



Norfolk County

Communication, Marketing and Engagement Strategy

September 2025



Contents

- Executive summary 4
- Alignment with Council’s Strategic Priorities 5
 - Empowering Norfolk..... 5
 - Building Norfolk 5
 - Connecting Norfolk..... 5
 - Serving Norfolk 5
 - Sustaining Norfolk 5
- Research 6
 - Community Communication Survey findings 7
 - SCOT analysis (Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, Threats) 8
 - Future considerations..... 11
- Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles 12
 - Vision..... 12
 - Mission 12
 - Guiding Principles..... 12
- Target audiences..... 14
- Strategic action items..... 18
 - Pillar 1: Proactive planning and strategic alignment 20
 - 1. Develop a content calendar 20
 - 2. Proactive planning with divisions 20
 - 3. Identify priorities using feedback and analytics 21
 - 4. Develop, review or update policies and procedures 22
 - 5. Use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve communication..... 22
 - 6. Recruit co-op and summer student placements 23
 - 7. Retain an agency of record for additional support..... 23
 - 8. Complete a social media audit 24
 - Pillar 2: Culture and capacity building..... 25
 - 9. Build an internal communications culture 25

| | | |
|--|--|----|
| 10. | Build a community communications culture | 26 |
| 11. | Launch a Community Ambassador Program (CAP)..... | 26 |
| 12. | Continue with a centralized delivery model | 28 |
| 13. | Use tools, templates and processes to increase efficiency | 28 |
| 14. | Balance traditional and digital tactics | 28 |
| Pillar 3: Audience engagement and inclusion | | 30 |
| 15. | Expand social media content with human-centred, “living in Norfolk” and educational content..... | 30 |
| 16. | Strengthen in-person communication and engagement | 31 |
| 17. | Build and strengthen partnerships | 31 |
| 18. | Prioritize visual communication..... | 32 |
| 19. | Refresh Norfolk County’s brand and visual identity | 32 |
| 20. | Enhance accessibility and inclusion | 33 |
| Pillar 4: Issues management and trust building | | 35 |
| 21. | Enhance issues management and response..... | 35 |
| 22. | Strengthen media relations and messaging clarity | 36 |
| 23. | Promote transparency through Council communications | 36 |
| 24. | Develop and share an <i>Annual Report to the Community</i> | 37 |
| 25. | Refine risk and contingency planning | 38 |
| Roles and responsibilities..... | | 39 |
| Timeline and metrics | | 42 |
| Appendix A: Overview of tactics | | 45 |
| Appendix B: Social media moderation, escalation steps and response protocols | | 47 |
| Appendix C: Research | | 51 |

Executive summary

Effective communication is essential to modern local government. As public expectations for timely, clear, and accessible information continue to grow, Norfolk must meet the challenge with a coordinated, community-focused approach. Strategic communications support transparency and accountability, enhance public trust, and empower residents to participate meaningfully in civic life. They also play a vital role in public safety, economic development, and community resilience.

This strategy recognizes the increasingly complex environment in which municipal communications operate. Norfolk serves a diverse population with varying needs, preferences, and access to technology. The rise of misinformation, limited resources, and the need for cross-departmental coordination all add to the challenge. At the same time, Norfolk's Communications team must manage a wide range of responsibilities—from digital marketing and media relations to graphic design and community engagement.

Norfolk County's Communications team is amongst the leanest in the province, with the lowest FTE count among municipalities of comparable size and services scope. To meet the goals of this strategy, a disciplined and creative approach to resource allocation is required.

Despite these challenges, Norfolk is well-positioned to build on its strengths. Significant progress has been made in improving communications: a skilled team, equipped with strong digital tools and supported by a growing culture of engagement, is now in place. This strategy provides a path forward that leverages these assets, addresses key gaps and ensures that communications continue to evolve in a way that is inclusive, proactive and aligned with community needs.

Findings from surveys, interviews, focus groups, and workshops have shaped the strategic direction and priorities in this document, ensuring alignment with community needs and expectations. The Community Engagement Framework, approved in June 2025, further outlines Norfolk County's approach to inclusive, transparent, and responsive engagement.

At its core, this strategy seeks to build a communications culture across Norfolk County—one that distributes responsibility for proactive communications across the enterprise, and encourages a mindset that anticipates communications needs and opportunities, with everyone playing a role in providing the public with timely, accurate and useful communications.

Alignment with Council's Strategic Priorities

The Communications team supports Council's Strategic Priorities (2022–2026) by fostering transparency, engagement and access to information across all five pillars:

Empowering Norfolk

Builds trust through collaboration, promotes local success, and amplifies Norfolk's priorities to key stakeholders.

Building Norfolk

Keeps residents informed about health and safety, infrastructure projects, and growth planning through clear, proactive messaging.

Connecting Norfolk

Celebrates community identity, promotes mobility options, and supports digital connectivity initiatives.

Serving Norfolk

Enhances service delivery, strengthens internal culture and supports continuous improvement through responsive and accessible communication.

Sustaining Norfolk

Raises awareness of environmental and agricultural priorities, supports climate action, and fosters understanding of financial decisions.

Research

An effective municipal communications and marketing strategy must be guided by those who hold the most interest: Council, administrative leadership, staff, residents, community agencies and partners. Comparable municipal communications teams can also offer insight into strategic and creative ways to meet communications objectives.

A comprehensive research and engagement effort was undertaken to guide the directions in this strategy. It included:

1. Frequent collaboration and exploration with Norfolk Communications staff in the evaluation and development of this strategy.
2. Materials, website, social media and media audits.
3. One-on-one interviews (23) with County staff and community representatives.
4. Best practices research and interviews (4) with communications leaders in comparably sized municipalities.
5. Workshops and focus groups (6) with Norfolk Council, staff, partners and community representatives.
6. Community Communication Survey that explored current communications effectiveness and respondents' preferences in subject matter and communications channels.

Research results are available in Appendix C: Research.

In a small and rural municipal government, effective communication must account for the diverse ways community members access and engage with information. While digital tools like websites, social media, and email newsletters offer speed and reach, not all community members have reliable internet access or feel comfortable using digital platforms.

To ensure strategic effectiveness, accessibility, inclusivity, and equity, communication strategies must strike a balance between modern digital tools and traditional methods—such as mailed notices, community bulletin boards, local newspapers, radio announcements, and in-person outreach. This blended approach ensures that all residents can be informed and aware, regardless of their access to technology, and reinforces the municipality's commitment to serving the entire community with fairness and transparency.

Community Communication Survey findings

Completed in January 2025, the Community Communications Survey demonstrates strong public interest in communications and provides a high level of confidence in the results. The survey revealed clear public preferences for how Norfolk communicates and engages with community members.

Highlights include:

- Both the public survey and focus groups revealed a shared understanding that communication is a two-way responsibility. Residents expect Norfolk to provide timely, accurate, and useful information, but also recognize they play a role in staying informed and seeking out updates when needed.
- The topics most valued by survey participants include community events, emergency services, recreation programs, road maintenance, service disruptions, waste/garbage, and news.
- Transparency, clarity, and proactive outreach were recurring themes, with comments advocating for more inclusive engagement and improved follow-through on public input.
- Feedback mechanisms such as surveys, email, and in-person events remain popular, with growing interest in the Engage Norfolk platform. (Note, community engagement has been addressed in the *Community Engagement Framework* approved in June 2025.)
- Community members primarily access information through Norfolk’s website, social media (especially Facebook), newspapers, and email newsletters.
- Many community members—particularly older adults—expressed a need for more accessible, timely, and jargon-free information. Suggestions included improving website usability (since addressed with new website launch in January 2025), increasing advance notice for Council decisions, and offering more consistent updates across platforms.
- Demographic-specific strategies were emphasized: younger residents prefer digital channels, while older residents often rely on print and radio.

Reports on the outcome of all research can be found in Appendix C: Research.

SCOT analysis (Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, Threats)

Drawing on all research activities, this SCOT analysis provides a comprehensive overview of Norfolk County's current communications, marketing, and engagement landscape, highlighting areas of strength and potential growth, as well as challenges and threats that warrant attention.

Strengths (internal)

- Marked improvement in communication over the past three years, with more accessible, effective information and strong execution by the Communications team. Public satisfaction is 6.5/10—on par or better than similar municipalities.
- There is increasing organizational understanding of the value and role of Communications and a belief that, with few exceptions (Economic Development and Tourism), the Communications department should be responsible for guiding and executing all related communications, marketing and branding activity.
- Employees on Norfolk's Communications team possess strong expertise and experience, with senior staff demonstrating commitment to the 24/7 nature of their work.
- A strong and consistent brand voice and visual application across Norfolk's communications with an authoritative but friendly, and at times playful and fun, voice brings personality and a human quality to messaging.
- Messaging is generally strong and effective, using plain language and emphasizing key points and calls to action.
- Norfolk's email newsletter, *Community Connections*, is a strong, effective and popular communication tool, and is ranked among resident's most preferred tactics. It is well-executed, cost-efficient, and offers significant potential for continued growth.
- Digital marketing is effective: successful "subscribe" campaigns resulted in strong growth of the *Community Connections* email newsletter and Instagram. Digital marketing efforts are focused and targeted, with campaigns using a variety of elements that perform well, such as graphics, carousels (a series of photos that convey a message as the user scrolls) and videos.
- Social media content, frequency and responsiveness are strong and comparable to other municipalities. Social media content is deployed using Sprout Social, an effective and efficient tool. Social media content usually includes branded visuals.
- There is a growing use of quality video (both live action, explainer and animation) with several recent examples highlighting services, showcasing community development, clarifying policies and sharing important announcements. This method is proven effective, and its use should continue to be a predominant tactic.
- Adopting new and updated templates to enable more efficient, consistent content production.

- Leverage Norfolk’s commitment to community engagement by creating a stronger, more visible presence at local events—such as community fairs—where residents can connect with the County in a more informal and approachable way.
- Norfolk's new website launched in January 2025 is a significant improvement over the former, less user-friendly web experience, as noted by several internal and external people.
- Use the website’s subscription features to send targeted updates—like weather alerts or road closures—to people who’ve signed up for them. This allows media releases to focus only on newsworthy content that’s relevant to journalists and media outlets. A review matrix can help guide communicators towards the most effective tactic.

Challenges (internal)

- Norfolk’s communications team has less staff compared to similar municipalities—anywhere from 20% to 50% fewer people. This makes it challenging to keep up with the growing demands and complexity of modern communications work. For comparator municipalities, see Appendix C: Research.
- Limited staff and resources make it challenging to consistently share effective messaging across multiple channels (website, social media, email, newspapers, radio, direct mail, in-person events). As a result, quicker and more affordable options like the website and social media are often used which can limit overall reach and engagement.
- Norfolk has made progress in building a culture that values communication, but more work is needed. Divisions and the Communications team need clear processes to spot issues early, involve Communications from the start, and allow enough time for planning and resourcing.
- The team has limited time for testing, measurement, analysis and recalibration of messaging. However, integrating and prioritizing metrics, including reviewing email click and open rates, website traffic patterns, social media engagement trends, etc. will help guide future efforts with more precision.
- Communication between ServiceNorfolk, other departments, and the Communications team is improving. However, to be most effective, there should be a process to proactively identify topics the public is asking about. This would help the team address confusion or correct misunderstandings through clear communication.
- Several policies are dated and should be reviewed and updated. These include media relations, graphic design guidelines and social media. An AI use policy is required (in development).

