

Santa Clara Valley Water District  
Rebrand Research Project Phases I & 2

Qualitative Research Report

Presented by Nichols Research

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# Introduction

## Background and Objectives

- 2019 is the 90<sup>th</sup> year since the founding of the Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD).
- The mission of SCVWD is more than providing safe water, but includes managing watersheds, creeks and dams
  - SCVWD does not provide water directly to consumers homes, but provides it to local water companies that do provide water directly to consumers.
- There is a feeling that most consumers in Santa Clara County do not know what the organization does.
- SCVWD is undertaking a qualitative research program to consider a new name and logo, and to adapt a tagline that more strongly reflects its mission and its role.
- The research tested new names, taglines and logos as well as a different look and feel
  - The goal is to have a mission focused name and tagline that makes it easier for the public to understand what SCVWD does
  - The question is: will a rebranding of the organization impact how the public views the organization.

## Methodology

- Two focus groups conducted the evenings of October 15, 2018 (Phase I).
- Two additional follow-on focus groups were conducted the evening of November 19, 2018 (Phase II).
- The groups were held at Nichols Research in Sunnyvale CA, and were moderated by Michael Mermelstein, Executive Vice President of Nichols Research.
- All participants were screened to ensure that they are residents of Santa Clara County.
  - Participants were screened so that all were non-rejectors of (not very negative) Santa Clara Valley Water District and of environmental issues.
  - 9 participants were male and 8 were female in Phase I.
  - 7 participants were male and 9 were female in Phase II.

- *NOTE: The qualitative approach (focus groups) used for this study seeks to develop insights and directional information, rather than precise or absolute statistical measures.*

## Summary and Recommendations

Building awareness and cognizance has real benefits both for residents and for the District and it is worth proceeding down this path. Most people currently do not know what Santa Clara Valley Water District really does. While there are varying degrees of awareness of the company name there is otherwise confusion about their role.

More public awareness is seen as a way for the organization to have more accountability. Future messaging and branding should take into account that public expectations rise along with awareness.

The name and the tagline are the message to the public that states who you are as an organization and what your mission is. Additional messaging and marketing should reinforce this.

Future marketing campaigns that amplify the desired message creates a lot of freedom for Santa Clara Valley Water District to adapt a name that the organization and its Board see as the best fit. We have garnered a lot of feedback through the research and there is widespread agreement on the basics.

- Overall, people agree with changing the name, they agree that a tagline is very helpful, and they are open to a new logo. Differences on wording amongst the research participants is mostly picking at the edges.

Let's remember: Key messages are NOT about saying everything you want to say. They're about saying only what matters. In this context, you want the messages delivered by the name, tagline and logo to really do what you want them to do. If not, it will be difficult to stay on message and/or there will be reluctance to use them.

All four focus groups lead to the conclusion that a new name is needed. Valley Water is succinct, catchy and a contemporary name. The Phase 1 focus groups found this name to be appropriate and one that fit well. The Phase II groups felt a need for more specificity or clarity. This was not a rejection of the Valley Water name at all, but rather recognition of possible confusion as to the specific geographic areas the organization works in.

Future messaging and marketing will help people get used to the new brand. They will get used to Valley Water. Or any other name that is positioned well. This future marketing will help the public to associate the new name with who the organization is.

The tagline will help. When paired with the logo and tagline the Valley Water name was more acceptable. And, the tagline can include a geographic reference to help alleviate confusion while introducing and then reinforcing the organization's role and mission.

Of the taglines presented the one that is most popular is:

**Clean Water • Healthy Creeks • Flood Protection**

But this is not universal. Some participants were confused by the reference to floods, others discussed whether healthy was an apt description or not. Ultimately this tagline would work to help the public understand the role of the organization and alleviate confusion.

Whatever words and concepts are used in future messaging and the tagline must be accurate and a true reflection of Valley Water's mission. Select words that reflect clear concepts that Valley Water can live up to. Residents clearly expect a certain measure of accountability. Claiming too much or using puffery could backfire.

The tagline should have a clean and simple look.

Key words that appeal to the public for future messaging - and including potential options for a different tagline include the words: safe, protect, clean, conserve, manage, water, reliable, stewardship and watershed.

Thoughts on optional taglines using these words (with an option of incorporating geographical description):

- Conserving/ Protecting Santa Clara County's Water
- Providing Safe & Clean Water (can include the county name if desired)
- Watershed Management to Clean Water
- Protecting our Most Precious Resource: Water



There is a clear preference for the water drop logo that includes the mountain and stream going through the middle of it.



There is a clear preference for the logo and name to be on the same line, not have the logo above the name. And, there is a preference for a font that has more volume to it than not. One participant likened a heavier volume font to the flow of water.

Participants liked the green and blue color scheme. It works in reinforcing who and what the organization is about.

- There was some discussion around the hue, especially of the green and whether it should be a deeper green than that presented. Graphically the organization can look at and test various hues of these colors, but this is an issue that will not make or break the rebranding efforts.

## Detailed Findings

## Climate Change and Environmental Concerns

- It is unsurprising that environmental concerns are pervasive – climate, air, water. Climate change to these residents means unpredictability, intensity, and weather extremes.
- Talking about climate change has evolved, in the thinking of many, to become about politics and money which they also believe to be misdirected.
  - People worry about:
    - *“Melting ice caps.”*
    - *“Farming radically changed.”*
    - *“Resources running out.”*
- Air quality is also a sensitive topic associated with “large corporations polluting” and “(federal) government rolling back regulations.”
  - Many have been left with the feeling that “they [government entities] just don’t care.”
- Water quality also causes worries among participants:
  - *“Substances / chemicals in the water.”*
  - *“Our water is so hard.”*
  - *“The pipes are worrisome.”*
  - *“They do the minimum.”*
  - *“Water companies should maintain safety, infrastructure, etc.”*
  - *“Water companies should be sure that there is enough to go around.”*
  - *“Water in Santa Clara County varies so much!”*
- When asked who is responsible to oversee and mitigate conditions causing climate change and the corresponding issues of global warming, drought and air quality participants point to the federal and state governments, local water districts -and to residents themselves.

- Water is considered a “precious resource.”
  - *“Everybody has to do their part; governments have to do their part.”*
  - *“State and federal government are not doing enough.”*
  - *“California has so many good water districts that oversee this as well.”*
- Most see conservation as a key responsibility of water companies and water districts.
- Most agree that water districts are responsible to *“make sure water is available – to not overtax the resources.”*
- Many also feel that water quality is the responsibility of *“water agencies”* or *“water districts.”*
- They also agree that whomever is managing water resources is doing it rather well.
- An interesting catch 22 – *“unconscious reliability.”*
  - *“If a utility is doing a good job you are not conscious of them.”*
- However, in the current climate context it is good to know that an agency is specifically responsible to manage resources.
- There is value in knowing who they are and what they do
  - *“I’m just happy to know that someone is in charge of caring for the creeks and dams and reservoirs.”*
  - *“They are planning for the future so you don’t want to take them too much for granted. The things they are doing are important today and, in the future, so you should not forget that they are out there doing it.”*

## Who Supplies Your Water?

- When asked, most have a vague familiarity with the entity that supplies the water to their homes. They usually know the company's name. But not everyone is aware of this and people do not really think about the process involved in getting water to them. They pay their bill and otherwise take it for granted.
- Most know that a local town or city supplies the water to their homes.
  - A few believe it is a privatized water company that supplies water to their home.
- But, people care. Many are leery of drinking tap water and prefer bottled or filtered water. Others complain about having hard water and not understanding why one community has hard water and another does not.



