



2025 Business Plan Communications (1011)

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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.

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 manages 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. Job advertisements nor statutory notices for development applications 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 - 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:** Lead public engagement for referendums on firehall replacement / renovations in 150 Mile House alongside a replacement fire engine.

Rationale: A referendum on a likely replacement of the 150 Mile House fire hall is planned for early 2025. This referendum will consist of multiple phases, including community awareness, feedback gathering, and the actual referendum itself. This is expected to strain existing resources and mark a significant investment of staff time from this department.

Strategy: Provide support to CRD departments and Area F Director in promoting public awareness, gathering feedback, and seeking a positive referendum result for a firehall replacement.

Financial Impact: The costs for this referendum do not impact the Communications Department beyond commitment of staffing. However, there are significant financial implications for the 150 Mile VFD budget.
- 3. Goal:** Support a referendum in 150 Mile Fire Protection Service Area for a new fire truck (pumper engine).

Rationale: 150 Mile VFD's pumper truck is reaching the end of its serviceable life and must be replaced per FUSBC standards. A referendum is required to secure sufficient funding for it, as the amount needed is not available from the fire department service's capital reserves.

Strategy: Empower voters via a referendum to vote on a 10-year borrowing option (yes vote) or a 5-year borrowing option (no vote) for the necessary loan to complete the purchase. Educate voters through mailed pamphlets, social media posts, radio advertising, print advertising, and a community meeting. Referendum timed in conjunction with firehall replacement referendum.

Financial Impact: The costs for this referendum do not impact the Communications Department beyond commitment of staffing. However, there are significant financial implications for the 150 Mile VFD budget.

- 4. Goal:** Expand initiatives for Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment in coordination with Fire Protection Services.

Rationale: Several CRD volunteer fire departments are facing critical shortages with volunteers, and there is a concern about these department's ability to continue meeting FUSBC requirements for staffing and training. An expanded effort is required to support recruitment and retention initiatives for VFDs.

Strategy: Increase VFD and CRD funding for firefighter recruitment to include public events, direct advertising, increased promotional campaigns, etc.

Financial Impact: The costs for this initiative do not impact the Communications Department beyond commitment of staffing. However, there are significant implications for each VFD budget which are reflected in those business plans.
- 5. Goal:** Transition website Content Management System (CMS) to a new platform.

Rationale: The CRD website CMS is being transitioned to end-of-life by the software company. No firm date has been provided, but the CMS is likely to be deactivated by 2026. A new CMS is required to maintain the CRD's digital information repository.

Strategy: Investigate options to stay with current CMS provider on a new platform or pursue an alternative CMS through a procurement process.

Financial Impact: \$25,000 in one-time costs. Annual subscription costs are subject to pricing provided by the selected provider.
- 6. Goal:** Support efforts to engage the Bouchie Lake community during the feasibility study of a proposed sanitary sewer system.

Rationale: The Board has committed funding for a feasibility study to assess the feasibility of a community sanitary sewer system in Bouchie Lake. In line with the Board's strategic priorities, continued engagement during the feasibility study phase is necessary to keep the community informed and involve them in this critical step for a proposed new service.

Strategy: In coordination with the feasibility study lead and Utilities Department, coordinate public information meetings, awareness campaigns, and input or feedback opportunities to inform the feasibility study and the Board's decision-making on the proposed service.

Financial Impact: \$50,000 is allocated inside the Rural Feasibility Studies function for the feasibility study, which includes funding for public engagement. Funds would be returned to this function if a service proceeds. Staff time required to be determined based on how the study proceeds and any contractual requirements.

7. **Goal:** Support public engagement efforts as part of the establishment of a new regional trails and parks service.

Rationale: The Board has committed to pursue implementation of a new regional trails and parks service. While no referendum is required by the *Local Government Act*, there is an expressed desire for public engagement. Because this is a new service where the details are not determined, a high level of public engagement is required under the IAP2 Framework.

Strategy: Identify the level of engagement that the board desires from the public on the decision to implement a regional trails and parks service. Utilize appropriate public engagement tools to broadly engage the public.

Financial Impact: No impact to the departmental budget. However, staff time will be required to develop public engagement materials and ensure effective moderation and distribution.

8. **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 and allocate space for CRD Departments to utilize. Aim for bi-weekly distribution due to overall costs of print advertising.

Financial Impact: \$33,800 for a bi-weekly half-page full colour print advertisement. The Communications budget would carry 50% of the total cost while the remainder would be assigned to other functions as space is needed. Note: Planning Advertisements and Assent Vote advertisements which are legally required to be posted for two weeks in a paper can be accommodated, however costs will still need to be carried in Administration and Planning Services to pay for the remainder.

- **Half page bi-weekly** - \$33,800 total
- **Full page bi-weekly** - \$54,600 total
- **Half-page weekly** - \$67,600 total
- **Full-page weekly** - \$109,200 total

9. **Goal:** Conduct public consultation for 2025-2029 Five Year Financial Plan.
Rationale: The Regional District is required by s. 166 of the *Community Charter* to conduct a form of public consultation prior to adopting a financial plan.
Strategy: With online surveys, mailed newsletters and social media advertisements, promote awareness for financial plan and process. Also seek feedback via surveys on changes to service budgets before adoption.
Financial Impact: \$25,000 per year to fund advertising, print materials, and distribution costs. Significant staff time allocation.

