
2023 Business Plan & Budget

Communications

Prior Year Accomplishments

Economic Prosperity & Innovation

- In response to community concerns regarding the lack of action by VIA Rail Canada to restore commuter Train 651 – suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic and not restored in June 2022 despite the restoration of other services – the County’s Communications and Economic Development Departments collaborated with community members and local, regional, and provincial elected officials to implement a robust advocacy plan during the third and fourth quarters of 2022 calling for the restoration of this train. This included a survey of over 2,800 commuters along the Kingston-to-Toronto corridor, a report on survey results and regional economic data pointing to the case for restoration of this train, community engagement, and outreach to federal and VIA officials seeking action. Advocacy is ongoing to press for a favourable outcome for Northumberland residents and partnering Eastern Ontario communities.

Sustainable Growth

- Monitored for, and identified, opportunities to secure funding from other levels of government and external sources for investment in County programs and services, coordinating interdepartmental collaboration on – and development of – 16 funding applications in the first three quarters of 2022. During this time, \$12,026,886 in funding commitments was secured for community housing, infrastructure projects, and community paramedicine, along with \$58,800 for partner organizations as part of joint submissions advancing community priorities. In addition, two successful funding applications for broadband infrastructure were confirmed during this period amounting to \$45,037,804, for a combined total of \$57,123,490 in funding secured.
- Through the development of approximately 30 communications strategies and plans, and implementation of related multi-channel campaigns, supported the advancement of



corporate priorities related to infrastructure maintenance and renewal, major capital development, regional transit, land use planning and development, broadband, human resource recruitment, community digital literacy, newcomer settlement and support, community housing, early learning and child care, and community paramedicine.

- In collaboration with the Architect for the Golden Plough Lodge & Northumberland County Archives and Museum Redevelopment project, provided leadership for an inter-departmental working group that finalized interior and exterior wayfinding systems for the new facility.
- Produced Northumberland County's 2021 Annual Report – the County's premier publication detailing the allocation of budget dollars to program and service delivery, and highlighting key accomplishments delivered in fulfillment of the County's Strategic Plan. The Annual Report is a vital tool for demonstrating transparency and accountability to residents and businesses.
 - The County has previously received industry awards for the design of its Annual Reports, including a Hermes Creative 'Honourable Mention' Award for the 2018 Annual Report, a Hermes Creative 'Gold' Award and a MarCom 'Gold' Award for the 2019 Annual report, and a MarCom 'Gold' award for the 2020 Annual Report.

Thriving & Inclusive Communities

- Continued to expand reach of information about County programs, services, and initiatives through best-practice communications, media relations, and graphic design.
 - Secured media coverage for County good news stories and supported balanced coverage of sensitive issues through the release of over 60 proactive media releases designed to drive pick-up, and coordination of responses to over 65 media inquiries. Northumberland County uses the industry standard Media Ratings Points (MRP) – a tool endorsed by the Canadian Public Relations Society – to measure the effectiveness of its media relations activities. Analysis of media coverage from the first three quarters of 2022 confirms:
 - 750 local news articles covering County stories related to these efforts.
 - 81 per cent of stories were balanced in tone; 14 per cent were positive in tone; and 5 per cent was negative in tone.
 - County spokespeople were quoted in 69 per cent of articles.
 - County key messages were captured 91 per cent of the time.



- Supported Council and senior staff in raising awareness of programs and services for the community and positioning key county priorities through the development of over 20 sets of official remarks.
- Advised Council and senior staff in anticipating and effectively responding to emerging issues and media inquiries through the development of over 25 issue notes and key message briefings.
- Delivered visually engaging layout and design for over 150 products - publications, campaign materials, videos and signage – for print and online distribution.
- Grew Facebook followers by 17 per cent (to 6,138 followers); Twitter followers by 20 per cent (to 1,854 followers) and Council News subscribers by seven per cent (to 865 subscribers) over 2021 numbers.
- In response to an identified need from staff and the County’s vendor community, developed and circulated a guidance document for vendors on requirements and best practices for the creation of accessible documents, supporting the County’s efforts to ensure materials available through its website are accessible to all community members.