## Awareness and Understanding of Santa Clara Valley Water District

- When asked: Most have heard of Santa Clara Valley Water District, but very few understand what it actually does.
- Most are aware of the name because:
  - They have seen the trucks, or seen signs while hiking or by streams.
  - They have seen it as a taxed line item on their bill *“to pay for all their projects.”*
  - They have seen flyers in the mail *“that I don’t read.”*
- Some people are surprised they do not provide water to their homes, they assume that they do.
  - There is confusion about the differences among the organizations that provide water.
- What people guess it is that Santa Clara Valley Water District does?
  - *“They provide non-potable water to some businesses [for landscaping].”*
  - *“Manage the operations that pump water up”*
  - *“Read meters.”*
  - *Serve unincorporated areas.”*
  - *“I think they do flood control.”*

## Flood Protection

- When asked how they are protected from floods, or who is responsible for dams, most are clueless and do not even think of Santa Clara Valley Water District.
- Asked: “how are you protected from floods and garbage in streams? They reply:
  - *“Levies.”*
  - *“Marshland.”*
  - *East Bay Water District.*
  - *EPA.*
  - *“Streams go into water retention areas.”*
  - *Army Corps of Engineers.*
  - *City and County.*
- Asked: who is responsible for dams? They reply:
  - *Hydroelectric power companies*
  - *PG&E*
  - *USGS*
  - *Government*
  - *Must be some agency or other*

## Phase II Validates the Context and Initial Findings Discovered in Phase I

1. Participants are very aware of and concerned about climate change and drought.
2. Participants believe that government entities (Federal, State, Local) are responsible to mitigate the effects of climate effects including drought; and that consumers themselves also have a role to play.
3. Participants want to know what entity is responsible to protect their water sources – all the more important in the current climate.
4. Many have heard the name “Santa Clara Valley Water District,” but few understand what it is or what it does.
5. When SCVWD is explained, there is very positive reaction and most see value in knowing and understanding it.
6. The name is too long and should be changed.



## Reaction to Description of Santa Clara Valley Water District

“SANTA CLARA VALLEY WATER DISTRICT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR EVERYTHING WE HAVE BEEN DISCUSSING. THEY ARE A TYPE OF GOVERNMENT AGENCY CALLED A SPECIAL DISTRICT AND ARE GOVERNED BY AN ELECTED BOARD. THEY PROVIDE SAFE, CLEAN WATER, THEY MANAGE WATERSHEDS, WORK ON FLOOD PREVENTION AND PROTECTION, OWN AND MANAGE DAMS AND FEEL RESPONSIBLE TO BE A STEWARD OF THE ENVIRONMENT. WHAT THEY DO NOT DO IS TO PROVIDE WATER DIRECTLY TO YOUR HOME. THIS IS PROVIDED BY COMPANIES SUCH AS SAN JOSE WATER, THE CITY OF SANTA CLARA WATER DEPARTMENT AND THE CALIFORNIA WATER SERVICES COMPANY.”

There is a positive reaction when participants hear or read a basic description of what Santa Clara Valley Water District is and does:

- *“They do a lot more than I thought they did.”*
- *“It’s a good thing to see what they do.”*
- *“I am just happy to know that they are a steward of the environment – creeks, dams – proponents of keeping the area healthy.”*
- *“I knew a lot about their environmental work but didn’t know how they interacted with other districts or agencies.”*
- *“They seem trustworthy.”*

But some confusion remains

- *“Who maintains the pipes?”*
- *“Who chlorinates the water?”*
- *“Do they test the water?”*
- *“Are they a private or public (government) company?”*
- *“It seems we have zero say in what they do – why is that?”*

## Building Awareness and Understanding is Worthwhile

There are clear reasons to move forward with the rebranding efforts:

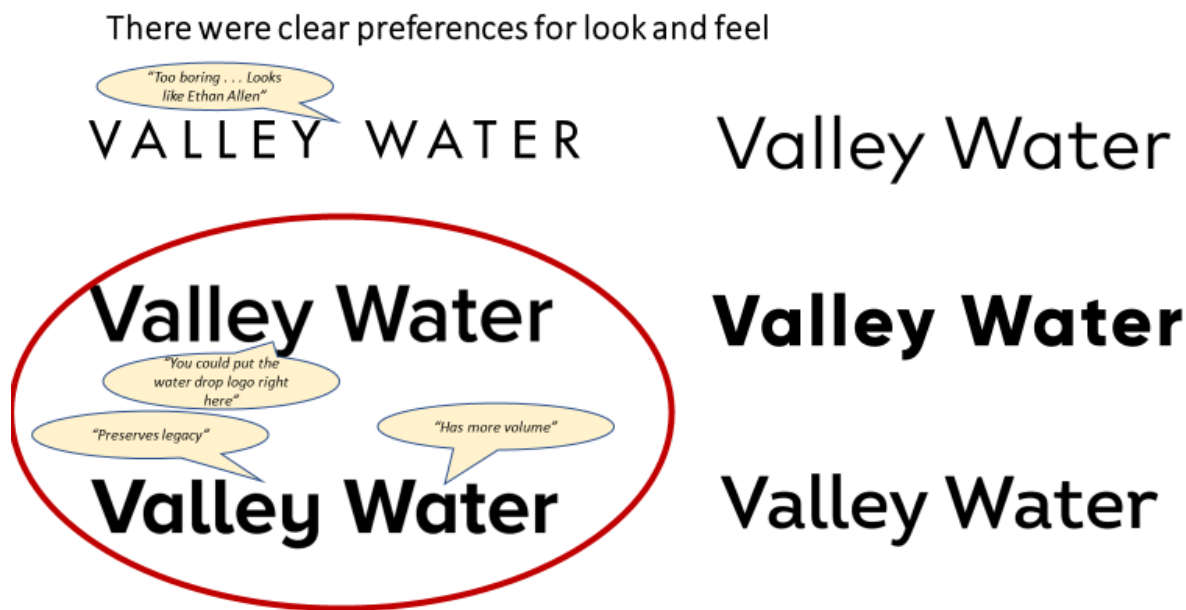
- Most do care and want to know what SCVWD does.
- Participants say that there are benefits for knowing and understanding what SCVWD actually is and does:
  - Knowing that somebody is responsible / somebody is in charge “*feels good.*”
  - There is a sense of feeling protected / protecting the public from adverse water events.
  - Somebody is looking out for their future.
  - The public will know where to check to see if they are doing enough.
  - It helps people know where tax dollars are going.
  - It’s a really good idea for them to map it out so everyone can know the source.
  - Knowing the chain of responsibility is important.

## Changing the Name

- Participants agree: “change the name to better explain who they are and what they are.”
  - *“It’s too long . . . Cut it in half.”*
  - *“The name is a mouthful.”*
  - *“It sounds too government.”*
  - *“It’s unclear – is it the city? The County? The federal government? – They need to differentiate it.”*
  - *“It’s very confusing.”*
  - *“It’s not catchy.”*
  - AND *“don’t use the word ‘silicon’ in the same phrase as ‘water.’”*
- Asked to suggest a name, **“Valley Water”** is suggested spontaneously in Phase 1 groups. The name met with some pushback in Phase II groups.
- Other suggestions include:
  - *Valley Water District*
  - *Environmental Water*
  - *SCVW*
  - *Santa Clara Water Protectors*
  - *SCWA (Santa Clara Water Authority)*
  - *“I think of Silicon Valley” “It sounds high tech”*
  - *“Everybody knows what Valley Medical Center is, so I’m not confused with the name ‘Valley’”*
- *“Water district” does not mean anything to them.”*
- *“A new name needs to be shorter and punchier.”*
- In the end, there was agreement that when a tagline and logo are added, Valley Water will work as the new name.

## Look and Feel of the Name

Phase I Display and Preferences:



- The colors bring to mind water for the blue and the valley for the green.
- Opinions vary on the font style, but once in color, the heavier font on the left (above) prevails.

**Valley Water**

## Phase II Preferences:

The colors appeal.

Opinions vary on font but lean toward 3<sup>rd</sup> variation, confirming the choice of Phase I groups.