2026 Business Plan Goals & Objectives

1. **Goal:** Conduct awareness campaign for 2026 General Local Elections.
Rationale: A General Local Election is scheduled for October 2026, as required by the *Local Government Act*. All 12 Director positions are up for election.
Strategy: Using multiple communications tactics in a non-partisan manner, promote awareness of election process, nomination period, voting requirements, and voting opportunities. Communicate results and issue statutory notices as required by Chief Election Officer.
Financial Impact: Staff time required. Costs borne by EA Administration function.
2. **Goal:** Conduct public consultation for 2026-2030 Five Year Financial Plan.
3. **Rationale:** The Regional District is required by s. 166 of the *Community Charter* to conduct a form of public consultation prior to adopting a financial plan.
Strategy: With online surveys, mailed newsletters and social media advertisements, promote awareness for financial plan and process. Also seek feedback via surveys on changes to service budgets before adoption.
Financial Impact: \$25,000 per year to fund advertising, print materials, and distribution costs. Significant staff time allocation.
4. **Goal:** Implement Phase 3 of the 2024-2027 Engagement Strategy.
Rationale: The Board adopted the engagement strategy in 2024. The final phase will consist of solidifying organizational engagement practices and evaluating future needs for a new engagement strategy.
Strategy: Implement the engagement strategy actions set out in the 2024-2027 Engagement Strategy.
Financial Impact: Staff time.

2027 Business Plan Goals & Objectives

- 1. Goal:** Conduct a review of the Corporate Communications Strategy and Engagement Strategy in collaboration with an appropriate Board Committee.

Rationale: By 2027, a new Board of Directors will have been sworn in and established governance structures to suit their initial desires. To ensure that Corporate Communications and Public Engagement aligns with their objectives, a review of relevant strategic guidance documents will need to be conducted.

Strategy: Based on public feedback collected in 2026, work with an appropriate Board Committee to define future goals and objectives for public communications and engagement.

Financial Impact: Staff time.
- 2. Goal:** Conduct a Board communications and engagement workshop to support the newly elected Board's orientation.

Rationale: By 2027, a new Board of Directors will have been sworn in and established governance structures to suit their initial desires. To ensure that the Board can meet its legal obligations and public expectations while fulfilling their governance and policy responsibilities, a dedicated communications and engagement workshop should be completed.

Strategy: Hire an external facilitator to provide training and mentorship to Board members elected in 2026 to clarify their roles and responsibilities in public communications and engagement.

Financial Impact: Hiring a facilitator would cost \$20,000 for a two-day workshop.

Overall Financial Implications

The Communications Department functioned well through the 2024 fiscal year and was able to effectively support corporate and crisis communications needs. A key goal was to recruit an additional staff member, which briefly occurred between March and August 2024 through the hiring of a part-time position. Following a vacancy, the position was posted and filled as a permanent full-time position. Maintaining this level of staffing ensures that the department can not only effectively support other department's communications needs, but it also expands capacity to coordinate efforts to ensure the CRD is transparent, open, and accountable in how it manages public resources.

Major disruptions to achieving specific goals and objectives were faced this year. These included the 2024 BEGEU strike (seven weeks total), EOC Activations to support wildfire evacuations and the Chilcotin River landslide (collectively a 12-week disruption), and the third staff position being vacant for most of the year.

Corporate Communications maintains a high level of interaction and engagement with local media. In 2024, nearly 81% of all the CRD's media interactions were with local news outlets (Vista Radio and Black Press). CRD representatives were also able to convey key messaging on specific issues over 95% of the time, a very high success rate. This was paired with 89% of interviews being arranged within one hour of initial contact, with

variances being explained by contacts being made when staff were unavailable during days off or because the interview was not arranged through the department.

The 2024 Business Plan proposes cutting funding for Electoral Area Meet and Greets and Multistakeholder Trade Shows. Funding for these events has been insufficient, and attendance at generic public information events with no clear public communications outcomes has been low. Instead, the department will seek to focus efforts on specific events with defined outcomes to maximize the cost-benefit for these events.

Consideration should also be given to either eliminating or reducing the funding allocated to Board on the Road. While offering an opportunity for Board members to meet outside of the CRD's Central Cariboo office, this campaign has seen mixed results due to being disassociated from other outcomes. The resources assigned to Board on the Road could be better used towards other public engagement initiatives which are clearly tied to a decision-making process and outcome.

The Department's business plan also incorporates several goals and objectives which are funded by other departmental budgets. This is to recognize the significant resource requirements placed on it from other business units, which have previously not been recognized. This also ensures that these efforts are acknowledged during the budget planning process.

Measuring Previous Years' Success

- 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.

Status: Completed. The goal is to now maintain this.

- 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.

Status: Not completed. 2024 saw a significant 7-week labour disruption, EOC activations due to wildfire and landslides also impacted this. Work will carry forward into 2025.

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.

Status: Completed. Referral to a decision-making body is required.

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 and allocate space for CRD Departments to utilize.

Financial Impact: Not completed. Initial funding was insufficient to achieve desired results and has been requested in the 2025 business plan.

- 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 part 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 used leading into the budgetary process to determine costs for a solution.

Financial Impact: Research completed. Cost-Benefit evaluation determined there would be minimal gain from investing time in implementing this system.

- 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 goals and improve our corporate reputation.

Strategy: Set up 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.

Status: Not completed.