

**WRPI SAWPA Fall 2019 Intern:  
Communications Internship at  
Orange County Coastkeeper**

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**12/30/19**

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## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express immense gratitude toward California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) communications internship advisor Amber Chitty-Wilson, for her reliability and dedication to the program. In addition, I would like to thank Orange County Coastkeeper (OCC) site supervisor Ray Hiemstra, for simultaneously allowing the freedom to express creative ideas and providing succinct, clear instructions throughout the entirety of the project. Cari Hachmann, the current communications coordinator at OCC, was also very helpful with on-site instruction.

Lastly, my work as an intern for the Water Resources & Policy Initiatives (WRPI) program would not have been possible without the help of internship manager Christina Rodriguez, who always provided quick and helpful answers to all inquiries.

This project was supported by the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority's (SAWPA) Disadvantaged Communities Involvement (DCI) Program and Proposition 1 funding from the California Department of Water Resources (DWR).

## **Executive Summary**

Orange County Coastkeeper (OCC) is an environmental non-profit organization that serves as a beacon of information and activism for clean, drinkable, fishable, and swimmable waters in the greater Orange County area and beyond. Through influencing public opinion and actions through social media, promotional efforts such as pop-up events, legal strategies, education, activism, and more, OCC is an influential figure in the public hemisphere. Further, OCC is not limited to endeavors concerning oceanic cleanliness and responsibility, as they also focus on providing smart, drought-tolerant landscapes to disadvantaged communities throughout Orange County.

With such a plethora of services offered and public activities conducted, OCC thrives on providing communications interns opportunities to help promote and market their events via social media, email, and in-person community outreach. From late August 2019 to late November 2019, I aided these efforts as a communications intern under the supervision of Ray Hiemstra.

## **Project Objectives**

Throughout my tenure as a communications intern for OCC, the project objectives varied greatly depending on upcoming events and other factors.

During the first month or so of the internship, much focus was dedicated to promoting Firescape workshops at various locations. These workshops covered how to remain safe throughout California's fire season, and also yielded information regarding which plants were more fire-resistant than others.

The second month of the internship largely centered on creating promotional materials for the Cox Conserves National Heroes campaign, a national voting campaign aimed at helping local environmental organizations earn money for their goals. In this campaign, myself and other communications interns at OCC supported Laguna Bluebelt's candidate, Jinger Wallace.

The final month of the internship was almost completely dedicated to creating awareness and incentivizing the public to attend the Santa Ana Regional Water Board workshop on December 6, 2019, at the Huntington Beach Town Hall. This event was crucial to OCC and Orange County as a whole, due to the implications it held for Poseidon's permit to proceed with a desalination plant in Huntington Beach, an action that OCC is firmly against.

## Project Approach

To accomplish the aforementioned tasks and objectives, a consistent communications approach and strategy was put into practice: using Canva to create interesting and effective marketing deliverables, creating text-based posts for various Facebook pages, and using email to contact various community stakeholders regarding participation in upcoming events.

To elaborate, Canva was used to create social media infographics that contained promotional messages and event details. It was also used to capture attention on Facebook in a manner other than the more common, text-heavy approach, but Canva's effectiveness in this department was questionable.

The text-based Facebook posts created for various pages related to OCC and other organizations such as Laguna Bluebelt and Save Laguna served as a means to inform the public of local, national, and global oceanic conservation endeavors. While this platform was also used to promote upcoming events related to OCC, much of its use was more research-oriented, and required hours of reading through various articles and websites to find information that followers of these Facebook pages would find interesting and newsworthy.

The use of email in order to accomplish OCC's communications objectives was crucial, as it provided a channel to contact other environmentally-minded non-profit companies, local businesses, and school organizations to inform them of upcoming events and actions by OCC. Without the use of email, much of this community outreach would have been an extremely daunting task.

## Project Outcomes

By the end of my communications internship with OCC, my knowledge of how a non-profit environmental organization operates from a communications perspective was expanded immensely. Moreover, it was interesting to experience the significant role that both social media and in-person promotional strategies possess in creating awareness and incentivizing participation for numerous events.

The creation of visuals through Canva and written social media copy for OCC and other organizations' Facebook pages helped create public awareness of upcoming events and campaigns at the time. When concerning the Cox Conserves National Heroes campaign, Laguna Bluebelt's Jinger Wallace unfortunately did not win, despite the aforementioned communications efforts through social media, email, in-person community outreach, and more.

While the Cox Conserves National Heroes campaign results were not ideal, promotional activities for the Santa Ana Regional Water Board workshop on December 6 were highly effective, as OCC and other environmental organizations mustered a significant number of individuals to publicly oppose Poseidon's proposed desalination plant in Huntington Beach. This result was undoubtedly influenced through continued social media activity, promotion, community outreach, and other communications strategies.

For future communications tasks and objectives at OCC, one activity that could be performed differently is perhaps allowing interns more opportunities to examine social media engagement analytics. While OCC provided a significant platform to create both image-centric and text-focused materials for various Facebook pages, it would be even more helpful if the

social media analytics were more widely available to interns. If made available, this would further bolster the learning experience of interns and allow for an invaluable opportunity to conduct social media data analysis in a real-world setting.

## **Conclusion**

The learning opportunity provided at OCC was simply indispensable, and I consider myself lucky to have had the chance to partake in it. The variety of tasks conducted and events promoted allowed for a truly diverse learning experience, and greatly strengthened my perspective on how a non-profit environmental organization promotes itself and its events both on social media and in-person. While it is unlikely that I will pursue a career in environmental sciences, I feel that my communications experience at OCC is highly applicable to other realms of promotion and marketing, especially political campaigns, as the strategies used for both are quite similar. Also, skills such as using Canva, creating concise, yet effective social media copy, and conducting community outreach are highly transferable for communications endeavors in almost any industry. Thus, the communications internship at OCC is not solely beneficial to those pursuing a career in an environmentally-related field, but rather a broad opportunity that yields benefits to anyone interested in learning about communications and marketing.