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To: Board of Commissioners
From: Briggs Tople, Outreach & Communications Specialist
Jessica Seide, HHS Community Health Specialist/Public Information Officer (PIO)
Re: Goodhue County Communications Plan

Commissioners,

Communication is important to government because it helps improve effectiveness, responsiveness, and accountability. It also helps build trust and confidence in the government, and can inspire citizens to become more involved in their communities.

With this in mind - Goodhue County hired the Outreach & Communications Specialist to take lead on communication efforts for the County in June of 2022. Since this hiring, a noticeable lack of advanced strategic planning has hindered the efficacy of several communication campaigns. To address these issues, in October 2023 Communications staff began charting the course of what would be needed to create a comprehensive communications plan to guide future communications.

Following discovery meetings with each department, a public survey with 64 responses, and benchmarking alongside surrounding local units of government - Communications staff have completed the 2024 Communications Plan in this packet. The Plan contains six priorities (pg. 11) for County Communications which were established out of the key findings (pg.6) identified from our discovery portion of the plan.

These priorities will help the County succeed in our vision that the County "will demonstrate its work and reliability to form a stronger connection with the community we serve." The priorities are to be implemented by the Outreach & Communications Specialist and department specific PIO's.

Recommendation

It is the recommendation of the Communications Committee and staff to approve the 2024 County Communications Plan.

Approval of this plan will guide County Communications in meeting our community where they are at through strategic communication efforts. Additionally, approval of this plan will allow for Health & Human Services to include the plan in their application for public health accreditation. If the county communication plan is not adopted, HHS would need to come up with different documentation for certain measures which would take up additional staff time.

Find your Good here.



2024 Communications Plan





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Executive Summary

Plan Purpose

The purpose of the Communications Plan (Plan) is to clearly define the priorities, strategies, tactics, and tools Goodhue County will utilize when communicating with the Community. This Plan ensures the community is informed of services, benefits, and announcements in a timely and effective manner. The Plan should be updated every four years.

This Plan aligns with the Goodhue County Branding guidelines, furthering the County's mission of helping all Find their **Good** here.

Plan Goals

Overall goals of the Communications Plan are to:

- Increase stakeholder engagement;
- Increase community understanding of County services, initiatives, and resources; and,
- Ensure dissemination of information in a timely and efficient manner.

The Plan will also help guide the priorities of Goodhue County Communications.

Vision

Through implementation of the Communications Plan, Goodhue County will demonstrate it's work and reliability to form a stronger connection with the community we serve.

County Board Priorities

Our Board of Commissioners uphold our County Mission Statement:

To Effectively Promote the Safety, Health, and Well-Being of our Residents

Our Communications Plan will compliment the County Mission through it's implementation

County Tagline

From the 2024 Goodhue County Branding process, the County developed and utilizes the following Tagline:

Find your Good Here

Our Communications Plan will compliment the tagline by ensuring both residents and visitors are aware of what makes us unique as described by our Brand Pillars.

Storytelling

The services and resources delivered by every County department and office play a critical role in the lives of those in our community whether seen or unseen. Our County is full of unique stories within each project and program we oversee. County Communications helps to create and sustain productive connections between our services and County community members, businesses, and visitors to tell the County's story while also listening to and sharing our community's stories.

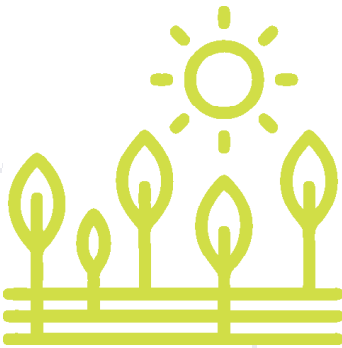
Brand Anchors

To guide the storytelling, Goodhue County utilizes our three brand pillars that were created based on extensive community engagement during the 2024 Branding Project. Similar to the County Mission Statement, these branding pillars represent the community and celebrate what makes our County unique and should be followed when communicating to the public.



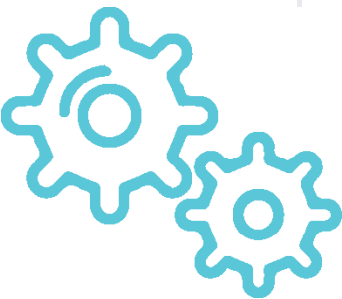
Naturally Inspiring

Our majestic riverlands, bluffs, vistas, lakes, farms, trails, and parks are home to eagles, wildlife and all-season, awe-inducing adventure.



Good to Grow

Thriving farms, living close to nature, and our “maker” heritage feed refreshing options for growing families, careers, start-ups, sustainably minded businesses and brands.



For the Public Good

We are committed to growing our proactive service culture and operational excellence in vital areas as forward-looking public stewards for our diverse communities.



Discovery Report

Key Takeaways

The Discovery Report is a combination of an audit of existing County communication practices and procedures and a public survey.

This section provides a snapshot of findings most crucial to the Plan and provides rationale for new communication opportunities for the County to explore.

1 45% of County related information is being shared via Word of mouth. Making this a primary communication tool.

2 Top topics of interest to the public are split widely amongst varying departments/offices

3 The County was ranked 4.25/10 for informing residents of benefits and services it provides

4 Our social media presence is mostly in line with what the public indicates are their most used platforms

5 All departments have varying rationales with internal communications

Demographics

47,582

Population

42

Median
Age

62.4%

Employment
Rate

19.9%

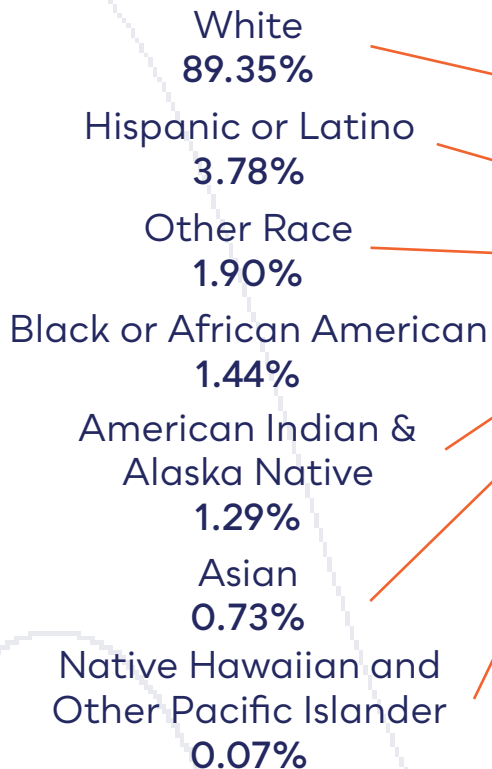
65 Years
& Older

77.5%

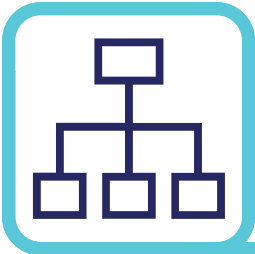
Homeownership
Rate

27.8%

Possess a
Bachelor's Degree
or Higher



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Census



Communications: Core Functions

Role of County Communications

County Communications is not an established department but rather a cross-department collaboration of communication professionals. The Outreach & Communications Specialist serves as the central communications position for the County and serves as the Public Information Officer (PIO). Other departments may also have additional PIO's.

Regardless of department affiliation, our role is to bridge Goodhue County to the community. Through establishing integrity and reliability amongst residents, businesses, visitors, and key stakeholders - Communications bridges the gaps. We ensure organizational integrity and positive brand reputation through strategic communication efforts. Communications is the main medium for delivering timely, accurate, and pertinent information to the community.

Strategic Communication Planning Process Implement strategic planning goals and guiding principles through thoughtful, essential, and effective communications. This form of communication is about telling the stories of County services and how those services impact the community. By uncovering and sharing the human aspect of the County's work, we illustrate how implied goals are translated into action for our residents and businesses.

