The academic environment also offers unique "rules of engagement," presenting an opportunity to discuss Marine Corps priorities in highly-specific terms with a large audience of potential influencers inside what is typically a non-attributable setting.

DELIVERY & ASSESSMENT

As the lead agency responsible for Marine Corps Strategic Communication Planning, the SCC will coordinate delivery and assessment in accordance with this plan.

To facilitate this coordination, the SCC has developed a communication template (Fig. 1) to be used as a planning tool in support of each of the communication themes. These templates will identify, in detail, the enabling objectives as they relate to key audiences, describe the actions needed to realize these objectives, and define assessment methodology. These templates will be informed by members of the SCC Planning Team, reviewed by the Executive Committee, and approved by the Commandant. The SCC will review the communication templates regularly to update assumptions, refine assessment, and determine when objectives are achieved.

The SCC Secretariat will also use the communication templates to develop additional support products and planning tools that facilitate further shaping operations in support of this plan. The Secretariat is the principal point of contact for any proposals or issues relating to Marine Corps Strategic Communication.

IMPLEMENTATION & EXECUTION

The Director, Marine Corps Staff is tasked with the implementation of this plan. The themes outlined above and the associated activities designed to support them will be reported as part of the Marine Corps' operational battle rhythm. The enclosed planning tools (Fig. 1) are provided for that purpose.

The plan's execution, however, is not the exclusive responsibility of the SCC leadership and its members, but also that of every leader across our Corps. As such, I expect every Marine Corps Leader to read and understand this plan. Make no mistake; the future of our Service and our success in the Long War relies upon our ability to secure our nation's support and ensure the Corps' prosperity. Ultimately, each and every Marine has a stake in the success of this plan.

Semper Fidelis,


James T. Conway
General, U.S. Marine Corps
Commandant of the Marine Corps



Fig.1 – Strategic Communication Theme Planning Template

<p>FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY</p>	<p>Marine Corps Strategic Communication Communication Theme Planning Template</p>	<p>PRE-DECISIONAL</p>
	<p>TITLE OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION THEME</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px solid black;"/>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Intent</p> <p>Describe desired effect and end-state; use active terms that express purpose such as <i>assure, reassure, dissuade, deter</i>; rather than simple tasks that lack a full sense of purpose (<i>inform, apprise, explain, educate, etc.</i>)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Target List</p> <p>List High-Priority Targets (HPTs) in order of engagement priority.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Key Messages</p> <p>These messages are principally drawn directly from the Strategic Communication Plan. However, it may be necessary to identify additional messages as communication campaigns develop.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Targeted Areas of Influence*</p> <p>Describe the specific TAIs relative to 1) the Target and 2) the lead Agency. (e.g. <i>Legislative Affairs will brief individual HASC members on Plan X, CMC will speak on need for Plan X at NCR dinner hosted by The Cohen Group, DIRPA will host Surrogate Round-table with D/C CD&I on Plan X development, D/C Aviation will conduct press briefing at Pentagon regarding Plan X implementation, etc.</i>)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>* TAIs are inputs to the Strategic Communication Sync Matrix</i></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Enabling Objectives</p> <p>Identify interim objectives that support the Strategic Communication theme, just as a Campaign Objectives support pursuit of a Strategic Aim.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Assessment Methodology</p> <p>Measures of Performance (MOP) – These are leading indicators of engagement relative to each TAI. MOPs are the "phase lines" that describe progress toward achieving the enabling objectives; they do not constitute securing the objective itself.</p> <p>Measures of Effectiveness (MOE) – These are the lagging indicators that describe effect on Target. MOEs relate directly to each TAI and constitute realization of a particular HPT.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Assumptions</p> <p>Assumptions in this context retain the definition and purpose described in MCWP 5-1, <i>Marine Corps Planning Process</i>,</p>		
<p>CMC COMMENTS:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Approve</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Disapprove</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Approve w/ changes</p>		

Fig. 2 – Strategic Communication One-Sheet

Assuring Marine Corps success requires effectively articulating what we stand for, what we do, who we are, and what we aspire to be. It is opening a window to our culture. These are its key elements.

Core Values

Honor — Courage — Commitment

The Marine Corps Strategic Communication Plan is rooted in our Core Values. In communications terms, our values are our most important attribute.

This is what we stand for.

Our Mission

Make Marines — Win Battles — Create Quality Citizens

Our Mission is the foundation of our reputation; we are judged on our success in each task.

This is what we do.

Our Priority

Our Marines and Sailors in combat are our number one priority

Our top priority is a reflection of our warrior ethos; “... the stuff of which legions are made.”

This is who we are.

Brand Vision

Elite Warrior

The Marine Corps and the individual Marine should be viewed as the epitome of military virtue; a group of smart, tough, warriors who gain strength of mind, body, and character through membership in an elite and proud Corps.

This is what we aspire to be.

Our Competitive Advantage

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Securing America’s investment in our Corps requires that she consider us worthy of her treasure. We must demonstrate that the Corps is unique and valuable to the Nation in a very practical sense.

Marine Corps Strategic Communication Themes

Achieve Victory in the Long War	Right-size our Corps to achieve a 1:2 deployment-to-dwell ratio.	Provide our Nation a naval force that is fully prepared for employment as a MAGTF across the spectrum of conflict	Reset and modernize to be “most ready when our Nation is least ready.”	Improve the quality of life for our Marines and our families.	Rededicate ourselves to our Core Values and warrior ethos.	Posture the Marine Corps for the future.
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Commandant’s Strategic Communication Guidance

The Nation must believe we produce quality citizens who are better for their service as a Marine, or she will not entrust us with her sons and daughters.	The Nation must view us as successful, or she will not call on us in times of crisis.	The Nation must perceive us as “always ready,” or she will see us as having no value.	The Nation must believe the Marine Corps has value, or she will view us as a luxury she cannot afford.
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Strategic Communications Purpose

Build and retain our Nation’s support, and ensure the Corps’ prosperity.

Annex A – Strategic Communication Council Standing Members

The Strategic Communication Council (SCC) develops, implements, and synchronizes Marine Corps strategic communication activities across relevant staff agencies. The SCC consists of 15 standing members supported by a full-time Secretariat and designated planning representatives. Additional members may be added at the discretion of the Director, Marine Corps Staff.

The SCC is composed of three main elements:

- **The SCC Executive Committee (EXCOM)** is chaired by the Director, Marine Corps Staff and comprised of senior level representatives from designated activities. The following members form the SCC EXCOM:
 - Director, Marine Corps Staff.
 - Deputy Commandant for Aviation.
 - Deputy Commandant for Combat Development and Integration.
 - Deputy Commandant for Installations and Logistics.
 - Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs.
 - Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policies, and Operations.
 - Deputy Commandant for Programs and Resources.
 - Commanding General, Marine Corps Recruiting Command.
 - Director, Public Affairs.
 - Legislative Assistant to the Commandant of the Marine Corps.
 - Chief Information Officer of the Marine Corps.
 - Staff Judge Advocate to the Commandant of the Marine Corps.
 - Counsel for the Commandant of the Marine Corps.
 - Director, Commandant's Staff Group.
 - Director, Strategic Initiatives Group.
 - **The SCC Secretariat** is a full-time staff charged with conducting the day-to-day business of the SCC. The Secretariat's primary duties involve directing strategic communication planning and coordinating delivery and assessment in support of associated campaigns.
 - **The SCC Planning Team** serves as a standing Operational Planning Team (OPT) responsible for developing communication plans in accordance with Marine Corps strategic communication themes. The planning team consist of a core planning cell made up of field grade officers representing Legislative Affairs (OLA), Public Affairs (PA), Recruiting (MCRC), and the Strategic Initiatives Group (SIG), with the Secretariat Plans Officer serving as OPT Leader. Additional staff representatives will be integrated as appropriate in accordance with the targeting process.
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Notes

1. Maj. Gen. John A. Lejeune, USMC, *Marine Officer's Guide* (1996) 306.
2. John D. Rockefeller, Available at <<http://www.brainyquote.com>> (30 April 2007).
3. T.R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 455.
4. U.S. Marine Corps, *Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for the Targeting Process, MCRP 3-1.6.14* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 1996), 1.1-2.1.