



building communities together

File:

MEMO

To: John M. MacLean, Chief Administrative Officer
From: Emily Epp, Manager of Communications
Date: Sept. 26, 2018
Re: Additional Resource for Communications Department

OVERVIEW

Communications demands on the Cariboo Regional District are increasing. The Communications Department supports all the CRD's departments and is part of all of their advertising, events, publications, website presence and social media engagement. Additional resources are required as the workload is intensifying with increased EOC activations, emergency communication demands, referendums, projects, and public engagement requirements.

While it may seem that the current level of communication is adequate, the present workload to resource ratio is not sustainable. There is an imminent increase in communications demands (especially around emergency preparedness, response and recovery, and volunteer fire departments) and many communications responsibilities of the CRD have been neglected because of a lack of resources to fulfill those duties.

The heart of communications work is relationship building, through a variety of tactics. The department using a range of tactics to connect with residents including: email, media interviews, news releases, website, newspaper, radio and social media advertising, posters, unaddressed admail, social media, print and electronic publications, brochures and public engagement events. A fully resourced Communications Department will improve on the relationships we are building with our residents and will provide support for all CRD departments towards that end.

In the 21st century reality of demands for instantaneous communication and lack of trust in government institutions, the need to communicate effectively and cohesively has never been more critical or demanded.

RATIONALE

Currently the Manager of Communications is working an average of 45 hours per week and the Communications Assistant/Web Assistant works 20 hours per week. At this level of resourcing, the department is just staying on top of current projects and priorities; however, tasks are falling through the cracks and the department does not have resources to take on additional projects. The Manager of Communications is very involved in the tasks of the department and does not have time for strategic

Electoral Areas

A – Red Bluff-Quesnel South ● B – Quesnel West-Bouchie Lake Ten Mile ● C – Barlow-Bowron ● D – Wildwood-McLeese Lake
E – Esler-Dog Creek ● F – Horsefly-Likely-150 Mile House ● G – Lac La Hache-108 Mile House ● H – Canim Lake-Forest Grove
I – Narcosli-Nazko ● J – West Chilcotin ● K – East Chilcotin ● L – Lone Butte-Interlakes

Municipalities

Quesnel ● Wells ● Williams Lake ● 100 Mile House

tasks, such as communications planning, developing needed policies or guidelines or supporting all the communications needs of the departments.

For context, the annual tasks of the Communications Department are listed below with some statistics and time allotments. The department is currently resourced to barely manage these tasks; however, the gaps listed below indicate that this level of resourcing is not sustainable or sufficient to address all the communications needs (current and upcoming) of the Regional District.

Current Communications Tasks

- 3 Information Fairs (Multi-Agency Forums) per year (one info fair involves about 30 hours of work)
- Director Meet and Greet events (individual meetings in a specific electoral area for constituents to meet the Director or address a specific topic/issue), up to 12 per year (an event involves about 10-15 hours of work)
- 2 Board on the Road events (each event involves about 20 hours of work)
- 2 UpFront newsletters (each newsletter involves about 20 hours of work)
- Maintain and update CRD swag and promotional banners (5-10 hours of work per year)
- Corporate advertising
- Develop, maintain and update CRD brochures and other literature
- Media relations and media monitoring (each take about 1 hour per week, with periods of increased volume)
- Produce news releases (Each news release takes 1-3 hours of work; in 2017 the CRD produced 32 and 28 have been produced in 2018 to date, not including EOC releases)
- Update and maintain the CRD website (this is a significant workload and content updates are falling through the cracks; the website takes about 3-5 hours per week for regular maintenance and additional hours to meet with departments and update content)
- Content development and monitoring of social media accounts (Twitter and 2 Facebook accounts; about 2-4 hours per week)
- Graphic design of all CRD materials
- Issues management and crisis communications (e.g. Boil Water Notices, etc; averages out to about 1 hour per week)
- EOC Information Officer support and prep (8 weeks a year in the EOC at minimum, often with both Communications staff members engaged; EOC prep work averages to about 1 hour per week)
- Public events, as required
- Public engagement strategies and implementation for CRD projects (a small referendum requires about 30 hours, an extensive project could be 60-80 hours).
- Maintain corporate signage (i.e. electoral area signs)

- Speech and presentation preparation for directors and departments (averages to about 1 hour per week)
- Board highlights (attending Board meetings and preparing highlights averages to about 1.5 hours per week)
- Corporate communications plan, communications budget and business plan (averages to about 1 hour per week)
- Communications support for departments as possible (e.g. recycling education, invasive plant Facebook posts, economic development advertising, job postings, etc.). (Averages 2-4 hours per week)

Current Communications Assistant Tasks:

- The Communications Assistant's 20 hours a week is mostly consumed with graphic design work (for publications, advertising, social media graphics, signage, posters, public notices, swag, brochures, templates, etc.), booking advertising, and website updates. She also provides EOC support and some event planning and social media support as she is able.