Opportunities (external)

- Explore the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a strategic communications tool for planning, content creation, and visual design, while staying aligned with County policies and best practices.
- The community has a vibrant local journalism environment when compared to many smaller towns, giving residents and the municipality options for quality reporting and communication. Communications' reputation with local media is strong, with staff commended for the efforts they take to support reporters' inquiries.
- Community willingness for communication can be leveraged and strengthened with efforts that inform people of the best ways to get the information they need. There is a strong public appetite for communications and a recurring theme that citizens embrace the idea that the responsibility for communications is reciprocal: Norfolk must provide effective communications and citizens have an obligation to seek it out and be informed.
- Access to reliable, affordable professional development training and development is essential for Communications staff to mitigate current challenges and threats.

Threats (external)

- The growing risk of misinformation and disinformation requires increased vigilance and increased efforts of Communications teams to provide factual information, drawing on resources and risking public confusion.
- Increasing levels of distrust in government requires municipal communicators to put more effort into offering evidence-based content, rationale, building relationships with trusted partners to get messages out, separate efforts to build and reinforce trust, and to be more persistent and frequent with messaging.
- Despite ongoing efforts to improve connectivity, some rural and remote parts of the county continue to struggle to access consistent high-speed internet or Fibre-to-the-Home technology. This challenges Norfolk to rely on more traditional—and more costly—communications tactics.
- The fast pace of technological advancements, particularly in AI and digital communication, can be challenging to keep up with, while ensuring that communication strategies remain relevant and effective amidst these changes is crucial.
- Reliable digital advertising such as Google (including YouTube), Meta, Spotify and others are increasingly effective at reaching people but are also becoming more expensive and complicated, requiring a specific skillset that is relatively new to the communications function.
- As Norfolk County continues to grow, demographic shifts will require changing communication preferences and needs, including communicating in multiple languages,

supporting accessibility, and forging partnership with cultural groups to better ensure effective reach into those communities.

- With the proliferation of content channels (e.g., social media platforms, apps, websites) and continuous news cycles, people can become overwhelmed with too much information and requests for engagement. This can lead to disengagement and reduced effectiveness of communication efforts.

Future considerations

Research findings have identified some ideas that could be investigated in the future, including the following:

SMS (text message) alerts

While SMS (text message) Alerts were identified as a desirable tactic in the Community Communication Survey, additional research is necessary to establish a clear understanding of community interest and specific areas (such as emergencies and crisis, waste reminders, recreation schedule releases, etc.) where SMS contact is warranted.

Chatbot

An AI-powered Chatbot could reduce demands on ServiceNorfolk and other staff, help identify frequently asked questions and provide a seamless and efficient customer service experience for community members. Several Ontario municipalities are testing chatbot functionality; monitoring their progress and successes will help guide future decisions for a Chatbot.

Mobile App

The survey revealed an interest in a mobile app where community members can access frequently used content, and Communications can push timely notifications and other important messaging. While several existing options are available, there is little evidence of successful app development and maintenance amongst small Canadian municipalities. However, as AI quickly grows, this is an area to monitor and for future consideration.

Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles

Vision

Well-informed and engaged staff and community members able to easily access the municipal information and services they need.

Mission

To be a strategic partner that leads and supports Norfolk County divisions in achieving their communication goals through proactive guidance and cost-effective, high-impact tactics that engage and inform our audiences.

Guiding Principles

Our guiding principles outline the core values that shape how Norfolk County communicates with our community.

Timely and relevant

We provide timely communication that is responsive, transparent, and shows an awareness of the community's needs. We share messages when they are most needed or useful, allowing reasonable time for residents to prepare to attend events, provide feedback, learn more, or adopt new practices.

Consistent and coordinated

We provide consistent information that helps build credibility and trust. We coordinate messaging internally first and share with Council. We use communication plans—big or small—to ensure we are clear, coordinated and accountable.

Collaborative

We work collaboratively with internal and external partners and organizations to help ensure we can reach our intended audiences with clarity, consistency, and maximum impact.

Accurate

We ensure communication is factually correct, clearly sourced, and regularly reviewed for updates to build and maintain public trust.

Transparent

We proactively share timely, accurate information about decisions, policies, and services, especially those that impact residents. We include the reasons behind decisions, acknowledging challenges honestly, and creating accessible, two-way channels for public input and feedback.

Inclusive

We work hard to ensure no one is left out of important conversations or services. We use plain language, offer content in multiple formats, ensuring compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), actively engage partners that are close to audience groups, and take steps to ensure information presented is culturally representative, appropriate and inoffensive.

Measured

We are committed to defining and evaluating the success of the outcomes and/or metrics set in communication plans, such as increased awareness, participation or behaviour change. We will develop reports and share results with recommendations for how future activities could be improved to help strengthen communication efficiency, effectiveness and value.

Target audiences

Our audiences are the individuals, groups or organizations that have an interest in, influence over, or are affected by Norfolk's communications, marketing and engagement efforts.

It is important for communicators to recognize that different audiences may have different needs in terms of content or tactic. The following chart identifies most key audiences, their role, and the best ways to reach them.

| Audience | Demographic description | Unique characteristics | Communication tactics |
|--|---|--|--|
| Municipal leadership | | | |
| Council | Elected municipal leaders | Decision-makers and public representatives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council briefings • Strategic backgrounders • In-person |
| County senior staff (Senior Leadership Team, SLT) | Employees in leadership roles | Implement Council priorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefings • In-person • Email |
| County staff | Workers | Frontline communicators and ambassadors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal newsletter • Department briefings and training • Intranet and website |
| Committee members | Appointed advisory board members | Provide input on policy and community needs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • Orientation packages • Staff liaison |
| Residents | | | |
| Youth | Students or early career; digitally advanced and nimble | Future leaders and residents; shaping long-term community identity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instagram campaigns (video) • School partnerships and youth councils • Interactive and gamified engagement |
| Older adults | Ages 60+; retirees; may be | High civic participation; often | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local media • Facebook • Website |

| Audience | Demographic description | Unique characteristics | Communication tactics |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| | less digitally engaged | impacted by municipal services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person |
| Property owners | Homeowners, landlords, developers | Key interest holders in planning, taxation, and infrastructure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pamphlets and guides (PDF) • Website FAQs and explainer videos • Email newsletters |
| Urban residents | Residents in towns like Simcoe, Delhi, and Port Dover | Higher population density; more reliant on municipal infrastructure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media • Email newsletters • Website |
| Rural residents | Residents in agricultural or low-density areas | Key to Norfolk’s agricultural economy; may lack digital access | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local radio and print ads • Mailed notices • Community partnerships |
| Newcomers | Recent arrivals to Norfolk County | Growing demographic; need support to integrate and engage; may face language barriers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multilingual materials • Partnerships with cultural and immigration organizations • Website |
| Individuals with disabilities | Residents with physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities | Ensuring accessibility and inclusion in all services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AODA-compliant materials • Plain language and visual supports • Partnering with accessibility organizations |
| Low-income residents | Individuals or families facing economic hardship, possible food or | May be underserved or unaware of available supports | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach through social service partners • Website |

| Audience | Demographic description | Unique characteristics | Communication tactics |
|---|---|---|---|
| | housing insecurity | | |
| Parents and caregivers | Adults responsible for children or dependents | Key decision-makers for family services and programs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School board/day care partnerships • Recreation program guides • Facebook groups and parenting forums |
| Seasonal residents | Cottage owners, part-time residents | Contribute to tourism and local economy; may miss key updates | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email newsletters • Website updates • Signage or literature at key entry points (marinas, parks) |
| Interest holders and partners | | | |
| Indigenous communities | First Nations and Métis residents and organizations | Important cultural partners; require respectful, tailored engagement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship-building with Indigenous leaders |
| Businesses | Local entrepreneurs, employers, service providers | Drive economic development and job creation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • Business-focused newsletters • LinkedIn and targeted email campaigns |
| Community facility users | Residents who use libraries, rec centres, arenas | Regular contact with County services; diverse age groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posters and digital screens • Social media • Website • Print guides |
| Organizations and community groups | Non-profits, service clubs, advocacy groups | Amplify messages, shared objectives, and support community engagement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person engagement • Partner toolkits • Co-branded campaigns |
| Partners and collaborators | Schools, health units, libraries, etc. | Extend reach and credibility of County messaging | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-branded campaigns • Shared events and info sessions |

| Audience | Demographic description | Unique characteristics | Communication tactics |
|-----------------|--|--|--|
| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-promotion on partner channels |
| Media | Local journalists, bloggers and social media influencers | Key to informing and influencing public opinion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely media releases • Backgrounders and interviews • Media briefings and relationship-building |
| Visitors | Tourists, day-trippers, event attendees | <p>Understand local bylaws and expectations.</p> <p>Support economy and brand reputation</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • Social media • Visitor centre materials <p>Appropriately placed signage</p> |

Strategic action items

The strategic action items outlined in this strategy have been grouped into four overarching pillars that reflect the key themes that emerged through research, consultation and internal collaboration.

| Pillar | Focus | Strategic direction |
|---|--|--|
| Proactive planning and strategic alignment | Building processes to ensure communications are timely, coordinated and aligned with organizational priorities. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a content calendar 2. Proactive planning with departments 3. Identify priorities using analytics and feedback 4. Develop, review or update policies and procedures 5. Use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve communication 6. Recruit co-op and summer student placements 7. Retain an agency of record for additional support 8. Complete a social media audit |
| Culture and capacity building | Strengthening internal and external communications culture and creating the tools and relationships needed to deliver effectively. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Build an internal communications culture 10. Build a community communications culture 11. Launch a Community Ambassador Program (CAP) 12. Continue with a centralized delivery model 13. Use tools, templates and processes to increase efficiency 14. Balance traditional and digital tactics |

| Pillar | Focus | Strategic direction |
|---|--|--|
| Audience engagement and inclusion | Ensuring our messaging is accessible, inclusive and customized to our audiences and the channels they use to access information. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15. Expand social media content with human-centred, “living in Norfolk” and educational content 16. Strengthen in-person communication and engagement 17. Build and strengthen partnership 18. Prioritize visual communication 19. Refresh Norfolk County’s brand and visual identity 20. Enhance accessibility and inclusion |
| Issues management and trust building | Anticipating, managing and responding to issues while building public trust with transparency and timely communication. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 21. Enhance issues management and response 22. Strengthen media relations and messaging clarity 23. Promote transparency through Council communications 24. Develop and share an <i>Annual Report to the Community</i> 25. Refine risk and contingency planning |

Pillar 1: Proactive planning and strategic alignment

1. Develop a content calendar

Establishing a yearly content calendar is an essential tool for Norfolk County’s Communications team, playing a major role in efficiency and consistency across all platforms. A calendar helps the team plan, coordinate messaging, and ensure timely delivery of information to residents. By organizing and creating content in advance, the team can avoid last-minute scrambles, align with strategic priorities, streamline costs if possible, and maintain a steady flow of engaging, relevant updates that reflect the County’s values and initiatives.

Action items:

1.1 Communications will develop a content calendar that includes the following content areas:

- **Time sensitive:** news updates, events, important dates, commemorative days, recreation programming registration, etc.
- **Participation/engagement:** share surveys, ask for feedback and engagement on initiatives
- **“Living in Norfolk:”** educational content that helps people who live in Norfolk (e.g. how to ride the bus, garbage and recycling tips)
- **Government:** role of municipal government, how the budget works, how to access information you need, etc.
- **“Good News Norfolk:”** weekly feature focused on human-interest storytelling of staff or community members
- **Celebration:** storytelling to reinforce the community brand and recognize staff and public achievements.

