SMALL TOWN P.R.

PLAYBOOK

CHANGING TIMES ◆ CHANGING TOOLS

Northern Development INITIATIVE TRUST

Northern Development Initiative Trust

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Small towns aren't what they used to be

Al Richmond,
Chair, Cariboo Regional District
Past President, Union of B.C. Municipalities

There was a time when sophisticated communications and public relations strategies were the bailiwick of big cities. Those days are over. From the Southern Interior to the Northern Rockies and points beyond, the demand from residents and stakeholders for increased communications, engagement and transparency has only intensified in our small communities.

Our region's communities are often small, short-staffed and separated by vast distances, and yet we're faced with some of the largest and most controversial topics in Canada today. Pipelines. Mines. Mills. The mountain pine beetle epidemic. Aboriginal relations and reconciliation. Climate change.

But how does a local government or band government effectively get its message out these days? How do we leverage new media with the traditional forms of communication – meetings, hearings, conversations - we're also so used to?

How do we meaningfully engage with our residents when faced with a summer wildfire or a controversial industrial project? How do we develop partnerships between our communities that withstand the good times and the bad?

These are just some of the challenges communities across central and northern B.C. are asking every day – and that's why the *Small Town P.R. Playbook* is so timely. The Playbook is a tool for small local and band governments to increase and improve their engagement with residents and key stakeholders.

The content in the Playbook reflects the dynamic nature of our region – showcasing the leading edge communications work underway in municipalities, regional districts and First Nations communities throughout B.C. And, perhaps most importantly, the Playbook is fun and easy to read, which hopefully will make it more enjoyable to pick up and read than a weighty textbook on the subject.

Communications and engagement practices in our communities have come a long way in recent years, but we still have a long way to go.

My hope is that the Playbook adds to the conversation about communications and public relations in our communities, and serves as an insightful, engaging and helpful tool for administrators, elected officials and communicators. Small towns aren't what they used to be, they're better than ever.

Changing times, changing tools

Paulin Hilistis Waterfall,
Councillor, Heiltsuk Tribal Council

To begin, "play" and "book" are incongruous to my 72-year-old Heiltsuk mind that was born into a traditional world where communication relied on the spoken word, hand gestures, facial expressions and body language.
It was these tools – the first tools - that were used to convey a full understanding of the topic in discussion.

Today, my nine-year-old granddaughter adds to my confusion as she effortlessly clicks through a variety of digital devices while I struggle to get my iPad to work, wondering all the while which graveyard my old typewriter rests in. The "talking stick" of yesteryear was used in a feast or potlatch system, and the holder of this ornately carved staff delivered a public speech without interruption. Now, the landline phone rings, the mobile phone buzzes, the television blares and the iPad dings.

From a structured traditional way of communicating to a multi-tasking virtual world, I can be overwhelmed.
As an elected leader, my daytime is filled with meeting schedules that can change on a dime and be eclipsed by other urgent concerns. Having enjoyed a simple, uncomplicated and idyllic life as a child to a complicated, complex and hectic one as an old woman, I sometimes wonder which end is up!
The traditional way of learning is audio-visual based with reinforcement through practice and teaching. As such, the *Small Town P.R. Playbook* could be one answer to enhancing my technical mind.

It integrates this traditional way of learning, and allows me to navigate communications according to my own needs and terms. This simple, uncomplicated and user friendly toolbox is a modern way of engaging with the people who matter most to us, building consensus, supporting effective communication and engaging users for maximum benefit and transparency.
Above all else, it helps me weave through a new world of technology that almost mimics the traditional ways of audio-visual engagement.

It could even become regarded as the new age talking stick, which of course means it needs to be adopted into a family clan, be ceremonially named and presented in a public setting.

Maybe we'll save that for later.
For now, it's a handy tool.

Good government and business depends on good communications

Matt Wood,
President, Canadian Public Relations Society – Northern Lights

On behalf of more than 50 members of the Canadian Public Relations Society Northern Lights (CPRS-NL) chapter, I am excited to endorse this first edition of the *Small Town P.R. Playbook*. In today's world, we are bombarded by conflicting information and perspectives. Good government and business depends on good communications, and as communications professionals working throughout the coastal, interior and northern reaches of British Columbia and the Yukon, we understand that.
This easy-to-read manual provides you with a great overview of best practices in public relations from people who know your communities, and the opportunities and challenges you face.

On behalf of CPRS-NL, I commend the Northern Development Initiative Trust for championing this project and turning a good idea into a tremendous product. I also thank the CPRS members who contributed to this project. Beyond the advice and expertise they have provided here, you will find a large and friendly group of public relations professionals living in the B.C. coast, interior and north who are ready to help you in your community engagement.

CPRS is an organization of 14 member societies across Canada, and CPRS-NL is a chapter represented by public relations professionals from Vancouver Island to Kelowna, to Northern B.C. and on to the Yukon. Our members live and work in your communities, and we're very proud of the work they undertake upholding the Canadian Public Relation Society Code of Professional Standards. You can learn more about CPRS-Northern Lights at cprsnorthernlights.com.

A great deal of effort has been invested by PR practitioners, and other community leaders in developing this Playbook. It is our hope this manual will support you in your communication endeavours and provide you with valuable insight as you enter the communications arena.

Small town P.R. is anything but boring

Joel McKay,
Editor, The Small Town P.R. Playbook
Director, Communications -
Northern Development Initiative Trust

Small town public relations.
Sounds boring right? Ha!

If that's what you think, consider this: Nearly two metres of snow have fallen in the last 48 hours and your municipality has virtually shutdown. People are worried about access to food and drinking water, and the town has only one communications person to get information out to them – you.

Or: how about this: The Supreme Court of Canada has just rendered a decision that will forever alter First Nations land title rights in Canada, and nearly every media outlet in the country wants to interview your tribal Chief. And there's only one person to coordinate it – you.

Or: A $9 billion hydroelectric dam is being proposed for construction a few kilometers from your town, half of your residents are in favour of it, half are opposed and one person has been asked to lead a public consultation process on it – you.

These are just a sample of some of the challenges communications and public relations professionals in small town B.C. are faced with every day (and also happen to be featured in this book). And in nearly every case these challenges are being met in communities that:

a. Have no communications staff whatsoever; or

b. Have a single communications officer or manager

And yet our communities are responding to these challenges with innovative new ways to engage and consult with the public, show respect to our members and residents and get information out to them.

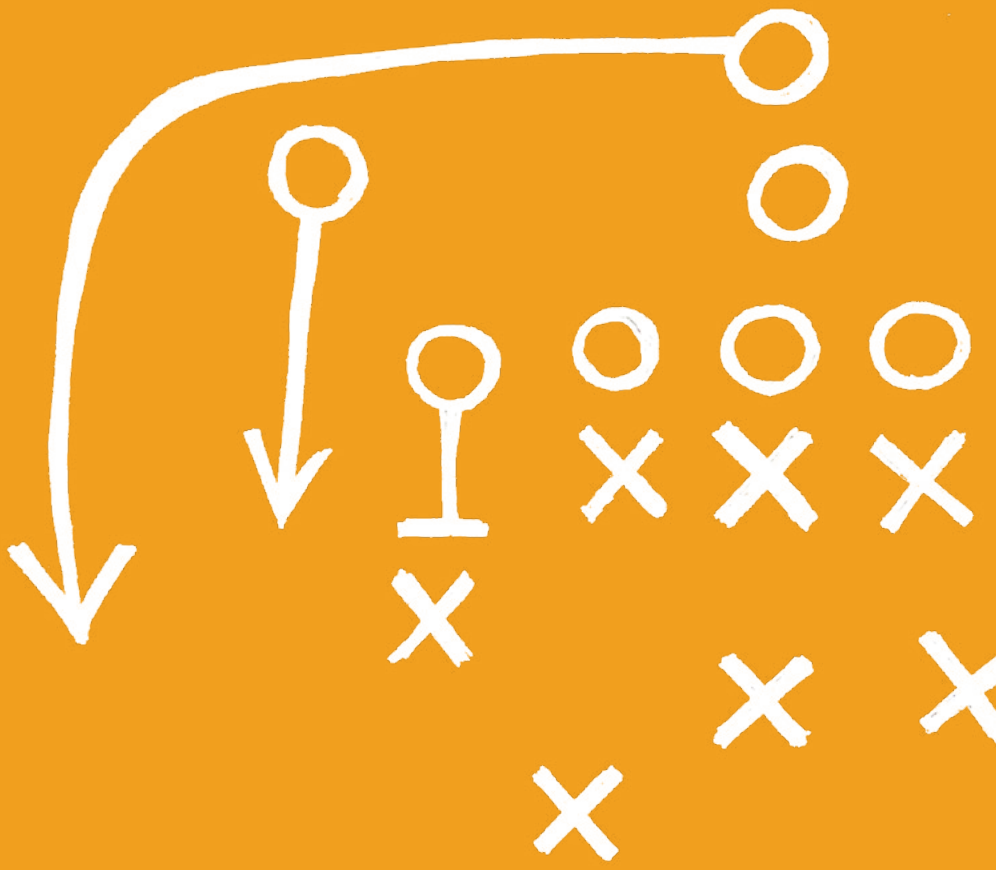
The *Small Town P.R. Playbook* is a fun, accessible tool that has been specifically designed for local government and First Nations community administrators who aren't professional communicators, but are faced with these issues and challenges every day. *The Playbook* showcases the innovative work underway in small communities across British Columbia, accomplishments that are often overshadowed by 'big city' P.R.

The summaries, case studies, tools and graphics in this book have been written and designed by small town, local government and First Nations community P.R. professionals from across B.C. As a result, this book showcases the expert opinions, approaches and experiences of more than two-dozen professionals, representing nearly every region in British Columbia.

SECTION ONE

Chapter 1

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT AND THE GAME PLAN



Trust and relationships are the foundation of good P.R. – you simply can't do the job without them

By: Joel McKay

The nature of small towns is that there really is no anonymity, which means your words have to mirror your actions

Public relations, public affairs, external relations, communications – they're all nice titles for a basic function: building trust and relationships. Trust and relationships are the foundation of good P.R. – you simply can't do the job without them. I repeat: you can't do the job without them. Why?

Think of it this way: who's going to read your news release if they don't trust that the information in it is factual? Or, when a reporter calls and you ask them for a bit of time to get the information they need or connect them with the appropriate person, are they going to cut you some slack? Only if you've built a trust-based relationship with them. Just the same, who's going to show up to your event if you haven't built relationships with your invitees? Or, perhaps most importantly, in an emergency situation or crisis it's absolutely essential that the information you disseminate publicly is factual, accurate and timely – so that the public knows the information coming directly from the community can be trusted and they can act accordingly.

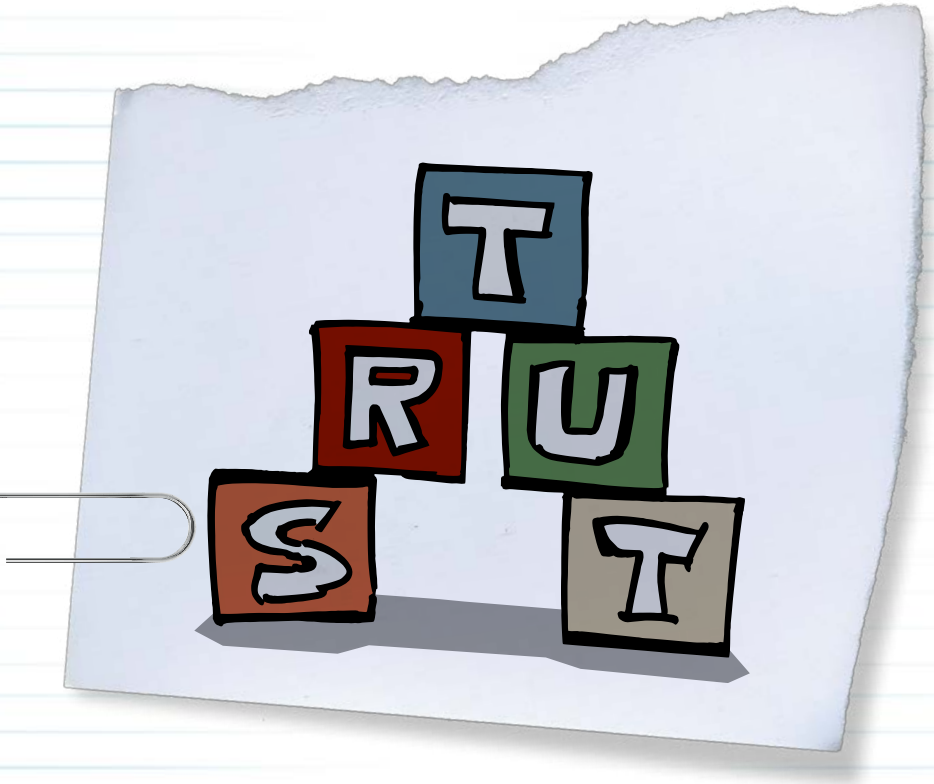
The Small Town P.R. Playbook was designed to be a fun, easy-to-read tool that community administrators can use to improve their day-to-day communications and public relations practices. Throughout *the Playbook* there are overviews, summaries, case studies, tools and templates designed to assist in this effort. The unspoken words throughout the Playbook are 'trust' and 'relationships' – when combined, these two base elements are the chemistry that makes all of your other public relations activities successful. And they're particularly important in small towns.

> "The unspoken words throughout the Playbook are 'trust' and 'relationships' – when combined, these two base elements are the chemistry that makes all of your other public relations activities successful."

The nature of small towns is that there really is no anonymity – everyone wears multiple hats and, as an administrator, it's likely that the newspaper editor's son or

daughter plays soccer on the same team as your son or daughter. In many of our communities, it's impossible to go to the grocery or hardware store without running into half a dozen people you know. And, inevitably, you end up visiting with one or two of them.

It's crucial then the information we share on behalf of the community is factual, timely, genuine and mirrors what we say in our everyday conversations around town. Building trust and developing relationships is an ongoing process – it never ends nor should it. But it's important to know that it takes only one wrong move to lose trust or destroy a relationship – a single inaccuracy, a bad news release, a poorly managed public consultation process or event – and you're back at square one. And so I repeat: trust and relationships are the foundation of good P.R. – you simply can't do the job without them.



Rules of engagement – don't overlook the basics when it comes to your town's communications

By: Joel McKay

In addition to building trust and developing relationships, there are some basic rules of engagement when it comes to everyday public relations – the items you want to ensure are checked off in most, if not all, of your external communications. We've tried to make it as simple as possible – so here's the list. It's short but important.

"Often, people just want to know they're being heard and that there's a real human being on the other end of the phone. First rate client service is a hallmark of good public relations."

1. Accurate:

make sure everything you communicate externally is fact-based. Use numbers and data where you can, and triple-check the numbers and data to ensure they're accurate before they're published. There's nothing worse than publishing false information that misleads your residents or stakeholders – the cleanup job can be insurmountable.

2. Timely:

a. Don't delay publishing information the public needs to know about, or that you promised them – get it out.

b. Make sure what you're publishing is relevant to the current discussion in the community.

3. Genuine:

Honesty is everything. The public knows when they're being spun. Be honest. Be genuine. Actions speak louder than words so ensure your actions match your words.

4. Responsive:

Be available and respond to people. If someone has a concern or is looking for information – get them an answer as soon as you can even if the answer is that you need more time to solve the concern they have or access the information they want. Often, people just want to know they're being heard and that there's a real human being on the other end of the phone. First rate client service is a hallmark of good public relations.

The Game Plan

By: Jan Enns

Step One: start with a plan.
Precious time and resources can be wasted due to a lack of or a poorly planned public information campaign.

If you're reading this, it's likely you have a career in local government and are helping to make a difference in your community. You're part of the "home team" providing clean drinking water, safe roads, handy recycling programs, ample parks and recreation opportunities, strong governance and much more. And while we as local government employees typically do a great job at getting all of this done, we don't always take it to the next level – that is, letting people in our community know what we are doing, why we are doing it and what they need to do or know to be a part of it. As a result, precious time and resources can be wasted fixing misunderstandings from a lack of or a poorly planned public information campaign.

"Solid communications can help you deliver your programs and services on time and on budget, and improve your reputation along the way."

That's where the role of communications comes into play. Communications is more than just creating a brochure or starting a Facebook page. It's a strategic business process designed to provide your residents and businesses a clear, consistent message for a specific purpose, such as informing or engaging. Thoughtful communications can reduce the challenges associated with misinformation, public opposition and bad press, and provide better information to your Council or Board. Solid communications can help you deliver your programs and services on time and on budget, and improve your reputation along the way.

Firstly, you need a game plan – otherwise known as a communications plan. This plan spells out, step-by-step, what you need to do to put your policy, program or service into practice. It will help you clarify your purpose, determine your audience, your message, how you can deliver that message and, finally, whether your communications worked. Your communications plan can be as short and simple as a few pages of notes or a more complex document, rich with details.

Why communicate?

Improve outcomes

If people don't know what you're doing they can't participate or support you, leading to a greater chance of project failure. A survey by the Project Management Institute, showed that about one third of projects fail primarily due to ineffective communications. [1]

Create sustainable decisions

By informing and engaging, we're able to gather input and insights that may not have been considered previously in the decision-making process. As a result, decisions may be less likely to be overturned due to public opposition.

Reduce barriers

Start communication planning as soon as you are thinking about starting, stopping or changing a program, project, service or policy. This early thinking will help you identify risks and barriers, and address them in advance, reducing the need for damage control.

Save time and resources

From a public relations perspective, the rule of thumb is for every hour you spend on planning ahead, you can save six to 10 hours of time fixing problems later. Communication planning will help you reduce the "do overs" and leads to more cost-effective decision-making.

Improve reputation and employee morale

It's important that a local government is seen to be "doing it right," especially in a small town where the "grapevine" rules. Your employees can be your biggest advocates. Trust studies have shown that your own employees are often the more trusted source for information – ahead of CEOs, well-known personalities and elected officials. [2]

Meet growing public demand

More and more citizens want to know about and have a say in what is happening in their community. The BC Auditor General's report on Public Participation: Principles and Best Practices in British Columbia (2009) found "the vast majority of Canadians surveyed indicated they would feel better about government decision-making if they knew that governments sought informed input from average citizens on a regular basis."

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1. (http://www.pmi.org/en/About-Us/Press-Releases/PMI-More-Than-Half-of-All-Project-Budget-Risk-is-Due-to-Ineffective-Communications.aspx)
2. (http://www.edelman.com/insights/intellectual-property/2015-edelman-trust-barometer/global-results/)

Communication planning in six simple steps

By: Jan Enns

Planning takes time and we know time is at a premium these days, so these six simple steps will help any community get its communications game plan in shape in short order.

1. What do you want to do?

Identify your broad communication **goals** and specific **objectives**. What do you need to achieve with your communications? What will you monitor and measure to see if you have succeeded?

Goals are broad statements about what you want to achieve with your communications. They articulate your purpose for communicating.

For example:

- **Remind drivers to move their vehicles to make way for snow removal.**
- **Increase voter turnout.**
- **Get feedback on a proposed secondary suite bylaw.**

Objectives are specific.

Often described as "SMART" (specific, measureable, achievable, realistic and timely), objectives can help you identify, monitor and measure specific steps you need to take to achieve your goals. For example:

- **Send reminders to media and social media by noon on Wednesday.**
- **Increase voter turnout by 10 per cent over the last election.**
- **Host two open houses on the proposed bylaw by June 30.**

Be flexible.

For example:

- **At the start of the planning process, objectives don't need to be written in stone.**
- **Simply revisit your objectives once you've completed your plan.**
- **You may wish to change some of your objectives based on what you decide to do as you develop your plan, or what you plan to monitor or measure in the evaluation section.**

2. Who do you want to – and need to – reach?

There will be specific groups of people, which we call target audiences, you need to reach with your message.

They may be internal audiences like your own elected officials and front line staff, or external audiences like business groups and neighbourhood associations. In both the internal and external audiences, prioritize your key, or primary, target audiences, so you can identify who needs to know first and plan accordingly. The more you can identify key target audiences you want to reach, the more successful your plan will be.

"Responding to an inquiring public is a lot easier when you can show you've considered or addressed some of the bigger challenges in advance."

Different audiences usually have distinct communications needs that require different approaches, messages and tools to deliver those messages. For example, you might host a neighbourhood meeting for businesses directly impacted by a lengthy summer road construction project, providing information in more detail, while media updates and ads could be the main way to reach the rest of the community.

Understanding your target audiences also helps you more readily identify barriers and benefits to increase awareness or participation.

What are the risks in communicating with these audiences? One of the key benefits of communication planning is the ability to assess potential barriers and take action to remove them if possible. For example, how can you reduce the length of time road construction will restrict access to businesses during their peak summer months? Can you change the start or end date of construction so businesses can benefit from the summer tourist season? Responding to an inquiring public is a lot easier when you can show you've considered or addressed some of the bigger challenges in advance.

Make plans to inform each audience in a timely matter. Be sure to avoid surprises for your elected officials as well as those external audiences who may be most affected by the actions being taken.

3. What do you want to tell them?

Once you know who you need to reach and have identified and removed significant barriers, think about what you need to communicate.

What's your message?

What do your audiences need to know, want to know or are likely to ask?

At a minimum, always be prepared to answer these three questions:

- What you are doing (or what is happening)
- Why you are doing it, and why it's better or necessary (the rationale)
- What your audience needs to know or do (the "call-to-action")

Your message needs to be clear, consistent and compelling. Keep it simple and easy to understand. Support your message with facts, statistics, examples or testimonials to lend credibility to your message.

For more on messaging, be sure to check out Chapter 6 - Conveying your message.

4. How will you reach them?

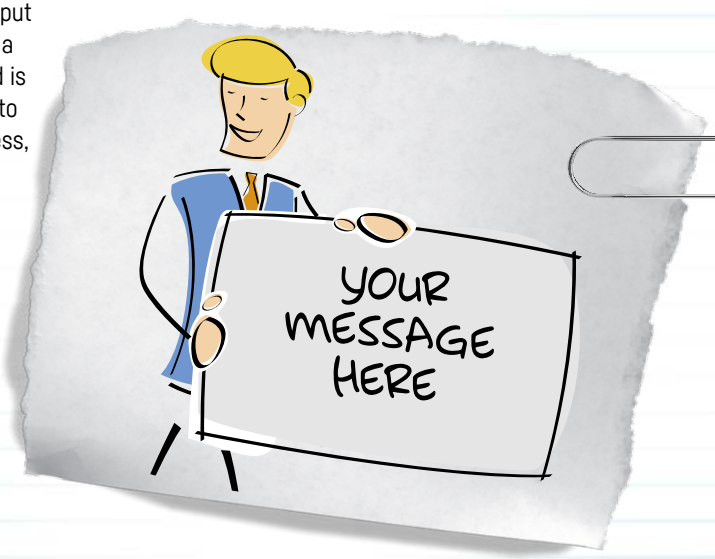
Knowing your audiences will help you better decide how to spread the word. Start with an assessment of what you typically use and grow your list of communication tools from there.

You're competing for people's attention in a media-saturated world so consider using a variety of ways to showcase your message. Remember, the magic is in the mix. Here are five key areas to think about::

- **Publicity:** Also known as "earned media coverage," these are the news stories that run in your local media often generated by a news release that you sent. Typically these news stories get better coverage than a paid advertisement. However, there is no guarantee that your local media outlets will publish your words verbatim.

- **Paid advertising:** This is the best way to ensure that your message gets to your audience in your words. Be sure to budget for advertising whether print, radio, TV or online, especially for those larger projects.

- **Personal and community contacts:** Personal networks are really key, particularly in smaller communities. For example, look for opportunities to make presentations to local community groups, service clubs and businesses. It's a great opportunity for them to get to know you and your message, and to ask and have their questions answered. It helps put a personal face on a public program and is more likely to lead to increased awareness, participation and support.



- **Informational and promotional materials:** Think ahead about what type of materials you will need such as handouts, newsletters, media releases and posters to name a few. Plan ahead to ensure the content and key messages can be crafted, designed, approved and produced in time. And make sure the look, colour and design are consistent, making your brand easier to recognize in its many forms.

- **Website and online:** Keep your website up-to-date. Make sure information about your program is prominently featured and easy to access. For larger projects, you may wish to dedicate a webpage where you can host all of the information about that program. You may also wish to extend an invitation for people to sign up for project updates. Keeping an up-to-date email list of key community contacts and groups will make it easier for you to reach them when needed. And don't forget your social media sites if you have them. You'll need to ensure you have the information about your program posted on Facebook or other social media sites. You'll also need to ensure that you check those sites for comments and respond promptly.

Learn more on Social Media in Chapter 8 – Social Media, Websites and Internet Tools.

- **Who will do what by when?**
  Someone once said, "If you don't record who will do what by when, no one will do anything ever!" A simple action plan will help you identify the steps that need to be taken to ensure success. It can also help you identify costs associated with your communications plan for budgeting purposes.

Check out the example included in the Six Steps Worksheet in Chapter 11 - Resources.

6. How did it go?

How you choose to evaluate your project will vary according to the size and complexity of your communications plan.

What are you able to track in order to measure or monitor?
Did you achieve your objectives?
Do you need to adjust your objectives?
Did you complete your project on time and on budget?

Some common methods for evaluation include:

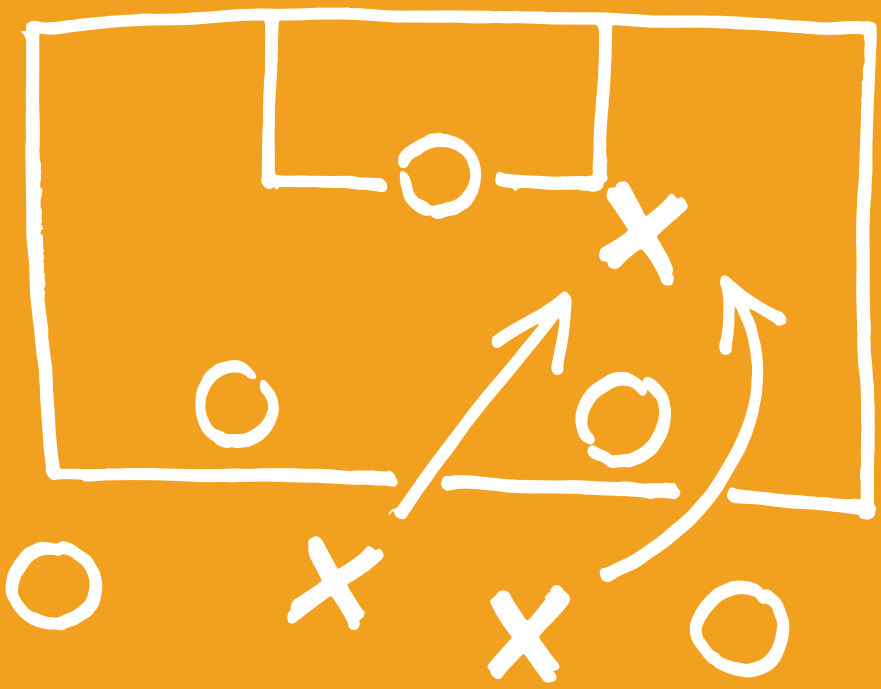
- **Process** – What worked well? What can we improve for next time?
- **Outputs** – What did we track (e.g., how many survey respondents, open house attendees or website hits)?
- **Outcome** – How well did we achieve our SMART objectives? What feedback did we get (e.g., what did we learn from the surveys, calls, media coverage and content)?

These six simple steps will get you started on your game plan. Planning for the different audience and options will give you a clearer picture of what you can achieve so you can make the most of your valuable time, limited resources and the competing demands of a noisy world.

SECTION ONE

Chapter 2

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, COMMUNITY CHARTER AND FREEDOM OF INFORMATION -OH MY



Playing by the Rules – Local Government Act and Community Charter requirements

By: Renee McCloskey and Karla Jensen

Consultation and engagement in local government is more than building public consensus, in many cases it is a requirement of law. Local governments in British Columbia must adhere to the *Community Charter* and the *Local Government Act.*

The *Local Government Act* is the provincial statute that creates municipalities and regional districts and, together with the *Community Charter*, enables them to perform their assigned responsibilities and obligations.

The *Local Government Act* and the *Community Charter* define the requirements local governments must meet when it comes to public notification and/or consultation. Meeting these requirements can prove challenging for smaller, rural communities who may not be as well serviced by media outlets, or whose population is spread out over a large geographic area. For example, in Section 94 of the Community Charter, Public Notification Requirements include the following:

Subject to subsection (4), publication under subsection (1) (b)

(a) must be in a newspaper that is distributed at least weekly
(i) in the area affected by the subject matter of the notice, and
(ii) if the area affected is not in the municipality, also in the municipality, and
(b) unless otherwise provided, must be once each week for two consecutive weeks.

At a time when community newspapers are cutting back on their publishing days, or closing down entirely, meeting these requirements can be difficult. If your local government has concerns about its ability to meet the public notification requirements, they should contact the Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development, Local Government Division to discuss alternate ways to satisfy public notification requirements.

The following is a listing of some of the subject matters that require either public notice or public consultation under the Local Government Act or the Community Charter.

In some instances, the requirements are different for regional districts and municipalities.

	Subject	LGA	CC	Public Notice	Public Consultation
1	Tax Sale	✓		✓	
2	Protected Heritage Property	✓		✓	
3	Termination of Land Use Contract	✓		✓	
4	Board of Variance – Application for variance or exemption to relieve hardship	✓		✓	
5	Development Variance Permit Applications	✓		✓	
6	Temporary Use Permit Applications	✓		✓	
7	Public Hearings on Planning and Land Use Bylaws	✓		✓	
8	If Public Hearing on Planning and Land Use Bylaws Waived	✓		✓	
9	Tax Notice		✓	✓	
10	Disposition of Land and Improvements	✓	✓	✓	
11	Application to Volunteer as a Scrutineer	✓		✓	
12	Assent Voting	✓		✓	
13	Election by Voting	✓		✓	
14	Nomination for Election	✓		✓	
15	District municipality drainage works	✓		✓	

Provisions within the Local Government Act and Community Charter are subject to change.

	Subject	LGA	CC	Public Notice	Public Consultation
16	Board Meetings	✓		✓	
17	Parcel Tax Roll Review Panel	✓		✓	
18	Alternative Approval Process	✓	✓	✓	
19	Drainage Works	✓	✓	✓	
20	Improvement District Annual General Meeting	✓		✓	
21	Annual Reporting on Regional District Finances	✓		✓	
22	Municipal Development Works Agreements with Private Developers	✓		✓	
23	Municipal Boundary Changes	✓		✓	
24	Development of Regional Growth Strategy	✓			✓
25	Official Community Plan	✓			✓
26	Financial Plan	✓	✓	✓	✓
27	Permissive Tax Exemptions		✓	✓	
28	Council Meetings		✓	✓	
29	Procedure Bylaw Amendment, Repeal or Substitution		✓	✓	
30	Annual Municipal Report Meeting		✓	✓	
31	Local Area Service on Council Initiative		✓	✓	
32	Special Council Meetings		✓	✓	
33	Intention to Provide Certain Forms of Assistance		✓	✓	
34	Business Regulation		✓	✓	
35	Opening and Closure of Highways		✓	✓	
36	Recovery of Taxes		✓	✓	

Your corporate officer is your in-house expert on the requirements for public notification and consultation. Updated versions of it are available online.

CASE STUDY

Re-imaging boring public notices: how the Village of Pemberton made national news with its eye-catching ads

By: Kim Slater and Jill Brookbank

"There is not a single communication approach that will work for all residents. It's important to understand community demographics and create outreach initiatives tailored to each group. Planning these initiatives can be a bit more time intensive but will pay off."

– **Jill Brooksbank,**
Communications Coordinator
Village of Pemberton

You know those pesky public notices you are legally required to post in the local newspaper? Not terribly engaging, are they? We don't think so either – but there's a solution! And the solution was developed right here in Small Town B.C. (with a little encouragement from Toronto).

But let me back up. A few years ago, Toronto community activist Dave Meslin noticed the City of Toronto's public notices weren't terribly engaging. In fact, he described them in a video and TED Talk as "intentional exclusion." He then invited designers across the country to reimagine municipal development notices. Meslin received submissions from across the country. He then asked communities to reimagine their notices. A few months later, the Village of Pemberton in B.C.'s Sea-to-Sky country submitted to Meslin a re-designed public hearing template (pictured on page 31). The template caught Meslin's attention and he travelled to Pemberton to present the community with the first ever DNA award (Dazzling Notice Award).

Meslin's TED Talk and video were the catalyst for Pemberton to get working on a new approach to public notices. Jill Brooksbank, the village's communications coordinator, and Caroline Lamont, the village's manager of development services, teamed up to address the issue. At the time, Pemberton council was searching for creative ways to extend the village's reach in the community, specifically to increase participation in public meetings. With that in mind, Brooksbank and Lamont started working on a new notice that was appealing, relevant and easy to understand. This collaborative approach to the redesign

involved several mock-up designs, as well as staff members from the planning and legislative services department to ensure the ad complied with legislation and that all necessary legal information was included. Pemberton ensured the redesign also included two key components: rewording the text and an eye catching design that served as a call to action.

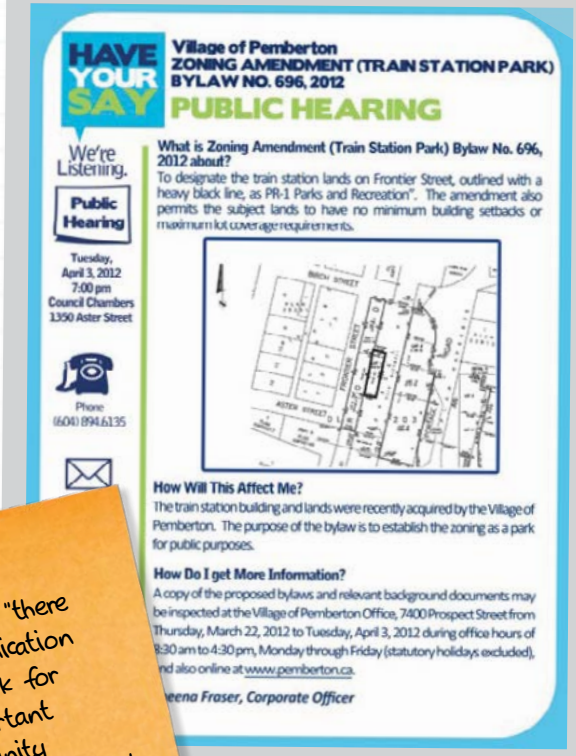
In addition to garnering an award from Meslin, the community has seen traffic to its website, newsletter and social media sites increase since the ads were redesigned. The redesigned ads also generated a lot of community conversation, national media coverage and attracted an overwhelming response from other communities across Canada.
This article was written with the help of Jill Brooksbank and Kim Slater from the Village of Pemberton. Thank you to them.

With the community in mind, village staff created three questions to clearly outline the purpose of each note:

1. What's the notice about?
2. How does it affect me?
3. How do I get more information?

The graphic elements included:

1. A layout that was readable and flowed nicely for the eye.
2. Adequate white space.
3. Prominent placement of contact information for municipal hall.
4. Full colour to ensure the ad stood out in the newspaper where it was posted.


HAVE YOUR SAY

Village of Pemberton
ZONING AMENDMENT (TRAIN STATION PARK)
BYLAW NO. 696, 2012

PUBLIC HEARING

We're Listening.

Public Hearing

Tuesday, April 3, 2012
7:00 pm
Council Chambers
1350 Aster Street

Phone
(604) 894.6135

What is Zoning Amendment (Train Station Park) Bylaw No. 696, 2012 about?

To designate the train station lands on Frontier Street, outlined with a heavy black line, as PR-1 Parks and Recreation". The amendment also permits the subject lands to have no minimum building setbacks or maximum lot coverage requirements.

How Will This Affect Me?

The train station building and lands were recently acquired by the Village of Pemberton. The purpose of the bylaw is to establish the zoning as a park for public purposes.

How Do I get More Information?

A copy of the proposed bylaws and relevant background documents may be inspected at the Village of Pemberton Office, 7400 Prospect Street from Thursday, March 22, 2012 to Tuesday, April 3, 2012 during office hours of 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday (statutory holidays excluded), nd also online at www.pemberton.ca.

eena Fraser, Corporate Officer

Lesson learned?
In Brooksbank's words, "there is not a single communication approach that will work for all residents. It's important to understand community demographics and create outreach initiatives tailored to each group. Planning these initiatives can be a bit more time intensive but will pay off."

TRANSPARENCY

Freedom of Information – the five basics you need to know

By: Shelly Burich and Alice Johnston

The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPPA) has significant implications for local government communications in B.C. For those staff at small local governments that also wear the communications hat, you should be aware of your responsibilities under the Act, and involve the appropriate staff member if there is any discrepancy in regard to whether or not FOIPPA applies to a communique.

"Consider implementing an open information program in your local government that will enable proactive disclosure of records"

Our top five tips to remember when dealing with FOIPPA and communications are:

1. The Act places an obligation on local governments to disclose information without delay (and without requiring a request for the information), if disclosure is in the public interest. In other words, if there is a significant risk of harm to the environment or to the health or safety of the public or a group of people, speak with your head FOI staff member to see if you should get the information out there through your communications channels.

2. Personal information may only be collected if it is necessary to do so, and there are rules about how it may be collected and from whom. For example, you may want to consider posting a warning on your website advising that information is being collected through use of the website.

3. Disclosure of anyone's personal information is highly restricted; check the Act before doing so.

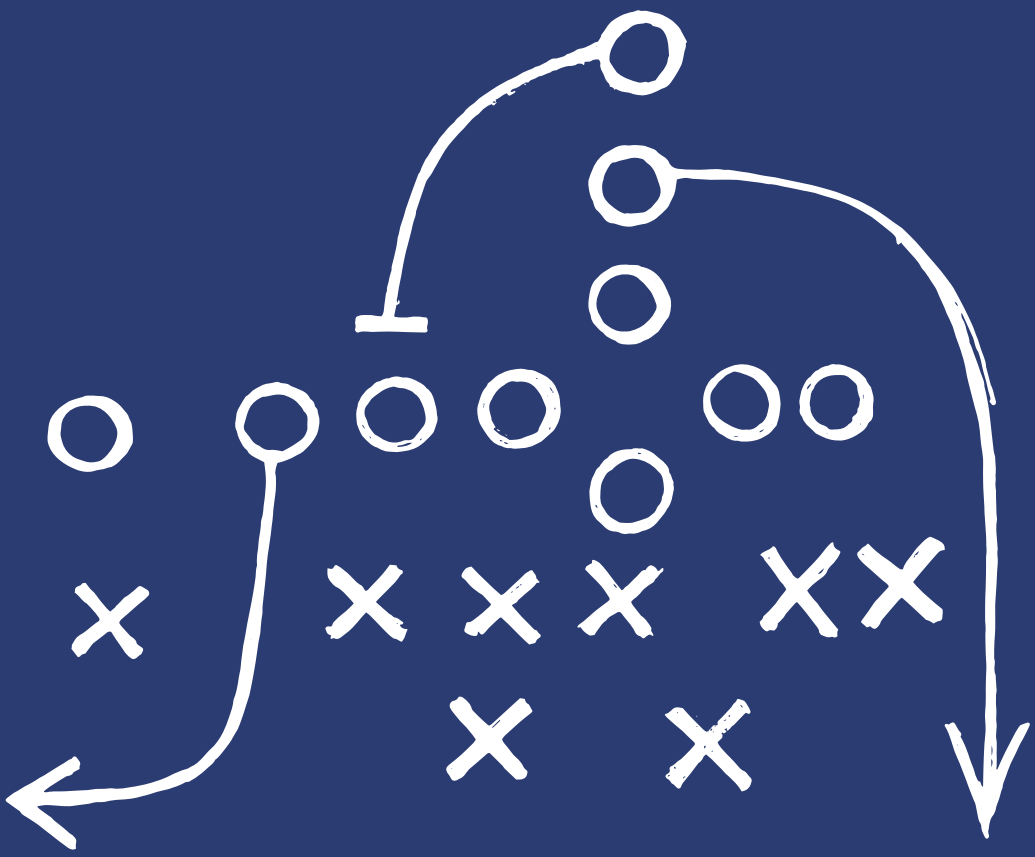
4. Requests for information under FOIPPA may be seen as an opportunity to advance the concept of open transparency. Consider implementing an open information program in your local government that will enable proactive disclosure of records in accordance with the Act, in a way that serves the public effectively.

5. Remember that all local government records are subject to the requirements under FOIPPA, including emails. Be careful when forwarding emails that may contain personal information.

SECTION TWO

Chapter 3

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS



Internal communications: getting everyone rowing in the same direction

By: Joel McKay

If you don't have effective systems and processes in place you're going to have chaotic internal communications and discombobulated external communications.

News flash: you're going to have a tough time communicating effectively with residents if you can't communicate with your own staff, Council and/or Board. This might seem like a glaringly obvious point but I can't tell you how many local governments I've been in where the fundamental P.R. challenge is not external communications but a lack of solid internal communications.

Think of your town as a canoe on a journey and all of your staff are paddlers in that canoe. What happens if everyone is paddling at different times and different directions?

So what do I mean by 'internal'? Simply put, it's the way in which town staff and elected officials communicate and share information amongst themselves. The fact is if you don't have effective systems and processes in place for this you're going to have chaotic internal communications and, as a result, discombobulated external communications.

Here's another way to look at it: think of your town as a canoe on a journey and all of your staff are paddlers in that canoe, what happens if everyone is paddling at different times and different directions? You'll go around in circles.

Now, in small towns where the municipality only has three or four staff this might not seem like a big deal – especially when those three or four staff sit next to one another in a single office space.

But even in those cases don't overlook the fact that the volunteer fire department has a dozen or more people who work out of a separate building outside of typical office hours, public works has temporary summer employees and Council – or your Board – are part-time officials who, in light of B.C.'s unique geography, might live a ways away or even on another island.

One of the complaints I've heard most often from local government staff is that they find out about town news once it's already hit the media. Another frequent complaint is when staff members are surveyed about workplace matters ...and then their opinions seemingly vanish into the ether!

Here's a tip:

If you're going to ask for someone's opinion, it might be wise to report back to them at a later date how that opinion was used or impacted decision making – it shows respect and builds trust. Another key aspect to consider is inter-departmental initiatives.
In small communities, a staff person might wear multiple hats: handling recreation centres, economic development and the town website.

Consider a situation where public works has a new initiative, does recreation need to know about it? Should it be posted on the website? It's wise to determine ahead of time which departments might have an area of responsibility that's crucial to the success of your department's initiative – and once you've mapped it out, find a way to be inclusive. Again, this builds systems for trust and collaboration. Often communities run into challenges and don't have protocols for information sharing between staff and Council or the Board. There should be protocols for this. In very small communities, the most common protocol is for all information between staff and Council and the Board to flow through the chief administrative officer (CAO) – the reason for this is to ensure there aren't conversations being had, money being spent or decisions being made that only one or two elected officials know about: everyone should know and have the opportunity to vote on new initiatives.

Just the same, it's good for a local government to understand how a Council or Board wants to communicate with staff. Do they want the ability to engage directly with staff members on issues? Or should everything flow through the CAO? If an email comes in from a councillor to a junior staff person requesting information, does the staff person have the authority to respond to the request without letting the CAO know?

Or should the request be kicked up to the department head or CAO for response to the councillor or all of council? Each council and board is different and it's important to ask these questions early and have systems and processes in place that encourage collaboration, two-way communication and an environment of fairness and transparency.

Internal communications tips

Tip #1.

Have clearly defined policies and procedures for sharing information and engaging with staff internally – Is there an internal newsletter? How often is it published, for whom and what's in it? How often are staff meetings held? How do junior staff receive information or report information up the chain? How do department heads get back to them?

Tip #2.

Have clearly defined systems for sharing information between staff and council or the board – does it all go through the CAO? When a single request comes in from a board member, is the reply back cc'd to all board members?

Tip #3.

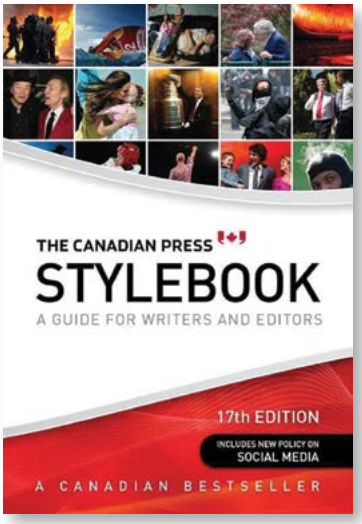
Establish communications triggers – staff reports to Council and the Board almost always include a "financial implications" section, consider including a "communications implications" section as well. This trigger point will force staff to consider the communications requirements for every initiative, allowing the community to be more proactive with both its internal and external communications and engagement initiatives.

Losing time fixing grammar and spelling? Adopt Canadian Press Style

By: Joel McKay

Want to know what gets capitalized and why?
The style guide has your answers.

The Canadian Press Stylebook is your one-stop shop for all the answers to your grammar, spelling and capitalization questions



Here's a question: how many productive hours have you lost this year editing reports and briefing notes for spelling, capitalization, grammar and the like? Now multiply those hours by the equivalent of your hourly rate. The result is horrifying, isn't it? There's a solution, and no it doesn't involve regular spelling tests and grammar courses for your staff members. Make your life easy: adopt Canadian Press Style in your organization.

The Canadian Press Stylebook is your one-stop shop for all the answers to your grammar, spelling and capitalization questions. Originally designed for journalists and the Canadian Press national news agency, it's become widely adopted as the accepted style guide for media across Canada, public relations professionals, educators and public sector workers. Want to know what gets capitalized and why? The style guide has your answers. When do you write out numbers and when do you use digits? The style guide has your answers Want to know when to use abbreviations and acronyms? The style guide has your answers.

As a former journalist, the style guide is my Bible. I don't leave home without it (not really) and I ensure all my communications staff own copies of it. Also, I'm constantly working to ensure our organization is adhering to Canadian Press Style as closely as we can (and it's not always easy, nor is it currently perfect, to be clear).

Possessing a commonly agreed to set of rules for basic writing will save your organization time and money. The style guide can be ordered online and is updated every few years to include new and relevant information. Its partner book – Caps and Spelling – is an alphabetically ordered collection of commonly used Canadian words and how they should be spelled and/or capitalized. I use both of these books constantly.

So here's my advice. It's simple:

1. Order the Stylebook and Caps and Spelling right now.
2. Eagerly await their arrival.
3. When they arrive, hold them up to the sunlight and enjoy the glory that is Canadian Press Style.
4. Adopt these rules across your organization.
5. Enjoy no longer losing hours as CAO and Editor-in-Chief of your local government.

www.thecanadianpress.com

Bonus tip:

Reporters like it when you publish verbiage in Canadian Press Style – it makes their lives easier.

The small town graphic standards manual: organization or OCD?

By: Shelly Burich

Colours, logos and slogans – consistency is key and manuals help a local government achieve clarity and effectiveness in its communications.

The Devil is in the details! For years, communicators and marketers have strived to establish brands that are easily identifiable and consistently displayed in all materials be it print, television, documents, online applications and even radio. Graphic standards manuals are used to help ensure your community's identity or brand – including logo, slogan and colours – remain intact. The document will help guide external and internal audiences in the proper application of the logo, in other words, your corporate identity.

"Embracing and following set standards has been advantageous to the Cariboo Regional District, enabling us to achieve clarity and effectiveness in all print and electronic communications"

Traditionally, graphics standard manuals include content such as formatting of correspondence, emails and memos. As a local government, you may also want to include the use of letterhead as part of the policy. Some of the key sections you may want to consider for your manual (depending on your level of OCD) include:

- **Logo guidelines and usage**
- **Official colours (including Pantone colour matches)**
- **Slogans**
- **Typography**
- **Advertisements and notices**
- **Email formatting and signatures**
- **Letterhead and templates**
- **Graphics quality checklist**

The focus of a graphic identity is usually a symbol or logo. However, an identity system is much more than the utilization of a symbol. A comprehensive graphic system is a structure for communicating and presenting information logically, clearly and with distinction. The standards and guidelines should have

firm institutional support.
Embracing and following set standards has been advantageous to the Cariboo Regional District, enabling us to achieve clarity and effectiveness in all print and electronic communications.

Implementation of these standards will develop greater awareness of the Cariboo Regional District as a whole. Our comprehensive commitment to excellence in design will exemplify our commitment to quality in all other respects. When the graphic system is fully implemented, the identity will consistently distinguish all of your local government's publications and advertising– all print, electronic and audio visual materials.

A custom designed graphic standards manual will thus provide visual unity to your expansive and diverse organization for the first time in your organization's history. Your manual should provide technical information required to ensure that the visual identity is used consistently and uniformly – and it also helps to create accountability within your own organization.

Make your life easy: have a 'cheat' style guide pinned to the wall next to your monitor

By: Joel McKay

OK, by this point we've talked about a lot of basics to get you started – hopefully you're not too bored – but here's another piece that can help make your life easier: a cheat sheet style guide printed and pinned to the wall next to your monitor. Here's what I mean: Canadian Press Style and your graphic standards manual will contains loads of valuable information that you'll reference repeatedly and on an ongoing basis.

> The reality is that there are always a dozen words, phrases acronyms, statements or 'ways of writing' that are specific to each community

That's good. But the reality is that there are always a dozen words, phrases acronyms, statements or 'ways of writing' that are specific to each community – they come up repeatedly and, for whatever reason, it's difficult to remember our organization's 'custom' style for these items each time we're forced to write them again. So it's really handy if you have these items printed on the wall next to the monitor on your desk – quick reference is crucial.

Here's how to do it:

1. Make a list of a dozen words, phrases, acronyms or written items that are specific or 'custom' for your organization (for example, at Northern Development we refer to Northern B.C. with a capital 'N' and periods between 'B' and 'C' on every reference. Why? It's our custom style even though Canadian Press Style disagrees.)

2. It's wise to consult with your co-workers on the list – is there anything missing?

3. Once you have the list, print it out and ensure every staff member has it – this will help reinforce common business practices and reduce editing time later.

4. Review the list once a year to ensure it's up to date.

> **Bonus tip:**
>
> if it turns out your organization has two different ways of writing the same thing, pick one! If it's not easy to decide, revert to Canadian Press Style.

The value of an email policy in your town

By: Joel McKay

The more we rely on email to communicate with one another, the less we're able to truly engage with one another.

Remember when we talked about relationships and freedom of information and privacy protection? Here's another element to all of that: email. It seems these days that interoffice emails are replacing everyday conversations, especially in towns where staff are based in multiple buildings. The challenge here is the more we rely on email to communicate with one another, the less we're able to truly engage with one another – and the trust and relationships we've worked so hard to build begin to erode. As well, since we're human and co-workers generally get along with one another, we have a tendency after a time to become relaxed with one another and our email language becomes casual.

The risk here is that written language, notably written language of a transient nature, is often lacking context and can be misinterpreted if it becomes public. Emails are subject to freedom of information requests and can be accessed and released to the public – the last thing you want is an email going out that's perfectly fine internally, but externally lacks context and can be misinterpreted to embarrassing results. People get fired over these things. So here's a suggestion: have a short, succinct email policy that all staff members have signed and are accountable to avoid these pitfalls.

Here's an example:

Don't *write or send trivial emails from your [Local Government] account.*

Don't *use email as an excuse to avoid personal contact. Don't forget the value of face-to-face or even voice-to-voice communication.*

Don't *print copies of transitory emails for project files. Print and file only those emails that are critical to the file.*

Do not *forward emails without checking all of the content in the string – sensitive information may be included that should not be sent along.*

Be informal, *not sloppy. Proof for spelling and punctuation and always use sentence case. Your email message reflects you and the [Local Government], so traditional spelling, grammar, and punctuation rules apply. Refer to the Canadian Press Style guide where appropriate.*

Remember that your tone can't be heard in an email. Email communication can't convey the nuances of verbal communication. Staff is encouraged to communicate in-person or verbally whenever possible to maintain strong relationships with clients.

Refer to Page 27 for Community Charter Requirements

Spreadsheets do not build relationships – but a CRM can help

By: Kim Hayhurst

One of the first items I was tasked with at Northern Development was to identify and implement a tool to help resolve overflowing contact lists and make it easier for our team to keep in touch with key clients. We decided to implement a full Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system that would not only fulfill our contact management needs, but also empower our small team with client engagement information.

If your organization at all values customer service, you need a CRM. Traditionally used by sales teams, a CRM can benefit any type of organization. Properly implemented, a CRM will help define internal work processes, enhance the way staff engages with clients and help achieve organizational goals in an effective and efficient manner.

The work to prepare for the CRM implementation was considerable. It required that I possess an in-depth knowledge of our business processes, information needs – oh, and dozens of hours poring over contact lists to clean up the data we had collected over a decade of doing business. We cleaned our data and implemented consistent formats for how data was created and managed. We also spent time validating email addresses and creating tags for contacts so that we could locate them easier or group contacts together for target marketing. Although it was exhausting, this front end work was crucial to ensuring the system we implemented was useful.

Of course, don't be surprised if your staff are initially resistant to such a significant change in how they work and document client interactions. It's important to reassure staff the CRM will not be used as a performance measurement tool, and that, over time, they will come to depend on the system as a critical tool for success.

"Properly implemented, a CRM will help define internal work processes, enhance the way staff engages with clients and help achieve organizational goals in an effective and efficient manner."

The bottom line is this: *a properly managed and maintained CRM will create efficiencies in your organization that save you time and money and strengthen your relationships with customers and clients.*

10 reasons you need a CRM

1. Your memory is not perfect. Where are your car keys? Yeah, took a second, right? Don't limit your corporate potential by what you can remember. A CRM will help you document institutional memory, which is especially important when people change jobs or leave the organization.

2. You need metrics A CRM will provide you with easy access to many reports rich with statistics on everything from last interactions to completed projects. And you won't have to calculate a thing.

3. History is important A CRM will allow you and your colleagues to review the history of any client with your organization. It will help everyone understand what it took to get to where things are today.

4. Email marketing A CRM is ideal for connecting with clients using email. You can finely segment your contacts and direct highly targeted emails so they are receiving information specific to their interests with your organization. And you can track if they were effective.

5. Manage your to do list A CRM can prevent you from dropping the ball with your clients. A CRM will help you track actionable items, assign tasks to colleagues, set up meetings, create call lists and follow-ups.

6. Consistency counts A CRM will force all users to enter data into the system in a consistent format. This quality control will produce more useable results for reports and direct marketing campaigns.

7. You need to manage risks A CRM will create a trail of touch points that can be audited in the event of a client dispute, staff conflict or a lost customer.

8. Empower your staff Information really is power and a CRM will allow staff to field client inquiries to the absolute best of their ability by accessing client history, preferences and needs.

9. Relationships are everything Accessing client information in the CRM allows the level of customer service that can be provided to be unparalleled. It will only help build the intimate knowledge that you have of your clients and their needs.

10. Time is limited Streamline processes by automating them, freeing up time for more valuable business activities, like engaging with your clients.

Contact lists and eblasts – how to get the most out of targeted email campaigns

By: Kim Hayhurst

How many emails do you receive in a day?

According to a report by the Radicati Group, in 2015 the average number of business emails a person sent/received per day was 122. That number is only expected to grow. Reaching around 126 by 2019. If you're like me, that number sounds about right, which is a lot of information coming at us every ... single ... day. The question then becomes: how do we ensure our eblasts are actually read by the people we send them to? What does success look like? Here are some tips:

1. Your #1 asset

A good contact list is the #1 asset for your organization. Protect and invest in it. Keep it current. Validate emails. Segment that list into categories. This is one of the best investments of time that you could undertake.

2. Get permission

Consider a double-opt in process that will give you proof that each and every recipient gave you permission to send them emails. This can go a long way to preventing SPAM filters from grabbing your message.

3. Design for mobile devices first

More and more, people are catching up with their emails in the evenings, on the toilet and in bed. Seriously. So make sure your email is optimized for all devices.

4. Use images, but not many

Email services embed a tiny blank image into your email. Open rates for your message are only counted with the viewer clicks to "download images". So, you definitely want to include images in your email to encourage your viewer to download them. But don't go nuts – a few will suffice. Keep it simple.

5. Consider killing your newsletter

While newsletters can be great for the sender - create one message and send to all - they are often too broad to solicit interest from your audience. Instead, consider sending targeted emails with engaging subject lines where the content is tailored to your segment. Be relevant to your audience, that's the key.

6. Headlines and snippets

Be brief. Indicate what the story is about and then direct people to your website, blog or social media for the full content. You really want your eblasts to help direct the audience to your other digital media and train them to engage with you there too.

7. Unsubscribes are no big deal

Done right, you'll train your user where to find your information. They just might decide to clear out their inbox and seek it on their own. Unless, of course, you haven't obtained their permission to email them and they are reporting your message as spam. Yeah, don't do that.

By the numbers: a couple helpful benchmarks to consider for email campaigns

- Open rates: 14% mobile, 18% desktop is typical for an eblast
- Click rates: 2.5% is typical for an eblast
- Limit subject lines to between 60 and 70 characters
- 10am and 4pm on weekdays is the best time to send an eblast
- Wednesday and Friday are the worst days to send
- Opens mostly happen between 8pm and 12am
- Send on a consistent schedule so people learn when to expect your message
- Test, test and test again! Make sure it looks exactly how you want it to and that there are no simple spelling errors or broken links before you blast it out to your recipients

A good contact list is the #1 asset for your organization. Protect and invest in it.

CASE STUDY

Reconciling Western and traditional communications practices in modern First Nations communities

By: Joel McKay

The Heiltsuk Tribal Council 'guiding communications protocol' was a simple solution to a complex challenge in that it incorporated a traditional style of communication into a Western-style governance model.

One of the most rewarding experiences of my P.R. career so far was the three days I spent in Waglisla (Bella Bella) on B.C.'s remote central coast in December 2014. The Heiltsuk Tribal Council had invited me to the community to support the elected council through a communications planning session and, with their permission, work with them to develop a communications plan. In times past, the Heiltsuk were said to occupy 55 distinct villages across more than 6,000 square miles in an area that today is called the Great Bear Rainforest. Today, there are four main tribal groups with evidence of the seasonal and permanent villages that were home to many Heiltsuk people who were believed to number as many as the trees at one time in history.

