



## 2024 Business Plan Communications (1011)

*Gerald Pinchbeck, Manager of Communications*

*building communities together*

***Working in partnership with communities large and small to offer local, sub-regional, and regional services to ensure that the Cariboo Chilcotin is a socially, economically, and environmentally desirable region.***

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### **Department/Function Services**

The Communications Department falls within the Administrative Services function and budget and provides communication services to all departments of the Cariboo Regional District.

The Communications Department manages the Regional District's internal and external communications. Communications is primarily responsible for all media relations, select corporate events such as Board on the Road meetings, news conferences, managing the CRD's social media channels, and maintaining the website and graphic design standards. The department also plays a key role in issues management, emergency communications and crisis communications. The Communications team provides graphic design services to all other departments and is responsible for all promotional literature and materials.

While not under the department's direct administration, the Communications Department supports the delivery of approximately \$100,000 in budgeted advertisements and public relations activities. These advertising funds are budgeted on a per-service basis, and not reflected inside the Communications function budget. Statutory notices are not managed by the department.

Administrative Services is a mandated service under the *Local Government Act* and as such, has no taxation limits attached. Each Electoral Area, the City of Quesnel, the City of Williams Lake, the District of 100 Mile House, and the District of Wells all participate based on the assessed value of land and improvements.

All members of the Board are responsible for the governance of this service.

## Business Plan Goals, Rationale & Strategies - 2024 Goals

- 1. Goal:** Hire and train an additional full-time team member.

**Rationale:** The Board's strategic plan identifies a desire to improve communications and engagement with residents and interested parties. There are also increasing demands on the department to manage the CRD's reputation, meet public engagement expectations, and support access to information through open and transparent communications. However, the Communications Department remains unable to fill a vacant part-time position and has received little interest from suitable applicants for the part-time role. This impairs the ability of the department to meet strategic and tactical objectives. By increasing staffing, the department will be able to better support the CRD's corporate reputation management, marketing and branding activities, and public awareness and engagement activities.

**Strategy:** Fund a full-time Communications Specialist position to replace the vacant part-time position, and onboard a suitable candidate. Due to the resourcing implications and requirements, this is identified as a specific activity within the business plan.

**Financial Impact:** \$41,800 increase to cover additional salary and benefits.
- 2. Goal:** Implement Phase 1 of the CRD's Engagement Strategy.

**Rationale:** The CRD has adopted an Engagement Strategy to guide its public engagement efforts, in fulfillment of its strategic priority to improve how we engage and communicate with residents. With the plan's initial endorsement anticipated in 2023, the next step will be to implement Phase 1 of the strategy.

**Strategy:** Phase 1 of the implementation plan entails the following actions:

  - A. Train Directors and CRD staff in engagement principles and fundamentals.
  - B. Build engagement planning into decision making processes.
  - C. Formulate processes and practices in support of a culture of engagement.
  - D. Evaluate the CRD's communications and engagement efforts to date.

**Financial Impact:** \$7,500 increase to bring in facilitator for Public Participation / Engagement Fundamentals training.
- 3. Goal:** Assess the feasibility of a welcoming package for new property owners in the CRD to raise the awareness of the CRD, and present fully costed proposal for 2025 financial planning process.

**Rationale:** During Committee of the Whole discussions on a public engagement strategy, the Board identified a need to increase resident awareness of what the CRD is and its programs, services, and initiatives.

**Strategy:** Collect information from the Land Titles & Survey Authority on average property title transfers and prepare an estimate for costs to produce an introductory package for residents, and present to the Board for review. If accepted, aim for implementation in 2025.

**Financial Impact:** No increase required in 2024 to support research. An unknown increase is needed in 2025 to finance implementation.

- 4. Goal:** Develop a regular feature print advertisement to complement the radio bulk-buy advertisements, allowing for regular updates in urban and suburban communities.

**Rationale:** There is a demand for a higher level of non-digital communications, particularly during engagements with the CRD. Direct mail remains the best solution for residents in rural and remote areas. Urban and suburban residents can be much more efficiently reached through traditional media channels, such as radio and print newspapers. The CRD currently spends on average \$50,000 per year in newspaper ads and could see a benefit from consolidating these ads into a single and consistent space.

**Strategy:** Pilot a feature advertisement in locally distributed newspapers which allocate space for CRD Departments to utilize.

**Financial Impact:** \$33,800 (\$650 per week) for full-page colour advertising. Other options for reduced distribution or half-page ads are described below.
- 5. Goal:** Develop, deploy, and evaluate a public complaint tracking system.

**Rationale:** The 2023-2026 Strategic Priorities include a commitment to improve the CRD's communications and engagement with residents. A core component is to improve the CRD's overall responsiveness to resident's concerns, aspirations, and input on our programs, services, and initiatives. One method to track, prioritize, and action this is through a customer complaint tracking system.