2. Proactive planning with divisions

Establish a coordinated, forward-looking planning process by partnering with divisions to develop annual communications plans that define priorities, timelines, responsibilities, audiences, messaging and success metrics. These plans will align with Norfolk’s strategic goals and be integrated into the broader content calendar to ensure consistency, accountability, and timely execution.

Action items:

2.1 Designate a **Division Communications Liaison** for each department who will act as the primary conduit between Communications and the Division. The Liaison will:

- Coordinate and oversee an annual Division Communications Plan.
- Set up processes to spot emerging issues early and request Communications support in time to plan and respond effectively.
- Coordinate with subject matter experts to gather content and background materials needed for communication, website content and media relations, as required.
- Coordinate approval of content

2.2 Define a triage and priority system for requests and tasks. When large, competing priorities occur, Communications will use a review system that will help prioritize requirements. Factors such as urgency, risk assessment, timelines, resource demands, potential outcomes, and opportunities for collaboration should be considered.

3. Identify priorities using feedback and analytics

Set up processes to identify current areas of interest and topics that may need attention or proactive issues management.

Action items:

3.1 Establish bi-weekly meetings between ServiceNorfolk and Communications to review frequent inquiries and identify upcoming issues or topics to enable proactive communication and iterative improvements to content, processes, etc.

3.2 Review website traffic monthly to identify the most visited pages, pages with long visit times, etc., to proactively make improvements to content, site architecture, navigation, etc.

3.3 Establish a Teams Group Chat with Division Communications Liaisons to prompt discussion of issues or concerns.

4. Develop, review or update policies and procedures

Update policies and procedures to guide communications activity.

Action items:

4.1 Review, update or develop the following policies and procedures:

- Accessibility
- AI usage policy (in development)
- Brand guidelines
- Clear language/plain language guide
- Coordinated Advertising Policy
- Graphic design
- Media relations policy
- Social media
- Website Governance
- Writing for the Web
- Writing style guide

4.2 Within the social media and website policies, establish governance protocols for ongoing account management, including ownership, content standards, and performance tracking.

5. Use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve communication

Leverage AI tools to enhance and support the efficiency, creativity and responsiveness of the Communications team, recognizing that AI is not a replacement for professional judgment, creativity or community understanding. Staff must follow Norfolk County's AI Use Policy (in development) and privacy guidelines.

Actions items:

5.1 Use generative AI to draft content such as first versions of media releases, web content, newsletters, and social media posts. All content must be reviewed and approved by the Director of Communications and the applicable departmental Director and divisional General Manager before publication.

5.2 Use AI tools to brainstorm campaign themes, messaging, or engagement strategies during planning sessions.

5.3 Implement AI tools to summarize Council meetings or public consultations into digestible formats (e.g., “At a Glance” summaries). Summaries must be reviewed for accuracy and tone before public release.

5.4 Use AI to assist with translating content into multiple languages and generating plain-language summaries. Ensure translations are reviewed by fluent speakers or cultural partners when possible.

5.5 Maintain human oversight and ethical use of AI tools. Ensure that all AI-generated content is reviewed by a qualified staff member. Never use AI to impersonate individuals or create misleading content. Publicly acknowledge how AI is being used as a communications tool.

5.6 Support continuous learning amongst Communications staff about emerging AI tactics and will continue to add value and efficiency, and champion AI technology by offering training and guidance to other staff on how to use AI tools effectively and responsibly. Develop a quick-reference guide for common AI communication use cases and limitations.

6. Recruit co-op and summer student placements

Strengthen capacity and foster future talent by hiring postsecondary students from communications and related programs into summer student or co-op placements. With appropriate oversight, student offer a cost-effective way to expand resources and will learn by contributing to strategic and routine tasks (e.g., template development, content creation, and community engagement).

Action items:

6.1 Continue to share the Corporate Services Summer Student with Finance.

6.2 Explore opportunities for a year-round college or university co-op student.

7. Retain an agency of record for additional support

Enhance the Communications team’s agility, innovation and capacity by retaining an external communications or marketing agency of record. The agency will provide support for special projects, contribute specialized expertise, and introduce emerging strategies and creative approaches that complement internal capabilities.

Action items:

7.1 Establish a contract with a pre-qualified agency of record that outlines scope, availability, and response timelines.

8. Complete a social media audit

Enhance brand consistency and optimize digital engagement through streamlined social media account management.

Action items:

8.1 Conduct a comprehensive audit of all existing social media channels to identify active, inactive, and duplicate accounts. Assess the strategic value of each account based on audience engagement, alignment with corporate messaging, and contribution to business objectives. Consolidate or sunset accounts that do not meet performance or brand alignment criteria to reduce fragmentation and improve operational efficiency.

Pillar 2: Culture and capacity building

9. Build an internal communications culture

Foster a culture of proactive, transparent communication across the organization by embedding communications early in planning processes and prioritizing an “internal first” approach that informs and empowers staff, strengthens morale, and builds organizational credibility.

Action items:

- 9.1** Launch a staff-focused campaign that promotes the work of Communications, celebrates successes and recognizes employees who contribute to the communications culture.
- 9.2** Deliver “Lunch and Learn” in-person seminars or webinars to help educate employees on the communications and engagement landscape, process and complexity. Topics could include accessibility, plain language, writing for the web, etc.
- 9.3** Establish a Communications Working Group of 12 to 15 employees from across the organization that meets biannually to review priorities, explore new and emerging tools and trends, new channels and media, etc.
- 9.4** Send “Networks” weekly newsletter on Thursday mornings to maximize email open rates and provide time for engagement.
- 9.5** Include regular Communications updates and “Did You Know?” content in the staff “Networks” newsletter.
- 9.6** Share Communications updates at least monthly, or as needed, with Division Communications Liaisons.
- 9.7** Introduce this strategy to staff to ensure that staff are aware of new processes, procedures and the role of the Division Communications Liaison. Plan launch communication that reinforces support from senior leadership.
- 9.8** Support IT in the enhancement of the intranet to ensure that resources, tools and information can be easily accessed by staff.
- 9.9** Support staff and Council well-being by establishing social media boundaries and providing training.

10. Build a community communications culture

Promote a two-way communications culture by recognizing that while Norfolk County must provide timely, accurate, and accessible information, residents also play an active role in staying informed and engaged.

Action items:

10.1 Launch a “Stay Informed” campaign to raise awareness about how residents can access Council and County news, notices and updates, subscribe to email updates, get answers to their questions, and participate in engagement opportunities, etc.

10.2 Develop communication material to clarify the roles of different levels of government, reducing the time staff spend redirecting inquiries.

10.3 Humanize Norfolk’s online and social media presence through storytelling and visual content. Feature staff, residents and County-associated community events (via the special events process) to build connection and reduce institutional tone.

10.4 Expand Norfolk’s online events calendar to include special events (approved through Norfolk’s special event process), recreation, heritage and culture, waste management, etc.

10.5 Use online engagement Tools like polls and Q&As to encourage two-way dialogue. Schedule monthly interactive posts to gather feedback and spark conversation in the content calendar.

10.6 Add a link to the news and updates subscription tool in all staff’s email signature.

11. Launch a Community Ambassador Program (CAP)

To further build a community communications culture, launch a Community Ambassador Program to collaborate with trusted community members to counter misinformation on social media and in the community in a friendly, approachable way.

Goals include:

- Amplify accurate information
- Counter misinformation
- Foster respectful discourse and enhance trust
- Improve consistency of key messages
- Increase engagement
- Contribute to a more informed and aware community

Action items:

11.1 Develop a CAP Charter that outlines roles, responsibilities, expected time commitment, and code of conduct. Include guidance on how Ambassadors should respond to misinformation and communicate Norfolk County messaging.

11.2 Recruit local volunteers to serve as key communicators from different segments of the community to ensure representation from rural and urban areas, youth, older adults, newcomers, Indigenous communities, business owners, and service organizations. Membership can be appointed by Council or senior leadership, or community members can apply.

11.3 Host an annual CAP orientation session to maintain engagement, share information and hear feedback. The session will cover:

- Norfolk’s communications strategy
- Misinformation response tactics
- Accessibility and inclusive messaging
- Use of branded templates and visuals

Provide a digital toolkit with:

- Fact sheets
- FAQs
- Shareable graphics
- Sample responses to common questions

Outside of the annual orientation session, Communications staff will maintain regular contact with this group to ensure they are consistently and factually informed in a timely manner of decisions and issues within the City that should be communicated to the community. Encourage them to reach out for useful resources to help communicate with their contacts, e.g., fact sheets, flyers, FAQs, etc.

Provide a direct contact (e.g., Communications Officer) for CAP members to escalate concerns or request help responding to misinformation. Include guidance on when to disengage or refer residents to official channels.

11.4 Include a quarterly feedback form or short survey for CAP members to share what they’re hearing in the community. Use this input to inform messaging and identify emerging issues.

11.5 Launch a “CAP Spotlight” feature in newsletters or social media to highlight Ambassador contributions. Offer certificates, thank-you letters, or small tokens of appreciation annually. Include CAP metrics as part of Communication’s annual report to Council.

12. Continue with a centralized delivery model

Ensure consistency, efficiency and alignment in Norfolk's communications, marketing and engagement efforts by implementing a centralized delivery model led by the Communications team, supported by designated Division Communications Liaisons.

In some cases, the Division Communications Liaison may undertake more of the tactical communications work.

13. Use tools, templates and processes to increase efficiency

Increase the efficiency and consistency of the Communications team by introducing tools and processes that streamline content development, approval and maintenance.

Action items:

13.1 Define approval workflows for different types of content to reduce delays, ensure accountability and accuracy.

13.2 Introduce a Writing Style Guide to maintain tone, style, and accessibility across all platforms.

13.3 Establish Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for recurring tasks and workflows.

13.4 Use website tools to identify outdated, in-accessible or underperforming content and schedule regular reviews.

13.5 Improve departmental efficiency and consistency by developing user-friendly templates for standard and repeatable communications tasks and deliverables.

14. Balance traditional and digital tactics

Ensure inclusive, equitable, and effective communication by balancing digital and traditional tactics to meet the diverse needs and preferences of Norfolk County's residents.

Actions items:

14.1 Centralize email newsletters on a single platform and shift *Community Connections* to a bi-monthly schedule to ensure timely, relevant updates.

- 14.2** Leverage Division Communications Liaisons to source *Community Connections* content.
- 14.3** Review *Community Connections* performance metrics monthly to refine content and improve engagement.
- 14.4** Review each campaign to determine if paid advertising is necessary, starting with legislated requirements and followed by an evaluation of strategic value, reach and cost-effectiveness.
- 14.5** Continue using print, radio, and digital billboards strategically, ensuring all paid content is visually engaging and action oriented.
- 14.6** Design new variations of newspaper ads that are visual, with focused text and a clear call to action.
- 14.7** Move to an annual schedule of ads that feature timely content, typically one topic per ad, with a clear call to action (e.g., awareness, learn more, registration, etc.). Retire the full-page monthly advertisement.
- 14.8** Leverage the opportunity to get printed content in the hands of community members by refocusing and redesigning the Recreation Guide to include more comprehensive information beyond Recreation, repositioning it as a Recreation and Community Guide.
- 14.9** Position the Norfolk County website as the central hub for all communications and marketing content by consistently linking to content using short-links and QR codes.
- 14.10** Assign shared responsibility between Communications and Division Liaisons for regular website content reviews, with cycles ranging from monthly to annually depending on the content type. Embed this task into the annual department communications plan.
- 14.11** Use printed materials selectively to reach audiences with limited digital access or for content that benefits from long-term visibility. Materials such as postcards, pamphlets, and guides should be designed with clear messaging and QR codes linking to digital versions.
- 14.12** Centralize all print production to be managed by Communications to ensure quality, accessibility, cost efficiency, and environmental responsibility.
- 14.13** In alignment with provincial requirements, track paper use and incorporate sustainable printing practices, such as using recycled paper and minimizing unnecessary print runs.
- 14.14** Continue using the in-kind presence at the digital billboard at Highway 3 and 24 in Simcoe, as per the agreement established through Realty Services. Extend with additional contracts when needed.

Pillar 3: Audience engagement and inclusion

15. Expand social media content with human-centred, “living in Norfolk” and educational content

Expand Norfolk’s social media content beyond operational, time-sensitive content to include human-centred stories, engagement opportunities, service tips, community highlights and explainers on how government works, Council summaries.

Ensure communications are clear, engaging, and audience-appropriate by tailoring tone, format, and calls to action to match the platform, purpose and expectations of each message.

Action items:

15.1 Use a positive and confident tone in most communications to build trust, reinforce Council decisions, and foster a sense of community pride and optimism.

15.2 Establish and maintain a content that actively engages users by introducing storytelling elements that humanize Norfolk. Share stories that highlight the people behind municipal services, using real-life examples to make messages more relatable and impactful. This approach supports respectful civic engagement by demonstrating how services benefit residents and encouraging action. Ensure all storytelling content is planned and tracked within the overall content calendar.

15.3 Enhance social media content with visuals and interactive elements that capture attention and encourage participation. (Also see recommendation 18: Prioritize visual communication.)

15.4 Include clear calls to action in all communication that guide audiences on what to do next, such as attending an event, completing a form, or visiting a webpage for more information.

15.5 Position Norfolk County as a thought leader in municipal governance, community development, and public service innovation by leveraging LinkedIn to engage professionals, attract talent, and showcase Norfolk’s strategic priorities, culture, and achievements.

15.6 Develop targeted content for the LinkedIn audience that aligns with Norfolk’s strategic priorities. Collaborate with Economic Development to share business success stories, investment opportunities, and tourism highlights, tagging local partners to expand reach.

Content will include:

- Behind-the-scenes service highlights
- Community impact stories
- Digestible Council updates
- “Working at Norfolk” series to showcase workplace culture, career development, and employee testimonials, supporting recruitment and employer branding.

Enhance visual storytelling by sharing infographics, short videos and branded visuals that simplify complex information and increase engagement, with captions and alt text for accessibility. Plan and track LinkedIn content within the overall content calendar.

15.7 Review analytics monthly to monitor social media performance, optimize content, and report on growth, engagement and reach quarterly.

16. Strengthen in-person communication and engagement

Strengthen community engagement by boosting Norfolk County’s in-person presence at local events and public spaces, meeting residents where they are to foster trust, visibility and meaningful two-way communication. Read more about community engagement recommendations in the Community Engagement Framework introduced in July 2025.

Action items:

16.1 Participate in local, community events (festivals, and fairs) with a staffed booth or table that offers printed materials, QR codes linking to digital resources and opportunities for residents to ask questions and provide feedback.

17. Build and strengthen partnerships

Strengthen community reach, trust and impact by collaborating with like-minded organizations to share resources, align messaging and co-create engagement opportunities that reflect shared goals and serve diverse audiences.

Action items:

17.1 Establish and host a Community Communicators Working Group that meets annually to share best practices, explore joint initiatives and coordinate messaging on community-wide priorities.

17.2 Leverage partner networks such as libraries, schools, public health, and local charities to extend the reach of Norfolk County messaging through trusted, established channels.

17.3 Collaborate on co-branded campaigns and shared events that align with mutual goals, allowing for consistent messaging, resource sharing, broader engagement, and stronger community presence.

17.4 Develop a communications network for emergencies that includes key community partners to ensure rapid, coordinated outreach during critical events.

18. Prioritize visual communication

Enhance clarity, accessibility and engagement by prioritizing the use of visual communication such as images, infographics, and video to simplify complex information, increase retention, overcome language barriers, and reach diverse audiences.

Action items:

18.1 Incorporate visual elements, including icons, charts, infographics, and animations, into communications wherever possible to improve comprehension and recall, especially for audiences with language or literacy barriers.

18.2 Use storytelling through video to convey key messages in a concise, accessible format. Prioritize narration and on-screen text to support translation and accessibility.

18.3 Build internal capacity by training staff in visual content creation and providing tools or templates to support consistent, high-quality design.

18.4 Develop and maintain a photo library that includes high-quality, diverse and inclusive images of Norfolk County and its residents. Expanding on the success of initiatives like the community photo contest to source authentic local visuals.

19. Refresh Norfolk County's brand and visual identity

Modernize Norfolk's visual identity to reflect the community's unique attributed, growth, values and aspirations while preserving brand recognition, minimizing costs and resources, and ensuring consistency across all communications.

Action items:

19.1 Undertake a brand visual identity refresh that updates the logo, colour palette, typography and design elements to create a more modern, inclusive and consistent visual presence. Ensure the refreshed brand maintains familiarity by preserving key visual elements while expanding the “look and feel” to support a broader range of applications.

19.2 Explore creating a version of the Norfolk logo without the word “County” to simplify branding, reduce confusion about Norfolk’s government structure as a single-tier municipality, and align with the organic use of “Norfolk” within the community.

Lead a branding strategy exercise to identify the most distinctive, compelling and proud attributes and ‘personality’ traits of Norfolk County’s identity. Use this brand identity strategy to establish a consistent narrative about what makes Norfolk a great place to live, work and experience.

Use the brand refresh as a storytelling opportunity to reinforce Norfolk’s identity, values and future direction, answering the questions “Who are we?” and “Who do we want to be?”

19.3 Develop a “living” brand guidelines document that can be adapted as visual branding is updated. Include signage and wayfinding with the brand guidelines.

19.4 Replace physical items (e.g., signage) with the new branding in a phased way to avoid significant upfront costs.

19.5 Allocate a portion of the Communications budget for ongoing branding updates.

20. Enhance accessibility and inclusion

Ensure all Norfolk communication is accessible and inclusive, enabling every resident, regardless of ability, literacy level or cultural background, to understand, engage with, and benefit from messaging, news and services.

Action items:

20.1 Update Norfolk's *Clear Language Guidelines* to reflect current best practices in plain language and accessibility. Share and promote the updated guide with staff.

20.2 Ensure all website content follows recommendations in Norfolk's *Writing for the Web* guide, including using short sentences and paragraphs, active voice, and logical organization with clear headings, subheadings, bullet points, and lists. (Also see Pillar 1: Review and update policies and procedures.)

20.3 Follow universal design (UD) principles to provide content in multiple formats (e.g., screen-reader compatible PDFs, website content, audio version) to meet AODA compliance and provide a better user experience.

20.4 Investigate adding Google's language translation feature to norfolkcounty.ca.

20.5 Set up a Norfolk County WhatsApp Channel to send one-way communication to residents, in particular those who do not use social media. Followers can see updates but cannot reply, making it an effective tool for announcements, alerts, and service updates.

20.6 Partner with cultural organizations and community groups to co-create and distribute inclusive messaging that reflects the diversity of Norfolk's population. For example, creating content for Norfolk's Low German Mennonite community.

20.7 Conduct regular reviews of messaging to ensure cultural sensitivity, representation and relevance, including visual content and tone. Avoid emojis or slang that may not resonate culturally and share recommendations with staff.

20.8 Use inclusive imagery that allows residents to see themselves reflected in Norfolk communications.

20.9 Ensure that all documents posted on the Norfolk website are accessible and meet WCAG 2.0 AA guidelines. Update accessibility and web policies to ensure processes and guidelines are included.

Pillar 4: Issues management and trust building

21. Enhance issues management and response

To protect public trust and ensure timely, accurate communication, Norfolk will implement a proactive and coordinated issues management process. This includes forecasting, analyzing, and responding to emerging or ongoing issues—internal and external—before they escalate.

A key component is the ability to monitor and respond to misinformation, disinformation, and online incivility, ensuring residents receive clear, consistent, and trustworthy information.

Action items:

21.1 Add “Potential Issues” as a monthly standing item at Senior Leadership Team meetings, with Communications representation as required to identify emerging concerns and plan responses.

21.2 Subscribe to a media monitoring tool to proactively detect trends, issues, misinformation, disinformation, shifts in public sentiment, and inaccurate or misleading narratives about Norfolk's services, staff, decisions or events across traditional and digital platforms.

21.3 Maintain a cyclical issues list within the content calendar to anticipate and prepare for recurring or seasonal topics. Reflect topics on the content calendar to enable proactive content.

21.4 Establish a process for staff to flag emerging issues to Communications early. Develop an internal protocol for escalating and responding to misinformation or disinformation, including roles for Communications, ServiceNorfolk, and senior leadership.

21.5 Develop a standardized Issues Brief template to evaluate potential impact, including background, stakeholders, risks, opportunities, and recommended actions.

21.6 Define when, how and for what issues staff and Council will be notified before public messaging is released. For example, a facility closure, engagement opportunity or new process.

21.7 Implement social media moderation, escalation, and response protocols using the Red-Yellow-Green Light framework. This includes:

- Guidelines for hiding, deleting, or blocking users
- Response templates for misinformation and incivility
- Internal escalation steps for high-risk content

Clearly define and communicate the difference between misinformation (incorrect but unintentional) and disinformation (incorrect and intentional), ensuring staff understand implications and response strategies. Include in the Social Media Policy and on the Norfolk website.

Update Norfolk's Social Media Policy to reflect these processes. See Appendix B: Social media moderation, escalation steps and response protocols for the foundational elements of this protocol and process.

21.8 Develop a rapid response toolkit with templated messaging, FAQs, and visual assets to correct false information and reinforce accurate narratives across trusted channels.

21.9 Track recurring misinformation themes or sources (individuals, accounts, groups) to inform future messaging and pre-emptively address common misconceptions.

22. Strengthen media relations and messaging clarity

Norfolk County will strengthen its media relations practices and processes by ensuring that media releases, news, notices and alerts are used strategically, appropriately and in compliance with legislative requirements.

Action items:

22.1 Define all types of news and notices (including media releases), how they are shared, who approves, how long they must be posted for, if they need to be archived, etc.

22.2 Continue to post all Public Notices on the Norfolk website and social media.

22.3 Define and document legislated public notice requirements, as well as those required in a Norfolk County by-law or policy, that require additional distribution (e.g., printed newspaper advertisement). Include the required timelines.

22.4 Continue to build and maintain relationships with local media outlets to support timely, accurate reporting and ensure Norfolk's perspective is represented in public discourse.

23. Promote transparency through Council communications

To promote transparency and strengthen opportunities for public engagement, Norfolk will implement a clear and consistent process for communicating Council meeting information. This will ensure residents are informed about upcoming decisions, understand how to participate and share feedback, and can access summaries of Council activity.

At the discretion of Senior Leadership Team, a formal media release may be issued to support broader awareness of significant Council outcomes.

Action items:

23.1 Publish an “Agenda at a Glance” summary at least 48 hours before a Council-in-Committee, Public Hearing, and Council meeting. The summary will be posted on social media and as a “Council Update” on the website’s *News and Notices* area that is also sent to subscribers. The summary will highlight the most significant agenda items in bullet format, provide a link to the full agenda, include instructions on how to observe or participate in the meeting, including links to deputation information.