The region is characterized by the soaring serrated peaks of the coast mountains, lush forested mountains and misty valleys, bountiful fjords, inlets, rivers and streams.

Today, Bella Bella is accessible only by air or ocean with no year-round access to a service centre. The Heiltsuk population today totals approximately 2,400. Some 1,100 members live on-reserve concentrated in Bella Bella, while the remainder live elsewhere, notably Vancouver.

It was an intense few days. The community has challenges that are common to many remote communities in Canada – a shifting economy, high unemployment and social challenges – but it's also a place of extraordinary beauty, rich history and home to people who are proud of their heritage. Heiltsuk means to "speak and act correctly." As an outsider visiting for the first time it became immediately apparent to me to use my ears more than my mouth (a general rule for good communications if there ever was one). An elder cautioned me to choose my words carefully when speaking with community members and officials, avoiding certain 'trigger' words that might end an opportunity to engage with members before our conversation really began.

One of the key challenges we faced was the reconciliation of two seemingly competing streams of communication in the community: the Western-style elected council and the traditional hereditary chiefs. Although the elected Heiltsuk Tribal Council is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the community and its members, the hereditary chiefs, or Hemas, were traditionally responsible for leading each tribal group and had been doing so for more than 10,000 years. From a communications perspective, this creates a fundamental challenge: who speaks for whom? When? When is each leadership body consulted? About what? There was no single answer. I learned very quickly that one of the keys to success was a greater understanding of the nation's history. During my time in Bella Bella, I asked as many questions as I could – many of them about the history of the nation and how things were done prior to European contact. After I returned to Prince George, I spent a good portion of the next month researching the history of the nation, reading its origin tales and asking more questions. The Heiltsuk have occupied their traditional lands for at least 11,500 years so there was no shortage of history and information to learn.

Among the key 'communications' related details I picked up early on was that, traditionally, a chief did not speak on his own behalf, this was done by a *Pkwalelks*, who was a commoner that acted as the chief's spokesperson and advisor. As well, it was essential that important business be conducted and validated in public view at a potlatch or feast. A network of interdependence between Heiltsuk villages existed, which involved systems of potlatching, arranged marriages, unity in war efforts and resource sharing. Consensus building was an important part of Heiltsuk governance and decision making.

The community would often gather to discuss and debate important business or major concerns. Decisions were reached or proposals amended until consensus was built for the betterment of all. *Papguala*, or *baquila*, is the Heiltsuk word for working together cooperatively. At gatherings a protocol for public speaking existed to ensure those who wanted to speak would be heard. A λiáṗiq, or 'talking stick', was used and the holder could not be interrupted until she or he gave the stick to the next speaker. Although hereditary chiefs were traditional leaders, they were expected to lead by example and work as hard or harder than anyone else in their community

Among the Heiltsuk, the *Hemas* remain today a very important part of the nation's leadership – so this wasn't a "one style of communication or the other" decision. The solution, it turned out, lay within two traditional words: Xáła, which means to have respect for all things, and Haíłaẏut, which is the ability to make things right if something was done contrary to the way it should be.

A draft communications plan was written with an intent and focus on respecting traditional practices and pre-existing ways of communication. This was reinforced at the front of the plan with a 'guiding communications protocol' the tribal council could adopt in its day-to-day communications practices to promote better engagement with members in a way that respects both traditional and modern leadership.

It functions as follows: each time a decision has been made or needs to be made that's of importance or significance to members, the Heiltsuk Tribal Council will:

- **Ask itself what must be done to proactively communicate the matter to members and the public and make a list of those communications tasks**
- **Ask itself what must be done to respectfully communicate the matter to members through the traditional structure and make a list of those tasks**
- **Combine those lists into a basic communications plan and carry it out**

"A good chief rules through his people, not over them"

- Pauline Waterfall Hilistis

This 'guiding communications protocol' was a simple solution to a complex challenge in that it incorporated a traditional style of communication into a Western-style governance model. Simply put, it incorporates respect for all things and a process to 'make things right.' Several months after I left the community and submitted a draft communications plan to the tribal council, the elected council adopted the plan and its protocols and goals. As a communications practitioner, it was a very proud day for me but, more importantly, it was a chance to reflect on what I learned:

1. **Listen.** You might be invited into a community based on your expertise, but that doesn't mean you should do all the speaking. Listen first; you will build trust and relationships this way that will serve the community well.

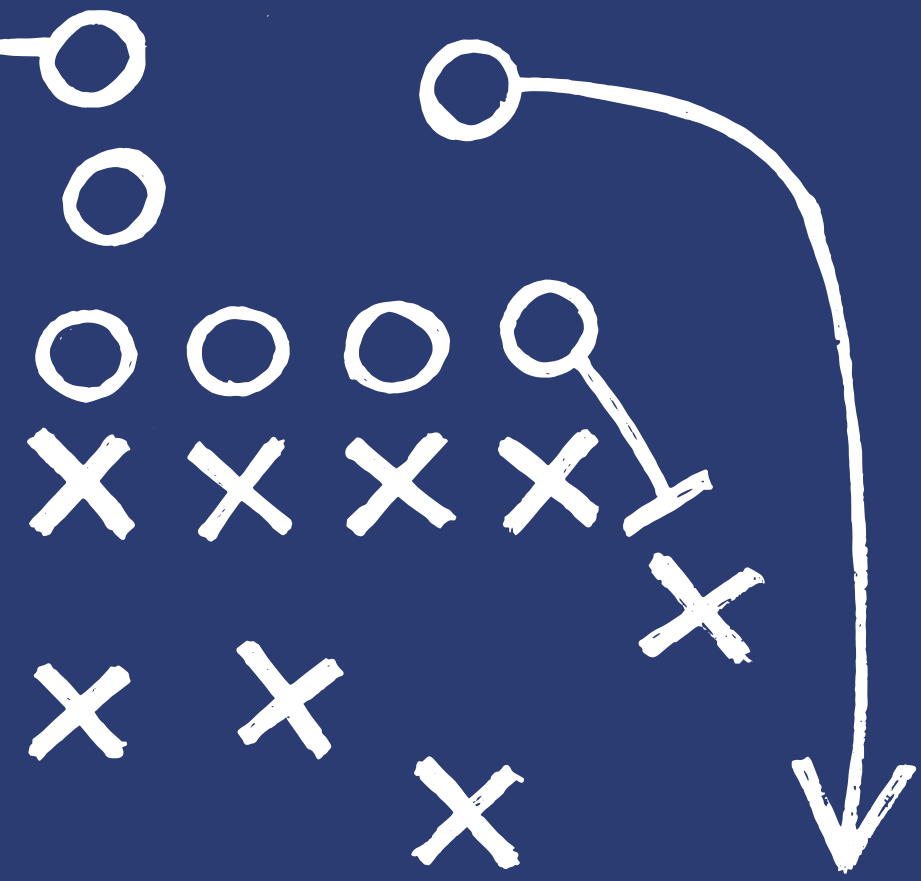
2. **Be respectful.** Although you've been invited into the community for a reason you are also still a stranger, and it's important to act as though you are a guest in another person's home – be respectful of the community, its people, culture and leaders.

3. **Recognize the value of pre-existing history and culture.** B.C.'s First Nations communities have called this land home since time immemorial; they have a long, complex history and traditional practices. It's important to ask what traditional systems were in place prior to contact. Are they still functioning or could they be used in a modern context to engage with members?

SECTION TWO

Chapter 4

CONVEYING YOUR MESSAGE



I was 12 when I started writing my first novel. I wrote it mostly because my friends told me I was too old to play with action figures. I figured the best way to continue living my 'stories' was to write them down. So I did. I finished that first novel when I was 14. It was terrible but I never stopped writing. I went to school for it, became a journalist, wrote other people's stories and, eventually, found myself in P.R. – where I still write stories. Over the years, I've continually fielded the same question from other story tellers, P.R. practitioners and even administrators: how do you find and tell engaging stories?

This chapter – "conveying your message" – is all about that. There are a lot of low-cost ways in the modern age to 'find and tell' decent stories. In this chapter, Rob van Adrichem talks about the five 'Ps' that set the stage for effective storytelling. Videographer Paul Alberts provides tips on photo and video storytelling, which is becoming a staple of community engagement. Kim Hayhurst provides some context and experience to the age-old local government question: to rebrand or not to rebrand? And Madison Kordyban and Rudy Kelly share their experiences finding solid community stories that people want to engage with.

- Joel

Two tips on writing engaging stories:

1. How do you find engaging stories?

Focus on people. Find 'human' stories with 'real people' – average residents or members achieving things in our communities that relate to the community's strategic priorities. Remember, as local governments or First Nations communities our first duty is to serve our residents and members – focus the stories on them and you can't go wrong.

2. How do you tell engaging stories?

Don't 'tell' stories 'show' stories. This was one of the earliest lessons I learned as a writer. Use imagery, video and audio to add depth and emotion to your stories. When it comes to the actual writing itself, don't be afraid to get creative with your narrative – have fun, describe the person or persons the stories focus on, where they live, what they do, what's interesting about them – the details that keep readers engaged.

Setting the stage for effective storytelling

By: Rob van Adrichem

Process, platforms, presentation, people and pride – the five Ps for creating and curating content that your residents will find engaging

We all know that news involves five Ws – who, what, when, where, why.
Oh, and there's one 'H' – how. These basic 'needs' provide the factual basis for stories but they can also lead to communiqués that are dry and lacking in context. So next time, in addition to identifying the Ws and Hs, consider the following P's to give your story some purpose and pizzazz.

Process

Developing materials for public communication shouldn't be assigned to someone sitting in isolation. Talk with others about the elements of the story, some potential risks, and people in the community who may be particularly interested or supportive. Coming up with good stories is less about following a formula and more about conversation.

Platforms

There are many ways to deliver your story to citizens and each one will affect the way the story is delivered and ultimately received. These include social media, hand-outs and flyers, newspaper articles, your website, television, radio and even reports during council meetings. Each requires a slightly different approach. If there's one constant, however, it's "the point" as in "get to it!" Contrary to the writing style we all learned in grade school – with an introduction, body, and summary/conclusion – writing articles really requires the writer start with the key message and then provide focused evidence.

Presentation

A review of platforms or communications channels ahead of time will inevitably lead you to consider the way your story might actually look and also be received or interpreted. This is often described as your "visual identity" and includes your brand standards. A brand standards manual depicts your logo, colour(s), and font(s), the rules for their use, and examples of their proper deployment.

- **Don't fear brand standards.**

  They're often perceived as restrictive and the enemy of creativity but that's not true. Brand standards don't confine you to a box – they provide you with a stage upon which you can tell your stories and communicate to your citizens. Over time, residents will come to know your brand and instantly recognize the information as coming from a legitimate, credible source.

"The goal here is to make people want to get engaged, to become involved in the issues they care most about, to advocate for their community."

- **Another part of presentation is photography. Show, don't just tell.**

  These days, anyone can get a half-decent photo with their mobile device, so it's wise to use photos as a basic part of how you communicate through every platform. See below for a tip on how to make engaging photographs.

People

Your community should look as if it actually likes people. Make people, not bylaws, the subject of your stories. Make people, not just pretty landscapes, the focus of your photos. Talk to people about the issues they care about in your community. This isn't always easy, but try focusing on people who are active participants (another important P word) in your community. Their stories will often help personify important local issues.

Pride not Propaganda

Wait a minute – isn't having citizens come around to our way of thinking the goal? That might be politics but it isn't government. The goal here is to make people want to get engaged, to become involved in the issues they care most about, to advocate for their community (particularly when they're outside of it), and to feel confident in the way their community is being run. This isn't about blind trust. It's about faith. It's about pride.

There's no such thing as rebranding: a simple guide to strengthening your brand

By: Kim Hayhurst

It's no longer enough to meet a customer's expectations – you must give them something to remember

Your brand is not your logo. It is not your product or service. It is not what you stand for. You are not in control of your brand, your customers are and it is all about how they feel. When enough people feel the same way, you have a brand.

1. Exceed expectations each and every time

The best thing you can do to help build a positive brand is to understand your audience. Understand who they are, what they need and what you can offer them. A customer who feels they are understood is more likely to place trust in a product or organization, and that trust will help shape their customer experience. It is no longer enough to meet their expectations – they must be given something to remember. Work hard to exceed customer expectations at every interaction. These interactions will cultivate loyalty and an emotional connection to your organizational identity, which create customers who become ambassadors for your brand.

2. How you look matters

Aesthetics are the language of feeling. They are so powerful that they can turn a commodity into a premium product. Himalayan Pink Salt looks pretty and we pay a premium for it, but it is still just salt. Whether you are designing a form, an office space or a logo, the aesthetics will represent you and your brand performance. Creating a distinctive identity and voice that captures your brand personality, will help to establish a memorable connection between your audience and brand promise. If your look does not align with your organization's personality, change it.

3. Embrace change

There is no such thing as rebranding. Brands are not static. Brands constantly evolve to align with perceptions, feelings and attitudes towards you and your offerings. Brand management involves hard work by organizations to help influence how their audience feels about them. Instead of forcing continuity, let the brand live, breathe, make mistakes and be human. Your brand is alive and dynamic, its value will grow in relation to how quickly you can respond to changing perceptions.

4. Protect your brand.

Brands are not built in isolation. Stewardship of your brand is the responsibility of everyone, not just the marketing department. Every decision that we make – from the font we use to the people we hire - can either strengthen or weaken the brand. Create an internal culture that embraces the brand promise and it will translate into external actions that define the customer experience. As a result, you'll have a charismatic brand that exudes authenticity and leads to brand loyalty and value.

Five tips for local governments that want to strengthen their brand:

1. Review processes that residents experience in their dealings with you. How can you streamline these processes to leave people with a better experience and impression?

2. Take a good look at your front counter and how you can make it more welcoming. Deal with everything from clutter to signage, and ensure staff are well equipped with knowledge, skills and a positive attitude.

3. Review your visual identity. Is your logo, font choice and graphics representative of the personality you want as an organization? It is it authoritative or friendly? Is it consistent or fractured? Consider an update if it is needed to align with your brand personality.

4. Tell stories that help people get to know you, your staff and your brand's impact. Tell these stories everywhere you can – posters, ads, social media, videos, presentations, thank you notes. Everywhere.

5. The only way for you to understand your brand is to solicit feedback. Provide opportunity for comments wherever you can and really listen to what people say. Use negative comments as a tool to generate change and as an opportunity to respond and strengthen your brand.

There is no such thing as rebranding. Brands are not static. Brands constantly evolve to align with people's perceptions, feelings and attitudes towards you and your offerings.

Five Tips for better photos and videos

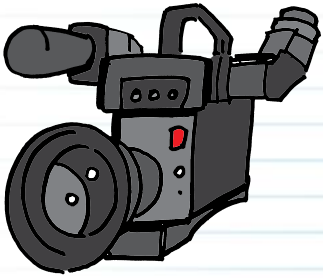
By: Paul Alberts

Engaging citizens through multimedia connects them to the events, decisions impacting the community, and, at the same time, has the added benefit of showcasing your community. From smaller communities where citizens are highly aware and engaged with town hall, it's absolutely crucial that the local government gets its information out in front of its residents before misinformation has a chance to spread like wildfire. Multimedia content such as photography and videography not only increases a community's transparency, but also builds relationships with residents through humanizing photographs and videos that feature residents.

Five tips for successful videography and photography for communities:

1. Don't forget the basics.

When purchasing equipment start off with the basic equipment that will help you make great video. A tripod with a fluid head, a wireless lavalier microphone, and LED lighting should be first on the list and the camera last. Even with these basics you can use an iPhone as your camera if your budget is too tight to buy a more expensive camera.



2. The same goes for shooting photography.

Spend the budget on a fast lens (an aperture that is between 1.2 – 2.8), a basic tripod, a flash and a camera body last.

3. Pre-Production is a very important step that should not be missed.

It also helps to ensure your "shoot" – or time spent behind the lens – is as efficient as it can be. Create a storyboard or script and sit down and think about the purpose of the content or message you're trying to create. What story are you trying to tell? Map it out in the form of a linear video or photos.

4. Create content with longevity

The key is to focus on creating content that has longevity so that it can be used for promotional purposes for years to come instead of becoming outdated or irrelevant in a week.

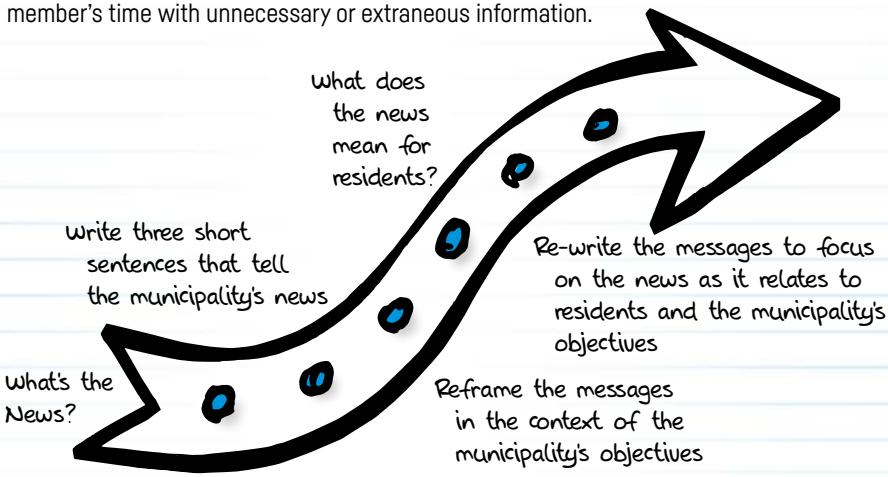
5. Know your capacity.

You might want to be the photographer or videographer, but time might not allow that desire to become a reality. If it's not feasible for you to carry out the work, consider contacting local photographers or videographers for quotes and consider their past work. Find one that's comfortable working with your style and have them teach you the basics.

Key messages – what they are, why you need them and how to write them

By: Joel McKay

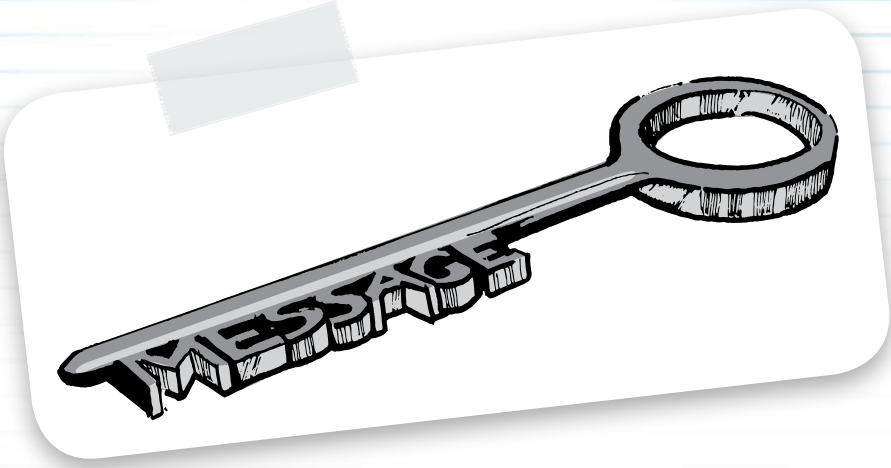
Awhile back a municipality asked me to create a graphic that showed, in a simple format, how to write key messages. Why? Key messages are the communications bedrock for whatever you're announcing or discussing – they're the main points you want your audience and key stakeholders to know. The key message is designed to help a spokesperson or organization get straight to the point and not waste an audience member's time with unnecessary or extraneous information.



From a small town perspective, the key message has to achieve a few things:

1. Clearly communicate the town's news or announcement
2. Frame the news within the town's objectives or strategic priorities
3. Succinctly explain what the news means for residents or community members

The key message is designed to help a spokesperson or organization get straight to the point



Let's say the town is announcing a new curbside recycling program, which fits into Council's strategic objective to become a more sustainable community and means reduced waste. Here's how we might frame some quick key messages on this:

1. A curbside recycling program will be implemented for all residents of the Village of Riverdale beginning this May.

2. The program helps achieve Council's strategic priority to enhance community sustainability and adopt eco-friendly practices that reduce waste and costs.

3. The curbside recycling program means residents will be able to recycle household materials that will be picked up at curbside in front of their homes every second week beginning this May. The additional annual cost for residents is $50 per household.

The example above is fiction, by the way (notably the costs). But you get the point – the goal is to boil down the news or subject matter into simple key points that can be communicated to the target audience. And then repeat, repeat, repeat.

I'm a fan of writing three key messages for news topics and subject matter of importance. I find that three generally cover the basics but aren't too much to remember for a speaker. It's also important to note that three key messages aren't, generally speaking, enough: there could be intensifying factors at play in your community that might cause you to focus your messages on other aspects of the announcement or to write additional messages. Many times it's helpful to have a few additional key messages handy and a FAQ available to answer more of the detailed points that the public or media might raise.

The elusive "good news" story. Where do we find one?

By: Madison Kordyban

Situation: the town has decided to put a new emphasis on telling "good news" stories. Where do we start?

The value of a good story is unparalleled. Good stories spur people to action, embed facts in one's memory and allow readers to see the other side of the coin. Storytelling is innately human, and so it should come as no surprise that the best way to gather stories that have an impact is through people and the relationships that tie us together. The North Central Local Government Association's (NCLGA) mandate is to support our communities – and robust communication is essential to ensure we're doing that effectively.

But from a local government perspective, it's not always easy to keep relationships as current and strong as we'd like – communication takes time and authentic relationships are not easily made or sustained! Finding good stories at the local government level means tapping into those relationships, finding people whose community connections helped make their careers – the council members, regional directors, school board trustees and pillars of the local area. Engaging with these people allows you access to more information than you could ever gain on your own. Make time to sit with these people face-to-face, and they will provide you with the great stories you need to help promote your community or highlight the issues that face it. Of course, if you do that, you'll get no shortage of stories.

Now the challenge is determining which ones to share with the world.

"Find people whose community connections helped make their careers!"

Here are two simple pieces of advice that I use to help me wade through the plethora of community stories that have come my way:

1. Does it have a human element?

Have you ever found yourself crying at your computer screen after reading a story about an abandoned child? An impactful story draws emotion out of people and the storyteller has made you empathize. Tell stories about people. Feature people. Allow your readers to feel something - pride, fear, love, excitement - and then tie that story to what your community is trying to accomplish or the challenges it faces.

2. Does it have media?

Our culture is an increasingly visual one. Photos, video clips, or illustrations do wonders to help our readers connect with the messages we're trying to communicate to them. Visual elements also help break up large swathes of text, allowing readers a brain break. Hone in on stories that feature great visuals!

CASE STUDY

A newcomer's guide to finding stories First Nations community members want to read

By: Rudy Kelly

A high number of First Nations communities have published regular newsletters, but are they really engaging members?

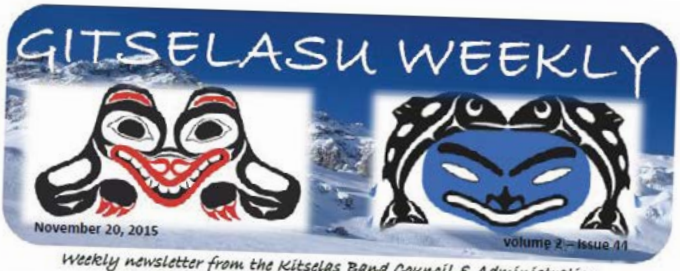
When I began working as the first communications officer for the Kitselas First Nation in February 2015, I was surprised to hear the nation published a weekly newsletter – that's a lot of work for someone to do off the side of their desk! Upon reading it though, I saw that it was fairly easy to produce – most of the content was submitted in PDF or screenshot form.

"I drew on my journalistic roots and found the best way was simply to get out there and meet as many people as possible."

The newsletter had enjoyed this format for some time and no one seemed to be unhappy (kind of like Toronto Maple Leafs fans: they always show up to watch games even though they know the product could be better). Still, I had the sense that Kitselas, like most small communities, didn't want to just hear about upcoming road work, fundraisers and event dates – they wanted stories, relevant information and compelling pictures. The challenge was that I was new to the community and didn't yet have strong relationships. How would I get access to the compelling stories people wanted to read?

I drew on my journalistic roots and found the best way was simply to get out there and meet as many people as possible.

And the best way to do that is to attend community meetings. Being at community meetings not only introduced me to many band members and stories, but also it gave me an easy story: the meeting itself. Now, people who couldn't attend could read about what was said, who was there, what the mood was and any outcomes. The real gold mine, though, was the people. Once I told them what my role was, their faces would light up like the red lights at a Leafs game – everyone had something they believed members needed to know more about. If I had a dime for every time someone said, "you know what would make a good story..."



Weekly newsletter from the Kitselas Band Council & Administration.

Survey participation key to jobs, training

The survey continues. And more Kitselas members need to participate to ensure that when training and job opportunities arise in the territory, they are the first in line.

Only 85 Kitselas members filled out the Survey on Education, Employment & Training given out by summer students in August, which is only one-fifth of the surveys handed out. The band's Employment & Training department is embarking on another push to get more completed.

"We have industry and business representatives looking for workers and asking us if we have people (Kitselas members) they can hire," said Kitselas Employment & Training Coordinator, Judy Gerow. "We have been getting calls from employers asking us if we have flag people, people with First Aid training but, currently, we have nothing to go on except memory."

With the database that will be created from the survey results, the department can more quickly identify and contact members when opportunities arise, and that includes not just employment but training as well.

(Continued page 2)

Headstart students (l-r) Camden Wilson, Peter Clayton, Bryson Bevan and Sicilly Bevan had lots of fun playing in the snow Thursday afternoon.

The trick is the ability to separate genuinely good stories from those that are less likely to attract readers. Just ask yourself: would a lot of people want to read about this? Is it in the public interest? That doesn't mean it can't be something personal. A youth who has been chosen to join a provincial soccer team has more than just proud family members – he or she has a proud community. Oh, and did I mention pictures? They say a picture is worth a thousand words (700 now, in Canada, exchange rates being what they are). One photo of a little boy with an ice cream cone will get more views than a photo of a new water line being installed, even though one is far more important than the other.

Lesson learned:

Always take pictures.

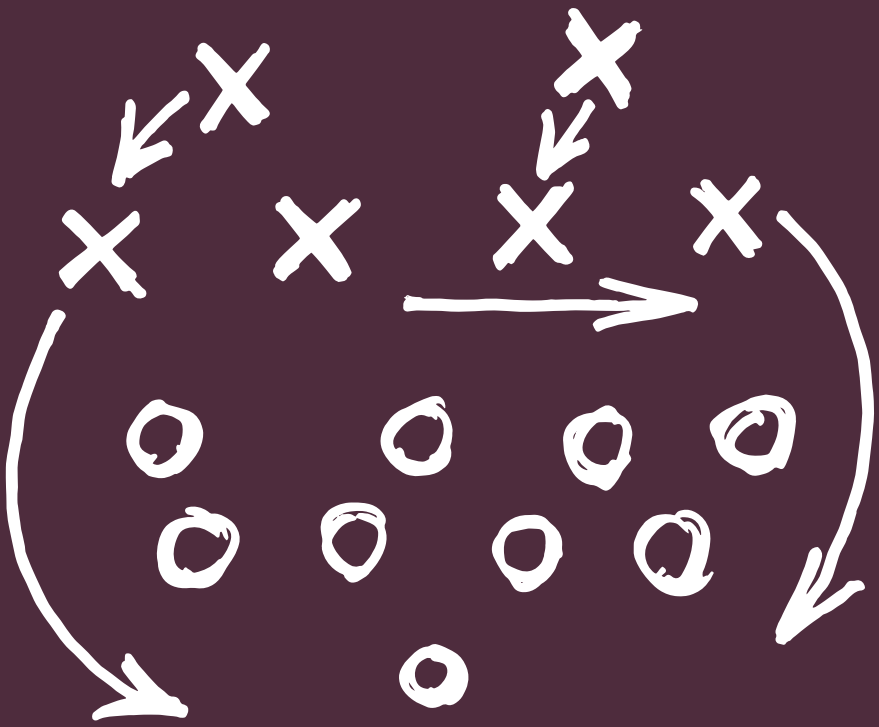
Nearly everyone has a decent camera on their phone these days, so even when you're not working keep an eye out for anything of interest that you can use to make your life easier later on: wildlife, vistas, events or that aforementioned kid with the ice cream. Finally: remember who you work for. The government that you work for has programs and services (along with those meetings) and achievements that they want the community to know about and utilize. Regular department reports fulfill that purpose AND answer perhaps the most basic question that members and the public want to know: how is our money being spent? Of course, choose your words wisely. Emphasize the positives. The story on a waterline problem is not that it's broken, but how diligently staff is working to fix it. Just like with the Leafs.

SECTION THREE

Chapter 5

ENGAGING WITH THE PUBLIC

Meetings and consultation



Old school face-to-face tools remain the foundation of good engagement and consultation in small town British Columbia

There are a lot of fancy gadgets and digital tools that help communities engage with residents and members, but, in small town B.C., old school face-to-face tools are still the foundation of proactive engagement. Engaging with the public via meetings and consultation processes is absolutely crucial to any successful communications initiative, be it an official community plan, wastewater treatment facility, curbside recycling program or the development of a new pool, arena or industrial facility. People still want to connect face-to-face – never forget that.