Leadership in Change

- Co-designed the County’s approach to the Federal Electoral Boundaries commission to advocate for the retention of all Northumberland County communities and Alderville First Nation within the proposed new riding of Northumberland.
- Launched a process to standardize tracking of corporate performance metrics and share via public dashboard by the end of 2023 in alignment with the release of the updated Northumberland County Strategic Plan, improving access to – and visibility of – key insights about the County's progress towards fulfillment of Strategic Plan objectives.
- Advanced the County’s Mission to be ‘a best practices leader’ by positioning the Grant Writer to deliver training sessions at industry events targeting municipalities, as well as local workshops for small businesses, on how to build successful funding applications. Furthermore, strengthened community capacity for acquiring funding for investment in Northumberland by growing a distribution list of municipal and community agency contacts and circulating a weekly update on funding opportunities identified through monitoring.



- Coordinated media training for identified managers to strengthen the County’s pool of spokesperson resources. Having trained spokespeople is part of the County’s media relations strategy to expand the reach of information about County programs, services, and initiatives, proactively telling County good news stories and supporting balanced coverage of sensitive issues through clear, transparent response.
- Improved organizational capacity by delivering staff information and training sessions on grant writing best practices; accessible design for the use of graphics in documents; building accessible web forms; website content management; and social media policy requirements for account managers.
- Continued to support the work of the Ontario Health Team of Northumberland (OHT-N) by collaborating with Communications Working Group partners to develop and implement effective communications strategies and meaningful community engagement approaches that advance OHT-N priorities for improved local services and health outcomes. In 2022, these collaborative efforts included:
 - Development and implementation of a multi-pronged communications and community engagement campaign designed to generate awareness and participation in a county-wide, cross-sector, collaborative community consultation to establish health and well-being priorities for Northumberland. This process generated over 500 touch points with community members through surveys, stakeholder interviews and focus groups, along with the participation of over 170 people in ‘Strategy Hives’ – planning sessions pertaining to priority topics. Information gathered supported the development of the new OHT-N Strategic Plan, as well as the strategic plans of partner organizations.
 - Development of a communications strategy and materials supporting the phase 1 roll-out of an online appointment booking solution by OHT-N primary care provider partners, improving patient access and convenience to 24/7 appointment booking options. This service is initially available to approximately 10,000 local patients/caregivers.
 - Ongoing co-facilitation of the OHT-N Experience Partner Council - a body of patients and caregivers working together with service provider partners to transform the delivery of local health and community care through the Ontario Health Team model.



2023 Service Objectives & Initiatives

Economic Prosperity & Innovation

- Deliver strategic communications support to advance infrastructure, workforce, housing and technology priorities that are positioned to be key drivers of economic growth and prosperity.

Sustainable Growth

- Secure funding from other levels of government and external sources for investment in County programs and services by monitoring for and identifying grant opportunities and coordinating interdepartmental collaboration on applications.
- Collaborate with department leads to define communications objectives, develop strategies, and implement tactics to support successful deployment of 2023 County projects and initiatives.

Thriving & Inclusive Communities

- Continue to expand reach of information about County programs, services, and initiatives through best-practice communications, media relations, event management, and graphic design.
 - Grow corporate Facebook and Twitter followers and Council News subscribers by 15 per cent (each platform) over 2022 numbers, and evaluate opportunities to grow social media reach by expanding to additional platforms.
- Continue to strengthen public participation in designing and shaping municipal priorities, programs and services through the design of engaging consultation processes that leverage dialogue and feedback mechanisms aligned with public expectations.

Leadership in Change

- Lead the development and implementation of a Communications Master Plan for Northumberland County, setting the direction for – and measurement of – strategic communications and community engagement practices over a 10-year horizon that cultivate an informed and engaged community and advance municipal priorities.
- Collaborate with internal working group partners to design and execute engaging staff and community consultation processes for gathering insights and validating priorities for



the formation of an updated Northumberland County Strategic Plan, to be released by mid-2023.

- Improve organizational transparency and accountability by leading the implementation of a public dashboard for tracking corporate performance metrics, improving access to – and visibility of – key insights about the County's progress towards fulfillment of core priorities in alignment with release of the updated Northumberland County Strategic Plan.
- Continue to support the work of the Ontario Health Team of Northumberland (OHT-N) by collaborating with communications working group partners to develop and implement effective communications strategies, and supporting the work of the Experience Partner Council to implement meaningful community engagement measures, in order to advance community priorities for improved local services and health outcomes.

Long Term Plan & Strategic Objectives

Thriving & Inclusive Communities

- Continue evaluating opportunities to enhance corporate customer service by incorporating best practices for connecting with and serving residents and stakeholders, such as Artificial Intelligence applications, and a municipal 311 service that would deliver a single point of access to local government non-emergency services.
- Advance public engagement and business intelligence practices by strengthening use of audience research to align communications efforts with the information needs/desired delivery mechanisms of residents/stakeholders, and to measure the effectiveness of these efforts.

Leadership in Change

- Continue to expand the corporate marketing mix by maximizing the use of technology to deliver effective communications, including new social media channels, website apps, SMS technology, and other web and mobile-focused tools and solutions.
- Pursue best practice strategies and tactics to ensure strong corporate culture and employee engagement in order to maximize performance, achieve organizational goals, and enhance public trust and confidence in government.



2023 Issue Paper

Communications Master Plan

Purpose

This Issue Paper is to request funding for activities related to the development of a Communications Master Plan to guide Northumberland County in the delivery of two-way communications with the residents we serve, over a 10-year horizon. This Master Plan will focus the County's efforts to build more inclusive and effective public services and greater trust in local government by fostering a community that is informed about County services, and engaged in shaping municipal priorities, policies, and programs.

Background

Northumberland County's Communications Department supports fulfillment of the County Strategic Plan and operational priorities through a coordinated and strategic approach to corporate communications. The multi-disciplinary team of four engages with members of County Council and staff to advance priorities through services including: communications and community engagement strategy and planning, marketing and creative services, emergency/issues management, event management, grant writing, speech writing and media relations.

Since its establishment in 2013, the department has delivered value in areas such as:

- Collaboration with departmental leads to support successful deployment of projects and initiatives through the design and development of communications strategies and plans.
- Expanded earned media coverage of County programs and initiatives through a planned approach that includes relationship-building with local media – establishing the department as a resource for fast and accurate response to media inquiries – as well as increased distribution of County stories via media release.



- A coordinated approach to issues management, mitigating risk and ensuring the capture of County perspective through key messaging, Q&A and briefing documents, and implementation of a briefing protocol for Council and senior staff.
- Management of the public information response from the municipal Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) in the event of a local emergency, including protocols for managing and sharing timely, accurate information with various stakeholder groups.
- Expansion of in-house creative services, enhancing marketing and communications with graphic design, and improving consistency in the application of branding and visual identity through the creation of visual identity guidelines.
- Identification of opportunities to secure funding from other levels of government and external sources for investment in County programs and services/to advance community priorities, along with development of related funding applications, securing \$62.9 million in funding – \$45 million being for the broadband as a utility initiative – since 2018.
- Professionally managed and marketed events such as facilities grand openings, high profile announcements, and community activities that represent further opportunity to immerse invitees/members of the public in a County-brand experience.
- Increased capacity for information-sharing and connecting with staff and residents through expansion of channels and platforms incorporated into marketing mix including: a redesigned corporate website, the launch of corporate social media accounts, the implementation of an online public engagement portal, and the launch of an employee intranet.
- The development of communications vehicles to expand reach of information about County programs and services, including an award-winning Annual Report, a digital Council News newsletter, the consolidation of print ads into a 'County News' page in local newspapers, and expanded digital advertising (social and programmatic).
- Improved positioning of County priorities through centralized speech-writing support for Council members and senior staff, framing remarks in the context of Strategic Plan key messaging and County core values.
- Active response to legislative requirements for public sector communications including the Information and Communications Standard of the Accessibility for Ontarians with



Disabilities Act (AODA) and Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation (CASL) through policy development and tactical plans.