23.2 Within 24 hours of a Council-in-Committee, Public Hearing, and Council meeting, Communications will publish a “Meeting at a Glance” summary that outlines key decisions, discussions, and next steps, with links to the full agenda, time-stamped video links, and any relevant reports. The summary will be posted on social media and as a “Council Update” on the website’s *News and Notices* area that is also sent to subscribers.

24. Develop and share an *Annual Report to the Community*

Develop and publish an *Annual Report to the Community* as a key accountability, storytelling and engagement tool. The report will highlight progress on strategic priorities, celebrate community and staff achievements, and provide transparent performance data in an accessible, engaging format.

Action items:

24.1 Produce an *Annual Report to the Community* that provides updates on initiatives aligned with Norfolk’s Strategic Plan, reinforcing transparency and accountability. Include a dashboard of key performance indicators (KPIs) will be included to provide residents with a clear view of progress and service delivery outcomes.

The report will feature stories that celebrate staff contributions, community partnerships, and citizen-led successes to foster pride and connection. A directory of commonly used municipal services will be included to support resident access and awareness.

Present the report in multiple formats, including a microsite with a dashboard landing page, an interactive PDF, a limited print run, and a short video summary.

24.2 Repurpose content from the report throughout the year on social media and newsletters, to extend its reach and relevance.

24.3 Responsibility for the report will be shared between Communications, who will lead editorial planning, design, and project coordination, and individual departments, who will contribute content aligned with the editorial plan.

25. Refine risk and contingency planning

Norfolk’s Communications team plays a vital role in emergency preparedness and response by ensuring that timely, accurate and accessible information reaches the public, staff, Council and media. Through its role in the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), the team supports public safety, operational coordination and community resilience during crises.

Action items:

25.1 Document contingency plan for communications, including alternative communication methods such as radio announcements, printed notices, in-person updates at community hubs and partner distribution networks.

25.2 Create and maintain centralized hard copy/external memory drive contact list of media, community partners, and internal stakeholders to support offline communication.

25.3 Develop emergency messaging pre-approved templates using plain language principles to ensure clarity, consistency and accessibility.

25.4 Develop a social media Crisis Response Toolkit with templated messaging and visual assets. Prepare content in advance for high-risk issues and misinformation scenarios.

Roles and responsibilities

Effective implementation of this strategy requires clear roles and shared accountability across all levels of the organization. While the Communications team leads the development and execution of corporate communications, the success of this strategy depends on collaboration with senior leadership, departmental staff and external partners.

This section outlines the key responsibilities of individuals and teams who play a role in delivering consistent, accessible and engaging communications that reflect Norfolk's values and priorities.

Council

- Share approved messaging with constituents and stakeholders.
- Provide feedback on community communication needs and effectiveness.
- Help promote a community communications culture by encouraging residents to access key channels to stay informed.

Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)

- Acts as the executive sponsor of the strategy.
- Provides final approval on high-risk or politically sensitive communications.
- Ensures alignment between communications and Council priorities.
- Supports a culture of transparency and proactive communication across divisions.

General Managers/Senior Leadership Team

- Ensure departmental alignment with the communications strategy.
- Identify and escalate emerging issues to the Communications team.
- Support the development and implementation of Divisional Communications Plans.
- Encourage staff participation in internal communications initiatives.

Director of Communications

- Oversee the implementation of the communications strategy.
- Provide strategic direction and ensures consistency across all messaging.
- Lead media relations, issues management and crisis communications.
- Ensure compliance with accessibility and legislative requirements.
- Ensure team stays abreast of emerging practices

Manager, Accessibility and Customer Experience

- Advise on AODA compliance and best practices.
- Review key communications for accessibility.

- Collaborate with the Communications team on training and policy development.
- Support the implementation of Universal Design principles.
- Monitor and report on accessibility metrics (e.g., website compliance, alternate format requests).
- Champion inclusive practices across departments.

Supervisor, Communications

- Manage day-to-day operations of the Communications team.
- Assigns tasks, oversees timelines and ensures quality control.
- Coordinate with Division Communications Liaisons.
- Track performance metrics and prepares reports for leadership.

Supervisor, ServiceNorfolk

- Monitor and identify trends in public inquiries and shares insights with the Communications team to inform proactive messaging.
- Coordinate with Communications to ensure consistent, accurate responses to frequently asked questions and emerging issues.

Communications Officers

- Develop and execute content across platforms (web, social, print, etc.).
- Support departments in crafting clear, accessible and engaging messages.
- Monitor media and social media for misinformation or emerging issues.
- Assist with campaign planning, event promotion, and public notices.

Graphic Designer

- Design branded, accessible visuals for all platforms.
- Maintain visual consistency across all communications.
- Support storytelling through infographics, video graphics and templates.
- Maintain the photo and design asset library, including file saving platforms.

Departmental directors

- Appoint and support Division Communications Liaisons, ensuring they have the time and resources to fulfill their responsibilities.
- Review and approve Department Communications Plans, aligning them with corporate priorities and timelines.
- Identify emerging issues and escalate them to Communications for early intervention and coordinated response.
- Approve content to be shared with the public on social media, advertising, website, etc.

Division Communications Liaisons

- Serve as the point of contact between their department and Communications.
- Help identify content needs, emerging issues and opportunities for engagement.
- Contribute to the development of annual Department Communications Plans.
- Gather required content for campaigns or communications deliverables.
- Ensure departmental content aligns with County standards and timelines.

Community members

- Access Norfolk's communications through official channels (e.g., website, social media, newsletters in-person events).
- Provide feedback through surveys, public meetings and engagement platforms like Engage Norfolk.
- Share accurate information within others and actively identify misinformation.

Community partners

- Collaborate with Norfolk to distribute messaging that reflects their shared goals and priorities.
- Participate in the Community Communicators Working Group and emergency communications network.
- Provide feedback on communication effectiveness and help identify opportunities for improvement or joint initiatives.

Timeline and metrics

Key activities timeline

The following timeline does not include all action items but instead focuses on key activities that will enable others to be completed as a result.

| Phase | Timeline | Key activities |
|--|-----------------------------|--|
| Phase 1: Foundation and alignment | September 2025 – March 2026 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop content calendar • Establish Division Communications Liaison roles and connection points, as well as stronger connection with ServiceNorfolk • Set up regular analytics reviews for website • Launch internal communications culture campaign • Launch “Stay Informed” campaign • Launch “Agenda at a Glance” and “Meeting at a Glance” summaries for Council-in-Committee, Public Hearing, and Council meetings • Begin media monitoring • Review policies and develop schedule to complete revisions or drafts • Complete social media audit and present findings and recommendations • Establish online events calendar • Introduce Writing Style Guide and update Clear Language Guideline • Retire full page ad, introduce new print ad strategy • Define and launch social media • Develop and launch Red-Yellow-Green Light framework for social media |
| Phase 2: Tools, training and policy updates | April – September 2026 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch/continue training for Liaisons and staff • Review and refine Department Communications Plans |

| Phase | Timeline | Key activities |
|---|---------------------------|---|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin recruitment for Community Ambassador Program • Launch rapid response toolkit for misinformation • Begin planning 2026 Annual Report • Begin sending Community Connection eNewsletter bi-monthly • Introduce LinkedIn content • Establish Community Communicators Working Group • Develop and distribute new templates |
| Phase 3: Community engagement and partnerships | October 2026 – March 2027 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch WhatsApp Channel pilot • Launch 2026 Annual Report to the Community |
| Phase 4: Optimization and evaluation | April – August 2027 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate effectiveness of tactics and adjust Department Plans • Launch refreshed brand and visual identity |

Metrics

Measurement will ensure continuous improvement, accountability and strategic alignment. Findings will be used to adjust tactics.

Results will be shared as part of an annual Communications report presented to Council.

| Strategic objective | Metric | Targets | Review frequency |
|----------------------|---|--|-----------------------|
| Content calendar | Planned content published on schedule | Calendar developed by the end of 2025 to be implemented for 2026 | Reviewed annual |
| Community engagement | Participation rates for surveys, focus groups, etc. | Meet goals set and/or meet minimum engagement rate | After each engagement |

| Strategic objective | Metric | Targets | Review frequency |
|---------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------|
| | Engage Norfolk participation | | |
| Internal Communications Culture | Newsletter engagement (open rates) | Consistently achieve 60% open rates by month 12 | Monthly |
| Accessibility & Inclusion | Website AODA compliance | 100% compliance | Quarterly |
| Proactive Planning | % of departments with annual communications plans | 100% by Phase 2 | Biannually review plans |
| AI Integration | Awareness of staff about AI tools, policies, procedures | 75% awareness by Phase 3 | |
| Visual Communication | % of campaigns using video | 80% by Phase 4 | |
| Community Engagement Culture | “Stay Informed” campaign reach | +50% increase in subscriptions by Phase 4 | |

Appendix A: Overview of tactics

Choosing the right communication tactic ensures messages reach the intended audience, are noticed, and prompt action—without causing confusion or overload.

Below are some examples of typical communication objectives, the category or categories where they best fit and an effective tactical approach.

| Goal | News | Info | Action | Engagement | Effective mix of tactics |
|---|------|------|--------|------------|--|
| Announce a new policy, program, or decision | ✓ | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media release • Event • Website news post • Social media post • Newsletter article • Mail to interest holders |
| Share emergency or time-sensitive updates | ✓ | | ✓ | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media release • Social media • Website banner • Website news post • Local radio advertising |
| Provide background or details on a service or project | | ✓ | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • Pamphlet or guide • Newsletter article • Social media |
| Explain a process (e.g., permits) | | ✓ | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website page • Infographic or video • Pamphlet or guide • Social media |

| Goal | News | Info | Action | Engagement | Effective mix of tactics |
|---|------|------|--------|------------|--|
| Explain required behaviours (e.g., sidewalk clearing) | | ✓ | ✓ | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website page • Website news post • Infographic or video • Newsletter ad • Social media • Radio |
| Encourage residents to complete a survey or participate in a public meeting | | | ✓ | ✓ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage Norfolk • Newsletter • Newspaper ad • Media release • Social media • Partner engagement • Radio |
| Provide tips or advice to support community wellbeing | | ✓ | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media campaign • Newsletter • Website page |
| Promote a festival or community event | | ✓ | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media campaign • Radio • Newspaper ad • Flyers • Newsletter |

Appendix B: Social media moderation, escalation steps and response protocols

Social media is Norfolk County’s most frequently used communication channel, with Facebook leading in resident preference and Instagram showing rapid growth, particularly among younger audiences. As digital platforms evolve and public discourse becomes increasingly polarized, Norfolk must adopt a strategic, proactive, and human-centered approach to social media that fosters trust, combats misinformation, and supports respectful civic engagement.

Staff should follow the following **process** for threats, harassment, criticism, misinformation and disinformation. To clarify:

- **Misinformation** is false or incorrect information that’s shared by mistake. The person sharing it doesn’t mean to cause harm. For example, someone might accidentally post an article with the wrong due date.
- **Disinformation** is false information shared on purpose to trick or mislead people. For examples, someone may create a fake news story to confuse or try and influence others.

Red-Yellow-Green Light framework

Use a Red-Yellow-Green Light Framework to classify and respond to content:

| Category | Examples | Action |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Red Light | Threats, harassment, racist or sexist language, hate speech, doxxing, misinformation posing a public safety risk | Immediate action: hide or delete comment, document with screenshots, block user if repeated. Escalate to senior leadership and/or legal if necessary. |
| Yellow Light | Misinformation (non-safety), criticism of services or decisions, complex questions | Triage: draft response with facts and neutral tone, submit for approval. Consider hiding if tone escalates. |
| Green Light | General questions, positive feedback, service inquiries | Respond: Engage directly using approved tone and messaging. |

Escalation steps

Step 1: Identify and document

- Screenshot and save the comment or post.
- Note the platform, date/time, and user handle.
- Classify the content using the Red-Yellow-Green framework.

Step 2: Take immediate action (if Red Light)

- **Hide** the comment if it contains:
 - Hate, racist or sexist speech
 - Personal attacks
 - False safety information
 - Doxxing or privacy violations
 - Vulgar language or swearing
- **Delete** if the comment violates platform terms or County policy.
- **Block** the user if:
 - They post Red Light content.
 - They have been warned and continue to harass or threaten.
- **Report** to platform (e.g., Facebook, Instagram) if it violates community standards.

Step 3: Escalate internally

- Notify the Supervisor, Communications and Director of Communications.
- If the content involves threats or legal risk, escalate to the CAO and Corporate Security.
- For misinformation, coordinate with the Division Communications Liaison to prepare a factual response.

Step 4: Respond (if Yellow or Green Light)

- Use templated responses where possible.
- Redirect to official sources (e.g., website, Council agenda).
- Offer to continue the conversation offline if tone escalates.

When to block a user

Blocking should be a last resort and used when:

- A user repeatedly posts Red Light content despite warnings.
- A user engages in targeted harassment of staff or Council.
- A user shares personal information or incites violence.

Before blocking:

- Document all interactions.
- Issue a warning via direct message or public comment (e.g., “This comment violates our community guidelines. Continued violations may result in removal.”).

Guidelines for hiding vs. deleting comments

| Hide | Delete |
|---|---|
| Use when you want to de-escalate without alerting the user. | Use when content is clearly harmful, illegal, or violates platform rules. |
| Keeps the comment visible to the poster but not to others. | Removes the comment entirely. |
| Useful for repetitive misinformation or baiting. | Use for hate speech, threats, or doxxing. |

Sample response templates

Use templated responses and visual assets to correct misinformation quickly and consistently.

- **Correction (Yellow light):**
“Thanks for your comment. To clarify, [insert factual correction]. You can find more information here: [link].”
- **Unrelated but civil comment (Green light)** *Example: A resident posts a question about garbage pickup on a post about a community event.*
“Thanks for reaching out! This post is about [event/topic], but we’re happy to help. For questions about garbage pickup, please visit [link] or contact ServiceNorfolk at [email/phone].”
- **Unrelated and uncivil comment (Yellow or Red light)** *Example: A resident uses a post about a recreation program to vent angrily about taxes or Council decisions.*
“We understand that residents have concerns, and we’re committed to respectful dialogue. This post is about [topic], and we ask that comments stay on-topic. For feedback about [issue], please contact [email] or use our official feedback channels at [link]. Continued off-topic or inappropriate comments may be removed in accordance with our community guidelines.”

- **Redirect (Escalating tone):**
“We understand this is a concern. If you’d like to discuss further, please contact us directly at [email].”
- **Closure (Circular or bad-faith comments):**
“We’ve provided a full response and consider this matter closed.”
- **Warning (Before blocking):**
“This comment violates our community guidelines. Continued violations may result in removal or blocking.”

DRAFT

Appendix C: Research

Public survey responses (930)

Topics of Interest

The survey revealed that residents are most interested in the following topics:

- Community events
- Emergency services (fire/paramedic)
- Recreation programs
- Roads (maintenance and snow removal)
- Service disruptions or closures News Sources

Residents access Norfolk County news and information through various sources:

- Website (norfolkcounty.ca)
- Social media (Facebook, Instagram, X)
- Newspaper articles (printed or digital)
- Email newsletters
- Radio

Preferred feedback methods

When providing feedback on Norfolk County topics, residents prefer:

- Surveys
- Email
- In-person at open houses or info sessions
- Social media
- Engage Norfolk platform (engagenorfolk.ca)

Communication effectiveness

Residents rated the effectiveness of Norfolk County's communication on a scale of 1 to 10. The average score was around 6.5, indicating room for improvement.

Demographics

- **Age:** The majority of respondents were aged 55-64 and 65+.
- **Community:** Most respondents were from Ward 5 (Town of Simcoe) and Ward 6 (Port Dover and Renton).
- **Residency duration:** Many respondents were lifelong residents or had lived in Norfolk County for more than 20 years.

Key findings and recommendations

Enhance Digital Communication:

- **Website Updates:** Regularly update the Norfolk County website to ensure timely and accurate information.
- **Social Media Engagement:** Increase engagement on social media platforms to reach a broader audience, especially younger residents.

Improve Feedback Mechanisms:

- **Surveys and Open Houses:** Continue using surveys and open houses for feedback but also explore new methods like virtual town halls.
- **Engage Norfolk Platform:** Promote the Engage Norfolk platform more widely to encourage participation.

Targeted Communication:

- **Demographic-Specific Strategies:** Develop communication strategies tailored to different age groups and communities. For example, use social media for younger residents and printed materials for older residents.

Transparency and Timeliness:

- **Advance Notice:** Provide advance notice for important meetings and decisions to allow residents ample time to respond.
- **Clear and Concise Information:** Ensure that all communications are clear, concise, and free of jargon to make them accessible to all residents.

Community Partnerships:

- **Local Organizations:** Partner with local organizations, libraries, and community centers to disseminate information more effectively.
- **Interactive Platforms:** Use interactive platforms for public consultations and feedback to make the process more engaging.

These recommendations aim to improve the overall quality of communications within Norfolk County, ensuring that information is disseminated effectively and that residents are more engaged and informed.

Norfolk County Focus Groups (6)

General Effectiveness

- **Improvement noted:** Participants acknowledged that communication from Norfolk County has improved over time, particularly with the efforts of the communications team.
- **Delayed information:** There were concerns about the timing of information release, with some participants noting that press releases often come out too late or at inconvenient times.
- **Over-reliance on social media:** Many felt that the county relies too heavily on Facebook and other social media platforms, which may not reach all demographics effectively.

Accessibility and Usability

- **Website navigation:** The county's website was frequently mentioned as difficult to navigate, with outdated information and a lack of clear, concise content.
- **Print media:** There was strong support for traditional print media, especially in areas with older demographics. Local newspapers like the Port Dover Maple Leaf were highlighted as effective channels.
- **Email newsletters:** Mixed feedback on email newsletters, with some finding them useful and others feeling overwhelmed by the volume of emails.

Internal Coordination

- **Cumbersome Processes:** Internal communication within the county was described as cumbersome, with a lack of coordination between departments.
- **Responsiveness:** Participants noted that responses to inquiries are often slow, and there is a need for better follow-up and acknowledgment of received requests.

Engagement Strategies

- **Town Halls and Public Meetings:** Traditional methods like town halls and public meetings were seen as ineffective, with low attendance.
- **Online Platforms:** Tools like "Let's Talk Brantford" were mentioned as successful models for engaging the community online.

Recommendations

Enhance Website Usability:

- Redesign the website to improve navigation and ensure information is up to date.
- Implement a central news aggregator on the homepage for easy access to recent updates.

Diversity Communication Channels:

- Continue using social media but balance it with traditional media like local newspapers and radio.
- Develop a robust email newsletter strategy with options for residents to customize their subscriptions based on interests.

Improve Internal Coordination:

- Establish clear communication protocols within the county to ensure timely and accurate information sharing.
- Implement a centralized communications team to manage and streamline messaging across all departments.

Increase Responsiveness:

- Introduce auto-responses to acknowledge receipt of inquiries and set expectations for follow-up.
- Set performance standards for response times to ensure timely communication.

Strengthen Engagement Efforts:

- Explore the creation of an online engagement platform similar to "Let's Talk Brantford" to facilitate ongoing dialogue with the community.

Leverage Partnerships:

- Collaborate with local businesses, schools, and community organizations to disseminate information and gather feedback.
- Utilize existing networks and trusted relationships to reach diverse demographics, including new Canadians and seniors.

Norfolk staff and community leader individual and group interviews (35)

Strengths and accomplishments

Public Awareness and Engagement Efforts:

- Creative use of media (e.g., staff videos, fun posts) to engage the public.
- Strong brand identity, despite dissatisfaction with specific elements like color schemes.
- Libraries and divisions departments (e.g., Recreation, Fire) have leveraged social media effectively to engage their audiences.

Commitment and Enthusiasm:

- Many staff members and departments, despite limited resources all around, demonstrate significant enthusiasm and dedication to communication efforts.
- Staff autonomy and creativity in filling gaps where communication supports are limited.

Recognition of Communication Tools:

- Social media, e-newsletters, and media releases noted as effective tools for public outreach.
- Collaborative efforts with County communications are valued when executed well.

Challenges

Understaffing and Capacity Issues:

- Repeated concerns about understaffing in the communications department, limiting their ability to support all needs effectively.
- Lack of sufficiently dedicated communication for departments like Paramedic Services and Recreation.
- Gaps in proactive communication due to limited capacity and resources. Lack of workflow clarity and coordination with other teams.
- Prioritize support based on strategic goals, ensuring that time-intensive departments like Recreation are not overloading resources at the expense of others.

Reactive vs. Proactive Communication:

- Divisions often feel comms is reacting to issues rather than proactively planning communication strategies.

- Missed opportunities for proactive messaging (e.g., election communication, paramedic services campaigns).

Internal Communication Gaps:

- Inconsistent or unclear communication among divisions.
- Lack of regular updates or strategic communication, particularly during organizational changes or policy implementations.

Public Communication Challenges:

- Struggles to reach certain demographics effectively (e.g., seniors, Mennonites, families).
- Faces connectivity issues and a significant non-digital population.
- Strong support in addressing messaging that is too formal or intimidating; continued need for more accessible and plain language content.
- The *EngageNorfolk* platform is useful but has limited uptake, fatigue? And many rely on paper communication over digital.

Confusion about roles and responsibilities:

- Uncertainty about the role of corporate communications versus division-specific communication responsibilities.
- More synergy between ServiceNorfolk and Communications teams.

Outdated Systems and Tools:

- Issues with outdated or underutilized tools like the website, software for community engagement and digital signage.
- Need for better integration and training on digital tools for both staff and public-facing communication.

Opportunities for improvement

Increased Collaboration and Training:

- Calls for regular check-ins, shared calendars (?), and strategic planning sessions to improve coordination between departments and communications.
- Aligning annual departmental work plans with communication efforts is crucial to avoid last-minute crises and ensure smoother operations.
- Greater focus on staff training to enhance digital literacy and communication capabilities.
- Clear expectations for customer service, coordinated communication efforts, and streamlined processes for internal collaboration.
- Regular performance appraisals should identify skill gaps and outline training opportunities to build capacity; training to ensure that cross-functional team members can backfill key roles without sacrificing quality.

Enhanced Use of Media and Tools:

- Desire for more targeted use of videos, print materials, print ads and radio ads to supplement digital outreach.
- Opportunities to highlight individual departments' work (e.g., highlighting Fire, HR, or Paramedic Services' contributions).

Public Education and Transparency:

- More consistent campaigns to educate the public about County services and governance.
- Simplifying complex topics for broader accessibility (e.g., Council activities, service offerings).
- Increase transparency with tools like dashboards and live updates. Expand public education through more events and community outreach.

Expanding Communication Capacity:

- Exploring opportunities to dedicate more staff or resources to communications, including department-specific roles where needed.
- Consideration of new roles, such as coordinators for Recreation or Paramedic Services.
- Council alignment with communications to improve public engagement; provide strategic messaging support for council projects.
- Requiring Rec managers to approve and consolidate edits before submission to designers or Communications.

