



U.S. MARINE CORPS COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

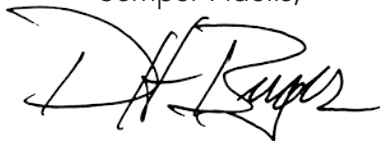
Communication Directorate, HQMC

February 2023

CMC FOREWORD

We have an obligation as leaders and as a Marine Corps to engage with the public and our elected leaders. Strategic communication and strategic engagement are more than buzzwords – they are complementary activities critical to realizing our institutional priorities. Without action toward those ends, we incur significant risk as a military service. This communication strategy serves as the basis for all communication campaign plans and subordinate communication planning documents, and it presents a framework for establishing a common, clear voice for how we communicate. The complexity of today's information environment demands unity of effort to maintain and build on our relationships with the American public, our elected leaders, and our global network of allies and partners. It is through coordinated, integrated, and synchronized communication that leaders and individual Marines can affect the outcome. My intent is that you use the ideas in this strategy to develop your communication, engage with the public, and tell our story.

Semper Fidelis,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. H. Berger', with a stylized, flowing script.

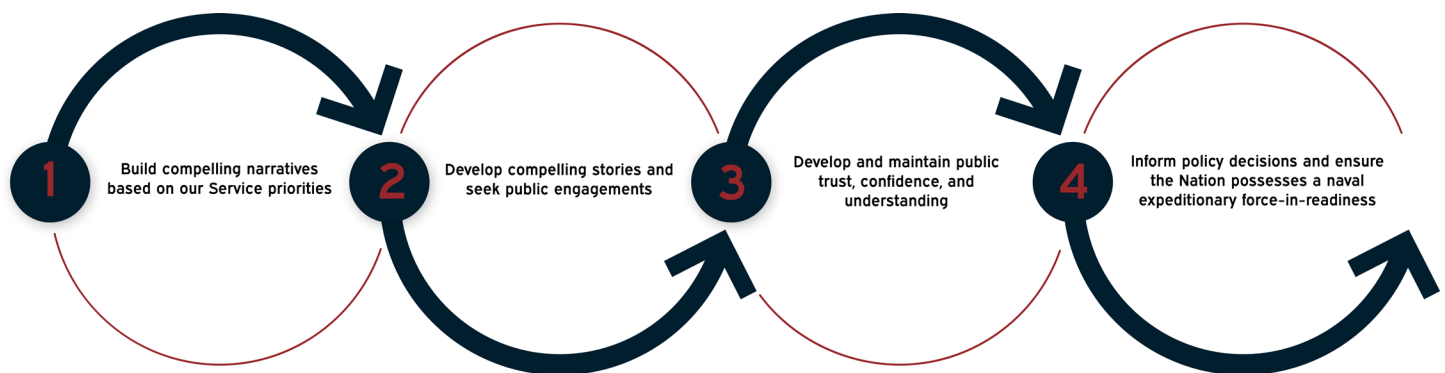
David H. Berger

General, U.S. Marine Corps
Commandant of the Marine Corps

PURPOSE

This document outlines the Marine Corps' communication priorities for the Service in order to build and retain our Nation's support of the Marine Corps through cohesive storytelling and public engagement. It is equally important that Americans possess an understanding of "why" their Marine Corps exists and for "what" purpose, lest we find ourselves lacking the resources, equipment, or willpower necessary for our all-volunteer force to succeed. Operations, activities, and investments (OAI) spanning across the Fleet Marine Forces (FMF) and Headquarters, Marine Corps (HQMC) should be synchronized and driven towards a shared understanding of what Service initiatives or priorities they communicate and whom we must connect with to inform, educate, foster advocacy, and maintain public trust. This communication strategy serves as a perennial reference enabling this synchronization and aims to assist commanders, leaders, and communication strategy professionals at all levels toward sharing the central tenets of why the Marine Corps is critical to enabling the Department of the Navy and Joint Force in defending our Nation and our allies from the myriad of 21st Century global threats. Lastly, this document sets the foundation for the Marine Corps' holistic communication approach for the long-term, whose tenets and OAIs are formally implemented via each subsequent "Annual Year Communication Campaign Plan," as well as through updated iterations of the HQMC "Communication Directorate (CD) Playbook" (both published separately by HQMC CD).

The U.S. Marine Corps Communication Strategy builds and retains our Nation's support through deliberate communication topics and methods that create holistic understanding of the mission and purpose of our Corps as America's naval expeditionary force-in-readiness.



WHY WE MUST COMMUNICATE

We are in the midst of a decisive period in our Nation's history, where the actions of our Corps in the 21st Century will project generational impacts far beyond those currently in our ranks. As we have transitioned from years of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency into a period of Great Power Competition, the 2018 and 2022 National Defense Strategies have changed our priorities. Traditional threats to U.S. global interests have not diminished, and the Marine Corps must remain prepared to respond to crisis throughout the globe. Thus, we are adapting our force to meet the demands of the future fight through the implementation of our Service initiatives and adoption of critical operating concepts via Force Design 2030.

Modernization efforts allow our Corps to maintain its lethality while continuing to communicate our value to the

Joint Force. Through this evolution it is equally important to guarantee the buy-in of the Nation by ensuring the American public possesses an understanding of the unique capabilities the Marine Corps brings to bear on behalf of the Nation, particularly as those capabilities become more complex.

Reaffirming our purpose comes at a time of dynamic changes in trust, confidence, prioritization, and understanding in and of our military and our Service within the American public. Trust and confidence in U.S. institutions, particularly in the government¹, are at their lowest in 40 years due to a variety of political and economic factors. Despite this, American trust and confidence in the military ranks second highest only behind small business in both categories. Yet, even with the American public's continual faith in the military to protect the Nation and to remain true to its oath, less than 40% of the public believes the military should be a priority in policy or practice by the government. The

institution ranked 15 out of 18 topics polled in 2022², which indicates a disconnect between military priorities and the public's support for its aims.

Amidst this paradoxical perception environment, there is also an increasing civil-military divide characterized by the public's separation from those who serve and a general lack of knowledge in the military writ large. The public's disinterest and lack of knowledge in the military puts our Corps at risk, particularly in an information space where our Service uniqueness does not always break through the knowledge and perception gap.

With that said, our brand as a Service is still known for its prestige, and the public's confidence in the Marine Corps is the highest amongst all services to protect the Nation³. Conversely, like the military writ large, our Service also ranks poorly in a number of other important categories, to include favorability, likelihood to join, and overall importance to national defense. The public clearly views the military as trustworthy and important to the Nation, and the Marine Corps as effective in the execution of its duties. However, there are layers to these public perceptions that affect the military as a whole and the Marine Corps individually.

At a time where our Corps is becoming more complex to meet the challenges of the 21st Century, the challenge is to **communicate our Service value in a clear and comprehensible way** that inspires and reminds the Nation of our historical purpose in a modern context.

"NARRATIVE" OF THE 21ST CENTURY MARINE CORPS

To confront the myriad of security challenges outlined in the National Security and Defense Strategies, our 38th Commandant is clear that the Corps must modernize and adapt to rapidly meet changing geopolitical circumstances of a new era. The United States remains a maritime nation, and in this hyper-competitive century, America will rely on its Marine Corps to be an extremely adaptable and agile naval expeditionary force-in-readiness. Our Marines must be forward-deployed and forward-postured, fighting in partnership with the U.S. Navy and Joint Force, making us instantly mobile, self-sustained, scalable, and lethal. Today and every day you will find nearly 38,000 Marines forward deployed around the globe. This enables the Corps to be first on scene, first to help, first to contain a brewing crisis,

and if required to do so, first to fight anywhere for as long as it takes to buy time, create decision-space, or enable the Joint Force.

Marines bring unmatched combined arms capability, adapting to all-domain threats through a modernized design that incorporates emerging technologies and changes in force structure to deliver a Marine Corps the Nation needs and demands. Amphibious warships are the cornerstone of the Navy-Marine Corps maritime crisis response force, and there is no substitute. Our persistent presence within integrated naval power-whether as Stand-in Forces (SIF), Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO), or as a part of naval-task forces-must provide warfighting capabilities that deter our adversaries from conflict, and if that fails, dominate inside the enemy's weapon engagement zone (WEZ).

But a Corps like this is about more than capabilities and equipment-it's about Marines. And, to meet existing national defense imperatives, the Marine Corps must also modernize how it recruits and retains Marines with the requisite talent. Marines themselves remain the greatest weapons in America's arsenal-each polished and capable, battle-tested, resilient, and determined to fight and to win.

Talent Management 2030 outlines our Corps' initiatives to recruit and retain high quality Marines to professionalize our future force in order to keep those Marines poised and conditioned for 21st Century challenges. Training and Education 2030 is the manifestation of years-long work to modernize the resources for service-wide training and learning tools. Marines are the products of quality training that defines the rigorous standard of excellence for our force and promote a culture of where we challenge ourselves and our peers. The advancement of our training and education continuum shapes the force by developing Marines who are intuitive problem solvers capable of making consequential decisions in uncertain environments. **It remains the Marine Corps' imperative to man, train, and equip the force to respond to current and future threats against our Nation with innovative warfighting capabilities in any clime and place, and in every domain from sea to space.**

As our world becomes more complex, America will continually rely on the Corps to deploy an elite fighting force that can adapt to a changing world by countering threats to our Nation and defending our friends-working side by side, upholding our values, and winning battles. This is America's 21st Century Marine Corps.

¹2022 Gallup Poll on Trust in U.S. Institutions and 2022 Gallup Poll on Confidence in U.S. Institutions


²2022 Pew Research Center Survey on the Public's Top Priorities for 2022

³2022 Q3 Gallup Survey, CHINFO


MASTER NARRATIVE

America's Marines are always ready to respond and ensure our Nation prevails against her adversaries-today and in the future.

- C COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE**
- O OPERATIONAL FORCES**
- S SUPPORTING ESTABLISHMENT**



WHO WE ARE
A Corps of professional, disciplined, capable, and strong Marines



WHAT WE DO
Serve the Nation and enable the Joint Force as a naval expeditionary force-in-readiness



WHEN WE DO IT
First to fight whenever our Nation calls

CONTENT THEME

- Embody core values
- Leadership qualities
- Proud history and legacy
- Representative of our Nation
- Innovative and adaptable
- Smart, elite warriors

CONTENT THEME

- An optimized naval force ready for the future battle
- Marines deliver the warfighting expertise our Nation demands
- An integrated force of ground, aviation, and logistics assets designed for swift deployment

CONTENT THEME

- Ready whenever our Nation calls
- Fighting our Nation's battles, providing disaster and humanitarian relief, and resolving conflicts before they escalate is an essential function of deployed Marines
- In competition, crisis, and conflict

C MESSAGE
Through a relentless commitment to emerge victorious, Marines embody the uncompromising standards and characteristics of honor, courage and commitment.

C MESSAGE
We are a naval expeditionary force-in-readiness that will quickly respond to threats against our Nation with innovative lethal and non-lethal warfighting capabilities in all domains.

O MESSAGE
Marines are always ready to answer our Nation's call. We fight and win in any clime and place.



WHERE WE FIGHT
We train and operate in every clime and place and in every domain from sea to space



WHY WE DO IT
To support the National Defense Strategy



HOW WE DO IT
Trained to improvise, adapt and overcome any obstacle in whatever situation we are needed

CONTENT THEME

- Posture: The Marine Corps is forward-stationed, forward-deployed, and globally engaged
- We train and operate in every clime and place
- We survive and thrive in weapons engagement zones

CONTENT THEME

- The Marine Corps supports national defense
- When needed, Marines possess the capabilities and the determination to fight and to keep fighting until victory is assured

CONTENT THEME

- Warfighting and lethality
- Marines are trained to improvise, adapt, and overcome all obstacles in all situations
- Innovation and optimization
- Training and education

O MESSAGE
At any given moment in time, there are tens of thousands of Marines serving in more than 200 locations domestically and abroad, ready to respond when called.

C MESSAGE
In current and future battles; we train Marines to defeat the challenges, obstacles, and adversaries that hinder our Nation's progress.

C MESSAGE
The Marine Corps provides our Nation with a variety of response options in the form of a Marine Air-Ground Task Force that is built to conduct a full range of operations at a moment's notice.

