Discovering Our Culture

T.R.I.P.S.

San Antonio River Authority
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Introduction

**Culture and Our North Star**

What does organizational culture mean exactly? Businesses and organizations define culture as the organization’s expectations, experiences, philosophy, and values that hold it together, and culture is expressed in its self-image, inner workings, interactions with the outside world, and future expectations.

It is based on shared attitudes, beliefs, customs, and written and unwritten rules that have been developed over time.

To put it more simply, it’s the our North Star. Just like the North Star, our culture is a fixed guide that we can depend on to remain constant in our organization. When we find ourselves in unfamiliar territory, our culture leads us in the right direction. It is how we work, how we communicate, how we make decisions, how we perform, the results we achieve, and our commitment to our community as public servants.

The ideas surrounding culture can sometimes seem like an intangible concept and difficult to put into words.

The truth of the matter is, intentional or not, every organization has a culture. It is our responsibility as SARA inspirers to align our actions everyday at work with what we value as important components of our organization’s culture. In order to do that, we have to identify and understand the elements that make up SARA’s culture.

**Discovering our SARA Culture:** We have intentionally set out to put our insights down on paper to describe how we work at SARA.

As we embark on our culture exploration, we have to keep an open mind and consider the importance of why our culture is so important to our success as an organization.
Expedition Behavior

Paul Petzoldt, legendary mountaineer, environmentalist and founder of the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), coined the term “expedition behavior” to describe the human interaction necessary for a successful expedition.

Expedition behavior incorporates these aspects into everyday behavior as the group embarks on any outdoor expedition.

• Serve the mission and goals of the group
• Be kind: treat everyone with dignity and respect
• Do what needs to be done
• Support leadership and growth in everyone
• Be inclusive: value and welcome diversity within your group
• Have a tolerance for adversity and uncertainty

Rather than perfect technical skills, these guidelines are often what makes the difference in a successful expedition and an unsuccessful one.

These same ideas can be transcended into the workplace; and at SARA, we often refer to our expedition behavior as the SARA way.

We want to identify key aspects of our culture that enable us to create a work environment where we are having fun, being fulfilled, accomplishing goals, and having a meaningful impact through our daily work.

Cairn of Culture

Outdoor enthusiasts and adventurers use a variety of handy gadgets that can help guide their way while exploring various outdoor terrain. One of the oldest methods utilized is not one of great technological magic, it is actually created without any technology at all - it is a pile of rocks.

Cairns have been around since ancient times and are built for a variety of different cultural and spiritual purposes. However, for backpackers, hikers, and paddlers, cairns are often used as trail markers.
Cairns serve as navigation aids and they help guide the individual or group to a path when there is no clear trail to follow or there are no trail signs in sight. Outdoor explorers can travel for miles with confidence on a worn path leading them to their destination. When that worn or marked path disappears their first instinct is to look for a cairn that might give them the guidance they need to confidently continue on their journey.

Just as these trail cairns are a tool to help guide those outdoor explorers in times of uncertainty or even in their daily journey, we as SARA’s group of inspirers have our own cairns that we look for when we seek guidance in our everyday work.

As we embark on our own journey to identify aspects of our SARA culture, we want to narrow down our focus to the key elements that serve as the foundational rocks we used to build our culture cairn.

**T** Trust is the foundation of our communication

**R** Results are the foundation of our effectiveness

**I** Impact is the foundation of our performance

**P** People and Public Service are the foundation of our organization

**S** Strategy is the foundation of our decision making

Trip: to make a journey, or course of travel taken as part of one’s duty, work, etc.
Like many aspects of our culture cairn, trust is an element of our culture that is built with intention and purpose. It is how we foster our relationships with each other and the groundwork behind how we effectively communicate within SARA.

Paddling the elements of trust

The stream of communication

We create a steady stream of communication that uniquely flows both upstream and downstream.

What does this look like in action?

- We regularly share information about the business
- We share updates on current internal/external projects
- We speak clearly and concisely
- We actively listen to understand
- We openly share ideas and ask for feedback
- We engage in crucial conversations to better support each other

Unmuddy the waters

Transparency alone isn’t enough at SARA. We aim to unmuddy the waters by having both transparent and productive conversations. We give people the information they need at the right time in order to understand and see the big picture. When we unmuddy the waters, we are willing to have the necessary honest conversations that not only foster growth in our people but establish the trust needed to build strong teams.

What does this look like in action?

- Fluid supervisor to employee feedback
- Fluid employee to supervisor feedback
- Giving candid and timely peer to peer feedback
- Recognizing and energizing each other by communicating praises
- We ask for clarification when we don’t understand
- We learn to listen to truly hear what is being said; not to dominate or push our way as the only way
Surprise!

Sweeper ahead

In the paddling world, a sweeper is known as an overhanging obstacle like a low hanging branch or tree limb. These sweepers can create dangerous river hazards that can even lead a paddler to be swept from their canoe or kayak. One of the easiest ways that paddlers avoid these dangerous obstacles is just simply by knowing that they are there in the first place. They communicate with other paddlers who have experience with the route and river so that they can prepare for their own expedition.

We reinforce our trust in each other by giving others the full picture. Openly sharing what we know with others who may not know is how we are able to effectively solve problems and create innovative solutions.

In some cases that means having to share news that requires others to change course completely. That’s never fun, but we create conditions where people feel safe to share all news - good and bad.

What does this look like in action?

- Committed to sharing all news - good and bad
- Offer options to help others solve problems
- Avoid surprises by sharing relevant information

More information is always better than less. When people know the reason things are happening, even if it’s bad news, they can adjust their expectations and react accordingly. Keeping people in the dark only serves to stir negative emotions.

Simon Sinek

When was the last time someone shared bad news with you?

What was your reaction?

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The Expert Halo

As human beings, the nature of someone’s expertise or authority tends to make a significant impression on us. So much that even when we have other information that leads us to believe the expert is wrong, we ignore it. We continue to follow their lead, and even worse, we may not even speak up to tell that person they might be wrong.

This is the expert halo and we practice not falling into the expert halo trap by making a commitment to speak truth to power. We share trust in our colleagues that they are motivated to operate in the best interest of SARA.

What does this look like in action?

- Regardless of position, we don’t let someone believe their information is correct when we know it’s not
- We respect expertise and experience, but we don’t assume that the expert knows everything
- We share all of the facts

Leadership by Trust

No matter how skilled or how prestigious of a title a person has, they aren’t influencing others if they aren’t working to establish trust. Leaders who have built a pillar of trust do so through the respect and care that they have for others. It is not built overnight and as author David Hosager says, “Trust is like a forest. It takes a long time to grow but can burn down with a just touch of carelessness.”

Our communication at SARA relies on the foundation of trust, and we work intentionally to ensure our actions cultivate an environment where we trust each other.
Trust Passport Checklist

It’s your turn to begin the journey to build your own T.R.I.P.S. cairn. Like most trips, you’ll need a few required documents for travel.

Below is a check list to help gather your TRUST stone

• Practice improving your active listening skills by paying close attention to the full message being communicated. Use your passport to write down what differences and improvements you’ve seen in your communication when you are actively listening to understand the full message.
• Go to lunch with someone outside of your department.
• Plan or coordinate a team building activity for your team or a small group.
  • Example: Group lunch, team hikes, or team happy hour
Hitting Your Mark of Excellence

Every journey has a purpose. On any outdoor expedition, backpackers, hikers, paddlers, and those alike plan their route by first determining where they want to go. They often identify a landmark on the map and set a goal to reach that reference point. This is known as marking your “X”.

Before embarking on their daily expedition, the adventurer will assess both internal and external conditions. They will identify their own ways of measuring progress that include setting smaller goals to meet along the way. As an outdoor explorer, hitting your mark means you have identified a goal and executed a plan to successfully get to the “X” - the goal.

This practice is similar to how we hit our mark of excellence at SARA. The process requires strategic thought with an understanding of our environment. It requires setting long-term and short-term goals and determining a plan as to how we will reach them.