Recurring Comments:

- Communication staff are overburdened and unable to meet all needs consistently.
- Divisions appreciate collaboration but want clearer expectations and more frequent engagement.
- Tools like newsletters and videos are effective but underutilized.
- Public engagement relies heavily on staff enthusiasm and improvisation rather than structured support.
- Advocates for early communication on projects, leveraging visual storytelling (e.g., videos on stormwater ponds).
- Develop a communications evaluation matrix to assess effectiveness of PR, social media, and publications, and audience engagement and brand alignment.

Group Interviews themes and recommendations

Key Themes

Centralized vs. Decentralized Communication:

- Preference for Centralization: Many participants expressed a preference for a centralized communication model, believing it would be more beneficial and strategic.

Resource Limitations:

- Insufficient Staffing: The communication team is understaffed, making it difficult to meet the demands of both internal and external communications.

Internal vs. External Communication:

- **Internal Communication:** There are gaps in internal communication, with inconsistent information flow and a lack of clear policies and templates.
- **External Communication:** External communication has improved with the use of social media, but there are still challenges in reaching all demographics effectively.

Engagement and Feedback:

- **Engagement Strategies:** There is a need for better engagement strategies to encourage more residents to participate and provide feedback.
- **Addressing Apathy:** Overcoming public apathy and encouraging broader participation in communication efforts is a significant challenge.

Communication Tools and Channels:

- **Effective Tools:** Social media, community centers, and partnerships with local organizations are seen as effective tools.
- **Ineffective Tools:** Traditional methods like newspapers and flyers are resource-intensive and less effective in reaching younger audiences.

Recommendations

Enhance Centralization:

- **Define Roles Clearly:** Clearly define the roles and responsibilities between corporate and divisional communications to avoid overlap and confusion.
- **Increase Resources:** Allocate more resources to the communication team to support a fully centralized model.

Improve Internal Communication:

- **Develop Clear Policies:** Create and disseminate clear communication policies and templates to ensure consistency.
- **Regular Updates:** Provide regular updates and ensure that all staff receive the same information in a timely manner.

Strengthen External Communication:

- **Utilize Multiple Channels:** Continue to use social media and explore new digital platforms to reach a broader audience.
- **Community Partnerships:** Foster partnerships with local organizations to disseminate information more effectively.

Engagement and Feedback Mechanisms:

- **Engagement Strategy:** Develop a comprehensive engagement strategy to encourage more residents to participate and provide feedback.
- **Address Apathy:** Implement initiatives to address public apathy and encourage broader participation in communication efforts.

Leverage Technology:

- **Digital Tools:** Utilize digital tools like email subscriptions, text message alerts, and online platforms to keep residents informed.
- **Interactive Platforms:** Consider using interactive platforms for public consultations and feedback to make the process more engaging.

Best Practices Interviews (4) and department structure research

Key Learnings and best practices in municipal communications

Department Structure and Integration

- **Centralized Communication Models** are preferred to ensure consistent messaging and avoid departmental silos.
- **Integrated Teams** that combine communications, engagement, and customer service (e.g., Brantford, Simcoe County) enhance responsiveness and information flow.
- **Direct Reporting to CAO or Executive Leadership** ensures early awareness of issues and strategic alignment.
- **Flexible Work Models** (e.g., remote work, hot-desking) have improved productivity, staff satisfaction, and recruitment reach.

Strategic Planning and Prioritization

- **Council Priorities and Strategic Plans** guide communication focus areas.
- **Annual and Biweekly Planning Cycles** help balance long-term strategy with day-to-day responsiveness.
- **Submission Briefs and Activity Reports** are used to manage workload and track progress.

Engagement and Outreach

- **Multi-Channel Engagement** is essential: online platforms (e.g., “Let’s Talk Brantford”), telephone surveys (RDD), and in-person outreach at festivals and events.
- **Random Sampling** through partnerships with universities ensures more representative community feedback.
- **Use of Citizen Committees and Local Partnerships** (e.g., neighborhood associations, sports teams) extends reach and credibility.

Technology and Tools

- **AI Use** is limited to drafting and outlining; final content is human reviewed to maintain tone and quality.
- **CRM Systems** are being introduced to integrate customer service data with communication planning.
- **Social Media Management Tools** like Sprout are widely used for scheduling and monitoring.
- **Digital and Video Tools** (e.g., drones, editing suites) are increasingly used for storytelling and engagement.

Internal Communication

- **Intranets and Newsletters** (e.g., CityNet, HR Matters) support internal messaging and staff engagement.

- **Internal Committees** often include communications staff to ensure alignment and support.
- **Recognition and Culture Initiatives** (e.g., Fun at Work committees) are supported by communications teams.

Addressing Rural and Accessibility Challenges

- **Print Media** remains vital, especially in rural areas or for older demographics.
- **Direct Mail via Utility Bills** and **quarterly newsletters** are effective for reaching non-digital audiences.
- **Algorithm Awareness:** Municipalities are working to ensure local news is prioritized in digital feeds.

Collaboration and Resource Sharing

- **Inter-Municipal Collaboration** (e.g., WOWC) includes shared newsletters, templates, and portals.
- **Quarterly Networking and Best Practice Sharing** among municipalities fosters innovation and consistency.
- **Avoiding “Rogue” Communications:** Ongoing education and relationship-building with internal departments are necessary to maintain brand integrity.

Recommendations for Norfolk County

Based on these insights, Norfolk County could consider:

- **Centralized communications and engagement team** with CRM integration.
- **Maintain a branded engagement platform** complemented by random sampling methods.
- **Expanding proactive outreach** through community events and partnerships.
- **Balancing digital and print media** to ensure inclusiveness.
- **Investing in internal communication tools** and staff engagement strategies.
- **Participating in inter-municipal collaboration** for shared resources and learning.

Municipal Best Practice Research

Transparent and Timely Communication

- **Transparency:** Sharing information about decisions, policies, services, and budget allocations foster trust. This includes regular updates on regulatory changes, upcoming projects, and community events.
- **Timeliness:** Providing timely information during crises or unforeseen events ensures citizens are well-informed and can act accordingly.

Multi-Channel Engagement

- **Traditional media:** Engaging with citizens using traditional tools such as advertising, printed materials and posters help reach people who are less digitally engaged.

- **Social media:** Utilizing platforms like Facebook, Instagram and YouTube to share updates and engage with citizens.
- **Public meetings:** Hosting regular town hall meetings and forums to encourage dialogue and feedback.
- **Mobile apps:** Developing apps for easy access to information, bill payments, and virtual meetings.

Collaboration with Local Organizations

- **Partnerships:** Collaborating with community organizations such as school boards, health departments, charities, libraries, and utility companies help reach audiences, provide cohesive messaging and comprehensive information.

Personalized Messaging

- **Relevance:** Tailoring messages to specific audiences to ensure they are relevant and impactful.
- **Language Accessibility:** Providing information in multiple languages to cater to diverse communities.
- **Cultural Groups:** Connecting with community members through cultural organizations helps build trust and ensures relevant messaging.

Feedback Loops

- **Surveys and Polls:** Conducting regular surveys to gather citizen feedback and gauge public opinion.
- **Interactive Platforms:** Creating online portals where citizens can submit questions, concerns, and suggestions.
- **Participatory Process:** Events and processes such as participatory budgeting exercises, master planning and issues management help citizens better understand and guide political decisions.

Recognition and Celebration

- **Achievements:** Recognizing and celebrating community achievements and milestones to foster a sense of pride and belonging.
- **Brand Identity:** Creating and promoting a consistent and distinctive brand identity helps build community pride, participation, and promotion.

Training and Empowerment

- **Staff Training:** Empowering city staff with the necessary skills and tools to effectively communicate and engage with citizens improves internal cultures and outcomes.

Examples of international campaigns

Examples of innovative campaigns and strategies that municipal governments have deployed:

Participatory Budgeting: Porto Alegre, Brazil

- **Strategy:** Porto Alegre pioneered participatory budgeting, allowing citizens to directly decide how a portion of the municipal budget is spent. Residents attend meetings and vote on proposed projects.
- **Outcome:** Increased citizen engagement and empowerment, with more equitable distribution of resources and improved community trust.

Urban Innovation Units: Boston, USA

- **Strategy:** The Boston Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics (MONUM) is an urban innovation unit that experiments with new processes, services, and policies. They involve residents in problem-solving, such as crowdsourcing ideas for pothole repairs, and leverage storytelling to inform and engage citizens in the exercises.
- **Outcome:** Enhanced problem-solving and community involvement, leading to more effective and responsive city services.

Civic Imagination Office: Bologna, Italy

- **Strategy:** Bologna's Office of Civic Imagination engages citizens in co-creating urban policies and projects. They host workshops and events where residents are in charge and can share their ideas and visions for the city.
- **Outcome:** Increased creativity and innovation in urban planning, with projects that better reflect community needs and aspirations.

Data-Smart City Solutions: Chicago, USA

- **Strategy:** Chicago uses data analytics to improve city services and address urban challenges. They analyze data from various sources to guide communications priorities and messaging, optimize traffic flow, reduce crime, and enhance public health.
- **Outcome:** More efficient and effective city services, with data-driven decision-making leading to improved access to information for residents.

Community-Led Environmental Initiatives: Freiburg, Germany

- **Strategy:** Freiburg engages citizens in environmental initiatives, such as community solar projects and urban gardening. Residents can participate in workshops and volunteer programs to contribute to sustainability efforts.
- **Outcome:** Increased environmental awareness and action, and increased citizen engagement in municipal activities, with community-driven projects leading to a greener and more sustainable city.

Creative Bureaucracy: Amsterdam, Netherlands

- **Strategy:** Amsterdam's Creative Bureaucracy initiative encourages city employees to think outside the box and experiment with new ideas. They host innovation labs and hackathons to foster creativity and collaboration, crowdsource to strengthen ideas and engage community.

- **Outcome:** More innovative and effective solutions to urban challenges, with a culture of experimentation and learning within the municipal government.

Interviews with leaders from comparable municipalities (4)

Summary and Recommendations

Interviews with communication leaders/managers at comparable municipalities were conducted:

1. **Allan Greenwood**, Director, Public Affairs; Simcoe County
2. **Kate Burns Gallagher**, Executive Director, Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus
3. **Suzie Keczan**, Director of Communications and Public Relations; County of Brant
4. **Maria Visocchi**, Director, Communications, Community Engagement and Customer Service at The City of Brantford

Interviews were based upon the following lines of question:

- What is your department's structure? (reporting to staff #) – PRESENT AT SLT/DLT?
- What are your department's responsibilities (website, social, Council)?
- How do you determine your communication priorities?
- Where do you focus your greatest resources/energy and why?
- Are there strategies/tactics you've put in place that have yielded impressive results?
- Is there a particular area or issue that your team struggles with?
- How are internal communications handled (especially with off-site staff)?
- Probe social posting guides (merging?) / Media release frequency / accessibility

Key Learnings:

- Created a formal Engagement Framework: Tactical adjustments made based on trends and performance observations.
- Diverse outreach methods: A mix of traditional (town halls, surveys) and modern (social media, online platforms) methods are employed, supplemented by direct, in-person outreach post-COVID.
- Limitations of digital-only engagement: Digital platforms are voluntary, often reaching a non-representative audience.
- Lack of inclusivity due to access and time constraints
- Proactive community presence: Attending local events and festivals for on-the-spot research to engage a broader audience.
- Centralization of communication: All communication efforts are centralized, avoiding departmental silos, ensuring consistent messaging.
- Appropriate communications resourcing: Increasingly diverse and complex skillsets, continuous learning due to rapid change, and increasing demands on communications

staff due to the breadth of channels used, and expectations from Council, citizens and departments.

