2019 Department Overview

Communications Department

Service Description

The Communications Department ensures a coordinated and strategic approach to County communications through the creation, implementation and measurement of plans to exchange key information with the community, resulting in informed and engaged stakeholders, improved stakeholder relationships, and the achievement of organizational goals.

Specifically, the department structures deliverables in pursuit of the following three goals:

• Informed and engaged residents

• Informed and engaged employees

• Quality and mutually-beneficial stakeholder relationships

Department activities are grounded in Northumberland County's core values:

Mutual Trust and Respect
Understanding the needs of stakeholders and responding with quality customer service and communications products that address the needs of all are important facets of communications.

Honesty and Integrity
Providing clear information and communicating our values and service expectations defines accountable, efficient and effective operations.

Collaboration/Communication
By understanding and responding to the information needs of residents, Council, staff, member municipalities and community partners through a coordinated approach, the department helps to ensure transparency and successful relationships.

Caring and Supportive

The department supports the successful delivery of County programs and services by ensuring alignment between corporate messaging, imaging and activities, and the organization's mission, vision and values. We respect and understand the needs and priorities of our internal partners while being part of a caring corporate and community culture.

Accountability

The Communications Department is committed to promoting alignment with the County core values, mission, vision, goals and objectives.

Innovation and Excellence

We aim to provide high-quality communications campaigns and products – continuously exploring best practices for planning, innovative tactics for extending reach, and new mediums for sharing information and engaging in thoughtful dialogue with stakeholders – that perpetually improve connections internal and external to the organization.

Mandatory Programs

The Communications Department supports realization of the County Strategic Plan as well as individual departmental priorities through the planning, implementation and measurement of communications strategies and tactics for a wide range of programs, services and initiatives. In particular, the department fulfills the following functions:

- Branding and Corporate Identity – key messaging, style guides, visual identity related to buildings, vehicles, signage and services.

- Emergency and crisis communications – protocols for managing and sharing timely, accurate information with various stakeholder groups in the event of a local emergency; strategies for reputation management when addressing public-facing challenges.

- Event management – concept development, budgeting and promotion, logistics and vendor management, on-site coordination, official remarks and marketing oversight.

- Creative services – layout and design, photography, and videography.

- Grant writing – monitoring and identification of opportunities to secure funding from other levels of government and external sources for investment in County initiatives, coordination of interdepartmental collaboration on applications, and management of reporting requirements related to successful submissions.

- Internal Communications – tools, content and feedback channels that create well-informed and engaged workforce.

- Issues Management – protocols for identifying, monitoring and responding to key issues.

- Legislative compliance – monitoring of pertinent provincial and federal requirements pertaining to creation and distribution of information, and development of policies and templates to support compliance.

- Marketing, Advertising and Communications – planning and content development for print, web, social media, multimedia and promotional materials that engage target audiences and stimulate action.

- Media Relations – proactive activities including story identification, materials creation and briefings and reactive activities including responding to inquiries and coordinating interviews.

- Reporting and best practice identification – ongoing measurement of outcomes achieved related to communications practices, as well as identifying and tracking best practices in corporate communications and public outreach in order to ensure continuous improvement across these core functions.

- Speech writing – background briefings, talking points and official remarks for elected officials and senior staff.

Discretionary Programs

In addition to mandatory programs, the department is also engaged in discretionary projects and initiatives. This engagement often constitutes communications collaboration and support for the work of committees such as the inter-municipal Emergency Information Officers (EIO) committee, and the Eastern Ontario Warden's Caucus communications committee, as well as ad hoc support for member municipalities in the areas of communications consultation, media relations, and materials creation and/or review.

Partnerships

See Discretionary Programs

Environmental Scan

Population & Demographics

Internal – Staff

Northumberland County employs over 550 people within nine departments. The Communications Department supports all departments through functions ranging from policy and protocol development, to messaging research, counsel and creation, template provision, development and distribution of key corporate information, and events planning.

The department also provides project-specific supports, working with program/initiative leads to define communications objectives, and coordinate content creation and distribution.

When developing internal communications plans, key considerations to maximize reach of messaging to all staff include:

- Location: staff members are spread across more than 15 locations throughout the County

- Hours of work: staff members operate according to a range of traditional, shift and compressed hours, and the County also employs seasonal workers

- Communications medium: a minority of County staff members are office workers with regular access to computers.

External – Northumberland County

2016 Census data confirms that Northumberland County has a population of approximately 85,600 people spread across seven municipalities.

According to research provided by Greg Suttor Consulting, Deb Ballak, and Tim Welch Consulting as part of the Northumberland County 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan submitted in 2013:

- Compared with the average for Ontario, Northumberland has a higher proportion of adults aged 60 and over, with 30% of the population represented by this demographic compared to 21% at the provincial level.

- Conversely, the County has fewer residents in the age bracket of 20-44 than the provincial average.

- The male/female ratio in Northumberland is similar to Ontario, at 51.1 percent female in comparison to 51.3 percent province-wide.

- Two-thirds of employed Northumberland residents work in the County.

- People living in Northumberland work primarily in economic sectors including:

    - Agriculture and other primary industries

    - Construction/utilities

    - Manufacturing, and

    - Retail

- Median incomes in Northumberland are about 10 percent lower than for Ontario. There are relatively more households with low to lower-middle incomes ($20–$60,000) and fewer with upper incomes (over $100,000) compared to Ontario.

These factors will continue to provide important insights when defining the appropriate mix of communications vehicles through which to share information and establish dialogue with residents.

Funding

The Department of Communications is funded through the County levy. As a corporate services department, a portion of the cost for delivery of this service is allocated to each operating department.

Legislative

The Department of Communications ensures practices consistent with legislation including the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation (CASL), and the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA).