

**JEFFERSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

AGENDA REQUEST

TO: Board of County Commissioners
Mark McCauley, County Administrator

FROM: Wendy Davis, Communications Specialist

DATE: March 27, 2023

SUBJECT: County Communications Strategy and Planning Workshop

STATEMENT OF ISSUE:

Jefferson County hired Wendy Davis as a Communications Specialist in 2023 to create and implement a Public Communications Plan and Social Media Plan, manage the County's social media accounts, as well as other duties to inform the public of County events and information.

ANALYSIS:

The County's Communication Specialist will meet with the Board to review her ideas for a Public Communications Plan and Social Media Plan. Some of the items she will be discussing will be regarding rapid/nimble communication, Key Performance Indicators (KPI), press releases, and frequency of reporting.

FISCAL IMPACT:

To be determined.

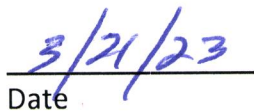
RECOMMENDATION:

Participate in discussion and give staff direction, if needed.

REVIEWED BY:



Mark McCauley, County Administrator



Date

2023 Strategic Communication Plan Proposal

1. Purpose

- a. The primary purpose of this strategic communications plan is to promote effective communication between and among the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners, the residents of Jefferson County, and the departments and staff of Jefferson County Government.
- b. Public access to government and freely shared information are cornerstones of the democratic process. Accordingly, this Plan is intended to simplify access to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) and to the workings of Jefferson County Government. This Plan establishes: guidelines, policies, and vehicles for accomplishing the Board's goals for effective communication; and best practices for organizing and executing communication efforts throughout Jefferson County Government.

2. Mission

- a. The mission of the Communication Division is to provide timely, accurate, coordinated information in ways the public wants to receive it.

3. Objectives

- a. To establish the communications role of the Communications Specialist
- b. Develop a reputation as a 'media friendly' County of accessible experts.
- c. Ensure information being disseminated is consistent and timely, spoken with 'one voice.'
- d. Increase opportunities for community members to interact with County government

4. Guiding Principles

- a. Disseminate information to the public (and other audiences) in a manner that is clear, concise, transparent, helpful, timely, proactive, and consistently professional
- b. Implement and promote opportunities and mechanisms to obtain regular feedback from targeted audiences, especially Jefferson County residents
- c. Utilize a variety of targeted communication methods and strategies so as to be effective and appropriate for the specific situation
- d. Provide a unified, coherent voice for Jefferson County Government, especially as a source of information during crisis or emergency situations.

5. Where do we need work?

- a. Define the current roles and responsibilities of the Communications division.
- b. Need clearly defined communications objectives for Jefferson County as an entity.
- c. Increase use of existing social media platforms and determine what others to add.
- d. The roles of the communication division are being defined and gradually laying the foundation for growth.

6. Roles

- a. Adoption of this Plan contemplates the following ongoing communications roles:
 - i. Board of County Commissioners
 1. Approve periodic updates to the adopted Plan
 2. Consider recommendations from the Communications Division to allocate financial, staff, and technological resources to address unmet or emerging communications

3. Provide guidance and direction to the Communications Division that will disseminate information to residents and other audiences regarding significant County programs/policies/events/initiatives
4. Assign and direct staff to accomplish the strategies laid out in this Plan in a timely and effective way.
5. Prioritize communications work to match available resources

ii. County Departments

1. Establish SOP to provide material for dissemination, in a manner consistent with the County's overall Plan
2. Support the Communications Division and other departments by sharing staff/technological/other resources when feasible to accomplish County communications goals and objectives

iii. Communications Specialist

1. Design specific content for the County's media platforms.
2. Create and manage the County's social media profile and presence.
3. Promote additional projects to support all of the County Department's needs.
4. Create engaging text, image, and video content for the County Connection Employee Newsletter.
5. Update the County Website specific to Plan.

2. Audience Identification

- a) The Plan recognizes its Primary Target Audiences to include Residents; Media; Jefferson County Employees; and the Current Business Community. Secondary Target Audiences include Visitors; Other Governmental Officials (local, state, federal); Community groups (e.g., civic organizations, faith-based organizations); Potential Business Recruitments; and Potential Future Residents.
- b) The target audiences for any particular piece of County communication will depend on the type of message, the nature of the messenger, available communications resources and tools, and the particular environmental circumstances at the time. Specific audiences are then more narrowly focused from the general grouping, taking into consideration any targeted marketing campaign, which tools should be used, and any strategic messages.
- c) Communications decision-makers should review the checklist at Appendix A to determine which of the potential audiences are to be specifically targeted recipients of communications under the particular set of circumstances at hand. In many cases, audiences on that list will be non-applicable or redundant. The rationale behind creating and using the list in that appendix is to err on the side of considering too large a list, then to reduce it by purposeful analysis – as opposed to considering too small a list and improperly ignoring an important audience for the message.

3. Tools/Asset Identification

- a) Jefferson County Government communicators are afforded discretion in selecting and employing the mechanisms and vehicles for transmitting information to their desired audiences in any particular set of circumstances. Appendix B provides a list of potential tools to be considered for each communication event. This list reflects both those communication tools that are available to Jefferson County Government and those that may become available in the future.