Thoughts:

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First

Responsiveness

In times of serious need, outdoor enthusiasts rely on wilderness first responders to do just that - respond. The circumstances usually involve responding to a medical care request in remote areas where communication is limited. While it may seem far fetch to parallel SARA responsiveness to that of a wilderness responder, we believe responsiveness is crucial element to our culture.

At SARA, we expect each other to maintain a commitment of responsiveness to everyone.

As public servants, we are dedicated to serve the public and provide timely and accurate information.

What does this look like in action?

• Honor your commitments to internal and external customers
• Set high standards of responsiveness to everyone
• Do not judge or criticize, or condescend any request by anyone.
• Be timely on responses to calls, emails, and letters
• Respect everyone

Imagine this:

You’ve just started kayaking down a familiar but major river run packed with strenuous white rapids. It is one of your favorite runs because of it’s challenging nature and skills required to successfully paddle this beast.

While this particular run is one you’ve done before, you’ve still practiced your routine efforts to prepare. Nonetheless, you reach the halfway mark of the run and begin to realize something is different. Some unexpected environmental changes have caused this section of the run to be more sporty than it’s been in the past. You think to yourself, “This may not end well.”

You paddle harder to push through the super natural force of the water. You can feel its power and its sting with every splash against your face.

As you maneuver through the final stretch, a sigh of relief hits you like a breath of fresh air - you know everything is going to be just fine.

When you finally get to steady calm water - What comes to your mind first?

Thoughts:

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Remount
Reenter
Relaunch
We believe in up-tapping new ways of doing things we’ve already done. As humans we have a tendency of putting ourselves on autopilot when we repeat routine tasks. At SARA, we avoid autopilot mode, and we seek out innovative mode. If there is a better, faster, more accurate way to perform task - we find it.

Remount, reenter, relaunch is a concept that is used when kayakers are capsized from their watercraft. It is times like these when a kayaker has to make intentional efforts to get back in their craft and keep heading toward the finish line.

At SARA, we take a similar approach in moments when we miss our mark or “overturn the boat.” We assess our surroundings, learn from our experiences, and reposition ourselves to better our chances to successfully accomplish our goal. Learning from what we’ve just experienced, we remount, develop a plan to reenter, and prepare to relaunch.

What does this look like in action?

- Find opportunity in times where you fall short
- Up-tap new ways to improve accuracy and efficiency in your work
- Ask questions like: Can I do this differently to achieve better results?
- In times where you fall short, don’t give up.
- Be resourceful - know your limits and assess your resources
- Look at the skills and strengths of your team
- Reach out to others internal and in the industry

Thoughts:

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“If we don’t change, we don’t grow. If we don’t grow, we aren’t really living.”

~ Gail Sheehy
The Debrief

One of the most beneficial components of any hiking trip is the debrief. It typically takes place at the end of each day and allows the individual or group to reflect and discuss topics regarding what went well, what didn’t go so well, what new knowledge or skills were developed, and what skills need more developing.

At SARA, we see the benefits of the debrief when we take time to reflect on our own results. We practice the debrief a little differently in that it does not only take place at the end of our achievements but also when we plan our goals and while we are working to achieve them. Being effective isn’t enough for SARA inspirers. Having meaningful goals that are met in a timely and accurate manner are qualities that we find important to our work.

What does this look like in action?

Debrief in Strategy:
- Review/share information with everyone on the project
- Discuss the known/potential challenges

Debrief in the moment:
- Are we on track?
- Discuss the unexpected challenges and adjust accordingly
- Share the good and the bad with those involved

Debrief in reflection:
- What is the result we wanted?
- Was it delivered timely and accurate?
- Did I use my resources efficiently?
- Share pitfalls
Results

Passport Checklist

Below is a check list to help gather your RESULTS stone

- Use the debrief action cards on a new project. Use your passport to write down and share your experiences using the debrief cards. What debrief stage did you find most helpful?
- Meet with your supervisor for a feedback on a successful project. Use your passport to write down feedback notes.
- Practice utilizing your resources and discovering new ones that improve your overall effectiveness. This includes investigating new resources and topics that might help you in current or future projects. Establish go-to internet resources, professional organizations, etc. Write them down in your passport.
In a recent study reviewed by LinkedIn, findings revealed that organizations are looking for high-performers who are purpose-oriented. The firm who executed the study, Imperative, defined purpose-oriented employees as, “those who see work as a personal fulfillment and helping other people.”