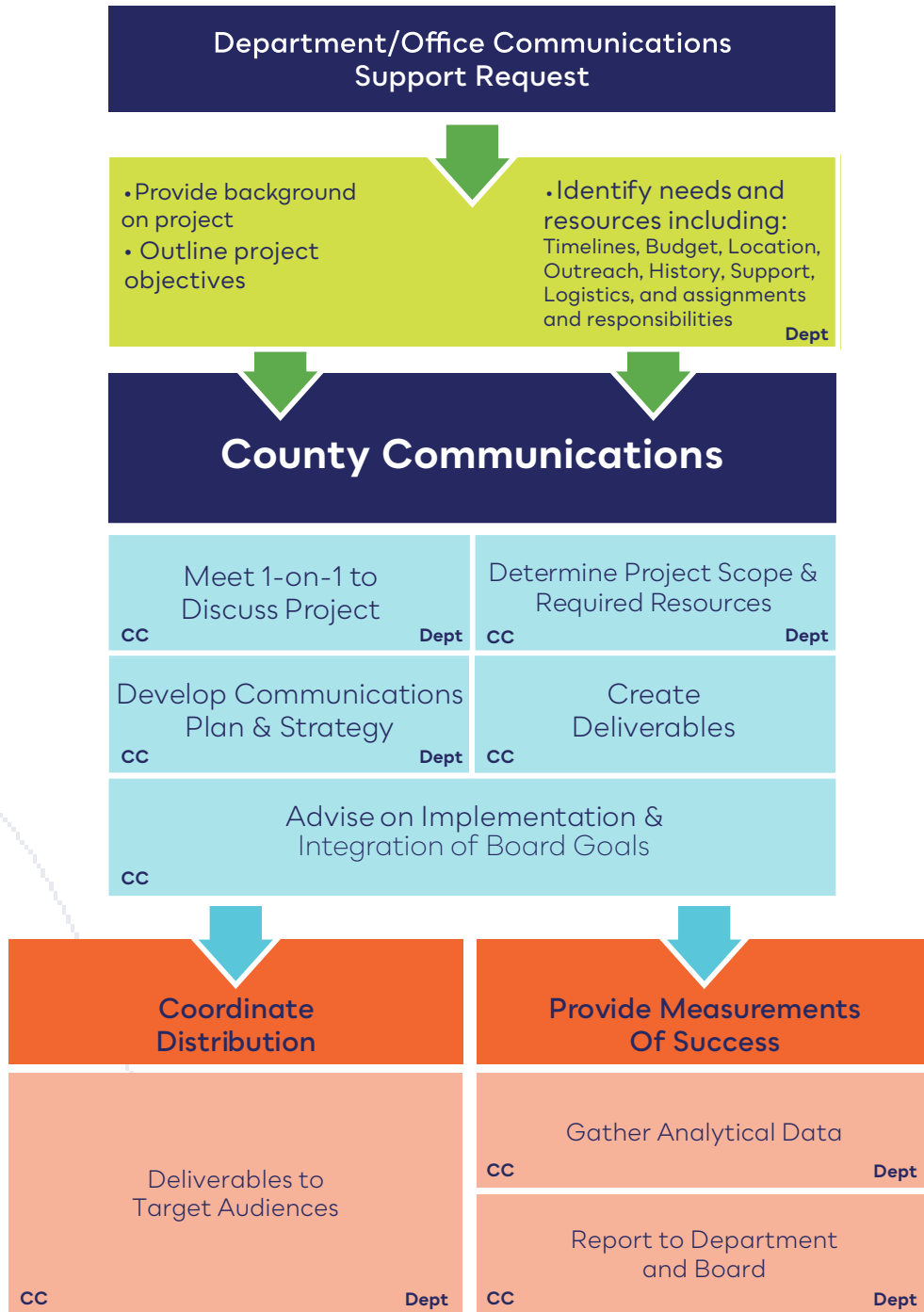
Communications Support for Offices and Departments As department leaders and County staff seek communications support for programs and projects, Communications helps to ensure that projects, initiatives, and events are communicated through the lens of the County brand.

Public Engagement Communications staff works to develop and carry out successful strategies to engage the public in their local government through participation at events, through digital platforms, and with County services.

Brand Management Communications ensures the County brand is being used consistently and brand messages are used appropriately and often in all communication efforts.

Emergency Communication This form of communication occurs unexpectedly and takes many forms. When a crisis occurs, Communications will develop and position emergency messages, correctly and effectively disseminate information, prepare department leaders and emergency responders, and manage media relations.

Offices and Department Support Process

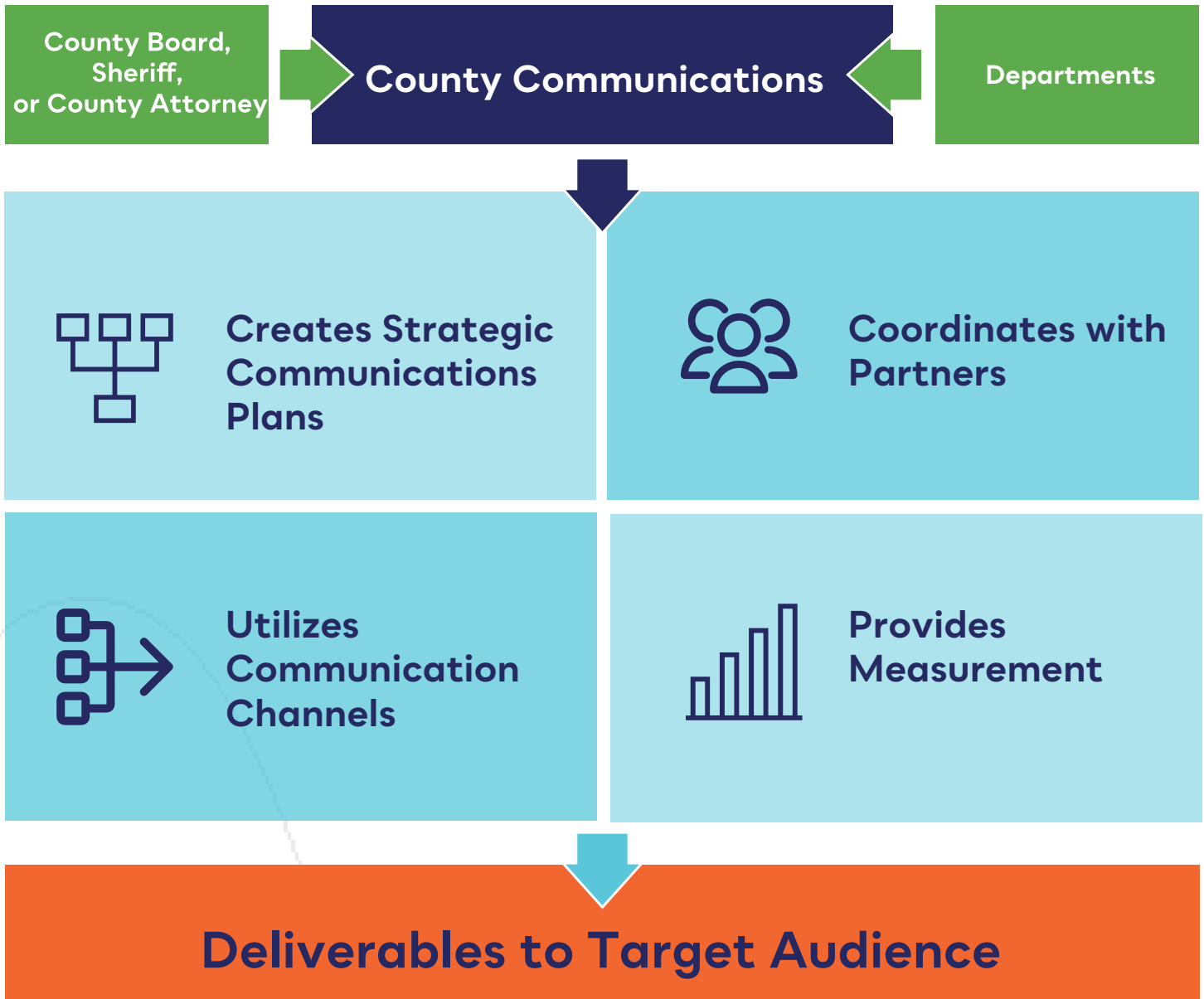


KEY
TASK ASSIGNMENT & RESPONSIBILITIES:
 CC = County Communications
 Dept = Department

Dept = Department

Strategic Communication Planning Process

To best support the County, communications utilizes this process to intake ideas, strategize key messages and create high-quality content in order to effectively communicate and engage the community of Goodhue County.





Communications: Priorities

County Communications is based in the responsibilities of supporting, guiding, and managing communication functions in the overall County organization.

Our Communications Plan is led by the priorities established below. Practical strategies and tactics will aid in furthering these priorities and follow each priority. These priorities will help the County succeed in our vision that the County *“will demonstrate it’s work and reliability to form a stronger connection with the community we serve.”*

Priority #1: Lead Strategic Communication Efforts

Create meaningful partnerships with community media organizations, adjacent local governments, and business & volunteer organizations for a better web of communication sharing.

Priority #2: Increase Community Awareness of County Services and Programs

Establish communication pathways and tools to better educate community members of our services and programs.

Priority #3: Strengthen Current Communication Channels

Invest in our current communication mediums through developing our digital platforms as well as recentring traditional media within our long-term strategy.

Priority #4: Develop Accessible Communications

Work to identify, develop, implement and evaluate accessibility within our current communication practices and policies.

Priority #5: Clarify Agency-Wide Internal Communications

Develop clear guidelines on the procedures for internal agency-wide communications between and to employees.

Priority #6: Provide Measurements of Progress and Success

Track metrics to evaluate communication efforts and effectiveness in order to guide future communications programs and projects.

Priority #1: Lead Strategic Communication Efforts

Create meaningful partnerships with community media organizations, adjacent local governments, and business & volunteer organizations for a better web of communication sharing.

Strategies

The County will focus partnerships as a key to strategic communication efforts. Given a lack of monolith media within Goodhue County, audiences are scattered amongst a variety of news outlets, radios, and even local government publications. Previous communication efforts focused on community members seeking out our information - these attempts have proven to be faulty. A birth of partnerships will increase communications reaching intended audiences and allow us to meet community members where they are at.

Work through local events to establish a face onto Goodhue County. Many community members can forget that those who work for the County are of the County. Establishing personal connections between community members and the County will increase reliability of our communications. By attending local events, the County can begin to spread information based on topicality or timeliness to meet intended audiences where they are at when they need information the most.

Tactics

- 1. Form a local Joint Information Center** Form partnerships with agencies of local governments such as Cities, Townships, and Schools to form an informal Joint Information Center (JIC). This JIC will allow for intergovernmental cooperation on dispersal of pertinent communications. Creates a more reliable web of communications based partnerships.
- 2. Utilize visual communications** Partner with organizations that have large client bases for consistent & increased visual communications efforts. Print materials that catch the eye such as flyers, advertisements and posters can help spread information in these settings.
- 3. Establish outreach efforts** Attending local events will aid in establishing a presence and connection amongst the community and help with communication campaigns.

Priority #2: Increase Community Awareness of County Services and Programs

Establish communication pathways and tools to better educate community members of our services and programs.

Strategies

Empower and train employees to communicate the services and programs we offer in an effective and lasting manner. Employees are our greatest assets for increasing community awareness. Centering employee participation in communication furthers general education of services and creates a more participatory workforce. Every interaction had between an employee and a community member is an opportunity to build trust and educate.

Implement effective strategies and tools to educate community members on services and programs through first point of contacts. Community members usually attempt to find an answer to a question prior to reaching out directly for help. By revising our strategy of first points of contact, we can educate while aiding community members in their search for answers.

Tactics

1. Well Informed Workforce

Empower employee “storytellers” to be the eyes, ears, and voice of the organization and expand upon the County’s traditional communication reach. These employees serve as champions, helping to educate and inform about services & programs, listening to community concerns and at least one employee from each department serves as an employee ambassador to support the County’s communication efforts.

Additionally, offer County 101 classes for all current and incoming employees. Ensures understanding of cross-departmental collaboration as well as services provided across the entire agency.

2. Front-Line point of contacts

Create more consistent front-line point of contacts to aid community members.

- Establish talking points or cheat sheets for front desk staff to assist in direction of proper services.
- Set up clear and easy to use phone trees to assist in direction of incoming questions.
- Review and renew meta tags on website pages to ensure Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is working to our advantage.

Priority #3: Strengthen Current Communication Channels

Invest in our current communication mediums through developing our digital platforms as well as recentering traditional media within our long-term strategy.

Strategies

Identify the strengths, weaknesses, and potential in our current communication channels. Through this analysis, Communications can begin the process of reinvesting time and energy into fruitful communication pursuits. Pursuing communications known to ensure interactions from the community is a key to this plan. Additionally, ensuring channels are consistent with the expectations of community members is crucial. For example, making sure community members can find the proper channels. It is paramount to center user experience.

In addition to County-controlled communication channels, time will be invested towards building relationships with external communication channels. Positive media relationships built during normal day-to-day activities is a valuable asset. Developing relationships with media and building credibility can lead to increased benefits and trust between media and the County.

Tactics

1. Increase following on virtual communications tools

Virtual announcement tools are a vital tool for communications in their ability to reach a large audience. Some ways to increase our followings involve: incentivizing community members through prize drawings at events, linking to these tools on physical signage, asking for larger accounts to share content to increase awareness of our social media presence, and referring to our 'Notify Me' function on the website in press releases.

2. Deepen partnerships with external communication mediums

Our partners in local media such as newspapers, radio stations, and magazines deserve our time and attention. Establishing genuine relationships with these mediums can ensure consistent publication of County related communications. Additionally, these relationships will aid in growing community awareness of County happenings and increased communication efforts.

3. Evaluate current social media accounts

The County operates a number of social media accounts varying from different departments. Evaluation on the accessibility of our various accounts, consistent county branding on accounts and demand for multiple accounts will be completed.

Priority #4: Develop Accessible Communications

Work to identify, develop, implement and evaluate accessibility within our current communication practices and policies.

Strategies

Government is meant to reflect the people we serve. As our community demographics continue to change and evolve, Goodhue County and how we communicate needs to adapt to the community members we serve. From an increased focus on ADA compliance to servicing our limited English community members - communications is a first line of contact. Attention must be given to reflect our communication practices to the community.

While accessible communications is a new priority for the County, we are not without aid in moving the needle on this issue. Instead, County Communications should utilize the expansive knowledge of our staff and agency partners to develop this priority.

Tactics

1. Evaluate current communications

Identify the strengths, weaknesses, and potential in our current communications. Through this analysis, Communications can begin the process of identifying alternate solutions and methods to fix these lapses.

2. Partner with the LEP working group

Through the County's Limited English Proficiency (LEP) plan, an LEP working group has been established to identify ways to increase accessibility within our services. County Communications should work with this group on recommendations for best practices for communications.

3. Implement Recommendations

From the recommendations provided from the LEP working group and our own research, County Communications should begin the process of implementing solutions. Focusing on low-cost, user friendly, and low-staff capacity principles should direct the implementation of recommendations.

Priority #5: Clarify Agency-Wide Internal Communications

Develop clear guidelines on the procedures for internal agency-wide communications between and to employees.

Strategies

How we communicate internally can embolden or hinder our agency's ability to provide adequate services, ensure message consistency, and work collaboratively. County Communications can do much more to guide these internal communications.

County Communications will create streamlined guidelines and practices. Focusing on agency-wide internal communications, these guidelines will seek to answer:

- When to issue internal notices
- Why notices should or should not be issued
- Where to issue notices for various reasons
- Who is the designated authority on notice issuing
- How are internal audiences wanting to be engaged

Tactics

1. Benchmarking

Most agencies our size do not have personnel solely for internal communications. They may, however, have established procedures for internal communications. Communications will reach out to surrounding agencies and inquire on their processes for internal communication. Overall, we will research best practices to increase inter-departmental collaboration and overall connectedness.

2. Identify potential

Through an agency-wide survey, County Communications will gather employee feedback as to how they would prefer internal notices and communications to arrive to them.

Priority #6: Provide Measurements of Progress and Success

Track metrics to evaluate communication efforts and effectiveness in order to guide future communications programs and projects.

Strategies

There are a variety of standard metrics, also known as key performance indicators, which will be used to track the success of the County's communication techniques. The County will evaluate these metrics on a regular basis and compare them to previous statistics to understand what techniques are working well and which need improvements, refinement, or further implementation.

Less standard metrics that are more challenging to monitor include behavior changes, attitude changes, and awareness changes. These metrics are attached to considerable effort, but may give a better picture of outreach effectiveness. County Communications will continue to look for proven methods for monitoring these metrics.

As part of our ongoing communication planning process and ahead of each major project launch, staff will set goals then outline the key performance indicators that will be used to identify success, measure effectiveness, and refine future plans.



Key Performance Indicators (KPI's)

Media Coverage

News Releases	The number of releases reacted to by the media.
News Sentiment	The sentiment of mentions, articles or interviews published by the media.
Reach	The reach of advertisements (both paid and unpaid) and news stories in media outlets. Examples include ads and news stories in print and online and the number of people who saw it based on the number of publications printed or the number of people who visited the webpage where the content is located.

Website

Unique Visits	The number of distinct individuals visiting the site.
Page Views	The number of times a page on the site has been viewed.
Top Pages	The pages that are visited most frequently – the top 5-10 should be tracked regularly.
Bounce Rate	The percentage of people that navigate away from the site after only viewing one page. A lower bounce rate means that people are exploring the page and finding the information they need.
Search Terms	The more frequently a term is searched, the more likely it is that visitors are not finding what they need, and suggest it may need to be displayed more prominently.

Social Media

Followers	The number of people who subscribe to, and follow, the County's pages.
Engagement	The number of people who take action by interacting with the County's pages including likes, comments, tags, or shares.
Reach	The number of people who saw the County's posts.

Printed Materials and Paid Advertisements

Distribution Rates	The number of places a printed piece can be found – both physical and online – and the actual number of pieces distributed.
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Other Metrics

Quantity of survey responses
Board feedback
Reduction in unsolicited inquiries to departments (demonstrating that the proactive messaging is working at effectively delivering the message)
Video Views
Survey results that demonstrate community understanding and engagement
Consistency in brand use across departments
Number of materials translated to Spanish or another language
Positive employee response to ambassador program
Positive community or industry response to advisory groups (quantity and frequency of participation)
Quantity of community complaints and compliments
Event and forum attendance



Implementation Plan

High Priority

Lead Strategic Communication Efforts

Strengthen Current Communication Channels

Increase Community Awareness of County Services and Programs

Medium Priority

Clarify Agency-Wide Internal Communications

Develop Accessible Communications

Provide Measurements of Progress and Success



Communication Tools

Communication Matrix

The communications matrix is a resource that both communications staff and non-communications staff can use to identify the best tools available to reach a particular audience segment.

Audiences	Tools																				Additional Long Term Tools (More than one year)			
	County Website	Flyer/Poster	Brochure	Location/Digital Signage	Press Releases	Media Advisory	Facebook (@goodhuecountymn, @goodhuecountypublicworks, @gchss, @goodhuecountysheriffsoffice)	Instagram (@goodhuecountymn)	X - Formerly Twitter (@goodhuecountymn, @godhuesheriff)	LinkedIn (@goodhuecountymn)	YouTube (@goodhuecountymn)	Photography	Virtual Town Hall	Stakeholder Meeting	Print Advertising	Digital Advertising	Fact Sheet	Video Short Form	Agenda Report	Internal Newsletter	Facility Signage	Progress Report	Final Report	End-Of-Project Wrap-Up
County Board	AN	AN	AS	M	AN	AS	M	M	M	AS	AS	AS	AN	AN	AN	AS	AN	AN	Q	AN	AN	AE	AE	
Community Wide	AN	AS		AN	AS		D	AS	AS				AS	AS	AS	AS	AE	AS			AS			
Gen Z																								
Millennials																								
Generation X																								
Boomers																								
Non-English Speakers																								
Rural-Ag																								
Urban																								
Internal Employees																								
Event Promotion																								

Audiences

- County Board
- Community Wide
- Gen Z
- Millennials
- Generation X
- Boomers
- Non-English Speakers
- Rural-Ag
- Urban
- Internal Employees
- Event Promotion

Short Term & Special Projects
(Up to one year)

Additional Long Term Tools
(More than one year)

Communication Tools Glossary

For elaboration on the potential communication tools, use this glossary.

County Website	www.goodhuecountymn.gov
Flyer/Poster	Posted in public areas where people gather.
Brochure	Found in public display racks or on counters where businesses transactions occur.
Location/Digital Signage	Displays at physical location of a project or digital displays in County Buildings.
Press Releases	Newsflash worthy of being published on the website and to the media.
Media Advisory	For Your Information email directly to a targeted media list.
Instagram	@goodhuecountymn
Facebook	Multiple accounts for the County, Public Works, HHS, and the Sheriff's Office.
X - Twitter	@goodhuecountymn
LinkedIn	@goodhuecountymn
YouTube	@goodhuecountymn
Photography	Used for storytelling for visual message. Can be used in print or digital.
Print Advertising	Advertising official publications in our official publisher and/or publishing project and survey ads in targeted media.
Virtual Town Hall	When direct feedback from constituents is needed but an in-person gathering wouldn't be efficient.
Fact Sheet	Quick, high-level overview of a project for external audiences.
Facility Signage	Guiding principles, strategic plan progress posters, etc.
Agenda Report	Information meant for communication directly to the County Board.
Progress Report	For sharing project status with stakeholders or public.
Final Report	For sharing success with stakeholders or public.
End-of-Project Wrap-Up	Public open house, ceremony, etc.