**Valley Water**

Clean Water • Healthy Creeks • Flood Protection

**Valley Water**

Clean Water • Healthy Creeks • Flood Protection

**Valley Water**

Clean Water • Healthy Creeks • Flood Protection

They say:

- *“I like the blue – they nailed that”*
  - *“It could be a darker green”*
  - *“I really like the colors -- it is captivating. Very peaceful combination.”*
  - *“I don’t like the font used in #1 because it is too simple . . . It does not give me a big picture”*
  - *(2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> option) “It stands out more”*
- And, for those familiar with existing signage/logo, it is very useful to retain elements (e.g., a font) that is recognizable.

## Tagline content:

Participants in Phase I had a negative reaction to the phrase “Investing in Clean Water”

- Told (only) that Santa Clara Valley Water District “invests in clean water,” participants in Phase I were not very impressed.
- The word ‘investment’ appears to be the culprit because it brings to mind financial instruments:
  - *“putting your money into companies that do that.”*
  - *“like a government bond that you invest in.”*
- Most do understand ‘investing’ to mean that a company is putting more money into infrastructure
  - *“I like to know that – it makes me feel good.”*
  - *“They are spending money on plants and testing.”*
- But the implication of ‘investing’ is that more money is directed toward clean water which may have negative associations:
  - *“It means they are aware that there is bad water, so it means that they are putting money into testing and infrastructure.”*
  - *“Saying ‘investing’ means they are just trying to keep up.”*
  - *“If they are investing to make it better, we would end up paying more.”*
- Bottom line: *“They need to say something more glamorous!”*

## Tagline content:

Participants understand that a new name can be explained or described by an effective tagline, but they have varying opinions on the content of the taglines proposed.

With the word **‘investing’** uniformly rejected by Phase I groups, three new tagline variations were tested among the Phase II participants. These variations contained the following content:

**Clean Water**  
**Healthy Environment    Healthy Creeks**  
**Flood Protection**

There was vigorous debate regarding these content elements:

- ‘Clean Water’ has broad appeal although rather obvious and to some *“boring”* in a tagline.
- ‘Healthy Environment’ appeals to some, but seems too broad a concept whereas . . .
- ‘Healthy Creeks’ has greater appeal than ‘Healthy Environment’ given that “creeks sounds more descriptive of what they actually do”
- ‘Flood Protection’ seems a bit out of place to many: *“Right now, none of us are worried about floods;”* There have not been many floods in the past few years so people had difficulty making the association why and what the Water District does in this regard. *“Well, we don’t have any floods;” “Flood protection seems out of place for California;” “Flood protection is not a concern for me – Clean water is everyone’s concern”*

## Suggested concepts and words important to Phase I and Phase II participants:

- Safe
- Protecting
- Preventing
- Planning
- Ensuring
- Clean
- Conserve
- Managing
- Engineering
- Water
- Reliable
- ~~Watershed~~
- *Stewardship*



*Good concepts, but rejected  
because terms are too complex*



## Preferred tagline format:

Of the options presented the “dot” format was preferred strongly by Phase I groups, and also had an edge with the Phase II groups.

Clean Water • Healthy Environment • Flood Protection

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Clean Water • Healthy Creeks • Flood Protection

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Clean Water | Healthy Creeks | Flood Protection

*“The lines make it feel  
closed off”*

## Logo Preferences:

- In all groups, there were a few who recognized the existing logo.
- They would not be averse to updating the logo as long as some similarities to the existing design are retained.

Phase II groups were asked their opinion the existing logo and replied:

- *"It is 'too old school'"*
- *"Reminds me of the font from my elementary school"*
- *"I recognize that logo – so they need something iconic so that when I see it, I know"*
- *"Something to do with water"*



Phase II groups were presented with a choice among three logo designs and made a clear choice for their most preferred:



Clear preference for this logo because *"it works – mountain, stream, water droplet"* together with heavier font (style 3) for the name.

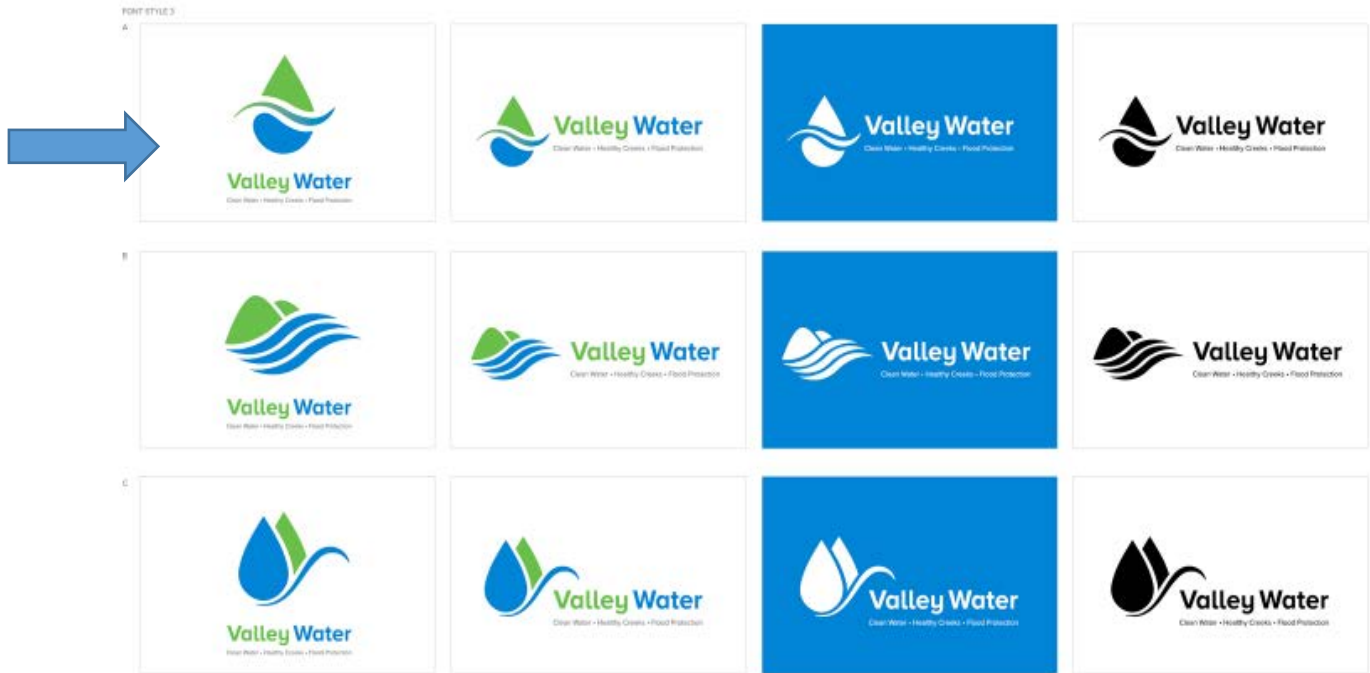
- *"I like it – especially when it is put together with the name and the tagline."*
- *"This has color and I see the mountain, water, wave, and it's symbolic."*
- *"I like it because they are changing the name, and for those of us who recognize the original logo, it ties and connects us back to that."*
- *"This is what I imagined in my head!"*
- *"It seems more evocative of what they are trying to pull together."*
- *"It pulls in the aspect of stewardship and the environmental conservation piece."*
- *"It looks more professional than the original logo."*

The alternative logo options were far less preferred.



## Full Mock-up Preference:

### Logo options



- Again, there was clear preference for the contemporary droplet logo with the Type 3 font.
  - It seems that a few participants did not notice any difference among font styles in these exhibits.
  - Overall, the heavier volume font seems to be preferred.

## Participants tell us:

- It is important to get the message out regarding what the agency does, and a rebranding is a good way to do this.
- The new logo and colors and name are visually appealing and a way to get the important “conservation” message out to the public.
- This new look is more likely to be appealing to the younger generation.
- In the current climate situation, no one should take this agency for granted. It is important for the public to know more.



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