COMMUNICATION PRIORITIES

Five communication priorities guide the Marine Corps Communication Strategy. They exemplify our enduring qualities/capabilities as a Service and provide a structure for the basis of our stories, as well as reinforce the Department of the Navy's "Enduring Priorities" of: *Strengthening Maritime Dominance in the Defense of our Nation, Building a Culture of Warfighting Excellence, and Strengthening Strategic Partnerships.*

LEGACY, HISTORY, AND VALUES

- **The Marine Corps has served the Nation honorably.** Through relentless commitment to emerge victorious, Marines embody the uncompromising standards and characteristics of honor, courage, and commitment.
- **The Marine Corps is first to fight.** Whatever the crisis might be, our civilian leaders should have one shared thought: Send in the Marines.
- **The Marine Corps is a professional, disciplined, and capable force.** The sentiment evoked by the values honor, courage, and commitment are seen and felt in the shared experiences, hardships, and challenges in training and combat. These values embody what it is to be a Marine, and they live in the collective soul of our Corps.

QUALITY PEOPLE

- **The Marine Corps is successful because of the individual Marine.** How we recruit, train, educate, equip, and treat our Marines is what makes the Marine Corps an elite warfighting organization. People are the main effort by which we convey our purpose and mission.
- **The Marine Corps is a force dependent on talent, discipline, and execution.** We require a more mature, resilient, talented force, gained through improved retention and realistic training. Training conditions must replicate current and future operating environments to ensure Marines and their units are prepared as the Nation's naval expeditionary force-in-readiness.
- **The Marine Corps invests in each and every Marine.** To best prepare Marines for the demands of combat and leadership, we must

prioritize personnel and funding dedicated to education and training to keep pace with the evolving character of warfare.

- **The Marine Corps develops quality citizens.** When a person earns the title and serves the Nation as a Marine, they return to their communities as productive and focused citizens, having selflessly contributed to a purpose greater than themselves, continuing to display the fighting spirit to make their communities and enterprises stronger because of their service.

LEADERSHIP AND PUBLIC TRUST

- **Marine Corps leaders set the standard.** Access, transparency, accountability, and safety must guide how Marines and our Corps operates and communicates.
- **Marine Corps leaders are institutional advocates.** Our Service leaders play an integral role in driving positive public perception of the Marines and Sailors they lead as well as the capabilities they provide. Communication remains the commander's responsibility by planning and prioritizing key-leader engagements and public outreach with recurring frequency across all levels.
- **Marine Corps leaders are responsible stewards.** The American people and the U.S. Congress entrust precious national resources that underwrite the success of our Corps, and we must continue their preservation and responsible employment.

WARFIGHTING AND LETHALITY

- **Marines are warfighters first, and always.** Every Marine a rifleman, and every Marine officer a rifle platoon commander. This unique characteristic separates Marines from all Services, at home and globally.
- **The Marine Corps innovates to meet the demands of today and tomorrow.** The Marine Corps must be prepared to adapt when the war it encounters is different than the one it imagined. Our capability as a modernized amphibious war organization is focused on analytically-driven innovation, wargaming, and experimentation.

- **The Marine Corps must prepare to operate in contest with the pacing threat.** Programs or organizational constructs do not define us. We will build one force, optimized for naval expeditionary warfare in contested spaces, and purpose-built to facilitate sea denial and assured access in support of our Naval fleets.

PRESENCE AND READINESS

- **The Marine Corps is the premier naval expeditionary force-in-readiness.** We fight from the sea. Operating with the U.S. Navy, Marines remain at the ready to respond to diverse threats against our Nation (and our allies) across all domains-spanning battles against armed combatants to providing rapid-response and aid due to natural disasters.
- **The Marine Corps operates on land, in the air, and at sea.** Whether forward-postured or forward-deployed, the Marine Corps remains fundamentally naval and expeditionary in character and identity, as capable and formidable on the seas as operating ashore. This underpins the mainstay of our enduring mantra: first to fight.
- **The Marine Corps is prepared to support the Joint Force.** Forward-postured, steady state forces serving as the forward observer for the Joint Force, operating in contested areas and capable of transitioning rapidly from competition to crisis to conflict and back again. This creates a strategic advantage for joint and combined military operations.

