

MOUNTAIN VIEW COUNTY

Strategic Communications Plan 2019

1. Background

Mountain View County Council – through its Strategic Plan, approved May 23, 2019 – determined that a Communications Strategy Review be undertaken to identify areas for improvement and efficiency within the Communication business unit and the development of a Communications Strategy and a Communications Action Plan that reflect the findings of the review.

Communications was formalized as a business unit within Mountain View County in 2008. Years prior saw the usage of consultants and contractors to do much of the communications work. As part of the development of the Communications business unit, a single FTE position was developed and has continued to remain in place as the primary conduit for County communication functions across all departments and Council.

In 2010 a Strategic Communications Plan was prepared by external consulting agency Corpen Group. The plan was adopted by Mountain View County Council in 2011 and reviewed in 2013. Under review, the plan is in need of revision due to a changing landscape in terms of communication tactics and venues, and shifting priorities due to Council's stated vision of having an engaged rural community and desire for engagement through the 2018 approval of a Public Participation Policy as required under Alberta's Municipal Government Act.

Currently, the Communications business unit is responsible for:

- Responsible for consultation or leadership on community engagements using the County's Public Participation Policy and accepted International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) standards
- ~~Preparation~~ Preparation of press and information releases for public consumption
- Preparation of speaking notes, key messages for Council members and senior administration upon request
- Liaise with local and further media outlets, arrange for background information access
- Assisting departments with their communications needs and campaigns
- Development of content (text and photo) for website
- Maintenance and administration of website environment and front-end functionality
- Development and/or oversight on any video production
- Development of content for social media pages including:
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Instagram
 - YouTube

- Monitoring of social media, including hashtags, direct messages, mentions, etc.
- Internal and external surveying and reporting
- Monitoring of media, specific to mentions of Mountain View County or trends of interest to municipal government
- Assistance (where required) of materials development for open houses, trade shows, workshops, etc.
- Direct support to the Intergovernmental Communication Committee when required
- Monitoring and assistance for identity standards usage and adherence
- Monitoring and administration of County brands and guidelines
- Overseeing of County's image and video library

As part of this review, engagement of Council, County departments, and the general public was undertaken to provide insight into the communications priorities and tactics that are outlined in this document and the Communications Action Plan that supports this strategy. This revised strategy is informed by, and will be updated annually to reflect, the County's Strategic Plan 2019-2021.

1.1 Executive Summary

The Communications Action Plan is intended to help focus Mountain View County's communication activities and priorities over the next three years, as reflected in the County Strategic Plan and prioritized in this document, the Communications Strategy. This strategy identifies Council and Administrations goals and objectives to not only inform the public of County decisions, events, emergencies and programming but to engage the public directly for input and feedback in all County services area, and to find channels and tools suitable to encourage that two-way communication.

1.2 Applicable Strategic Goals per MVC Strategic Plan

Under Community/Quality of Life: *Promote a vibrant, rural culture in Mountain View County*

Under Governance: *Adhere to a culture of open communication and responsive effective governance*

1.3 Elected Officials role in Communications

As with any public entity and democratic institution, the first line of communications is through the elected officials who live, work and interact within the community they serve. In Mountain View County, elected officials are considered primary communicators who help increase awareness and understanding of Council decisions and priorities to the electorate while providing feedback and direction to

administration on behalf of the electorate on how to strengthen or expand County services and service delivery where fiscally and practically possible.

1.4 Communications Coordinator

The primary conduit for delivery of the practical communications functions undertaken by the municipality. While under the direction of the Legislative, Community and Agricultural Services Department, the Communications Coordinator works across all departments and with the CAO's office to ensure effective and timely delivery of statutory, regulatory and organizational communication priorities. The Communications Coordinator also works directly with Council, and specifically with the Reeve or designate to provide executive voice to decision making.

1.5 Approval by Council and review on annual basis

The Strategic Communications Plan is approved by Council. To ensure that it remains relevant it must be reviewed on an annual basis. An annual report on the progress made toward achieving results will be presented to Council at the beginning each year.

Mountain View County Communication Goals:

The Communication Goals highlighted in this section are broad, overarching statements to clarify what the communications plan seeks to achieve. These goals seek to strengthen current communications practices and improve service levels for the County's key stakeholders in terms of messaging from the municipality and opportunities to engage with both Council and Administration.

1. Mutual Expectation for Communication to, from and with, External Stakeholders

Mountain View County Council expects to present residents, ratepayers and other stakeholders timely, effective communications utilizing traditional and modern methods of distribution and broadcast, that facilitate feedback and conversation from the intended audience. The expectation is that the County's audience will be able to access County messaging regardless of age, income, geographic location or perception of role. Residents have expressed a strong desire to receive constant, applicable and timely information through a variety of methods with clear and plain language, which parallels Council's expectations. Further, Council and Administration wish to receive feedback and input from residents, ratepayers and other key stakeholders on all issues with or without solicitation. The facilitation of this should include platforms and media where the audience are provided an opportunity to respond or provide feedback to the County Administration and Elected Officials.

2. Positioning with Government Partners

Mountain View County Council and Administration look to continue building positive and productive bilateral relationships with partner rural municipal, urban municipal, Provincial and Federal counterparts through consistent, proactive communications on matters of mutual interest or advocacy of local issues.

3. Internal Communications

Council is desirous of a strong internal communications system to ensure that staff are engaged and provided the appropriate tools and information to delivery effective services to residents and ratepayers while providing an environment and reporting structure for staff to provide appropriate communication to elected officials to ensure that Council has the necessary information to strengthen their governance and decision making roles.

Communications Objectives

The Strategic Communications Plan 2019-2021 seeks to accomplish the following objectives designed to achieve the broader goals noted above with an underlying theme of ensuring two-way communication with the intended audience. Action items will be derived from the objectives to build the Communications Action Plan that will complement the Strategic Communications Plan and direct the actions of Communications (and other County) staff.

1. Increase Public Awareness of County Business

Mountain View County Council and Administration considers communicating with its residents and ratepayers to be of the highest priority. Broadcasting a wide variety of messaging out to the community via a diverse set of media in a clear, concise format that removes the technical and jargon language of government is supported within this plan and the Communications Action Plan. The purpose of this objective is to proactively determine and satisfy stakeholder information expectations. Designed to improve on the understanding of the mandate of Council and Administration in providing County services, and the processes involved to provide those services. Will also address consistent communications tailored to residents and ratepayers on key County projects and initiatives (i.e., specific divisions/regions).

Potential Action Items

- Review of current media buys effectiveness in terms of reach
- Investigation of further social media opportunities that prioritize two-way communication
- Continued varying of messaging onto social media platforms to include “hard news”
- Improved usage of website capacity. More available to be utilized in terms of space and capability

2. Demographic Outreach

Mountain View County Council and administration see as a priority the strengthening of engagement and reach within the current demographics where County messaging finds an audience, while also emphasizing opportunities to get information out to and engage residents who fall in the demographic under 30 years of age, and also youth under 18 years of age. Expanding tactics beyond traditional means is strongly encouraged to engage a younger audience to lend credibility to an inclusive community approach to communication, as is ensuring messages and issues that resonate with the younger demographics is promoted through the County’s communication platforms. During the research portion for the Strategic Communications Plan, data aligned with anecdotal accounts that not all demographics or County regions are well represented. While the theory that some of this trend is self-selected is viable, efforts to continue to engage all age, economic and geographic groups have the access to County messaging remains a priority for County Communications business unit.

This includes ensuring that a variety of messages, are being offered via multiple formats where feasible, and that new technology and/or ideas (such as direct outreach) are considered to attract these individuals to ensure they can receive County messages and provide feedback to the County on the topics in the messaging.

Potential Action items:

- Investigation of further social media opportunities (photographic & video capable)
- Use of engagement tactics like Conversation Cafes and Open Spaces
- Direct contact with youth organizations and schools in community

3. Enhanced Communication Channels & Venues

Seeking to add and enhance the toolkit of communications channels and venues will provide further channels to publish and broadcast County messages and information while also focusing on a value for time and resources component is being pursued to achieve fiscal responsibility within the Communications business unit. This will address the paradox noted in community research of where residents and ratepayers currently receive County messaging, and through which media they would like to receive County messaging. Further, this will help identify appropriate budget and time allocation into successful outreach venues.

Potential Action Items:

- Use of outcome metrics to measure audience engagement and success of messaging
- Op Review of current media buys effectiveness in terms of reach
- Exploring successes of peer municipalities and where those may fit with

4. Strengthening of County Brand

Council sees value in enhancing the County's brand recognition and reputation within and outside the local community to ensure that all communication displayed from the County is consistent and representative of the County image. This includes ensuring that Mountain View County's reputation and corporate identity is maintained externally.

Potential Action Items:

- Review of MVC Logo and Crest Usage Policy;
- Review and update of Identity Standards Guide;

5. Celebration of Success

Municipal Government Communications often gets weighted down by the routine of statutory obligations (those set out in the MGA). At the same time, the municipality often achieves projects, services and agreements that exceed expectations in terms of budget, outcome or impact. Not sharing these instances – often done as a form of humility – can do further damage to the municipality’s reputation in the community, particularly in a social media world.

Potential Action Items:

- Consistent messaging and timely sharing of successes
- Working within departments to share their successes for public broadcast

6. Community Engagement – Policy into Practice

Part of sharing information from the municipality is how to accurately assess the effectiveness in those communications. When the public shows an understanding of issues and municipal initiatives the tone of the feedback and the willingness to engage the County is enhanced. It also allows Council and Administration to effectively move through the information gathering and decision-making process and speeds up the resolution of issues. Utilizing *Policy 1030 – Public Participation* on a proactive basis should help improve public understanding of County initiatives and help to identify any emerging issues within the community relating to County activities. The policy provides a framework of engagement and information sharing with the community based on the needs of the County. Education on what the policy for the public and its efforts to engage in two-way communications with the municipality is also designed to be addressed with this objective.

Potential Action Items:

- Utilizing the Policy on a more consistent basis and generating reports based on campaigns (ongoing)
- Investigating successes and/or failures of peer municipalities to garner learning opportunities
- Re-evaluation of Public Participation Campaigns on an on-going basis to ensure effectiveness and representation of Council direction
- Ensure two-way communication and feedback is emphasized and facilitated as necessary

7. Strengthening Intergovernmental Communications

Communications with partner levels of government particularly with provincial ministries remains a critical component to Mountain View County Council and administration. Currently communications are done mostly through face to face meetings at a political level and/or at an administrative level between corresponding officials. The Communications Coordinator's involvement has been to serve as administrative support for the Intergovernmental Communications Committee and to oversee the committee's one-page ministry summaries. Council remains committed to this committee and seeking opportunities for its work to become more effective.

Potential Action Items:

- Revisiting the IGC Committees Terms of Reference
- Developing a consistency in timing of communications (direct scheduling)

8. Internal Communications

Mountain View County Council continues to support Administrations efforts to enhance and improve internal communications. The view that a staff informed of Council initiatives provides an enhanced level of service to County ratepayer, residents and other customers is supported throughout the organization. Communications having a continued role in that initiative is also generally supported by both Council and Senior Administration.

Potential Action Items:

- Working with Senior Management Team to ensure that messages from Council are effectively broadcasted to Staff;
- Development of an internal process to enhance messaging to Staff on decisions, current events or issues that affect the operations of the municipality.