**Strategy:** To be achieved in cooperation with IT, Corporate Administration, Procurement, and Management. Identify software to track customer complaints and present budgetary implications to the Board as part of 2025 implementation. A Request for Proposals process may be utilized leading into the budgetary process to determine costs for a solution.

**Financial Impact:** Staff time only for research. An unknown increase may be required for implementation and development in 2025.
- 6. Goal:** Develop systems and processes in support of a stronger internal communications culture and framework.

**Rationale:** With the Communications Department maturing in its capabilities and capacity to support external communications, a tactical shift will need to occur to support internal communications efforts. Increasing the level of support and systematizing internal communications will produce better outcomes for the organizations' core services and initiatives and support strategic objectives and improve our corporate reputation.

**Strategy:** Establish a staff-level committee focused on collaborating for external messaging, utilize project management principles to plan corporate initiatives, and coordinate on integrating long-term policy development.

**Financial Impact:** A significant contribution of staff time is required; however, no new expenses would result from this objective.

## Business Plan Goals, Rationale & Strategies - 2025 Goals

1. **Goal:** Complete implementation of Phase 1 of Engagement Strategy and transition to Phase 2.

**Rationale:** Following completion of Phase 1 activities, a shift should occur mid-year towards Phase 2 actions in the Engagement Strategy. Phase 2 is expected to start mid-2025 as Phase 1 actions are completed. Phase 2 focuses on enhancing and extending the CRD's engagement capabilities and activities.

**Strategy:** Building on Phase 1 actions, implement further training for select staff members, enhance the policy and decision-making process, and expand the CRD's engagement activities.

**Financial Impact:** \$25,000 for IAP2 training in P2 Design and Methods, facilitated through a third party.

2. **Goal:** Develop a marketing plan for 2024-2026.

**Rationale:** During Committee of the Whole discussions on a public engagement strategy, the Board identified a need to increase resident awareness of what the CRD is and its programs, services, and initiatives. A core discussion point was to increase the CRD's visibility by having its representatives attend more community events, rent tables at community fairs, and be more visible overall in community. There are also opportunities to improve existing campaigns, particularly the Make the Move resident/investor attraction campaign.

**Strategy:** Develop a marketing plan to complement efforts guided by the CRD's Communications and Engagement strategies. This plan would focus on specific actions the CRD would take, assign resources to the plan, establish roles and responsibilities for marketing, and strategic attendance at community events. Once developed, the aim would be to implement in 2025.

**Financial Impact:** Dependent on staffing capacity; this goal is subject to staffing resources being available. Additional costs to develop a mobile events kit and branded materials are about \$2,000.

### Overall Financial Implications

The Communications Department functioned well through the 2023 fiscal year; however, its capacity was significantly limited because the part-time Communications Specialist role being vacant. The 2023 Wildfire season was manageable between the two staff members we had, however provides a critical exposure point for the organization's ability to preserve business continuity and reputation management. As the climate continues to change and environmental impacts increase, future wildfire seasons are expected to require more resources from the department and reduce the ability of the department to focus on core business needs.

As such, there is a proposed increase in staffing to the department to maintain organizational capacity for non-emergency operations centre communications. This change alone represents over half of the proposed increase to the Communications Department Budget. However, this will drastically improve the department's ability to maintain its level of service within the organization and to the public.

**Without this increase in staffing, the department cannot meet its commitments under this business plan.** Should increased funding to host a full-time versus part-time position be removed from the business plan and budget as a cost reduction measure, the business plan will require significant revisions to become feasible. This will also impair the department's ability to support the Board's strategic plan implementation, particularly for better and more frequent public engagement and education campaigns.

Another key area of consideration for the Board is budgeting for Board events and activities. Based on experiences from the 2023 Board on the Road series, increases were made to facility rentals, catering budgets, and travel. The CRD also carried \$300 per Electoral Area to host Electoral Area and Multiparty Stakeholder meetings, however to date there has been no uptake on these events. Open house style events are also facing continued declines in attendance when no clear or marketable purpose to attend is present. Cumulative increases to travel and Board events represents a total 6% of the increased budget costs, despite there being a potential savings or reallocation of funds if there is no desire to continue these events.