Communications Gaps

Communications Support is Required 5 Days a Week

The CRD's communications department is not resourced to stay on top of crisis and EOC communications, social media or media relations when someone in the department has a vacation, sick day, flex day, conference, etc., particularly because the Communications Assistant works Tuesday through Thursday each week. This creates a resource gap in areas where the communications demands are unexpected (crisis/EOC communications) or ongoing (social media/media relations). It is not sustainable for the Manager of Communications to stay on top of these needs while out of the office.

Increased Emergency Communications

With the expected frequency of emergencies (ranging from EOC activations to small crises like boil water notices), communications requirements during the education, preparedness, response and recovery aspects of emergencies are increasing and the Communications Department does not have the capacity to manage all of these tasks.

This includes working on the recommendations following the 2017 wildfire review, but also regular emergency-related communications, such as promoting the Emergency Notification System, educating the public on emergency preparedness, and supporting communication needs during recovery.

The department is currently providing very limited support pre- and post- emergency and is not fully staffed to support the EOC for activations beyond 2 weeks. In 2017/2018, contractors had to be hired to support the CRD's communication response during the EOC and recovery phases. A contractor also had to be hired to develop a crisis communications plan for the CRD.

Project-Based Communication Needs are Increasing

This year the Communications department supported three referendums, the election, the South Cariboo Rec Centre expansion public engagement process and the library strategic plan public engagement strategy. This was beyond the maximum of support the department could provide (the Communications department was not able to fully support the library's strategic plan) and this level of project-based communications support is only increasing with OCP updates, recreation projects, fire department referendums, emergency program initiatives, etc.

Over the past few years, consultants have been hired to support communications needs for several major projects such as OCP and solid waste management plan updates. With a communications contractor working within the \$70-100 per hour range (or more), it would be more cost effective to hire another staff member rather than rely on consultants to fill in the gaps.

Department Communications Plans are Needed

To support the departments better and coordinate our corporate communications, communication plans need to be developed and implemented with each department to identify communication needs and opportunities for projects, initiatives and regular business.

Currently, we are meeting the legislative requirements for communication (i.e. public hearings, referendums, etc.) but these standards are outdated as they only require newspaper advertising. Public expectations are much higher than that and multiple methods of communication are required.

This would include:

- Improved communications regarding Development Services public hearings, OCP updates, etc. (Could be improved and coordinated)
- Developing a communications plan to support recruitment and retention of our volunteer fire departments. (Currently non-existent)
- Supporting the library's advertising and social media needs. (Currently not being supported or coordinated)
- Improving communications regarding our invasive plants and solid waste programs. (Could be improved and coordinated)
- Developing and implementing a promotion strategy for the Emergency Notification System. (Currently only being supported through a bit of social media efforts)
- Supporting communication needs of the Heritage Committee. (Currently being supported minimally)

Need to Develop a Coordinated Social Media Strategy

The Communications Department needs to develop a social media and advertising calendar to coordinate our social media presence, post consistently on social media, highlight our programs and services at key times (invasive plant program deadlines, what to recycle at Christmas, utility bills, etc.), and link with key external dates/initiatives (e.g. Fire Prevention Week, holidays, Waste Reduction Week, FireSmart week, etc.).

Taking a coordinated approach to social media and advertising like this would help our content stand out in a saturated social media market and amidst social media algorithm challenges. Following this same approach with online and traditional advertising would provide a consistent and well-executed marketing strategy for the CRD. Currently, the CRD does not have a consistent marketing or social media strategy.

Need to Provide Further Media Training and Coaching

Ongoing media training and coaching needs to take place with elected officials, department spokespeople and fire chiefs to ensure all CRD spokespersons are well-trained and competent to conduct interviews.

The Communications department is working to adopt a decentralized model where reporters can directly access 'subject experts' without going through the Communications department. This model

has been proven to be very effective and CBC has termed it the 'gold standard' for local government media relations.

This model works when staff and elected officials are trained in media relations on a regular basis, when there is a media policy in place and when the communications department stays involved in media relations but is not the only access point for media. Currently the CRD does not use this model, does not have a media policy or guidelines, and does not have the resources to conduct regular in-house media training.