- Integration of customer service and communications: Combining teams under a single leadership has improved speed and synergy.
- Flexibility and remote work success: Transition to remote work has increased productivity, staff satisfaction, and expanded recruitment reach.
- Leveraging community and academic relationships: Partnerships with local universities, citizen committees, and neighborhood associations enhance campaign reach and accuracy.
- Collaborative engagement: Using targeted campaigns (e.g., sports center proposal) to involve stakeholders like sports groups and developers, leading to informed council decisions.
- AI and CRM Integration: AI is cautiously used as an outline tool for communication but not for final outputs.
- The planned introduction of CRM systems will enhance customer service and provide data-driven insights for communications.
- Social media and website management: Teams handle extensive platforms with tools like Sprout for social media and GHD for web content.
- Stakeholder management: Proving expertise to colleagues and addressing “rogue” communications by departments is a recurring challenge.
- Negative feedback on social: Managing negativity while balancing transparency and engagement.
- Inclusivity: reaching non-digital populations and addressing rural connectivity gaps
- Proactive issue framing: Utilizing partnerships and early indications of issues to get ahead of potential crises.
- Event-based engagement: Success in outreach and data collection at festivals and public events
- Citizen committee utilization: Scripts and frameworks for committees to maintain consistent messaging.
- Enhanced collaboration: Strengthening inter-municipal communications (e.g., with WOWC) and sharing resources like templates and portals.
- Technology investment: Expanding video and digital communication capabilities with new tools like drones and editing suites.

Summary of feedback

Engagement and Outreach

- **Engagement Platforms:** Effective use of online engagement platforms like "Let's Talk Brantford" to facilitate community engagement. However, online engagement alone is insufficient as it tends to attract the same respondents repeatedly.
- **Random Sampling:** To ensure a representative sample, some municipalities use random digit dialing (RDD) for telephone surveys, often in collaboration with local universities.

- **Proactive Outreach:** Post-COVID, there is a focus on attending festivals and community events to conduct on-the-spot research and engage with a broader audience.

Department Structure and Centralization

- **Integrated Teams:** Combining communications, engagement, and customer service teams enhances synergy and information sharing. This structure allows for more efficient and effective communication.
- **Centralized Communications:** All communications are managed through a central department to maintain consistency and avoid decentralization. This approach ensures that messaging is cohesive and professionally handled.

Use of Technology and AI

- **AI Utilization:** AI is used cautiously, primarily for initial drafts and outlines, but final content is reviewed and refined by human communicators to maintain quality and avoid generic outputs.
- **CRM Systems:** Implementing CRM systems helps collect feedback and manage customer service effectively. CRM data is used to inform communications strategies and ensure real-time access to information.

Resource Allocation and Prioritization

- **Balancing Tactics and Strategy:** Teams rely on each other and manage time effectively, balancing day-to-day tasks with strategic initiatives. Regular reviews and adjustments of communication priorities are based on strategic plans and emerging issues.
- **Print Media:** Despite the rise of digital channels, print media remains an important tool, especially for reaching demographics that prefer traditional methods.

Internal Coordination and Responsiveness

- **Internal Communication:** Clear communication protocols within the organization ensure timely and accurate information sharing. Regular meetings and activity reports keep all teams aligned and informed.
- **Responsiveness:** Auto-responses and performance standards for response times help ensure timely communication and build trust with the community.

Addressing Rural Communication Challenges

- **Overcoming Digital Access Limitations:** Strategies to address limited digital access in rural areas include direct mail through water bills and regular newsletters. Ensuring algorithms prioritize county news helps reduce disengagement.

Collaborative Communications

- **Inter-Municipal Collaboration:** Sharing resources and information with neighboring municipalities helps address regional concerns. Monthly newsletters and direct emails keep all stakeholders informed and engaged.

Recommendations

Develop a Comprehensive Engagement Platform:

- Create a platform like "Let's Talk Brantford" to facilitate online engagement.
- Complement online engagement with random sampling methods like telephone surveys to ensure a representative sample.

Enhance Proactive Outreach:

- Attend local festivals and community events to conduct on-the-spot research and engage with a broader audience.
- Utilize community partnerships, such as neighborhood associations and local sports teams, to disseminate information and gather feedback.

Centralize Communications:

- Integrate communications, engagement, and customer service teams to enhance synergy and information sharing.
- Ensure all communications go through a central department to maintain consistency and avoid decentralization.

Utilize AI Cautiously:

- Use AI for initial drafts and outlines but ensure final content is reviewed and refined by human communicators to maintain quality and avoid generic outputs.

Leverage CRM Systems:

- Implement a CRM system to collect feedback and manage customer service effectively.
- Use CRM data to inform communications strategies and ensure real-time access to information.

Balance Tactics and Strategy:

- Allow teams to rely on each other and manage time effectively, balancing day-to-day tasks with strategic initiatives.
- Regularly review and adjust communication priorities based on strategic plans and emerging issues.

Expand Print Media Use:

- Continue using print media extensively to reach demographics that prefer traditional methods.
- Ensure print media is complemented by digital channels to cover all bases.

Improve Internal Coordination:

- Establish clear communication protocols within the county to ensure timely and accurate information sharing.

- Implement regular meetings and activity reports to keep all teams aligned and informed.

Address Rural Communication Challenges:

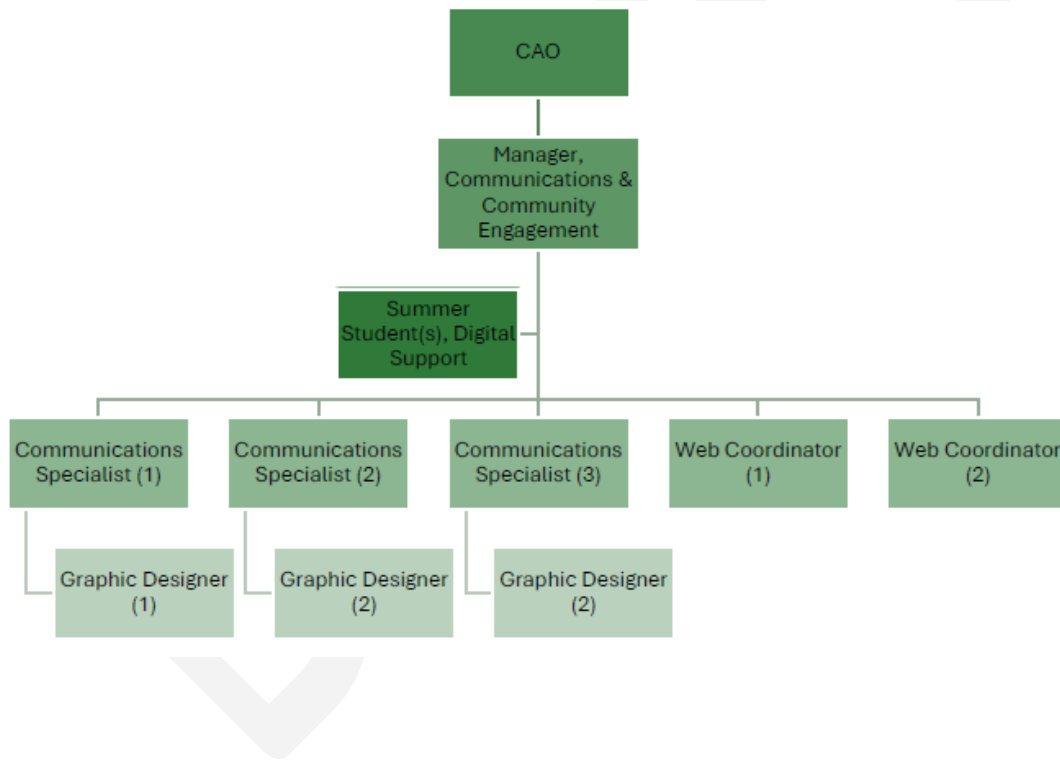
- Develop strategies to overcome digital access limitations in rural areas, such as direct mail through water bills and regular newsletters.
- Ensure algorithms prioritize county news to reduce disengagement.

Collaborate Across Municipalities:

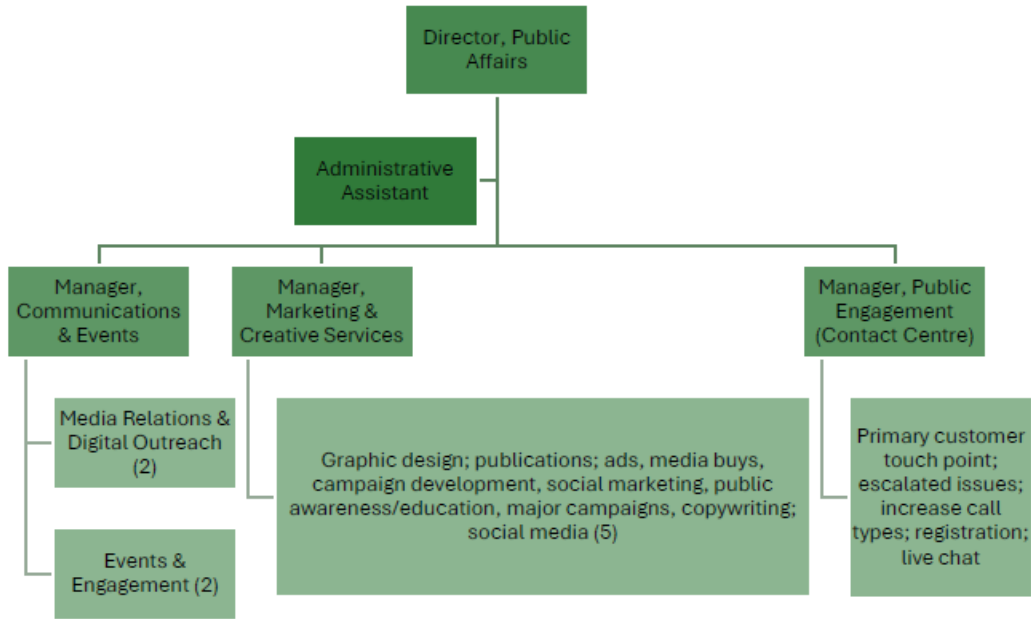
- Share resources and information with neighboring municipalities to address regional concerns.
- Use monthly newsletters and direct emails to keep all stakeholders informed and engaged.

Structures

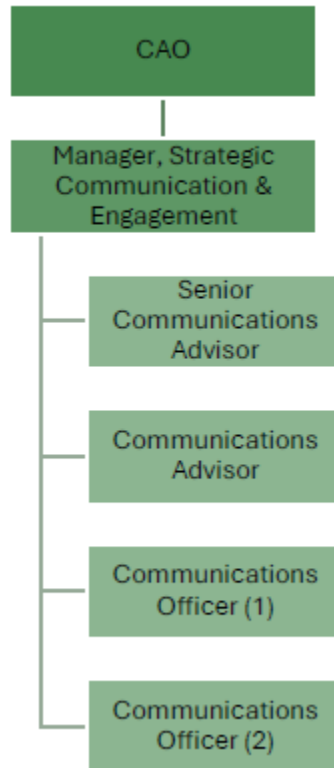
Brantford



Simcoe County



Oxford County



County of Brant