Trends

The field of communications has changed dramatically over the last ten years with the proliferation of news and information sources and advances in technology. Consistent with these changes, taxpayers today have increased expectations of government around timely access to information, two-way communication, and engagement in decision-making.

As the field becomes increasingly complex, and with further rapid change assured, the UK Government Communication Service has identified several trends in leading edge communications that government communicators must be prepared to address, including: the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation, disruptive digital integration, advertising technology and audience segmentation, and ethics and transparent data use.¹

- **Prevalence of misinformation and disinformation:** Misinformation, being inaccurate or misleading content, and disinformation, being false content deliberately spread with intent to deceive, are widely shared online, often out-performing substantiated content. This can "generate concern and confusion, reduce trust in institutions and... disrupt attempts to communicate (government) messages effectively."²

This issue is part of a broader development in the prevalence of information in general. With the decline of traditional newsrooms, there has been a fragmentation of news sources, including a proliferation of independent bloggers and online media, and increased variety and use of social media platforms. This has necessitated new approaches by municipalities in delivering news and information to target audiences and in monitoring how this information is being reported and shared, and requires strategies to generate trust in official sources and to counterbalance false narratives.

- **Disruptive digital integration:** The rate of change in the communications sector is accelerating exponentially. Over the last ten years, the digital landscape has evolved to "include programmatic advertising, search optimization, Artificial Intelligence,

¹ 5 Trends in Leading-Edge Communications. UK Government Communication Service. October 2018. Page 5. [5-Trends-in-Leading-Edge-Communications.pdf \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](#)

² Ibid. Page 7.



predictive (marketing) insights, social listening, and new media platforms,”³ with new advances rapidly emerging. Voice technology – including voice-controlled intelligent personal assistants (IPAs) like Apple’s Siri and Google’s Alexa – was specifically singled out as an emerging area of opportunity for more personal, tailored connection with citizens.⁴ These developments are revolutionizing how governments are interacting with citizens. As digital innovation and integration progresses, a workforce with the skills, talent and capacity to adopt these innovations but also, more generally, to continuously adapt will be required.

- **Advertising technology and audience segmentation:** Marketing is increasingly data-driven, with advances in ad tech enabling ‘intelligent audience engagement’ – targeting specific audiences with customized marketing strategies based on data-driven insights. “Smarter targeting based on behaviours, interests and attitudes can build a more relevant picture of our audience”⁵, enabling more personalized, meaningful communications, and better assessment of campaign outcomes. With these opportunities also comes a greater accountability on communicators to leverage such data within the context of strong frameworks for ethical, responsible and transparent use of data.
- **Ethics and transparent data use:** As previously noted, contemporary communications are data driven, with data used to “research and strategically plan...campaigns, intelligently target and share...messages, and accurately analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of...content.”⁶ Guidelines for the ethical use of data will become increasingly important to ensure appropriate, transparent application. Centering the citizen’s perspective in the use of data to determine whether this use “directly serves the user need”⁷ will be paramount and required to build trust.

Modern communications practices are also required to ensure Northumberland County remains responsive to the community as it grows and changes.

Provincial planning forecasts indicate that the local population will grow to 122,000 residents and 44,000 jobs by the year 2051. As noted in the Executive Summary of the Growth

³ Ibid. Page 22.

⁴ Ibid. Page 11.

⁵ Ibid. Page 17.

⁶ Ibid. Page 27.

⁷ Ibid. Page 29.