Communications Support for VFDs and Libraries is Lacking

Currently the Communications Department does not provide any support to the CRD's volunteer fire departments. This is an area that will see a significant increase in demand for communications services, particularly around: social media; media and communications guidelines; recruitment and retention; media training; raising their recognition and profile in their communities; identification cards and signage; resources for recruitment, fire prevention week, etc.

Additionally, the Communications Department is not currently able to provide any support to the libraries regarding social media training and support, media training and support, or advertising.

Website Redesign Will Take Significant Resources

The CRD's website needs to be redesigned and this project will take a lot of resources. Without additional staff, this project will take away communications resources from the regular tasks the department is currently able to support.

Engagement Policy Needs to be Developed and Supported

The CRD is working towards developing a public engagement policy and incorporating that standard in all our public engagement efforts. Effectively integrating this policy into our public engagement work will require support and coaching from the communications department. All public engagement efforts also require communications support for advertising, website, social media, etc.

JOB DESCRIPTION:

The ideal position to add to the Communications Department would be a Communications Officer, as per the CRD's job description. A full-time resource is required and the CRD's job description for a Communications Officer places them in Grid Level 8 earning \$30.85 per hour as of November 2018 (approximately \$72,000 per year), as per the collective agreement. This position would ideally be funded through Electoral Area Administration as the position's main duties would be in support of the various CRD departments.

For this position, the specific qualifications that would be sought are education or experience equivalent to an undergraduate degree in a relevant discipline, such as Communications, Public Relations, Journalism or Marketing, and two to three years of directly related experience in public engagement, events management, communications planning and marketing/promotions. Previous experience in a local government setting would be desirable, along with certification from a public engagement association (such as IAP2).

In consultation with other communications professional in Northern B.C. and the Central Interior who have recently hired similar positions, the market looks promising for quality candidates. They have had good candidates that met their qualifications apply for their positions and some have even had local government experience.

An example job description for this position is as follows:

Key Accountabilities:

- With guidance and supervision from the Communications Manager, develops, contributes to, and implements communications strategies in support of internal and external audience engagement around organizational projects and priorities.
- Supports the development of CRD's communications strategy to advance internal and external audience engagement.
- Researches, writes and distributes original content across all of CRD's internal and external communication channels
- Supports leaders in the development of operational communication tools, including speeches and presentations, memos, issue notes, surveys and bulletins.
- Supports internal audience engagement by planning and executing all aspects of special events and forums.
- Works closely with Communications Manager and Assistant to ensure consistent messaging and alignment with corporate brand.
- Supports the department by providing media escorts, troubleshooting, providing crisis communication counsel, and gathering information in support of issues management and proactive media opportunities.
- Provides counsel to leaders to enhance and protect organizational reputation, including identifying and advocating adoption of fresh approaches to employee and physician engagement as appropriate.
- Acts as Project Manager in executing communications tactics in accordance with overall strategic plans, along with monitoring costs and budgets, timelines, resources and measuring outcomes.
- Provides communications support to corporate and regional project teams as required.
- Performs other related duties as assigned.

Role Specific Expertise:

- Demonstrated excellent writing, editing and proofreading skills, with exemplary attention to detail.
- Demonstrated critical thinking coupled with the ability to produce effective products and campaigns.
- Demonstrated content planning skills.
- Demonstrated experience with graphic design tools and layout.
- Demonstrated solutions-focus, positive attitude, maturity and ability to engage a variety of busy stakeholders.
- Demonstrated ability to plan and coordinate events and forums to advance stakeholder engagement with organizational initiatives.
- Strong organizational skills with the ability to independently research, prioritize and assemble details for all aspects of a project or initiative.
- A results-oriented and enthusiastic team player who thrives on new challenges and responds nimbly to new priorities.
- Strong customer service skills to adeptly investigate client needs and negotiate communication solutions that are both cost effective and aligned with stated audience needs.
- Demonstrates flexibility and the willingness to work across individual roles to deliver collaborative communication solutions.
- Demonstrated project management skills and ability to work well under pressure to meet tight deadlines.
- Contributes to a team environment by working efficiently, professionally and in a friendly manner, and establishes and maintains a harmonious working relationship with all colleagues.
- Advanced computer skills in organizational electronic communication technology, publishing and web-based communications. Demonstrated expertise with MS SharePoint, Adobe, InDesign, and Photoshop is desirable.