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City of Nanaimo Communication Plan

The City of Nanaimo's Communication Plan outlines goals, objectives and specific actions that Council and staff will introduce to assist the organization in connecting with citizens. Care has been taken to recognize the growing demand for open and two-way communication, particularly as it pertains to listening to citizens, gathering feedback and the expanding influence of technology in accessing information. The Plan is a living document and will be reviewed and updated annually as part of the City's commitment to continuously improving service.



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Getting Started

Introduction

This document establishes the City of Nanaimo's coordinated approach to corporate communication. The goals, strategies and actions outlined over the following pages were drawn from feedback obtained through various sources, including:

- suggestions provided by community members who attended the 2012-2015 Corporate Strategic Planning, "Your Voice, Our Nanaimo" workshops,
- the results of the 2012 Citizen Satisfaction Survey, and
- discovery conversations with members of Council, stakeholders and staff identifying past communication practices and future needs.

Pulled together, these community suggestions, survey results and conversations provide the foundation for a *Communications Plan*; a plan that speaks not only to what our citizens, Council and staff have told us they wish to hear, but a plan that also facilitates the creation of an organizational culture that values open and two-way communication in how it listens to citizens, plans projects and undertakes tasks.

What we've heard

During the creation of the 2012-2015 Strategic Plan, community workshops and surveys were conducted for the purpose of defining the business the City is in, clarifying its strategic intent and establishing priorities for municipal investment.

Feedback was collected on a variety of popular topics and points of interest. In particular, comments specific to three topics that encourage open communication – public participation, transparency and meaningful consultation – identified a strong desire for:

- a) engaging citizens sooner
- b) boosting public participation
- c) creating new channels to distribute information
- d) having conversations with the public
- e) providing information that is clear
- f) keeping citizens informed

Attention to these six desires helped the City of Nanaimo align the goals, objectives and actions described throughout this plan with the following operating philosophy:

We intend to be known and earn respect for positive relationships, community engagement and participatory democracy based on effective consultation and open communications. *

* 2012-2015 Corporate Strategic Plan, page five

A Communication Culture

Our current state

The City of Nanaimo manages the corporate communication function using a distributed approach that places responsibility for implementing and budgeting communication activities directly in the hands of each department. The approach is successful in promoting accountability and openness by ensuring the people who make decisions are the same people who speak to them (subject matter experts). Likewise, regular communication duties are carried out in a coordinated manner using a variety of traditional and social media channels. The independence that accompanies this approach can, however, cause discrepancies across the organization including:

- inconsistent procedures,
- pockets of excellence that are not adopted corporately, and
- department focused messaging that overemphasizes the promotion of specific programs and services and underemphasizes organizational goals and objectives.

Additional irregularities may be attributed to the absence of corporately applied best practices in organizational communication and public engagement, including those endorsed by recognized professional groups and accrediting associations.

Moving forward

By implementing this plan, the City of Nanaimo will work to create an organizational culture that values open and two-way communication in how it listens to citizens, plans projects and undertakes tasks. Creating this culture requires staff understand how their roles – both individually and collectively – impact the City in communicating its message. Likewise, knowledge of how citizens wish to send and receive information, and with what frequency, must be recognized and supported.

But simply communicating and receiving information is not enough.

Building trust is a crucial element in creating the connections that lead to successful two-way communication, thus attention to how Council, staff and citizens relate to and understand one another's messages must be thoroughly considered. Similarly, as circumstances change, procedures and routines that once built understanding may now generate limited meaning, requiring the City to recognize emerging trends and introduce new ways to connect with citizens, and in doing so, ignite open dialogue, mutual understanding and genuine confidence.

Our Approach

Guiding Principles

The City of Nanaimo's Communication Plan is based on an organizational culture that is guided by the following principles that support effective municipal communication.

Taking Responsibility

Every member of Council and staff has a role to play in assisting the City to listen to citizens, incorporate feedback and communicate its message.

Informing Citizens

Make information available to citizens in a timely fashion, using the channels they prefer.

Active Listening

Citizens want to be heard – communicate information that acknowledges their input.

Measuring and Improving

Ensure City resources are used effectively and appropriately by regularly evaluating the information the City sends out.

