City of Pacifica
Communications Plan

Development of a City Communications Plan, proposed by then Mayor pro tem Len Stone, was designated as a high priority in the City Council Goal Setting process initially conducted in September 2012 and refined in council discussions at a Council meeting in November 2012. The plan is in response to an important community value identified by the Council: Key Dynamics between the City and its People. The overall purpose of the Communications Plan is to improve relationships with the general community through more effective communication and education on community issues. The plan focuses on the development of goal and strategies to more effectively engage the community and bridge the gap between citizens and government.

In an effort to move forward in the development of a communications strategy for the Council and City the Council appointed a Council sub-committee to explore and develop a Communications Plan. For purposes of the sub-committee's work a communications plan is designed to identify goals and strategies to effectively communicate with constituencies and community members, help set priorities, provide focus and direction to those involved in day-to-day operations, and improve the overall effectiveness of the city in meeting the needs of its citizens. An effective plan encompasses all written, spoken and electronic interactions with the community and provides effective tools for communication.

The initial work on the plan has been completed by a Council appointed sub-committee which will potentially expand as work progresses. The overall steps in developing the plan include:

- Determining Goals
- Identifying Audiences
- Developing Messages
- Selecting Communication Channels
- Choosing Materials and Activities
- Establishing Partnerships
- Implementing the Plan
- Evaluating and Making Mid-Course Corrections

COMMUNICATION PLAN DEVELOPMENT:

Determining Goals:

The goals of the Communications Plan are derived from the overall vision identified by the City Council and the key strategies identified in the Council goal setting process. The goals established by the City Council included:

To maintain and enhance our open, sustainable community

- Financial Management: Revenue Generation and Fiscal Integrity
- Community Values: Key Dynamics between City and Its People
- Responsive Government: Positive Interface between City and Its People
- Infrastructure: Ensuring the Critical Services and Support
- Public Safety: Ensuring Critical Services

Based on these discussions the following goals/outcomes were developed for the Communication Plan:

- Increased community understanding and knowledge of the city, its services and fiscal situation
- Increased support for city government and services as a result of positive community interactions with the city
- Increased citizen involvement in city programs, services, committees and commissions
- Increased trust from the community as a result of positive relationships and effective communications.

A number of tangible outcomes and indicators of progress will result from achieving the goals of the communication plan including greater understanding of and support for addressing the long term financial stability of the community, greater participation with new citizens being involved in the city and its programs, support for future programs and projects such as economic development and community development projects, and improved overall relationship between the City and its citizens.

To achieve these outcomes the City and City Council are committed to providing consistent, thorough and current information to the community.   The City Council took action at its January 2013 Goal Setting Workshop to approve these Communication Plan goals.

Identifying Audiences:

The next step in the development of the communications plan was to identify the audiences to target with a communications initiative in order to determine the most effective ways to communicate the issues and develop the messages. Recognizing that the city has a complex structure with a variety of constituencies the sub-committee identified a number of key audiences in the community (in alphabetical order):

- Business community/Chamber
- Citizens at large
- City commissions and committees
- City staff
- Community organizations
- Critics of city government
- Developers
- Environmental groups
- Families
- Future/potential business owners
- Future employees
- Media (print, radio and television, internet)
- Other governmental agencies (local, county, state)
- Potential funders
- Property owners (residential and business)
- Renters
- Seniors
- Tourists
- Users of city services

Developing Messages:

The purpose of this section of the communications plan is to determine what information needs to be conveyed to our audiences. That is, how do we tell the story and what are the key components of that story so that the audience clearly understands and relates to the issue and feels the need to act.

In order to determine the information needs and the messages to be developed the sub-committee conducted an analysis of our current internal and external communication strategies using the following approaches:

- Conducted an internal assessment of current communication activities in each city department
- Conducted focus group with key community members and business leaders to obtain input on current and future communication strategies
- Conducted focus group with selected commission and committee members to obtain their perspective
- Conducted individual interviews with key community leaders
- Obtained input from City Council members
- Attended League of California sponsored training programs
- Researched the efforts of other public agencies to implement communications plans

As a result of this research the sub-committee identified a number of important information needs and messages that are vital to the city successfully establishing effective, transparent and trustworthy relationships with its individual citizens and constituency groups.

- Citizens want to hear accurate, factual, objective information about issues facing the city
- City needs to share positive aspects of programs and services
- Website needs to be user-friendly and updated in a timely manner
- City needs to be proactive, not reactive in its communication with citizens
- City Council is approachable, available and willing to listen
- Incorporating social media can facilitate city's communications with citizens

Communication Channels:

In an effort to determine communication channels available to the City for communication to key audiences an analysis identified the following existing communication channels in the community many of which are currently being used to some degree by the city to communicate with citizens:

- Direct Public Contact (phone/voice mail, email, in person)
- Websites (City, Chamber, Patch, other governmental organizations)
- Newspapers (local and regional)
- Television (Channel 26, regional stations)
- Governmental offices (schools, library, community center, city offices, other governmental agencies)
- Chamber of Commerce (office, directory)
- Community meetings (public hearings, study sessions, community forums)
- Community Organizations (neighborhood groups, PTO's, churches, civic organizations)
- Mayor's Walks and Coffees
- Blogs
- Social Media (Facebook)
- Printed Materials (letterhead, brochures, maps, instructional guides, agendas, reports, annual reports)
- Electronic Reader Boards (community center)
- Emergency Robo Calls
- Departmental Newsletters and Communications (PLAY guide, Senior Services newsletter)
- Community Events (Fog Fest, Earth Day)
- Department Open Houses (Fire Dept., DPW, PD, WWT)
- Email Blasts (selected lists, selected issues)
- Electronic/Written Surveys
- Facility Tours, Ride A-longs
- City Employee Contacts

The committee also identified several new or expanded potential avenues for communications that could be included in the city's communications efforts:

- Expanded Social Media and websites
- Community Calendar
- Smart Boards

- Department Head Office Hours
- Expanded web presence
- Internal Electronic Systems (permit applications, processing)
- Mayor/City Council Office Hours
- Commission and Committee member involvement
- Expanded Radio, Television coverage
- Robo Calls

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN:

As a result of the analysis and research conducted by the sub-committee the following guiding principles, key messages and communication strategies are recommended for adoption and implementation by the City Council in an effort to meet the identified communication goals approved by the City Council.

- Increased community understanding and knowledge of the city, its services and fiscal situation
- Increased support for city government and services as a result of positive community interactions with the city
- Increased citizen involvement in city programs, services, committees and commissions
- Increased trust from the community as a result of positive relationships and effective communications.

Guiding Principles:

The Communication Plan is based on the following guiding principles for all internal and external communications efforts conducted by the City in its day-to-day operations and its focus on providing transparency and consistent community information, outreach and engagement.

- Provide relevant, accurate and timely information to citizens, businesses and organizations
- Encourage active citizen participation in city government programs and services
- Increase community knowledge of city operations
- Ensure that information is available to all citizens by utilizing a variety of communication channels and methods

RECOMMENDED COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES:

The following communication strategies are being recommended by the sub-committee to meet the goals of the Communications Plan, take into consideration the current organizational structure of the

city organization and are designed to be implemented within the constraints of the city's budget and financial resources.

Structural and Organizational Strategies:

The following recommendations are designed to establish an effective city communications structure and organization to ensure to the Communications Plan strategies can be implemented effectively.

Designate the City Manager as the City's Public Information Officer (PIO) to serve as the spokesperson for the City and City Council to media and the community.

> To ensure effective and consistent communications with the media and public it is critical that one person be designated to serve as the "voice" of the City, especially in regard to major decisions of the Council, major projects, policy directions and emergency situations.

Direct the City Manager to appoint a current staff member as Public Information Coordinator (PIC) who will be responsible for coordinating the City's public relations/communications efforts and will chair the Communication Committee.

> The PIC will work at the direction of the City Manager to prepare press releases, work with the media and coordinate the efforts of the Communications Committee to ensure that all communications from the city are relevant, accurate and timely.

Establish an internal staff Communications Committee, chaired by the PIC, with representation from each department, to implement the Communication Plan including:

> Establish internal PR policies
> Ensure consistent messages are being sent by city staff
> Coordinate department PR efforts
> Develop and implement internal staff communications training
> Coordinate website improvements
> Develop and coordinate social media efforts
> Coordinate a staff speaker's bureau

Establish effective working partnerships with news media and key community organizations to ensure their assistance in the implementation of the Communications Plan and strategies.

> The Pacifica Tribune, Patch, Channel 26, other governmental organizations and organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce are important partners in establishing effective city communications, public relations efforts and the achievement of the Communications Plan goals. Establishing effective working relationships with these organizations is critical to the success of the City's communication efforts.

Establish a process for evaluating the effectiveness of the City's implementation of the Communications Plan.

In order to effectively evaluation the effectiveness of the communications efforts the City Manager, PIC and Communications Committee needs to provide the City council with quarterly reports of the progress made in the implementation of the communications strategies and suggestions for improvement. The City Council can then evaluate the progress and provide directions for future implementation strategies.

Communications Strategies:

The following are recommended communications strategies the City and its Communications Committee can undertake to ensure that the goals and guiding principles of the Communications Plan are implemented effectively.   It is important that the overall communications efforts consider the audiences and key messages it wants to address and that it utilizes all possible communications channels to effectively implement these recommended strategies.

 It is recommended that the City Manager/PIO, with input from the PIC and Communication Committee, provide the City Council with recommended priorities for the implementation of these strategies.

- Create consistent public contact messages to be incorporated by all departments in phone, voicemail and over the counter communications.

- Adopt a city-wide 24-hour response policy for all email communications, phone calls and public contact.

- Develop and implement an employee communications training program.

- Upgrade the city's website to be user friendly and interactive.

- Develop a quarterly or semi-annual electronic newsletter which highlights current projects, department highlights, promotes upcoming events and issues, and provides up to date, factual information regarding the city's operations. Consider mail/school /library/city facility distribution to those without computer access.

- Establish a monthly column, presented by the City Manager or Department Directors, in the Pacifica Tribune highlighting current and future projects, upcoming issues, status reports, department activities.

- Publish weekly city government meeting schedule in the Pacifica Tribune, on Patch and Channel 26 which includes key agenda highlights

- Submit weekly press releases to news media including newspapers, Chamber Wave, Patch which provide updates on current and future city projects.

- Develop community awards program to recognize volunteers, outstanding projects or outstanding community efforts.

- Celebrate positive aspects of city operations with employee, commission, and committee service recognition.

- Establish brochure-information racks in each department office and related facilities that display city-wide information to ensure that information about city programs and services, Council and commission agendas and department contact information is available at all points of public contact throughout the city.

- Continue to create opportunities for citizens to learn more about city operations at the city and department levels with open houses, department head office hours, tours, and participation in major city wide events such as Fog Fest and Earth Day.

- Continue to conduct quarterly update sessions for all city commission and committee members.

- Develop a city-wide Facebook page to provide all departments and commissions the capacity to inform citizens of current city programs and provide immediate information regarding changes in operations or make program or service announcements.

City Council Communication Strategies:

Over the years Mayors and City Council members have undertaken a variety of communications/public relations activities that have resulted in positive responses from the community and have provided an important communications link between the City government and its citizens. The City Council is encouraged to develop a coordinated effort to participate in any of these activities as they deem appropriate.

- Mayor/Chamber walks
- Coffees
- Mayor's column in Tribune
- Quarterly open houses
- Council office hours
- Presentation of key issues at council meetings
- News conferences
- Use of city social media platforms
- Conduct public forums on issues
- Quarterly community meetings
- Presentations to community organizations
- Attend community functions
- Conduct project ribbon cuttings
- Channel 26 programs

CONCLUSION:

This communications plan was developed provide a city structure and implementation strategies to achieve the communications goals adopted by the City council including:

- Increased community understanding and knowledge of the city, its services and fiscal situation
- Increased support for city government and services as a result of positive community interactions with the city
- Increased citizen involvement in city programs, services, committees and commissions
- Increased trust from the community as a result of positive relationships and effective communications.

The Communication Plan is based on the following guiding principles for all internal and external communications efforts conducted by the City in its day-to-day operations and its focus on providing transparency and consistent community information, outreach and engagement.

- Provide relevant, accurate and timely information to citizens, businesses and organizations
- Encourage active citizen participation in city government programs and services
- Increase community knowledge of city operations
- Ensure that information is available to all citizens by utilizing a variety of communication channels and methods

Its implementation requires a dedicated, concerted effort on the part of the City Council and all the employees of the City to ensure that these efforts result in informed, knowledgeable citizens who are engaged and participating in the community.

"Democracy is interactive… It's a constant job of information, education, explanation, listening, and interactive communication."
Dick Gephardt

Prepared by Council Sub-Committee:
Mayor Len Stone
Interim Council Member Ginny Jaquith
July, 2013

Communications Plan Focus Group Process

Welcome

Introductions:

Moderator, Assistant Moderator
Role is to ask questions, guide discussion, not participate other than to provide information, ask for clarification, take notes

Purpose of the Focus Group:

Council subcommittee to develop city/council communications plan
Goals of plan:
Increased community understanding of city, services and fiscal condition
Improved attitudes and support
Increase citizen participation
Increased citizen support for future programs, projects, policies
Improved city reputation
You have been invited because you are active members of the community and we need and want your input and want you to share honest and open thoughts with us about ways the city can improve its communications and increase citizen participation

Ground Rules:

Want you to do the talking
Everyone participate
No right or wrong answers
Everyone's experiences and opinions important
Speak up whether agree or disagree
Want wide range of opinions
What said in room stays in room
Feel comfortable with sensitive issues
Will take notes
Not identify anyone by name

Questions:

Start with general questions and then get into more specific areas of discussion
Parking lot

a. As a resident, business owner, and involved citizen what information do you want to know about the city, i.e., its operations, policies, programs, services, etc? What do you think residents want to know? What information is important for you as a citizen to know about your city?

b. When you think about the City's communications with the general community what does the city do well?

c. In what areas can the city improve its communications with the community?
    i.   Internal organization
    ii. External

d. What key strategies would you suggest the city implement to increase communications and understanding in the community? How can the city more effectively reach out to the community?

e. In what ways would you prefer getting information about the city?

f. Are there any areas we missed in our discussion?

Conclusion:

Thanks for your participation
Comments have been valuable
Information/ideas will be incorporated in the final plan and recommendations to the Council

Communications Plan Focus Groups 4/11/2013

The following are comments expressed to questions asked during two focus groups conducted on April 11, 2013.

As a resident, business owner, and involved citizen what information do you want to know about the city, i.e., its operations, policies, programs, services, etc? What do you think residents want to know? What information is important for you as a citizen to know about your city?

- There is a disconnect in the public between City finance and services provided to the community
- The city has reached a milestone
- Share the positive aspects of the city (programs, services)
- Do not "white wash" the bad but promote the positives
- Important to provide status reports on hot topics/issues
- Have a trusted messenger
- Facilitate land use discussions
- Website needs to be reorganized and made user friendly
- Be proactive in your communication – people like to know what is going on
- Issues shouldn't sneak up on people –give updates on issues
- Give a history of how we got where we are
- People shouldn't get their information from letters to the editor
- Talk about progress or issues and City goals
- People want to hear the good news
- Be honest, strait forward, reassuring
- Be proactive, not reactive
- People don't look at City finances until in affects them
- Make it interesting
- Messaging clear, facts, objective information
- Have key meetings televised
- Need to help people understand interrelationship of governmental agencies
- Have meeting information and reports out ahead of time
- List committee members on the website

When you think about the City's communications with the general community what does the city do well?

- City Council seems to be more available
- Feels City is moving in the right direction
- More City council dialog with community through Mayor and Council addressing community groups. (attending events, Coffee with Mayor, Mayor Walk, Chamber events, Fog Fest booth, etc.)
- County involvement improving
- City Council is approachable and willing to listen
- More positive energy from Mayor & City Council

- Meeting coverage by Channel 26
- Agendas online
- Like community meetings held twice (Police report meeting)

In what areas can the city improve its communications with the community?   In the internal organization and externally.

- Using Social media
- User friendly website with timely information
- Get agendas out early to provide more study time
- Email blast (weekly or monthly newsletter), acurrate and consistent
- Use "Nextdoor" and Patch websites
- Send things home with kids
- Televise all key meetings
- Communicate through homeowners associations
- Relay information that is neighborhood specific
- City article in Tribune at least every other week/Tribune section
- Consistent press releases
- At affinity group meetings
- Bullet point information. People are busy, they want to ingest information quickly
- Reorganize website
- Have more community meetings/ community building events
- Utilize Commissioners to help City Council do their job/contact information
- City employees always top notch

What key strategies would you suggest the city implement to increase communications and understanding in the community? How can the city more effectively reach out to the community?

- Proactively send out meeting agendas
- Communicate Council's sincere approach to make the City better
- Get meeting minutes and materials posted to the website in timely manor
- Council communicate their goals to the Committees and Commissions
- Have social media post link to agendas and meeting materials
- Hot topics list on City website
- Make finance information user-friendly
- Develop a neighborhood liaison program
- Council report on issue/project status during Council communication time
- Lot more positive energy in city
- Celebrations, community gatherings

In what ways would you prefer getting information about the city?

- Messages on City marquees
- Direct Mail
- Email
- Communicate through schools

- Community organization summit
- Promote website
- Tribune
- Mail campaign to promote website
- Weekly updates

Focus Group Participants:

Wendy Santiago- Beautification Advisory Committee
Vasu Narayanan -Economic Development Committee
Joe Kell- Financing City Services Task Force
Rich Campbell- Planning Commission
Cindy Abbott, PBR Commission
Patrick Chiechi- Emergency Preparedness
Paul Jones- GGNRA
Trish Scholl- Pacifica Educational Foundation/ Pacifica Mothers Club
Cheryl Yoes- President, Pacifica Chamber of Commerce
Sue Beckmeyer- Co-President, Pacifica Library Foundation
Carol Prail- Real Estate Agent
Chris Fogel- Pacifica Index