4. Legal and Ethical Considerations

- a) All communications disseminated by Jefferson County Government will be tested

against the highest ethical and legal standards, to ensure that the County faithfully serves the public.

- i. Washington Open Meeting/Public Records Laws – The State’s open meeting and public records laws are critical to operating a fair and open government. The spirit with which public officials work to comply with the law is as important as the law itself. Recognizing that the public’s business should be done in the open and honoring requests for help serves the people in a transparent manner.
- ii. Accessibility – Jefferson County will make reasonable efforts to ensure that the information concerning policies and programs is available to all despite the many barriers that could hinder effective communication. These barriers could include, but are not necessarily limited to, access to media/technology, language, and physical disabilities.
- iii. Informing Versus Persuading – The BOCC and all County departments strive proactively to provide all residents with complete and unbiased information on issues that may be, or are currently being, considered by the BOCC. This is especially important on matters that are coming to the Commissioners before the full Board has deliberated, voted, and established an official position. In instances where it may be appropriate for the BOCC to adopt a voice of persuasion (e.g. encouraging voters to vote on a bond referendum), County communication will be carefully crafted to recognize and explain the distinction between information intended to educate and information intended to influence. The county departments serve as responsible advocates for the Board’s policy decisions by providing clear, concise, and accurate information to all. The county will provide the data and reasoning behind the policy decisions so that residents can understand how these decisions were made.
- iv. Collective Versus Individual Commissioner Communications – The Chair of the Board acts as the spokesperson for the Board. In the absence of the Chair, the Vice Chair or Chair’s designee acts as spokesperson. In the interests of clarity and transparency, individual County Commissioners will take care to dispel any reasonable confusion about whether they are communicating on behalf of the Board as a whole or whether they are communicating their own individual viewpoints.

5. Strategy Implementation/Action Plan

- a) The following prioritized list of actions was developed to promote achievement of the Communications Division goals and objectives. It is important that any persons involved in Jefferson County Government communications pursue these steps in a manner that is consistent with the Communications Division overarching vision for transparency, accuracy, timeliness, and integrity in the information exchange process.
- b) Priority A
 - i. Purposefully convene the BOCC ahead of anticipated community policy/program/event discussions that are – or may become – complicated or controversial, to consider appropriate messaging content, tools, and audiences.
 - ii. Empower the Public Relations Committee to conduct debriefing sessions following important communications events, evaluating both successes and shortcomings, and to make recommendations to the BOCC regarding key

communications decisions.

- iii. Identify and implement a two-way communication tool that facilitates meaningful, interactive dialogue among Commissioners and constituents regarding the development and implementation of significant County policies, programs, and activities.
- iv. Establish and foster ongoing working relationships with external communicators.
- v. Examine the established checklists of potential audiences and available tools and then tailor the release of any major County communication piece to increase the likelihood that all potentially interested parties will have improved access to the intended message about County programs, policies and events.

c) Priority B

- i. Develop a set of performance measurement tools to conduct an evaluation (at least annually) of Jefferson County communication efforts.
- ii. Develop and implement a training program for staff members that are likely to have primary communication responsibilities to audiences outside their departments.
- iii. Develop and promulgate a formal Jefferson County Media Relations program.
- iv. Formally amend this Plan as needed from time-to time to take immediate advantage of communications "lessons learned" and "best practices" gleaned from the Public Relations committee debriefings.
- v. Formally recognize and support the existing ad hoc group relationship among communications professionals in various Jefferson County public sector agencies.
- vi. Establish the County's social media operating philosophy, including social media procedures for use and monitoring of commentary on any interactive format.

d) Priority C

- i. Develop and implement policies to establish and promote a Jefferson County "brand"

APPENDIX A

EXAMPLE INVENTORY OF POTENTIAL AUDIENCES

- Residents
- Citizens
- Board of Commissioners
- Taxpayers
- Media
- County departments
- County employees
- Current Businesses/Commercial Enterprises
- Advisory Boards and Commissions
- Real property owners
- Non-English speakers
- People with various disabilities
- People with limited literacy
- Residents with limited or no access to digital communications networks (e.g. no computer or internet access)
- Visitors
- Potential future businesses/commercial enterprises
- Potential future residents
- County Municipalities
- Adjacent counties
- School districts
- Municipalities in adjacent counties
- Court system
- Public Utilities
- Non-profit services
- Emergency service providers (e.g. volunteer fire departments, rescue squad, Red Cross)
- Washington Governmental agencies
- United States governmental agencies
- Other volunteers

APPENDIX B

EXAMPLE OF POTENTIAL TOOLS/ASSETS

- County Website
- County Newsletter
- Digital Message Monitors
- Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube)
- County Intranet
- County Connection E-mail notification
- Citizen Comment via Commission Mail
- Annual Report
- News Releases
- Public Forums
- Brochures
- Public Service Announcements
- Calendars/Events
 - Public meetings
 - Public Events
 - Classes
- Photography
- Purchased print ads
- Purchased radio spots
- Purchased TV spots
- Listservs (allows users to add or remove automatically)
- Streaming Video
 - BOCC Meetings
 - County generated content, public service announcements (PSAs), service highlights
- County expo
- Active engagement with other communicators within Jefferson County
- Coordinated communicators team of County PIO type staff
- Membership with regional and national communication organization
- Newspapers
- Special events
- Translation for any of the above content