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## MEDIA RELATIONS CASES

### CASE 3-1

*The U.S. Navy approved bringing the USS Midway to San Diego as a naval aviation museum, subject to California Coastal Commission (CCC) approval. When the CCC denied the project, the San Diego project leaders mounted a lobbying and media campaign to change the commission's vote. Exhibit 3-1a is a news release used in the campaign. Exhibit 3-1b is a media alert announcing the CCC hearing. Exhibit 3-1c is a photograph of the USS Midway on active duty.*

Mobilizing the Troops to Save the Midway

San Diego Aircraft Carrier Museum with matthews/mark

#### **Background**

One of the most famous aircraft carriers in the Navy, the USS Midway, sits on the backwaters of Bremerton, Washington, destined for scrap. Decommissioned in 1992 in San Diego, the carrier saw duty in Korea, saved lives in the Philippines, and led air operations in the Gulf War. For eight years a group of San Diego leaders has worked to bring the Midway to San Diego as a nonprofit 501(c)3 naval aviation museum, memorial, education center, and visitor attraction. The Navy finally approved the Midway application, conditional on California Coastal Commission (CCC) approval.

In December 2000, CCC staff stunned the San Diego community by recommending denial of the project. Project organizers needed to convince at least seven of twelve CCC commissioners to reject the staff recommendation and approve the project. Without approval, the Midway project's financing guarantees would evaporate, the project would die, and the Midway would be sold to a recycler and turned into razor blades.

## Research

We first assessed the situation. A review of two years of CCC records revealed that the CCC failed to follow staff recommendations only 15 percent of the time. We reviewed the meeting minutes of all hearings conducted by the current CCC, read every news clip of CCC meetings for the past five years, and audited key reporters to identify their predisposition about the project. Qualitative analysis showed that the commission was sensitive to charges of not representing Californians' interests. We researched the backgrounds of each commissioner and learned that only two had San Diego ties. The key learning from all this, however, was that when the commission overruled staff recommendations, it was on projects of immense and demonstrable public support, those with extensive news media coverage, and in cases when public hearing attendance overwhelmingly opposed staff recommendations. This finding made community leaders (in the areas of business, arts, veterans' groups, special interest groups, elected government, education, tourism, economic development, and environmental groups) our intermediate target audiences on the road to convincing the CCC (our ultimate target audience) to support the project.

## Planning

Our goal was clear: convince at least seven of twelve commissioners to approve the Midway project despite staff opposition. We assembled a task force of project organizers, community leaders, and others who had been successful in overcoming CCC staff opposition in the past. Collectively, our analysis of the research told us that our goal of approval could be accomplished by a strategy that educated and motivated key target audiences to vocally and forcefully support the project. Six objectives were established as strategy guideposts. Although this was a pro bono project (except for a \$9,000 newsletter), our objectives were lofty:

*Objective #1:* Generate advance spot news and feature publicity as a precursor to op-ed and hearing attendance strategies.

*Objective #2:* Generate as many support letters from community leaders as possible to the commissioners and obtain copies for use at the hearing.

*Objective #3:* One week prior to the hearing, generate as much editorial board and op-ed support as possible.

*Objective #4:* Use the Midway Web site as our most timely, efficient method of communication to a broad audience of potential supporters.

*Objective #5:* Fill the hearing room with well-trained spokespeople and attendees.

*Objective #6:* Ensure massive on-site news coverage of the hearing as another measure of community interest in the project.

## Execution

Our first step was to arm ourselves for the upcoming battle. We updated and tailored our media kit to meet specific objections raised by CCC staff. And then we trained spokespeople and presenters on how to interact with the media, focusing on CCC staff objections.

*Addressing Objective #1:* To generate broader coverage, we placed stories on suburban neighborhood leaders who supported the Midway. We commissioned an artist to render a vision of the Midway as a visual for editors and to overcome the CCC's concern of land-use compatibility. We secured project feature stories about aircraft restoration and the donation of a major archival collection, always with a call to action of appearing before CCC to voice support.

*Addressing Objective #2:* We identified constituencies whose opinion would matter to the CCC and encouraged them to write letters in support of the Midway. Our draft letter for the mayor of San Diego became an example.

*Addressing Objective #3:* Op-eds for community leaders were crafted and pitched to every major print publication in San Diego. We identified key messages and trained our representatives for editorial board meetings. In addition, we ghost-wrote a number of letters to the editor to assure consistency of message.

*Addressing Objective #4:* We recognized that the Midway Web site would be vital in real-time dissemination of new developments to a broad audience. Weekly and then daily updates were made to the site, and every piece of written material included a call to action of visiting the Web site for the latest developments. This emphasis on the Web site always promoted hearing attendance.

*Addressing Objective #5:* High attendance was crucial. We overcame an unexpected challenge when we learned that applause was banned in CCC hearings by "arming" 247 attendees with American flags that were waved after each presentation. We organized and ran a telephone tree to solicit attendance by and presentations from business, civic, veterans, Navy, school, arts, tourism, military spouse, and aviation organizations. We trained all speakers. To generate informed attendance, we produced a four-color newsletter.

*Addressing Objective #6:* Finally, hearing day saw a bevy of television cameras aimed at the commission. Media alerts coupled with the advance "seeding" of feature stories with the news media were primary tactics.

## Evaluation

*Advance Publicity Objective:* Every San Diego television station and daily and suburban newspaper ran stories profiling the Midway in advance of the hearing.

*Commission Letters Objective:* Community leaders sent over 200 letters to the commissioners, copies of which we made available to the news media at the hearing in front of the commissioners.

*Editorial Pressure Objective:* Op-eds, published as submitted, ran in every major publication, and the *San Diego Union-Tribune* (a major daily with a circulation of 400,000) reiterated its support on two occasions leading up to the hearing.

*Web Site Traffic Objective:* Monthly Web site traffic increased from a typical 26,535 visits in November to nearly 59,000 visits in March, the final month of our campaign.

*Attendance Objective:* More than 350 supporters filled the hearing room. Speakers in favor of the project outnumbered opposing speakers 20 to 1.

*Event Publicity Objective:* Every television station in San Diego covered the hearing. Seventy-seven minutes of coverage were generated. All but one station had repeated live reports, from 8 A.M. (the start of the hearing) to 6:30 P.M.

In the end, we met our goal, with the commissioners' rationale for approval confirming what our research analysis had tactically inspired. The California Coastal Commission voted 12-0 in favor of the Midway. One commissioner explained her vote as the result of "the finest presentation strategy I've seen as a commissioner"; another said, "It's my obligation to vote for the Midway in response to community input." The USS Midway, as the San Diego Aircraft Carrier Museum, is now on track to open in the second quarter in 2003.

**Exhibit 3-1a**

*News Release*



**From:** SAN DIEGO AIRCRAFT CARRIER MUSEUM  
**Date:** May 19, 2000  
**Contact:** Scott L. McGaugh  
**Phone:** 619/238-8500

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**MORE THAN 8 OF 10 SAN DIEGANS  
SUPPORT THE MIDWAY AT NAVY PIER**

SAN DIEGO – A recent poll shows more than 86 percent of San Diego voters support the proposal to establish the Midway aircraft carrier as a visitor attraction at Navy Pier in San Diego Bay.

The poll was conducted in late last month by Competitive Edge Research and its results are being distributed by project organizers to local government officials as part of the community campaign to expedite Port approval for the project.

A representative countywide sample of more than 400 high-propensity voters were asked a series of questions about the proposal to establish the Midway as a naval museum and visitor attraction on the south side of Navy Pier, just south of Broadway in downtown San Diego.

**Other highlights:**

- support for the project intensifies when voters are informed no local tax dollars will be used to finance the project;
- two-thirds of the voters polled said it would make no difference in the support of the project if it blocked a portion of the harbor view;
- similarly, 70 percent said the Coastal Commission should approve the project.

SAN DIEGO AIRCRAFT CARRIER MUSEUM

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The survey was conducted at a time when Midway supporters are pressing their case with the San Diego Unified Port District as it considers a master plan for the North Embarcadero that includes the Midway.

The survey results are similar to an independent survey conducted two years ago which showed a Midway approval rating of 84 percent.

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The San Diego Aircraft Carrier Museum



Welcome Aboard!

BREAKING NEWS

Long-Awaited California Coastal Commission Hearing Set for March 14 in San Diego

It's been a long time in coming, but the crucial California Coastal Commission hearing on the Midway will be held March 14, in San Diego. It's the last required approval before the Navy formally awards the Midway to San Diego.

THE HEARING WILL BE HELD AT THE BAHIA HOTEL ON MISSION BLVD. IN SAN DIEGO AND WE NEED ALL OUR SUPPORTERS TO ATTEND!

Originally scheduled for January, consideration was postponed to March because Coastal Commission staff raised 11th-hour questions about the Midway's parking plan. Since the staff report was issued during the Holiday Season, it was impossible to resolve those concerns in time for January.

In the interim, we've been working with staff, showing how parking on the adjacent Navy Pier is an interim measure. The ultimate vision is to convert Navy Pier into a public park, panoramic viewpoint and Armed Services memorial.

It's vital that we show strong community support for the Midway at the March Coastal Commission hearing.

IN CASE THE AGENDA CHANGES, STARTING MARCH 5 YOU CAN CALL (619) 702-7704 FOR A RECORDED, UP-TO-THE-MINUTE UPDATE.

As always, we appreciate your support. We look forward to welcoming the Midway to San Diego later this year and a grand opening in 2002.

Become a member of the Midway Magic Circle of Friends See membership information or go directly the the online membership form.

Renderings Blend Education and Tribute With Entertainment! Four great views of different elements now being planning for the grand opening and in future phases.