



2022 COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

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Introduction:

The Town of Slave Lake Communications Plan outlines specific goals, strategies and actions that can be used to strengthen communications with key stakeholders and to promote the Town and the Slave Lake region to residents, investors, and visitors.

The vision of this plan is to build a collaborative, constructive and accountable relationship with the community. Proactive engagement is the most effective way to communicate important initiatives and build community collaboration to ensure an open and transparent administrative process.

The communications process needs to be relevant, accurate and current to be successful and trustworthy. All methods used to communicate to the community must be honest, easy to understand, clearly identifiable as being from the Town, and use each medium to its full potential.

The Communications Plan outlines the objectives and tasks that need to be completed and will guide plans for successful communication, with both internal and external stakeholders.

This plan will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that it continues to suit the Town's needs. Surveys, discussions, and reviews will be used to help expand and/or refine this strategy in the coming years.

This communications plan and its goals and strategies build from and support the Town's vision, mission, and strategic plan.

Vision

Slave Lake is committed to building opportunities by growing business, industry and population, while promoting ourselves and our exceptional quality of life.

Mission

Working Together, Building a Better Community

Target Audiences:

Residents
 Internal (Staff, Council, Contractors, Volunteers)
 Industry and local business
 Media
 Visitors
 Municipal, Provincial, and Federal Governments
 Community Groups

The Process

The Communications Plan is based on media monitoring and social media scans and audits, studying past internal communications, as well as best practices in communications for local government.

Organizational strengths and weaknesses were determined from this research.

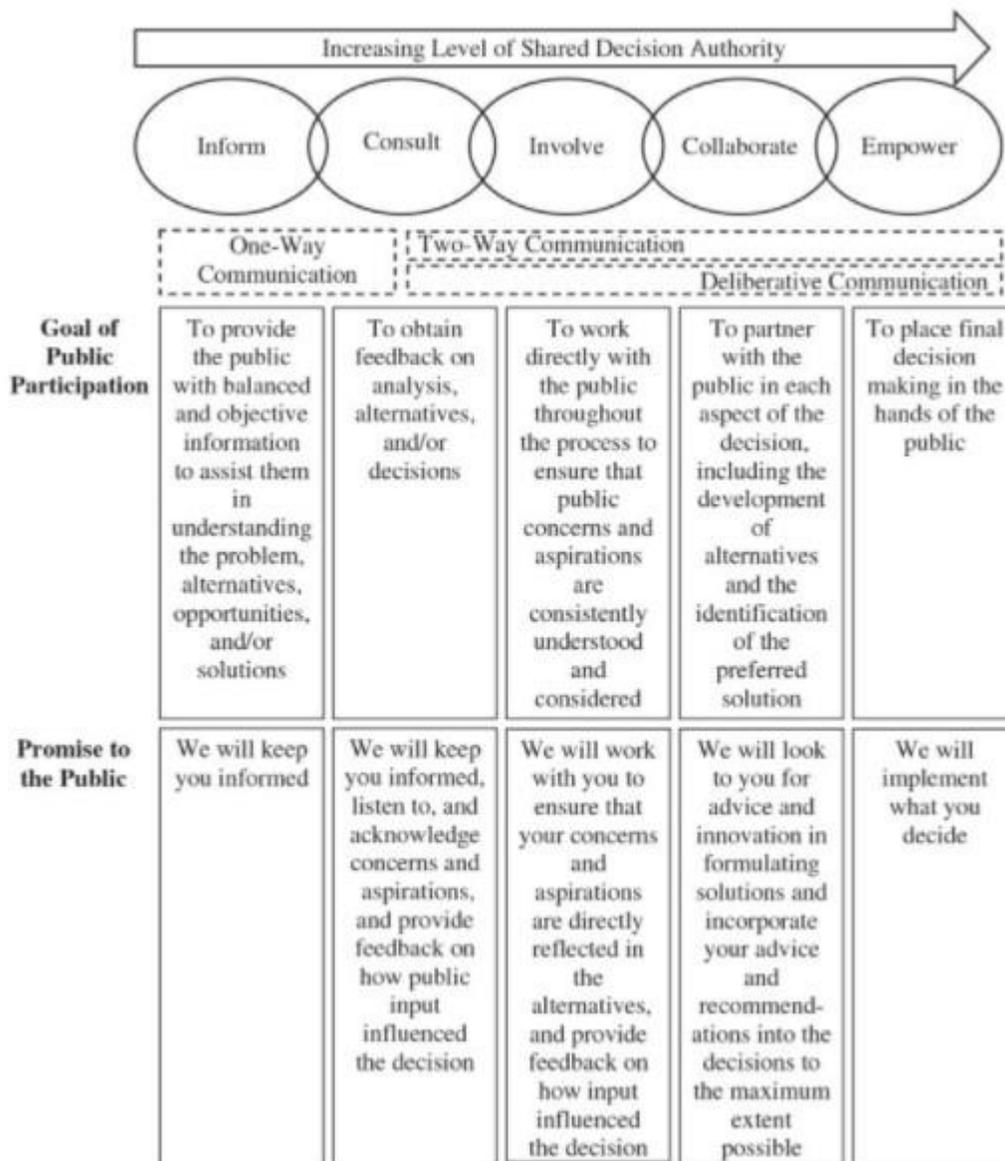
<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A dedicated in-house Communications Coordinator position • Motivated Senior Staff and Council that encourage clear and transparent communications and organizational practice. • Knowledgeable Administrative Staff that are always willing to help and share expertise when additional help or resources are required • An established website • Established social media accounts with an active online local community • Templates from past communications 	<p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website is difficult to maintain and navigate • The difficulty in navigating the website makes it hard to determine what information is outdated without department specific intervention • The information Communications receives is not always prompt and is rarely beyond surface level. • There is a lack of understanding within the community in what each department/the town does which raises more questions and creates distrust. • Social media reach outside of the immediate community is small.
<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community is very active on social media and has a strong desire to be informed. • A community with the time and desire to be engaged which will allow opportunity for community engagement campaigns. • Have the resources to share as much information as possible to residents preferred platforms. • Ability to clean the website with departmental help 	<p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A polarized community • Misinformation is common and spreads quickly. • Slow internal response times leads to a lack of trust in the community towards administrative initiatives. • Information sharing to the community is occasionally lost due to vocal negative public opinion.

Communications Principles:

- Be clear, timely, accessible, and responsive when providing information
- Ensure that organization contact information is always accessible to support direct feedback and assistance.
- Inform public decision using engagement opportunities
- Regularly analyze communication efforts to ensure quality maintains constant.
- Use the most appropriate communication medium for the given information to ensure the needs of residents are met and informed.
- Work collaboratively among all departments to ensure the information is timely, transparent, and factual
- Work in respect to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP)
- Take steps to ensure two-way communication is commonplace

The Town of Slave Lake and the Town of Slave Lake Communications Department will strive to provide opportunities for public engagement and allow the opportunity to provide feedback when possible and through various methods and mediums. The level of participation will be determined by staff and based on the number of residents who will be affected by the decision or the overall impact of the decision

The Spectrum of Public Participation developed by the International Association for Public Participation will be a guide for public participation initiatives.



(Nabatchi, 2012)

Goal 1: Improve Internal Communications (Internal)

Improve upon the speed and consistency of internal communications. All staff should have all the information necessary to effectively do their jobs while maintaining a collaborative environment among town employees. It's important that department information is heard and shared as this will also positively affect external communications to residents.

1.1 Strategy:

Have the Town identity be focused on promptness and openness.

Background:

Information given to the Communications department is often surface level and given either right when the information needs to go out or after the issue has already occurred.

Proposed actions:

- If there is a regular occurrence (monthly, yearly, seasonal) that needs to be shared, a schedule template should be created that allows editing. This allows more convenient and easier to read communication both internally and externally. **(Q1)**
- Hold regular meetings (bi-weekly) and correspondence with department heads to get an idea of possible information and updates that could be released in the near future. If there is early information that Town departments know will need to be shared in the future, they should inform the communications department so that they have an idea what to expect and plan. Sitting in on Senior Leadership Team meetings can also be effective. **(Q1)**
- The implementation of an intranet for town employees is currently being researched **(Q2-Q4)**

1.2 Strategy:

Improve background knowledge on information before sharing.

Background:

Communications department should be prepared to answer questions regarding topics without having to inquire with each department individually.

Proposed Actions:

- On planned information sharing, a brief FAQ to possible questions from residents should be compiled by the department the information is coming from and given to the communications department alongside the information. If the information is recent or urgent then as much detailed information that is available should be given to the communications department. The best course of action for this initiative with each department can be discussed in the update meeting. **(Q1-Q4)**
- Develop a generic FAQ to display prominently on the Town website regarding information from all departments on a large coverage of administrative tasks and responsibilities. This would require collaboration from all departments. **(Q1)**

1.3 Strategy:

Improve website information to allow ease of use and information flow both internally and externally.

Background:

The website is difficult to navigate and is full of outdated information. The communications department only has a surface level knowledge of what is important and what is no longer relevant for each department without being directly told.

Proposed Actions:

- Have each department review their respective section on the website and compile a list of what needs to be changed, removed, or kept the same. **(Q1)**
- Determine how each department would like their section of the website to be presented. This process has already begun to occur. For example, meeting with project manager to update the page to have weekly updates on ongoing projects to keep information recent and archived for posterity. **(Q1)**
- Possible rebranding with the help of Incite is being explored.

Goal 2: Improve Transparency and Trust within the Organization (Internal)

2.1 Strategy:

Give a better understanding of what each department does

Proposed Actions:

- The FAQ mentioned previously would be beneficial
- Work on a highlight series that showcases different departments, who is in them, and the different tasks and responsibilities that they are responsible for that occur around town. The different mediums that the town has at its disposal can be used to effectiveness here. Blog posts can be used for Facebook and website, images can be shared to Instagram, lighter and fun videos can be made for the TikTok account that has been set up over the past few months and be used to begin developing a following. **(Q2-Q4)**

2.2 Strategy:

Ensure that engagement policies are clear and understandable.

Background:

In recent months there has been an increase in hostile and hateful comments, as well as spam.

Proposed Actions:

- Develop a social media terms of engagement and have it readily available. This ensures people who are interacting with the Town's accounts know what is appropriate. It also makes it clear which content is not appropriate and will be removed or not engaged with. The Communications department is striving to build a platform that allows for two-way communication, but two-way communication is difficult to conduct when the conversation isn't started with the intention of being constructive. **(Q1-Q2)**

2.3 Strategy:

Develop a Media Relations Strategy

Background:

The Town does not currently have a media relations strategy which is needed if it wants to receive outside attention or be able to tell its story to outside sources.

Proposed Actions:

- Develop a press release template/guide which can be built upon whenever newsworthy information needs to be shared. **(Q1)**
- Continue to enhance the media contact list which is comprised of an extensive list of prominent Edmonton based reporters. **(Q1-Q4)**
- Inquire with internal departments, community organizations and monitor social media to be aware of events within the community and determine whether a press release or media advisory should be sent out to gain media coverage. **(Q1-Q4)**

Goal 3: Increase capacity to communicate with and engage with residents in meaningful ways (External)

3.1 Strategy:

Have specific types of content located in appropriate mediums

Background:

Currently, Facebook is the Town's main communication method, causing other outlets to become secondary. Each outlet has its strengths and weaknesses and allows for different kinds of engagement and reach that can be utilized.

Proposed goals:

- Administrative information such as council agendas, bylaws, etc can be put on the website and be pushed to social media depending on the information. All important information will be located on the town website and not just on social media. **(Q1)**.
- Important/time sensitive information such as road and facility closures or emergencies can be done through notification communications and pushed to social media. This can be done through either text notifications from the website alert centre that we already have in place or done through an emergency communications service such as Alertable or Voyent Alert. Both have benefits and drawbacks. Current system is already in place for no extra cost and would just require residents to sign up for notifications via either text or email. However, the process is a bit cumbersome, and the

result only supplies residents a notification that gives them a link to a post with the title name. They also need to subscribe to each event category individually. With the paid service all residents will need to do is download an app and they will receive app notifications that can be sent based off location. This would cost the Town between \$2500-\$3000 a year. Big Lakes County recently implemented Voyent Alert and the City of Vancouver recently implemented Alertable. Both would require an information campaign developed by the Communications Department to encourage and instruct how to sign up. **(Q2-Q3)**

- Softer/commercially neutral information can be saved exclusively for social media. More social media avenues are being explored such as TikTok and LinkedIn (Incite is providing assistance with establishing this account). The platforms can be used by departments to highlight information that is happening around town. **(Q1)**

3.2 Strategy:

Expand reach to outside of region.

Background:

Currently the main reach of our social media is locally, with the next closest following being Edmonton with less than 10%.

Proposed Actions:

- Create content that allows more active participation from residents, rather than passively being given information. This increases interaction and sharing which can help in achieving organic growth and reach **(Q1-Q4)**
- Enhance media relations efforts to get local word of mouth of activities and events to a larger audience. **(Q1-Q4)**
- Explore paid social media promotion on large events such as *All-In* to encourage outside participants to attend. **(Q1-Q4)**

Goal 4: Increase resident engagement and knowledge of the public process (External)

4.1 Strategy:

Implement more opportunities for residents to directly engage in the process to build two-way communication.

Background:

Currently the Town only shares information without any consistent interaction outside of comments. Content needs to be made that allows residents to participate, which will also help improve knowledge of the municipal process.

Proposed goals:

- Create more opportunities for informal digital feedback (online polls, Instagram story quizzes, educational content on lesser-known aspects of the municipal process, Q&A). **(Q2-Q4)**

Examples:

- Use the ethelo program to encourage residents to learn about the budgeting process. This program allows residents to participate in an online survey that allows them to determine how they would allocate taxes and funds to different resources using a fixed budget. This allows participants to understand where their taxes go within the town and gives perspective on the decision-making process that goes into it. The Town is also able to see the results of these surveys which can give a better understanding of how residents would like to see their taxes spent which can be put towards future decisions. **(Q4)**
- In terms of question and answers, Ask us Anything type questions can be posted on the Town's social media. The City of Calgary recently posted the question on their Instagram "What would you like to know about city service plans and budgets" which was followed by an online video of the Chief Financial Officer answering selected questions. Allows voices to be heard while also actively participating. **(Q2-Q4)**

Evaluation:

Provide quarterly reporting on social media analytics to the senior leadership and council. Evaluate the success of the communications projects based on analytics, public surveys, levels of engagement online and in public through events and open houses, and feedback from senior management and council.

Annually:

- Review projects and initiatives completed to evaluate what is working and what needs to be improved upon.
- Conduct peer reviews of communications.
- Provide a summary report to Senior Management and Council.