



Visit SLO CAL Marketing Committee Meeting
Tuesday, May 20, 2025
8:30 am – 10:30 am
Visit SLO CAL Office: 81 Higuera St, Suite 220, San Luis Obispo, CA

1. CALL TO ORDER

PRESENT: Ashlee Akers, Terrie Banish, Sheridan Bohlken, Jacqui Clark-Charlesworth, Cheryl Cuming, Gordon Jackson, Stacie Jacob, Kathleen Naughton, Courtney Pene, Joel Peterson, Lindsey Roberts, Lynette Sonne, John Sorgenfrei, Leann Standish

STAFF PRESENT: Cathy Cartier, Molly Cano, Lisa Belsanti, Matt Halvorson, Aleigh Hogan, Mayla Lohnes, Alyssa Mano, Brooke Weisbecker, Lauren Miller, Megan Leininger, Theresa Nagai

Call to order at 8:31 am

2. PUBLIC COMMENT (On Non-Agenda Items)

Public Comment – None.

Committee Comment – None.

CONSENT AGENDA – <i>motion required</i>
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3. Approval of March 11, 2025 Marketing Committee Minutes

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion – None.

ACTION: Moved by Jackson/Bohlken to approve the March 11, 2025 Marketing Committee Minutes.

Motion carried: 12-0-1

Pene arrived after vote. Naughton abstained.

4. Visit SLO CAL VP of Marketing Report

Cano thanked the committee for their volunteer hours, for attending the Visit SLO CAL (VSC) BASH event and drew attention to the appreciation gifts at their chairs. Cano shared an air service update highlighting the return of the Las Vegas flight on October 4. Cano played the newest Sustainably SLO CAL video featuring Hotel San Luis Obispo and provided an update on the next video release in June.

Cano presented updated data on the hotel pipeline and expected increase in room inventory. Cano shared the Cal Poly's academic calendar for the 26/27 school year as the University moves from the quarter to semester system. Cano flagged that the FY 25 partner satisfaction survey will be sent out next week and asked the committee to complete the survey and share it with their stakeholders. The survey will be anonymous and there will be a raffle drawing for those who complete the survey.

Cano shared the Marketing Committee schedule for next fiscal year. The committee was encouraged to attend the Advisory Committee Meeting on Thursday, July 12 with reception to follow. Cano also told the committee to save the date for the SLO CAL Summit on November 13.

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion – Jackson asked for clarification on the percentage share of projected hotel growth by location.

5. New Brand Campaign Update

Cano shared that staff took Committee feedback from the last meeting and performed creative testing on the new brand campaign with focus groups in California markets. Brand positioning and new strategic insight around spontaneity was proven true. Testing groups had positive reactions to the themes of different pace and opportunity to discover unexpected experiences. Spontaneity didn't affect travel plans, those tested would still book key items.

Risser presented concept revisions which will build upon cross visitation and spontaneity. Turns Well Taken in the Land of SLO CAL campaign was shared with the committee. There will be three brand spots as well as local destination 15s. This is a nice evolution that focuses on cross visitation while celebrating spontaneity

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion – Banish asked for clarity on de-tourist testing. Cano replied that it wasn't perceived as negative, many were intrigued and thought the phrase was catchy and clever. It captured the spirit of travel and how visitors take a trip. Cano added that de-tourist is not in new campaign as it wasn't central to the spirit of the campaign.

Jackson asked when the new campaign will kick off. Cano responded that pre-production would start in the summer and filming would take place in fall. The campaign would go live by February of 2026. Sorgenfrei highlighted the need to include relaxation which was resounding in research. Cano confirmed that VSC will work with each destination partner to tell their part of the story. The storylines can be different in each spot. Banish thanked staff and the agency for taking the time and shared positive thoughts about this new version.

Cuming asked for clarification since de-tourist performed positively in focus groups why it wasn't kept. Cano replied that it did take the focus groups more time than an ad would provide for them to understand the concept and think the new iteration is stronger. The updated campaign concept has the same spirit, but the name is updated. De-tourist can be more easily incorporated into owned media. Jacob commented that it would make a great media FAM. Akers added de-tourist would make a great social series as the cleverness of that campaign helped SLO CAL to stand out. Cartier agreed and reiterated that this campaign is a collaboration and that this is the next iteration of the House of Brands. Cuming noted that local DMOs will need time to get board approval in order to participate in campaign (as co-op). Cartier confirmed that the planned timeline allows for ideation and appropriate approvals.

6. FY 2026 DRAFT Business & Marketing Plan

Cano presented the draft Business & Marketing Plan. Cano highlighted the four objectives from the Roadmap to 2026 strategic direction, factors that influence the travel landscape, research and the next chapter of the SLO CAL Brand, geographic prioritization of media spend and the visitor profile study. Cano also presented the breakdown of the proposed paid media budget, as well as, went through different VSC program elements.

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion – The committee discussed target markets and focusing on drive markets.