There are four case studies in this section that highlight different facets of meetings and consultation. First, Julie Rogers from the City of Fort St. John explains how the Energetic City engaged with its residents over the development of an $8.9 billion hydroelectric dam. Then Rob van Adrichem and Mike Kellett from the City of Prince George describe how their 'Talktober' public engagement sessions were a hit in a city of nearly 80,000. After that, veteran communications consultant Kevin Brown recalls the communications process used to consult with stakeholders over the development of an OSB plant in Fort St. John. Finally, Town of Smithers Mayor Taylor Bachrach recounts how his community engaged with residents, quite literally, at their dinner tables.

What's the common thread? Go to the people, as Julie Rogers points out in her Site C case study. In each case, the communities and communications professionals actively south out residents and stakeholders – met with them on their turf – and built a collaborative, trust-based approach. And each process resulted in success. Enjoy!

- Joel

The IAP2 Spectrum – a roadmap for understanding different levels of public participation and the promise you're making to the public

By: Joel McKay

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has a nifty tool that, in my opinion, every local government should adopt – the spectrum. IAP2 is an international association of public participation professionals dedicated to promoting and improving relations between individuals, organizations and governments. IAP2 has developed a code of ethics and a number of tools that professionals can leverage to improve their engagement practices – the IAP2 Spectrum is one such tool.

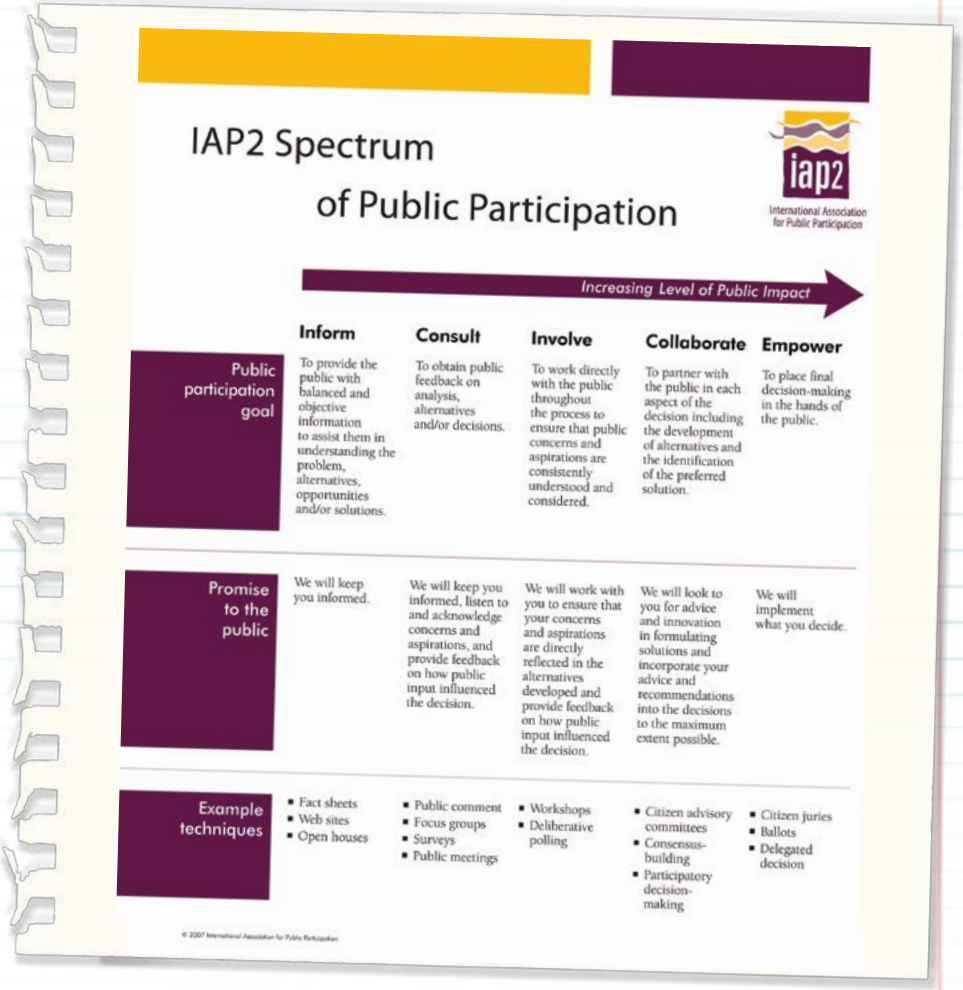
I highlight it here because it's a simple road map that can help a small town determine the type of public participation, or consultation and engagement, it wants to have for different initiatives. I first incorporated the IAP2 Spectrum into a communications plan while working with the Central Coast Regional District in Bella Coola. The Chief Administrative Officer had previously received IAP2 training and was absolutely insistent that the spectrum be included in the plan. She was right and it's a tool I've promoted ever since.

Here's how it works:

The top row of the spectrum highlights various levels of public participation: from inform and consult, to involve, collaborate and empower. The left-hand column highlights the 'public participation goal' and 'promise to the public' associated with each of these. Then, below each level of public participation, is a description of the participation goal and what's promised to the public if the organization, government or individual moves down that path.

In more simple terms, if your community promises to "collaborate" on the development of a curbside recycling program, your goal would be to "to partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of a preferred solution." What does that mean in terms of actual elected official and staff work? It means you're not only looking for advice and solutions from the public to implement a curbside recycling program, you've promised that advice and those recommendations to the maximum extent possible into the decision that's eventually made. That's what collaboration means in the context of the spectrum.

"The IAP2 Spectrum is a handy tool to have in your communications plan as a guiding force and reference point for communications and public engagement initiatives"



IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

iap2 International Association for Public Participation

Increasing Level of Public Impact

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example techniques	▪ Fact sheets ▪ Web sites ▪ Open houses	▪ Public comment ▪ Focus groups ▪ Surveys ▪ Public meetings	▪ Workshops ▪ Deliberative polling	▪ Citizen advisory committees ▪ Consensus-building ▪ Participatory decision-making	▪ Citizen juries ▪ Ballots ▪ Delegated decision

The IAP2 Spectrum not only encourages public participation professionals to use common language and agree on common goals and promises, but it also provides professionals with a sense of the workload associated with individual levels of participation. Generally speaking, the 'inform' level of participation requires less time and financial support than the 'collaborate' level of participation. In sum, the IAP2 Spectrum is a handy tool to have in your communications plan as a guiding force and reference point for communications and public engagement initiatives.

Best practices for short meetings – a few tips

By: Joel McKay

We've all suffered through too many meetings, poorly run meetings or both. I once went to a meeting about meetings. Not kidding. Managing what little time you have to conduct the affairs of the community is no easy task in a small town. Chances are you wear multiple hats, are at the office at least eight hours per day and you're also attending meetings and other events in the evenings or on your weekends. That means you likely have very little time available to sit and jaw about the general state of affairs. For that reason, here are a few handy tips to keep those essential day-to-day meetings short, to the point and valuable:

1. Have an agenda

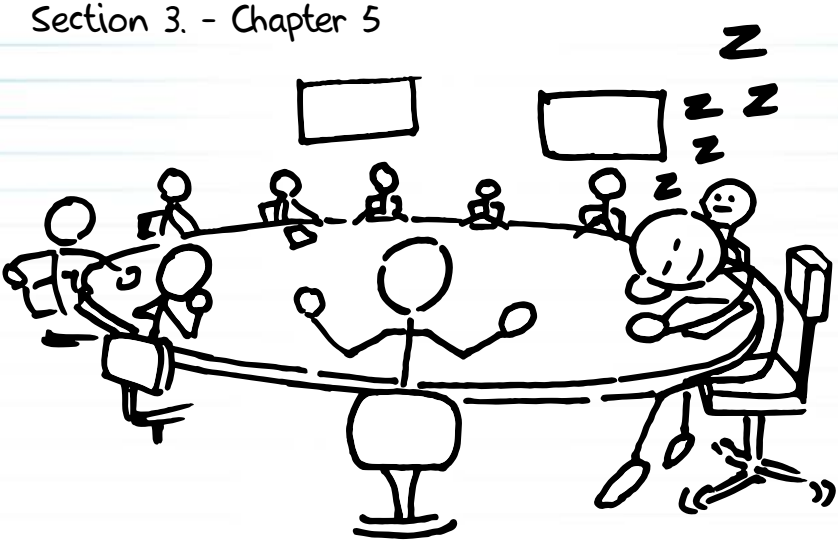
Process and organization are fundamentally important to good meeting management – you need to have an agenda that includes topics of discussion, speakers and time allotment. It's also important to consider strategically 'sequencing' the items in your agenda. For example, how are people going to feel after discussing Item A? Are their emotions running high and likely to unfairly influence a decision around Item B? Does that mean Item B should go ahead of Item A?

2. Stick to the agenda

There's nothing worse than having an agenda and losing it within 10 minutes because the group has gone off on a tangent. Stick to the agenda, stick to your timings, and remind people at the beginning of the meeting that you will be respectful of their time and the topics on the table for discussion.

3. Make sure the right people are there

Have you ever been to a meeting and thought to yourself, "I add absolutely no value to this meeting, this is a waste of my time." That happens because the meeting organizer didn't separate the people who 'need' to be there from the people who 'want' or 'could' be there. Only invite those people who need to be there – this will reinforce the focus of the meeting, limit it size and help you stick to the agenda and timings.



4. Have a parking lot for ideas or further discussion

Inevitably, new ideas or topics of discussion come up during any meeting. Are they crucial to the discussion at hand? Maybe. But, if not, have a sheet of people or a place where these ideas or topics can be 'parked' for a period of time so that your meeting doesn't lose focus and go off on a tangent. At the end of the meeting, determine who will address these items and when.

5. Host the meeting in the right space

A good meeting requires a comfortable space where attendees can hear one another clearly. Don't hold your meeting on a street corner or in a noisy location. If the topic is important enough to call a meeting, show your attendees respect by hosting it in a comfortable, quiet space that encourages thoughtful discussion and engagement.

6. Limit distractions

Ask attendees to turn their phones and tablets off, on silent or on vibrate. As well, ask that phones, tablets and laptops not be on the table unless they're necessary to review documents or find information. Meetings are all about sharing ideas and having discussion – don't let electronic devices distract attention away from the topics at hand. Also, try not to host meetings in rooms with glass walls that have a view – outside scenery serves as unnecessary distractions.

7. End with a list of action items for attendees

It's smart to end every meeting with a quick discussion of what comes next: here's what we discussed, here's what each of us has agreed to do and here's when we'll do it by. I always follow this discussion up with a group email thanking everyone for attending the meeting and highlighting each person's actions items. This creates accountable, a paper trail and ensures nothing is forgotten.

Tried and true: effectively communicating in rural and remote areas of B.C.

By: Shelly Burich

Most communicators these days incorporate a large social media or online component as part of their overall communications strategy, however, for many parts of B.C. the old tried and true communications tools will have the most impact for your campaign. That is not to say you shouldn't venture into online tactics or social media, but it is vitally important to know where your audiences are and how they communicate within their own communities.

For example, in 2010, the Cariboo Regional District (CRD) experienced firestorms of a magnitude the region had not seen for many years. We used a number of old school communications tools such as posters at the general store, phone calls to residents and hand-delivered mailers to connect with affected residents in rural areas.

Just prior to the wildfires, the CRD had been conducting some research and discovered that despite the lack of high speed connectivity, Chilcotin residents were using satellite for their online accessibility, and were extremely active on Facebook. This knowledge, allowed the CRD to communicate with residents across the region and provided a platform for a two-way dialogue to help the regional district ensure their safety and provide information or help if they required any assistance.

When planning a communications strategy, a good rule of thumb is to follow the RACE formula to help you develop your communications plan.

Research where your residents traditionally get their information about their local government, where they live, who's best to communicate with them and any other information that will help you in serving them in an emergency;

Analyze your findings to help devise a plan that allows you to best communicate with your residents through the mediums they use most often; Determine which tools they use most often. Determine which tools are the best way to

Communicate the information; and **Evaluate** your techniques and extrapolate learnings to make any adjustments during the campaign to address shortfalls and for your next emergency situation that comes along.

More information can be found about the RACE formula on the Canadian Public Relations website at www.cprs.ca

CASE STUDY

Reach out and engage them – Official Community Plans, Campbell River style

By: Julie Douglas and Amber Zirnhelt

Vancouver Island city of 32,000 residents used more than a dozen engagement tools to get its residents and stakeholder groups involved in community planning.

In 2010 and 2011, the City of Campbell River pursued a comprehensive, interactive civic engagement program to increase awareness of government services, generate a vision for the community and increase involvement in policy development. More than 1,500 community members were involved in this extensive year-long process that provided more than 2,000 inputs into the development of the city's Sustainable Official Community Plan and several associated plans.

The Sustainable Campbell River initiative has included broad and deep civic engagement ranging from extensive youth involvement, partnerships with First Nations including hosting a storytelling event, video, social media, radio and print communication, school workshops, outreach at grocery stores and community events and 20 public workshops and forums – all to involve community members of different ages and backgrounds in shaping the future of Campbell River. To support outreach and increase awareness around the importance of participation in local decision making and governance, during Local Government Awareness Week, city staff developed a trivia contest, organized a public dinner with the Mayor and promoted tours of city facilities. Collectively, these initiatives are the most extensive civic engagement process to take place in Campbell River's history.

As a community in transition from reliance on a resource based economy, it was an opportune time to develop a long-term sustainability plan and a comprehensive re-write of the city's Official Community Plan for its 32,000 residents. The city partnered with the Wei Wai Kum, We Wai Kai and Homalco First Nations to enhance collaboration in community planning. To shape the development of a governance and partnership strategy with First Nations, 19 events, workshops and staff working group meetings were held. A youth and elder storytelling forum, with performances, music, and cultural teachings, a council-to-council meeting and a public governance backgrounder illustrating the differences in governance structures for each First Nation and

the city were outcomes. Approximately 300 residents subscribed to the Sustainable Campbell River e-bulletin, and more than 400 people liked the Facebook page.
Sustainable Campbell River launched with an information booth at Canada Day 2010 festivities. Additional outreach included full-day forums, stakeholder workshops, open houses, direct outreach at movies under the stars, information booths at major retail outlets, surveys, photo contents, presentations to community groups, tours, videos and media outreach.

"Go to where the community gathers. Work with local organizations and arrange presentations with local service clubs such as Rotary, your chamber of commerce, etc."

Strathcona Photography

Mark Wunsch, Greencoast Media

So what did we learn?

Here are a few best practices:

1. **Use diverse outreach techniques from community mapping exercises and inspirational speakers to surveys and outreach at community events**
   Make activities interactive. Use surveys, storytelling, photo and trivia contests, visioning exercises, hands-on use of maps, blocks and sticky notes and mimic budget spending by having participants vote with City bucks.

2. **Involve staff from all levels of the organization and multiple departments**
   (builds capacity for future engagement efforts) Keep all staff within your organization up to date on your outreach efforts.

3. **Integrate multiple city plans**
   to prevent stakeholder fatigue from over consultation and save the costs of multiple consultation efforts.

4. **Partner with local First Nations communities**

5. **Partner with local media outlets so they help document the process**
   The city hosted a press conference and launched the initiative with a video.

6. **Use electronic and social media**
   such as email list-serves, websites and Facebook to reduce communications costs and provide updates that are convenient and accessible to the public at any time of day.

7. **Seek funding support**
   (Campbell River's process was funded primarily through external funding including federal and provincial government grants and support from BC Hydro and the Real Estate Foundation, saving money for local tax payers.)

8. **Develop a steering committee**
   with community representatives from diverse backgrounds, including youth, seniors, families, business, the arts, education and First Nations

9. **Mix traditional and social media**
   from newspaper and radio to face-to-face to Facebook).(In Campbell River, a local artist developed graphic illustrations with images and words representing the community's long-term vision for future policy.

10. **Tell a comprehensive story,**
    create connections and build relationships, speak to the benefits of community involvement – and thank people for participating.

And here's some more helpful advice. (We learned a lot!)

1. **Identify staff and community champions** to help reach diverse members of your community. Campbell River involved existing advisory committees and commissions and developed a steering committee with community representatives from diverse backgrounds, including youth, seniors, families, business, the arts, education and First Nations. Integrating multiple city plans requires extensive coordination with and between consultants.

3. **Go to where the community gathers** Have booths and opportunities for input at festivals and events such as concerts, parades, craft fairs, farmer's markets, and even grocery stores.

4. **Work with local organizations and arrange presentations with service clubs, your chamber of commerce, etc**

5. **Link with schools** During Earth Day celebrations, staff led five sessions at Timberline Secondary on the role of local government in transportation, environmental management, solid waste, GIS and land use planning.

6. **Have booths and opportunities for input at festivals and events such as concerts, parades, craft fairs, farmer's markets, and even grocery stores**

7. **Keep all staff within your organization up to date on your outreach efforts**

Video documentation provides a great outreach tool. Campbell River captured the ideas of well-known community members to generate positive peer pressure.

Work with your local media and get them excited on helping document your process. The city hosted a press conference and launched this campaign with a video. The Sustainable Campbell River initiative was designed to inform, create diverse venues for dialogue, reach broadly and deeply within the community and to empower citizens to share ideas. One long-lasting result from this process was the establishment of a Youth Action Committee and Youth Charter. The extensive partnerships established with our First Nations partners for the development of the Sustainable Official Community Plan and a Planning and Governance Strategy go well beyond consultation. This planning partnership was a first of its type in B.C. This process also led to the development of a framework that the city will be able to replicate or adapt in the future according to our needs. Materials developed, such as the City Services brochure, are easy to update for future use at events, career fairs and information sessions.

The City of Campbell River won the UBCM 2011 Excellence Award for Best Practices, Civic Engagement. The City's leadership and innovation in youth engagement was also recognized by Sustainable Cities International, an international organization based out of Vancouver. In the fall of 2010, Campbell River was invited to participate in a peer exchange with other B.C. communities to share our experiences in engaging youth in city planning.

CASE STUDY

Let's Talk Site C – Fort St. John's approach to engaging with residents about an $8 billion hydroelectric project

By: Julie Rogers

The task at hand was to figure out what the details of the project were and how it might impact the community. Then we needed to find out how the community believed the municipality should respond it.

Fort St. John City Council took a very pragmatic approach to the possibility of an $8 billion hydroelectric project proposed only seven kilometers from the city: they were neither in favour nor opposed to the Site C dam, but they were in favour of protecting and promoting the interests of the community. The subject itself threatened to divide the community: half the community was opposed to the dam and its impacts on the landscape, while the other half was supportive of the dam and the economic impacts it would generate.

From a communications perspective, a community conversation about the dam was not as simple as a discussion about whether we should build a new pool. This was big – an issue of provincial importance in our backyard. The task at hand was to figure out what the details of the project were and how it might impact the community. Then we needed to find out how the community believed the municipality should respond it.

The project, at that time, was only a proposal but if it went through what would that mean for the city? There were an enormous number of questions the city faced. How many people would move here? How many people would work in the camps? Will this impact our roads? Would the dam impact our water supply?

The first smart thing the city did was engage Urban Systems to lead the consultation process. This was too big and too important to run off the side of someone's desk. The city engaged a number of stakeholders, researched and wrote a position paper to present to BC Hydro and provincial and federal decision-makers. Mayor and Council were the face of the initiative to ensure a "made in Fort St. John" position paper, tirelessly facilitating engagement activities in 2012. The initiative was branded Let's Talk Site C.

Here what's we did

The city already had a strong and active social media presence, which meant the task of getting the word out about the engagement opportunities was not a big challenge. We facebooked and tweeted the heck out of it. The city began the engagement process with presentations from the mayor on the key objectives for a long list of community groups. BC Hydro also offered presentations about the specifics of the project.

"Noah was not in favour of the flood but he still built an ark."

Mayor Lori Ackerman
– City of Fort St. John

Phase two of the engagement process included a media launch of the briefing paper, video presentation, surveys, Facebook polls, community meetings, coffee house chats with Mayor and Council and conversations in the park. Mayor and Council took advantage of the city hosted 'Play in the Park' program to meet with community members in the park during the summer to chat about Site C. Feedback from the meetings was recorded on forms and incorporated into briefing papers.

The engagement process also marked the first time the City used PlaceSpeak – a location-based community consultation platform. PlaceSpeak was used to house all of the Let's Talk Site C reports and links to city documents and videos, which created a one-stop-shop for citizen access to information. The site also hosted discussion forums, provided online surveys and enabled feedback that was sorted by each resident's geographic location.

Here's what happened

Feedback from citizens was gathered over the course of a year and included in a final position paper sent to BC Hydro and key government decision makers. That information was also taken to the bargaining table with BC Hydro, and, in February 2016, Fort St. John finally inked an agreement with BC Hydro that addressed the community's concerns.

This engagement project was crazy long. As well, there simply were no other communities we could steal ideas from. (How, how did that $8 billion mega-project in your community work out?) Consultation and conversation went on for months. Normally, such a long process would work against our attempts to keep people engaged – people simply lose interest. But the media served a powerful role in continuing to provide news about the project to the public and keep the conversation going.

Here's what we learned

Lessons learned? Go to the people. Simply assuming that you can hold a community meeting for a project of this magnitude will doom you to failure. A table and chairs set up at Play in the Park was brilliant. Parents have time to talk when their children are occupied. Just the same, setting up in a local coffee shop also worked really well for our community because people already planned to sit and chat for a while. These kinds of conversations are also less intimidating for people - there is no microphone to step up to, only a casual conversation with your neighbours.

Lessons learned?
Go to the people.

PlaceSpeak was hit and miss

Those that signed up seemed to like being able to express their opinions online without going to a meeting in person. But how many didn't sign up? How many people didn't engage with that medium because they didn't want to provide their email address on a website that was not familiar to them? That was definitely a drawback.

We found that when we posted a link to PlaceSpeak on our Facebook page the conversation actually started on Facebook! We needed to be prepared to manage that conversation, which can easily grow to include more than 80 comments, many of which are full of misinformation and questions that MUST be corrected or answered.

Lastly, it's important to realize you won't reach everyone

I recently had a resident say to me about a different project, "I had no idea this was coming! You people need to communicate better!" I replied with, "I will absolutely do my best to do better next time. For this project we had ads in all the local papers, ads three times a day for a week on the local radio station, Facebook ads, notices delivered to every residence, a 20 minute special on Shaw TV, signs in all city buildings and we Tweeted it every day. So where do you get your news?"

"Oh. Never mind," the resident said.

We will never reach everyone but we will keep trying.

CASE STUDY

Prince George's 'Talktober'- neighbourhood conversations are a reminder of the value of face-to-face communications

By: Rob van Adrichem and Mike Kellett

Talktober 2015 occurred less than a year after a municipal election that had resulted in a new Mayor and a Council that had promised to re-connect with residents. This was their chance to prove it.

The ubiquity and promise of social media has led many local governments to favour online tactics over traditional communications methods, such as public meetings. Online tools are often cheaper and provide precise metrics on reach and engagement, but direct, person-to-person engagement still occupies an indispensable place. Prince George's experience with its series of Talktober "neighbourhood conversations" provides a useful case study.

Launched in October 2015, Talktober featured a half-dozen public meetings held in school gyms and local halls, and involved displays featuring parks and trails, community recreation and culture, public works, transportation, and planning. These displays often featured hands-on exercises and senior staff who could answer questions. The mayor also hosted a town hall-style question-and-answer session on any topic for up to an hour or more. Each neighbourhood conversation attracted an average of 50 to 60 people.

Exit surveys indicate that attendees came with a particular topic or issue in mind, and that 80% felt their input will be used by Council. 100% indicated they would attend a similar event in the future. Although Talktober had been conceived as a one-time exercise, Prince George City Council voted unanimously to host Talktober again in 2016.

A gesture goes a long way – not one Talktober event was held at city hall or in a civic facility. Each featured staff and councillors "on the turf" of local residents.

Timing is everything – Talktober 2015 occurred less than a year after a municipal election that had resulted in a new Mayor and a Council that had promised to re-connect with residents. This was their chance to prove it. October provided a perfect month being just after the start of the school year and just prior to civic budget discussions.

Talktober illustrates the enduring value of in-person engagement

An infectious name –
Arguably, the series may not have been successful if it had simply been called "The 2015 neighbourhood budget conversations."
Talktober became a well-known name and, together with a simple logo, appeared on all advertisements and promotions.

Unusual advertising –
Along with advertisements on popular local websites and normal city channels, Talktober was featured on portable billboards that appeared in a specific neighbourhood prior to a Talktober event in that area. In addition, photographs from the most-recent Talktober event were boosted on Facebook by a small ad-buy in order to promote the next Talktober event.

In the end, Talktober became part of the local parlance and symbolic of the city's interest in community engagement.
It quickly became synonymous with a particular activity, at a particular time of year, first among city staff and then the general public. Whether they attended or not, citizens were aware the city was hosting public meetings and was interested in connecting with them.
Talktober illustrates the enduring value of in-person engagement, especially when effectively and strategically deployed in tandem with other methods, including social media, online consultation, the news media and advertising. A summary from each event was posted on the city website and highlighted on the homepage.


TALKTOBER
Let's talk!
The City is hosting Neighbourhood conversations through the month of October to find out what matters to residents.
· Parks, Recreation, and Well-Being
· Roads, Utilities, and Transit
· Housing and Development
· The City's budget and proposed smoke-free bylaw
Share your thoughts on these and other topics with City staff and members of Council.
Join us!
· October 1 (Thursday) East Bowl – South Fort George Family Resource Centre
· October 7 (Wednesday) Blackburn – Blackburn Community Hall
· October 14 (Wednesday) Vanway/Beaverly/Haldi – Vanway Elementary School
· October 21 (Wednesday) College Heights – Columbus Community Centre
· October 28 (Wednesday) West Bowl – Kinsmen Community Hall
All Conversations are from 6:30pm to 8:30pm.
Information collected will inform the City's upcoming budget deliberations, Council's strategic priorities, and the City's Corporate Plan for 2016.
www.princegeorge.ca
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facebook.com/cityofpg
CITY OF
PRINCE GEORGE

CASE STUDY

Partnership and collaboration are crucial for controversial community projects

By: Kevin Brown

Not everyone was in favour of a new OSB plant in Fort St. John in 2004, but a collaborative approach to communication built trust and helped move the project forward.

One of the most rewarding projects I've worked on as a PR consultant began soon after I launched my practice, Kevin Brown Communications (KBC) in 2003. The project – Peace Valley OSB – remains today as an excellent example of how to turn a controversial project into a positive one through meaningful, two-way communication, collaboration and a willingness to develop and partnerships even with stakeholders who don't support your project. In January 2004, the announcement that one of the world's largest oriented strand board (OSB) plants would be built in the City of Fort St. John took the community by storm.

The community was already home to a mid-sized sawmill and the new OSB plant would create dozens of permanent jobs, as well as and opportunities for local contractors during construction. The new mill was a result of a partnership between Slocan Forest Products and Louisiana-Pacific (Slocan-LP), both of which saw the value in building one large OSB plant versus two small mills. The $250 million project had the city's support, as well as others who saw that it would help diversify the local economy and create new opportunities for residents, First Nations and local contractors. However, there were concerns on the part of local environmental groups and residents who lived close to the proposed OSB Plant about the plant's effect on air quality, health and the environment. There was also concern that steam from the plant could cause fog on colder days and potentially shutdown the nearby Fort St. John airport.

The Slocan-LP OSB project team determined during the following months a process was needed to bring all parties to the conversation together to share information, address concerns and seek solutions. The project team also determined that a comprehensive communications program during the construction phase would be essential to keep all stakeholders informed as the

In the case of Peace Valley OSB, the investment in an in-depth consultation process resulted in people with differing views coming together in a safe, respectful forum to discuss issues and seek solutions.

plant was built. A decision was then made to form a Citizens Information Liaison Committee (CILC), which would meet monthly during construction. The first meeting was held in May 2004. Members of the CILC included: the City of Fort St. John, District of Taylor, Fort St. John and Area Chamber of Commerce, North Peace Clean Air Society, Northern Environmental Action Team, North Peace Airport Society, Swanson Road Residents, Environmental Interests Representative, Airport Interests Representative and individual concerned citizens. The group soon approved a Terms of Reference (TOR) that outlined the purpose of the committee, how often it would meet, what issues it would consider, how its business would be conducted and outlined a framework for the committee to move forward. CILC meetings included reports from all participants and company officials who reported on construction progress and issues, OSB markets, forest planning and preparation for hiring operational staff in 2005. Committee members would ask questions, report on concerns in the community and discuss proposed solutions to key issues.

When the CILC began to meet regularly there was caution on the part of members who did not support the project. They weren't sure they could trust the company to be honest in sharing information. Just the same, some company representatives were not comfortable hearing the complaints and concerns of groups and individuals about the project. It took several months for committee members to gain confidence in the meeting process and build trust with one another. Committee members were quick to remind company representatives that this was the first time these individuals and groups had ever been asked to meet in the same place, at the same time and that it would take some getting used to.

Through the meetings in 2004 and into 2005, information was shared on every topic brought forward. Committee members also made many helpful suggestions about how to best manage everything from excess dust on the plant site to ensuring that local businesses could compete for goods and services contracts. CILC meetings would include

detailed briefings on operational plans, environmental controls and systems, hiring practices, log yard management by a new First Nations owned company which would manage the log yard and a host of other topics and issues. The project progressed through planning and development to construction.

Soon after the plant opened in June 2006, CILC members were asked if they wished to continue meeting as a group and the unanimous response was 'yes'. In the fall of 2006, the committee name was changed to Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) to reflect the change in purpose of the committee, which was to focus on issues related to the operation of the plant. The CAC also agreed that it could meet quarterly instead of monthly beginning in 2007. The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) has developed a five-step spectrum of public participation: Inform, consult, involve, collaboration, empower. The formation of a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) reflects the 'collaboration' step of the spectrum. Not every company, community or agency is willing to go to this step in seeking public participation for a project or new initiative.

There are risks.

It's a longer term investment of staff time and resources and requires a willingness to adopt recommendations and proposed solutions. In the case of Peace Valley OSB, the investment in an in-depth consultation process resulted in people with differing views coming together in a safe, respectful forum to discuss issues and seek solutions. They also benefitted from the outcomes of true collaboration in action and helped turn a controversial project into a positive project through the process.

CASE STUDY

Talking about the town at your table

By: Taylor Bachrach

Committed to improving public consultation, Smithers Town Council has been experimenting with new ways to engage residents through its *Let's Talk* and *Table Talks* sessions.

For the past five years, Smithers Town Council has been working to improve public consultation and more actively engage local residents. These efforts began in 2012 when an incoming Council made consultation a key priority. That year, town staff organized a series of town hall meetings under the banner of a program dubbed "Let's Talk." The idea was to invite members of the public to a facilitated dialogue on town issues.

The first "Let's Talk" event considered three questions:

What makes our town great?
Where do we want to be in 20 years?
And what should we focus on first?

We had tremendous attendance and much thoughtful input. Our next event, "Let's Talk Business" was more focused on the needs of the business community, and our third event, in 2013, focused on three key issues related to the town budget: roads, arena operations and bylaw enforcement.

While all of our "Let's Talk" sessions were well attended, we identified a few shortcomings. We were good at soliciting input, but it was tough to get beyond brainstorming and the input we often received was contradictory. Moreover, the sessions were all held in the evening and we received feedback that parents of young children found it difficult to attend.

We took what we learned from the "Let's Talk" town hall meetings, and in 2015, initiated a new program called "Table Talks." This time, instead of expecting people to attend a single session on a given night, we issued a challenge: pull together six to 10 neighbours, friends or coworkers, find a location, and Council will come to you!

The community's response was positive. Over the course of a month, we attended 16 sessions. For each session, two members of Council came armed with flip charts, markers and a set of three questions.

1. **What do you love about Smithers that you never want to change?**
2. **What change would you embrace to make Smithers better?**
3. **And, if you were Council, what would you do first?**

The results were then summarized in a report that was shared with the public through social media and on the town's website.

We have been working on public consultation for four years, and each year we have learned something new that has allowed us to improve our approach. However, at the heart of consultation are a few simple principles.

- **Listen with a curious mind**
- **Go to where the people are**
- **Report back what you have heard**
- **And, most importantly, talk about how you plan to connect consultation to concrete action**

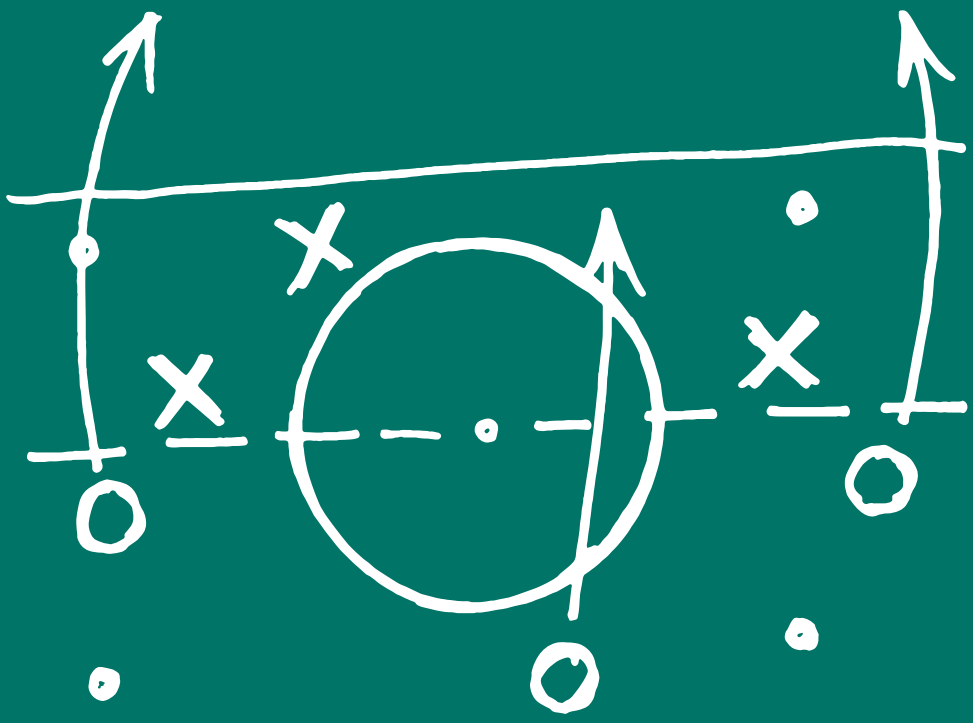
It remains a work in progress – as it should be.

"Pull together six to 10 neighbours, friends or coworkers, find a location, and council will come to you!"

SECTION FOUR

Chapter Six

SOCIAL MEDIA, WEBSITES AND INTERNET TOOLS



Social media, websites and Internet tools – OH MY! Feeling overwhelming by all this technology yet? I am. And I'm a millennial. But here's the deal: your audience is on social media, so you need to be too. As Barb Floden rightly points out in her piece in this chapter 'Social media: what it is and why it's important', the growth of these tools has exploded since the turn of the millennium. Here are a couple numbers:

59% of Canadians use Facebook on a regular basis

50% of 55 to 64 year olds use Facebook

What does that tell me? Well, if you're on Facebook you're also on the Internet. If you're on the Internet, even if you're not on Facebook, you're on websites. A revolution in communication is underway, so much so that it's hard to keep up with at times. Even though I've been known to disparage social media publicly (and subsequently not invited back to speak for doing so), even I spend an inordinate amount of time on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Flickr, YouTube and other social sites. Oh, and the Internet? Call me Tron – I live in it. In fact, I'm listening to Apple Music on my iPhone while I type this.

Humour aside, these tools are as important to communication and engagement in local government as meetings, mail outs and posters. Important note: they don't replace face-to-face communication or Stone Age tools, as I like to call them. Those are still extremely important, especially in small town B.C. But there's no doubt that social media, websites and Internet tools will figure prominently in your community's communications and engagement practices – and so this chapter has been designed to provide some basic pointers to make your life easier and perhaps lessen the feeling of being overwhelmed by these tools. Oh, and for your information, this chapter will likely be out of date by the time it's published so read it with a grain of salt. Welcome to the Internet Age! Enjoy.

- Joel

Websites don't communicate. People do.

By: Cam McAlpine

Digital communications tools can be complicated and require IT support, but don't overlook the need for someone with solid communications skills to ensure they disseminate the content your audiences care most about.

Hands up if your website is managed by:

- **A.** Your IT manager
- **B.** Your service centre staff
- **C.** You and your administrative assistant, when you have time

How's that working for you? One of the biggest mistakes anyone makes when setting up digital, web-based communications channels is putting too much emphasis on "digital" and "web-based" and not enough on "communications." A website, or a social media channel, is simply a tool to allow you as a local government to communicate with your stakeholders. The act of communicating and the substance of that communication are what matters. The technology just allows it to happen.

Think about it this way: you wouldn't ask the guy running the printing press to also write the content for the newsletter he is producing, would you? So when it comes to building a website, or establishing a social media strategy, by all means invite the IT consultant and the graphic designer in to help with setup and implementation. They can ensure the tools help communication and engagement with your stakeholders instead of hindering it. But when it comes to the daily management of those channels, the most important thing is the content that moves through them: is it providing your community's citizens with the information they need when and where they need it? And is it consistent with the content being communicated through other channels?

> "You wouldn't ask the guy running the printing press to also write the content for the newsletter he is producing, would you?"

The best person to answer those questions may be the IT Manager, the service centre staff, or you and your administrative assistant (particularly if you're in a community in where staff members wear multiple hats). The key is that the person handling these mediums should also know what the messages are that need communicating, to whom, at what time, by which channels and how they support the community's larger communications goals and objectives.

Visual storytelling: core values, authenticity and relevance are the keys to success

By: Kim Hayhurst

Visual storytelling is the art of using photos, videos, illustrations and infographics to craft a story about your organization's brand and its offerings. Done well, it is one of the best ways to stand out from the clutter and develop engagement with your audience. Our brains process images WAY faster than text. Visuals can connect with people instantly and emotionally and can stimulate the senses. They help with understanding by converting concepts into something tangible. They are memorable. In short, they tell stories and are engaging.
The key is in knowing how to choose the right visuals to tell your story.

1. Identify the single most important value that is at the heart of your organization

For a local government that value might be community pride, citizen engagement, innovation, customer service, quality of life, a flourishing economy, cultural spirit or even resilience. Pick one. Now that you have one, ask yourself: what visuals help to tell – or show – that story?

2. Exude authenticity

Avoid stock photos at all costs. Instead, get out there with a camera and capture candid moments and real reactions in your community. The honesty in your images translates into trust with your audience.

Avoid stock photos at all costs. Instead, the honesty in your images translates into trust with your audience.

3. Reflect an experience

If your core value is quality of life, make it easy for people to imagine themselves living that lifestyle in your community. What visuals or images reflect that core value? Again, ensure that they are authentic – the experience a resident will actually have in your community. Don't have palm trees and turquoise beaches? Don't worry about it. We're not selling Barbados here, we're showcasing your community and what makes it unique, beautiful and attractive.

4. Ensure relevance

Make sure your photos are relevant to the story you're telling but are also up to date. If you are talking about the indoor pool, don't use a photo of the outdoor pool. Have you ever seen an advertisement with a horribly outdated photo that made you laugh about the fashions of days gone by? Me too. It's 2016 - don't use photos from 1987. The hairstyles, clothing, and business facades will all be different. We need to show our community as it is today.

5. Stimulate the senses
Promoting a bakery? Ensure the photos include some steam coming off of that loaf of bread. Believe it or not the steam translates into feelings of warmth and welcoming for our audiences. Showcasing the landscape in autumn? Make sure the colours in your image really make the fall leaves pop with colour.

6. Repeat
Stories not only require a lot of words but also a lot of visuals to properly communicate them to audiences. It's important for communities to develop rich libraries of imagery that can be used across all communication platforms, allowing the community to tell its story in a memorable way every chance it gets. Then repeat. Again. And again. And again. Eventually, the message will get through.

Our town's website sucks: What local government websites are for, and why you need to have one that works

By: Barb Floden

Residents need to find what they're looking for quickly and complete their task efficiently when they visit your town's website.

- Is your late 1990s-era website causing residents and staff to pull their hair out?
- Do you have so much content you can't find what you need?
- Or is what you need not even on it?
- Is posting or editing content frustrating for staff?

If you answered 'yes' to one or more of these questions, your website probably sucks.

Websites are a bit like your home's front hall closet. When you moved in, your cavernous closet seemed empty, even after putting in your outerwear, a pair of boots and a few hats and mitts on the top shelf. Then you get more jackets. The family grew and their jackets and boots and hats and mitts went in the closet, along with your golf bag, skis and that home emergency kit. Everything is in there but you can't find anything. Just like when you're trying to find your hiking boots, your residents need to find what they're looking for quickly and complete their task efficiently when they visit your town's website.

The website should never be a corner-of-the-desk job. Your IT staff needs to be in charge of the backend (server, hosting, etc.), but content creation should be a daily task of someone from a communications or administrative function area

Local government websites websites serve five basic purposes:

1. Inform

This is the static content that doesn't change often: contact information, staff and elected official directories, list of facilities and services, etc.

2. Involve

Your website is an excellent tool to solicit ideas and feedback and promote public engagement. This can be as simple as a feedback form to report problems such as potholes and links to video coverage of public meetings, or as complex as interactive town hall meetings. Larger municipalities also involve residents through the provision of 'open data' such as municipal statistics that can be accessed by anyone, including journalists and web application developers.

3. Transactional

More and more transactions are completed online. For municipalities this includes paying parking tickets, applying for a job, submitting a home owner grant application, renewing a dog license, or applying for a business license.

4. Showcase

Tourism and economic development functions are often part of local government websites. Make sure you have content that captures the attention of visitors and businesses and answers questions on visiting or setting up a business.

5. Reference

Sometimes referred to as archives or documents, this is where your council minutes and agendas, official bylaws, planning and zoning documents, etc. live. This part of a local government website can often account for the bulk of webpages. The content in these areas needs to be easily searchable by word or phrase. Websites aren't the only way to communicate with your citizens. Phone numbers, physical and postal addresses and social media connections should be easy to find on your website. Websites are not static. Your website needs to be updated frequently, and both content and imagery changed often.

10 Easy Ways to Refresh Your Local Government Website

By: Barb Floden

1. Clean the clutter

trim homepage content to just a few links or posts and ensure the search box is easy to find.

2. Make it someone's job

The website should never be a corner-of-the-desk job. Your IT staff needs to be in charge of the backend (server, hosting, etc.), but content creation should be a daily task of someone from a communications or administrative function area.

3. What's happening

Use a calendar to display municipal events such as Council and other public meetings, special events and community festivals. Ensure you include a link to agendas, RSVPs, tickets and other important event information.

4. Change the art

If your website uses scenic photos of your town, change them frequently and ensure they match the season. No one wants to see a snowy wonderland in the middle of summer!

5. Freshen the colours and fonts

Use your town's style guide or branding to make simple visual changes to your website. Avoid solid backgrounds in favour of more "responsive" (friendly on mobile devices) plain layouts. Choose simple icons over
tacky clipart.

6. Use search content

Use your site's search data to learn what people are looking for. If you see a pattern, move that item to somewhere more easily found. Use searched-for terms in your content to maximize search engine optimization (SEO).

7. Help people connect

Use your site's footer to display contact information such as phone numbers on every page. Use a contact widget to allow web visitors report a problem, submit a question or reach a department. Provide detailed contact information, including staff names, for each department or function area.

8. Get social

Provide links to your social media accounts. Use "share this" buttons to allow social media sharing, easy printing or emailing of page links and content.

9. Duplicate links

Some menu items can be placed in more than one category. Parks and trails might be found under 'recreation' but could also be placed under the 'visitor' or 'tourism' tabs. Think about your website's users – beyond your community's department structure – when organizing content in menus.

10. Be prepared for an emergency

During a disaster, your website will become a critical link for communication with citizens. Have a plan for repurposing your homepage to handle emergency messaging, and create unpublished emergency pages that can be quickly launched.

Social media: what it is and why it's important

By: Barb Floden

Boomers are becoming the largest rising demographics on all platforms, with Facebook.

Imagine there's a café in town where several dozen – or more – locals hang out and talk about you. They're sharing photos and stories of you. Some have all the facts and others clearly don't. But you're not there to participate in the conversation because you either don't even know about the café or you don't think it's the sort of place you'd go. Now what if it's not really a café: it's social media. Would you want to join in and hear what's being said?

Social media use started to explode in the mid-2000s, primarily with younger audiences. Today, social media numbers are staggering[1]:

59% of Canadians use Facebook on a regular basis

75% of Canadians earning $80-$100K annually use Facebook

75% of Canadian 18 to 34-year-olds are on Facebook

Almost one in three 18-34 year olds use Instagram

Twitter is holding steady at about one-quarter of Canadians using that platform

Local governments need to have a presence on social media in order to be part of conversations already taking place in the community.

Boomers are becoming the largest rising demographics on all platforms, with Facebook used by one-half of 55 to 64-year-olds

No matter the platform the basic premise is the same: users share content with other users in real time, and others can share posts and comment. Content can be breaking news, photos of food, cat videos or political views. Local governments need to have a presence on social media in order to be part of conversations already taking place in the community.

Social media is also where citizens look during a crisis. Make sure you include social media as part of your town's emergency communication plan. And for this reason it is important senior level staff hold the keys to login information for all accounts and applications.

1. Source: www.emarketer.com, 2015

11 tips for top social media apps

By: Barb Floden

1. Make it someone's job

Social media should never be a corner-of-the-desk job. Issues can spring up overnight, residents can report problems or ask questions, and conversations may need to be weighed in on in a timely and accurate manner. The work can be shared among many, but one person or role should be the gatekeeper.

2. Real time

Social media is very much about what is happening right now. Just as you should do with phone and email enquiries, respond quickly to comments and questions, even if it is just acknowledgement with a promise to provide more information later.

3. Know who has the keys

Senior level staff should have access information (user names, passwords) for all social media accounts.

4. Use the right tools

Social media management tools such as Hootsuite, TweetDeck and SocialPilot (a few examples) allow organizations to plan and schedule posts in advance, manage user access to a variety of social media accounts and provide customized statistics. Some offer basic services for free, and charge monthly fees for larger organizations or number of users.

5. Claim your name

Signing up for social media accounts is usually free, so grab your organization's name (or names) across all popular social media platforms, even if you don't have immediate plans to use those channels.

6. Silence the trolls

Probably the most difficult task of social media management is dealing with "trolls" – someone who deliberately posts offensive or inflammatory comments. It is critical to have a policy statement on your account that stipulates commenting expectations, and guidelines for staff to effectively address trolling incidents.

7. Understand the reach

Each social media application reaches followers differently. With Facebook, only a small percentage of posts are seen by most followers, and the science behind those delivery algorithms is constantly changing. Use a mix of channels and frequencies for messaging, especially for urgent or important information. Most platforms offer paid advertisements, which can play a role in reaching your target audience.

8. Understand the platforms

Each social media platform has its strengths and weaknesses. Learn how each application reaches different demographics in your community, and what type of messaging works best.

9. Look backwards and forwards

Use site statistics to understand which posts worked and which didn't, who they reached, and even what time of the day followers are paying attention. And be aware of what new applications are springing up and gaining traction in your geographic area.

10. Cross pollinate

Use traditional communication tactics to advertise your social media presence. Provide social media links on your website and print publications.

11. Get expertise

Reach out to consultants and industry experts for advice on strategies and policies, and social media integration on specific campaigns or issues.

Measuring social media impact: what to track, why and how it informs your communications

By: Madison Kordyban

A quick rundown on the metrics behind the two most commonly used social media apps in B.C. communities – Facebook and Twitter.

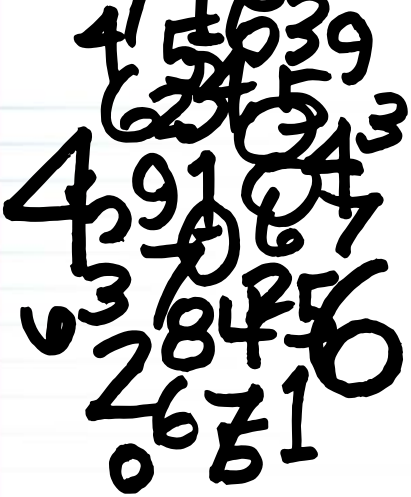
Engagement: creating conversations
Engagement is one of the most important metrics to be following. As a local government, the main purpose of your communications is to engage with your constituents. Rather than market yourself, you seek to create conversations.
This means two-sided communication, which, strangely enough, is one of the hardest types of communication to engage in. Try sharing deliberations from the Council table or new initiatives embarked upon by staff. Or, perhaps, it's creating a conversation about a recent presentation to Council – whatever it is, it should solicit a response from your followers. Of course, there are times when plain-old information sharing is necessary (such as telling people when and where they can vote), but pay attention to your engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments) and compare them to your post views.

And here's a tip:
Sometimes using the most humanizing of elements (humour, hardship or love) can break down the barrier between a seemingly uninteresting report and the people that the report represents or is designed to help.

Optimal Posting Times
As straight-forward as it gets, Facebook handily lets you know when most of your followers are online and lets you schedule posts accordingly.

Time is always critical
If everyone is at work at 11AM, there's no point in posting to an empty room. When your post ends up without much of an audience, it tends to die before even beginning. Try hitting one or even two high-traffic times so that most of your followers can see what's going on.

Demographics
Your audience is always a key measurable. How much does your communication about local issues matter if your followers are from other parts of the world? After you get a healthy amount of local followers, you can sometimes find that your demographics are skewed (volunteers, young, blue collar, immigrants, etc.). Remember, diversity is key! Measure your communication accordingly, and try adjusting your content (how you say things, examples you use) to attract a different demographic. Good conversations come from varying opinions and life views!



Twitter's Analytics - Impressions
Twitter is instantaneous, running as a continuous feed of recently sent tweets. If your users aren't there to receive your message immediately, there's a good chance they won't see them at all. To ensure you're communicating effectively, Twitter's 'impressions' field is incredibly useful. Tracking your impressions (or how many users see your tweet) allows you to see if you're using Twitter's tactics well. Even though Twitter relegates your tweet to the bottom of the pile after a few minutes, things like tagging other users, hashtags, retweeting, and more can be used to still maintain a high ratio of impressions relative to tweets sent out. With Twitter, it's a case of being effective within the constraints of the medium.

Retweets and loves
Tracking 'retweets' and 'loves' over time helps you to understand what content is effective and what isn't. The raw data itself often doesn't provide any real revelations. Making connections between hashtags used, users tagged, and topics talked about can help inform future tweet planning. What the retweets and loves data helps you to do is discern what tweets were popular – after that, it's up to you to decide why they were received as well as they were.

Followers
Followers are a great piece of data to track. They track the health of your Twitter handle, gauging if people are consistently interested in you. Unfollows (which can be tracked by a third-party site) point to a degradation of content. More than simply determining if people are interested in what we're saying, followers also indicate whether people are interested in how we're saying things. Again, the valuable gems of knowledge here come from the inferences one can pull from data sets. Did you see a large spike in followers after a particularly popular tweet about a certain program? Did you tap into a new subset of Twitter users that you'd never accessed before with a specific hashtag? Did networking at a convention pay off? Mark it down, and try to replicate the results.

Final note: Record your data and track it over time! What's the point of knowing what's happening here and now if you can't compare it to what came before and set goals for what comes next? Interpreting data over time is just as important as reliably recording the data itself.

For the numbers-obsessed, information-driven junkies, metrics are a godsend.

Every week it seems there's a new social media app. How do we manage them all?

By: Madison Kordyban

Making sense of different social media systems - why they help, when to use them and what you need to know.

For a world that runs on borrowed time, social media management systems – what I call aggregators – are a godsend. Staying on top of social media is tough. Aggregators help by streamlining this already overwhelming world into a more bite-sized format, producing a condensed snapshot that shows how each of your social media channels is performing. Ultimately, this saves you time. Rather than having to spend time bouncing between windows and scrolling through histories to get a full sense of how your community's various social channels are doing, the aggregators do the legwork for you.

Akin to a control panel, aggregators have all the bells and whistles necessary for social media success – allowing the user to write posts, publish to multiple feeds at once, link to other social influencers, shorten hyperlinks and monitor engagement from a single dashboard. In addition to condensing content, aggregators also provide you with options to schedule social media posts. While Facebook already has this option, you may find it helpful for Twitter, Pinterest or other mediums that don't offer this service. If you are expanding your social media network beyond a single channel (say, adding a Twitter account to compliment your existing Facebook page), it's worthwhile to consider using an aggregator. The aggregator allows you to schedule content across multiple channels, which means you can track multiple data and post histories using a single webpage, all while also controlling future posts. As a rule, I generally say that only one in four posts should focus on your organization specifically (board meeting minutes, announcement of a new funding program, bylaw changes), leaving the rest to be about things happening in and around your community (local events, good news stories, new businesses).

In addition to their scheduling and overview functions, aggregators provide users with expanded analytics suites, which means you can view, print and pass on reports that show how your social media channels are increasing engagement with residents and key stakeholders. Aggregators also allow you to surf and identify social trends, tapping into community news that your audiences might be actively engaged or interested in. This allows you to expand your network by connecting with other social media users in your community, while investing a minimal amount of time in seeking out such trends and finding future content. Social media aggregators have a tremendous capacity for furthering your social media efficiency, while keeping you in tune with your followers and other active players in your social sphere. If you're looking to dive into the world of aggregators, Hootsuite, RebelMouse, Sprout Social and Cyfe are all great service providers (though some charge a monthly fee).

Social media from the Mayor's chair

By Taylor Bachrach

Town of Smithers Mayor Taylor Bachrach shares a quick overview of how he uses social media, and how he's navigated tough issues.

Communicating with constituents is a core responsibility of any elected official. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are a powerful set of tools that are inexpensive, fast and easy to use. I started using Facebook in my first campaign for mayor, and since being elected it has been my favourite platform for sharing town news and engaging in conversation with residents.

In Northern B.C., most residents have Facebook accounts and many are comfortable using the platform. The demographics of the 2,000 people who currently follow my page are 63% female, 35% male, with the largest age group being between 35 and 44 years old. There are about the same number of 18 to 24-year-olds as there are 55 to 64-year-olds.

I post to my page approximately once per day and I try to mix it up. A lot of posts are updates about my work as mayor, such as photos from events I've attended. It's fun to post positive news about the community and see people come together around a sense of pride for their home. At the same time, I've found it's important to post about more challenging topics, too.

With Facebook, I find I can reach a large audience very quickly and it doesn't cost anything apart from my time. If rumours are circulating based on untrue assumptions, I can (try to) set the record straight by providing accurate information.
If I want to know the range of opinions on an emerging issue, I can solicit feedback and receive it quickly. Promoting public events is a snap.

"Sometimes, issues have proven too tough to work out in Facebook conversation and I've resorted to looking up the resident's phone number and giving them a call. You can do that kind of thing in a small town and it surprises the heck out of people."

The comments on my page tend to be honest, thoughtful and respectful. Of course there have been a few exceptions. One time, a resident posted something I felt was a personal attack and I deleted it, which I later regretted because it only made the matter worse. Now, I try to take a few deep breaths, wait a few hours then respond as thoughtfully and honestly as I can muster. I've also developed a set of guidelines to clearly communicate that certain types of posts – such as racism or other kinds of hurtful discrimination – will not be tolerated.

Sometimes, issues have proven too tough to work out in Facebook conversation and I've resorted to looking up the resident's phone number and giving them a call. You can do that kind of thing in a small town and it surprises the heck out of people (usually in a good way). Despite all the advantages of social media, there is still no replacing a chat over the phone or sitting down for a cup of coffee.

Five tips for elected official social media use

1. Use your own, authentic voice.
2. Be responsive. Social media is about the conversation, not simply broadcasting.
3. Ask engaging, open-ended questions then welcome people's responses – even if they are challenging.
4. Post rich content, especially photos and video. Tell a story about what is going on in your community.
5. If things get difficult with someone online, invite them to meet up offline.

Survey says!

By: Barb Floden

Surveys can help a local government glean important information that guides decision making processes, but they're only useful if done correctly – here are some tips.

Surveys are useful in obtaining specific information regarding a variety of proposals or projects that a local government or community might undertake. They can be used early in the process to gauge public opinion, or later to fine-tune project parameters based on changes in perception. Here are 10 keys to successful surveys that will make your life easier:

1. Define your objectives

Figure out the decision or decisions you're trying to make to focus your survey. Once you've set your objectives, determine the data you need to gather in your survey to make your decision. Do not collect data (ask questions) beyond the scope of your objectives.

2. Determine your sample

Whom will you ask? And how? Make sure you have solid tactics for distributing your survey to the right audiences.

3. Check for bias

Keep questions neutral and make sure you're not asking leading questions.

4. Keep it simple

Close-ended, fixed response questions work better than open-ended questions.

5. Educate at the beginning

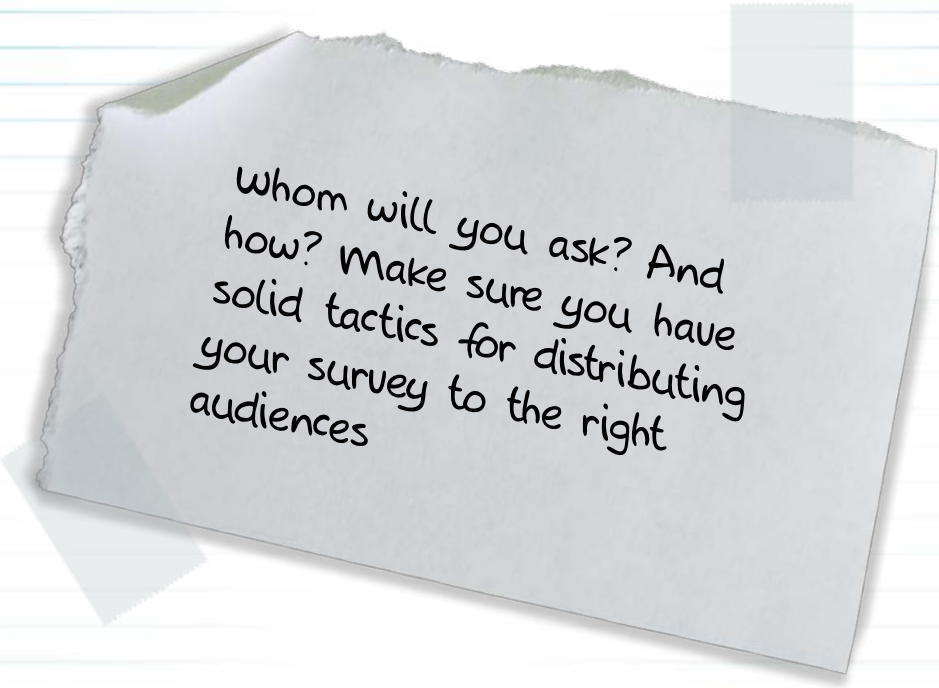
Begin with background on the reason for the survey and provide respondents with enough information to base their responses. Say how long the survey is at the start: 'Answer 5 questions,' 'Give us 10 minutes of your time,' etc.

6. Do a test drive

Send the survey to personal contacts both within and outside your organization for a test run. Ask them for feedback on question wording, response options, and if all your survey logic works.

7. Offer a comment box at the end

Sometimes respondents want to make a point that was not raised with the questions. Give them space to do this. At the end include a thank you page that includes contact information or newsletter sign-up link to keep in touch with project news.



8. Keep responses and personal information separate

If collecting personal information, ensure (and reassure in the survey) that personal information will not be stored with the survey response data. Reasons for asking for personal information could include joining a mailing list or entering a contest.

9. B.C. FOIPPA Section 30.1

Data storage and access of personal information must be in Canada, so ensure the survey application you use respects this requirement. FluidSurveys and SimpleSurvey are two examples of survey solutions that utilize Canadian-based servers.

10. Collect results and analyze data

Compile the data and ensure the results are made publicly available.

CASE STUDY

So you've got a Facebook page. Now what?

By: Jan Enns

The Town of Creston leveraged an 'inside out' approach to building external engagement via its community Facebook page.

In mid-2014, the Town of Creston, nestled in the fertile Creston Valley in the Central Kootenays, decided to get onboard the virtual highway and create a Facebook page. Their goal was to provide more opportunities for informing and engaging their community, as well as promote Creston as a choice destination to live, work and play. At the outset, there was some immediate uptake, garnering about 45 page Likes. And then it stalled – despite the potential to reach about 3,600, according to Facebook estimates for the Town. Having a Facebook page is a start. It gets you online but it doesn't automatically get populated with likes, much less become that 'go to' platform for those community conversations you were hoping for.

Enter Hélène Miles, Community, Policy and Research Coordinator to the rescue. She knew that she would have to find ways to promote the existence and encourage the use of the Town's Facebook page. And she did. Following these five simple steps she has helped Creston grow its fan-base from a mere 45 to 628 in 15 short months. Here's how:

1. Start from the inside out

Starting with her internal audiences, she met with key department contacts to show them how the Facebook page could be used to promote what they are already doing. In essence, how posts on the Town's Facebook page can be another tool in their toolkit to inform and engage the community. Ideas for posts included timely reminders about town services and programs, meetings, events and consultation opportunities.

2. Map it out

To make it easier, she developed a social media content calendar to keep track of what was happening and when it would be posted – reducing the chances of losing your fledgling audience with inconsistent posts. Using a simple calendar can maximize exposure and save time, taking the guess work out of what to post and when.

3. Make it appealing

Using pictures draws more attention than straight text, so Hélène posted scenic pictures of the Creston Valley and encouraged residents to share their pictures. Tapping into the community's collective pride, residents continue to post a variety of pictures sharing the beauty of the valley, acting as a small army of economic development officers.

Starting a Facebook page is a bit like opening up a new customer service window. Once people know it's there they'll come to rely on it – all the more reason to manage expectations for fans and staff alike.

Since they launched their Facebook page, the Town of Creston has grown their Facebook fan-base from a mere 45 likes to 628 in 15 short months.

4. 'Like' and 'like' back

Hélène also reached out online to other community organizations with larger followings, such as the Library, Chamber of Commerce and Visitors' Centre. By liking and sharing their posts, these organizations started sharing the Town's posts. Now these organizations are able to amplify the reach of their message to include each other's followers expanding their virtual network.

5. Paid for exposure

Spending a little seed money, she ran a Facebook advertising campaign promoting the Creston Valley as a great place to live as part of a bigger media campaign. Facebook offers a wide range of advertising options that you can target by age, area, interests and much more. Plus the stats on who's reading it are detailed, making it easy to track and measure your success.

6. Moving forward

Next, Hélène is working with Council and staff to put clear policies and procedures in place to keep up with the practice. Starting a Facebook page is a bit like opening up a new customer service window. Once people know it's there they'll come to rely on it – all the more reason to manage expectations for fans that like and comment on the page, as well as staff for posting and replying. Taking the time to monitor the page and answer questions is key to building that online community. Making sure that the game rules are clearly posted help ensure that the comments and questions are positive, engaging and productive. Clearly, given the increase in participation on the page, the Town's approach has already been successful in putting the "social" in social media.

For more information contact Hélène Miles: Helene.Miles@creston.ca

Privacy? That's sooooo 20th Century...

By: Joel McKay

We live in a world with an app that'll record and broadcast every aspect of our lives, if we wish. Statistically, the younger you are, the more likely it is that a portion of your life can be found online. For those of us in the public sector, this creates somewhat of a challenge in that we work for the public and carry the reputation of the town, city or community with us wherever we go. Certainly, it's not going to go over well if there are pictures of the Chief Administrative Officer beer-bonging on Facebook over the weekend.

Here's a couple quick tips to help you navigate the world:

1. **Ratchet up all your security settings on your social media applications**
   Ensuring only those people you want to see your personal details can see them

2. **Don't post things online that you don't want to see on the front page of the local newspaper**
   A simple rule to follow

3. **Separate your personal devices from your professional ones**
   Yes, this might mean you have to carry two phones but it will limit the changes, however slim, of your personal data being leaked

4. **Watch what you sign up for online**
   Some companies will share your information with other organizations, resulting in annoying phone calls from 1-800 numbers

5. **Do a regular Google search on yourself, see what's out there. Find something you don't like? Find a way to change it.**
   Lastly, society is become more and more accepting of people's personal lives being broadcast online. Tolerance is rising, so if you or one of your employees has an unfortunate photo leaked online or publishes a Tweet that's a bit embarrassing, don't immediately resort to letting them go – assess the situation, talk to the employee and determine a fair course of action. We've all made mistakes.

Comment threads – what not to do

By: Joel McKay

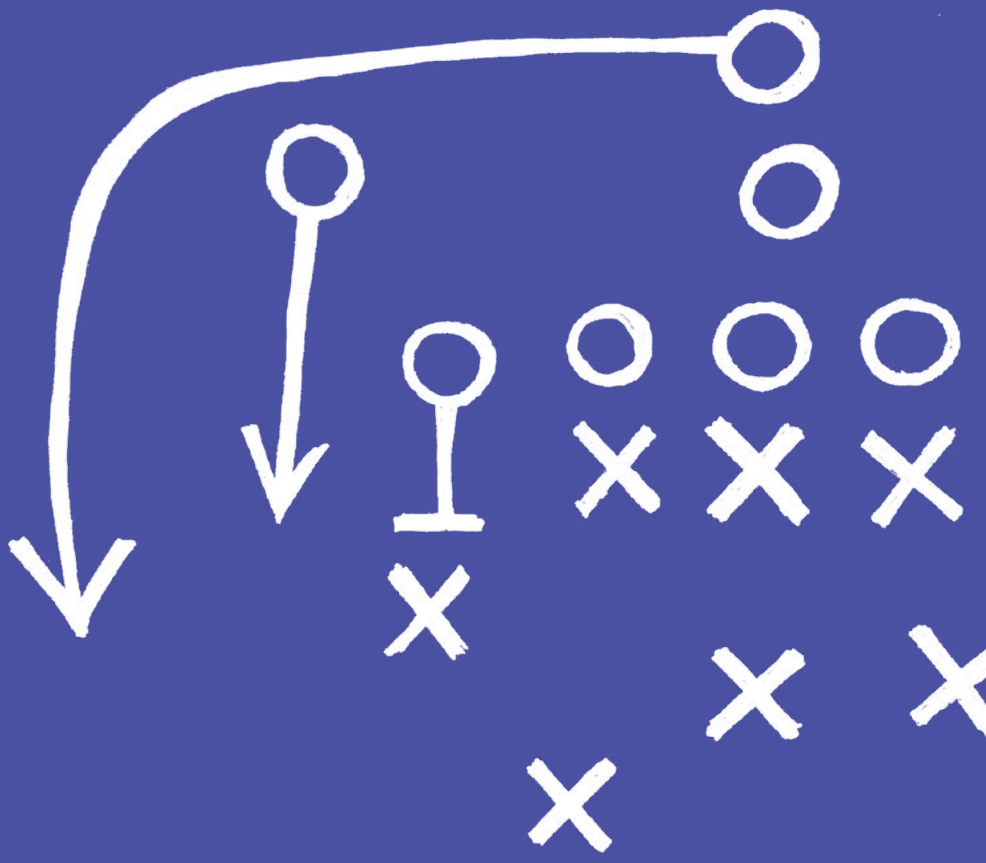
So you're a town councillor and you noticed someone has written something incorrect on a comment thread online about you or a decision made in chambers last night. Let me guess, your first instinct is to log in and correct them? While we appreciate your passion to come to the rescue of your reputation or your town's reputation, think before you act.

Comment threads on the Internet are notorious for nasty comments, many of them hateful and defamatory. Responding to a message might invite further harassment. And if you've responded once, how you do you justify not responding a second time? Sometimes it's better to report the comment to your chief administrative officer and seek his/her or Council's advice as to how best to respond to the comment, if at all. There's an old saying that politics is a game of tennis – if you hit the ball in your opponent's court he's obligated to hit it back. Replying to a nasty comment can often invite another one back. Be careful. Assess the situation. Seek advice.

SECTION FIVE

Chapter 7

NEWS MEDIA - MEDIA RELATIONS AND ISSUES MANAGEMENT



The media – who they are, what they do, how they work

By: Joel McKay

I began my career as a journalist so the topic of media relations hits particularly close to home. I loved being in the news business. I recall my early days of journalism school in the Lower Mainland and being taught that news, generally speaking, is any story with conflict and controversy. It was a bit of a joke but if you're a news junky like I am then you know there's some truth to it.

"Although the media industry in B.C. continues to contract, local newspapers and radio and TV stations remain crucial sources of factual information about our communities – especially in small towns."

I prefer to think that 'news' is anything that's generally of interest to the public. When it comes to local government, everything is news and subject to media coverage. Why? The services the local government provides citizens with are paid for with tax dollars – and taxpayers have a right to know how their money is being spent. I recall one of my early stories as a city hall reporter was the city's summer paving plans. I'm not kidding. I interviewed people and wrote about the highly sexy topic of asphalt repaving. Why? Well, a list of the streets being resurfaced, when they were being resurfaced and the cost associates with those paving projects were of interest to my readers. Laugh if you will, but if it was on the Council agenda I would write a story about it.

Media relations is simply the act of working proactively with media, and responding to their needs to get information out that the public might want to know about or care about. Although the media industry in B.C. continues to contract, local newspapers and radio and TV stations remain crucial sources of factual information about our communities – especially in small towns. In fact, they remain the single best channel for sharing factual information with a large portion of your local audience. Although the media landscape in our province continues to evolve, it's absolutely crucial that we continue to work positively and proactively with our local journalists to ensure they get the information they need to inform their readers, and we, as community

Media – who they are

Generally speaking, your local media are just like you. Forget all the Woodward and Bernstein stories you've read – small town journalists (and big city journalists) are regular people with families and friends just like you. It just so happens that they chose a creative career that sometimes places them at odds with the public sector.

Media – what they do

The media's job is, first and foremost, to get the news out so that the public is informed. The news is manufactured in the form of 'stories'. What are stories? Stories generally contain basic elements – who, what, when, where, why and how, but also they contain a 'hook' – the 'this is important and happening now or just happened' element. That's what makes it news.

So how is a basic news story structured? Most journalists are taught the Inverted Pyramid style of reporting, which places the most important information up top and the least important information at the bottom or end of the story. The reason for this is that most readers/viewers don't read all the way through stories, so even if they read the only the first two sentences they get the most important information.

Stories must include sources

Reporters aren't allowed to make things up, despite some of the complaints you might've heard about them in the past. Sources range from factual documents to reports and interviews with experts or people 'in the know.' Generally speaking, local news stories contain at least two or three sources – a document or report set of statistics that confirms the 'news' and then one or two interviews that provide context or opposing views on the situation. Feature stories, investigative work and in-depth journalism may contain hundreds of interviews, documents, reports, statistics and other data. Once all of the information is collected, the story is compiled (written or recorded), edited and sent for publication by deadline.

Media – how they work

Deadlines. Everything in the media world revolves around deadlines. If you don't get your comment in to the media by deadline don't expect to have it included in the story the next day, which can result in a very one-sided story that leaves the public ill-informed. Always ask a journalist what his or her deadline is.

That said, it's important to know that deadlines are always changing. A radio station might have a deadline every three hours – for morning, noon and afternoon/evening broadcasts. A newspaper might have a daily or weekly deadline. A TV station might have a 3PM deadline in order for the story to air in time for the 5PM or 6PM newscast. A magazine might have a deadline three months from now. The important point is that when working on a story with a member of the media always ask, what's your deadline? And then do your level best to get the information they're seeking to them in time for the deadline, if it's within your power to do so.

Here's a quick overview on media and why they matter

By: Joel McKay

A few keys to remember

▪ Off the record

Ever heard of this? A reporter might ask you to tell them something 'off the record'. This assumes you'll share the information and it remains between you and the reporter. Let me tell you something, there's no such thing as off the record. It's only off the record if the reporter decides to keep whatever you've told them off the record. The golden rule is this: nothing is off the record. Stick to that and you won't get burned.

▪ I've been mis-quoted!

I've heard people tell me this numerous times (both when I was a journalist and now as a P.R. practitioner). Here's how quotes work: a reporter cannot alter the words you said or the intent of your quote. They can, however, trim a quote. So if it takes you 300 words to explain your point, chances are good your 300 words will be clipped down to 50 and the quote won't come out well. This is, again, why it's important to hone your key messages ahead of media interviews.

▪ Awkward silences

Here's an old interview trick taught to me by a former Vancouver Sun journalist: let the interviewee finish his/her thought and then stay silent. Often the silence will cause them to get nervous and they'll start blabbing, which can result in new information or a great quote. So here's the lesson: if you're being interviewed, beware the awkward silence. Simply say, "do you have any more questions?"

▪ Know the facts and only the facts

If, during an interview, you're asked for a particular number and you don't know it – don't make it up. If you don't know the number or figure in question, simply say, "I'm sorry. I don't have that top of mind, however, I can get it for you. What's your deadline again?"

▪ No comment

Never say "no comment." Why? It makes you look guilty. If you can't comment there must be a reason. For example, "I'm sorry, we can't speak to it right now because the matter is before the courts," or, "I'm sorry, we can't speak to that because it's confidential or in camera."

Media relations and issues management: two sides of the same coin

By: Cam McAlpine

Good media relations is all about developing relationships with those who are tasked with writing the stories that tell the public about what is happening.

"Oftentimes, a reporter will give you the benefit of the doubt if you've shared a cup of coffee."

As the proverb says, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. And so it is with media relations and issues management. Regardless of if you live in a small community with one reporter or in a major metropolitan area with hundreds of journalists, good media relations today can prevent major issues tomorrow. "The key term is 'relations' or 'relationships'.

Good media relations is all about developing relationships with those who are tasked with writing the stories that tell the public about what is happening at town hall, on our snowy roads or over at the water treatment plant. If you have a pre-existing relationship with a reporter, it makes it much easier to reach out to them to pitch a story you'd like to tell. On the flip side, when there is bad news to tell, that reporter will feel much more comfortable reaching out to you to get your side of the story before switching on the laptop and writing a salacious tabloid article devoid of facts or context. Oftentimes, a reporter will give you the benefit of the doubt if you've shared a cup of coffee. They might at least make sure your side of the story gets equal play if they know your dog's name is Daisy, that you volunteer at the school and that you shovel your neighbour's driveway after a heavy snowfall.

Make no mistake: any journalist worthy of the name should not let personal relationships get in the way of good reporting. And if there is truly an issue of concern, don't expect to avoid scrutiny. You will need to deal with whatever it is openly and honestly. But if you do, and the reporter knows you as an individual, as a person of integrity and trust, the chances of the issue dragging out or turning into a full-blown crisis diminish substantially. If they've sat down with you and looked you in the eye, they cease to be "the media" and you cease to be "the government."

Simply put, you both become human beings doing what you each think is best for your shared community. So don't ignore the media when they call. In fact, pick up the phone and call them today. You'll be glad you did the next time all hell breaks loose.

Tips on media relationships

By: Joel McKay

Relationships, as you've likely gathered by now given the content of this handbook, are everything. Same goes for the media. In small communities, it can be really easy to become familiar and friendly with local media. I don't discourage this but it does come with a caveat:

Remember that each time you engage with media in a professional capacity it is a business transaction – you are exchanging information for their audience and vice versa.

You will become friendly with media but I caution elected officials and local government representatives from becoming too friendly, it potentially places both parties in awkward situations. It's easy to let something slip over a coffee or a beer on a Saturday afternoon. What is the reporter supposed to do now? Forget that information. No, they have a duty to report the facts to their audience, which might place new strain on your relationships with your local media. Caution is warranted here.

Big city media will occasionally parachute into town to cover a big story – a mill or mine closure, a flood or fire or something novel and unique. The biggest complaint I've heard from media in small towns over the years is that they're forgotten when *Global BC*, the *CBC* or *Globe and Mail* show up. Don't forget about your local media even when the big shiny camera crews come to town. In fact, my advice would be to go out of your way to continue serving local media while big media are in town. Remember, the local journalists will remain in town long after the big city crews have gone home – maintaining that local relationship is crucial.

5 things the media may not know when they call your First Nation

By: Myanna Desaulniers

Outlining who the spokesperson is for your community or nation from the start of any conversation with a reporter will save the wrong people from being quoted.

First Nations communities are in the news now more than ever before, which means First Nations community administrators, Chief and Councillors can expect to receive media calls moreso than in years past. But how do we effectively respond to these requests while also achieving our goal to have our stories heard and stay engaged with our members? The media have a tough job and are forced to distill a lot of complex information into readable – or watchable – stories on a daily basis. We can't assume they know everything about our communities.

Here are five basic pieces of information First Nations communities might consider providing to media ahead of any interviews – These tips will make your life, and the media's easier, and help you and them more effectively tell your story.

1. So you're a Band right?

Not all reporters will know the difference between a nation and a community. They will need some background as to how your community, national government or specific organization fits into the picture.

2. I'm sorry, how do I say that?

The pronunciation of your community, nation or specific ideas that are explained in your language should be provided. Some reporters may feel uncomfortable asking for this, so providing it without them asking would likely be appreciated.

3. Who speaks for who?

Outlining who the spokesperson is for your community or nation from the start of any conversation with a reporter will save the wrong people from being quoted, even yourself as an administrator.

4. What do you mean the Chief is out of cell service?

The context in which your community or nation is situated may need to be explained. Outlining some of the constraints to reaching your community spokesperson for an interview can be very beneficial for your relationship with a reporter. The fact that the chief is haying may seem like a logical answer to why

"The fact that the chief is haying may seem like a logical answer to why he/she isn't available for an interview - but a reporter may not be able to empathize with this response."

he/she isn't available for an interview – but a reporter may not be able to empathize with this response.

5. You know our paper, right?

The media may assume that you know who they are and what they are about. It's important to ask for clarification or probe more about the media outlet itself. This will help you as an administrator or communication coordinator to situate the importance of the interview. For example, media with a large reach, such as Canadian Press, have a large audience, allowing you to expand the reach of your story. You may also want to give priority to local media, knowing that this may have the best chance of getting your message to your members or citizens.

CASE STUDY

Open Access at Kelowna city hall a 'gold standard' in media relations

By: Jan Enns

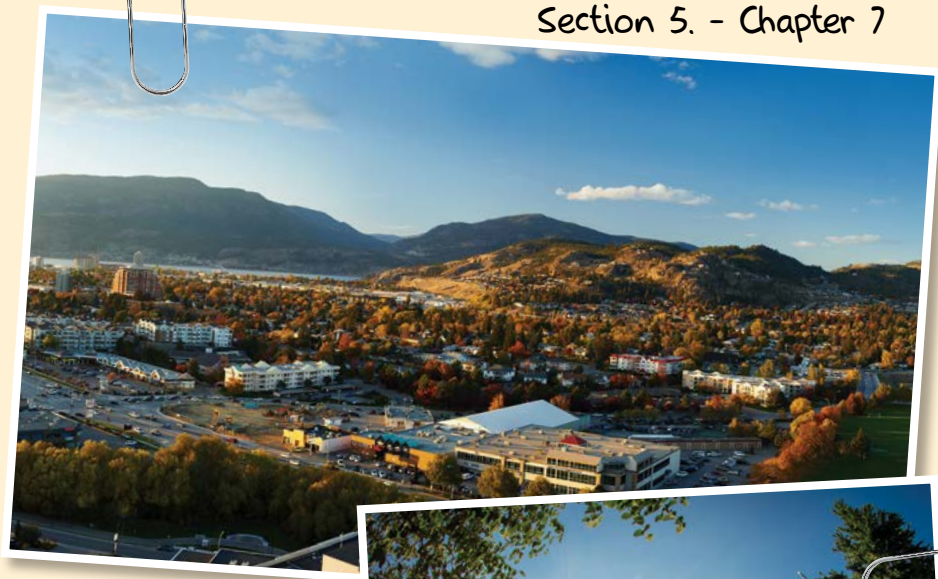
The City has invested in open access guidelines that allow reporters to contact the staff directly.

Media relations has real rewards. Just ask the City of Kelowna. Their proactive approach has been dubbed the "gold standard" by a few local media sources, including CBC radio, in an article published in Infotel News. The City knows reporters want access to the people in charge of the programs they deliver. Reporters are often loath to talk to the communications officer – they want the real deal. And so do their readers. That's why the City has invested in open access guidelines that allow reporters to contact the project managers directly.

The media know this and will often call for an update or to get answers to questions directly, in addition to having access to the City's communications officer. The City is quite deliberate in their desire to ensure timely and accurate information to the community via the media. First, it is just one of many steps to keep their residents informed and engaged. This starts with proactive communication and consultation planning to clearly identify the purpose, the issues and the response. Second, media news releases and interviews are only one of many tactics they use to spread the word. Paid advertising, public meetings and social media are just some of the many other tools they use in concert with media relations.

When it comes to the interview, the City makes sure its staff have the media training needed to answer the questions. They get the fact that it is more than a conversation with a single journalist: it's their opportunity to reach their entire community, and beyond, depending on the topic. It's a fact they don't take lightly. Ensuring their spokesperson is prepared can make the difference between an accurate news story or the need for damage control.

For the past seven years, the city has offered annual media training workshops for staff to learn about what the media is looking for, how to develop powerful key messages and the do's and dont's of media interviews. A unique feature of their day-long workshop includes filming mock interviews that are then shared with the group for insights and feedback. By all accounts it has been one of the most popular and effective training



programs the city provides, with staff becoming more comfortable in their role as a spokesperson.

The media training also includes an overview of their protocols and procedures for handling media calls, including those in response to a news release or council item and those unexpected ones that often have some issue attached. Rather than handling an interview 'off the cuff,' staff are encouraged to make sure they have the latest info, knowing they can get support for those tougher topics. The protocol also includes a "no surprise" rule to notify key contacts (think Mayor, Chair, Chief or CAO) about interviews in advance or as soon as possible.

The proof of this coordinated approach is in the quality and quantity of media coverage they receive, helping the city to convey clear, compelling and consistent information about their programs and services. Communications are planned, the message is carefully developed and the spokesperson is ready and able to deliver a 'gold standard' interview.

"For the past seven years, the city has offered annual media training workshops for staff to learn about what the media is looking for, how to craft their key message and the do's and don'ts of media interview"

10 tips on working with the media from a Northern B.C. news veteran

By: Elaine Meisner

There is no secret to working with media – it's all about relationships. The reality is that you have a message you want out and they are looking for content, and, in most cases, it's as simple as that. So, in terms of tips, here are a few ideas to keep that relationship working to the benefit of both parties:

1. Get to know the reporters in your community. Knowing who to call, text, email or send a tweet to when you need to share a story works wonders. Oh, and don't be surprised if the reporter you worked with last month isn't with the media outlet this month. Communities throughout Northern B.C. are considered small to medium markets where new reporters often land straight out of school. They expect to learn some new skills and hone their craft to help them move to a larger market.

2. Find out what kind of deadlines your reporters face. Radio and T.V. reporters may have an hourly deadline, newspapers a daily deadline, Internet sites could be publishing immediately. Knowing deadlines should help you set dates and times for media releases, or news conferences.

3. When inviting media to a news conference, make sure you cover, who, what, when and where, but DON'T give out all the details of what you plan to discuss, otherwise, why would anyone bother to show up? Something like: "Mayor So and So invites media to a news conference on Saturday, April 2nd at 2pm at the Community Hall at 1652 Main Street, to share details of a new program that will benefit local businesses" works.

4. Find out from your media partners if they would like photos or video or just audio clips. If they need visuals, try to make them interesting and make sure you can provide media with the proper names, spelling and titles of those appearing in a photo.

5. **Never** schedule a news conference for late Friday afternoon. This is considered the "dump" time when "bad" or controversial issues are released by parties in an effort to ensure there is minimal coverage. The public is already in weekend mode, and has forgotten about the issue or item by the time Monday rolls around. A late Friday afternoon event or release usually sends up red flags with media.

"We all make mistakes, but a mistake can spiral out of control if there is an effort to deny or ignore the error. There is a saying, 'When you mess up, dress up and fess up."

6. Give media at least a day of advance warning. Yours may not be the only event and media outlets need to schedule their staff.

7. Understand which of your media partners will honour an embargo. Sending out news before it is to be broadcast or published can save everyone some time, however, it has been my experience that some media outlets do not hold back from releasing material, you need to know who will or won't honour an embargo.

8. Be accessible. Let the members of the media know how you can be reached should they need a comment, an update or some clarification on an issue.

9. News doesn't happen on a Monday to Friday nine to five schedule. It happens when it happens, so expect calls or emails or texts outside regular office hours.

10. Don't be afraid to be human. We all make mistakes, but a mistake can spiral out of control if there is an effort to deny or ignore the error. There is a saying, "When you mess up, dress up and fess up." Look at these two examples: The late Rob Ford, former Mayor of Toronto, denies drug use and the media hounded him until the truth was revealed. Or how about former Alberta Premier Ralph Klein? He was caught making some inappropriate comments at a men's shelter, Klein stepped up, apologized, admitted to having a problem with alcohol and sought immediate treatment for it. If you've made a mistake, admit it and allow you or your organization to move on. Denial can be your worst enemy.

The Media Tool Box: stories, interview requests, templates and contact lists

By: Joel McKay

So you've survived the media relations and issues management chapter. Here are a few quick tools to help your day-to-day communications practices:

Seven keys to finding your story

When it comes to having your story told, you need more than enthusiasm to snag a reporter's attention (although enthusiasm can go a long way). Here are seven themes to keep in mind before you pitch your town's story:

1. Conflict

Media love stories with conflict. Does your news solve a recent conflict or provide a solution?

2. Humanity

Is there a human angle to this story? Will it make a difference for a certain segment of the population?

3. Immediacy

Did Council just make the decision? Then it's news now! Get it out!

4. Locality

Is it a local decision that affects locals? If so, local media will want to know

5. Novelty

Is your news unique, cool or unusual? These types of news bits make for great feature or slice of life stories.

6. Peril

Does your news provide an immediate solution to a coming peril? Do you have an issue that needs to be highlighted in the media to gain traction and generate action?

7. Pictures

Keep a selection of stock photos and b-roll video on file for media use. Does your story have great visuals? Can you use your existing photos or b-roll to help tell it? Great! Get it to the media.

Tools: Interview request template

Whenever you're working with the media to arrange interviews, it's handy to have a checklist to ensure you're not forgetting anything. This handy interview request template will get the pertinent information you need to prepare yourself, your mayor, chief or board chair for an interview. A few key points:

- **Request**
  What does the reporter want to talk about? For how long? This will help you determine the information you need to pull to provide to your mayor, chief or board chair for the interview. Also, knowing how long the reporter needs is especially important on busdy or heavy news days when you're handling an influx of media calls

- **Angle**
  Always ask a reporter what their angle is. The angle is the story slant or the part of the story they're focusing on or issue at hand. Truth is, they might not tell you. That's OK. But if you don't ask, you don't know and it's more difficult to prepare.

- **Deadline**
  Again, don't forget to ask for the reporter's deadline – this is crucial!

News release template

News releases, press releases, media releases – they're all the same thing. Different organizations have different ways of doing them, here's my advice:

1. Use a template
This will save you time (see template example)

2. Keep it short
Provide the basic information and try to keep it to a single page, if the media is interested they'll contact you for more information

3. Separate quotes and facts from your body paragraph
This make it easier to scan and read from a media perspective

4. Always include contact information
Who's handling the media calls for this release? That's the contact person that should be on the release. Oh, and make sure that person is aware they're listed on the release and is ready to take calls when the release goes out.

5. HEDs and DEKs
H eadlines are the attention grabber statement you put at the top of the release, such as: "City signs $1 million agreement for new park development." The DEK is the sub-headline that goes below it, such as "New park agreement will expand the City's green spaces by 500 hectares."

Interview Request Template

Prepared by:

Date:

Reporter's name and contact information:

Outlet:

Request:

Angle:

Deadline:

Notes:

News Release Template

HED:

DEK:

Month, Day, Year:

Dateline - Body copy
(who, what, when, where, why, how)

Explanatory paragraphs

"Quote"

More explanation

About / Background / FAQ

Media Contact:

Name:

Title:

Department, Organization

Telephone

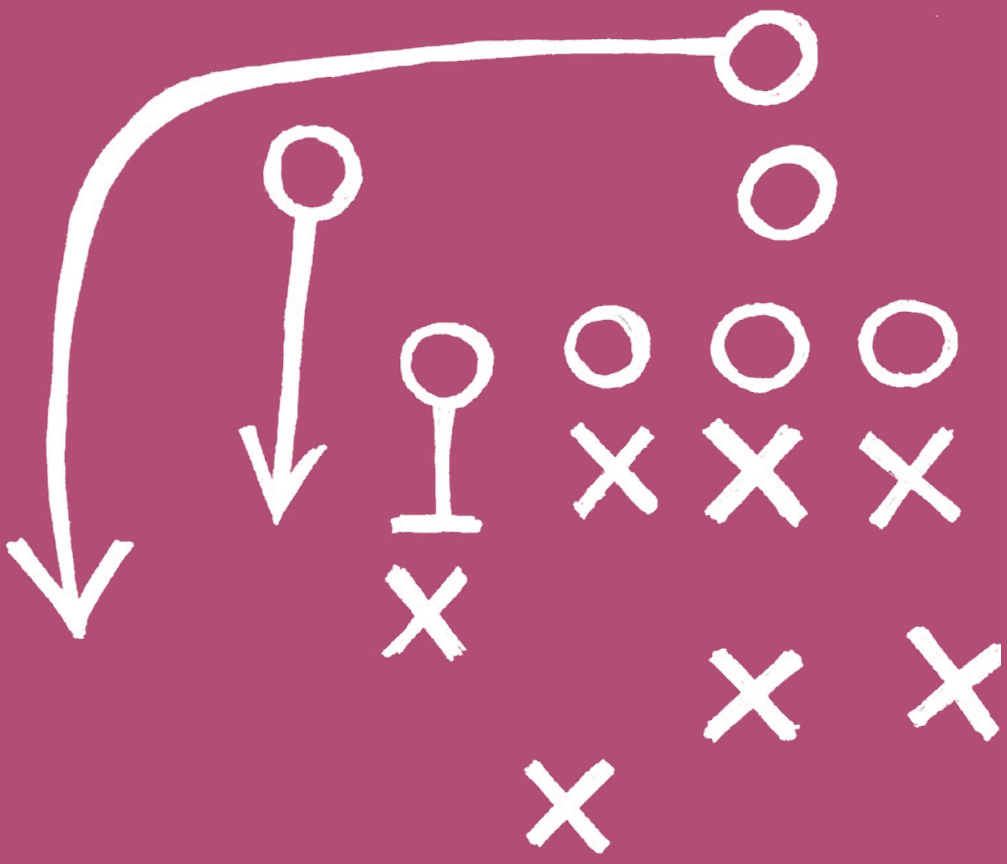
Mobile

Email

SECTION SIX

Chapter 8

EMERGENCY AND CRISIS COMMUNICATION



The difference between emergency and crisis communications and why it matters

By: Shelly Burich

Emergencies can happen anywhere, anytime – and crises can happen to the best of us – it's best to know the differences between them and how to prepare yourself.

Often, people use the terms of 'emergency communications' and 'crisis communications' as an interchangeable term for two distinctly different types of communications.

Here's how they're different while keeping it in simple terms:

A crisis can happen to the best of local governments despite the best intentions and efforts to mitigate them. As the old saying goes, %$#& happens! These types of events have a tendency to affect the reputation of the organization. The severity and duration of a crisis can vary depending on the severity of the situation.

All of these situations have damaging effects to the reputation of the organization. On the other hand, when the safety of communities, its residents and infrastructure is at risk, you are talking about emergency communications. Events such as wildland fires, flooding, landslides, earthquakes or hazardous spills are all examples of emergency events. Whereas crisis communications deals primarily with the reputation of an organization and its people of being at risk, emergency communications deals with situations whereby the actual life safety of communities, residents and infrastructure are in peril.

Examples of crises include:

1. An elected official arrested for public intoxication
2. A disgruntled employee goes to the media with accusations of bullying by the Chief Administrative Officer and management team
3. Leaked documents make their way to the media and suggest there may be serious layoffs so that council can make their budget targets

Whereas crisis communications deals primarily with the reputation of an organization and its people of being at risk, emergency communications deals with situations whereby the actual life safety of communities, residents and infrastructure are in peril

The value of an emergency operations plan

By: Shelly Burich

Emergencies and disasters can happen anywhere at any time.

They affect communities, businesses, organizations, governments, infrastructure and individuals. No one and nothing is immune. Prevention, preparation, effective response and recovery can mitigate the long-term impact of such events. Emergency management is the effective collaboration of systems and processes that prevent, mitigate, respond to and recover from an emergency.

An emergency plan is developed as part of an emergency program.

An emergency plan provides direction for staff that should be adaptable to any emergency, which generally includes instructions based on recognized hazards and vulnerabilities. The emergency operations plan should address who, what, when, where, and how things need to be done during the stages of preparation, mitigation, response and recovery.

An integral component of the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) is the development of a communications plan for each stage of an emergency.

Developing an EOP is not a one-time initiative to create a binder destined to sit on a shelf, be used as a door stop or to help prop a window open. The plan should be reviewed on a regular basis with your key staff who will be participating in your Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) should it be activated. Staff that will be stepping into the Information Officer role should make sure they keep current with the emergency communications plan as part of the overall EOP.

Talking the walk: why crisis communications is integral to emergency response

By: Cam McAlpine

A crisis communications plan is both an appendix to an EOP and a stand-alone corporate document.

Crisis communications is the planned communications response to any controversial issue, emergency or catastrophic event. The actual response to the emergency or crisis event – the actions outlined in your Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) – is obviously the first and most important task.

1. **Is the fire out?**
2. **Are homes protected from the floodwaters?**
3. **Has a suspect in the crime been arrested?**
4. **Are people out of harm's way and are the injured being cared for appropriately?**

- Your stakeholders want to see you in action
- They want to know you are responding to the event
- They want to know you have a plan of action and that you are managing the situation
- They also want to know how the situation will impact them, and they need to know how they should respond

That's where a crisis communications plan comes in.

It deals with the roles, responsibilities, policies and procedures for coordinating the communications response to any controversy or crisis event. It informs people what you are doing, and what they should be doing.

It safeguards the reputation of your organization by reducing the duration or severity of the impacts of the crisis event or issue.

Why is it important?

Because it helps to protect human life and limb by ensuring people have the correct information they need to avoid further injury or impact. It maintains public confidence by providing clear guidance to stakeholders about what is being done and what they need to do, if anything, in response to the issue or event. It safeguards the reputation of your organization by reducing the duration or severity of the impacts of the crisis event or issue on the community and your organization.

How does the crisis communications plan fit with the EOP?

A crisis communications plan is both an appendix to an EOP and a stand-alone corporate document. The reason for this is that a crisis communications plan describes how the organization will communicate its response to physical emergencies or catastrophic events (floods, fires, etc.), and therefore should be developed in tandem with the EOP. But also the crisis plan contemplates how the organization will respond to controversial issues and actions (criminal acts, threats to person, property or environment, labour disruption, etc.). Therefore, the crisis plan will also serve an important role as a supplemental piece of the local government's overall corporate communications plan.

"Nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care."
– Theodore Roosevelt

CASE STUDY

How facebook helped the Cariboo connect with rural residents during a 100-year firestorm

By: Shelly Burich

A well-researched communications plan helped the Cariboo Regional District leverage the growing use of social media in rural areas to keep residents informed and safe from danger during a record forest fire season.

In 2010, the Cariboo Chilcotin was ravaged by firestorms of a magnitude the region had not seen in more than 100 years.

Our communications team played an integral role in providing information to residents, national and international audiences and media. From July 28 to September 2010, the Cariboo Regional District (CRD) evacuated or provided alerts to approximately 3,000 residents through 31 evacuation orders and 43 alerts. Over 168,133 hectares were destroyed by 125 wildfires in the Cariboo Chilcotin.

As the Manager of Communications for the CRD, ongoing responsibilities included the development of effective strategies and tactics that allow for immediate communications with residents. One tactic the CRD implemented was the utilization of Facebook. It provided the ability to reach residents and provide them with information immediately, which for residents and others in rural or remote areas faced with fast-moving fires could ultimately mean the difference between life and death.

Our communications team needed to instantaneously reach the public, particularly those in the immediate area of the disaster. Research was conducted before the fires that showed growing numbers of Cariboo Chilcotin residents had access to broadband and satellite connectivity and were using the internet for news and information. The research also showed that social media use in these areas was high, and could be leveraged to provide timely and accurate information to residents in hazardous areas during the firestorms.

But in order to do so specific, targeted audiences needed to be made aware of the CRD's Facebook page as the central source of information about the operations.

The CRD communications team developed its emergency communications plan in collaboration with the manager of protective services.

The plan incorporated a number of traditional and non-traditional tactics including:

- Media relations
- A public information/outreach program
- An email distribution campaign
- Engagement with local elected officials

"The metrics gained through Facebook weekly reports showed the growing use of social media as a key source of information in rural areas."

The media relations program drew on previously established relationships with print media, radio, online news portals and bloggers. The public information campaign included community-to-community meetings and the CRD's emergency broadcast system. It also incorporated a government engagement component that linked together all Facebook pages of the agencies involved in the disaster.

"Our engagement strategy worked and was widely utilized by residents and provided timely, accurate and potentially life-saving information."

Our engagement strategy worked and was widely utilized by residents and provided timely, accurate and potentially life-saving information. The metrics gained through Facebook weekly reports showed the growing use of social media as a key source of information in rural areas, and allowed the CRD communications team to make adjustments in our mix of communications tactics as the firestorms progressed. It also provided a foundation for future use of social media tactics for CRD emergency operations and corporate communications.

As part of the 2010 emergency operations de-briefing, the future use and expansion of social media tools was identified as a strategic priority by CRD elected officials and staff. This provided the political and administrative support our team needed to identify the appropriate social media tools and the suitable administration of them for future events.

This first foray by the CRD into social media provided the baseline information we needed for the CRD to develop a robust social media communications policy, which was endorsed in 2011. This document will help the CRD continue communicating effectively with residents in day-to-day business and during life-threatening emergency situations.

"Always acknowledge a fault frankly. This will throw those in authority off their guard and give you opportunity to commit more." – Mark Twain

The criminal in the corner office – some tips on handling an employee-focused crisis

By: Cam McAlpine

The short-term operations of the city may be impacted by a controversy of a criminal nature as the public focus on city hall shifts from operations to the issue at hand.

Jim Smith* was by all accounts an accomplished public servant. Now in his mid-40s, he had worked in local government since he graduated as a planner from university 20 years previously. He had served in progressively more senior roles in the three communities in which he had lived: first working his way up to director of planning at a small regional district, then moving into a larger department in a more populated regional district across the country, and finally into the role of director of development with a mid-sized municipality located within the boundaries of the latter regional district.

Jim was always very professional in his relationships with staff. He kept his work life and his personal life as separate as is possible in a relatively small community. People at work knew he was married and had a couple of daughters, now in their teens. He was a Rotarian, coached kids' soccer, and played a little himself in the Master's league. He was a good boss with an open-door policy. So it came as a shock to the city's chief administrative officer (CAO) when Jim walked into her office one morning and informed her that he had been arrested on the weekend, and charged with offences related to the collection and distribution of child pornography. As a condition of his release pending trial, he told the CAO he had had all computerized devices seized, including his work cell phone. The arrest had not become public, however, Jim's first court appearance was scheduled for about three weeks later. While the nature of the charges made a publication ban highly likely, the fact that Jim lives in a small, relatively tight-knit community, means the story becoming public knowledge was almost inevitable.

***This scenario is a fictionalized account of a potential crisis situation for learning purposes. Any resemblance to actual events, or to real people, is coincidental and unintentional.**

What is at stake?

The short-term operations of the city may be impacted by this controversy, due to Jim's absence and the shift in focus at city hall away from city business and onto the issue. Longer term, it will be important to manage the controversy appropriately so that the city's reputation and the reputations of its staff and elected officials are not harmed.

What should the city do?

In addition to putting Jim on paid leave pending the outcome of the case, the CAO should pull together a small team of senior leaders at the city to manage the crisis, including communications and legal support. An initial step will also be to include the IT manager in the discussion to ensure no criminal activity took place on city property.

As part of its crisis communications strategy, the city should:

proactively address the allegations internally by: first, ensuring council and senior management are aware of the issue; and second, communicating directly with management and staff about the issue when it becomes public; reach out to Jim's former employer at the regional district to ensure they are aware and can prepare for any potential impacts or questions they may face about Jim's former employment; respond in a balanced, timely and appropriate manner to the issue when it becomes public; ensure the employee's personal information is protected as far as is required, and that the presumption of innocence until proven otherwise is upheld in all communication; and, take a firm position on the issue at the heart of the alleged offences (i.e. we do not condone it, and we will do what we can to educate the community about the issue and ensure those who violate the law face consequences).

Open, proactive communication about the case will be difficult because of the sensitive nature of the issue, and the combined facts that it is both a personnel issue and a matter before the courts. Once it becomes a public topic, efforts should be made to communicate the extent of the city's knowledge about the issue, without contravening privacy rules. A prepared statement, approved by legal counsel, should form the basis of any statements. Because Jim is in a senior position and there will likely be questions about the charges and his status as an employee of the city, it is important to communicate answers to these questions, to the best of the city's ability, with staff. The CAO should speak directly with Jim's direct reports, and provide them with information they can share with other employees, if necessary. In addition, the prepared statement referred to above should be circulated to all staff, prior to or at the same time as it is made public.

Ongoing monitoring of the case, and of media and social media coverage of it, will be necessary. The leadership team will need to determine the most appropriate messaging and method of communication based on the outcome of each stage of the case (charges, trial, verdict, post-verdict). As with any crisis communications response, the team will need to have the flexibility and adaptability to adjust its response to changing conditions.

CASE STUDY

The Tsilhqot'in Decision: how to prepare for decision day

By: Myanna Desaulniers

Tsilhqot'in National Government communication coordinator Myanna Desaulniers offers six must-know tips for nations faced with publicity surrounding major court decisions.

It was June 20, 2014 and the Tsilhqot'in National Government was notified that the Supreme Court of Canada would be rendering its decision on the 25-year-long Tsilhqot'in v. British Columbia court case on June 26, 2014. Although we had a lot of faith in what the verdict would be, we were prepared with two press releases prior to the decision day. A press conference was arranged in Vancouver where the Tsilhqot'in Chiefs and other First Nation leaders were set to hear the ruling. The six chiefs within the nation prepared the day prior and developed speaking notes or compiled their responses about the possibilities of the decision and each potential outcome.

A media advisory with a backgrounder with information about the court case, as well as the location and time of the press conference and contact for the nation, was emailed to all media contacts. At 6:00am on June 26, 2014 the decision – now known as the *Tsilhqot'in* decision – was read aloud to a room filled with some of B.C.'s most influential First Nations leaders. We had arranged the press conference to occur one hour after the decision to give the chiefs time to reflect, speak amongst themselves and honour their ancestors and elders that fought for this victory. This hour gave us time to speak with each chief and coordinate the content of each speech.

"Allow time for reflection after the decision is rendered. Taking media calls immediately after a decision can either lead to someone being speechless or over reactive."

Topics were chosen for speeches depending on the area of interest for each chief, ranging from spiritual to historical knowledge. For the bulk of the media, the Tsilhqot'in Nation was well prepared from the last 25 years of being in court, not to mention the 150 years that had elapsed since the Tsilhqot'in War – the leadership was well equipped

with their inherent knowledge and were simply waiting for this day to arrive so that they could finally speak with the rest of the world about it.

While the press conference unfolded, as the communication coordinator, I continued taking calls from media and coordinated radio, TV and print interviews to fill out the rest of the day. We directed our media interviews to the Tribal Chairman, the nation's official spokesperson. In the event that there was a scheduling conflict, the interview would be given to the Vice Chairman.

It was a whirlwind day – and certainly a significant one for the history of the nation. Here are a few tips for those Nations facing a court decision:

1. Preparation
You can never be over prepared. Ensure all Chiefs or Councillors are prepared for any decision and have corresponding speaking notes in hand and press releases drafted.

2. Space
Allow time for reflection after the decision is rendered. Taking media calls immediately after a decision can either lead to someone being speechless or over reactive.

3. Support
As an administrator or communications staffer, you will be there to support the Chiefs or Council through the day. Accompany the Chiefs to all interviews with background information as to who will be interviewing them and, if possible, a list of questions that outline what the media are likely to ask.

4. Recognition
A court decision of this nature is won (or lost) by many parties. Ensure all ancestors, witnesses, citizens, supporters and others are recognized first and foremost in any remarks.

5. Contact
Prior to decision day, you should have a hefty list of media contacts. If you think your story may need more visibility, a few days before, reach out to your media contacts a few days before and 'sell' the story to increase the chances that it will be featured prominently.

6. History
After a decision is rendered, the media will want access to the history of the case. Ensure that a backgrounder is sent out with the media advisory, and that a link to any background information is provided at the bottom of the press release. If possible, make sure the backgrounder is available for view on your nation's or community's webpage.

CASE STUDY

There's something in the water: how the Comox Valley Regional District systematized its approach to boil water notices By: Koreen Gurak

Social media can be a great place to communicate during a boil water notice – but be prepared to answer questions.

British Columbia's weather patterns can sometimes lead to unsafe drinking water conditions and the need to issue a boil water notice (BWN) to keep residents safe. The Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) on Vancouver Island has systematized a communications approach to BWNs that's simple and effective.
Here's the rundown:

The Situation

Changing weather patterns (e.g. extreme drought followed by intense heavy rain) can impact water quality in the drinking water source. Turbidity is a water quality term that refers to fine suspended particles that are picked up by water as it passes through streams and rivers. These particles are a very fine material that can stay suspended for a period of time before it settles. Elevated turbidity levels can trigger a boil water notice (BWN) to be issued for users connected to the affected water source. To date the CVRD has issued five boil water notices since fall 2014. The longest BWN lasted 47 days. The volume of inquiries are significant with engagement via social media reflecting the largest portion. Our boil water notices reached over 15,000 people in the Facebook newsfeed, shared or retweeted over a 1,000 times and had hundreds of questions posted under the status. The CVRD regularly monitored social media pages (Facebook and Twitter) and answered with facts that allowed for the online network to become more informed of the situation.

How we communicated

The CVRD developed a communication plan and a fan-out procedure to ensure that there were no gaps in critical notifications during the boil water notice, and to provide consistent information to a variety of target audiences. Our plan was intended to have a reasonably long shelf life and be useful to anyone who needed to implement it.

Here's what we included

Contact phone numbers/email for key stakeholders/organizations Names of particular individuals in key roles when the plan was created.

The prioritized protocol for distributing information (key stakeholders, website, social media, general public alert system, community signage, radio ads, etc.).

A BWN is of paramount interest and importance to the general public, and it is imperative that all communication channels available are utilized effectively.

"A boil water notice is of paramount interest and importance to the general public, and it is imperative that all communication channels available are utilized effectively."

What we learned

Community engagement on social media networks during a BWN can be amplified by the nature of the challenge, so it's important that the local government also develop a set of frequently asked questions (FAQs) that can be referenced when the public asks questions.

Here are a few questions you might want to consider answering ahead of time to make your life easier (other than the obvious – who, what, when where, why questions):

How often is the water tested and what is the acceptable level of turbidity?

How long could the boil water notice stay in effect?

I'm not sure if this boil water notice applies to me, where do I locate the map of affected areas?

Social media is an effective means of getting out this information quickly as long as you're prepared to answer questions and elaborate on further details on your website.

Three Keys to effectively communicating during a boil water advisory

1. Have a plan and include a "communication fan-out" procedure
2. Utilize social media and monitor and answer questions in a timely manner. Get out the facts.
3. Network with other community organizations to highlight information on their websites, social media pages, reader board signs or community bulletins.

CASE STUDY

189 centimetres of snow in 42 hours – Kitimat's lessons learned from snowmageddon

By: Tyler Noble

Speed, efficiency and flexibility were the keys to Kitimat's successful communications campaign during a record 2015 winter storm.

February 5, 2015 marked the beginning of what would become the biggest snowfall in Kitimat in 16 years. Clearing relentless, heavy snow accumulating at a fast rate is challenging to begin with, and the difficulties were compounded by a shortage of district staff, equipment breakdowns and – most notably – power outages. Kitimatians have come to expect a high standard for snow removal over the years and it took longer than usual for some streets to be cleared (FYI: Kitimat means 'People of the Snow').

Once it became clear this was a situation that warranted the activation of the District of Kitimat's Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), we relocated there. By this point, it was difficult even getting out of the parking lot at the city centre mall, where our municipal office is located. As the communications officer, I worked off my laptop to prepare news releases and social media postings. Being able to work quickly and efficiently is key, and being in the same room as the EOC director, fire chief and other key personnel allowed me to gather information quickly and get the required sign offs before disseminating the information to the public and media.

Our strategy for tackling snow removal and continuing to provide emergency services was constantly being adjusted as new issues arose. For instance, vehicles that became stuck and were left abandoned slowed the progress of snow clearing. Private contractors stepped up with equipment and manpower, but their unfamiliarity with infrastructure buried in the snow (e.g. fire hydrants) led to additional problems. Lengthy power outages affected our ability to fuel equipment and keep our water and sewer systems functioning properly. The issues we were dealing with were part of what we were communicating to the public. We also pleaded with people to stay off the roads and not deposit snow onto the road, to avoid further complicating snow removal operations. In today's world of Facebook and Twitter, it doesn't take long before a major weather event grabs the attention of the large market (Vancouver) media. Anyone can easily post pictures and describe how they're affected by

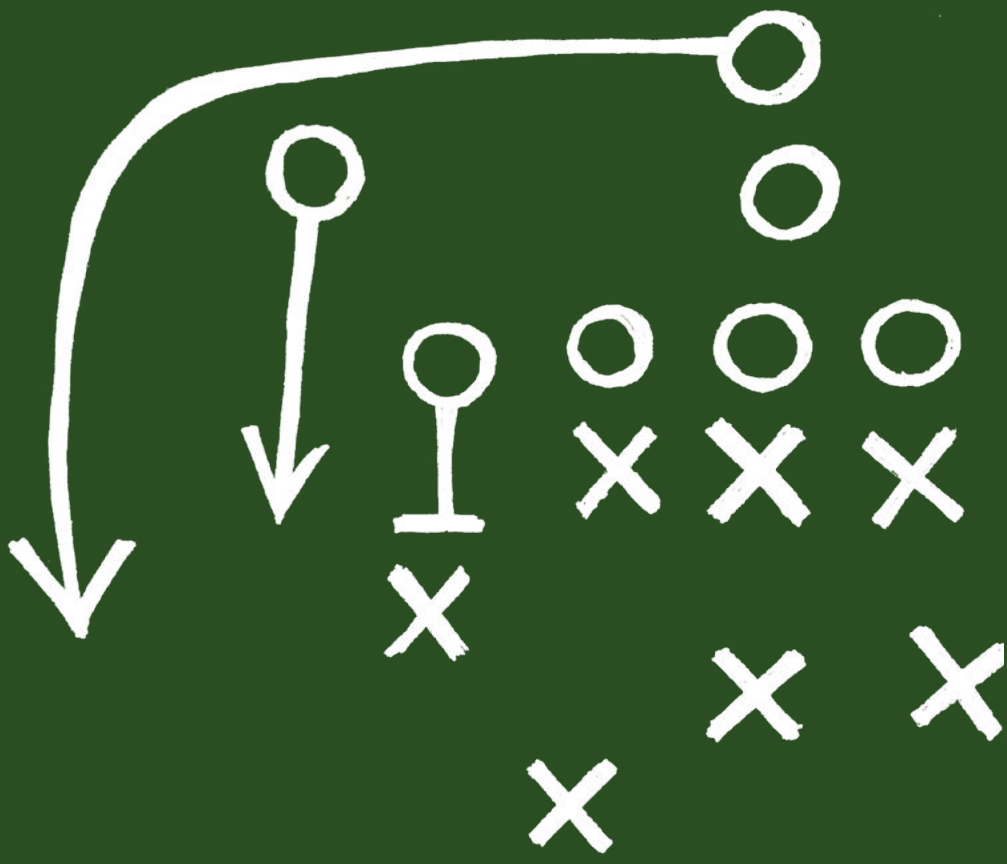
Being able to work quickly and efficiently is key, and being in the same room as the EOC director, fire chief and other key personnel allowed me to gather information quickly and get the required sign offs before disseminating the information to the public and media

"It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it." – Warren Buffett

SECTION SEVEN

Chapter 9

EVENT MANAGEMENT



Event management. Why did we include a chapter on event management? Well, it turns out, small communities have events just like big communities. But they also have a lot fewer resources with which to handle these events. In fact, often times it's the chief administrative officer, deputy corporate or economic development officer who's pulling the events together (assuming you don't have a communications manager).

So we thought we'd better include a chapter on it. This chapter includes five tips for successful short events, which are the type of one-hour events you'll most often be arranging. Madison Kordyban has also included some helpful information of speaking orders, protocol and how flags should be displayed. Additionally, we have a great case study by Kevin Brown on the important of project management when it comes to major community or regional events such as 2015 Nation 2 Nation forum. Enjoy!

- Joel

5 tips for successful little events

By: Shelly Burich

Have you ever been to one of those special events or news conferences that have an uncomfortable moment or a pregnant pause? I think we all have at one point or another, and those blooper moments are usually caused by any number of things. Generally, though, it comes down to poor planning. Here are five top communications tools and tips to make your event a successful one and to keep those awkward moments at bay!

1. Develop an event work-back schedule
It is tempting to just organize the event in your head, especially if it is a small one, but if you have the plan of what needs to be done and by what date, then you will minimize the chance that something falls off the rails on the big day.

2. Build an event plan or itinerary
The event plan is also another check point to keep things running along smoothly leading up to the event. An itinerary will help keep the actual MC and event on track and will help you organize as you confirm speakers.

3. Develop and issue a media advisory a few days out from the event
The media advisory will work to inform the media and any special guests you wish to invite that you will be having an event or making an announcement on a specific date, at a specific time and on a certain topic.

4. Ensure your media spokesperson is fully briefed about the event and provided with speaking notes in advance if required

5. The day before the event, ensure your venue is fully prepared and set up
If you do not have access to the site the day before, ensure you make arrangements for access with enough time to set up the day of your event.

I'm having an event and everyone wants to speak. Who goes first?

By: Madison Kordyban

Etiquette and protocol guidelines help you determine who speaks in what order at your event, ensuring that no one is offended. Hopefully.

So you've been asked to host an event – maybe it's a conference or a major funding announcement – and everyone is showing up and has a speaking role.
So who speaks first?

Generally, each province sets its "Order of Precedence" for events. Although each list is fairly similar, the following list pertains to British Columbia. A notable difference among Canada's provinces and territories include in what order First Nations representatives speak at events. In B.C., events are usually led by a First Nations representative who welcomes delegates to their traditional territory. After that, the order is determined by the following Order of Precedence. Chances are good the Chief Justice and Ministers Plenipotentiary are unlikely to attend local events on a frequent basis, so the easiest approach with this list is to remove the people who aren't showing up and whoever remains is in the proper speaking order.

1. Traditional Territory Chief or Elder
2. Governor General of Canada
3. Prime Minister of Canada
4. Chief Justice of Canada
5. Former Governors General of Canada
6. Former Prime Ministers of Canada
7. Former Chief Justices of Canada
8. Speaker of the Senate
9. Speaker of the House of Commons
10. Ambassadors, High Commissioners, and Ministers Plenipotentiary
11. Federal Ministers of Canada
12. Federal Leader of the Opposition
13. Lieutenant Governors of the Provinces of Canada
14. Members of the Privy Council
15. Premiers of the Provinces of Canada
16. Commissioners of the Territories
17. Premiers of the Territories
18. Senators of Canada
19. Members of the House of Commons
20. Military Leaders (Chief of Defence, Commissioner of the RCMP)
21. Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
22. Provincial Cabinet Ministers
23. Provincial Leader of the Official Opposition
24. Members of the Legislative Assembly
25. President of Union of British Columbian Municipalities
26. President of Local Government Area Associations
27. Chair of Regional Districts
28. Mayors
29. Chancellors of Universities
30. Presidents of Universities

What flag goes where and in what order?

by Madison Kordyban

Another snag that event organizers often run into is flag display.

The game of which flag goes where (and why) can send even the most seasoned of professionals into a tailspin! The Canadian flag always heads the display, followed by the corresponding provincial flag(s), and finally, any municipal flags. Common sense, yes? However, this order only applies when more than three flags are displayed. When two flags are displayed together, Canada's flag is on the left and the other, whether it is a national, provincial or local flag is on the right. When three flags are displayed together, the National Flag will occupy the central position with the next ranking flag on the left and the third-ranking flag to the right (as viewed by the spectator).

What if you're flying two or more provincial flags?

In cases like these, the province or territory which joined Confederation earlier is displayed first. Finally, municipal flags are usually displayed alphabetically. Exceptions to this rule include the hosting community's flag being displayed first, followed by any other regional or municipal flags.

CASE STUDY

2015 Nation2Nation forum: how an innovative idea and a solid event plan created a unique event for Northwest First Nations

By: Kevin Brown

Our early focus on planning and preparation, coupled with our event plan and regular communication, was the key to our success.

In Early 2015, I had the good fortune to play MC at the Northwest Growth Conference in Prince Rupert where I met Lisa Mueller. Lisa wanted to organize a conference that would provide a platform for safe, respectful conversations about economic development and major projects from a First Nations perspective. At that time, no such thing existed that provided sufficient time to examine in detail some of the factors First Nations communities consider when looking at economic development and major projects on their traditional lands. Several LNG projects, new mines and other major developments are proposed for Northwest B.C., and Lisa felt strongly the timing was right for something she called the Nation2Nation Forum (N2N Forum). Lisa knew my PR career included helping organize 100+ special events of varying sizes and we immediately hit it off, partnering to figure out how to hold a new type of conference that would be respectful of First Nations and provide a meaningful contribution to the region's ongoing discussion about major projects.

Early on, Lisa received positive support from First Nations leaders and organizations for hosting the N2N Forum, which ensured we didn't put the cart before the horse when planning the event. In addition to me, she recruited two other friends to help with graphic design, marketing, registration and other event services.

In July 2015, we scheduled a one-day visit to Terrace to meet and discuss planning and preparation, budget, sponsorships and speakers for the N2N Forum. We selected November 5 as the date for the event and secured the Terrace Sportsplex as the venue. We also made several other key planning and preparation decisions that allowed for the development of one of the most crucial elements to our success – the event plan.

Despite only having four months (August to October) to seek sponsorships, secure speakers and prepare and deliver the N2N Forum, we decided to proceed on the commitment from each of the four

NATION2NATION

FORUM DISCUSSING
THE REALITY OF ABORIGINALS
DOING BUSINESS

"I'm seeing all too often these days people trying to plan special events 'off the side of their desk' ... the event plan is the road-map to success for the special event, and it's always there to help make sure the organizing team is on the right track."

members of the organizing team that we would do 'whatever it took' to pull it off. We all knew there was substantial risk in hosting the event.

We constantly considered questions such as:

- Would we attract enough attendees from northwest communities?
- Would we get the speakers we wanted to participate?
- Would we generate sufficient sponsorship to pay the bills?
- Our early focus on planning and preparation, coupled with our event plan and regular communication, was the key to our success.

On November 05, our event team watched 150 people fill the conference room at the Terrace Sportsplex to attend the first Nation2Nation Forum. Speaker after speaker said they appreciated Lisa acting on her vision to bring people together in a safe, respectful environment and to share their perspectives and discuss important issues. The positive feedback in the weeks that followed from most of the communities throughout the Northwest clearly indicated that we had exceeded our goals. The most gratifying feedback was that we received plenty of encouragement to host another N2N Forum in 2016.
Here are a couple helpful hints for hosting a major event in your community:

Invest early in planning and preparation for all special events Whether a local government, community organization or company is planning an evening information session, a one-day workshop or multi-day conference, the time invested in planning and preparation is critical.

It's absolutely imperative to determine the purpose, scope and target audience for the event at the outset. This will minimize organizational stress and limit having to make major adjustments during the preparation process. Development of an event plan to guide everyone involved before and during the event is also critical to success. On days when organizers are busy with other tasks, having a solid event plan will help answer the question: what am I supposed to be doing today to get ready for this event?

A clear and concise event plan will ensure success The chances for event success equate directly to the time and energy you invest in the planning and preparation phase. The event plan describes in clear, concise language all the decisions made during the initial planning and preparation meetings and sets out the step-by-step, day-by-day, week-by-week task lists required for completion to ensure a successful event.

My current PR mantra is 'No Plan, No Progress.'
I'm seeing all too often these days people trying to plan special events 'off the side of their desk', and usually near the end of the day when the other so-called higher priorities have been dealt with. The event plan is the road-map to success for the special event, and it's always there to help make sure the organizing team is on the right track.

Audio visual technology at events: how not to screw it up

By: Joel McKay

I've been the victim of an audio-visual catastrophe at a large event. It happened during the Union of B.C. Municipalities annual convention in 2015 – the Trust was hosting a reception. There were several hundred people in attendance, most of them elected officials. I relied on the hotel staff to ensure the video we had made played at the right time. They assured me it would. We tested it. When the time came, it played but there was no audio. I can't begin to describe how embarrassing that was.

I then had to stop the video, encourage our speakers to carry on and rush behind scenes to find hotel staff and determine what went wrong. Turns out, the room automatically turns off the video projector volume when ambient music is playing, and it doesn't turn on again unless someone manually turns it on. This was the gap – we needed someone at the console at the right time to turn on the audio. Details. Details. Suffice to say, we got it fixed, I climbed back up on stage red-faced and we played the video. Not the best way to do it but we did it nonetheless.

Here's what I learned:

Murphy's Law does exist! Whatever can happen, will happen.

Joking aside, it was a great lesson and reminder to me to spend extra time to ensure the audio-visual elements of my event always work. To that end, I've since adopted a practice of hiring an A/V specialists for all of our events – it reduces my stress immensely and virtually guarantees success.

If you don't have the funds to hire an A/V specialist, here are a few handy tips:

1. Assess your event needs

Do you need speakers? A mic? A podium with a mic? A screen? Make a list and determine what tech you need to support your event

2. Assess your event location

Are you indoors or outdoors? Is it at night or during the day? Will there be sunlight shining on the stage? Is the room large or small? Will people hear us at the back? All of these things play into how/if you can have successful audio visual support at your event

3. Make it simple

Don't overcomplicate your audio visual with streaming videos or technology you've never used before. Go with tech you're comfortable with.

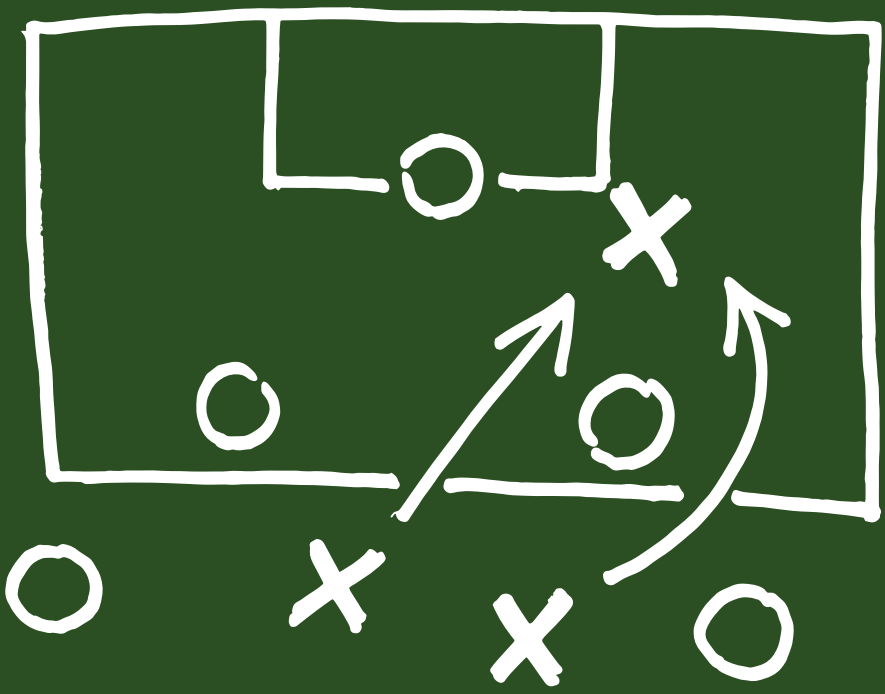
4. Test, test and re-test

Set up your event the day before, or as early as you can, and run through all of your audio visual – make sure everything works just as you planned

SECTION SEVEN

Chapter 10

REFERENDUM AND ELECTION COMMUNICATIONS



CASE STUDY

A no-spin approach to a referendum on a $30 million project generated results for the Cariboo Regional District and City of Quesnel

By: Matt Wood and Shelly Burich

We felt that a real win would be high voter turnout, with people making informed decisions based on accurate, unbiased information provided by their government.

Society often speaks in absolutes – black or white, win or lose. A local government referendum is no different. It's won or lost. Or is it? That's what we asked ourselves in 2008 when the Cariboo Regional District and City of Quesnel went to referendum on a new Multi-Centre: a 2,000-seat NHL-sized arena, 450-seat performing arts theatre and accompanying event and assembly space. The price tag was $30 million, with the referendum seeking approval to borrow $15 million.

In the beginning, we thought we needed a 'yes'. After all, our arena was near 60 years old and looked every day of it. And the arts community had no viable centre for excellence. But the scale and cost of the Multi-Centre project made it contentious. Add to that the beginnings of the 2008 economic meltdown and it's safe to say the community was divided about moving forward. As a result, the communications team wanted to do something different. We felt that a real win would be high voter turnout, with people making informed decisions based on accurate, unbiased information provided by their government. We didn't hype the obvious benefits of this new building. We didn't rely on the potential economic benefits to the community. We didn't use any corny messaging, such as "Your Project, Your Future, Your Choice." (Yes this was in contention at one point – ick!) Since we weren't trying to sell something, we were well-received by the vast majority of people we encountered, those in favour of and those opposed to, the project. From public meetings, advertising and newsletters, to proactive media relations and honest engagement with community stakeholders, we used every public relations tool available.
(In 2008, social media use by local government was in its infancy and we didn't use it. Today, it would be an important arrow in the quiver.) We also conducted baseline and finish-line surveys to ensure our approach was working.

The results of our efforts ending November 15, 2008 were nothing but a success.

Voter turnout was high: regional district voter numbers increased 39% over their last referendum. And, in the city, 52% more people turned out than their last referendum. At the outset of the campaign, just 32% of people said they had enough information to make an informed decision.

That number climbed to 58% in just six weeks. The best part of conducting these surveys, however, was that the information received allowed the team to devise some last-minute messages in areas we had not provided enough information. This last-minute blitz was seen as an honest response to some of the concerns and questions the public had. Elected officials were free to champion or detract from the project, but they didn't bring their positions to the official referendum information campaign.

> "The process was an opportunity for two local governments to come together and serve the public in the fashion they expect - with honesty, trust, and integrity."

A few key takeaways:

1. Don't rely only on play-by-play – include some colour commentary.
The public had an intense thirst for knowledge. In the beginning we kept to the basics but people wanted more. If we provided a dollar figure, they wanted a detailed breakdown. If we talked about parking, they wanted to read the independent parking study.

2. Targeted outreach
We reached out to certain individuals and influencers who pointed out flaws they perceived in our materials.
They ended up having considerable input into some of our last-minute messaging. The closer one gets to an issue, the easier it is to take for granted what others may or may not know about a project.

3. Be honest, be sincere, be real
We diffused many potentially explosive public confrontations by simply being honest. We told them in no uncertain terms that if they didn't like the project, this was their opportunity to turn it down: we had no vested interest and we believed that from the start.

So what happened?
The referendum passed by a slim majority, 2,765 in favour to 2,524 opposed. It wasn't a win, it was a result. It was an opportunity for our team, as local government public relations practitioners, to learn and experience something new. In fact, our local governments wound up winning the Don Rennie Memorial Award, presented by the Canadian Public Relations Society recognizing outstanding team achievement in developing and executing a strategic approach to government communications. And the process was an opportunity for two local governments to come together and serve the public in the fashion they expect - with honesty, trust, and integrity. These are the wins.

Referendum communications isn't simple or easy. Here's a handy checklist to help you navigate this complex process

By: Matt Wood and Shelly Burich

Referendum communications checklist

Do your research

- Learn about the current condition of the facility/issue
- Learn about the key stakeholders and user groups
- Identify the problems facing this situation and the opportunities
- Measure the level of awareness regarding the issue
- Measure support and attitudes
- Identify best practices from similar size communities who have undertaken a similar project
- Identify and track current and potential issues related to this project.
- Media analysis
- Social media analysis

Conduct a Communications SWOT analysis based on research findings.

Anticipate challenges

- Has misinformation about the cost been advanced to the taxpayers?
- Is there a willingness to adhere to the Communications Plan. Not following the prescribed program will have a tremendous impact on the efficacy of the overall plan
- How's the economic climate?
- Will people want to "chip away" at the design, or try to take the project back to the design phase, with the aim of reducing the overall cost?

- [x] **Identify your key audiences**
(you'll likely need to tailor messages for each one).
  - Don't forget your internal audience – your front line staff are critical spokespeople
- [x] **Set communications goals and objectives**
- [x] **Develop a communications strategy** to achieve those goals and objectives
- [x] **Develop your key messages** – concise, memorable, and something you're willing to say over and over and over again.
- [x] **Identify your communications tools:**
  - Public meetings
  - Newsletters/brochures
  - Advertising
  - Social media
  - Website – always drive people to visit your website.
  - Kiosks in public spaces (both staffed and static)
  - Presentations to service clubs, stakeholder groups
  - Media relations
  - Develop electronic information packages – FAQs, budgets, architect drawings
  - Pitch media stories with a human angle
  - Offer tours if it is a capital project
- [x] **Develop a timeline**
- [x] **Develop a budget** (include staff time as a "soft cost." You'll want to know how much salary went into this!)
- [x] **Implement communications**
- [x] **Evaluate throughout**, and don't be afraid to re-visit, revise or re-do!

Election period communications – think carefully before setting up at that photo-op or announcement

By: Matt Wood and Shelly Burich

An election period communications policy can make the rules of the road clear for elected officials and staff, saving you from potentially embarrassing headlines and repercussions at the ballot box.

So an election is coming. What better time for a photo op, right? Sure, but think closely before asking your staff to set it up. There is intense scrutiny on how tax dollars are spent in the run up to an election or during an election. A situation where it could be perceived that your communications team is working to advance your election prospects, or those of one councillor or director over another (or over a member of the public vying for office), could have serious repercussions for you and the organizations – and not just at the ballot box. That's why you should consider developing an election period communications policy that nests within your government's current communications policies and strategies (you have those, right?).

"It would be unwise to put yourself in a position where you can be accused of spending tax dollars to advance your personal interests."

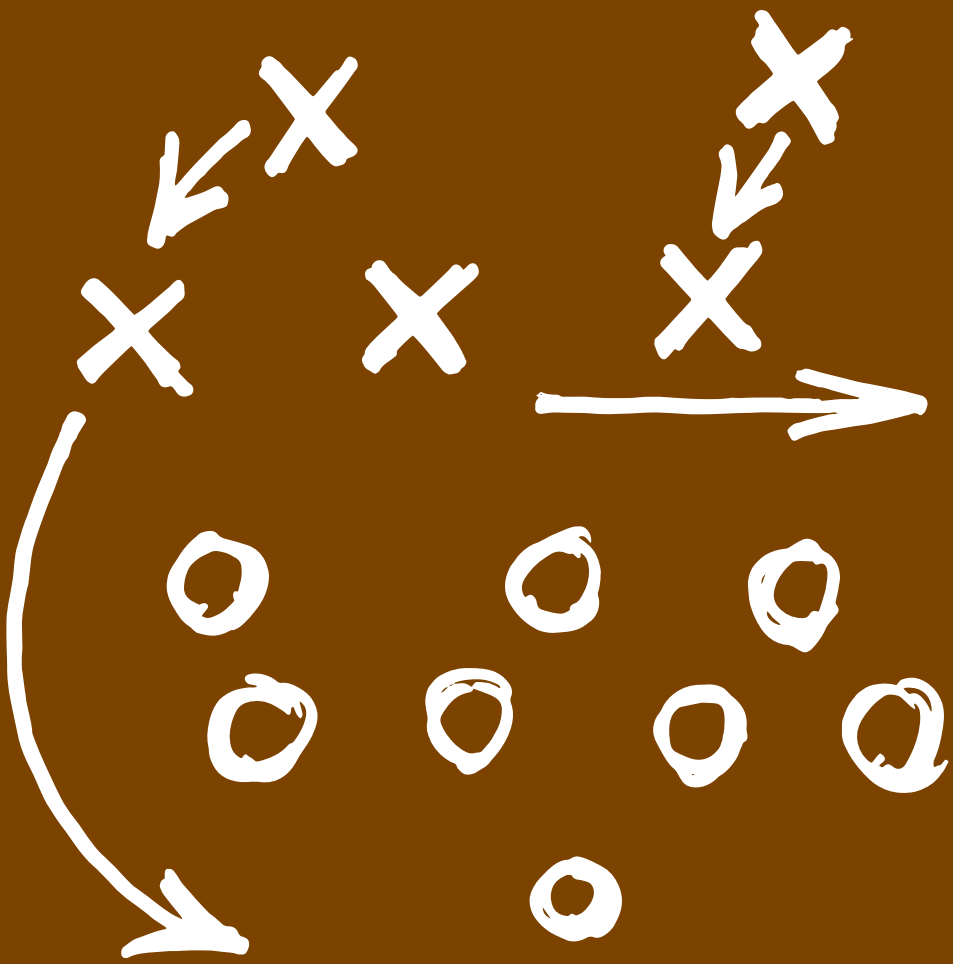
Sample Policy:

1. All current communications policies contained in the [name of government] policy manual still apply, in addition to the guidelines stated below:

- ☑ News releases, media events or other communications tools which may be perceived as promoting the efforts of individual elected officials on specific tasks will not be employed for a period of XX weeks/months prior to election day.
- ☑ [Name of government] staff shall not appear in photo opportunities with any local government candidates for a period of XX weeks/months prior to election day.
- ☑ [Name of government] staff shall not provide assistance to elected officials and/or candidates in website, social media or other communications strategy development to support any election campaigns.
- ☑ The [Name of government] newsletter will continue to be distributed on its regular schedule during an election year.
- ☑ The [Name of government] website and social media channels will continue providing information to citizens regarding core government services.
- ☑ As with any policy, there are exceptions to a rule. If senior levels of government have grant funding to disburse, you will likely need to find an equitable way to announce this news. If a special announcement, anniversary or event takes place, find an equitable way to promote it.
- ☑ But it would be unwise to put yourself in a position where you can be accused of spending tax dollars to advance your personal interests. Having some clear rules to which people agree (at the beginning of the term) will make everyone's lives easier come election time.

SECTION EIGHT

RESOURCES



Small Town P.R. Playbook Professionals Directory

Want more information about a case study or summary included in the Playbook? The Small Town P.R. Playbook Professionals Directory lists all of the contributors to this handbook, including a headshot, short bio and email contact information. Feel free to reach out, connect and engage with these amazing practitioners!

Taylor Bachrach

Taylor Bachrach is the Mayor of the Town of Smithers. Taylor was first elected Mayor of Smithers in 2011 after serving a term as a municipal councillor in the Village of Telkwa. He also owns and runs Bachrach Communications, a small web and graphic design company based in Smithers.

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Kevin Brown, APR, FCPRS, is the President of Kevin Brown Communications (KBC), a communications and public relations firm based in Prince George he started in 2003. 2016 marks 33 years of media and public relations experience for Kevin, primarily in Northern British Columbia.

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Shelly Burich

Shelly Burich, APR, is an accredited member of the Canadian Public Relations Society and the President of Shelly Burich Communications. Shelly specializes in local government strategic communications, emergency communications and media relations. She is the former Manager of Communications for the Cariboo Regional District in Williams Lake. Shelly has been in the marketing and communications field for almost 25 years. Some of the positions she has held include the National Manager or Marketing Communications for ADT security Services, Publicist for the Oakville Centre for the Performing Arts and holds the distinction of being named the first female media director in the CFL while with the Toronto Argonauts Football Club.

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Barb Floden

Barb Floden, APR, is a senior communications pro and owner of The Flow Communication Group Inc., a public relations and communications agency with a focus on local government, serving clients throughout B.C. Previously she held senior roles with the City of Vancouver, Vancouver Board of Parks & Recreation and the City of Port Moody. Barb's passion is providing clear and transparent communication plans that support client goals while aiding their publics' needs for information and involvement. Her other passion is running and biking B.C.'s breathtaking backcountry trails.
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Myanna Desaulniers

Myanna Desaulniers is the Communication Coordinator with the Tsilhqot'in National Government in B.C.'s Cariboo Chilcotin. She received a degree in geography from the University of Victoria in 2008 and a Masters of Communication from Simon Fraser University in 2012. Her education, work and volunteer experience has had a strong focus on social justice and human rights issues. Myanna has worked with the Tsilhqot'in National Government since January 2014.
myanna@tsilhqotin.ca

Julie Douglas

Julie joined the City of Campbell River in 2007 and has been the Communications Advisor there since 2010. The department-of-one is responsible for corporate initiatives for employees and the community, acting as the go-to and gatekeeper for news releases, website and social media postings, advertising, citizen surveys, branding... and in-house communications training.

Her role helps the City of Campbell River provide clear, consistent and complete information about City programs, events and initiatives, as well as the local government decision-making process - and encourages valuable feedback that helps improve City services. Julie's professional background combines print and broadcast journalism with video production, teaching and theatre. She holds a University of Montreal certificat en etudes francaises and a McGill University Honours BA in English, all with distinction/ first class honours.

Jan Enns

With a passion for interactive training, Jan Enns, MA, brings 25 years of local government experience, insights and examples of why and how communications will lead to better outcomes on everything from referendums to recycling. Jan specializes in providing customized, interactive communications and media training to help local governments achieve their goals, avoid or minimize issues and reduce the need for damage control.
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Koreen Gurak

Since 2008, Koreen Gurak, Manager of Community Engagement and Education with the Comox Valley Regional District, has planned, developed and managed the implementation of communications, education and marketing initiatives to increase awareness of operational based regional services including: water, sewer, solid waste, transit and sustainability initiatives. Her background is in recreation management, leisure programming and facility operations where she worked for local government for over fifteen years.
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Kim Hayhurst

Kim Hayhurst is the Manager of Marketing and Digital at Northern Development Initiative Trust. She received a Marketing degree from the University of Northern BC, and spent more than a decade there working in program development, marketing, communications as well as project and event management. Born, raised and educated in the North, she has worked with many private, non-profit and public organizations in the region with social media, graphic design and marketing initiatives. In her spare time, Kim is also the co-owner and co-maker for Hunter + Thistle Creative which creates and sells a variety of unique handmade items.
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Mike Kellett

Mike Kellett is the Senior Communications Officer with the City of Prince George. Mike is an award-winning public relations professional with more than 10 years of experience in the private, post-secondary and local government sectors. As the senior communications officer at the City of Prince George, Mike oversees the City's media relations, issues management, and social media activities, and is heavily involved in event and project management.

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Rudy Kelly

Rudy Kelly is Director of Recreation with the Lax Kw'Alaams First Nation near Prince Rupert and the former Communications Manager with the Kitselas First Nation in Terrace, B.C. Rudy was a reporter and columnist for 15 years, and holds a diploma in Journalism and certificates in Public Administration and Marketing. He writes, directs and acts in plays and is sooo close to finishing that novel.

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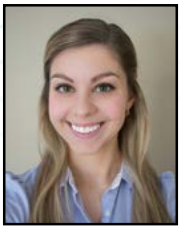

Madison Kordyban

Madison Kordyban was the Communications Officer with the North Central Local Government Association based in Prince George. After graduating with a Bachelor of Communications in 2014, Madison's short, yet immersive time in local government communications has allowed her keen insight into what it takes to make politics accessible. When she's not connecting with mayors and councilors, you can find her indulging her other favourite creative endeavor – cooking.

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Cam McAlpine

Cam McAlpine, APR, is an Accredited Public Relations (APR) professional with a background in journalism complemented by broad communications experience at all three levels of government as well as in the private sector. His company, PRMedia, specializes in the practice areas of communications strategy, media and issues management, crisis communications and stakeholder engagement. He is based in Kelowna and works throughout BC.

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Renee McCloskey

Renee McCloskey, APR, is the Manager of External Relations with the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George based in Prince George, a position she's held since 2007. She has worked in public relations and communications in Northern B.C. for more than 20 years. She is accredited in Public Relations from the Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS) and served as the National President for CPRS in 2015-16.

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Joel McKay

Joel McKay is Director, Communications with Northern Development Initiative Trust based in Prince George and the editor of the Small Town P.R. Playbook. He oversees all communications and marketing for the Trust, and also provides communications services to local governments and First Nations throughout Central and Northern B.C. Joel is an award-winning former journalist, a regular columnist with Business in Vancouver Newspaper and Resource Works and an alumni of 2015 Governor General's Canadian Leadership Conference.

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Tyler Noble

Tyler Noble is the former Business & Communications Officer for the District of Kitimat. He joined the District in April 2013 after a five year career in radio and television broadcasting. As Business & Communications Officer, his work included economic development functions in addition to being primarily responsible for media and public relations, social media and the municipal website. Tyler has since moved on to the private sector and resides in Terrace.
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Julie Rogers

As the Communications Coordinator for the City of Fort St. John, Julie is in what she refers to as the 'best job ever'. She has a degree in Psychology from SFU and a Certificate with distinction in Public Relations from BCIT. Julie has many years of experience in Communications but has only recently given in to the pull of municipal government. Just the idea of writing documents with words like 'implementable, consultitative and strategic sustainability' gives Julie chills - and hives. Julie is ambitious enough to think she can put governance into language that will get people excited about planning, development, bylaws, and other such governmentish types of things.

Rob van Adrichem

Rob van Adrichem joined the City of Prince George in 2015 as its first Director of External Relations. He joined the City after 23 years at the University of Northern British Columbia where he was a founding employee, and ultimately served as Vice-President External Relations. Rob has bachelor's and master's degrees from UNBC focusing on northern development.
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Matt Wood

Matt Wood is the Manager of Communications and Media Relations at the University of Northern British Columbia. Matt has more than 10 years of public relations experience with the City of Quesnel. Prior to that, he spent time as a reporter with the Ottawa Sun, Ottawa Citizen and Quesnel Cariboo Observer. He's a proponent of planning out public relations initiatives, and not delving immediately into the tactics, resulting in campaigns and initiatives that are well thought out and measurable in the long term.
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Up your game: check out these fantastic public relations resources

Public relations and communications is an industry that's constantly evolving – especially in small and rural communities! Check out these additional resources to up your P.R. game and connect with other professionals throughout British Columbia, Canada and elsewhere.

Canadian Public Relations Society

The Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS) is an organization of men and women who practice public relations in Canada and abroad. Members work to maintain the highest standards and to share a uniquely Canadian experience in public relations. CPRS was founded in 1948 from two original groups - the first in Montreal and the second in Toronto. In 1953, these became associated as the Canadian Public Relations Society, and, in 1957, the organization was incorporated as a national society. Today, CPRS is a federation of 14 Member Societies based in major cities or organized province-wide. All Member Societies adhere to the constitution of the National and Member Society. In cooperation with its regional Member Societies and with like-minded organizations in other countries, CPRS works to advance the professional stature of public relations and regulates its practice for the benefit and protection of the public interest.
www.cprs.ca
B.C. chapters:
https://cprsnorthernlights.com/, https://www.cprsvancouver.com/, http://www.cprs-vi.org/

International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)

IAP2 – the International Association for Public Participation – is the preeminent international organization advancing the practice of public participation. 'Public participation' means to involve those who are affected by a decision in the decision-making process. It promotes sustainable decisions by providing participants with the information they need to be involved in a meaningful way, and it communicates to participants how their input affects the decision. The practice of public participation might involve public meetings, surveys, open houses, workshops, polling, citizen's advisory committees and other forms of direct involvement with the public. IAP2's

mission is to advance and extend the practice of public participation. IAP2 advocates on behalf of members and is building an international reputation for the public participation practice and profession. It supports international research and offers professional development training and services.
www.iap2.org
B.C. chapter: *www.iap2bc.ca*

International Association of Business Communicators

Setting a standard of excellence since 1970, the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) is a vibrant global membership association with thousands of members from around the world, representing many of the Global Fortune 500 companies. IABC serves professionals in the field of business communication, bringing together the profession's collective disciplines. We deliver on the Global Standard in communication through our educational offerings, certification, awards program, resource library, online magazine and annual World Conference. We support our community of business communication professionals with innovative thinking, shared best practices, in-depth learning and career guidance.
www.iabc.com
B.C. chapter: *https://www.iabc.com/regions-chapters/canada-west/british-columbia/*

Local Government Management Association of British Columbia

LGMA is dedicated to supporting excellence in local government by providing high quality, practical training and resources; encouraging the development of professional networking and connections; and facilitating the exchange of ideas and best practices among members. LGMA has five key strengths: education and professional development, professional networking, local government resource materials, services for members, membership and volunteer development, engagement and retention. Be sure to check out LGMA's website for a wealth of programs, events, resources and publications that are available to help you.
www.lgma.ca

Have we missed one? Let us know!
The Small Town P.R. Playbook is constantly evolving and your suggestions will support continuous improvement that provides value to P.R. practitioners throughout B.C.

Send your suggestions to: *playbook@northerndevelopment.bc.ca*