Communications & Engagement Strategy

More Than Words: Listening, Understanding, and Delivering
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Introduction

The Communications and Engagement Strategy is the culmination of community and internal consultations, best practices and research, and over 5 years of communication practices.

The Strategy serves as a shared framework and provides overall guidance for how the Township communicates and engages with various audiences.

The Township of Oro-Medonte is committed to demonstrating a culture of open communication and engagement that delivers on a 'customers come first' approach. This involves providing accurate, timely, and open communications to all audiences.

The importance and role of Corporate Communications has evolved since it was identified as a priority initiative of the 2006-2010 Municipal Council. The 2010-2014 Council adopted a comprehensive Communications Strategy and a number of communications related policies and procedures.

The Communications and Engagement Strategy has been developed based on Customer Satisfaction Surveys completed in 2014, consultation with Township Council, senior staff and front line staff in 2015, public engagement sessions and survey completed in 2016, and research undertaken by Township staff.

Based on the feedback and input received, it validated that there was an opportunity to build upon the existing communications strategy to enhance how we communicate (methods and tactics), when we communicate (frequency), who we communicate with, and what we communicate about. It also identified an interest for public engagement and participation.

Recognizing the importance of public engagement and how it aligns with the Communications Strategy, a public engagement process was utilized in the development of the Communications and Engagement Strategy.

About the Strategy

The Communications and Engagement Strategy serves as a framework for how the Township communicates and engages with various audiences to enhance online and two-way communications, and encourage public participation in the municipal process.

It includes objectives outlining the direction of communications and engagement activities for the Township that supports the Corporate Strategic Plan, and delivery of Council's priorities to ensure a consistent and clear approach in the service delivery of communications.
Strategic Vision, Mission, and Goals

In early 2016, Council adopted a vision, mission, values, and strategic goals that will focus our efforts and serve as the road map guiding our decision-making throughout the term of Council.

Vision:
Oro-Medonte continues to be a progressive, collaborative community where everyone can live, work, and play.

Mission:
To provide the best customer service while meeting the needs of our community today and tomorrow.

Values:
- Customers First!
- Creativity and Innovation
- Honesty, Fairness, and Respect
- Courageous and Responsible Decision-Making
- Openness
- Engagement

Strategic Goals:
Continuous Improvement & Fiscal Responsibility
“We are innovators. We deliver affordable, quality services.”

Enhanced Communications and Customer Service
“We demonstrate a culture of open communication and engagement that delivers on ‘customers come first’!”

Balanced Growth
“We support business and job creation while protecting our natural environment.”

Inclusive Healthy Community
“We are a community that is safe, accessible and inclusive.”

Employer of Choice
“We attract, develop, empower and retain employees that demonstrate our corporate values.”
Communications and Engagement Strategy

The Communications and Engagement Strategy has been developed to deliver overall communication objectives in a cost effective manner with the available resources.

The strategy is supported by a communications and engagement action plan and includes the tools used to communicate corporate messages to external and internal audiences.

We attract, develop, empower, and retain employees that demonstrate our corporate values.

We will:
- Develop and implement an internal two-way communications strategy.
- Measure employee satisfaction on a regular basis.
- Simplify and improve our Performance Management and Compensation Programs to motivate and reward all employees.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities of staff and Council.
- Continue our Council training strategy.
- Review, fill, and train for leadership and organizational competency gaps.
- Elevate Human Resources and Corporate Communications functions to a strategic level.
- Strengthen the relationship between labour and management.

Current Trends

The strategy also takes into consideration various current trends and factors impacting communications and public engagement and participation.

- Higher expectations on local government for engagement and accountability
- Increased demand from citizens to be more involved in local government issues
- Complexity of issues facing local government, such as environmental, social, cultural issues
- Evolution of Social Media
- Growing use of technology using smartphone devices and apps
Communications and Engagement Objectives

Objective #1: Consistent and Focused Communications

✓ Ensure consistency of messages, brand awareness, and protect corporate integrity.
✓ Raise the profile of the Township, its services and priorities.
✓ Promote and increase use of Township website.

Objective #2: Proactive and Planned Communications

✓ Develop communication plans that address specific communications needs, messaging, and tactics.
✓ Use communication tools effectively to reach targeted audiences in a timely fashion.
✓ Identify, analyze, plan, and respond to issues through an issues management process.
✓ Implement a standard evaluation process and adjust methods as required.

Objective #3: Two-Way and Open Communications

✓ Increase and enhance opportunities for two-way communications for online tools and input into corporate projects and Council related matters.
✓ Consult and involve stakeholders through an engagement process.

Effective communications consists of reaching your target audience and disseminating the right messages to address the matter/situation for the best results. Effective engagement relies on involving the right stakeholders at the right time, and the right way. The communications and engagement planning process is designed to help identify and understand our stakeholders, and how to approach communications and engagement by outlining and responding to the following:

- What are we communicating?
- Why are communicating?
- Who are our stakeholders and influencers?
- What are the potential risks and issues impacting the situation?
- When do we engage and at what level?
- How do we plan to achieve our objectives? What tools and resources are available to us?
- Did we achieve our goals? Monitor and assess, change as needed.
Key Target Audiences

Communications targeted to specific audiences is fundamental to the Communications and Engagement Strategy. Each audience is a potential advocate for the Township and influencer of public opinion. Therefore it is essential to communicate in a manner that allows the audience to understand the Township’s goals and priorities, offer tools for two-way communications, and report on actions taken based on feedback received.

The target audience is determined based on the issue, project or service we are communicating about. Key target audiences include the following:

**External Audiences:**
- Residents – year round and seasonal
- Businesses, business owners and prospective businesses
- Contractors/investors
- Media
- Government agencies
- Third-party stakeholders, groups, associations, Township partners

As service users, our customers need quality, clear, and timely information. As ratepayers, customers need to understand corporate priorities and goals to ensure they are receiving the best value possible for their money.

Media representatives have a responsibility to provide timely news and editorial reporting. Since they are able to influence and form public opinion, it is essential that responsive relationships are maintained. As partners and stakeholders in service delivery, timely and targeted information about services and priorities is essential in order to work together effectively.

**Internal Audiences:**
- Township staff
- Council and Committee members

As service providers, staff need quality, clear, and consistent information so they may engage in shaping the services that contribute to quality customer service, along with supporting Council’s priorities and corporate goals. It is essential to ensure employees have access to all the information they need to make informed decisions. Staff who are informed effectively can be valuable communication ambassadors for the Township.

Communications and Engagement Planning Process

Part of the communications and engagement planning process is understanding the current environment and the needs and perceptions of our target audience through stakeholder relations and managing strategic issues/projects.
Stakeholder relations refers to the interactions between an organization and its stakeholders. Managing stakeholder relations encompasses a corporate culture and standards to maintain relationships with our stakeholders by responding to feedback and inquiries.

This will support positive relations and contribute to building a solid reputation for the corporation and Council. Effective management of strategic issues entails anticipating questions, comments, or concerns related to an issue before they arise in order to deal with them appropriately. Proactively planning will assist in the best success of obtaining the objective.

The communications and engagement planning process also takes into consideration mandated requirements that are regulated and must be adhered to by the respective legislation, such as the Municipal Act and Planning Act. In many cases, the parameters surrounding communications and engagement are set and outlined with little discretion provided to staff.
Strategic Approach to Issues/Project Management

The concept of strategic issues management has developed into a way of identifying and dealing with issues, developments and trends that may significantly impact the corporation’s strategies, goals, and communication messages.

The strategic issues management process identifies steps that are integrated as part of the communications and engagement planning process. The practice of issues management relies on effective planning and day-to-day communications involving engagement with staff, Council, community members, and stakeholders.

Identify Issues

Formal steps are in place and proposed to identify issues through the following:
- Daily media tracking and monitoring;
- Regularly providing media updates to Council and Senior Management Team;
- A standing item of “Communications and Issues Management” on the Senior Management Team meeting agenda;
- Council should advise Corporate Communications of potential issues that they may be aware of due to public interaction;
- Review of Council agendas in advance of meetings to prepare for possible inquiries or comments by public and/or media.

Analyze and Prioritize Issues and Projects

Analyzing issues and projects involves assessing each for its potential risk by understanding its impact to the corporation and stakeholders. Key issues/projects are prioritized and allocated the resources required to carry out the necessary action based on the degree of risk that has been identified.

Plan and Respond to Issues

Responding to issues involves developing a communication plan that effectively communicates the corporation’s position and key messages to stakeholders.

Evaluate and Measure

No two issues are ever the same and should not be treated as such. The purpose of assessing the results is to assist in formulating future strategies by capturing what worked and what did not work in executing the communications and engagement plan.

Communications and engagement will always be a work-in-progress and evolves with initiatives at hand. Measuring the effectiveness of communications and engagement processes is important as it facilitates continuous improvement by ensuring resources are being optimized and results are being realized.

Communication tools and engagement processes are assessed on an ongoing basis through a continued evaluation accomplished with customer satisfaction surveys, public feedback and input, available analytics and data audits, best practices, and review by internal departments with project debriefs.
SUCCESS
Proactive communications and engagement
Effective stakeholder relations and issues/project management

Plan designed to achieve goals with available tools and resources

Monitor and Measure
Monitor and assess, change as needed. Enables Continuous Improvement

Identification of potential risks and issues?

When do we engage/what level?

Who are our stakeholders and levels of influence?

What are we communicating? Why?

Identify Issue
Identifying key issues that may potentially affect the corporation, community, and stakeholders

Analyze and Prioritize Issue
Assess each issue for its potential risk by understanding its impact to the corporation and stakeholders

Plan and Respond to Issues
Develop a communications plan that effectively communicates the corporation's position and key messages to stakeholders

Evaluate and Measure Issues
Monitor and assess, change as needed. Enables Continuous Improvement
**Communication Tools**

The following list represents a variety of communication tools that may be used to communicate the Township’s messages to our external and internal audiences:

### External Communications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRINT</th>
<th>MEDIA</th>
<th>ELECTRONIC ONLINE</th>
<th>PUBLIC RELATIONS</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Township News Page  
- North Simcoe Life  
- Timely Topics | Radio interviews  
- Corporate updates  
- Barrie and Orillia | Website | Community Events  
- Networking Functions  
- Congratulatory Celebrations | Community Notice Boards  
- Hall Boards  
- Administration Centre  
- Arena |
| Community Information Guide | Media Releases | Social Media  
- Twitter  
- Facebook | Community Outreach  
- Mayor & Council Breakfast | |
| Posters, Flyers, Rack Cards, Targeted Marketing Campaigns  
- Strategic Plan  
- Accomplishments Report Card | TV Interviews  
- Barrie and Orillia | Information Display Screens  
- Administration Centre  
- Arena | |
| Press Conferences | Newsletter - Email | |

### Internal Communications

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- Twitter  
- Facebook | Targeted Marketing Campaigns  
- Strategic Plan  
- Accomplishments Report Card |
| Posters, Flyers, Rack Cards, Targeted Marketing Campaigns  
- Strategic Plan  
- Accomplishments Report Card | Information Display Screens  
- Administration Centre  
- Arena | All Staff Meetings | |
| | Newsletter - Email | Staff Notice Boards  
- corporate facilities, i.e. lunch room, common areas | |
Media Relations

Media relations involves working with various media outlets for the purpose of informing the public of the Township's mission, policies and practices in a positive, consistent and credible manner.

The goal of media relations is to maximize positive coverage to effectively facilitate the flow of information between the Township and the public by responding to media inquiries, providing background and current information, and explaining programs and initiatives.

It is necessary to establish a media relations protocol to provide clear guidelines on handling media inquiries promptly, accurately and in a consistent manner, throughout the corporation.

Based on the key messages and subject matter, a spokesperson will be designated to comment on behalf of the Township of Oro-Medonte on related matters, and be quoted in media releases issued by the Township.

The Media Relations Protocol for Council and Staff Policy outlines the process for media relations, and identifies corporate spokespeople for Council Decisions and Governance related matters, and corporate spokespeople for Administrative and Operational matters.

Visual Identity, Brand, and Marketing

Community Brand | Oro-Medonte - Proud Heritage, Exciting Future

Defining the identity of our community and promoting its brand identity to our customers will visibly communicate the unity and strength of the corporation and the community.

The corporate crest and logo, with the wordmark, are unique visual identities designed to communicate and reinforce a positive message about the Township of Oro-Medonte.
As the most important visual elements for identification, they function to build awareness of the Township as a professional corporation, act as a unifying visual device relating all departments and services to the corporation, and clearly identify programs, services, and facilities that the Township provides to the Oro-Medonte community.

At time of amalgamation in 1994, the former Oro and Medonte municipalities established a new corporate crest comprised of elements and symbols from each to represent the new municipality, the Township of Oro-Medonte.

In 2007, Council received and adopted Report CAO 2007-03 with a focus on customer service. As part of the customer service enhancements, Council authorized the development of a new corporate visual identity that would encapsulate the following:

Oro-Medonte

✓ The Township of Oro-Medonte being one Municipality
✓ Quality of Life
✓ Environment and Unique Natural Features
✓ Customer Service
✓ Tourism
✓ Proud Heritage and Exciting Future

The Township's brand is a reflection of how our corporation is perceived. This perception can be shaped by what and how we communicate about the services and programs the Township has to offer. As such, our corporate brand is a powerful tool that can be used to attract businesses, investments, and tourism.

A well-established corporate brand and marketing exercise can be a vital and empowering process of public engagement and active participation from our community.

The objective is to develop broad ownership of the Township's brand within our community by marketing the services and programs we deliver while highlighting the work done by Township Council and staff.
Marketing

The value in marketing the Township's brand, services, and programs is to build an internal and external profile, while offering information about the Township that creates an interest for Oro-Medonte and the level of services provided.

What are we marketing?

✓ Programs and services available to our customers and community;
✓ Major corporate projects;
✓ Council decisions and accomplishments;
✓ Employee recognition;
✓ Township meetings and events; and
✓ Community events.