Organizations Leading with Purpose

The study also outlined three core elements of culture and jobs that deliver an experience of purpose to their employees: positive impact on others, personal development, and delivery of work through strong relationships.

In the illustration below, Gary Keller, author of The One Thing, identifies the one thing for achieving extraordinary results is purpose. His formula links purpose, priority, and productivity together. He iterates that productivity, priority and purpose are related, and, most importantly, what you see is determined by what you don’t.
Integrity isn’t just a word that we put on the walls of our buildings. It is the foundational value that models the behavior and attitude of the work we do at SARA. It makes up our DNA and is demonstrated in our character.

We honor and live through integrity by upholding absolute honesty. We realize that our reputation is built on our voice and everything that we say maintains our credibility as public servants. The importance of what we choose to withhold carries equal significance. We understand that great leaders never compromise their honesty and that deluding others means you are ultimately deluding yourself.

We stand for honesty by ensuring we act in a way that reinforces our beliefs of sharing nothing but the full truth, every single day.

We do what is right, and we do not let our behavior be influenced by others who do not share our values.

We take pride in being honest and trustworthy public servants. We appreciate our role as stewards of public funds, and we seek to have confidence from the public that we are true to our mission.

**Integrity:**

1. The quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness.
2. The state of being whole and undivided.

What does this look like in action?

- Keep promises made
- Live honestly and stay true to our mission
- Be transparent and do what you know is right
- Speak the full truth and do not withhold information to your benefit

How do we improve the confidence others have in our integrity?
Paddle more,

**Drift less**

Most paddlers will tell you that falling out of your boat is never fun. One tip often shared to maintain balance is simple - keep your paddle moving.

If we are not actively paddling, we are drifting. Paddling allows us to steer ourselves in the direction we want to go and gives us the momentum we need to keep moving forward.

Author and leadership guru, Michael Hyatt, refers to this idea as, “How to avoid the power of the drift.” In his example of the drift, he recounts a time when he went on trip with his wife to Maui. On this trip, he and his wife discovered a newfound hobby of snorkeling. He describes looking at the vast beauty of life underneath the surface of the water.

He was mesmerized by the colorful fish and coral that covered the ocean floor. As his gaze turned into a trance, his paddling slowed down until he allowed himself to remain afloat by the ocean’s drift. Before he knew it, he was in the power of drift and when he lifted his head out of the water he realized just how powerful the drift was. He could hardly see the shoreline, and he knew he was in trouble.

It can be easy to let ourselves get drawn into the power of the drift, but we avoid doing so if we practice paddling more and drifting less. Our paddling is demonstrated in our performance as SARA inspirers. At SARA, we maintain a spirit of curiosity that leads us to do more. We don’t let our achievements slow us down, in fact, we let them inspire new ideas that lead us to deliver more than others think is possible.

### What does this look like in action?

- Inspire new ideas
- Maintain a spirit of curiosity
- Keep an open mind
- One idea may spark many, so speak up
- Execute and deliver big ideas
- Stay on course and manage distractions to sharpen focus
- We set high standards for ourselves (and each other) and expect them to be met

### What is your personal definition of integrity?

Real integrity is doing the right thing, knowing that nobody’s going to know whether you did or not.

-Oprah Winfrey-
The **good**
the **bad**
and the ugly

For most, when it comes to performance sharing, the good news is just about all we ever want to share. However, we all know that there are times where we all fall short and the difference at SARA is that we understand the importance of sharing the good, the bad, and the ugly. Even further, we take responsibility for all of our actions, and we own our mistakes whole heartedly.

Your Expedition Team

According to the expedition framework outlined by NOLS*, on every successful group expedition, every team member fills a variety of leadership roles in order to achieve their ultimate goal.

If we think about this in terms of a backpacking expedition, not all group members are going to share the same strengths or expertise. Some might be excellent cooks while others might be expert navigators. Both of these strengths are important to providing the support needed to accomplish the mission.

