

To:	Warden Hicks and Members of Grey County Council
Committee Date:	January 13, 2022
Subject / Report No:	CAOR-CW-01-22
Title:	Spending Prior to 2022 Budget Approval – Communications Strategy Update
Prepared by:	Rob Hatten
Reviewed by:	Kim Wingrove
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	none
Status:	

Recommendation

1. That Report CAOR-CW-01-22 regarding the issuing of an RFP prior to 2022 Budget Approval be received; and
2. That staff be authorized to release the Communications Strategy Update Request for Proposal ahead of Council approval in accordance with Section 25.6 (b) of the Procedural By-law.

Executive Summary

Grey County's Corporate Communication Strategy was due to be updated in-house in 2021. The update was delayed due to staff leaves and limited ability for in-person public engagement. Staff are recommending enhancing the scope of the update in response to increased corporate requirements and the reorganization of the communications function. External resources will be best able to provide unbiased best practice advice. Staff are asking Council for approval to release a Request for Proposal for the project prior to approval of the 2022 budget to facilitate a project completion date of June 2022.

Background and Discussion

Grey County adopted its first Communications Strategy in 2016 and began implementing the findings in 2017. This strategy provided insight into the current landscape of communications at the County and offered recommendations for improving the flow of information to the public and other audiences. The scope of the current strategy does not include communications needs of the Tourism Department or of Grey Roots Museum and Archives. This will be addressed in the new strategy.

Some of the objectives and deliverables of the RFP will include:

- Identifying current communications strengths and weaknesses by reviewing the current plan, practices, and resources.
- Interviews with the Warden, CAO, representatives of County Council, senior managers, and staff.
- Engaging with the public and the media to collect feedback on practices
- Developing a report of findings and recommendations
- Developing an updated Communications Strategy document

Communications Strategies need to be reviewed often and updated every four to five years to remain relevant and effective. Audiences and trends change, and the pandemic has had a major impact in the way people communicate. The Corporate Communication Strategy was due for updates in 2021 and included as part of the County's approved budget at a cost of \$24,000. However, due to staffing leaves in the communications department and ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic which limited public engagement opportunities, the project was postponed. The impacts of the pandemic still linger, but with circumstances feeling more like a new normal, staff recommend launching the project in early 2022 prior to approval of the budget so we can continue to communicate effectively in our changed landscape.

Staff also recommend expanding the scope of the Communications Strategy through this review. The Communications Department has evolved over the past two years. Staff realignments have moved two staff from the Economic Development, Tourism, and Culture department into Communications. In addition, a Digital Communications Specialist has been added to the team, offset through staffing level reductions in other positions. Now is an ideal time to expand the strategy to include a review of current staffing resources and to incorporate marketing and communication for tourism and Grey Roots.

This additional scope is reflected in the 2022 draft budget with a project cost of \$41,000 and is funded from reserve. Staff recommend seeking external consulting to provide an expert third-party review and to lessen the time requirements on the communications department which is currently short a staff member.

Considering this is a municipal election year, staff recommend completing the project by mid-summer. To achieve this timeline and to secure a quality consultant for the project, staff are asking for Council's approval to move forward with a Request for Proposal for the project prior to the passing of the 2022 budget. The findings of the strategy will also help inform the orientation of the incoming council.

Legal and Legislated Requirements

None

Financial and Resource Implications

The project cost of \$41,000 has been included in the draft 2022 budget and is funded by a \$24,000 transfer from the Communications reserve and \$17,000 from the One Time Funding Reserve.

Relevant Consultation

- Internal (list)
 - Finance staff
- External (list)

Appendices and Attachments

[2016 Communication Strategy](#)