Keeping pace with change

The environment into which the City of Nanaimo distributes its messages, along with the tools that it uses, is marked by change. With the creation of socially networked channels (social media) that allow citizens to easily share their ideas, personal experiences and feedback, the desire for online dialogue has never been greater.

Opportunities to expand the current use of popular social media channels like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are identified in specific actions throughout this plan, but their use is not limited to those actions only. It is anticipated that additional applications will quickly emerge as adoption of social media increases and evolves.

Goal One

Recognize community interests and respond with information that connects citizens, Council and staff

Objective 1.1

Strengthen the City's ability to anticipate issues and prepare timely information

1.1.1 Create efficiencies for identifying public issues and listening and responding to community interests

ACTIONS

- Identify current and emerging resources for collecting citizen feedback and maintaining dialogue – including changing trends in social media – and provide training to staff
- Circulate important and timely issue updates to Council, staff and citizens

1.1.2 Create issue readiness behavior by ensuring staff members understand their roles in the issues management process

ACTIONS

- Establish procedures outlining best practices and desired outcomes
- Determine in advance who will be the spokesperson on particular issues and topics, and make this information available to Council and staff

1.1.3 Follow issue and announcement cycles to identify and hear citizen concerns and prepare public information in advance to address questions

ACTIONS

- Create question and answers and tip resources and update annually
- Identify spokespeople in advance of a pending issue cycle
- Identify public safety issues and plan communication accordingly

Goal One continued

Objective 1.2

Continuously improve the process by which citizens can connect with Council and staff

1.2.1 Ensure City staff contact directories are up to date and easy to find

ACTIONS

- Promote contact information using distribution methods that provide the best reception, including social media
- Create an easy-to spot “contact” icon for website and standardize these icons across all webpages

1.2.2 Provide front-line staff with information and updates on topics of strong public interest

ACTIONS

- Brief staff on current issues in advance of them engaging citizens during regular duties
- Create a resource for staff to log feedback on comments regarding what they are hearing or being asked by citizens and the media
- Establish realistic guidelines for timely responses to citizen questions
- Prepare topical question and answers, including contact references

1.2.3 Increase Council’s and staff’s use of social media

ACTIONS

- Encourage best practices for elected officials and staff

1.2.4 Introduce new opportunities for citizen feedback on the City’s website

ACTIONS

- Invite website users to rate the value of posted content
- Increase the number of gateways for supplying comments

Goal Two

Increase capacity to communicate with citizens in meaningful ways

Objective 2.1

Improve dialogue with citizens by boosting Council and staff awareness about what is taking place across the organization

2.1.1 Raise awareness of department responsibilities and activities

ACTIONS

- Create issue focused fact sheets and updates and distribute these to Council and staff using methods that provide the best reception
- Profile individual or team contributions from different departments on the City Blog
- Distribute informative department-focused news articles to Council and staff

2.1.2 Communicate important Council and corporate decisions to staff

ACTIONS

- Distribute a monthly listing of news release links
- Host a regular "Meeting with the City Manager" and invite staff from across the organization for a casual update
- Prepare a bimonthly message from the City Manager and circulate to staff using methods that provide the best reception

2.1.3 Provide advance notice to staff highlighting the City's position or actions being taken on emerging developments

ACTIONS

- Create an employee "News and Information" page on the Intranet site and raise staff awareness of recent postings using methods that provide the best reception

Goal Two continued

Objective 2.2

Introduce planning, processes and training that supports open communication and builds quality customer service

2.2.1 Create annual department communication plans

ACTIONS

- Work with directors and managers to identify annual communication priorities for the coming year; build actions into yearly work plans for management staff
- Determine budget and resource requirements
- Identify key audiences and decide when to listen and decide when to engage

2.2.2 Standardize common operational procedures for communicating the City's message and receiving feedback from citizens

ACTIONS

- Create regular patterns of work across the organization for listening to citizens, sending out messages, alerting the media, hosting events, updating the website, informing staff, etc.
- Identify best practices for communication processes in procedure documents and circulate these to staff using methods that provide the best reception
- Establish a process to periodically review information generated during "In Camera" meetings and release this information once that would not undermine the reason for including the information in "In Camera"
- Maintain efficient and cooperative relationships with members of the media

2.2.3 Provide training to identified staff for writing and delivering public information and preparing communication planning documents

ACTIONS

- Host communication product writing workshops
- Establish a standard fit-and-finish for common communication products, including graphic and layout standards
- Provide spokesperson training

Goal Three

Boost participation in local government and the public process

Objective 3.1

Improve the manner in which community engagement events are promoted and how feedback is obtained

3.1.1 Regularly request direction from citizens regarding which channels they use to send and receive information

ACTIONS

- Solicit public feedback on the effectiveness of all channels used to distribute the City's message – social media, print advertisements, news stories, website, direct mail, newsletters, utility bills, etc.

3.1.2 Secure larger turnouts during community consultations

ACTIONS

- Coordinate events in conjunction with popular public gatherings
- Plan events in advance to access prime advertising opportunities
- Identify barriers that may exist to public participation and how these barriers influence citizen turnout

3.1.3 Promote the use of online civic engagement tools and social media for contributing citizen feedback and suggestions to the City

ACTIONS

- Capitalize on existing applications or develop custom applications that make providing feedback simple and convenient
- Introduce internet software that augments and diversifies online civic engagement in ways that can increase citizen involvement and trust in the public process
- Identify groups within the local population who may be restricted in fully participating in the public process and explore alternative methods of reaching out to them

Goal Three continued

Objective 3.2

Boost awareness and understanding of local government process, policy and priorities

3.2.1 Improve how information concerning public process and decision making is communicated and presented

ACTIONS

- Reposition sought out material to reflect common interests and concerns
- Raise the profile of popular information on website to make it easier to notice
- On the City website, create an online library for reports and studies
- On the City website, create a newsroom for announcements
- On the City website, continually improve live-streaming of Council meetings
- Using methods that provide the best reception, effectively explain details surrounding the City's annual budget and how money is being spent
- Paint a bigger picture of what the City is doing by describing how individual projects and initiatives support the City's 2012-2015 Strategic Plan and its commitment to the four sustainability pillars of economic health, environmental responsibility, social equity and cultural vitality

3.2.2 Promote sources of information where members of the public can learn more about local government

ACTIONS

- Introduce annual campaign to raise awareness about local government and the opportunities and methods to participate in public processes
- Create short and informative videos outlining opportunities for participating in the public process; share these via YouTube
- Use social media to draw attention to timely aspects of upcoming municipal procedures and events

3.2.3 Build partnerships that supply information to new citizens and youth

ACTIONS

- Work with local agencies and public sector organizations to distribute information on public meetings, key contacts and important dates

Goal Four

Develop relationships that bridge differences and foster dialogue

Objective 4.1

Balance the use of formal communication with opportunities for informal dialogue

4.1.1 Establish an annual schedule of open house events that receive and convey information on popular or annual topics

ACTIONS

- Host events at locations where foot traffic is high, such as malls and recreation centres.
- Plan events far enough in advance that they can be included on community calendars or upcoming event notices

4.1.2 Raise awareness of City programs and initiatives by encouraging readership of social media postings or bookmarking the City Blog.

ACTIONS

- Continue to promote the City's various social media accounts and work to attract a more diverse usership of this channel
- Follow emerging trends concerning social media usage and implement new platforms to widen the reach of the City's message

4.1.3 Encourage the public to submit questions to "Project Ambassadors"

ACTIONS

- Appoint City staff into generalist information roles to act as point people to take questions from the public and seek out answers concerning specific projects
- Promote these individuals as trustworthy and reliable sources of information

Goal Four continued

Objective 4.2

Ensure all corporate messaging is sensitive to the reception and cultural needs of a diverse population.

4.2.1 Whenever possible, use plain-language for all public messaging

ACTIONS

- Provide checklists and general standards for staff to review prior to distributing material to the public
- Ensure agendas prepared for public Council meetings contain straightforward descriptions of what is scheduled for discussion

4.2.2 Provide avenues to translate City information into other languages

ACTIONS

- Obtain knowledge of how many languages are spoken locally in Nanaimo and which ones are first languages spoken daily amongst family, friends and business acquaintances
- Identify citizens who may require alternatives to English and ensure provisions are made during the communication planning process
- Where opportunities exist, partner with local multicultural associations and immigrant welcome centres to help communicate the City's message to new Canadians

Notes

Acknowledgements:

The development of this Communication Plan was realized thanks to the assistance and valuable input of the following people:

- community members who attended the City of Nanaimo's 2012-2015 Corporate Strategic Planning, "Your Voice, Our Nanaimo" workshops,
- community members who participated in the 2012 Citizen Satisfaction Survey,
- members of Council and staff who took part in communication planning interviews and who provided feedback on the identified goals, objectives and actions, and
- community members who provided feedback during the March 2013 draft review process.

Questions:

What is the timeline for carrying out the actions identified in this plan?

The City of Nanaimo's Communication Plan is a deliverable of the City's guiding strategy document, the *2012-2015 Corporate Strategic Plan*. Carrying out specific actions identified throughout the Communication Plan will be realized during the same three-year period. It is anticipated that some actions will be completed quickly – likely within the first year of being adopted – while other actions will take longer. A listing of the action categories, along with proposed timelines, is attached as Appendix A.

Who is responsible for implementing this plan?

The City of Nanaimo's Communication Plan will facilitate the creation of an organizational culture that values open and two-way communication in how it listens to residents, plans projects and undertakes tasks. Implementing the actions identified in the Communication Plan is therefore a coordinated and joint responsibility for everyone who has a direct role to play in assisting the City of Nanaimo to listen to citizens, incorporate feedback and communicate its message. Administration of the City's communication function is carried out by the Communication Manager and includes planning, research and measurement. A cross-departmental Communication Committee, chaired by the Communication Manager, provides additional feedback and buy-in.

What will be some of the tangible outcomes of this plan?

Tangible outcomes will vary depending on the circumstances through which communication actions are applied to specific situations. General examples include: improved communication planning for events, public engagement, City operations and departments; policies and procedures specific to communication functions and information transparency; enhanced public information products including the City website, education materials and social media usage; and increased sharing of information, both externally and internally.

What is the budget for this plan?

The City of Nanaimo manages the corporate communication function using a distributed approach that places responsibility for costing communication activities within the operational budgets of each department; accordingly, the City of Nanaimo's Communication Plan does not require an independent budget.

I have comments and suggestions concerning this communication plan; who can I send my feedback to?

Comments and suggestions can be forwarded to communicationplanning@nanaimo.ca

Appendix A

The following table lists the 24 actions categories identified in the Communication Plan, along with proposed timelines.

Action	Timeline
1.1.1	Create efficiencies for identifying public issues and listening and responding to community interests 2013-2014
1.1.2	Create issue readiness behavior by ensuring staff members understand their roles in the issues management process 2013
1.1.3	Follow annual issue and announcement cycles to identify and hear citizen concerns and prepare public information in advance to address questions 2013-2014
1.2.1	Ensure City staff contact directories are up to date and easy to find 2013-2014
1.2.2	Provide front-line staff with information and updates on topics of strong public interest 2013
1.2.3	Increase Council's and staff's use of social media 2013-2015
1.2.4	Introduce new opportunities for citizen feedback on the City's website 2013-2014
2.1.1	Raise awareness of department responsibilities and activities 2013
2.1.2	Communicate important Council and corporate decisions to staff 2013-2014
2.1.3	Provide advance notice to staff highlighting the City's position or actions being taken on emerging developments 2014
2.2.1	Create annual department communication plans 2013-2015
2.2.2	Standardize common operational procedures for communicating the City's message and receiving feedback from citizens 2013-2014

Action	Timeline
2.2.3	Provide training to identified staff for writing and delivering public information and preparing communication planning documents 2013-2015
3.1.1	Regularly request direction from citizens regarding which channels they use to send and receive information 2013-2015
3.1.2	Secure larger turnouts during community consultations 2013-2015
3.1.3	Promote the use of online/social media for contributing feedback and suggestions to the City 2013-2014
3.2.1	Improve how information concerning public process and decision making is communicated and presented 2013-2015
3.2.2	Promote sources of information where members of the public can learn more about local government 2014-2015
3.2.3	Build partnerships that supply information to new citizens and youth 2014-2015
4.1.1	Establish an annual schedule of open house events that receive and convey information on popular or annual topics 2013-2015
4.1.2	Raise awareness of City programs and initiatives by encouraging readership of social media postings or bookmarking the City Blog 2013-2015
4.1.3	Encourage the public to submit questions to "Project Ambassadors" 2014-2015
4.2.1	Whenever possible, use plain-language for all public messaging 2013-2015
4.2.2	Provide avenues to translate City information into other languages 2014-2015