CONNECTING TO THE PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDERS

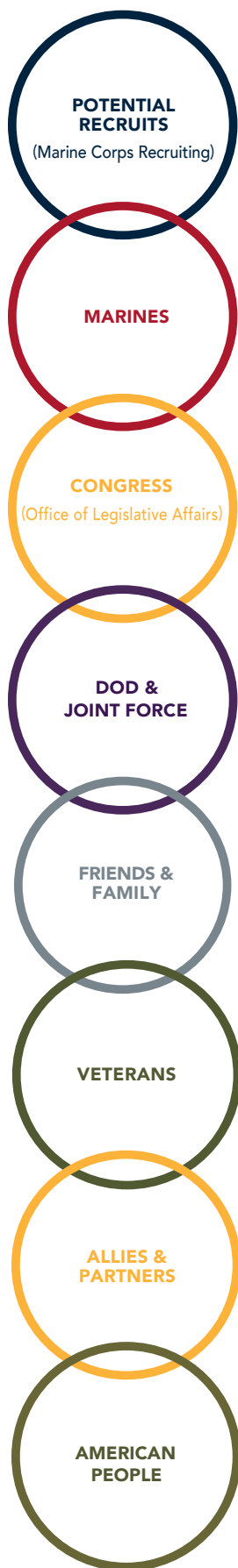
Marines at all levels should be trained, equipped, and empowered to communicate the progress and purpose of the Marine Corps in today's environment, and they must understand that communication is the summation of the words they use and the actions they take. Failure to communicate in accordance with this strategy minimizes the potential to inform and shape perceptions about who we are as a Service. **Context and execution matter.**

One size does not always fit all, and when we segment the American public or expand to our allies and partners, we must refine our communication plans. It is important that commanders empower their Marines and Communication

Strategy and Operations (COMMSTRAT) professionals to not only understand the Service guidance but to tell the right story at the right time with the right audience-emphasizing modernization, innovation, adaptability, and lethality. To that end, establishing a deliberate and disciplined communication planning culture must be inclusive to commanders and commands.

APPROACHES TO COMMUNICATION

- **Develop leaders who are prepared and desire to communicate. Owning and sharing our Service equities is important to communicate our message effectively.** Commanders must lead from the front in communicating commonly and seeking engagements that align with our Service communication priorities. Leaders and commanders set the example for Marines across the Service to emulate, as well as the conditions for their units to connect with the stakeholders they serve.
- **Prioritize building and maintaining relationships with our stakeholders.** Our stakeholders are not passively receiving the information we share. Our story will be told whether we are part of the conversation or not. We must be present and in touch with those who consistently develop the narrative of who we are, and aggressively seek out those who have yet to understand our relevance-spanning diverse sectors to include (but not limited to) private industry, academia, think-tanks, "Hollywood," online influencers, and our elected officials. For the latter, it remains crucial that the Marine Corps maintain consistent engagement on its resourcing needs to Congress, and when funded, the Corps provides transparency and examples of the capabilities they deliver to the security of American taxpayers.
- **Provide our Marines and Sailors with a voice-they are the future.** Our Marines and Sailors are the backbone of the Corps, and we must tell the Corps' story through our people. We must train and provide them with opportunities to tell their portion of our larger story, and to be the connecting fabric to diverse regions and communities across the Nation.



