



# Committee Report

<b>To:</b>	Warden Hicks and Members of Grey County Council
<b>Committee Date:</b>	July 28, 2022
<b>Subject / Report No:</b>	CAOR-CW-06-22
<b>Title:</b>	Grey County 2023-2026 Communications Strategy
<b>Prepared by:</b>	Rob Hatten, Communications Manager
<b>Reviewed by:</b>	Kim Wingrove, Chief Administrative Officer
<b>Lower Tier(s) Affected:</b>	None
<b>Status:</b>	

## Recommendation

1. That report CAOR-CW-06-22 regarding **Communications Strategy: Connecting Community 2023-20226** be received; and
2. That staff be directed to implement the recommendations of the strategy.

## Executive Summary

Grey County's new draft communications strategy, titled *Connecting Community*, builds off the achievements of the 2016 strategy and recommends several enhancements to improve community awareness of Grey County programs, services, decisions, and activities, and to strengthen public engagement.

## Background and Discussion

Grey County completed its first communication strategy in 2016. This plan was a launching point for a centralized communications function for the County. Many of the recommendations of the 2016 plan have been implemented over the past several years. Some of the recommendations were not, due to resource limitations, pandemic impacts, or other challenges. *Connecting Community* evaluates the success of the previous strategy, advises what tactics should continue, and proposes additional goals and actions to further improve Grey County's communications practices.

This year has proven to be an optimal time to revisit the strategy. There have been many challenges and changes over the past two and a half years and this project was a great opportunity to engage with our internal and external stakeholders to better understand how to adapt to the new communications preferences after the pandemic.

Significant research and engagement were key to making impactful updates to the strategy. Over the course of several months, consultants carefully analyzed the activities of the Communications department and engaged directly with several internal and external audiences. Some of the actions taken in the development of the plan include:

- Reviewing and analyzing existing communications, processes, and materials
- Reviewing social media and websites
- Reviewing media coverage
- Interviewing communicators from even comparative municipalities
- One-on-one interviews with various stakeholders including staff (senior managers and frontline), councillors, business representatives, First Nations and others.
- Conducting a public survey

Using the findings of the research and engagement, seven communications goals have been identified:

1. Drive Communications through strategic planning and analysis.
2. Enable connections and support collaboration and the open exchange of ideas through communications.
3. Ensure Council, County and department messaging are communicated in a fulsome, timely, and effective manner.
4. Explore and measure communication technology and opportunities against audience needs.
5. Ensure stakeholders can receive or access information through preferred avenues.
6. Promote the County's brand in a positive and consistent way.
7. Attract visitors and newcomers with compelling and evocative communications.

The strategies and tactics section of *Connecting Community* recommends a combination of old and new tactics. Tactics from the former strategy have been analyzed to determine if they should be continued, discontinued, or enhanced. These tactics have been separated for key audiences so they will be more effective. These audiences include:

- Internal staff
- County Council
- External partners
- The Grey County Community

One returning tactic is the continued emphasis on an internal-first approach to communication. Grey County is a community of small communities, and each of our staff have hundreds of interactions with family, friends, and neighbours throughout the County. We will continue to make important information about County programs and services so our staff can be informed ambassadors of our brand.

One way this will be achieved is through the assignment of a “communications liaison” for each department. This liaison will be the primary point of contact with the communications department and will contribute to annual communications planning. They will also be important in sourcing important information that needs to be communicated out to the public. These liaison roles will allow communications staff to be prepared in advance to support departmental needs, which in turn will reduce the number of unexpected requests and will improve the overall quality

of information being presented to the public.

Every department at the County completes important work that impacts the residents, businesses, and visitors we serve. Unfortunately, it's not always possible for the communications department to provide comprehensive support every time it is needed. *Connecting Community* recommends creating a priority matrix. During periods of competing needs and limited time and resources, this matrix will allow the Communications department to triage needs requests fairly and consistently.

Another opportunity identified in the strategy is to formalize a customer service strategy and delivery model. Communications is an essential piece of customer service, and it is important for there to be a direct connection between frontline service staff and the communications department. A formalized customer service strategy will be explored further during the lifespan of this communications strategy.

*Connecting Community* provides several other recommendations which will be implemented over the next four years; however, it is important to note the strategy is a living document. To remain successful, communications staff will regularly review this strategy and adjust the goals and tactics as needed to adapt to the County's broader goals and the wants and needs of our community and audiences. These adjustments will be through an annual communications report to Council, along with measurements towards the goals of the strategy.

## Legal and Legislated Requirements

None

## Financial and Resource Implications

Completion of the 2022-2026 Corporate Communications Strategy was approved by Council in January of this year prior to the passing of the budget.

The costs of implementing the findings of the strategy will be included for County Council consideration annually during budget deliberations.

## Relevant Consultation

- Internal (list)
- External (list)

## Appendices and Attachments

[Communication Strategy: Connecting Community 2022-2026](#)