Jacob asked how local destination partners can work in synergy with VSC to increase awareness. Cano replied that one of the co-ops this fiscal includes sales. Jacob replied that meeting and sales FAMs is a great way to increase awareness collectively. Sorgenfrei suggested that sales incentives is an area where SLO CAL can stand out while having smaller conference space. Cano confirmed that the opportunities are endless in this space and will be a focus for VSC. Cartier added that this fits with driving mid-week business to support the new lodging inventory. However, the destination needs to grow to assist with corporate meetings such as increased hours, etc. Cartier shared that VSC will look to partners to connect to service businesses and Cano added that staff will need to have conversations at the business/property level to ensure that the destination delivers to grow this business. Akers shared that SLO CAL's differentiator could be the customization.

Sorgenfrei asked about Film SLO CAL. Halvorson shared that there is a Film SLO CAL trailer that is shared with destination scouts to sell the destination and that VSC staff will send out the trailer to the committee. Jacob encouraged selling recent film success back to community to help to streamline the permitting process. Halvorson shared that Film SLO CAL works regularly in advocating with state and local partners and that permitting partners in the area generally do what it takes to bring the business here. Film SLO CAL will continue to share the impact of filming (especially highlighting the mid-week impact). Cartier added that VSC

staff could put together a package of film information that local DMOs could share. Jacob thought this might be a topic worth highlighting at the upcoming Advisory Committee meeting.

The committee asked to go over proposed budget before making a motion. Staff moved to agenda item 7 before asking for a motion.

ACTION: Moved by Jacob/Akers to recommend the Board of Directors approve the FY 26 Business & Marketing Plan.

Motion carried: 13-0-0
Naughton left before the vote.

7. FY 2026 Proposed Budget

Cano provided a summary of the proposed balanced budget of 9.3 M. Cartier added that the budget includes using reserves to pay for new brand campaign. Cano broke down budget by program.

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion – Peterson wondered why digital marketing outside of marketing. Cano it's not. It's part of 5 million. Jacob confirmed that of 9.2 operating, 5 million goes to marketing and wondered if there was anything else in the budget that can be reduced to move more money into marketing. Cartier replied that staff spent a lot of time combing through the budget to be the most cost effective and reduce spending. Cartier agreed that with the inventory growth, money needed to shift into marketing. Some additional areas that staff is actively pursuing to save money include a staff skills audit and subleasing part of the office.

Cuming asked when the renewal was. Cartier replied in 2030. However, staff is talking with the board about going to renewal early and to change some of the language of the TMD. Akers asked how early. Cartier replied as early as next year. Cuming inquired what percentage of reserves is the proposed budget using. Cartier replied that Visit SLO CAL has 3 million in reserves and this budget proposed taking 750k to pay for the brand campaign.

8. Marketing Committee Member Application Approval

Cano reviewed the Marketing Committee applications. VSC received nine total applications for four open seats. Cano shared that it is encouraging that so much interest, but staff would not recommend adding additional seats. Cartier added that there are other ways to get people involved with the organization and the work that VSC does. Cano asked for committee discussion to consider both renewals and new applicants.

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion – Standish asked if there are term limits. Cano, replied that there are not limits, but there are terms. Clark-Charlesworth wondered if the committee should consider term limits. Cartier replied that for now, the focus should be on having the best mix/representation at the table. Clark-Charlesworth asked for confirmation that there is no term cap. Cano confirmed and shared what verbiage is in the management district plan.

Cuming shared that all four renewal applicants have expressed interest in continuing to serve and the committee should welcome them back. Jackson agreed adding that they have historical knowledge. Cuming shared with the committee that Jessica Blanchfield manages the Visit Cambria account that contributes 45% of the CBID assessment. Cuming also confirmed that Blanchfield made the commitment to attend all meetings. Standish asked if there has to be an odd number of committee members. Staff confirmed it does not have to be an odd number, but additions increase quorum.

Jacob shared Blanchfield would be a great addition, as well as Corina Ketchum. Jackson replied that historically the committee has not accepted members that were in sales as there are different opportunities for them to get involved. Cuming shared that the distribution across the county is important, would like to see addition in north county. The committee appreciated that the Pacific Hotels are getting involved. Cartier reminded the committee that there are ways for the other applicants to have roles outside of the committee. Peterson voiced the recommendation to keep JUSTIN involved. Cartier echoed and gave examples of ways to plug them in.

ACTION: Moved by Cuming/Banish to recommend the Board of Directors to renew Allen, Sanpei, Sorgenfrei and Tweedie and add Blanchfield.

Motion carried: 13-0-0
Naughton left before the vote.

9. Marketing, Sales & ESC 2050 Updates

This item was not presented because of time constraints. Cano will share presentation with the committee after the meeting.

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion – Jackson asked when SLO CAL Welcome will roll out. Cartier replied that it will soft launch on the new platform July 1 and staff will continue to make changes into the fall. Cuming highlighted the economic impact of the arts study that was recently released. Cano agreed that the arts and tourism are very closely knit and staff will share the report with the committee.

Cano reminded the committee about the co-ops for next fiscal year and to keep an eye out for partner commitment forms. Jackson wondered if there is a co-op opportunity for summer spend. Cartier replied that VSC's summer spend is currently through an ad buy, but staff will investigate a co-op opportunity. Cartier reminded the committee not to forget their gift bags.

Next Meeting Marketing July 15, 2025

ADJOURN: 10:33 AM