It would be difficult to trade out teammates in the middle of a major expedition. Which is why from the initial first day of the hike the team starts out with an already earned sense of trust and commitment to achieve success. Their success is not only defined by completing the expedition goals but by making sure everyone on the team crosses the finish line.

In most cases, expedition teams are not built by chance. They are built by understanding individual strengths and strategically placing individuals in positions where they have the most impact. They want the best of the best on their team, and when they recruit, they look for those who posses similar values but unique talents.

*NOLS - National Outdoor Leadership School

What does this look like in action?

- Take responsibility for actions good and bad
- Don't deflect on what is yours.
- Be open to feedback that poses opportunities to get better
At SARA, we understand the importance of building high performing teams. We know that the people on our teams have undeniable and unique talents.

Like expedition teams, we leverage each others’ strengths to ensure everyone is in a role in which their strengths flourish. As team players, we know that sometimes we have a responsibility that we may not like, but we take ownership and use our strengths to do what it takes to get the job done.

We utilize resources that help us discover our individual strengths and unique natural talents. Many of us have taken assessments like the StrengthsFinder, MBTI, and DiSC to help us further identify, validate, and maximize our strengths.

Even further, as individuals we aim to become more self-aware of the strengths that do not come as naturally. We use this information to seek out others across the organization that can compliment our own strengths and support the overall team success.

What does this look like in action?

Take responsibility for being the best at what you do
  • Hire undeniable talent
  • Practice self-awareness by recognizing your strengths and opportunities to learn more
  • Take opportunities to learn from the experts
  • Help others solve problems
  • Work across boundaries to achieve results
  • Let your strengths manifest themselves in all of your responsibilities, even the ones that aren’t as fun.

What are your top five strengths?

How have you been able to use them in a difficult task you’ve been assigned to do?

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Impact Passport Checklist

Below is a check list to help gather your IMPACT stone

- Reflect on your recent performance feedback and the areas that you have been tasked to improve. Use your passport to write the efforts that you've made to make those improvements.
- Use your passport to write down the major ideas or initiatives you have delivered. Explain where your inspiration stems from and how you will continue to inspire new ideas.
- Spend 5 hours each month dedicated to creative whitespace.
- Find another person, not on your team, in which you share one of your top five strengths. Meet and use the strength description cards (found on SARAnet) to guide a discussion on how to maximize that strength.
“The way you see people is the way you treat them, and the way you treat them is what they become.”

-Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
The Hull

The bottom half of a boat or kayak is known as the hull. It is considered to be the most important part of the vessel, because it is the foundation of the entire structure of the boat. Designing, maintaining, and taking care of the hull is how the boat continues to function properly. Some boaters will say the time and attention that you put towards caring for your hull will result in better performance from your vessel, leading to better protection for the other important components of the boat.

Like the hull, people are the foundation of our organization. They are the most valuable component of SARA, because they are the only way that we can fulfill our purpose as an organization. Just like the hull of a boat, we put forth a tremendous amount of effort in ensuring our people are being taken care of.

As our most valued asset, we place a high regard for the amount energy and investment we contribute to our greatest champion - you.

Thoughts:

Working hard for something we don't care about is called stress; working hard for something we love is called passion.

-Simon Sinek-
Mind
Body and
Spirit

When it comes to taking care of our people, we take a holistic approach to ensure we are meeting their needs to engage their mind, body, and spirit.

While employee health is important to us, we understand that employee wellness doesn’t just stop at health; it encompasses each individual’s overall well-being.

So while we encourage people to participate in biometric health screenings, better nutrition, and exercise, we also encourage people to take time to participate in our mindfulness course, mediation, and taking time to do the things that positively impact their emotional and mental health.

Outfitting

The term outfitting in the outdoor world is often used to describe equipping you boat or kayak with the right tools and accessories in order to get the best performance from your craft. Outfitting a kayak can not only make a huge difference in how your craft performs but also in how you perform as a paddler.

At SARA, we take a similar approach in that we “outfit” our people. Through training and development, we equip our people with the necessary tools they need to continue to perform at their very best. Skills based training is a necessary component that people need to grow in their craft (professional development) and leadership based training is a necessary component that people need to grow in life (personal development); we consider both components essential to outfitting our people.

Outfit: 1. the act of fitting out or equipping (as for a voyage or expedition)
2. a set of tools or equipment especially for the practice of a trade
Our care strategy

When we say we take care of our people it not only means that we provide them with the resources and benefits that they need. It means our approach to care encompasses a commitment to building connections with each other and genuine care for each individual.

We understand that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to leading people, and we practice paying attention to the individual needs of each person that make up our team. Actions alone don’t necessarily define how much you care, we stick to the motto, “People know you care when they know you care.” We are intentional in practicing our care strategy, and it is one of the most important elements of our SARA culture cairn.

In what ways can we intentionally show genuine care to each other?

What can you start doing differently?

Care is about engaging the heart - creating a culture of commitment versus compliance.

Disney
• Develop, share, and execute a new process improvement idea to support your team. Use your passport to describe the new process and how it has been able to positively impact your team.
• Use your passport to write down how you plan to "outfit" yourself both personally and professionally.
  • Example: What new skill will you learn and how will you learn it?
• Find ways to strengthen your mind, body, and spirit through learning, exercise, and reflection. Write them down in your passport.
“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

-Mahatma Gandhi
Navigating the Technical and Public Conditions

We know that our organization is made up of some of the most talented individuals from all over the country. Some of our experts are regarded as trailblazers for bringing awareness and efforts to improving the health and safety of our creeks and rivers, while others are recognized for developing innovative solutions to resolve some of the most complicated issues surrounding floodplain management. We take pride in our work as leaders in watershed solutions, but we know our legacy as community leaders is embedded in our work as public servants.

We understand that the underlying foundation of our work is first in public service, and our expertise aids in our efforts to achieve the goals aligned to the mission and vision of the River Authority.

We are aware of our obligation to navigate the technical aspects of any project we work on. However, we are also aware of the responsibility that we have to navigate the conditions of public response and perception. This means we consider the public impact in all of our decisions, and we are guided by both the technical and the public conditions of each endeavor we take on.

Knowing Our Stakeholders

Because not everyone has the same wants and needs, as public servants we have to consider all stakeholders and how each of our decisions will impact people and the environment differently.

Triple Bottom Line

We use the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) model in our process to evaluate public impacts and response. Through the TBL model, we aim to balance the environmental, economic and quality of life needs of our communities.
Steward-based Public Service

As a core value at SARA, stewardship is rooted in the basis of how we act as public servants. We exercise care in managing public funds and resources entrusted in us. Just like most experienced paddlers take time to familiarize themselves with a water route before setting out on their paddling trip, we as public servants take time to familiarize ourselves with the public environment and its conditions each time we make decisions. We assess current political conditions, potential challenges, and public concerns that we may need to address now and in the future.

What does this look like in action?

- Seek to understand how the community will respond.
- Consider how any action would look if reported by a media outlet.
- Ask yourself if the decision you are making is defensible, smart, and good public policy.
- Ask what your neighbors think about SARA’s activities, projects, etc.
- Does it meet the TBL?

Σ TBL

People = Social Performance
Planet = Environmental Performance
Profit = Economic Performance

= Sustainability
Public Servant
Passport Checklist

Below is a check list to help gather your PUBLIC SERVANT stone

- Take advantage of a SARA volunteer opportunity.
- Find ways to stay informed on local news and events. Write down some of your favorite outlets and share them with your colleagues at SARA.
- Find ways to get involved with your neighborhood association or community partners. Use your passport to write down a new idea or improvements to an existing initiative that would have a positive impact on the community. Share them with a SARA colleague.
Thoughts:

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Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less

-C.S. Lewis-
Holistic

The word holistic defined as an adjective is, “characterized by comprehension of the parts of something as intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole.”

Making decisions at SARA requires us to take a holistic approach and strategically assess our benefits and challenges of every decision. We understand that every decision we make is interconnected to SARA’s big picture. It is up to us to ensure the connection is the best decision for the organization as a whole.