Management Report from the County’s Official Plan Update process, Northumberland County is located on the Outer Ring of the eastern region of the Greater Golden Horseshoe and is therefore “forecast to experience significant outward growth pressure...largely from the eastern and northern Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area.”⁸

Between 2016 and 2051:

- The 75+ age group is forecast to represent the fastest growing population age-group.⁹
- However, the County is also anticipated to accommodate a growing share of young adults and new families seeking competitively priced home ownership and rental opportunities, with growth in this group anticipated to be primarily driven by net migration.¹⁰

Delivering leading service to increasingly diverse stakeholders will require monitoring of sector and demographic trends, and careful listening to feedback from target audiences about their information needs and preferred channels for engaging with local government, in order to design effective consultation, customize outreach plans, and ensure content that resonates. The development of a Communications Master Plan will ensure a strategic framework for achieving this level of service excellence in alignment with the vision and priorities identified in the County Strategic Plan.

Formation of a Communications Master Plan

The Communications Master Plan will formalize a vision for Northumberland County communications and community engagement over a 10-year period, driven by the organization’s vision, mission, and core values, and aligned with strategic and business plans.

It will establish a strategic framework for engaging and exchanging information with the public based on industry (communications) and sector (government) trends, benchmarks, and best practices; technology and emerging tools; and research into the ways in which target audiences prefer to hear from, and communicate with, their local government, with an implementation plan to track progress and measure success.

⁸ Executive Summary, Northumberland County Growth Management Report. Watson & Associates Economists Ltd. December 2021. Page iii. [Northumberland County Growth Management Report Executive Summary \(ehq-production-canada.s3.ca-central-1.amazonaws.com\)](https://ehq-production-canada.s3.ca-central-1.amazonaws.com)

⁹ Ibid. Page vii.

¹⁰ Ibid. Page vii.



This Master Plan will be informed by – and align with – other strategies and plans that are shaping the work of our organization:

- The 2019 Digital Strategy
- The Economic Development Master Plan
- The Multi-Year Accessibility Plan
- The Northumberland People Plan
- The County of Northumberland Emergency Management Program
- The 2024-2028 Strategic Plan (under development)
- The updated County Official Plan (under development)

Through this important work, the County will foster a community that is more informed about County services, and more engaged in shaping municipal priorities, policies, and programs, ultimately building greater satisfaction with, and trust in, local government.

The development of a Communications Master Plan is a critical undertaking to properly anticipate, plan for, and address the changing communication and engagement needs of our community, to leverage new technology and systems to deliver meaningful outcomes, to build mutually beneficial relationships with key stakeholders that drive trust, and to ensure the Communications Department is positioned with the skills, structure, and training to support the organization over the long-term.

Consultation/Options

Development of the Communications Master Plan will involve research into global trends and standards, industry and sector best practices, and benchmarks relative to comparator and leading municipalities.

Consultation will also be undertaken with members of County Council and the senior leadership team, Communications staff, community partners and media, and residents.

Financial Impact

It is proposed that one-time funding of \$50,000 be allocated to the development of the Communications Master Plan.



Risk Considerations

The risks in not pursuing development of a long-term strategic plan for corporate communications include:

- Reduced opportunity to generate community feedback and research for refocusing County communications to be more citizen-centric rather than organization-centric.
- Fewer objective success measures for demonstrating results and value.
- Difficulty in assessing whether department structure and resources are aligned with the long-term business goals.
- Limited opportunity to assess current practices against emerging trends and adjusting to close gaps and capitalize on emerging opportunities.

Impacts to Member Municipalities/Partners

In addition to sharing insights gleaned through research of trends and best practices, the County will seek to collaborate with interested member municipalities on a joint approach to community consultation, the data from which will be available to inform County and member municipal communications and community engagement strategies and activities.

Included in 2022 Long Term Plan: YES/NO

The development of a Communications Master Plan was not included in the 2022 Long-term Plan, however this overarching strategy would consolidate various initiatives identified in the 2022 Business Plan as long-term strategic objectives, such as enhanced customer service and business intelligence practices, renewed employee engagement strategies, and expanded use of tools and technology to deliver effective communications.



2023 Issue Paper

Communications Summer Student

Purpose

This Issue Paper is to seek approval to create an annual summer student position for the Department of Communications, beginning in 2023. This position will support the mandate of the Department of Communications: to effectively inform residents and stakeholders about County programs and services, and to foster public engagement with local government to help shape municipal priorities.

Background

The Communications Department has typically relied on the availability of students seeking an unpaid internship to complete the requirements of their post-secondary program to enhance capacity in the summer months. However, because the role is unpaid, recruitment is not assured, resulting in some years where the department does not have access to such a resource.

The summer months are especially challenging for the department due to capacity limitations resulting from both standard holiday scheduling and also a redistribution of workloads required to produce, in-house, the intensive corporate Annual Report throughout the month of June. The ability to assign projects, research and tactical communications to a student during this period has had a significant impact on the department's ability to sustain service levels.

For this reason, the department is seeking to build this annual temporary resource into long-term plans. A dedicated summer student would support the department in the planning, development, and delivery of print, digital and multimedia communications that enhance public, stakeholder, and staff awareness of and engagement with the County programs and services.

Specific duties would include:



Staff Relations:

- Develop and curate content for the staff intranet.
- Coordinate and manage content for digital signage in staff areas at various corporate locations, summarizing intranet postings.
- Draft memos and other staff bulletins.

Public, Media and Stakeholder Relations:

- Draft media releases and advisories, increasing the quantity of 'County stories' shared with the public.
- Create new/modify existing web content regarding County services and initiatives to ensure consistency, readability and accessibility.
- Collect, edit and draft content for monthly Council News newsletter.

General Communications Responsibilities

- Support the development and execution of communication plans for County programs and initiatives.
- Support development and updating of communications material, including collateral (brochures, briefing notes, handouts) and web content
- Enhance social media presence through content development and analytics tracking.
- Prepare reports on website and campaign analytics: trends, open rates, bounce rates, click-throughs.
- Conduct media monitoring and track metrics.
- Ensure documentation prepared by the department meets accessibility criteria.
- Inventory department shared drive content to ensure all documentation is filed in accordance with County records management requirements.

Consultation/Options

The alternative to creating a funded summer student position is for the department to continue relying on the availability of students seeking unpaid internships to complete the requirements of their post-secondary program. This option comes with considerable variability in likely recruitment, resulting in some years where the department will not have access to such a resource, and thus is not recommended.



Financial Impact

The County's summer student program typically runs from May 1 to August 31.

Funding is available but not guaranteed through the Canada Summer Jobs Service Canada (Federal funding program) under HR Policy 4.19.5 Summer Students.

The unfunded 2022 salary pay for summer students is \$9,716.

The potential set-up cost for IT equipment is \$1,300 inclusive of a laptop, Microsoft 365 license and Adobe Pro license.

There is no financial impact for training or travel. Training will be covered as part of the corporation's orientation costs, and Communications' staff time.

Total Financial Impact: \$14,485 (salary and IT equipment).

Risk Considerations

The 2020 Northumberland County Modernization and Service Delivery Review (SDR) noted an anticipated year-over-year increase in the volume addressed by the department, based on demand forecasted by internal partners. The absence of a temporary resource to mitigate capacity issues during the summer months presents the risk of reduced service levels during this period, resulting in extended timelines for internal partner support and project delivery.

Impacts to Member Municipalities/Partners

N/A

Included in 2022 Long Term Plan: YES/NO

The Communications Department has typically relied on students completing unpaid internships, and therefore a summer student position has not previously been included in long-term plans.

However, in order to maintain service levels during the summer months where the department experiences reduced capacity, staff is seeking to build this annual temporary resource into future long-term planning.