GOALS	ROLE
<p>See a place for themselves within the ranks of the Marine Corps</p> <p>Seek purpose and want to belong to an elite legacy of warfighters</p> <p>Demonstrate willingness to engage and determination to defeat any opposing force</p>	<p>The Marine Corps' next generation of elite warfighters</p> <p>Demonstrate our values of honor, courage, and commitment</p>
<p>Understand the mission of the Marine Corps and how their unit and individual skills contribute to defense of the Nation</p> <p>Feel valued, and that the work they do is meaningful</p> <p>Respect tradition, legacy, and history</p> <p>Well-trained, adaptable, and ready to fight when called upon</p>	<p>The bedrock on which the organization depends upon for success</p> <p>Dual roles of 'consumers' and 'communicators' of our mission and purpose</p>
<p>Elected officials (and their professional staffs) understand the mission of the Marine Corps and its unique role within the Department of Defense</p> <p>Perceive Marines as professional, disciplined, capable, and highly-trained members of the U.S. Armed Forces-worthy of trust and investment</p> <p>Understand what capabilities the Marine Corps has, what capabilities the Marine Corps seeks, and why</p>	<p>Congress provides the resources and oversight that allows the Marine Corps to exist and operate</p> <p>Committees and Members influence foreign policy, national security affairs, and Service relationships with allies & partners</p>
<p>Promote and defend the Corps' mission as a naval expeditionary force-in-readiness; America's 911, crisis-response force</p> <p>Seek opportunities to train and work with Marines; understand the joint role Marines play inside contested spaces as apart of the larger Joint Force</p>	<p>Important partners with whom Marines train and operate</p> <p>Establish policies and directives that govern how Marines organize, train, and operate</p>
<p>Play a critical role in acceptance and endorsement of the Marine Corps</p> <p>Contribute to Marine readiness and stability</p> <p>Support the pursuit of a Marine Corps career choice (future and current)</p> <p>Proud and actively engaged with the Marine Corps family ecosystem</p> <p>Share organizational knowledge with new community members</p>	<p>Marine Corps advocates</p> <p>Contribute to each individual Marine's readiness and support system</p>
<p>Advocate for the mission and proud warfighting legacy of the Marine Corps</p> <p>Exhibit personal pride in their contributions during active years</p> <p>Positively influence potential recruits</p> <p>Continue to exhibit honor, courage, and commitment while identifying as a Marine</p>	<p>Represent the Marine Corps in their communities and online</p> <p>Serve as mentors to Marines leaving active service</p> <p>Set positive conditions within their community for future recruiting</p>
<p>Understand our mission and how it fits into Joint/Combined/Multi-National Force</p> <p>Perceive Marines as professional, disciplined, responsible, capable, and strong members of the U.S. Armed Forces</p> <p>Prefer U.S. as the partner of choice and seek to partner with Marines in exchange programs, security conferences, and military exercises</p>	<p>Important partners with whom Marines train and operate</p> <p>Maintain interoperable military networks that enhance joint and combined warfighting capabilities</p>
<p>Perceive Marines as professional, disciplined, responsible, capable, and strong members of the U.S. Armed Forces</p> <p>Perceive the U.S. is committed to global security</p>	<p>Support and advocate for the U.S. Marine Corps as a critical and necessary component of national defense</p>

METHODS FOR COMMUNICATION

- **Direct Engagement.** It is imperative that Marines and Sailors engage with the public, implicitly and explicitly, because it expands our ability to tell our story. Our Marines are professional, elite warfighters charged with the complex task of defending this Nation—they remain the physical ambassadors of our brand. Whether through community relations events, professional panels, or meetings with congressional representatives—making meaningful connections with our stakeholders reinforces public trust, confidence, advocacy, and understanding.
- **Media Engagement.** Accredited reporters, journalists, producers, digital (social media) influencers, film production companies, and interested citizens will tell our story whether we facilitate its development or not. We must seek and/or create opportunities through proactive planning and relationship development/management to afford professional media and key influencers **the access to tell our stories.**
- **Digital Media Engagement.** When used effectively, official social media and web platforms present unequalled opportunities

to share our Marine Corps’ story authentically, transparently, and rapidly. Seven-in-ten Americans use social media to connect with one another, engage with news content, share information, and entertain themselves.¹ These channels help build trust with new audiences we may not reach through traditional communication channels. We must also find the means to creatively empower and task-organize our most digitally “plugged-in” warrior generation to organically share and tell their Marine Corps story (in concert with this strategy and subsequent communication campaigning).

- **Communication Strategists.** Marine Corps COMMSTRAT professionals are resources who plan, synchronize, and execute communication on behalf of the Service and Marine Corps units worldwide. While every Marine and Sailor can and should share their story, COMMSTRAT professionals are force multipliers that exist to support senior leaders and all Marines and Sailors to meet the communication needs of the Corps. Include, use, and empower your COMMSTRAT professionals early and often to drive your communication OALs.

¹2021 Pew Research Center Survey on Social Media Use

COMPONENTS TO OUR COHESIVE STORY TELLING STRATEGY



Again, if we do not tell our story, someone else will. To remain silent is to risk the relevance of our “voice” and context in the telling of our story. We must communicate by providing access to unique and compelling opportunities to help shape the public’s perception of the 21st Century Marine Corps, and by doing so, we will directly influence the policies and resources required **to accomplish our mission.**

Additional Strategy & Communication Resources:

2019 Commandant's Planning Guidance

Force Design 2030 and Force Design 2030 Annual Updates

Force Design 2030 Website: <https://www.marines.mil/Force-Design-2030/>

Corps Vision Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1xJHDwG5do>

CD Communication Playbook

Talent Management 2030

Training and Education 2030