While we strive to use all of our resources efficiently, we use the SARA Strategic Plan as our main guide to making decisions.

Our strategic plan is our map that helps us reach our short term and long term destinations (or goals). Many times when we are on the brink of an idea our first step is to see how moving forward will strategically align with the mission, vision, and goals outlined in the strategic plan.

Mission and Vision

Mission and vision alignment is the other guide that we use when making decisions at SARA. If our strategic objectives do not align to our mission and vision then we have no mission or vision. When we are off the trail, walking unguided, we are what hikers might refer to as bushwhacking.

What is the SARA Mission and Vision?

Bushwhack: 1. the process of traveling off-trail, sometimes through dense trees, branches and bushes.
There are two perspectives in which we look at downstream connections. At SARA, we often use the term “downstream” in a literal sense when we refer to our lower basin that includes districts Wilson, Karnes and Goliad counties. Assessing how what we do in Bexar county will impact our downstream communities is crucial when making good decisions at SARA.

The other perspective of “downstream” stems from a more strategic and holistic approach. One of the most important components of how we holistically make decisions is by connecting the dots and assessing impact from where we are to where we want to go.

Making downstream connections is the part of the decision making strategy that takes a comprehensive approach to understanding how the decision will link internally and externally to our projects and goals now and later down the road.

The term “beta” in the outdoor world describes specific insider information about a hike, usually coming from someone who just completed it. Often times when a paddler or hiker is planning to explore a new route, they will rely on beta to gain information that will help them determine how they will execute a plan for their route. This is similar to our philosophies discussed earlier on regarding the importance of communication and sharing information for strategic decision making.

Many outdoor enthusiasts will tell you that two of the most important skills to have when navigating in any wilderness terrain is knowing how to read a map and work a compass. Similar to a company’s mission and vision, a compass tells you the direction you’re going. However, a compass is only useful if it is oriented with your map.

The map represents where you are and where you want to go. When you orient your compass you should be able to look in any direction and accurately see objects represented by the map.

If the features on the map don’t match up with what you see, it could be the result of a false reading and a misrepresentation of where you actually are. When we make decisions at SARA on the direction we want to go, we have to first orient ourselves to the current reality of where we are. We have to beware of false readings that may cause us to make decisions that are not based on all of the facts.
Taking a bearing

Intentionally going off trail isn’t always a bad thing. A backpacker might be steady on a trail when all of the sudden they encounter an unforeseen obstacle forcing them to go off trail. Despite some of the best laid-out planning, explorers have to be prepared to face obstacles and know how to get around them. Taking a bearing is a technique that explorers use to navigate their way off trail.

At SARA, we put our best foot forward in the amount of effort we put towards doing our homework and planning before executing our decisions. However, when we run into obstacles along the way we know how to navigate around them. We take smart risks and use the facts to inform our intuition.

Line of Sight

A good rule of thumb when group paddling is maintaining a good line-of-sight. This means maintaining view of everyone in the group so that each person can see everyone involved.

At SARA, we have a similar practice in that when we make decisions; we ask ourselves who needs to be involved and who is not currently in our line-of-sight that should be.

If we involve the right people and seek to see who is missing from our line-of-sight we improve our ability to make connections and think holistically.

What does this look like in action?

• Align your direction to the mission and vision
• Be strategic and think comprehensively about downstream impacts
• Be flexible and take smart risks
• Stay open minded to the best decision for the organization as a whole
• Involve the right people
• Collaborate with other teams
• Ask questions
• Use facts to inform your intuition
• Find discrepancies in your own position and others
• Make connections that others might miss
Strategy
Passport Checklist

Below is a check list to help gather your STRATEGY stone

• Think about your future. Come up with some clear goals and think beyond the immediate. Write them down and share them with a peer for feedback.
• In your passport, write down three projects that you have lead or contributed to. Then align those projects to an annual agency goal outlined in the current strategic plan.
**SAN ANTONIO RIVER AUTHORITY**

**FISCAL YEAR 2019/20**

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**VISION:**
INSPIRING ACTIONS FOR HEALTHY CREEKS AND RIVERS

**MISSION:**
COMMITTED TO SAFE, CLEAN, ENJOYABLE CREEKS AND RIVERS

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**WHAT SETS US APART:**
- Action oriented, engaged and informed elected Board of Directors.
- Innovative, sustainable, collaborative, and results-oriented solutions.
- Experts in watershed management and ecology.
- Caring, dedicated and passionate people providing responsive public service.