Advertising faces a substantial increase to reflect the Board's general desire to see a pivot towards traditional communications channels. The best method for reaching residents in urban and suburban areas through non-digital channels is to concentrate advertising within existing print publications. 50% of the cost of Option 1 has been included inside the draft budget, and remaining funds would come from existing advertising budgets:

1. \$33,800 weekly full page ad
2. \$20,800 weekly half-page ad
3. \$20,800 biweekly full page ad
4. \$11,700 biweekly half-page ad
5. \$10,800 monthly full page ad
6. \$6,000 monthly half-page ad

### **Significant Issues & Trends**

- The Communications Department has seen significant internal turnover; as a small department, this results in a systems shock and reduces overall productivity over the initial start up period.
- Emergency operations centre activities significantly reduced the capacity of the department in 2017, 2018, 2020, 2021, and 2023. The escalating impacts of climate change on our region will further increase this demand as the regional

district faces increased vulnerabilities from more frequent extreme heat events, prolonged drought conditions, reduced snowpack, and declining water tables.

- Significant communications issues are expected beyond EOC Operations, which will require significant investment of staff time. Referenda, major initiatives and projects, and ongoing activities will continue to pressure limited staff time.
- Labour market shifts have made it extremely difficult to recruit a part-time Communications Specialist to support departmental workload, which shifts it to an already stretched staff.
- Social media tools utilized in the past will need to be evaluated moving forward as the social media landscape continues to evolve. We will need to consider new platforms and reconsider existing platforms, or accept a status quo approach. This will be guided by our new Communications Strategy.

### **Measuring Previous Years' Success**

- 1. Goal:** Review and revise, as necessary, the 2019-2022 Communications Plan.  
**Rationale:** This goal was identified in the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan. The 2019-2022 Corporate Communications Plan was developed and endorsed by the Board in February 2019, and has since expired. The plan includes a variety of measurables to assess whether the CRD is meeting its communication objectives.  
**Strategy:** In consultation with CRD Departments and using public feedback on the CRD's current communication practices, update the 2019-2022 Corporate Communications Plan to reflect the CRD's new strategic planning objectives and appropriate performance measures for the 2023-2026 planning period.  
**Status:** A draft Corporate Communications Strategy is being presented at the November 8, 2023, Committee of the Whole meeting.
- 2. Goal:** Develop a community engagement strategy and build staff capacity to conduct effective public engagement exercises.  
**Rationale:** This goal was carried forward from the 2019 business plan and identified in the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan. Developing a strategy with written standards ensures public engagement is done with purpose and consistent with best practice. The strategy must include communication tools that front-load information to the public, where the decision is explained, and questions and concerns are anticipated.  
**Strategy:** Through FY2023 through FY2025, use of external resources, seek out public input on current communication and engagement methods, consolidate feedback and best practices into a strategy, and deploy with policy and procedure development, training and implementation. Alongside this, complete training of Communications personnel in IAP2 engagement standards and methods.  
**Status:** At the June 22, 2023, Committee of the Whole Meeting, an overview discussion was held with the Board of Directors to discuss the purposes and objectives of any engagement strategy. Initial discussions led to a follow up presentation at the September 8, 2023, Committee of the Whole Meeting. CRD

Communications Department staff have also completed IAP2 training to be eligible for a Certificate in Public Participation. A draft engagement strategy will be presented at the November 8, 2023, Committee of the Whole meeting.

- 3. Goal:** Research and identify a system for tracking public complaints/inquiries to the CRD. Aim for implementation in 2024.

**Rationale:** Some of the measurables in the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan include evaluating the number of complaints/inquiries received by the CRD. Currently, the CRD does not have a system for tracking positive and negative feedback.

**Strategy:** To be achieved in cooperation with IT, Corporate Administration, and Management. Review comparator local governments systems for tracking complaints, inquiries, and feedback. Identify current complaint tracking methods and issues, along with current results of complaints management.

**Status:** Staff have identified software within the Microsoft 365 Suite which could meet the needs of the regional district. Development and deployment are next.

- 4. Goal:** Build communications channels and relationships with indigenous nations and organizations within the region.

**Rationale:** This goal is in support of the Board's strategic objective to develop relationships and collaborative partnerships with indigenous governments. Province-wide implementation of UNDRIP principles and requirements will require a higher level of engagement with Indigenous Nations.

**Strategy:** Utilize existing networks and channels alongside relationship building opportunities (ex. Board on the Road) to develop introduction pathways and utilize these pathways to build capacity and knowledge within the organization.

**Status:** Initial contacts were made with certain First Nations over 2023 to identify opportunities for collaboration. Following a reorganization of the CRD's services and departments, a new Indigenous Liaison position reporting to the CAO was created, and funding requisitioned from within the Administrative Services budget. This position and workload were identified as out of the scope of the Communications Department and was removed from the business plan.

## **Conclusion**

The Communications Department has seen significant personnel changes in the previous year and is regularly involved in Emergency Management activities. To meet the strategic objectives of the organization, an increase in staffing is required. Without increased staffing, an organization-wide shift in resourcing allocations and priorities will need to occur in order to meet basic commitments moving forward.