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**CORE VALUES**

- **STEWARDSHIP**
- **INTEGRITY**
- **EXCELLENCE**

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**AGENCY GOALS**

- **Advance Science and Engineering Expertise and Data** – Through research data, tools and models, SARA will continue to serve as the lead agency providing technical and science based information and solutions to advance our mission.

- **Enable Policy, Projects, and Actions** – Apply SARA’s expertise and resources to influence, develop, and implement recognized and sustainable improvements to the health and safety of our creeks, rivers, estuaries and bays.

- **Enhance Community Appreciation and Recreation** – Enhance community appreciation by supporting engagement with our creeks and rivers to ensure that these resources contribute to the quality of life of all residents.

- **Maximize Strategic Use of Resources** – Diversify and leverage funding, technology, and people (employees, partners, community) to strengthen business processes and SARA service delivery.

- **Inspire Employees and Build Expertise** – Emphasize the value SARA places on its employees, focus on people services, improve service efficiencies and the expertise that sets us apart from other organizations.

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**WE SERVE:**
- BEXAR
- WILSON
- KARNES
- GOLIAD

**APRIL 4, 2019**
**Advance Science and Engineering Expertise and Data** • Through research data, tools, and models, SARA will continue to serve as the lead agency providing technical and science based information and solutions to advance our mission.

- Target Investments to maintain SARA’s technical leadership in flood, water quality and ecosystem modeling, mapping and analysis; and watershed master planning.
- Advance the capability for consumers to easily access and use models, data and master plans through development of tools.

**Enable Policy, Projects and Actions** • Apply SARA’s expertise and resources to influence, develop, and implement recognized and sustainable improvements to the health and safety of our creeks, rivers, estuaries and bays.

- Target investments in projects and incentives that result in quantifiable water quality benefits.
- Promote healthy ecosystems through proactive ecological restoration projects.
- Proactively address the threats to creeks and rivers.
- Drive adoption of sustainable design and development policy.

**Enhance Community Appreciation and Recreation** • Enhance community appreciation by supporting engagement with our creeks and rivers to ensure that these resources contribute to the quality of life of all residents.

- Increase positive public awareness of and engagement with SARA.
- Grow the use of SARA parks and trails.
- Engage with community partners to expand recreational opportunities

**Maximize Strategic Use of Resources** • Diversify and leverage funding, technology, and people (employees, partners, community) to strengthen business processes and SARA service delivery.

- Pursue implementation of the facilities improvement and expansion plan.
- Increase service delivery of the utility enterprise.
- Improve service delivery of the utility enterprise.
- Review and update business processes and practices that mitigate organization risk.
- Ensure GIS data, applications and guidance documentation are easily accessible, intuitive and user-friendly, for both internal and external customers.

**Inspire Employees and Build Expertise** • Emphasize the value SARA places on its employees, focus on people services, improve service efficiencies and the expertise that sets us apart from other organizations.

- Advance the River Authority’s culture by improving employee resiliency through programs that support employees personally and professionally.
- Develop and implement a SARA training program that improves ease of use and employee experience of technology and other resources.
- Implement organization wide processes that assist with human capital management (capacity planning).

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**ANNUAL OBJECTIVES**

1. Influence behaviors through education, advocacy and mitigation projects to achieve trash-free waters
2. Continue to advance SARA’s participation and influence in capital projects along creeks and rivers
3. Engage in actions to protect and conserve the habitat of the San Antonio Bay
4. Strategically position the Utilities Enterprise to support growth within existing and new service areas
5. Position the River Authority as a leader in advancing sustainability development practices
6. Improve water quality to support designated public swimming opportunities within creeks and rivers
7. Engage in the state flood planning process to maximize the benefits to the district

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**STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES**
Thoughts: