



Communication Audit and Recommendations

PRESENTED BY JAYRAY | AUGUST 2022

Table of Contents

Executive Summary **3**

1.0 Introduction **5**

Findings and Recommendations

 2.0 Proactive Communication **9**

 3.0 Organizational Structure and Capacity **15**

 4.0 Processes and Procedures **21**

 5.0 Platforms and Channels **28**

 6.0 Culture **34**

 Prioritizing Implementation **38**

Appendices

 1. Interview Summaries **40**

 2. Comparative Analysis **46**

 3. Materials Audit **75**

 4. Sample Tools **79**

Executive Summary

Starting in February 2022, the City of Tacoma worked with a consulting team to review its communications capacity, functionality, opportunities and needs. This report outlines findings and recommendations based on the research conducted which included internal stakeholder interviews, a comparative analysis of peer municipal agencies and a high-level audit of select city communication materials. Additional research into community perceptions is recommended. This phase of external research was postponed to allow for a focus on fundamentals to allow the city to streamline work, fill capacity gaps and improve communication in areas of known community interest.

It is often said there is no such thing as overcommunication. For communicators, this means there is always a demand to do more with finite resources. The challenge is to be strategic about priorities and resources, and to accept that not every need can be met.

FOCUS EXCLUSIVELY ON COMMUNICATION

It is clear the city would benefit from a communication-specific team. The Media and Communication Office (MCO) has broadened its scope of work in recent years to include Tacoma 2025 and related efforts. MCO is spread too thin to adequately serve both missions. Communicating with intentionality and telling the city's story competes with other priorities for time and attention. Focusing exclusively on communication will allow MCO to dedicate attention to proactive communication including media relations.

Furthermore, restructuring allows for a greater division of authority to address a flat departmental structure. This will give staff greater access to team leaders and increase their ability to act quickly.

OPERATIONAL NEUTRALITY

Siloed communication in the city is exacerbated at times by a perceived lack of operational neutrality

by the MCO. It is a challenge for communicators to shine a light on information without overlaying a personal sense of rightness or wrongness to it. However, operational neutrality in a government position allows for freer communication within an ecosystem of diverse opinions. Communicators still provide meaning and context for information, as appropriate in proactive communication. However, the context and meaning reflects leader positions.

DEVOTE MORE TIME TO PROACTIVE WORK

MCO staff should ideally devote a quarter to a third of their time on proactive communication, sharing information in advance of events and fitting it within a broader narrative to create a greater understanding of the city's work on key priorities. Proactive communication requires time to think and develop editorial calendars and a comprehensive communication plan. The result is worth it. By "laddering up" messages to city priorities in press releases, social posts and other materials, your audiences see their concerns reflected and translated into action.

REALIGN RESOURCES AND ADDRESS CAPACITY ISSUES

There is an opportunity for MCO to reallocate resources to fill key missing functions, the foremost of these is a dedicated media relations person. Currently media relations is handled by multiple staffers and is not "owned" by any one team member. The function is also not well covered in off hours. Dedicating one person to this role will improve media relationships and reduce the workload for other communication specialists.

Communication work does not just happen within the MCO. Constituent communications were highlighted as a significant pain point for both council members and staff. No specific position is tasked with responding to constituents and information requests have grown rapidly in recent years. Councilmembers need additional, dedicated

support in this area with the right tools and processes in place to ensure timely responses and build trust.

ESTABLISH CLEAR PROCESSES, USING NEW TOOLS AS NEEDED

The lack of clear processes during critical communication events is slowing the organization down, particularly during after-hours incidents. By better defining how to proceed when events occur, the city can operate more smoothly and risk fewer relationship bruises along the way.

There is also opportunity to improve communication platforms currently used to reach residents. Notably, the website is ripe for improvement, and this report recommends taking some interim steps to aid functionality while preparing for a large-scale overhaul in the next two years. Other recommendations are offered to help enhance public discussion, capture social content for public reporting purposes and improve news delivery.

NURTURE A COMMUNICATION CULTURE

Communicators can serve a key consulting function within the city without necessarily doing all the communication work. A significant role for communication is to ask tough questions and facilitate cross-departmental responses. This may be uncomfortable to some internal clients but when handled well, this questioning is collaborative work and not confrontational.

MCO staff should be proactive in the pursuit of information and they function best when brought into issues early or even embedded within standing department meetings. However, without growing staff numbers, the MCO team needs to focus on top priorities. MCO staff can serve as internal consultants rather than “doers” for work that can be done at the department level or outsourced. This allows them to provide guidance and maintain standards while freeing time to devote to proactive work on high priority issues.

Finally, the city needs to lean into communicating even when there is uncertainty. Acknowledging an issue, stating that not all the facts are known at this time and then promising updates is a better strategy than to delay that initial communication.

It is said no vacuum exists in communication. If you don't say something, someone else will and that's how misinformation begins.

1.0 Introduction

The City of Tacoma hired JayRay Ads & PR in partnership with Karapace Consulting to review the city's communication practices, materials and structure to find opportunities for better communication on key issues with Tacoma's residents.

JayRay is a full-service communication firm, launched in 1970 and based in Tacoma. The firm has worked with the City of Tacoma and many other local municipalities on strategic communication and marketing programs, including communication audits.

Katie Whittier, founder of Karapace Consulting, is a trusted JayRay partner who brings two decades of experience in government affairs, public involvement, media relations and advocacy. She has served as communication lead in several government positions.

The following pages outline key findings and recommendations for implementing changes to make the City of Tacoma's communication functions more manageable, scalable and approachable. Some recommendations are a departure from current practice, others mention work staff have already begun. All take into account the budget limitations of a fiscally responsible city. The solutions strive to:

- Help internal stakeholders, Tacoma residents, the media and the general public more easily access relevant information.
- Help the city strengthen community trust in government leaders and institutions.
- Allow MCO staff to feel more in control of their workdays and allow them to focus on city priorities.

Our findings and recommendations are laid out in the pages that follow, divided into the following sections:

- Proactive Communications
- Organizational Structure and Capacity

- Processes and Procedures
- Platforms and Channels
- Culture

1.1 CONTEXT AND OVERARCHING FINDINGS

Tacoma's team of communication and policy professionals works hard to make a difference amid vast changes in community expectations and trust. Councilmembers interviewed spoke highly of the efforts to which staff go to find answers, write articles, prepare talking points and respond to requests. The general sense is that everyone is doing their best given the demands of their jobs in the current environment. The biggest question was how to do more.

Overall, we found communication staff members are too often operating without the level of clarity necessary to succeed. The city is in a growing phase, operating as a mid-sized city without all the tools needed to serve the large city it has become. Some of the issues around clarity seem to stem from the city's operating structure, and others came more recently from the challenges of having a diffuse workforce during the pandemic. While communication teams pride themselves on flexibility, we found a diversity of practices around policies, procedures and priorities. Those engaged in communication benefit from established and consistent practices and clear prioritization of work. Still, other challenges may be rooted in the organization's underlying culture.

Tacoma is not alone in the communication challenges it faces. Misinformation is prominent nationwide, if not globally. Social media has upended expectations around frequency, accuracy and responsiveness of city communication and has given an amplifier to the loudest voices on any topic in any community on any platform. Digital platforms make it easier than ever to reach people anytime day and night, and the expectation for on-demand information and engagement grew

exponentially during the pandemic as in-person outreach moved online where it is easily archived for 24/7 consumption.

Throughout the U.S., cities face increased street violence and crime while trust in the police and government is low. Cities must communicate with residents who have never engaged with local government before, as well as with stakeholders who have historically commanded attention. Every governmental entity facing these challenges is figuring out how to address them while also coming out of the worst pandemic in a century, encountering the tightest labor market in the Post-war era, dealing with cost pressures from inflation and certainly “doing more with less.”

Put simply, we are in uncharted waters when it comes to how governments can effectively communicate and build trust with their residents. Communities across the nation are trying different methods to have an impact in this new environment, from relying more heavily on strategy to scaling up their capacity. When figuring out how to help Tacoma adapt to this dynamic new environment, our task is to illuminate the largest pinch-points and provide an array of next steps to add clarity, consistency and enough space to proactively engage not just with the community, but with colleagues. The good news is that there are many paths forward, and even small changes can make a big difference. The bad news is that there is no easy answer to building and maintaining trust in today’s landscape.

To that end, there exists an urgent need to tell a strategic, proactive, overarching story about Tacoma and share a unified vision with the community about where the city is heading. The need is not only conceptual (it appears the city would benefit from dedicating time to develop a strategic communication plan that can guide the next three to five years of MCO efforts) but practical, in terms of what channels, platforms and forums are the right avenues to reach the right people at the right time with the right information.

The following pages outline these findings in more detail and offer recommendations for how to begin changing the tide. We understand the city faces resource constraints and given current

staffing levels, staffing may be less important than resource alignment in achieving more effective communication outcomes alongside more manageable workloads. Resource alignment involves restructuring team resources to focus on communication as a priority mission; clarifying policies and procedures to lessen confusion and share best practices; defining priorities to focus on mission-critical communication; and improving the platforms through which the city connects with its residents. It also means giving the communication staff greater ability to “delegate, delay or don’t do.” This means enhancing their ability to outsource, control the timing of some communication and be clear on what support they can and cannot provide departments.

Compared to similar cities, Tacoma appears to have a wide presence across digital platforms which, in turn, could contribute to a heavier workload without necessarily reaching a proportionally wider audience. Content creation may be happening in disconnected pockets throughout the city without the level of coordination that would eliminate duplicated efforts and allow for a cohesive narrative to develop.

We also understand change cannot come all at once. With a range of recommendations in hand, city leadership can prioritize initiatives that fit the most urgent needs upfront and begin planning for longer-term changes. In the final section, we offer guidance on how to phase various recommendations for highest impact.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

The scope of work began in February 2022. Our research included interviews with city staff as well as the city’s elected officials. Additionally, we conducted a comparative analysis of four similar municipalities and audited Tacoma-produced communication materials and/or platforms. Last, we augmented the MCO team’s capacity during an emergent event and experienced firsthand many of the challenges described to us during the interview phase.

We initially planned an additional research phase that included stakeholder engagement through an online survey, workshops and a steering committee. This body of work has been postponed

in the interest of reviewing and implementing recommendations as quickly as possible. However, we do recommend the city conduct stakeholder engagement as it progresses through implementation to gather critical insights that may be beneficial.

1.2.1 INTERVIEWS

Interviews with staff and elected officials played a significant role in our research process. It was important from the outset that this work address concerns set out by the city council and examine internal hurdles that could be preventing the city's best efforts at sharing information externally while collaborating effectively internally.

We conducted interviews with the mayor, all current councilmembers, and staff members at both leadership and production levels. All interviews were conducted individually to encourage in-depth discussion. We intended to conduct similar interviews with external stakeholders, but the priority became sharing early recommendations. Should external stakeholder interviews become more important as changes are implemented, we stand ready to return to that part of the scope of work.

Themes from the interviews can be found in Appendix 1.

1.2.2 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

By examining how other municipalities communicate with their residents, the comparative analysis allowed us a glimpse into a variety of approaches that may be worth implementing at Tacoma to streamline or clarify communication efforts. Three other Washington state cities were selected for review, and one non-Washington city with similar characteristics was added to expand insights beyond state borders. They are as follows:

- **Vancouver, Washington** – Similar to Tacoma in size and nearly identical in governance, Vancouver USA sits in the shadow of Portland's media market but is a robust community unto itself.
- **Reno, Nevada** – Similar to Tacoma in size and nearly identical in governance, Reno, Nevada has made major changes to its communications practices in recent years, including a restructuring

post-pandemic to focus more specifically on strategic, proactive communications. It offers a wide array of best practices.

- **Seattle, Washington** – Different from Tacoma in size and governance, Seattle is the regional heavyweight and sets a lot of expectations across the Puget Sound area for how governments interact with residents.
- **Bellevue, Washington** – Similar to Tacoma in size and somewhat similar in governance, Bellevue sits in the shadow of Seattle's media market, as does Tacoma, but operates with a smaller communications team. Like Reno, it has restructured its communications practices in recent years to centralize efforts.
- Pierce County and Renton, Washington, also were reviewed but not selected for in-depth analysis.
- Spokane and Lakewood, Washington, as well as Ogden, Utah, also were considered but not selected for review.

The comparative analysis can be found in Appendix 2.

1.2.3 MATERIALS AUDIT

As part of the research phase, JayRay evaluated the effectiveness of five city-owned communications platforms and tools. A proven and standardized assessment form was used to establish rankings and provide input for recommendations on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 5 representing "strongly agree."

In general, high-functioning communications programs will score many 5s and work on their 4s. We caution against being satisfied with 3s, and both 2s and 1s should raise alarms about the effectiveness of a communications program.

Overall, Tacoma scores average as follows:

- Social media channels (Twitter and Facebook) = 24.5 out of 35 points (70% or a C-average)
- Press release sample = 24.5 out of 35 points (70% or a C-average)
- Council newsletter sample = 23.1 out of 35 points (66% or a D average)

- Website homepage = 22.5 out of 35 points (64% or a D average)
- OVERALL = 94.6 out of 140 points (68% or a D+ average)

As in academia, a D average is enough to get by but not enough to demonstrate mastery or compete well against peers. Concerted efforts will be necessary to bring Tacoma platforms up to community expectations and industry standards of excellence.

A complete analysis is found in Appendix 3.

Findings and Recommendations

2.0 Proactive Communication

“Communication should not be an afterthought. We need to be brought into discussions earlier.”

“We are too often in the weeds.”

“Working with the media is a time suck and they control the narrative.”

“Press releases tend toward ‘this is what happened’ plus a quote. Can we leverage that moment to fit that information into a larger narrative about the city?”

“We have too many voices and not one source of truth.”

– *Comments from city council and staff interviews*

A strong theme that emerged during interviews with Tacoma leaders and internal staff was the need to go beyond reactive communication to do more proactive storytelling and share a larger vision for the city.

What do we mean by “proactive communication”?

At its most basic level, proactive communication means anticipating what communication will be needed in the future and leaning in ahead of time with authentic storytelling and an overarching strategy to guide the work. Done well, it means most information that arises within an organization can be overtly placed within a wider context that aligns with the organizational mission and vision.

It is often times effective in proactive communication to include a simple message or statement to explain how any given event, decision or development aligns with the city’s goals to increase community health or address community concerns around affordability—or some other city initiative. The additional context keeps your audience focused on the big picture and demonstrates responsiveness to their interests. It also holds your organization accountable to the priorities you’ve set. This connection to contextualize is called the “laddering up” method in proactive communication.

Proactive communication also establishes a

cadence of stories and information to ensure regular updates to the community on priority topics. In doing so, it helps position the city as a trusted information source, addressing issues in advance when possible and in a timely manner during crisis events (“timely” being defined by the 24/7 news cycle). Proactive communication requires both communication staff and their internal clients to think about key initiatives and priorities well in advance and not individually, but rather as pieces of the larger story of Tacoma.

Proactive communication is imperative for any organization that seeks to break through the noise and build trust. ***It may feel like there’s not enough time for proactive communication, but the truth is that there’s not enough time because there’s not enough proactive communication.***

2.1 FINDINGS

- City of Tacoma communications often do not ladder up to Mayor and council priorities. Stories are not connected to the larger purpose. In the communications audit, this was called out as missing the opportunity to tell the story of Tacoma.
- MCO lacks a comprehensive communication plan to help plan proactive communication, prioritize work and allocate resources. Without this plan,

staff members work in silos, representing their many internal clients well, but without always connecting the dots between stories.

- While individual staff members calendar their work, the team operates without an overarching long-term editorial calendar that could ensure a regular cadence of communication on key topics.
- The media relations function is spread out among multiple team members. No one person owns these relationships and reporters seek out their own preferred sources for information.
- Not all MCO staff are comfortable with developing messages for leaders, and this role may not be fully developed across the team. This may hinder proactive development of responses to tough issues and hard questions.
- MCO staff report spending significant time in a reactionary mode and caution they are not called into projects early enough. Staff meetings focus on the issues of the day or week, but regular time is not set aside for long-range planning.
- Staff report their best opportunity for learning of advance information is to attend their internal client's team meetings. This is effective, but labor-intensive.
- The city recently launched a new intranet to facilitate internal information sharing.

2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS: PRIORITIZING PROACTIVE COMMUNICATION

The benefits of proactive communication are many. Staying ahead of the narrative gives organizations more control and direction, increases the believability of their messages among their audiences, widens their influence and lessens the burnout rate among staff.

Being proactive requires a commitment to priority setting that allows the time to focus on the most important work as defined by city leaders.

In our comparative analysis, we saw several examples of how municipal communications teams are balancing or prioritizing proactive communication to break out of the gravitational pull of reactivity.

- Seattle operates with communicators spread

far and wide across departments and has no centralized communication team. But three things help them prioritize and set boundaries:

- Setting an expectation that the default is to communicate—always communicate, even if the answer is we don't know yet—but also understand that communications work is never done, never rests and never feels like it goes far enough.
- Striving for an ideal time division where:
 - One-third of the day/week is spent proactively communicating.
 - One-third of the day/week is spent reacting to emerging needs.
 - One-third of the day/week is spent doing the desk work and/or coordinating across the team/teams.
- Knowing how to find communication contacts across departments.
- As described in more detail later in this document, the City of Reno reorganized its communication and outreach efforts to focus its core communications team on strategic communications. Routine communication for departments were distributed back to the departments. The result has been more time and space to be deliberate and proactive, and to respond in more strategic ways.
- The City of Vancouver's communications director is considering adding more team focus on strategy too. They are looking for ways to augment city outreach efforts into proactive communication campaigns to not only reach more people but to ensure those efforts are well recognized and understood.

In the section on organizational structure, we will get into specifics on how team structure may be improved. But that work arises from a commitment to focus on proactive communication.

2.3 RECOMMENDATIONS: DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNICATION PLAN

Proactive communication depends on solid communication strategy built around the city's top priorities. *We recommend Tacoma invest*

the time and budget to develop an overarching communication strategy and plan to address post-pandemic needs and the evolving demands for community information sharing.

The plan would lay out high-level communication strategy around council priority issues. As a baseline, it should include:

- **Goals.** What do we need to achieve? What will be different as a result of this strategy?
- **Specific, measurable objectives.** How do we measure our work? How do we define success?
- **An audience analysis.** Who are we trying to reach and where are we most likely to find them?
- **Key messaging.** What is it that we need to say and how do we make sure it is understood?
- **Key milestones in the foreseeable future.** What risks, challenges and opportunities do we anticipate, and how can we plan now to best navigate or leverage them?
- **A long-term editorial calendar.** When should we communicate about what, and how often should we communicate it?
- **A look at extending communication partnerships** with community organizations.
- **Plans to advance critical communication channels** such as the website and close or reassign low priority channels that offer less return for the work involved.

Development of a strategic communication plan requires MCO staff and leader engagement to ensure both staff ownership and feasibility. However, this work takes significant time and can benefit from an outside eye to provide objectivity, experience and fresh ideas. Our recommendation is to budget \$25,000 to \$35,000 for an outside communication firm to craft the strategic communication plan alongside the MCO team.

The comprehensive plan provides the foundation for work plans for each MCO team member. This effort may require additional training or resources, but often it streamlines workloads because:

- Priorities are easier to see and decisions easier to make.
- Following a set plan increases the level of

objectivity with which communication decisions are made.

- It becomes much easier to differentiate distractions from important moments in which to act. It's more apparent when an interruption serves a goal, and the team can accommodate the interruption by folding it into existing plans.

A note about building communication

plans around individual initiatives: With a comprehensive strategic communication plan to guide overall efforts, individual initiatives can use much simpler planning processes. Several team members use one-page work plans. We encourage standardizing them into one template and consider digital options like Asana, Basecamp or Wrike to streamline the project management aspects of individual communication plans. Then be sure to build from previous efforts when planning recurring events or similar campaigns so you're not starting from scratch.

- When a team functions together with a shared understanding of the goals, there is less need for repetitive conversations and redundant meetings to keep everyone on the same page, freeing up more capacity to act.

2.4 MAYOR AND COUNCIL PRIORITIES ESTABLISH EDITORIAL CALENDAR FRAMEWORK

The city already has in-hand a set of strategies upon which to establish a communications plan. The mayor and city council have identified priorities including community safety, health, housing, access, livable wage jobs, and belief and trust in city government. One simple way to move toward more proactive communication practices is to focus communication efforts around these priorities, linking news, announcements and statements back to the priorities as often as possible and crafting content that highlights progress toward the goals.

We recommend MCO develops and maintains a running 90-day master editorial calendar based on Mayor and council priorities to allow staff to tie individual stories to city goals, leverage

stories across communication channels, promote efficiency and prioritization, and ensure a regular cadence of stories on key topics.

We have shared a template for a 90-day master editorial calendar in the toolkit in Appendix 4.

2.5 RECOMMENDATIONS: PUBLIC RELATIONS AND MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT

In recent years, public relations has become a tainted profession as high-profile PR professionals have violated the common code of ethics underlying the profession. This erosion does not change the inherent value of public relations in helping the public relate to an organization. Done ethically, public relations delivers precisely what people expect from government agencies and corporations alike: It builds trusted relationships on which to exchange information, goods, services and opportunities.

While we recognize the reflex by MCO staff to approach PR with caution, we must emphatically point out that PR is not propaganda. It strives for honesty and openness, and it seeks to shine light on issues of importance. It doesn't hide bad news but endeavors to deliver it with the necessary and appropriate context to be understood and dealt with productively.

Delivering news with context for better understanding requires advance thought as to what is the most important information to convey on key topics, especially topics that arise on a regular basis. These messages are a foundation, not a replacement for specific communication that delivers the facts of a current event. This message preparation can help with day-to-day communication and provide essential context for delivering news in crisis situations. It also reduces confusion and helps the city "speak with one voice," an essential part of building trust with the community.

We recommend that MCO staff collaborate with city leaders to develop simple, context-setting messages on high-priority issues to help to enhance communication effectiveness and consistency.

2.6 RECOMMENDATIONS: MEDIA RELATIONS

Media relations is vital to successful communication programs because it opens the door to free, independent information sharing. This is known as earned media (as opposed to advertising, which is paid media). Earned media reaches audiences who might not otherwise hear from you, whether because they don't follow your social media accounts, receive newsletters or any other number of reasons. But more importantly, earned media independently verifies what you say. Then in a situation of distrust, where someone who follows you might be disinclined to believe what you post, they might be more likely to trust a similar story being told in the media.

In our interviews, we found a general sense of reluctance to engage media. We heard, "Reporters control the narrative," "We do too many news releases" and "Responding to media takes a lot of time." This reluctance is worrisome but understandable given that no one person owns this role and many perceive it as a less-desirable part of their job.

We get it: Media relations is hard. Journalists are trained to ask tough questions, and occasionally such questions come off as ignorant, disrespectful or even hostile. But not devoting enough time and energy to the press backfires 100% of the time when a news outlet leaves out your side of the story or reports reaching out but receiving no response.

Media efforts must be approached in a relational manner. This means proactively reaching out to journalists, getting to know who they are, what beats they cover, what types of issues they're especially concerned about. It means giving them a heads-up when big news is coming. It means responding quickly, even if the only information you can share is a time by which you expect to have more information to share.

Seeing journalists in their larger context often helps soften the natural tension between an in-house communicator and a media outlet. Few professions have been as gutted as journalism has been over the past two decades. Job opportunities are slim, salaries are low, workloads are significantly higher than they used to be and burnout is expected. Remembering this context when speaking to a

reporter can help diffuse the natural defensive reflex during interviews, but it also shines a light on how to sustain relationships with media: Whatever you do to make their lives easier goes a long way toward building trust. And when you've earned trust, the questions feel less confrontational.

We recommend the MCO creates a position that focuses solely on media relations. This position would handle all media questions and work with leadership and MCO specialists on proactive media relations. Since no one person can be “on” 24/7, we recommend the development of a rotating backup schedule using specialists to cover media relations on the weekends, holidays and vacations.

If the city wishes to apply resources for professional development opportunities to further develop internal media relations strengths, multiple avenues exist for in-person and online trainings in everything from interviewing tactics to media pitch strategies. Here are just a few places to start:

- Media relations
 - PRSA, https://apps.prsa.org/Learning/Calendar/list/category/106/media_relations
 - PRSA Bootcamp, https://apps.prsa.org/Learning/Calendar/display/5069/Media_Training_Boot_Camp#.Ynb5M1TMKUK
- Media interviews
 - Udemy, <https://www.udemy.com/course/media-training-and-interview-fundamentals/>
 - Mediapoint, <https://pa.media/pa-mediapoint/media-training/remote-media-training/>
 - JayRay also offers media trainings as part of its service portfolio (as do many PR agencies)
- Media pitching
 - Michael Smart, <https://michaelsmartpr.com/pr-training-courses/> (highly recommend)
 - PRSA, https://apps.prsa.org/Learning/Calendar/display/7401/Crafting_the_Perfect_Pitch#.Ynb4QFTMKUK
 - Udemy, <https://www.udemy.com/course/get-major-media-coverage-pitching-your-brand-to-the-press/>

2.7 RECOMMENDATIONS: INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Any organization's strongest advocates are more likely to be under their own roof than anywhere else, and giving those advocates timely, accurate information can make a huge difference. The City of Tacoma recently launched a new intranet platform—an excellent new way to share information with citywide staff.

We recommend MCO continue to expand the use of the new platform to simplify its operations and make information readily available to council and city staff.

The intranet is the ideal place to share factsheets, talking points and other resources on hot topics, especially for councilmembers to access when preparing answers to constituents. Without a doubt, city staff are producing a large volume of good information on a daily basis. By making more of that information easily accessible to others across the city, there's an opportunity to prevent duplicated efforts and support MCO messaging and proactive communication work. The intranet, handled well, can help provide that source of truth one commenter mentioned.

Version control will be important to manage as the intranet collects more information. If it isn't already standard practice, make sure a date is added to the body and file name of any file stored there and remove the outdated materials. Likely, the tool allows for automatic expiration or retirement of files. Finally, remind staff to consult the latest version on the intranet in the event that they may be tempted to download a copy and use it going forward.

Another opportunity for automation may be the daily news roundups. Consider migrating them to the intranet and exploring automation through a tool such as Cision, Mediatoolkit or even Google Alerts. This can be augmented as needed during bigger periods of news.

- Links: <https://www.cision.com/>; <https://www.mediatoolkit.com/>

A note about internal communications:

Usually, when a communication team reliably shares news and information across an organization, coworkers begin turning to them more often with departmental news and updates that a communication team might otherwise miss or find out about too late. Providing organizational updates can be a great way to not only break down silos but also build cross-departmental relationships and build trust.

There are many opportunities for internal communications, through the intranet and beyond. Our work centered more on structures, policies and platforms than on internal communications, but we do see a gap that should be filled so that staff are better able to sing from the same songbook, so to speak.

2.8 RECOMMENDATIONS: DEVELOP POLICIES AND TOOLS TO PRIORITIZE WORK

The MCO cannot pick up additional work without setting down some of the activities that currently flood staff. Prioritizing proactive communication, establishing an overall communication plan and master editorial calendar, and leveraging the use of existing tools such as the intranet will help.

We recommend the team adopt an intake form that requires the prioritization of the work being asked of the team and ensures the most efficient use of their time and resources. A sample template is included among the tools in Appendix 4.

We further recommend the adoption of processes that allow MCO to be more of an advisor to other departments, rather than needing to take on communication for every project and initiative. Seek opportunities to help departments develop templates and establish good communication practices for recurring activities that will allow them to become self-sustaining.

3.0 Organizational Structure and Capacity

“The CMO director has too many reports to be effective.”

“We need to change the organizational structure of the MCO. The structure is so flat, there’s no one to delegate to and no one above to ask for help.”

“No one oversees media relations and there should be.”

“There’s more work than we have capacity. I work evenings and weekends.”

“Provide support to councilmembers so residents don’t go unanswered.”

“There’s lots of ways for people to reach out to the city, but no way to channel requests or responses. That leads to no accountability.”

“No one wants to do constituent communication, and all acknowledge that it isn’t being done and it is harming citizen trust in the city.”

– *Comments from city council and staff interviews*

MCO and city council staff are working hard to deliver everything that is asked of them. While our focus has been on MCO, council staff also have a significant and important role in city communication. In this section, we offer ideas on how capacity constraints might be alleviated by restructuring as well as adding a limited number of staff in key areas.

3.1 MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE STRUCTURE AND CAPACITY

Tacoma’s MCO team is structured quite differently from similar municipal organizations and has trended toward adding responsibilities in recent years rather than narrowing its focus as comparable jurisdictions have done. When looking at some of the capacity constraints reported by staff, we reiterate our statement from section 1.1 and say staffing may be less important than resource alignment in achieving more effective communication outcomes. That is not to say no new FTEs may be required.

In addition to aligning work with an overarching communication plan, structural changes to the office could bring significant benefits because:

- Mission and resources would be better aligned.
- Staff would work from a common plan, lessening the need for ongoing decision-making and management of individual workloads and

heightening the ability to decline work that doesn’t serve the overall city vision adequately.

- The team can be more nimble to give and receive guidance.
- Authority to make decisions and take ownership projects could expand beyond leadership.

3.1.1 FINDINGS

- MCO’s director covers multiple high-profile missions on behalf of the city, and these missions conflict at times.
- MCO’s mission has grown in recent years, diluting its focus on communication and marketing activities. Regionally, the trend for communications departments in recent years has been to narrow their focus rather than expand them.
- MCO’s organizational structure is flat with all staff reporting to the director and no mid-level management to provide more hands-on guidance.
- MCO lacks a strong relationship with news media because no position directly prioritizes it.
- There is a lack of relationship building with other departments that reduces the “soft power” that communications teams generally achieve in organizations.

3.1.2 FINDINGS: WORKLOAD CARRIED BY MCO DIRECTOR

A striking feature of the Tacoma organizational chart is how approximately 14 MCO staff report to the director (with 11 reporting up through TV Tacoma). Our interviews showed that staff are hungry for more interaction with their leader, which is difficult given the director's number of reports.

Additionally, it is highly unusual to see communication staff at the director level cover more than the role of communications. At Tacoma, the MCO director also oversees implementation of the city's strategic plan, wearing two mission-critical hats that both warrant more than an FTE's worth of attention *and* can occasionally be at odds with one another, forcing the director to choose one mission's priorities over the other.

Taken together, the MCO director is spread thin in multiple ways, from managing a large group of direct reports to balancing two separate, mission-critical aspects of the city. This poses a significant strain on capacity and reduces the likelihood that communications can be timely, vetted and strategic on a consistent basis. It also creates a reliance on a position that, should the director accept a role elsewhere, would be difficult to hire.

3.1.3 FINDINGS: ADAPTATIONS IN RECENT YEARS

The trend in recent years has been toward narrowing the focus of municipal communication teams to allow more proactive, strategic communications work. The City of Reno is an example. Pre-pandemic, it functioned as a department that reported to the city manager but oversaw all externally facing city efforts, from proper public noticing for public works projects to managing their 311-line equivalent. They reorganized in 2021 to become a function of the city manager's office and now focus purely on strategic communication, defined to include official city platforms and channels, messaging, communication policy and media. They maintain relationships with the broader community-facing work of the city but no longer manage it, freeing them up to support city leadership (including elected officials) with responses to media requests, emergent issues and proactive messaging.

Similarly, the City of Bellevue used to staff communications across departments with one or more communicators assigned within each department. Over the course of the pandemic, to streamline efforts and allow more space for coordination on strategy, they brought the communicators onto one centralized team overseen by the chief communications officer, who is a member of the city manager's executive team. The centralization has helped them apply messaging not just more strategically, but more consistently and efficiently too, while still serving individual departments with assigned staff focus areas.

By contrast, Tacoma's MCO appears to have grown in scope over the past half-decade and now covers a wider array of city initiatives than it has in the past. As a result, it may feel like less communication is happening even as more staff resources are added and larger workloads accommodated. If this is the on-the-ground experience, the problems likely have less to do with staffing levels and inherent capabilities and more to do with trying to adequately service a growing mission. The city should divide the office to increase capacity for focusing on proactive, strategic communications work.

3.1.4 RECOMMENDATIONS: RESTRUCTURING

We believe a city the size and complexity of Tacoma needs a team that is 100% dedicated to communications. We recommend dividing MCO into two different departments or divisions:

- **Strategic Initiatives Office:** Tacoma 2025, special projects, engagement, etc.
- **Media and Communications Office:** Proactive storytelling, media relations, public information, marketing, etc.

The strategic initiatives director would oversee a team dedicated to implementation of Tacoma 2025, guide direct engagement with communities, and advise departments (including MCO) on how to apply the strategies in Tacoma 2025 to their work, serving in an internal consulting role.

The communication director's role would prioritize cross-departmental relationship-building and apply public relations expertise to execute communications strategies in service of the

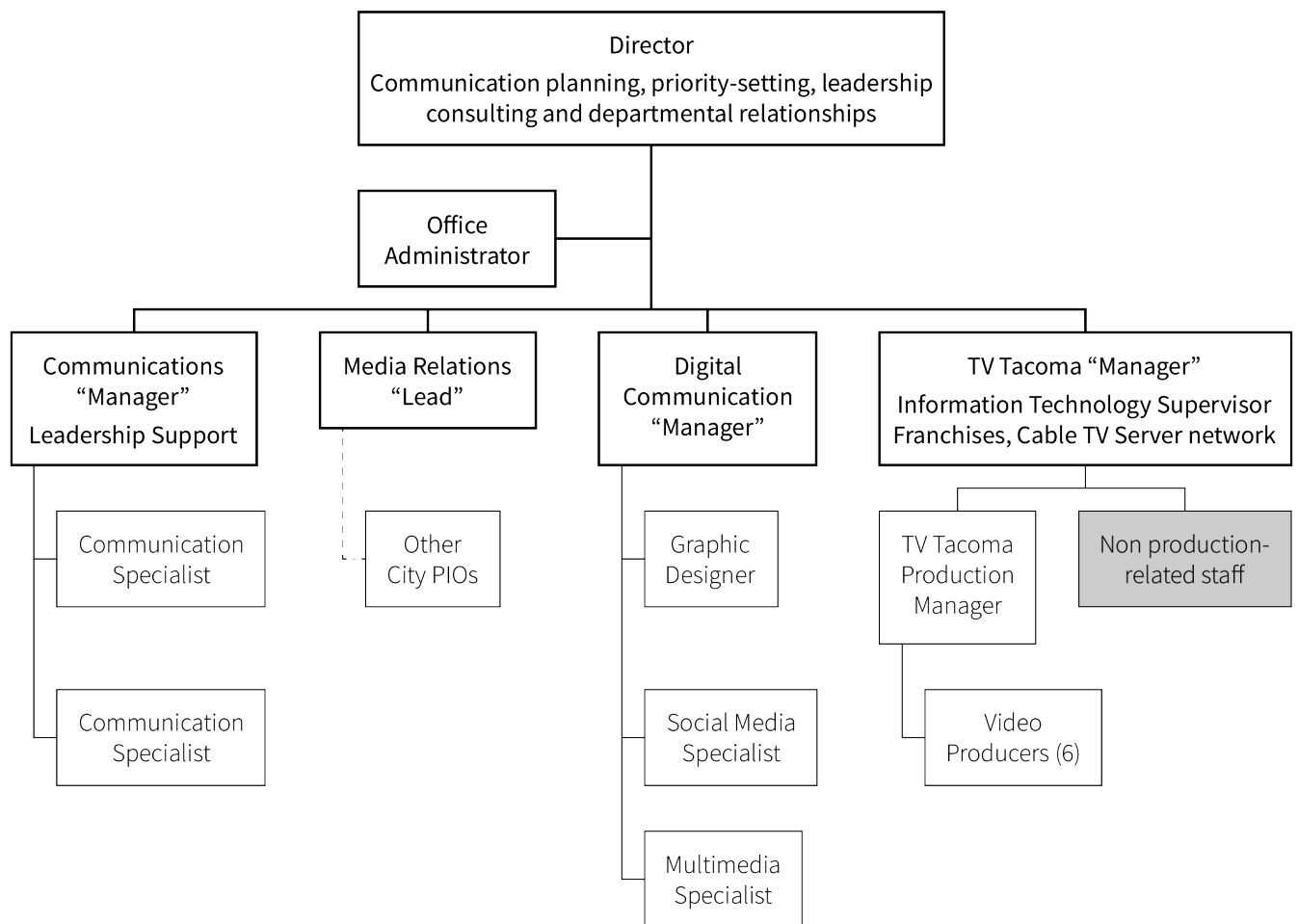
city’s priorities. This position would oversee a limited number of staff to whom the rest of the office reports directly, creating a less horizontal team structure. The director would focus on interdepartmental information sharing and communication consulting on an executive level, as well as comprehensive communication planning, messaging, process improvement and innovation.

By dividing MCO according to its differing missions, the city can free up MCO to focus on proactive efforts and bring a higher level of attention to the city’s communication needs. It should increase the inherent objectivity of the position because it minimizes the potential to prioritize one mission over another when the two missions are in conflict, such as representing the community to the city (as a Strategic Initiatives Office might do) versus representing the city to the community (as communications offices do). *Please note that one*

of the two leadership roles may need to be hired.

Our focus is on communication; therefore, we recommend a potential reporting structure just for the MCO. Note we are using roles, not titles.

“Manager” could therefore be a supervisor or other level as long as they are able to manage significant workstreams and other people. We were not given a full organization chart of all 25 members of MCO. There are roles within TV Tacoma that may not be accounted for. However, we understand upcoming retirements at TV Tacoma may create flexibility to add staff in urgently needed roles. We have not listed the roles of the three strategy and engagement positions as these would move into a new strategy office. Strategy staff with a focus on translation would have a dotted relationship to the communication manager and act as internal consultants.



3.1.5 RECOMMENDATIONS: COMMUNICATIONS ROLES

Reporting directly to the MCO director, each of the communications manager or lead positions should be working positions, not just supervisory. They would provide oversight to specialists or have a dotted line relationship to PIOs in police and other departments. They also would contribute heavily to team output and production. ***We recommend the workload be allocated as follows.***

1. **Leadership Support:** support council needs, provide support to the city manager and MCO director, function as a deputy to the MCO director
2. **Media Relations:** serve in the lead PIO role for the city, build relationships with news outlets and community blogs of note, lead press release preparation, identify and train spokespersons, and be a liaison to the police public information officer and potentially other city PIOs
3. **Digital Communications:** oversee and contribute to content development for all digital channels from website to social media (including intranet), implement digital marketing strategies to amplify messages that need to be shared

Specialists would provide cross-functional support ranging from drafting content to managing social media accounts. While not every specialist would necessarily do all of the tasks, at least two would be ready to support the communications managers with any need. The city may benefit from hiring additional specialists, but we recommend augmenting support for councilmembers as a higher priority for hiring at this time (covered later in this section).

3.1.6 RECOMMENDATIONS: SCALING UP AND DOWN

We recommend identifying and pre-authorizing contractors to allow MCO to flex capacity for on-demand work while minimizing the need for additional FTEs. We recommend working with the procurement team to select contractors in advance and allocating a contingency budget to minimize time lost in a procurement process when urgent new needs emerge, as they certainly will. From unexpected vacancies to family leave to a compressed timeline for priority work, the ability to scale up with contractors keeps workloads

more manageable while still meeting community information needs.

Similarly, we have seen positive results when an organization keeps a communication strategist on contract for consulting hours to advise leadership, provide second opinions and even cover high-level work when the communications director is spread thin. Given the varying level of PR experience available across the MCO team, including at the leadership level, mentorship and training might deliver high value. There are many qualified Tacoma-based agencies and individuals who could help here, but if the budget is restrictive for now, staff involvement in the local American Marketing Association (AMA) or Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) chapters could fill a mentorship gap.

3.1.7 RECOMMENDATIONS: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In the communication profession, there is always the need for continuing professional development as tools and techniques rapidly change in this information age. When internal departments are as busy as MCO, professional development time often disappears. Yet when the city is facing ever-greater communication demands, the need for professional development for communicators is great. We heard a consistent theme of “We don’t have time to think (about new tools, processes, strategies).” ***We recommend carving out time for professional development even if it comes at the expense of lower-level work that can be pushed back to the departments.***

3.2 CITY COUNCIL STAFF STRUCTURE AND CAPACITY

A key goal stated in the outset of our work was to figure out how best to meet growing demands for constituent communications, described as support for the city’s elected officials in responding to communications from and sharing information with residents. This need was reiterated in many ways throughout our interviews with councilmembers.

Community members are expecting more and more responsiveness from elected officials, especially as local media outlets have scaled back operations, leaving more people to rely on social media, websites and other on-demand media for

community news. This trend is not likely to change and, in fact, the expectations will likely continue to increase as governmental agencies scale up their communication efforts to meet these new expectations. Falling behind risks losing trust, and without public trust, agencies often experience radical change with each election cycle, disrupting the ability to follow through on long-term plans and sometimes disrupting normal operations.

Constituent communications come in two main forms:

1. Emails, phone calls, texts, online posts and meetings where information or responses are requested by residents from elected officials.
2. Emails, phone calls, texts, online posts and meetings in which elected officials seek to address issues proactively.

3.2.1 FINDINGS

- Councilmembers are under more pressure to communicate out to residents than in years past.
- Councilmembers rely on policy staff to support communication outputs.
- Councilmembers' availability and interest in communicating out to residents varies greatly member by member, creating an uneven landscape for various districts to hear from their elected officials.
- Time spent drafting communications is time taken away from policy development and advisory roles expected of the policy analysts.
- Council staff have been added in recent years but struggle to keep up with growing demands for constituent services.
- Tacoma's councilmembers are part-time and term-limited, creating a more urgent environment for change-making and increasing the importance of ongoing onboarding and training support for elected officials.

3.2.2 FINDINGS: EXISTING CAPACITY

Currently, the city's eight councilmembers rely on a team of four staff in two separate position types: schedulers (one for every four councilmembers) and policy analysts (one for every four

councilmembers). Additionally, the mayor has staff specific to her office.

Council staffing varies widely across the comparative municipalities we reviewed. Details can be viewed in Appendix 2, but with the exception of Seattle, the cities we reviewed provide communication support (for constituent communication and beyond) directly through the city's core communication team, with a dotted line between the communications director/chief communications officer and councilmembers, sometimes but not always involving the city manager. When asked whether peer cities would find it easier to have a different communications director to serve councilmembers specifically, the answers were emphatically "no" because it would be more challenging to speak with one, unified voice. (Again, the exception is Seattle, but Seattle is a mayor-council form of government.)

It is important to note that the City of Tacoma is a council-manager form of government, meaning the council is the governing body which directs city operations through a city manager who implements its direction. The mayor, while elected independently, is a member of the governing body and holds equal influence with the other councilmembers, serving in a ceremonial leadership role for communication and other duties but not empowered to manage city operations independently. This role warrants additional staff support but does not inherently espouse more authority in the city's decision-making or policy-setting processes.

Equally important to note is that Tacoma's elected officials are term-limited, resulting in a maximum span of eight years (if re-elected) in which to accomplish the goals voters elected them to carry out. Term limits are somewhat uncommon, though not unheard of, at municipalities. They bring a number of additional considerations when it comes to communicating with constituents, from a unique sense of urgency to a significantly higher need for onboarding and supplementary trainings. When combined with the part-time nature of the council role, staff are necessary to fill in gaps and support transitions so that elected officials can do what they were elected to do: set policy.

Currently, constituent communication is handled in combination between individual councilmembers and their assigned policy analyst. Broader communications and messaging are handled in part by MCO, but current MCO capacity allows for little support when it comes to constituent-level responses or proactive, district-level communication. This leaves a gap that is filled in part by the policy analysts but is often left up to the discretion of individual, part-time councilmembers to handle. The result is varying access to information from the council across city residents dependent upon where they live, how vocal/active a district's residents are, and how much capacity individual councilmembers can offer in each situation.

The lack of clarity and capacity for handling constituent communication can result in community distrust, as well as resentment and burnout among staff.

3.2.3 RECOMMENDATIONS: AUGMENTED STAFFING

Councilmembers will be best served when their policy analysts have more space to focus on policy. And communities are best served when they know their concerns are being received, heard and processed by the city even if the city isn't in a position to meet every demand. *To this end, we recommend:*

- *Support for council communication (most notably newsletter content, talking points, media statements and speechwriting) come through MCO* with the city manager weighing in on high-level issues and notified as needed along the way. We recognize that MCO will not be able to take on this work without letting go of other communication work that can be done within other departments.
- *MCO provides as-needed advising* services but not necessarily content creation for councilmembers' social media.
- *Add staffing capacity to handle reactive/responsive constituent communication.*

We recommend adding two constituent relations positions to the council staffing structure to facilitate responses to community inquiries and

increase the level of consistency with which constituents receive information from their elected officials. Constituent relations staff would:

- Assist councilmembers to triage emails from constituents by the level of response required.
- Develop responses and share information across councilmembers to minimize duplicated efforts.
- Take the lead in reaching out to departments to formulate responses and spur follow-up.
- Take community meetings on behalf of councilmembers, as needed.
- Connect via a dotted line to the MCO communications manager who provides leadership support so that messaging and talking points are developed with consistency and shared.

This in no way implies that policy analysts would never interact with, influence or be influenced by communication and constituent responses. In fact, policy analysts should contribute to the development of messaging and responses. But their focus should be on supporting policymakers rather than producing communication material.

This restructuring alongside reformatting the Monthly Forums to exist in a digital-first environment (discussed in section 5.3.1) can improve overall information sharing between the city's electeds and its residents. The overall aim is to create an environment of responsiveness versus reactivity through which to meet constituent expectations and increase the impact councilmembers can have given the time constraints they face.

4.0 Processes and Procedures

“We need to create a process on how after-hours and weekend issues are addressed.”

“We often prioritize based on timelines and who has the most urgent deadline.”

“We need to establish rules of engagement as to what departments and council can expect from MCO.”

“We need to update the municipal code so that we have more time to get out the official postcard notices for meetings. . .by the time people receive it they only have a couple days to try to attend.”

“We need to be able to outsource some communication work. We don’t say no and can’t outsource so the staff just has to try to dig themselves out of the hole on evenings and weekends.”

– *Comments from city council and staff interviews*

Processes and procedures serve organizations by prioritizing workflows, avoiding duplicative work and increasing consistency. When faced with emergent issues, organizations default to processes and procedures to step into action quickly while minimizing confusion and not having to “recreate the wheel” with individual responses to every incident.

Processes and procedures also can be tools to help define priorities and guide resource allocation, helping answer the question, “Is this work MCO needs to do? Does it need to happen right now? Is there someone better able to do the work?”

We acknowledge processes and procedures also form the backbone of a lot of the bureaucracy that the digital age finds so frustrating. It can mire teams into silos, become too rigid to allow creativity and end up discouraging worthwhile collaborations. Therefore, it is important to find a balance where procedures smooth and neutralize workflows without stifling opportunities.

While our work did not examine processes and procedures individually, our research revealed ambiguity about some practices that should be noted here. The ambiguity is significantly hindering the city’s ability to respond effectively in emergent situations and is causing unintentional distrust to develop between various arms of the organization.

4.1 FINDINGS

- Many interviewees expressed uncertainty about how information is supposed to be shared during emergent situations.

- MCO lacks a standardized practice for responding to incidents and needs that arise after normal working hours.
- Councilmembers are given a large batch of onboardings when first elected but are not generally offered refresher courses. In particular, orientation around communications is combined with orientation for Tacoma 2025, limiting the amount of communication-specific guidance and training councilmembers receive early in their tenure.
- Councilmembers demonstrated a varying level of understanding around how to navigate public records requirements.
- Councilmembers apply a wide range of approaches to producing communication like social media posts and newsletters, as well as responding to constituents. Most express a desire for more support or guidance.
- Technology solutions are available but are not necessarily being applied to improve procedures and ease workload burdens.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS: INFORMATION SHARING IN EMERGENT SITUATIONS

Many organizations develop a specific, repeatable method for disseminating news, announcements and information in emergencies—what we broadly call *emergent situations*, instances in which new information needs or deserves to be shared out but doesn’t fit neatly within existing content calendars or plans. As examples, the process could be

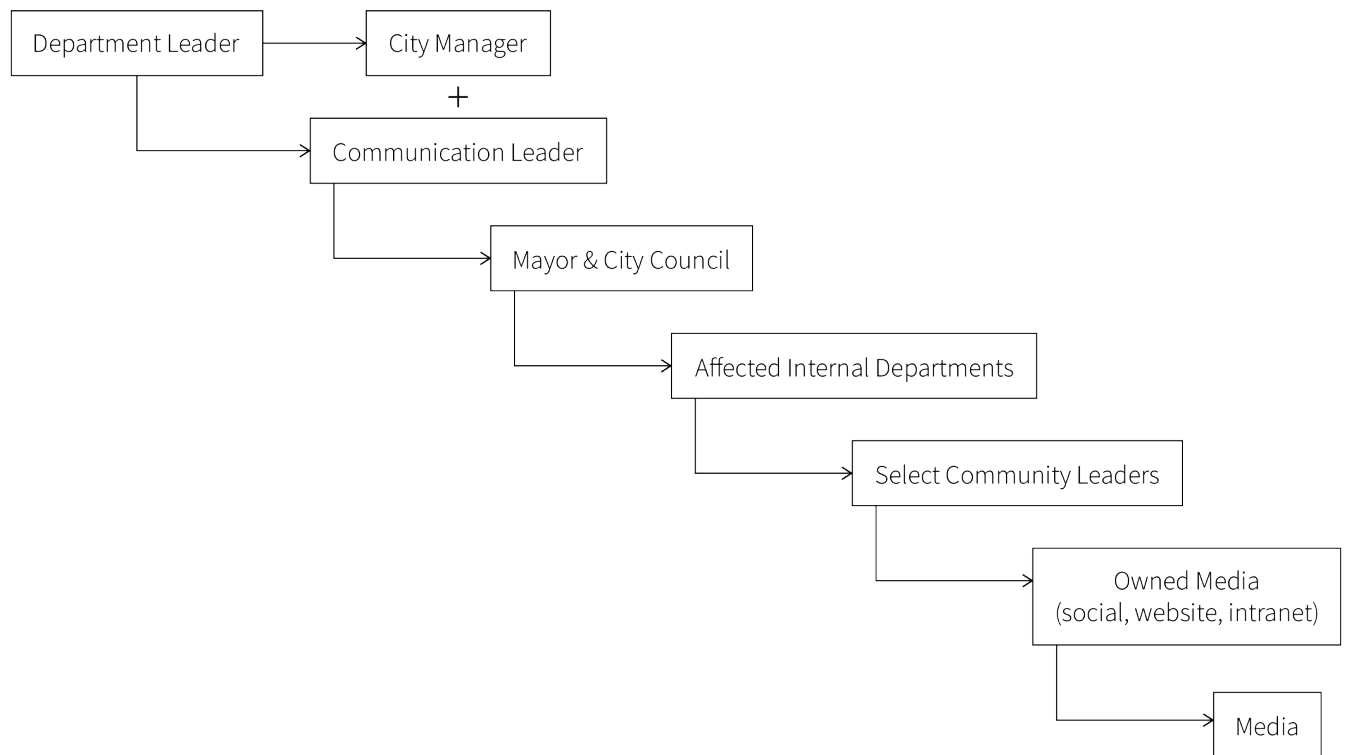
triggered by an event like an unexpected news story, information about upcoming protests at public meetings or sudden resignations of city officials.

The dissemination process can be visualized in chart form, as a cascade, radial or hierarchical form. An example of each type is shown on the following page. ***We recommend development of a consistent process for communicating with city leaders on emergent issues. In addition, we recommend a formal training process for all leaders, including department directors, and communication staff in this process.*** Doing so will save time, confusion and relationships under pressure.

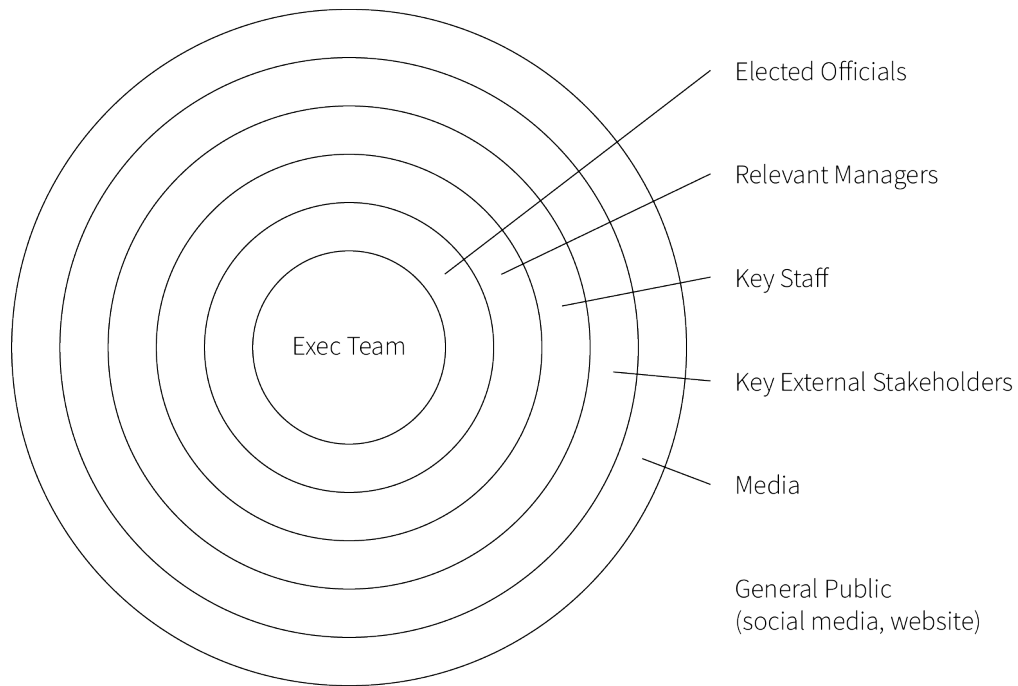
Note: The examples provided in the exhibits are generic and are not meant to capture the entirety of audiences Tacoma would want or need to reach nor the preferred order in which to reach them. These examples also lack job titles specific to Tacoma.

In each scenario, no matter where the information is first encountered, the process of sharing that information should start at the center (radial) or top (hierarchical) of the chart and proceed through the stakeholders listed.

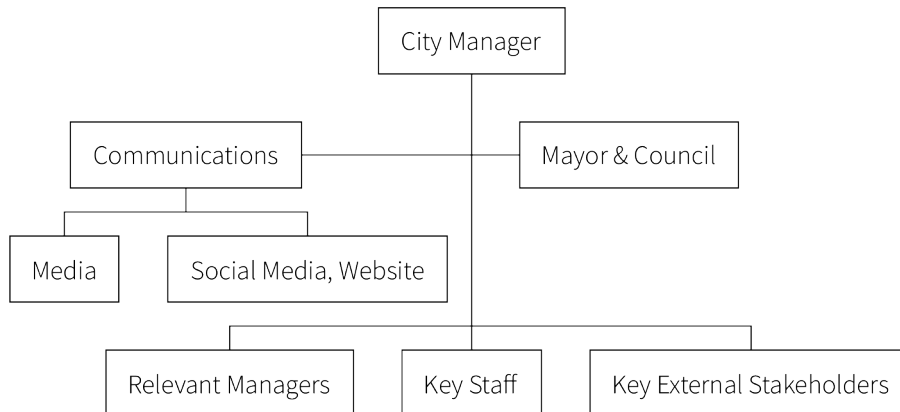
Communication Cascade



Communication Radial



Communication Hierarchy



Charts like these help define who needs to be informed when and by whom. It also helps ensure no one is forgotten, preventing unnecessary information vacuums and resentments. If needed, they can be altered for specific event/incident types or adjusted for rotating on-call duties when events/incidents occur after hours.

Charts like these aren't only for the *initial* sharing of information, news and announcements; it is

equally important to run updates through the same process and relay information through the same loops as information evolves. It can be tempting to skip steps as time goes on, but the risks for distrust are high if stakeholders are left out when new information is available.

An excellent source of training on how to rigorously apply information trees is the National Incident Management System (NIMS) developed and offered

by FEMA, especially the following introductory courses:

- IS-100.b - (ICS 100) Introduction to Incident Command System
- IS-200.b (ICS 200) ICS for Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents
- IS-700.a National Incident Management System (NIMS), An Introduction
- IS-702.a National Incident Management System (NIMS) Public Information Systems

Most likely, many city personnel have gone through these trainings, and equally many more stand to benefit from them. We've seen jurisdictions practice incident command processes when planning for and executing community events like fairs and festivals. The incident command method need not be reserved just for disasters and emergencies; it is a tried-and-true structure for any event, and by practicing it outside of emergencies, the procedures feel more natural when disaster strikes.

We recommend all communication staff who may be in that leadership position (the director may not always be there!) go through this training if they have not already.

Note: Each incident command training covers a vast amount of information. Encouraging refresher courses for staff at regular intervals can help immensely.

Link: <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/nims/implementation-training>

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS: AFTER-HOURS COMMUNICATIONS COVERAGE

The FEMA trainings also delve into how to rotate responsibilities when an incident runs for many days at a time and personnel need to rest. While obviously more applicable to disaster situations, it leads to the next missing or unclear policy at Tacoma: how to handle issues that arise outside of normal working hours.

This topic came up during each of the comparative analysis interviews. For most communications staff in leadership roles, there is an assumption

that they're always "on the clock." Some communications leaders like it this way—the downsides of weekend interruptions are worth tolerating for the benefits of staying in-the-know and navigating the challenge alongside city leadership to build relationships and prevent communication mistakes. Others recognize the need to rotate such duties to avoid burnout and have instituted an on-call system that alleviates the burden by distributing it across the team week-by-week. Across the board, cities we talked to report seeing more need for after-hours work than in years past, but all find the workload manageable for now.

As we understand it, MCO is developing a process for intaking and triaging incidents that occur after hours when it comes to how to communicate about them. Emergency responders have long had procedures in place to this end, and though emergency response teams typically appoint their own public information officer to outline the facts and keep the public informed of updates, the confusion seems to occur when figuring out how to apply the city's broader communication lens to an issue—how to develop and roll out an official statement from elected officials, how and when to involve MCO, etc.

We strongly recommend the MCO leader or designated staff be involved early in any after-hours incident. While they shouldn't supersede the emergency response PIO duties in the early phases of an incident, they should guide and encourage city statements on the issue, broaden the context where appropriate, and augment information shared publicly (through the media and otherwise) to demonstrate that the city as a whole is engaged on critical issues, not just relying on its first responders to carry out the city's mission.

4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS: COUNCILMEMBER BEST PRACTICES

As mentioned previously, Tacoma councilmembers are term-limited and may feel a unique urgency to show progress toward goals. Term limits also mean the city must accommodate a near-constant learning curve among its elected officials. Where policy-setting bodies with long-serving members can rely on more senior members mentoring and

advising newly elected members, such an advising role necessarily falls to city staff in Tacoma because staff are far more likely to bring that longer-term perspective.

Accordingly, councilmember onboarding should be an ongoing practice, with a calendar of orientations and refreshers available for councilmembers and with well-established, written guidance for reference. To our knowledge, onboarding currently happens early in a councilmember's term, and we are unclear on whether refresher orientations are offered. Our interviews show a varying understanding of what councilmembers can and cannot do when it comes to communicating with constituents, and over time, this dynamic will cause frustrations for the elected officials and their constituents alike.

Councilmembers are allowed to manage official social media accounts provided they:

- Stand ready to provide all posts and interactions when public records are requested.
- Develop all of their own content.

Councilmembers are equally welcome to not have a presence on social media, and the result is an uneven landscape where some councilmembers are on some platforms with varying levels of activity.

It is time to develop a more cohesive, defined approach to councilmember social media. Many municipalities allow their councils to maintain social media accounts independently. Most often, they connect the official platforms with a tool like ArchiveSocial so posts and interactions are automatically archived for public records purposes. This relieves elected officials of the pressure to maintain their own public records, assures a high level of transparency and helps councils maintain the requisite boundary between official work and campaign-related work.

We do strongly recommend defining clear, approachable guidance for elected officials on social media, auto archiving the content through a centralized system and providing a basic level of support through training and sharing of digital assets.

We do NOT recommend city-owned social media

accounts as a high priority for Tacoma elected officials in the near future. The additional workload it represents does not align with the city's current needs.

Municipalities with more resources do often invest in city-owned social media accounts by district and/or seat so that:

- Archiving is simpler as the city owns all the content.
- Staff are able to provide hands-on support for content creation.
- The audiences built during one tenure don't have to be rebuilt when the seat turns over.

The City of Seattle employs this model, and the City of Reno has expressed interest in moving that direction as well. For now, Reno, Vancouver and Bellevue take the more hands-off approach described above.

Such guidance may include:

1. Councilmembers are encouraged but not required to find ways to reach audiences on digital platforms, whether through a blog, e-newsletter, social media account or other method.
2. Councilmembers are encouraged to limit digital engagement to no more than two digital platforms to remain available for their other elected duties.
3. Councilmembers wishing to set up a digital platform should work with the city's information technology team to connect it to an auto-archiving service to align with state law.
4. In drafting content for digital platforms, councilmembers should:
 - a. Remember to keep a clear line between their official work and their campaigns, even announcing to followers that posts may go quiet in the final months before a re-election period.
 - b. Look to official city accounts, statements, blogs and newsletters for content ideas.
 - c. Share official city posts as often as feels appropriate.
 - d. Incorporate city branding wherever

appropriate (visual brand assets are available for download on the intranet).

- e. Attend periodic communications trainings with MCO staff to learn tips and tricks for good digital content.
5. Upon completion of their tenure, councilmembers may wish to consider encouraging their followers to follow the newly elected councilmember assuming the seat to maintain a consistent level of communication to residents in districts and citywide.

Important in crafting guidance is showing what can be done and how, rather than spelling out what can't or shouldn't happen. Policies that focus primarily on what not to do have the unintended consequence of stifling engagement and discouraging transparency. While it is tempting to provide standards and guidance in that way, in light of Tacoma's term limits, it is especially important for guidance to be treated as a how-to or training document rather than a glossary of risks.

In the section on platforms and channels, we outline how centralizing newsletter content into a city blog can help councilmembers develop content more easily. This content can easily be distilled into social media posts, commentary blog posts and other digital assets the councilmembers wish to produce, saving them time and keeping the city message more consistent and focused.

4.5 RECOMMENDATIONS: CONSTITUENT COMMUNICATIONS

Developing a triage process for constituent communications will be important should the city move forward in augmenting the constituent relations roles as recommended in the organizational structure and capacity section. The City of Seattle's council schedulers may be a resource for establishing processes early on, and we can provide an introduction if needed.

Whether or not staff is added, the city may need to consider offering boilerplate responses to manage expectations. Responses can state the intent to respond to as many inquiries as possible, the limited capacity to respond to all inquiries and list other methods of engagement available for reaching

out: 311, council meetings, etc. *Again, regardless of staffing status, we recommend establishing a process for response, a service standard for response and a boilerplate message to manage expectations around receiving a response.*

Note: It probably won't work best as an autoreply, where every email received gets the same response. Instead, it should be a file with language that a councilmember or designated inbox manager can copy and paste into responses as appropriate.

4.6 RECOMMENDATIONS: TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

ArchiveSocial is a tool already mentioned above. The technology connects to social media accounts and automatically captures content and activity on the account, storing it for easy retrieval later. Although accounts on ArchiveSocial add up, the ease with which content is maintained for public records compliance is a worthwhile cost. *If the city already uses an auto-archiving service like ArchiveSocial, we recommend expanding it to accommodate official council accounts as well.*

- Link: <https://archivesocial.com/>

Another technology worth mentioning is *OneBox*, an app the City of Reno implemented to triage media responses automatically. It serves as a single media hotline for all requests and triages requests as follows:

- A notification goes out simultaneously/ automatically to the communications team, PIO and city manager via text, email and through the app if it is downloaded onto a phone.
 - The reporter's message is both in audio format and transcribed for quick scanning.
 - The on-call communications staff logs in and tags applicable department heads for notification then watches to make sure the department head receives and begins acting upon the notification.
 - The on-call communications staff notifies the city manager as updates are available; the city manager keeps council and mayor apprised.

- Complex requests are elevated to the communication director if she is not the person on call (it's a four-week rotation).
- Their goal is to respond to every media request.

At first, media didn't like having to call just one number, leave a message and wait. But the complaints ended after they realized the City of Reno's responses were faster and more in-depth than previously provided. The system is set up to be responsive 24/7.

While OneBox may or may not be a good fit for Tacoma, it does demonstrate how the information sharing practices described early in this section can be automated with technology to reduce friction, operate as well after hours as during weekdays, accommodate a rotating on-call calendar and, likely, speed up response times. It does not have to be used only for media—it could potentially be used as a way to facilitate internal information trees if automation would simplify the workload.

- Link: <https://www.onebox.com/>

5.0 Platforms and Channels

“We can translate information and put it out there, but we have no dedicated channels for people to find the information. No Spanish language channel for example.”

“Community Forum is another example of constituents getting no response or reaction from council. The public has no way of knowing if they’ve been heard or if they (council) cares.”

“The website is the biggest disappointment. There is little central control and many of our department webpages are not even attached to the city site. Anyone can get a URL and start a new site.”

“We need a consistent location for transaction tools like the form to ask for a pothole to be filled.”

“Video is more and more important. People will watch before they read. Could repurpose some of TV Tacoma assets to short-form video for social.”

“TV Tacoma is underutilized. It needs revamped programming to be more relevant and then those shows need to be promoted.”

– *Comments from city council and staff interviews*

Part of our work included evaluating the platforms and channels used by the city to communicate out to the community and look for potential efficiencies and overall opportunities for improvement. It is important to point out that we intended to survey community members to gain an external understanding of where people are going to find information and what they would like to change related to the city’s platforms. In the absence of that perspective, our findings and recommendations rest on a high-level audit of available materials and feedback from internal stakeholders about the team effort that goes into producing content for the platforms.

We define a “platform” as being any *instrument* through which city-produced content is shared, physically or digitally, whereas a “channel” is any *method* through which information is shared. Accordingly, this section addresses everything from social media accounts to the council’s Monthly Forums.

5.1 FINDINGS OVERALL

- The city’s website is heavy with information that is very difficult to discover.
 - Its search function is ineffective.
 - Commonly accessed information is seldom available in just one or two clicks.
- The site is aging and page load times are slow.
- It may not be integrating optimally with other backend services.
- The mobile version of the site tends to work better than the desktop version.
- Information on the homepage “What’s Going On,” “In the News” and “Looking Ahead” are attempts at dividing types of content but it isn’t always clear what should be in each category and there is no way to search them by topic.
- There’s no connection from the homepage to Mayor and council priorities or an easy way to see how the city is making progress toward those goals.
- The site contains two hidden gems that aren’t readily understood by visitors: Tacoma FIRST 311 and Results 253. Both offer very helpful information, but if you don’t know what they are, you won’t ever click on them!
- There are many newsletters available for subscription but no master list displays all of them.
 - Some newsletters are longer than industry standard would recommend and may be especially difficult to read on mobile devices.
 - News releases are reliable sources of information but don’t often put the topics in

a larger city context (like explaining how the issue/topic relates to council goals or ongoing city initiatives).

- The city has quite a few accounts across multiple social media platforms and may be spreading itself thin.
 - Engagement is lower than at similar agencies.
 - Pages don't often tell a unified, consistent story and aren't always well-organized.
- TV Tacoma resources are underutilized for digital storytelling across platforms.
- In general, there seem to be missed opportunities to leverage stories across platforms. For example, using segments from TV Tacoma shows for social content and including a blog on the top under "What's Going On."
- Monthly Forums are one-sided information sessions in which the public can feel frustrated that their concerns never earn a response. As a result, the forums are likely to erode community relationships rather than support them.

View the full audit of select platforms and channels in appendix 3.

5.2 WEBSITE OVERVIEW

Websites are, first and foremost, a customer service tool. When websites work well for organizations, they cut down on the amount of staff time spent responding to requests for information because the information is available, easy to find and accurate.

Good websites build trust by demonstrating transparency, accessibility and opportunities to engage. Effort spent nurturing websites to maintain effectiveness over time tends to pay off in significant ways.

Governmental websites can be exceptionally heavy with information. Due to the volume of information housed on such sites, the "magic" lies in how easy it is to find information when looking for it. Too much information poorly indexed for discovery leads to a sense of obfuscation and can be very detrimental to trust and transparency even when transparency is the intent.

5.2.1 FINDINGS: WEBSITE

Far and away, the city's website (<https://www.cityoftacoma.org/>) is seen as both one of the most important and one of the least effective ways in which city information is shared. Organizationally, a website serves as any organization's digital "front desk." Websites are first and foremost a customer service tool and, secondarily, a repository for important information.

It is remarkable how often in interviews people mentioned having to rely on an **external** search engine to find information **inside** Tacoma's website. We found this to be true in our own work. The search function built into the site is weak enough (producing too many results) that it is rendered almost useless. This is an unusual problem and could stem from the website's age.

Websites follow the second law of thermodynamics and trend toward disorder over time. That's one of the many reasons why it is imperative to refresh your website on a regular, planned basis. While private sector entities typically refresh their site every two to four years, governmental websites generally last longer, going five to seven years between overhauls. But a website is never done; ongoing maintenance, regular content trimming and planning for the next redesign should happen cyclically.

5.2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS: WEBSITE

Accordingly, we recommend preparing now to undergo a significant website upgrade within the next one to two years. An internal, focused team can be appointed to begin preparing by reviewing content, auditing functionality, surveying staff for content and function needs and reviewing other governmental sites for ideas to implement at Tacoma. An outside contractor team can help with a lot of this work, but it is important for internal staff to lead the process so there is ample buy-in and support.

As you prepare to migrate content to a new platform, it is critical to set aside a three- to six-month work period in which content is reviewed page by page to pare down what is necessary to migrate, make sure it's up to date, and allow the rest of the content to be archived. Decide whether to keep content by applying criteria such as:

- Is the content up to date?

- Is the content easy to understand? Is it jargon or plain speak?
- Does the content have an identifiable audience outside of our organization?
 - If so, migrate it.
 - If not, consider posting it on the intranet instead. (The Style Guide webpages may be an example of the type of content better suited for an intranet than an outward-facing website.)

Ahead of a major redesign, we recommend working with your current website vendor to improve some functionality on the site.

- Optimize the website’s search function to better yield relevant results. (Your website vendor should be able to help you integrate Google’s search functionality into your site if it can’t optimize the native search function.)
- Consider placing the “search” bar in a central position on the Tacoma homepage rather than in the header. Users are far more likely to search for content than navigate through a menu, especially on government sites due to their unusually large menus.
- Improve page load speeds. Overall, the City of Tacoma’s website loads exceptionally slowly, decreasing its effectiveness and contributing to a false sense of obscurity. Work with your web vendor to address server speeds and other issues that may lead to limited bandwidth and long load times.
- Modify navigation so that TacomaFIRST 311 and Results 253 purposes are understood by the public and easily accessed (if you don’t know what they are by name, you won’t access their help). We encourage the City of Tacoma to explore Charleston, South Carolina’s website and scroll down to its Citizen Services Desk on the lower third section of the homepage. We suspect that their automated service, powered by Granicus, is the same that powers Tacoma FIRST 311. The difference is how they present it to the public.
- Help users more easily find information like agendas, meeting videos, etc. We recommend

simplifying the interconnection between backend tools that facilitate this process so that they either work better together or so that there are fewer of them, creating a more seamless experience for the end user. (See Appendix 2, Comparative Analysis, for details.)

- Consider making the Media and Communications Office page more content-rich and helpful to website visitors. This is a great place to introduce the city’s overall marketing message and direct visitors to platforms where they can engage with you, from social media links to newsletter signups.
- Update the copyright in the footer to read 2022 and remove the linked asterisk.
 - From a security standpoint, we recommend removing the asterisk because it leads anyone on the internet straight to the login page for backend content management. This invites brute force attacks and risks potential defacement of city content. Generally, backend management should be accessible through a different URL and not visible to visitors and, ideally, difficult to guess.

5.3 NEWSLETTERS AND NEWS RELEASES OVERVIEW

Newsletters are a direct line from the city to the people who subscribe to receive updates. Nothing is quite as valuable to a communication program as a solid newsletter audience. But in order to have an impact, newsletters must have relevant content, be easy to read and be produced at consistent intervals to tell your organizational story adequately and memorably.

5.3.1 FINDINGS: NEWSLETTERS AND NEWS RELEASES

The City of Tacoma appears to produce a large number of e-newsletters (we counted 25), though that may not be accurate and all newsletters on the subscription list may not be active. There is no obvious way on the website to subscribe to newsletters except through one of the newsletters themselves, which gives you an opportunity to subscribe to other newsletters. Most of these are updates from councilmembers or they are department- or program-specific, such as EnviroTalk or the Neighborhood Council Newsletter.

Ad hoc city council releases also are regularly pushed out through the govdelivery.com e-news channel. While they share information with the public, there isn't consistency in production cadence, content quality or overall impact between many of the other newsletters produced. Even though they come from the council, many still don't connect the dots to Mayor and council priorities and the program through which the priorities are being addressed. They also come as an email with little content until you click through to the webpage, forcing recipients to take that extra step in order to read the content.

Councilmembers publish their own newsletters sometimes as often as once per month. Individual councilmembers are responsible for figuring out what topics to cover and often write the first draft. They pull in their policy staff for support as needed, and MCO provides a content review prior to publication. As we understand it, councilmembers build their own list of email recipients or inherit a list from their predecessor if that predecessor utilized the opportunity. Because each councilmember has a different level of writing expertise and hours available to put toward writing, the result is significant variability district-by-district who is able to receive information directly from their elected official.

Overall, Tacoma's newsletter production appears to be a disconnected process that limits capacity by duplicating efforts. We wonder whether content arrives at MCO for final review too late to identify existing content that could save the department time and effort.

5.3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS: NEWSLETTERS AND NEWS RELEASES

We recommend the city reduce or at least better regulate its cadence of newsletters and news releases and build up its "What's Happening" section into a more robust municipal blog. This streamlines communication and develops a source from which councilmembers and departments can pull stories to share information about key initiatives. The blog also produces content for city newsletter editors who can curate and publish the most important stories for their audiences. This also

will aid in spreading consistent messaging across communication channels.

This approach brings a number of strategic advantages beyond lessening duplicated efforts:

- Drives more website visits.
- Produces regular, fresh content that staff and councilmembers alike can repackage into tweets, posts and constituent responses.
- Leads people back to the website for more information.

The blog-first approach could yield more real-time, unified information sharing with a smaller amount of effort.

Finally, GovDelivery may not be serving you as well as it could (or as well as another platform might). Its formatting isn't always user-friendly, especially on mobile devices. It is an expensive tool compared to others available. While it brings some government-centric advantages, we recommend weighing whether those advantages warrant the challenges it brings and reconsidering its importance in a blog-first environment.

5.4 SOCIAL MEDIA OVERVIEW

In interviews with comparative cities, social media was unanimously cited as the second-most important avenue for sharing information. (Websites were most often cited as the primary channel.) Its capacity for instantaneous information sharing and the opportunity to add a relational, human element to government news is a worthwhile investment even as trust in social media is lower than it once was.

5.4.1 FINDINGS: SOCIAL MEDIA

With more accounts than average on Facebook and Instagram, and a broad range of channels currently in use, Tacoma has a wider "surface area" than most cities of its size. And although Tacoma stands out for *not* having a presence on NextDoor and Flickr, spreading that surface area wider by opening accounts on new platforms isn't likely to be as impactful as focusing on the most effective ones already in use and leveraging them further.

Tip: Any successful social marketing effort should include funds to boost or promote posts, particularly on Facebook. It's a "pay to play" environment for organizational accounts.

Facebook engagement is notably lower for Tacoma than at peer agencies. This may warrant further evaluation in case there is a disconnect between the posts provided and what the Tacoma audience finds relevant. Alternatively, the differing engagement levels might be a direct result of relying on organic content alone rather than paying to boost key posts. Because social media algorithms favor posts that garner engagement, having multiple city accounts on a single platform allows for sharing/retweet opportunities and can be applied powerfully to amplify messaging without paying to boost. (This includes councilmember accounts too!)

Based on an audit of select social media pages, the accounts as a whole fail to tell a cohesive story about the city in a way that would be easily understood or recalled by visitors to the pages. They lack a consistent look and feel, not just in visual branding but also in topline messaging. For example, the city's official Facebook page describes the organization as follows:

We provide Tacoma residents with high quality, innovative and cost-effective municipal services.

But the City's official Twitter account describes the organization like this:

Nestled on the shores of Puget Sound in Pierce County, #Tacoma is Washington's third-largest city.

While these types of descriptions do not need to be identical, they should cover the same general ground and feel similar. Organizational descriptions are usually based on brand messaging and convey a sense of mission, vision or values.

As noted, when we researched the City of Reno, "it can be hard to take the punches, and the tendency is to stop engaging." Reno has worked toward cultivating a distinctly friendly and approachable voice for social media posts, and this positivity has helped staff lean into the inevitable attacks and has begun to inspire natural community advocates to

speak up organically on behalf of the city. Overall, the online attacks are easing up.

5.4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS: SOCIAL MEDIA

We recommend distilling a social media plan out of the proactive communication plan and master editorial calendar once complete. In the meantime, we strongly recommend focusing content more on Mayor and council priorities and activities. Current council meeting announcements and links to the latest CityLine episode have a consistent look and feel that is worth expanding to other types of content for a more unified result. Additionally, posting highlights after council meetings covering meaningful decisions and recognitions noted during the meeting is likely to increase engagement and help your audience stay up to date on city efforts.

Cultivating a humanizing voice for your social media accounts and applying it consistently across platforms is imperative and doesn't have to wait for a proactive communication plan to be in place first. The more relatable your accounts feel, the better – it is too easy to level attacks at faceless organizations. Providing more posts of positive sentiment and upbeat community stories is one of many examples of how to showcase that relatability.

Keep in mind that social media is considered the top news source for broad swaths of the population. While not an ideal place to break news, it is a critical avenue through which to amplify it, clarify it and respond to comments about it. Staff must be vested with the appropriate level of authority and apply a high amount of judgment to turn social media into a productive, responsive environment. ***We recommend reviewing current content development procedures and decision-making processes with an eye toward simplifying and quickening responses.***

Finally, as suggested by a few councilmembers, looking for opportunities to build relationships with community influencers can be a great way to amplify your messages and strengthen trust with residents. Consider building an influencer cultivation plan as part of the proactive communications strategy recommended in section 2.0.

In a video-driven era, the city has some of the best production capabilities of any organization in

the region. Its focus is to videotape and air public meetings, to produce shows that provide greater insight into the city and to highlight parts of Tacoma and its culture. TV Tacoma's videographers are story tellers, but the collective result feels piecemeal and viewership for its products is low.

In an "On Demand" and "Hulu" world, people expect to be able to watch shows at their convenience. Tacoma's YouTube channel can serve this function but the channel needs to be curated and presented in such a way that people can find the content they want, not scroll through shows based on date produced. ***We recommend that TV Tacoma review its use of YouTube and design its channel for easy access and to catch the viewer's attention.***

At the same time, we recommend that TV Tacoma's webpage also receive an update to highlight top shows. TV Tacoma is all about video. The page is all text. Adding video or even still images would infuse life and encourage viewership.

There is an opportunity for the TV Tacoma team to support Tacoma's proactive communication efforts with more content that connects to key priorities. One example of this is the recent relaunch of Inside Tacoma with the mayor and city manager. ***We recommend closer collaboration on content planning with other MCO staff to provide more quality short-form content for social media, website and other digital channels. We also recommend repackaging current programming on a regular basis for Facebook and Instagram Stories or other digital posts.***

Finally, it is important to take the time and creative energy to promote TV Tacoma's programs. ***We recommend that TV Tacoma programs be regularly cross promoted on all of Tacoma's owned communication channels.***

5.5 ABOUT MONTHLY FORUMS

The city council hosts monthly forums during which community members show up to give public comment. The council began hosting two forums monthly during the pandemic. The forums allow for a quick presentation by members of the public but do not allow for any comments or feedback from council. We question whether these forums provide

a worthwhile engagement experience for community members and councilmembers alike, especially given how much time is spent attending them.

Hopefully, there are ample ways for public comments to reach council outside of scheduled meetings, especially for community members who have busy schedules, work long hours, balance childcare and eldercare responsibilities, and increasingly, accommodate long commutes. One innovation implemented by the City of Vancouver seems like a potential alternative that could reach more people (at times that are convenient to them) and offer a way to scale back monthly forums to free up councilmembers for the work of legislating.

The City of Vancouver launched Be Heard Vancouver in the years prior to the pandemic. It was perfect timing: Be Heard Vancouver is an online hub for public involvement where issues are explored and comments accepted in real time. High interest topics are showcased for comment with libraries of information available for community members to explore in the process. Internally, the comments are an integral part of engagement efforts, forming a two-way-street on which to build understanding: the city is more informed as a result of the comments, and the community is more informed as a result of the resources available.

Visit <https://www.beheardvancouver.org/> to see how the engagement is happening.

6.0 Culture

“We need a cultural shift in what it takes to communicate fully and to bring communications in at the beginning, not as an afterthought.

“We need breathing room to think about new tools and techniques. There’s no room to be innovative.”

“We need a cultural shift to understand how fast communication is moving. We need to be able to communicate in real time and change the speed at which we can respond. It can’t take two days to deliver a statement to the media because the media will have moved on.”

“Each department has people assigned to be the web steward or the SharePoint steward or the social media steward for their department. There should be just one person from each department that MCO needs to liaison with and that person should have communication as a formal part of their job. It would make MCO jobs easier, make training easier and make the voice of each department more consistent.”

– *Comments from city council and staff interviews*

Seattle City Council Communications Director Dana Robinson Slote offered this advice during the comparative analysis interview in March.

“Communications is never an environment where you can do enough. You will never get ahead. Accept that, and then do as much as you can with what you have.”

This is an extremely important tenet to remember, especially in an era where most everyone has access to some of the most powerful communication and marketing tools in history: social media apps. Recognizing that the work is never done can make the difference between burnout and success if the understanding is shared organization wide.

It’s important to note that there is a difference between the marketing communication, which the MCO team does to promote programs, for example, and the strategic communication that helps explain the new policing plan or policies that affect people who are unhoused. Marketing communication presents facts and benefits. Strategic communication provides greater context and promotes a deeper understanding. It is also more often influenced by outside events which drive rapid responses (all the more reason to prepare position statements and core messages in advance.)

To that end, our limited exposure to the working environment at the City of Tacoma revealed a number of organizational opportunities that

can help develop a true culture of effective communication.

- Cross-pollination
- Default to responsiveness
- Operational neutrality

6.1 FINDINGS

- MCO sometimes feels isolated from the decisions and priorities of other departments.
- MCO expects other departments to recognize topics with potential media-interest and may wait to be informed about issues rather than seeking information proactively.
- Messages can get stuck in the drafting or planning process when delays arise due to conflicts or confusion. The result is that communication efforts are shelved and messages are not developed.
- Communication is often delayed until all facts are known and agreed upon, leaving a gap in time wherein community-produced rumors fill the void.
- MCO is perceived by colleagues as sometimes pushing agendas that conflict with city organizational interests.
- There is a tension between MCO’s role in representing the city to the community and, its role in representing the community to the city. It

is important that MCO leaders make city leaders aware of community sentiment and feedback, but once decisions are made, MCO's role is to represent the city.

- Many staff within and beyond MCO are hesitant to be candid in providing feedback.
- Resentment has grown between departments and MCO, decreasing the likelihood of organic cooperation.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS: CROSS-POLLINATION

The best communicators know how to ask the right questions and often play a key role of bringing people together to answer complex questions. In doing so, they aid in breaking down silos and helping cross-pollinate new ideas and potential solutions. This is a particularly vital role for the MCO director.

There are almost always gaps between what information is initially provided to the MCO team and what is needed to be able to share meaningfully with the public. It is the responsibility of a communication team to push hard to fill these gaps. Sometimes that can feel uncomfortable for internal clients, but it should never feel confrontational. Sometimes questions do reveal a program or statement isn't "ready for prime time." It should be appreciated that a communicator's role is to ask the difficult questions before the public does. It's also their role to understand what the public will want to know and how to identify the "story" from the background "noise."

The MCO can best add value to projects when they are engaged from the start. *The MCO specialists report having successfully embedded themselves in regular team meetings with their internal clients. We recommend that this practice be standardized with the understanding that this level of attention may only be possible for high priority departments or projects.* In order to produce better communication without significant staff changes, the only solution is to reallocate resources. That means some work will need to be delegated back to the departments or to outside resources. Again, a communication plan that is guided by Mayor and council priorities will help make these choices.

Many departments currently have a designated

MCO specialist assigned to them. *We recommend that, for lower priority projects or projects that can easily be outsourced, the specialists serve more as consultants and thought partners than as task takers and "doers."* Departments can take on more ownership of communicating about their programs with the guidance of MCO's professional communicators. We know this is currently taking place, but we recommend it be acknowledged and a process established for successful partnerships. It would create a freer environment of collaboration for both MCO staff and their clients. Toolkits of templates and simplified checklist plans can help support this work. A project intake form, such as the sample share in Appendix 4 can be useful to help set priorities and provide a basis for this collaboration.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS: DEFAULT TO RESPONSIVENESS

It almost always feels wise to wait and provide information, answers and updates until all, many or most of the facts are established and verified. As mentioned, communicators like to ask questions and press for answers. But in the world of Twitter and text messages, this wisdom is a recipe for disaster. The truth is that most people are doing exactly what you're doing whenever a situation arises that warrants attention: they're trying to find the facts in whatever way they can. In the absence of information, rumors fill the void. And thanks to the human tendency to believe what we hear first even above better information later. Uprooting rumors is exponentially more time-consuming than responding early enough to prevent them.

Herein lies the power of saying, "We don't have all of the facts yet. As soon as we do, you will know." It feels like a weak excuse, but it is quite the opposite. It inserts truth into the void (*the facts are not yet available*) and this helps people to approach rumors-posing-as-facts with a healthy eye of suspicion. The absence of facts is, itself, a fact.

Tacoma isn't alone in feeling the pressure to have information before giving any statements or responses. We are here to tell you that it is okay to let the community know you are searching for information just as they are. We recommend going

a step further when issues are particularly serious and providing specific times by which updates will be given, even if the early updates are still light on information. The goal is not to buy the city more time in an emergency, even though that may be the effect, but to demonstrate that community concerns are top-of-mind while also maintaining the integrity of the facts. Above all, the goal is to manage expectations, thereby freeing up staff attention to do the hard work of finding those facts.

One member on our consulting team found it especially helpful to set timelines for updates during a minor natural disaster. Media outlets were calling at such a rapid pace that she couldn't answer a phone call without two or three voicemails stacking up, and she couldn't listen to the voicemails without missing more calls. There was no room to respond, let alone to track the incident so she could respond with facts.

By implementing set timelines, timed to provide updates ahead of press deadlines (most notably for TV reporters), and then by providing the updates via a website so every news outlet got the same information at the same time, the time she spent in response-mode changed from "constantly" to a 30-minute window after each web update, leaving intervals of about two and a half hours in which to support interviews, monitor evolving facts and provide important internal updates across the organization.

Timed updates are a facet of the FEMA incident management model mentioned earlier in this document, but the concept isn't reserved just for emergencies and disasters. It can be implemented whenever demands for responses exceed the capacity of teams to find facts. It offers teams control and more space in which to assure quality work while demonstrating responsiveness at every step.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS: OPERATIONAL NEUTRALITY

One of the challenges of working in a governmental setting is the reality that regime change is always just an election away. When the change comes, it is common for staff leaders to step down, willingly or otherwise, so that replacements can carry out the new direction with the advantage of a "clean slate."

For most workers deeper within an agency, changes are less likely to be felt or impact their work. But communication staff, even at entry-level positions, will feel regime changes acutely because it is their job to reflect the mission of the agency even when that mission changes.

Suffice it to say, the primary way to endure and succeed in communications when changes inevitably come is to maintain operational neutrality. By this, we mean viewing the work at arm's length, shining light on information without overlaying a personal sense of rightness or wrongness to it, and allowing the information to lead the audience where it will. By this we **don't** mean disseminating information without assigning meaning or weaving in the bigger picture (as discussed in the section on Proactive Communication). The difference is to avoid, as much as possible, identifying personally with a belief or direction, because doing so risks the ability to pivot.

Amongst the cultural attributes of the newest generation of workers is a sense that a career must fulfill a mission, and young workers are especially likely to over-identify with a specific leadership vision and be left stuck or vulnerable to job loss when change arrives. For some workers, it is a risk worth taking, and turnover can be high in communications and outreach not just because of the workload but also because of this natural desire to be in alignment with a larger mission. We put forward, however, that public service is a mission unto itself, and operational neutrality is the key to achieving that noble vocation. Simultaneously, we recognize the ways in which such a statement feels outdated in the current societal environment.

As communicators identify openly with specific value-sets or missions, it is important to recognize that they may be more effective in some instances and less effective in others. There's a chance that some parts of the organization will trust them less. With the right balance of staff, that trust can be picked up by a different team member and nothing overall is lost. But without diversity of viewpoints and a healthy mix of operationally neutral workers, a communications team risks being ostracized when sentiment changes or leadership turns over.

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) offers many classes on ethics and professional standards that might form a solid foundation for maintaining a baseline level of neutrality on the team. We recommend, if they aren't already members, offering membership broadly across the team and encouraging involvement with trainings and local chapter events. Even for longtime public relations professionals, PRSA trainings provide excellent reminders and relevant insights on how to navigate the dynamics of the industry.

But professional development is only one piece of the puzzle. Hiring practices should take neutrality into account as well. It not only helps the communication team uphold the hard-earned trust of current and prior staff, but it also increases job stability for the new hires by ensuring they're intellectually and emotionally prepared for leadership changes of the future. Finally, to highlight an insight from section 2.4, following a proactive communication plan increases the level of objectivity with which communication decisions are made.

Prioritizing Implementation

The city has many opportunities through which to improve the way it communicates internally and externally, and not all of the opportunities are equally needed or equally valuable. To that end, we offer our perspective on what improvements to prioritize and how to phase the major efforts over the next two years.

We recommend the following actions take priority overall:

- Focus the MCO structure
- Move rapidly into proactive mode
- Craft an overarching, strategic communications plan
- Increase capacity for constituent communications
- Update the website to be more functional

YEAR ONE (2022)

1. Divide MCO by mission. We strongly advocate for focusing the MCO team solely on communications. We cannot understate the ways in which having multiple focus areas pulls capacity away from content creation as well as both proactive and reactive communication efforts.
2. Prioritize proactive communication. Begin by building a content calendar, message set and sample narratives surrounding the Mayor and council priorities and find ways to “ladder up” the messaging in most communications as they are developed.

We also recommend managing MCO staff to budget one-third of their time to working proactively and encouraging them to report-out about any reactive work that felt urgent in the moment but turned out to not be as mission-critical as it seemed. By recognizing these patterns, the team should begin to better recognize what reactive work warrants prioritization and what does not.

3. Develop a comprehensive communication plan, likely with the facilitation of an outside contractor. This may include organizational

branding but should focus on developing an overarching narrative for the city, defining specific city initiatives around which to ladder up messaging, identifying your key audiences, building a content/editorial calendar and addressing other metrics outlined in section 2.2.2.

4. Create an MCO position for a dedicated media relations staff member. Look to opportunities created by retirements to repurpose FTEs within the department to serve high need functions.
5. Lay the groundwork to hire two new positions to assist councilmembers with constituent communications and develop a formal and informal reporting structure that allows for ample coordination with MCO.
6. The website warrants some initial improvements this year, but a full-scale redesign should be on the two-year horizon. We recommend working with your current vendor to fix the search function and speed up the time it takes for pages to load. We also recommend making council meetings and agendas more readily accessed from the main council landing page.

YEAR TWO (2023)

1. Implementing the comprehensive communications plan should be the top priority, and once the plan is in hand, content development for a new website should start to fall into place.
2. Close on the heels of the plan’s approval, we recommend launching a website redesign procurement. Plan about six months from kick-off to launch for a website redesign, and come prepared to migrate high-quality, on-message content. Web vendors seldom bring content expertise to the table.
3. Move toward a blog-centric newsletter environment and streamline the volume of newsletters produced. Use newsletters as “round-ups” of relevant posts from the blog, and reconstitute blog content into social media posts, media pitches and other communications pieces.

4. Invest in professional development to fill experience gaps and instill more confidence among MCO staff, especially around public relations and news media.

As staff capacity opens up and strategy increasingly drives decisions, many of the other recommendations put forward in this document may start to fall into place. Plan to revisit this document after the communications strategy is finalized to determine what changes still make sense and whether priorities have shifted.

Appendix 1: Interview Summaries

Extensive interviews were conducted with council members, MCO staff, council support staff and several department leaders. We heard reoccurring comments that underscored needs in the following areas:

PROACTIVE COMMUNICATION

Council comments:

- “We need to do a better job telling our story.”
- “Tell the city’s story better.”
- “Key strategies should be based around values: belief and trust. Information should be shared openly, frequently and in a timely manner to live up to those values.”
- “The city sends out push notification on emerging issues, and they’re helpful. But they’re heavily fact-based and lack next steps [for action] and how it fits into a larger narrative.”
- “Press release pushes tend toward ‘this is what happened’ plus a quote. Can we leverage that moment to fit that information into a larger narrative about the city?”
- “We need to pair our messaging with our actions.”
- “We need to tell and retell people all the time [how we’re addressing hot-button issues] so they know it’s a priority. Otherwise, they’ll assume we don’t care.”
- “Can we have templates to use for social media posts and newsletters?”
- “We need a toolbox of content, templates and resources to allow councilmembers to be communication engines on social media and beyond.”
- “We need to hire a PR firm or an in-house PR lead to be more proactive in telling the city’s story and connect the dots between policymakers, departmental work and the community.”
- “We need short-term strategies we can implement quickly to start changing the communications environment internally and

externally. We especially need a cadence for communications, to push out information proactively and tools to accomplish this.”

- Media relations
 - “Be sure to include local bloggers as media outlets.”
- Internal communication
 - “We need a central dashboard with a daily or regular update to check along with an event calendar that shows all our meetings.”
 - “Please don’t send us more information, just easier ways to find what we don’t know when we need to know it.”

Staff comments:

“Some departments in the city are still siloed but MCO has done a good job of being a connecting point between various departments. Often the communication “answer” is complex and owned by multiple departments so MCO needs to bring in all parties.”

“Some departments are still siloed and defensive. We do the work better than we communicate about it.”

“We need to make policy and communications staffing a priority over tools and channels because we need the people to do the work.”

“We need to get a really clear shared understanding of authority of messaging and who speaks for Tacoma.”

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND CAPACITY

Council comments:

- “We are told to ask our assistants for answers to our questions, but given capacity constraints, it usually makes more sense for me to look for answers on my own.”
- “Our inboxes are quickly overwhelmed.”
- “We get most of our information through email, but there are too many [emails] to get through.”

- “Emails are overwhelming, and there’s no easy way to triage them. We’re on our own to decide how to prioritize, filter and manage responses.”
- “Provide email support to councilmembers so residents don’t go unanswered.”
- “Having staff support with emails would be far and away the most helpful communications support. Our current staff are saturated covering the needs of four councilmembers.”
- “Communication, especially at the constitutional level, varies department by department.”

Staff/leader comments:

- “We need someone who owns the relationship with the media and is proactive about pitching stories.”
- “No one is overseeing media relations specifically. There should be one person overseeing.”
- “Our focus as an office has been creating a media response.”
- “Media relations is a big time suck and the media control the narrative.”
- “Council members and council staff get limited support from MCO; they don’t have the time to do more than review and we understand that. But then we end up doing communication when our strength is policy.”
- “Change the organizational structure of the MCO department. The structure is so flat, there’s no one to delegate to and no one above to ask for help.”
- “The director needs fewer direct reports and some team leaders who can report to her.”
- “Consider adding more staff who can specialize in their strengths, like media or graphic design or social media, rather than having lots of generalists. Staff would feel less scattered and function more effectively.”
- “The mayor and council need their own communication support and it needs to be separate from MCO. They need dedicated people. MCO should focus more on awareness campaigns and proactive messaging – should be more marketing focused.”
- “I would love to see a multimedia team”

to produce more videos, podcasts, etc. “I would also love to see TV Tacoma recast its programming to do series on the homeless system. Have programming be equity driven and grow the channel into multilingual programming.”

- “We need to be able to outsource some communication work. We don’t say no and we can’t outsource so the staff just has to try to dig themselves out of the hole on evenings and weekends.”
- “We need more staffing. We have specialists who are able to do the strategy but we’re in the weeds all the time.”
- “Each department has people assigned to be the web steward or the SharePoint steward or the social media steward for their department. There should be just one person from each department that MCO needs to liaison with and that person should have communication as a formal part of their job. It would make MCO jobs easier, make training easier and make the voice of each department more consistent.”
- “The MCO director needs a deputy with communications experience. Need to empower people who know what they’re doing. There’s a gap in middle management in the department.”
- “In an ideal world MCO would have a few more bodies. One person alone could serve the mayor and the city manager.”
- “We’re (MCO) working evenings and weekends because we don’t have time and capacity during the day.”

PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

Council comments:

- In emergent situations:
 - “The biggest challenge is what to do when issues arise over the weekend.”
 - “We need a process for how after-hours and weekend issues are addressed.”
 - “The city needs crisis communication procedures—both internal and external.”
 - “Everything has to run through a process, and

sometimes, it feels like the process is meant to slow things down. Can there be a different process for emerging issues?”

- “Email and text updates on emerging issues have been very helpful, but they’re always coming straight from the city manager. Shouldn’t there be someone else helping with the lift?”
- “We need to create a better chain of command or looping-in system on emerging issues.”
- “We need more clarity around best practices when it comes to social media and electeds. Current guidelines focus on what *not* to do, but surely there’s a way to *do* these things without violating records laws.”

Staff/leader comments:

- “We need to establish rules of engagement as to what departments/other clients can expect from MCO. We need to tell them what we can do and what they need to do first.”
- “We often prioritize based on timelines - who has the most urgent deadline.”
- “The way I learn about communication needs is to attend meetings. I attend 4-5 meetings a day in order to know what’s going on. Otherwise, I wouldn’t know.”
- “There is little time for formal planning. If you try to craft a formal communications plan that sometimes becomes the deliverable instead of the actual communication. It can sit on people’s desks.”
- “On the council side, there are no communication hot topics key messages and no process or staff to make that happen. We would really benefit from key messages.”
- Council staff want acknowledgement that when they are doing communications, they are not doing policy work. They want clarity on priorities and expectations.
- “MCO has a big wall between what they do and the council. They will assist with the mayor but they cannot do much for the council.”
- “We need to prioritize work, but it’s difficult to do when you are supporting different council

members. I try to give them all a little. I usually prioritize by deadline.”

- We need to update the municipal code so that we have more time to get out the official postcard notices for meetings, etc. We have just two weeks to create and distribute the postcard, and by the time people receive the postcard people only have a couple days to try to attend.

PLATFORMS AND CHANNELS

Council comments:

- Website
 - “The website needs to be easier to use” for it to be effective. “The most-accessed information needs to be upfront.”
 - “Our website should be the mainstay [for information] because it has more staying power than social media, but we need to bring people back to the source.”
 - “We need to revamp the website and make sure it has project-specific pages.”
 - Search function:
 - “The website’s search function is important but provides too many results.”
 - “The website’s search function is so ineffective that Googling is easier even when I’m looking for information inside the city website itself.”
 - “Google is more powerful and exact than the website’s own search function.”
 - “Google is the easiest way to find information on the website, so SEO needs to be set up well.”
- Newsletters
 - “The website could be improved if it had a blog. Give department heads an opportunity to share the bigger picture context through blog posts... then use the posts to inform social media, newsletters, and so forth.”
- Social Media
 - “Social media should be staffed and empowered to answer when answers are mostly straight-forward.”

- “Posts about council meeting outcomes and important takeaways could be impactful.”
- “Social media is especially important in moments of crisis when time is of the essence and residents are looking for clarity.”
- “The community generally expects to find information on social media—timely information, too.”
- “Official city accounts don’t seem to connect with what residents are interested in or concerned about on a day-to-day basis.”
- “It would be better if the city served as a quality producer of content then relied on residents to share it voluntarily. We need to build relationships with amplifiers.”
- “Social media is where people spend time, but the city is missing out on the benefits of having councilmembers amplify their messaging.”
- “Humanize participate in government so people don’t feel like they’re talking to an institution but to people.”
- Monthly Forums
 - “We need to set up splash pages [on the website] for hot topics.” [relate this to the Be Heard Vancouver site]

Staff/Leader comments:

- “Video is more and more important. People will watch something before they read something. Especially important for people who have lower literacy, ESL or just trust issues with the government. Could use more short-form video production capabilities and/or repurpose some of TV Tacoma’s assets to more short-form work.”
- “The website is very important but needs work. It is very information dense, written by experts in those areas but not necessarily in language that is friendly to average resident. Could be simpler and more direct with better Search capabilities. Sometimes information is not updated.”
- “The website is the most important, but it isn’t user friendly. Then social media, media coverage and newsletters.”
- “Important communication is often buried in

technical jargon. No effort at plain speak.”

- “The website, intranet site (HUB) and Twitter are the most important channels...the website needs revamping.”
- “TV Tacoma provides transparency of meetings and has the ability to provide more insights for viewers. (Their goal is to set their editorial calendar to reflect the priorities of the city council retreat.) Videographers are storytellers, but they have to become more succinct and that often means less artistic.”
- “The website is important. You can build a beautiful website but people need to be able to use it. We need to build in multilingual capacity.”
- “The website is the biggest disappointment. There is little central control and many of our department web pages are not even attached to the city site. Anyone can get a URL and start a new site. We also need a consistent location for transaction tools like the form to ask for a pothole to be filled.”
- “The website should be (the most important channel), but I tell everyone if they want to find something on our website, just Google it. Don’t try the search function or try to find it yourself.”
- “Pre-pandemic we had Coffee with the Mayor and that was very popular and a trusted channel of communication.”
- “There’s a disconnect between how residents try to reach council members and how the Council responds. Residents are on social media and Next Door.”
- “TV Tacoma is underutilized. It needs revamped programming to be more relevant and then those shows need to be promoted.”
- One person mentioned they would get rid of GovDelivery and get a handle on the newsletters. “Some are great and other are not.”
- “GovDelivery is used a lot for newsletters, but it doesn’t show well on the phone.”
- “There are intranet pages for City Council members which could provide them with good information, but we don’t have the staff to post on it.”

- “Few people watch TV Tacoma.”
- “I’d like to see us get away from press releases. People are getting news from Facebook and Twitter.” Also, when posting the news release on the home page, remove the media contact and put the department contact on top. We end up responding to a lot of resident questions.

BUILDING TRUST

Staff/leader comments:

- “The mayor is a trusted source. People want to hear from the mayor, the city manager and the chief of police.”
- “We were overwhelmed by the death of Manny Ellis and the community response. We had no system set up, no resources in place and no time to make it happen. We needed a united front with the city manager, the mayor and the police chief. It was hard to do.”
- “Video is trusted more than written messages because you can see the person who delivers the message.”
- “When departments (or city and county) don’t play well together, communication messages on things like warming shelters are not accurate and that degrades trust.
- Constituents want affirmation that we care. They don’t get that feeling. They often don’t get responses at all or not timely responses. There’s a tension between using some type of form message in response, trying to respond to each person (impossible) or just not responding at all. So, often they get no response at all.”
- “Community Forum is another example of constituents getting no response or reaction from council. Council members are just supposed to sit and listen. The public has no way of knowing if they’ve been heard or if they care. There is no “thank you” follow up sent to those who speak to even acknowledge them... no one keeps track of who speaks.”
- “High intensity, face-to-face communication with city leaders like the mayor is what is needed to improve trust. Those types of engagements change minds and build trust.”

- “Part of the trust issue is everyone is managing their own communications. No overarching strategy. Questions get shift down to operations when it’s really a policy question. There is no one source of truth.”
- “We need to be realistic in our goals about building trust and understand what success looks like. Are we just chasing sentiment?”
- “One simple trust issue is simply not knowing if communication is coming from a legitimate city department or not. There are no standards or protocol for broadly distributed emails and sometimes you’re not even sure if it’s coming from the city.”
- “There are many ways for residents to reach out to the city and the city council, but there is no connection being made. There is no uniform process or tool that assures that they will be responded to. So, they reach out to as many people as possible hoping for a response. Then when people do respond, it’s often several people at once in an uncoordinated way.”
- “Because everyone is responsible for responding to constituents, it isn’t anyone’s responsibility. It leads to no accountability.”

CULTURE

Council comments:

- Default to responsiveness:
 - “The city is creating a vacuum by not commenting back on basic misinformation posted [to city social media channels].”
 - “There’s some reluctance to talk about the crime problem because it paints the city in a bad light. But **not** talking about it is **worse**.”

Staff/leader comments:

- “We need a cultural shift to understand how fast communication is moving. We need to be able to communicate in real time and change the speed at which we can respond. It can’t take two days to deliver a statement to the media because the media will have moved on.”
- “We need a cultural shift in what it takes to communicate fully and to bring communications in at the beginning, not as an afterthought.”

STAFF AND LEADER COMMENTS FOR “IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING, WHAT WOULD IT BE?”

- I'd like every resident who is reaching out to the city to get a response of some kind.
- I'd like to see us responding to residents that take the time to present at community forums. It feels like we are ignoring them.
- We need to make policy and communications staffing a priority over tools and channels because we need the people to do the work.
- We need to get a really clear shared understanding of authority of messaging and who speaks for Tacoma.
- We need a cultural shift to understand how fast communication is moving. We need to be able to communicate in real time and change the speed at which we can respond. It can't take two days to deliver a statement to the media because the media will have moved on.
- We need a cultural shift in what it takes to communicate fully and to bring communications in at the beginning, not as an afterthought.
- Change the organizational structure of the MCO department. The structure is so flat, there's no one to delegate to and no one above to ask for help.
- The director needs fewer direct reports and some team leaders who can report to her.
- Consider adding more staff who can specialize in their strengths, like media or graphic design or social media, rather than having lots of generalists. Staff would feel less scattered and function more effectively.
- The mayor and council need their own communication support and it needs to be separate from MCO. They need dedicated people. MCO should focus more on awareness campaigns and proactive messaging – should be more marketing focused.
- “I would love to see a multimedia team” to produce more videos, podcasts, etc. “I would also love to see TV Tacoma recast its programming to do series on the homeless system. Have programming be equity driven and grow the channel into multilingual programming.
- “I'd like to see us get away from press releases. People are getting news from Facebook and Twitter.” Also, when posting the news release on the home page, remove the media contact and put the department contact on top. We end up responding to a lot of resident questions.
- We need to update the municipal code so that we have more time to get out the official postcard notices for meetings, etc. We have just two weeks to create and distribute the postcard, and by the time people receive the postcard people only have a couple days to try to attend.
- We need to be able to outsource some communication work. We don't say no and we can't outsource so the staff just has to try to dig themselves out of the hole on evenings and weekends.
- We need more staffing. We have specialists who are able to do the strategy but we're in the weeds all the time.
- Each department has people assigned to be the web steward or the SharePoint steward or the social media steward for their department. There should be just one person from each department that MCO needs to liaison with and that person should have communication as a formal part of their job. It would make MCO jobs easier, make training easier and make the voice of each department more consistent.
- Fix constituent communication. One of our biggest pain points is no overarching process for responding to constituent inquiries. There is no service standard and asking the current staff to manage constituent communication would be impossible.
- Our decentralized way of responding to constituents is inefficient. We do have evergreen concerns and can have more consistent responses. We may not always be able to give customized responses, but we must do something better than no response.

Appendix 2: Comparative Analysis

By examining how other municipalities communicate with their residents, the comparative analysis showcases a variety of approaches and uncovers practices that may be worth implementing at Tacoma to streamline or clarify communication efforts. Three other Washington State cities were selected for review, and one non-Washington city with similar characteristics was added to expand insights beyond state borders. They are as follows:

- **Vancouver, Washington** – Similar to Tacoma in size and nearly identical in governance, Vancouver USA sits in the shadow of Portland’s media market but is a robust community unto itself.
- **Reno, Nevada** – Similar to Tacoma in size and nearly identical in governance, Reno, Nevada has made major changes to its communications practices in recent years, including a restructuring post-pandemic to focus more specifically on

strategic, proactive communications. It offers a wide array of best practices.

- **Seattle, Washington** – Different from Tacoma in size and governance, Seattle is the regional heavy-weight and sets a lot of expectations across the Puget Sound area for how governments interact with residents.
- **Bellevue, Washington** – Similar to Tacoma in size and somewhat similar in governance, Bellevue sits in the shadow of Seattle’s media market, as does Tacoma, but operates with a smaller communications team. Like Reno, it has restructured its communications practices in recent years to centralize efforts.
- Pierce County and Renton, Washington were also reviewed but not selected for in-depth analysis. Spokane and Lakewood, Washington, as well as Ogden, Utah, were also considered but not selected for review.

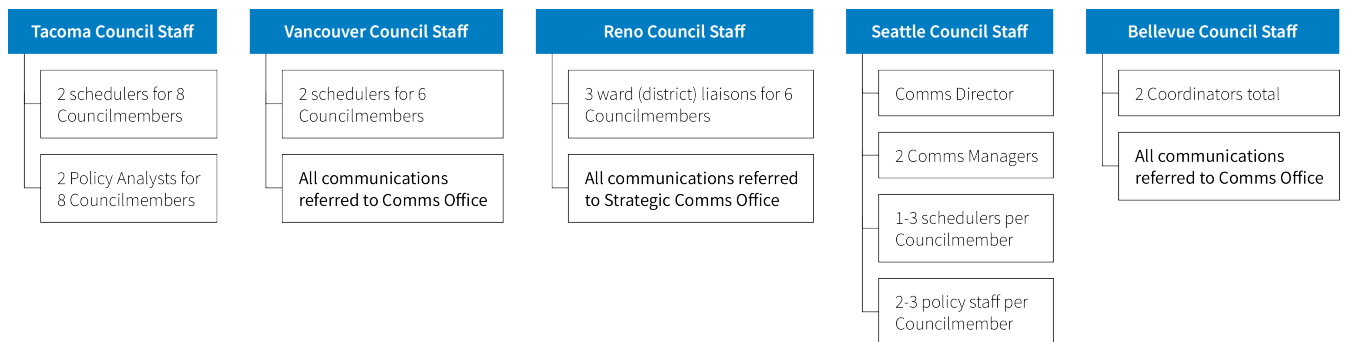
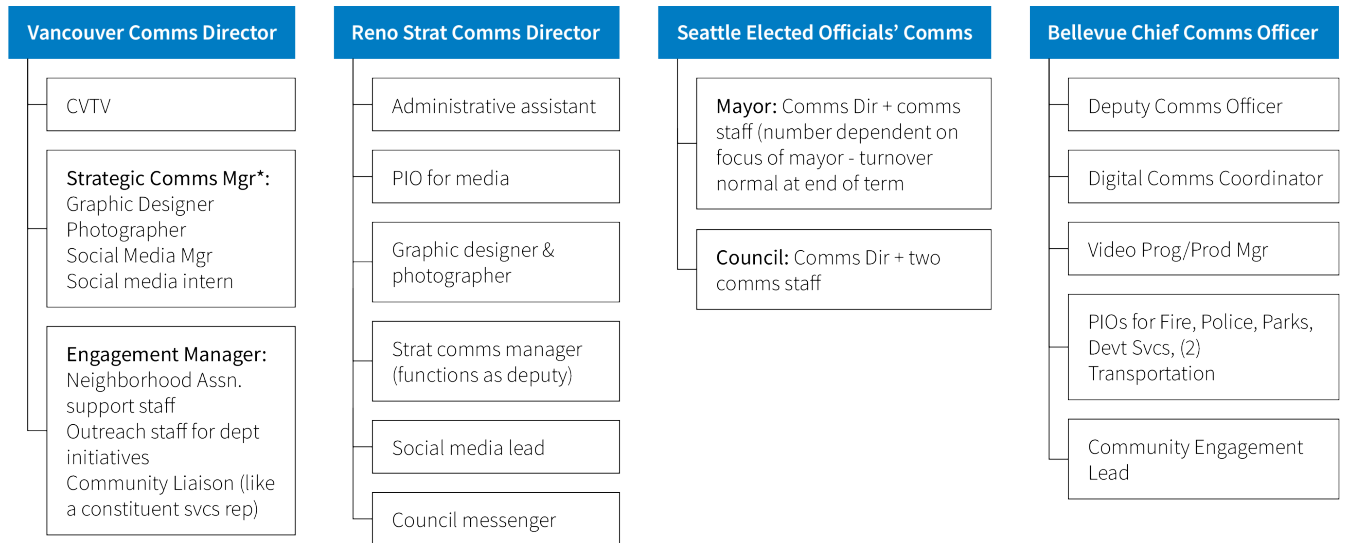
Tacoma	215,766 residents*	3rd largest city in state	2nd largest city in Puget Sound area	Exists in Seattle’s “shadow”	Council-Manager system with resident-elected mayor	8 Council-members + Mayor	Term-limited Council
Vancouver USA	182,792 residents*	4th largest city in state	2nd largest city in Portland area	Exists in Portland’s “shadow”	Council-Manager system with resident-elected mayor	6 Council-members + Mayor	Recent restructuring for more community engagement
Reno, Nevada	264,165 residents**	3rd largest city in state	Non-WA perspective with note-worthy comms program	Sets resident expectations across wide area	Council-Manager system with resident-elected mayor	6 Council-members + Mayor	Major recent restructuring to prioritize proactive comms
Seattle	741,251 residents*	Largest city in state	Largest city in Puget Sound area	Sets resident expectations across wide area	Mayor-Council system	9 Council-members + Mayor	City Light and TPU have similarities
Bellevue	146,145 residents*	5th largest city in state	3rd largest city in Puget Sound area	Exists in Seattle’s “shadow”	Council-Manager system with Council-elected mayor	7 Council-members incl. Mayor	Straight-forward org structure for comms team

*2020 American Community Survey

**Census data

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE BY JURISDICTION

Tacoma	Vancouver	Reno	Seattle	Bellevue
Media and Communications Office	Communications Director	Strategic Communications Director (website is outdated)	No centralized team	Chief Communications Officer
Office within City Manager's Department	Function of City Manager's Office	Function of City Manager's Office	Each department maintains its own communications approach and staff	Function of City Manager's Office
Elected officials/staff demonstrate some confusion about MCO's structure within the overall City org chart. MCO covers mission-critical initiatives beyond comms.	Reports to a Deputy City Manager but maintains a direct line to City Manager and functions on his behalf, including direct coordination with Mayor and Council.	Used to be a department that oversaw all outreach and resident engagement (incl. 311 customer service) but recently re-organized as a part of the City Manager's office to focus solely on strategic communications.	City contact lists are maintained and reaching out cross-department for support is expected. The cultural default is to "overcommunicate."	Used to operate in a "matrix" format with comms leads housed in individual departments. Now all comms staff are on centralized team within City Manager's office and provide services to departments.
Relationship with utilities: collaborative but separate	Relationship with utilities: collaborative but separate	Relationship with utilities: collaborative but separate	Relationship with utilities: collaborative but separate	Relationship with utilities: collaborative but separate
Including director, 15 staff plus TV Tacoma	Including director, 10-15 staff and an intern	Including director, 7 staff	Estimated 50+ staff doing communications across the various City departments, maybe more	Including director, 11 staff



COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS BY JURISDICTION

Takeaways:

- With more accounts than average on Facebook and Instagram, and a broad range of channels currently in use, Tacoma has a wider “surface area” than most cities of its size.
- While Tacoma stands out for **not** having a presence on NextDoor and Flickr, spreading

that surface area wider by opening accounts on new platforms isn’t likely to be as impactful as focusing on the most effective ones already in use and leveraging them further.

- To ease workload burdens, it may be worth launching a city blog from which newsletter content is sourced (including Council newsletters) rather than writing articles for multiple, individual newsletters.

Jurisdiction	Facebook	Twitter	Pinterest	Instagram	YouTube	LinkedIn	NextDoor	Flickr	Newsletters	Blog	App	TV Channel
Bellevue	6	6							3+	2		
Pierce County	11	7		3						4		
Reno	6	5		3					28			
Renton	3	2			3				2+			
Seattle	27	29	2	14	9	4	5	9	7+	20		
Vancouver	8	4		5								
Tacoma	14	10		13	2	2			5+			

Jurisdiction	Facebook	Twitter	Pinterest	Instagram	YouTube	LinkedIn	NextDoor	Flickr	Newsletters
Tacoma	City Arts Environmental Svcs Fire Conv Ctr Historic Preservation Libraries Minority Bus Devt Libraries Mobility Minority Bus Police Devt Mobility Police Tacoma Creates Tacoma Dome Sustainability TPU	City Fire Conv Ctr Historic Preservation Libraries Minority Bus Devt Mobility Police Tacoma Dome TPU	none	City Arts Environmental Svcs Conv Ctr Historic Preservation Libraries Mobility Tacoma Creates Tacoma Dome Sustainability TPU Youth Commission	City Tacoma Dome	City	none	none	News Releases Council eNews EnviroTalk Make it Tacoma (EcDvt) TPU Others?

Jurisdiction	Facebook	Twitter	Pinterest	Instagram	YouTube	LinkedIn	NextDoor	Flickr	Newsletters	Blog	App
Vancouver	City CVTV Police Fire Parks Public Works Fourth Plain Fwd Water Resource Ctr	City Police Parks Public Works		City Police Fire Parks Public Works	City	City	City	none	Ended in 2020	none	none
Reno	City City espanol Police Fire Arts Adaptive	City Police Fire Resilience/ Env'tl Auditor	City	City Arts Fire	City	City	City	none	28 subscription offerings (Constant Contact)	City, tagged by topic	Municipal Court
Bellevue	City Fire Police Parks Arts Econ Devt	City Fire Police Parks Econ Devt Transportation		City	City	City	City	none	It's Your City (quarterly, PDF + print) Neighborhood News (monthly, PDF + print) Parks eNews	City News, tagged by department (includes Council Roundups) Bellevue Beat, PD	My Bellevue (customer service app)

Jurisdiction	Facebook		Twitter		Pinterest	Instagram	YouTube
Seattle	Animal Shelter Arts and Culture City Govt City Light Civil Rights Councilmbrs Constr and Inspns DEEL Econ Devt Film and Music Fire Housing Human Services Immigr & Refugee	Labor Standards Library Mayor Municipal Court Neighborhoods Parks & Rec Planning & Cmty Devt OEM Police SDOT Seattle Center Seattle Channel SPU	Animal Shelter Arts and Culture City Govt City Light Civil Rights Councilmbrs Constr and Inspns DEEL Econ Devt Film and Music Fire Housing Human Resources Human Services Immigr & Refugee	Labor Standards Library Mayor Municipal Court Neighborhoods Parks & Rec Planning & Devt OEM Police Police Account'by SDOT Seattle Center Seattle Channel SPU	Library Municipal Archives	Animal Shelter Arts and Culture City Govt Civil Rights Councilmbrs Fire Library Mayor Municipal Archives Neighborhoods Parks & Rec Planning & Devt SDOT Seattle Channel	Fire Human Services Labor Standards Library Municipal Archives Planning & Cmty Devt Public Utilities Seattle Channel SDOT
	LinkedIn	NextDoor	Flickr	Newsletters	Blog		App
	City Govt Library SDOT	City Govt City Light Fire OEM Police	Animal Shelter City Govt Councilmbrs Immigr & Refugee Municipal Archives Neighborhoods Parks & Rec SDOT	Arts and Culture City Govt Councilmbrs Econ Devt	Animal Shelter City Govt Councilmbrs Constr and Inspns Econ Devt Film and Music Fire Human Services Immigr & Refugee Labor Standards	Mayor Neighborhoods Parks & Rec Planning & Cmty Devt Police SDOT Seattle Center Seattle Channel SPU	Find it, Fix it Seattle

WEB COMPARISON: HOMEPAGES BY JURISDICTION

Takeaways:

- Tacoma, Reno and Bellevue make excellent use of wide-angle photos on their homepages.
- Reno and Bellevue place a search bar front-and-center on their homepages.
- Vancouver links directly to its TV programming in the right sidebar.
- Seattle and Bellevue apply simple iconography to in-page navigation.
- Reno, Seattle and Bellevue use a dot-gov domain name. Tacoma uses dot-org, and Vancouver uses dot-US.

- Tacoma and Vancouver use smaller text which can make the page feel more crowded.
- Vancouver offers links to its main social media channels “above the fold” on the homepage.
- Reno offers a live chat function across all pages.
- Each city offers five to six tabs for organizing information.

Bottom line:

There are many ways to organize information on a municipal website. Due to the volume of information housed on such sites, the “magic” lies in how easy it is to find information when looking for it.






City of Seattle Official Website

Participate in Seattle Redistricting

Provide feedback on draft maps or attend a meeting about new City Council district lines.

[Learn how to get involved](#)




West Seattle Bridge Updates

Crews are making final repairs as we prepare to re-open the West Seattle Bridge in mid-2022.


[View progress videos and more](#)

Seattle Preschool Program
2022-2023 applications now open


Top Requests




COVID-19 Resources




Pay Utility Bill



Pay a Ticket



Adopt a Pet



Building Permits

COVID-19 Alert
As of Monday, April 4, City Hall and other city facilities are fully open, Monday to Friday, 8 a.m.-4 p.m. See COVID-19-related city information on [vaccines](#), [response \(with status of facilities\)](#), [community resources](#), [business resources](#) and [updates](#).

City of Bellevue, WA Language Menu

BellevueWA.gov

How Do I Search for... [Go!](#)

ACTIVITIES

HOT TOPICS

PERMITS

RESIDENT SERVICES

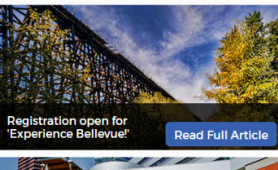
TRAFFIC

CITY COUNCIL

Happenings

Registration open for 'Experience Bellevue!'

[Read Full Article](#)



Headlines

Apr 4 | Board and commission vacancies

Mar 30 | Council Roundup: Changes to noise code to support events

[MyBellevue Chatbot for COVID-19 Questions](#)

COUNCIL WEBPAGES BY JURISDICTION

Takeaways:

- Tacoma’s is the only council page that doesn’t link directly to a meetings live feed. Each of the other jurisdictions includes a link or button featured prominently “above the fold” on their council pages.
 - A link to live meetings isn’t readily accessed through Tacoma’s “Council Meetings” link in the left-hand navigation bar either.
- Each jurisdiction also includes a direct link to

council agendas and upcoming meetings on their council main pages.

- Vancouver, Reno and Bellevue feature their council members as a group on the main page.
- Tacoma’s individual headshots are easily the highest quality amongst jurisdictions reviewed.

Bottom line:

Find ways to connect the council webpage more with the meetings-related content via direct links to livestreams, links to upcoming agendas, etc.



CITY OF Vancouver WASHINGTON Search Submit

Our Community Safety & Services Business & Development Recreation & Events Inside City Hall

I want to... ▾

- + Meet Your Mayor & City Council
- Agendas & Minutes
- + Council Meetings
- + About the City Council
- + Boards and Commissions
- + City Charter
- Public Notices
- City Liaison
- City Fact Sheets

Contact Information

2022 Council Meeting Calendar

Council Agendas and Minutes

Testify at a Council Meeting

Contact the City Council

Welcome to City Council

City Government in Vancouver is the essence of democracy and citizen rule. The city is managed by a Council/Manager form of government. This system empowers the citizens of Vancouver and provides responsive, progressive leadership and a vision for our community.

The City Council, subject to the Washington State constitution, general statutes enacted under its authority and the provisions of the Vancouver City Charter, are vested with the authority of an elective council to enact ordinances or resolutions, adopt rules and regulations, appoint and remove the city manager, fix all salaries, adopt the budget, control indebtedness and the issuance of bonds, and to provide for an independent audit of any department or office. (Charter Article I, Section 1.03 Form of Government, and Article II, Section 2.05 Powers and Duties)

The Council has seven members, including a mayor, nominated and elected from the city at large. The Mayor and Councilmembers serve four-year terms. One Councilmember is appointed biennially to serve as Mayor Pro Tempore and will act as mayor in the absence or disability of the mayor.

For complete information on the powers and duties of City Council, please see [Article II: The Council of the Vancouver Charter City Charter](#). [Read More.](#)

Meet Your Mayor & City Council Read short biographies, term information and current

RENO SERVICES COMMUNITY BUSINESS GOVERNMENT HOW DO I... SEARCH

City Council

- Mayor Hillary Schieve
- Community Engagement Program
- Memos to the Mayor and Council
- Proclamations
- Public Comment
- Request for Council at Events
- Vision, Mission, and Priorities
- Ward Map
- Welcome Letter Request

Government

City Council

Font Size: [A] [A+] [A-] [A-] Share & Bookmark Feedback Print

The Reno City Council is made up of seven people elected to make policy decisions for Reno City government. The City Council sets [priorities](#), approves the [budget](#), and addresses issues facing our community.



City Council Meetings

Regular City Council meetings take place in the City Council Chamber at City Hall, 1 East First Street, and begin at 10 a.m. [Directions](#). Watch live meetings, view agendas, minutes and staff reports online at [Reno.Gov/Meetings](#). Council meetings replay on Charter Cable channel 194.

We're Currently Offline. Please leave a message.

Seattle City Council

Meet the Council Issues News Committees Legislation & Research Calendar



THE SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL WANTS TO HEAR FROM YOU

PUBLIC COMMENT

NOW AVAILABLE DURING REMOTE MEETINGS



Seattle City Council Retweeted
@Lisa_Herbold
Today, I was joined by app-based workers to introduce the first bill in the PayUp policy proposal. The bill covers minimum payment.

Meet the Council

Watch Live



Budget Committee



Council Briefing
Mon, Apr 11, 2022, 2pm
Remote Meeting

Today

Seattle's Revenue Forecast Shows Improved Numbers, Although Budget Challenges Remain

Sara Nelson
Councilmember



Lisa Herbold
Councilmember



Debora Juarez
Council President




Council Connection Blog

4/8 **West Seattle Bridge Update; PayUp Legislation Introduced; Sound Transit**

COVID-19 Alert
As of Monday, April 4, City Hall and other city facilities are fully open, Monday to Friday, 8 a.m.-4 p.m. See COVID-19-related city information on [vaccines](#), [response \(with status of facilities\)](#), [community resources](#), [business resources](#) and [updates](#).

City of Bellevue, WA | City Council Search Go! Language Menu



Home / City Government / City Council

City Government

- > City Council
- Agendas and Minutes
- Councilmembers
- City Council Vision
- Council Pledge
- Proclamation Requests
- State of the City

City Council

The City Council is holding virtual meetings via Zoom webinar the first four Mondays of each month, at 6 p.m., broadcast live on Bellevue TV channel 21, the [BTU YouTube channel](#) and [BTU](#). Details on how to view the meeting in progress are included on each published agenda.

If you wish to provide oral communications, please register using the link in the agenda by 5 p.m. the day of the meeting.

Through proactive leadership and governance, the City Council provides high-quality services and facilities to meet the needs of a growing, dynamic community ([agendas and minutes](#)). They support the city's mission and vision, guiding the city according to the council vision.

Contact

Telephone
425-452-7810

Email
council@bellevuewa.gov

COMMUNICATION WEBPAGES BY JURISDICTION

Takeaways:

- Tacoma features comparatively little information on its communications page and it is notably difficult to find.
- Vancouver's communications page functions as a directory to the various communication tools it uses.
- The placement of Vancouver's and Bellevue's communications pages within the city manager's subpages makes it easy to understand the cities' reporting structures.
- Seattle lacks a central communications page but provides a comprehensive listing of media

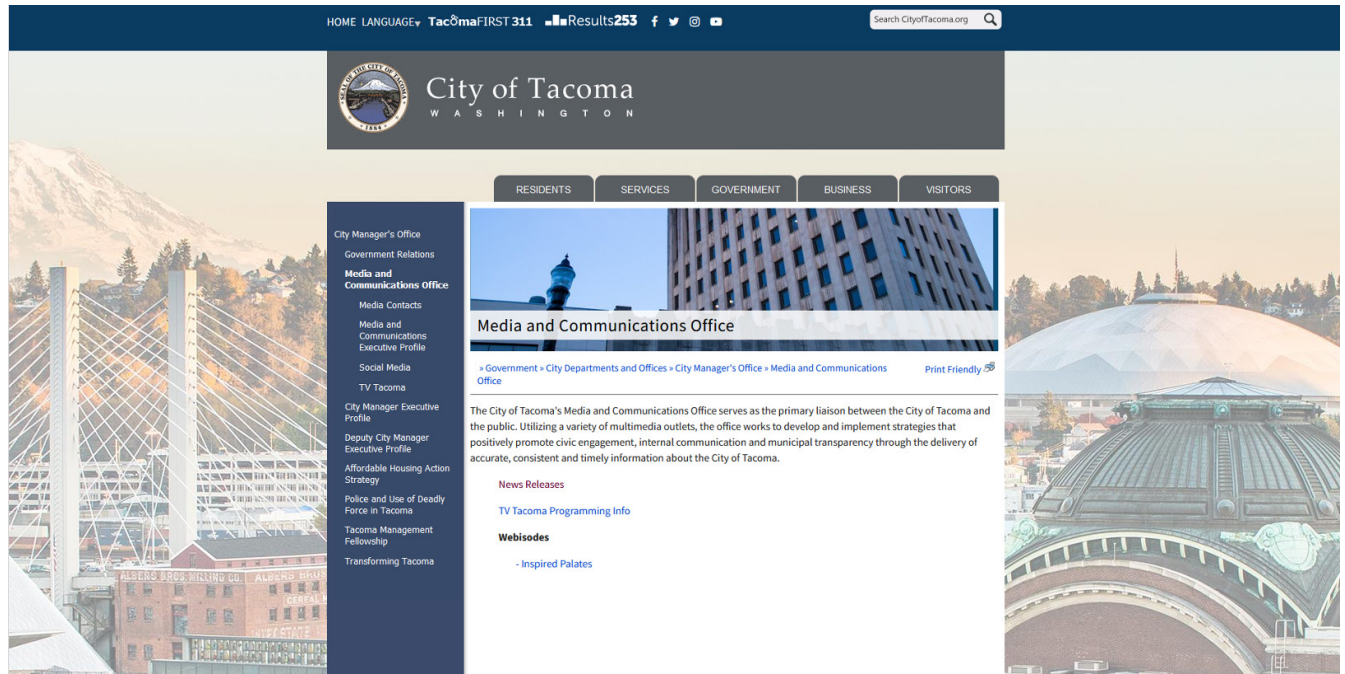
contacts through the page featured here.

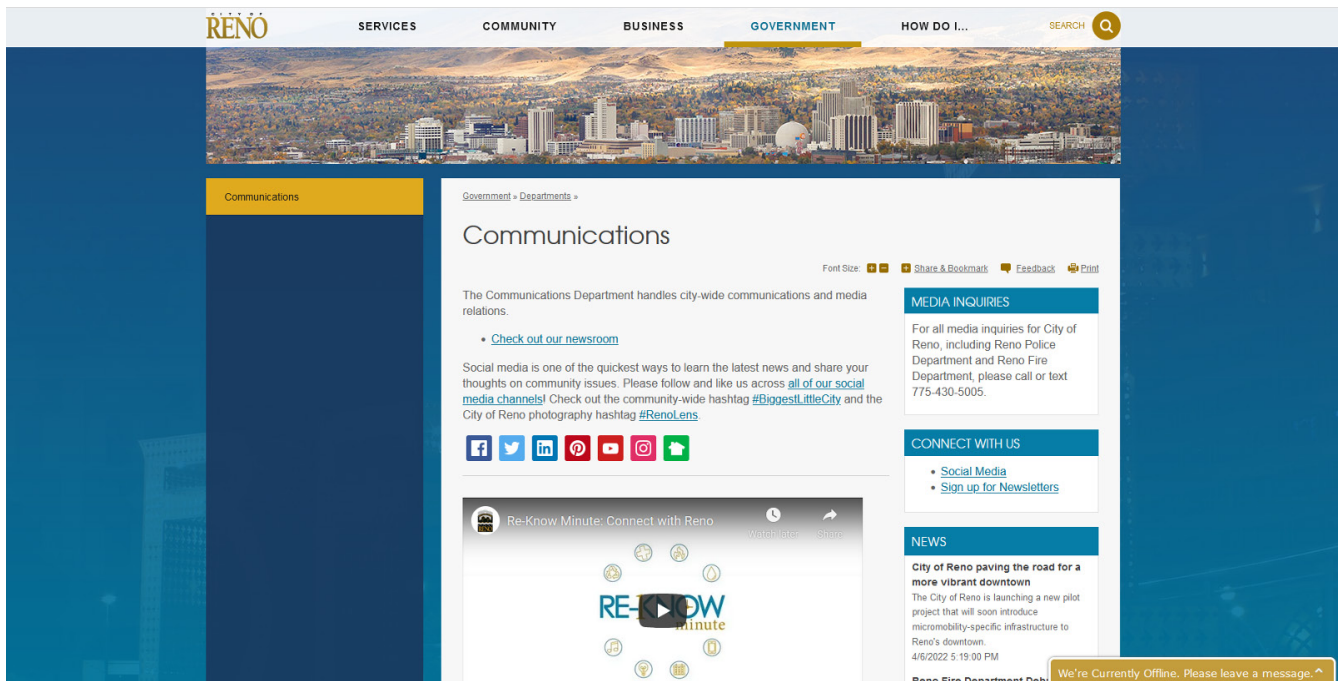
- Bellevue features its entire communications staff on its website.

Bottom line:

- A communications page sets the tone for how the city communicates with its residents.
 - Is the city a transparent organization? Then it may function as a directory, like Vancouver's page does.
 - Does it take a relational approach? It may feature its staff, like Bellevue's page does.

Because Tacoma's communications page is light on information, residents may mistakenly believe engagement is undervalued.





Media Contacts

Departments

- > Elected Officials
- > Boards & Commissions
- Media Contacts**

Q

Public Information Officers should be contacted for media related questions and requests such as press release information and media kits for their specific department.

<p>Animal Shelter</p> <p>Melissa Mixon (206) 727-8867 melissa.mixon@seattle.gov</p>	<p>Arts & Culture</p> <p>Erika Lindsay (206) 727-8668 erika.lindsay@seattle.gov</p>
<p>City Attorney</p> <p>Scott Lindsay (206) 684-8200 scott.lindsay@seattle.gov</p>	<p>City Clerk</p> <p>Monica Martinez Simmons (206) 684-8361 monica.simmons@seattle.gov</p>
<p>City Council</p> <p>Dana Robinson Slote (206) 615-0061 dana.robinsonslote@seattle.gov</p>	<p>City Light</p> <p>Jenn Strang (206) 677-6295 jenn.strang@seattle.gov</p>

City of Bellevue, WA | Communications

Q Go!
Language
Menu

Home / City Government / Departments / City Manager's Office / Communications

✉
🐦
f
A
A
🗻

City Manager's Office

- > **Communications**
- Communications Team
- City News
- Bellevue Television
- For the Media
- Hot Topics and Initiatives
- It's Your City
- Social Media
- Emergencies and Extreme Weather
- COVID-19 Response

Communications

The city Communications Office oversees citywide communications, disseminating timely information about city services and programs to the public, businesses, media, employees and other stakeholders.

We provide strategic communications, media relations, web content management, publications such as It's Your City, city video production through Bellevue Television and social media management.

Our Channels

Learn about all that's happening at City Hall and around Bellevue through the following channels. Our [Stay Connected flier](#) captures it all too.

- [Bellevue Television](#)
- [City News](#)

Contact

Brad Harwood
Chief Communications Officer

Telephone
425-452-6837

Email
bharwood@bellevuewa.gov

Alerts

GENERAL WEBSITE OBSERVATIONS

- Governmental websites house an immense amount of information, and as a general rule, they are unlikely to ever be particularly beautiful. That said, the information must be organized in a clean, easy-to-navigate manner to avoid a sense that information is being hidden or obscured from residents.
 - Consider placing the “search” bar in a central position on the Tacoma homepage.
 - But first, optimize the website’s search function to better yield relevant results. Current searches are more effectively conducted through Google for content within the Tacoma site, rather than through the site itself.
 - Your website vendor should be able to help you integrate Google’s search functionality into your site if it can’t optimize the native search function.
- Overall, the City of Tacoma’s website loads exceptionally slowly, decreasing its effectiveness and contributing to a false sense of obscurity. Work with your web vendor to address server speeds and other issues that may lead to limited bandwidth and long load times.
 - Information like agendas, meeting videos, etc. can be unusually difficult to find. We recommend simplifying the interconnection between backend tools that facilitate this process so that they either work better together or so that there are fewer of them, creating a more seamless experience for the end user.

Consider making the communications subpage more content-rich and helpful to website visitors. This is a great place to introduce the city’s overall marketing message and direct visitors to platforms where they can engage with you, from social media links to newsletter signups.

SOCIAL COMPARISON BY JURISDICTION

Takeaways:

- In interviews with comparative cities, social media was unanimously cited as the second-

most important avenue for sharing information. Websites were most often cited as the primary channel.


- Social media is a great venue through which to convey the personality of a city.
 - Reno’s use of casual video shows a grassroots, “we’re with you” vibe.
 - Bellevue’s emphasis on community activities shows a place-making emphasis.
 - Tacoma’s snapshot of posts demonstrates the importance of the Facebook channel for sharing city news—from council livestreams to TV Tacoma programming.
- Because social media algorithms favor posts that garner engagement, having multiple city accounts on a single platform allows for sharing/retweet opportunities and can be applied powerfully to amplify messaging without paying to boost.

That said, any successful social marketing effort should include funds to boost or promote posts, particularly on Facebook. It’s a “pay to play” environment for organizational accounts.

Tacoma - Twitter (government)

City of Tacoma @CityofTacoma · Apr 1

🚧 We will be closing the intersection of N. 21st & N. Orchard streets in #Tacoma April 6-8 from 7 am-4 pm each day to perform permanent street repairs. During this time, the entire intersection will be closed with detours in place. For more, visit ow.ly/CfrE50lyKEy.



1 2 3

City of Tacoma @CityofTacoma · Apr 7

UPDATE: Our #Tacoma crews have finished permanent street repair work at the intersection of N. 21st & N. Orchard Streets. This work was completed ahead of schedule, and the intersection is now open to all traffic.

3

City of Tacoma @CityofTacoma · Apr 5

Join us today for the #TacCouncil Study Session at noon. It'll be on Zoom & in-person at the #Tacoma Municipal Building and will be live on Facebook, tvtacoma.com & TV Tacoma. Agenda & Zoom login: ow.ly/7zbY50IAXLe.



2 2 2

City of Tacoma @CityofTacoma · Apr 5

Agenda:

- ◆ Spectators At Unlawful Racing Events
- ◆ Review of Funding Recommendations for: Community Development Block Grant, Home Investment Partnership Program & Emergency Solutions Grant
- ◆ City Manager's Performance Evaluation Process
- ◆ Consideration Request-South Sound Together

2 2

Vancouver - Twitter (government)

City of Vancouver, Washington Retweeted

VancouverPublicWorks @VanPubWorksUS · Apr 7

TRAFFIC ALERT: All travel lanes along Mill Plain Boulevard, between Reserve Street and Grand Boulevard, are CLOSED until further notice due to an emergency repair of a gas mainline. Watch for posted detour routes. Please plan ahead and take an alternative route.

1 7 4

City of Vancouver, Washington @VancouverUS · Apr 6


During April, watch for Broadway St. to be closed from 13th St through the Evergreen Blvd intersection. This also includes 11th & 12th St intersection closures. Construction will continue here to install/extend new sewer and water main lines [#vanwa cityofvancouver.us/Broadway](https://www.cityofvancouver.us/Broadway)



4 3

City of Vancouver, Washington @VancouverUS · Apr 1

This Earth Month, we acknowledge that we are in a race against time to adapt to the rapidly changing conditions we live in. This is a race that we as a city intend to win.



1 7

Show this thread

City of Vancouver, Washington @VancouverUS · Apr 1

The plan aims to achieve:

- ✅ an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by city operations by 2025
- ✅ an 80% reduction in GHG emissions by the Vancouver community by 2030
- ✅ Carbon neutrality by both city operations and the Vancouver community by 2040

1 3

City of Vancouver, Washington @VancouverUS · Apr 1

Follow the City on all month long on social to learn how we're doing our part to protect our planet and to find ways that you can take part, too!

Reno - Twitter (government)

City of Reno @CityofReno · Apr 8

Don't miss the Special Reno City Council Meeting on Monday, April 11 @ 10a at City Hall!
 The full agenda: bit.ly/372QjgR
 Watch live: youtube.com/cityofreno

Make public comment in person or online!
Reno.gov/PublicComment
 775-393-4499
PublicComment@Reno.Gov



1 retweet, 2 likes

City of Reno Retweeted

Reno Fire Department @RenoFireDept · Apr 5

RFD Investigators are seeking info on a vehicle arson that occurred late Monday night. Firefighters extinguished a vehicle fire that was parked in front of 425 Vassar Street. Any one with info the incident is asked to call the RFD at 775-334-2300 or Secret Witness at 775-322-4900



1 comment, 5 retweets, 9 likes

Seattle - Twitter (government)

City of Seattle Retweeted

Seattle Channel @SeattleChannel · Apr 6

Following a year of conservation efforts, the Soul Pole has returned to its home outside the Douglass-Truth Branch of @SPLBuzz. Hear from @emuiled, son of leader behind the wooden pole. Full video here: youtu.be/lhDvomZhi4Q

@MayorofSeattle @CityofSeattle



known at the time as Gregory Q X

2:03 418 views

5 retweets, 10 likes

City of Seattle Retweeted

Mayor Bruce Harrell @MayorofSeattle · Apr 5

Transportation electrification is key to delivering clean, reliable, and fast transit to every Seattle resident. Led by @SEACityLight, we're working with partners like @kcmetrobus we can build a cleaner, greener #OneSeattle. kingcountymetro.blog/2022/03/30/cha...



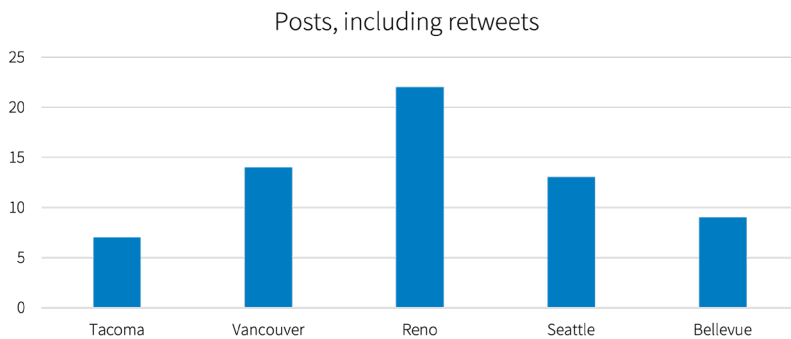
8 comments, 6 retweets, 23 likes

Bellevue - Twitter (government)



Twitter Posts Compared

March 27 to April 9, 2022 at appx. 3 p.m.



Tacoma: 7
 Vancouver: 14
 Reno: 22
 Seattle: 13 (all retweets)
 Bellevue: 9

Notes:

- Each jurisdiction manages multiple Twitter accounts, and this analysis looks specifically at the main “government” account for comparison purposes.
- Engagements/Comments/Shares not counted.

Tacoma - Facebook (government)

City of Tacoma Government was live.
April 1 at 8:00 AM · 🌐


Join us for CityLine! On this episode, we'll talk with the South End Neighborhood Council, Workforce Central, Washington State Historical Society and the Negro Motorist Green Book exhibit, The Grand Cinema, and we'll meet the Pet of the Week with the Humane Society for Tacoma & Pierce County.



4 Comments 2 Shares

City of Tacoma Government
March 29 at 10:00 AM · 🌐

Join us tonight for the March 29, 2022, Tacoma City Council Meeting at 5 p.m. It'll be conducted as a hybrid meeting on Zoom and in-person at the Tacoma Municipal Building (747 Market St.), Council Chambers located on the 1st floor. If you'd like to submit a comment relating to an item on the agenda, written public comments can be submitted to cityclerk@cityoftacoma.org before 4 p.m. or you can also speak during the meeting to share your public comment. For the agenda, visit ... See more



1 Share

City of Tacoma Government
March 28 at 8:00 AM · 🌐

Mayor Woodards met with U.S. Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh, U.S. Senator Patty Murray, Representatives Derek Klimer and Mariilyn Strickland, and community partners on Friday to discuss the need to strengthen workforce development programs to open opportunities for job seekers who face barriers to employment and how Tacoma can partner with local and federal partners to better help our workforce.

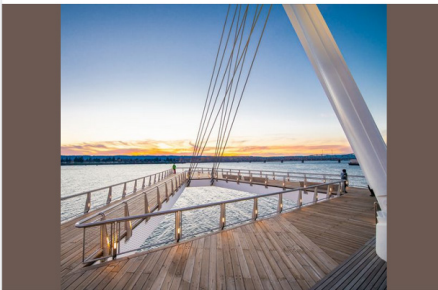


69 Reactions 72 Comments 1 Share

Vancouver - Facebook (government)

Vancouver, Washington City Government
4h · 🌐

Happy, happy #ScenicSaturday! Let's celebrate with one of the best views in our city: the gorgeous Grant Street Pier! Have you visited the waterfront lately?



7 Reactions 1 Comment 1 Share

Vancouver, Washington City Government
April 6 at 8:00 PM · 🌐

The second supportive Safe Stay Community, located on City-owned property at 4915 E. Fourth Plain Blvd., is set to open April 13.

Safe Stays improve community health, safety and cleanliness for both housed and unhoused community members by:

- Offering unhoused residents greater access to services, increased stability, and safe, healthy, and humane living conditions to transition out of homelessness.
- Reducing garbage, trash and clutter in public spaces.... See more




8 Reactions 3 Comments 1 Share

Vancouver, Washington City Government
April 1 at 3:57 PM · 🌐

After 150 years in service, Vancouver's Fire Department formed its first all-female crew. The future is bright for Vancouver Fire as they focus on more equitably representing the community we serve.

"I think a lot of women don't even consider the fact that they're capable," Vancouver Fire Department Capt. Heidi Parr continued. "We're a walking testament to the fact that if you have a desire and will, there's a way."




7 Reactions 1 Share

Reno - Facebook (government)

City of Reno Government
20h · 🌐


The Ward 1 Neighborhood Advisory Board meets Monday, April 11 at 5:30p! If you live in the area and would like to know what's happening in your neighborhood, then this is the place!
Find the full agenda: <https://bit.ly/3rckdZY>



👍❤️ 4

City of Reno Government was live.
Yesterday at 2:31 PM · 🌐

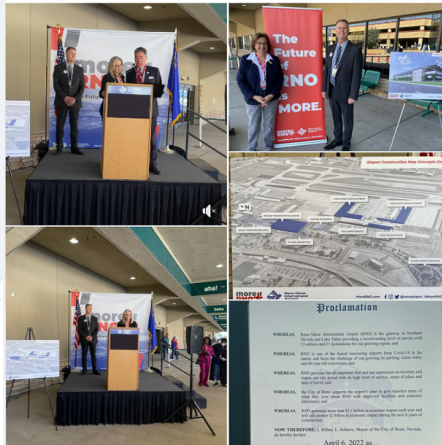
We are going live with Director of Development Services, Chris Pingree for today's '5 Faqs with City Staff!' For more info on permits or the planning dept check out: <http://reno.gov/DevelopmentServices>



👍❤️ 12

City of Reno Government
April 6 at 11:47 AM · 🌐

Today is Reno-Tahoe International Airport Day! We joined the Reno Airport as it announced the start of a multi-year project that will transform the way our passengers travel for generations to come. You can listen to the City of Reno Proclamation here! Thanks to Richard Jay from the Airport Authority Board of Trustees for joining Reno Mayor Hillary Schieve in the reading of the Proclamation!
More info: MoreRNO.com



👍❤️ 68

11 Comments 4 Shares

Seattle - Facebook (government)

City of Seattle Government
February 28 · 🌐



Mayor Bruce Harrell
February 28 · 🌐

After administering nearly 15,000 doses of life-saving #COVID19 vaccines, our West Seattle clinic closed its doors last Saturday after 4 months. Thanks to our p... See more

👍❤️🙌 27

3 Comments

City of Seattle Government
February 15 · 🌐

LIVE
Today @ 2:00 p.m.



MAYOR HARRELL DELIVERS STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
SEATTLECHANNEL.ORG/WATCH-LIVE

Seattle Channel
February 15 · 🌐

LIVE at 2 p.m. | Mayor Bruce Harrell will deliver his first State of the City address at the top of today's Seattle City Council meeting. Tune in to watch live... See more

👍❤️ 5

14 Comments

City of Seattle Government
January 20 · 🌐

We are building a greener and more sustainable Seattle region, with a healthy environment now and for future generations. This achievement to protect the headwaters of the Skagit River shows what we can accomplish through strong collaborative partnerships.



SEATTLETIMES.COM

Mining company drops rights to Upper Skagit watershed in key preservation step
The land in B.C., at the headwaters of the Skagit River, has been embroiled in controversy over ...

👍❤️🙌 14

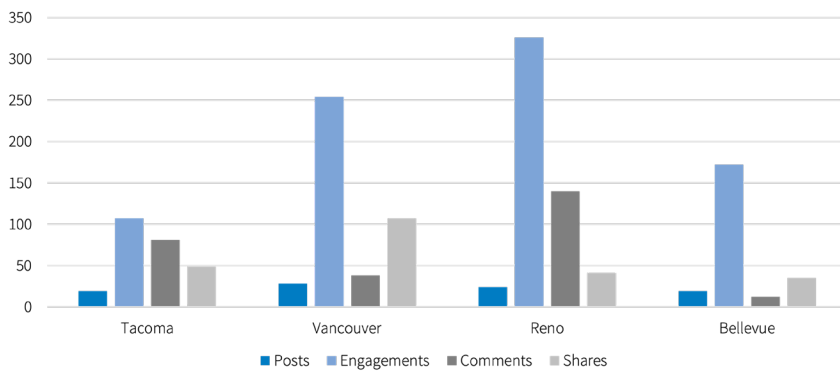
1 Share

Bellevue - Facebook (government)



Facebook Activity Compared

March 27 to April 9, 2022 at appx. 3 p.m.



Notes:

- Each jurisdiction manages multiple Facebook accounts, and this analysis looks specifically at the main “government” account for comparison purposes.
- Engagements/Comments/Shares reported are limited to the posts within the given date range. Other engagements may have occurred on older posts during the same date range but are not captured here.

Tacoma

- Posts: 19
- Engagements: 107
- Comments: 81
- Shares: 49

Vancouver

- Posts: 28
- Engagements: 254
- Comments: 38
- Shares: 107

Reno

- Posts: 24
- Engagements: 326
- Comments: 140
- Shares: 41

Seattle (no posts within date range)

Bellevue

- Posts: 19
- Engagements: 172
- Comments: 12
- Shares: 35

NEWS RELEASE COMPARISON BY JURISDICTION

Takeaways:

- Most news releases include contacts to whom journalists can reach out for more information.
 - Vancouver and Bellevue show good examples of how to break up information for easier scanning.
 - Where applicable, live links are included within the text, directing readers to source information or ways to participate.
 - All news samples include a clear date on which the news was posted (but Seattle's is just below the image included on the slide).
 - All cities make it easy to find the latest news
- Seattle's sample is the only one to include a quote—this would make it easier for a news outlet to lift wholesale and run as news, if desired.
 - Bellevue includes images with about half of its news posts. Seattle and Vancouver occasionally include photos or graphics. It appears to be less common for Reno and Tacoma to format images into news posts.
 - Seattle's navigation conveniently allows one post to be read after another without returning to the main list of posts.

Tacoma

The screenshot shows a news release on the City of Tacoma website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with tabs for RESIDENTS, SERVICES, GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS, and VISITORS. Below the navigation bar is a header image of a sustainability expo with the title "Sustainability Expo Returns on April 16". To the left of the main content is a dark blue sidebar with the text "In the News Sustainability Expo Returns on April 16 Temporary Intersection Closure April 6". Below the header image is a link "» In the News » Sustainability Expo Returns on April 16" and a "Print Friendly" icon. The main content area has the title "South Sound Sustainability Expo Returns on April 16" followed by "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" and the date "March 31, 2022". Under "MEDIA CONTACTS", it lists Tanisha Jumper and Stacy Ellifritt with their email addresses and phone numbers. The text of the release describes the 14th Annual South Sound Sustainability Expo, its location at the University of Washington Tacoma campus, and its theme "Better Tacoma 2030". It also provides contact information for event details.

RESIDENTS SERVICES GOVERNMENT BUSINESS VISITORS

In the News
Sustainability Expo Returns on April 16
Temporary Intersection Closure April 6

Sustainability Expo Returns on April 16

» In the News » Sustainability Expo Returns on April 16 [Print Friendly](#)

South Sound Sustainability Expo Returns on April 16

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 31, 2022

MEDIA CONTACTS
Tanisha Jumper, Media and Communications, tjumper@cityoftacoma.org, (253) 591-5152
Stacy Ellifritt, Media and Communications, stacy.ellifritt@cityoftacoma.org, (253) 591-2005

South Sound Sustainability Expo Returns on April 16

The 14th Annual South Sound Sustainability Expo is back and taking place on Saturday, April 16, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The event will be held completely outdoors, stretching from Tollefson Plaza and along the Prairie Line Trail through the University of Washington Tacoma campus (1900 Commerce St., in Tacoma).

The Expo is free, open to the public, and connects residents and businesses with services, products, companies, and agencies that address sustainability needs in the community. Attendees can explore a variety of sustainable living topics, enjoy environmental art displays, discover actions they can take every day to have a positive impact on the environment, and more.

The theme this year is "Better Tacoma 2030," as the event will celebrate the new Climate Action Plan, which details Tacoma's vision for a future grounded in sustainability. Attendees will enjoy fun activities for all ages. Families can get creative with hands-on crafts and hear from regional environmental experts on a wide range of topics.

For event information, visit SouthSoundSustainabilityExpo.org or call (253) 591-5172.

I want to... ▾

Contact Information

Public Works Administration
4500 SE Columbia Way
Vancouver, Washington
Phone: 360-487-7130
Fax: 360-487-7139

[View Full Contact Details](#)

Upcoming Events

- [Heritage Tree Tour, self-guided](#)
04/09/2022 - 6:00am
- [Arbor Day, Celebrate and Serve](#)
04/09/2022 - 10:00am
- [Volunteer: Wintler Park Beach Cleanup](#)
04/13/2022 - 9:30am
- [Organics 101 Class: Curbside Composting](#)
04/13/2022 - 7:00pm
- [Heritage Tree Tour, self-guided](#)

Community invited to review Vancouver's Draft Transportation Improvement Program

Press Release Date:
Thursday, April 7, 2022

Vancouver community members are invited to review the 2023-2028 Draft Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). This document provides detailed descriptions of all transportation projects planned in the city for the next six years. These projects include traffic signals, bike lanes, sidewalks and other improvements that will help make it safer for all people to get around Vancouver.

You can share feedback, project ideas, suggestions or questions, by visiting beheardvancouver.org/TIP22 or emailing betterstreets@cityofvancouver.us.

The TIP Planning Process

Each year, the City prepares an updated TIP, as required by state law. The program includes detailed information and the funding status for each project. It explains how transportation projects are paid for using local taxes and money from state and federal programs.

The TIP also helps the city determine which projects to complete first, using priorities and values identified by the community. For this year's plan, projects are selected and scored using eight priorities:

- Safety
- Social equity
- Active transportation
- Climate/environment
- Care for existing assets
- Traffic management
- Economic development
- Project viability

Projects included in Vancouver's TIP also reflect guiding principles and policies developed as part of [Vancouver Moves](#), the City's Transportation System Plan. Together, these documents help shape how Vancouver responds to the transportation needs of our growing community.

To learn more or view an interactive map of projects, please visit: www.cityofvancouver.us/TIP

- About Reno
- Accolades
- Book a Reservation in Reno or Lake Tahoe
- Things To Do
- Reno's Economy
- Newsroom
- Fire News
- Police News
- Media Contacts
- Spanish Press Releases
- View Road Closures
- Staying Safe
- + Reno 150 Birthday

[Community](#) » [About Reno](#) »

Latest News

Font Size: + - + [Share & Bookmark](#) + [Feedback](#) + [Print](#)

City of Reno paving the road for a more vibrant downtown

Pilot project will improve access and connectivity for residents and visitors through micromobility-specific infrastructure updates

Post Date: 04/06/2022 5:19 PM

The City of Reno is launching a new pilot project that will soon introduce micromobility-specific infrastructure to Reno's downtown. Micromobility refers to a range of small, lightweight vehicles such as bicycles or scooters that typically operate at speeds of about 10-20 mph and are driven by the user.

Using facilities such as bike rails, reduced lane widths, cycle tracks, lane closures, restriping, protected intersections and more, the pilot project will connect Keystone Avenue to Evans Avenue/University of Nevada via 5th Street and downtown Reno to Midtown via Virginia Street.

Designed with the vision of creating a community people are proud to call home, the pilot project will make it easier for the public to take advantage of more sustainable ways to visit downtown, the Truckee River, and surrounding local businesses while enhancing road safety for micromobility users. It also creates more equitable, car-free transportation solutions for individuals who may not have one, which can lead to improved access to jobs, groceries, healthcare and education.

Throughout the pilot project, the City will collaborate with and solicit feedback from stakeholders such as the University of Nevada, Reno's bicycle community, downtown businesses, micromobility users, and drivers to help shape the future of Reno's ever-improving downtown. The pilot project is scheduled to go live by the end of May 2022.

[Return to full list >>](#)

« Previous post | Council Connection Home Page | Next post »

Seattle’s Revenue Forecast Shows Improved Numbers, Although Budget Challenges Remain

SEATTLE – Today the City of Seattle’s Office of Economic and Revenue Forecasts released its revenue forecast, projecting improved revenue since November. However, the City is still facing a budget deficit and increased uncertainty due to global events.

The newest forecast shows a modest increase in projected revenue, roughly a \$32.5 million increase for the City’s General Fund resources, and an increase of \$57.3 million to Non-General Fund resources. The General Fund is the City’s largest primary fund, about \$1.6 billion altogether.

“Our economy is rebounding and there’s good reason to be optimistic about today’s baseline forecast projections,” said Councilmember Teresa Mosqueda (Position 8, Citywide) and Chair of the Economic Revenue Forecast Council. “Today’s forecast shows that, largely by raising progressive revenue as opposed to imposing austerity, we can build future budgets which assume that industries, jobs and small businesses will continue to recover. JumpStart Seattle is now projected to bring in more than \$277 million in 2022, which is \$43.6 million beyond what was expected last November. This means that more investments will be able to flow into economic resilience, building housing, and investing in green/equitable development.”

“Today’s numbers are an encouraging step forward on the path toward economic recovery,” said Senior Deputy Mayor Monisha Harrell, a Vice-Chair of the Economic Revenue Forecast Council. “Seattle is showing progress — benefitting from our positive efforts to reactivate downtown, restore an improved sense of public safety, deliver small business assistance, and support our community. We continue to face a challenging budget deficit next year and ongoing inflation uncertainty. We’ll analyze this forecast and monitor additional economic conditions to further develop a budget that drives progress and innovation, while also being fiscally sound.”

Today’s updated numbers come from the new Economic and Revenue Forecast Office, which was created via Council Bill 120124 in July 2021. The Forecast Office provides an independent source for the economic and revenue forecasts that underlie the City’s annual budget process, while reporting to Economic and Revenue Forecast Council, which includes equal representation from the Legislative and Executive branches of City government. This new Office contributes to a greater level of collaboration and transparency across multiple branches of government and is tasked with preparing three revenue forecasts each year, to be delivered in April, August and November.

The Forecast Office also flagged other national and global factors that are creating

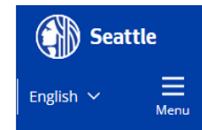
Search Council Connection

Go

Categories

- City Clerk (RSS)
- Councilmember Bagshaw (RSS)
- Councilmember González (RSS)
- Councilmember Harrell (RSS)
- Councilmember Herbold (RSS)
- Councilmember Johnson (RSS)
- Councilmember Juarez (RSS)
- Councilmember Lewis (RSS)
- Councilmember Morales (RSS)
- Councilmember Mosqueda (RSS)
- Councilmember Nelson (RSS)
- Councilmember O’Brien (RSS)
- Councilmember Pacheco (RSS)
- Councilmember Pedersen (RSS)
- Councilmember Sawant (RSS)
- Councilmember Strauss (RSS)
- News Releases (RSS)
- Past Councilmembers (RSS)

Council Photostream



City News

- City Clerk’s Office News
- City Council News
- City Manager’s Office News
- Communications News
- Community Development News
- Development Services News
- Emergency Management News
- Finance & Asset Management News
- Fire News
- Human Resources News
- Information Technology News
- Parks & Community Services News
- Police News
- Transportation News
- Utilities News

Board and commission vacancies

Published April 4 2022

The City Council is seeking candidates for vacancies on Bellevue’s Arts Commission and Planning Commission, as well as the Parks & Community Services Board. You can [apply online](#). Applications are due by 5 p.m., Friday, April 15.

Made up of volunteers appointed by the mayor with City Council concurrence, members serve four-year terms, offering their time and expertise to help shape Bellevue’s future. Bellevue’s boards and commissions advise the council and conduct regularly scheduled, public meetings.

Arts Commission: Advises and makes recommendations to the council on matters of art, with the goal of enhancing the cultural experience and raising the art consciousness of Bellevue. The commission advises on the city’s Public Art program, directs funding to arts organizations working in Bellevue and helps with cultural planning. The commission meets the first Tuesday of each month at 4:30 p.m.

Parks & Community Services Board: Advises the council on parks and open space issues such as park planning, design and construction, development, redevelopment and renovation, enterprise management and natural resources, land stewardship and environmental education. The board also advises the council on policies regarding community services issues such as recreation opportunities, cultural diversity, community centers and probation services. The board meets the second Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m.

Planning Commission: Reviews updates to the Comprehensive Plan and makes recommendations to the council. The commission also reviews land use management ordinances and regulations along with other council-directed work. The commission meets the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month at 6:30 p.m. and has other meetings as scheduled.

Applicants must be residents of Bellevue. The City of Bellevue values diversity and encourages anyone interested to apply.

Other Application Options

People who do not want to apply online can pick up community service applications from the City Clerk’s Office or Service First at City Hall, as well as the Bellevue Regional Library, the Lake Hills Library or Mini City Hall. A faxed copy may be requested by calling 425-452-6806. Applications may be submitted by any of the options below:

- Hand-delivered: City Clerk’s Office, 450 110th Ave. NE
- Mailing Address: P.O. Box 90012, Bellevue, Washington, 98009-9012
- Fax: 425-452-5247

COMMUNICATION LEADER INTERVIEW SUMMARIES

Vancouver Communication Director Laura Shepard

- She reports to one of the two deputy city managers but has a dotted line and regular communication (weekly meetings, etc.) with the city manager. Serves on leadership team; also has a direct line to councilmembers and mayor.
 - She has three direct reports: CVTV lead, engagement manager, strategic communications manager.
 - CVTV team has broad list of contractors to flex capacity up and down as needed, maintaining sustainable FTEs (all of whom are videographers and editors, sharing the workload). Clark County contributes funding but doesn't help staff or manage programming at CVTV.
 - Engagement manager oversees neighborhood association staff, outreach/ planning for departments, and a community liaison who intakes one-off/more complex requests from community members and council, then navigates city departments for answers/responses.
 - Strategic communications manager oversees:
 - Photographer
 - Graphic designer
 - Social media manager
 - Social media intern
 - Council members have schedulers/admin staff, but not policy staff or communications staff—mayor included.
 - All councilmembers go straight to comms director when they need help (talking points, statements, etc.).
 - Some councilmembers maintain official social media accounts, captured through Archive Social. The comms team is establishing new ways to share content ideas/toolkits with these councilors to share through their accounts to keep city messaging consistent and support councilmembers with good content.
 - When emergent issues arise:
 - City manager and comms director are generally notified first
 - Comms director takes lead, shares updates with council as information is available and keeps city manager apprised.
 - PD and Fire have PIOs who share out early facts and provide subject matter expertise, but comms director applies larger city lens.
 - Department heads (PD, Attorney, Fire, etc.) serve as spokesperson for emergent issues.
 - Otherwise, mayor serves as city spokesperson. Rarely is comms staffer delivering media interview/statement.
 - She's on-call 24/7/365, but she came from the "always on" tech world and this feels more manageable. She carries her city phone at all times and stands ready to put in a full day's work on days off.
- She recently ran an audit of existing communications platforms, and early results show social media being the best way to get city information seen, even engaged with.
- More and more, they'll be pairing social content with what's happening on the outreach/ engagement side of the house. Example: Hiring a new police chief and seeking public input on priorities.
 - Be Heard Vancouver is the public input platform Vancouver uses (built on the "Bang the Table" technology)
 - Promoted public input opportunity through social media, but also with a direct email appeal sent personally from the city manager.
 - The City's DEI director reached out to key contacts.
 - Translations offered:
 - Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Chuukese (significant community in Vancouver)

Reno Director of Strategic Communications Rebecca Venis

- Communications used to be a department, reporting up to the city manager and covered a very broad mission, known as Neighborhood Services:
 - Oversaw 311
 - Oversaw council liaisons
 - Added code enforcement oversight too, from the customer service angle
 - Plus billing, accounts payable and collections for utilities
 - AND all the normal internal and external communications functions of a city
- Now, under the new city manager, it's part of the city manager's office and does ONLY strategic communications, internal and external.
 - They have an additional layer to navigate to get deeper community insights, but they can finally do proactive work—messaging and outreach.
- Since pandemic, residents' tolerance and patience has vanished. They want information at their fingertips, 24/7.
 - Social media is the gamechanger. The goal is to have messaging out proactively, quickly, and in a friendly tone
- She has a team of six:
 - An administrative assistant
 - A PIO for media
 - A graphic designer who also does great photography
 - A strategic communications manager [like a deputy]
 - A social media lead
 - A council messenger—crafts messaging related to Council, political perspective
- Council is elected by districts, called “wards” in Reno, plus one at-large member. Mayor is elected. City manager works at their pleasure.
 - Citywide communications go through Rebecca's team, always.
- Ward-specific communications go through council staff.
- Council staffing:
 - One liaison for every two councilmembers (three liaisons total)
 - Liaisons do case management on inquiries (even through 311) that have some complexity and/or political bent.
 - They navigate the city for answers to council and resident questions.
 - They facilitate neighborhood advisory boards.
 - They conduct ward-specific outreach and attend community events.
 - But they rely on Rebecca's team to publish key information through City channels, and work with her team to craft messaging when needed.
 - Councilmembers keep their own social accounts, but Rebecca wants to move into setting up accounts by council seat so the followers don't disappear whenever the seat turns over. Plus it would be easier for record-keeping. Her team would oversee those accounts on the councilmembers' behalf, as she envisions it.
- The role of city spokesperson varies situationally. Her team represents police even though they have their own PIO. That PIO delivers messaging but her team directs that messaging. (Fire has no PIO, so her team handles it all.)
- A few years ago, they instituted a single media hotline for all requests. It operates through a program called OneBox which triages the request as follows:
 - Notification goes out simultaneously/ automatically to comms team, PIO and city manager
 - The on-call comms person logs in and tags applicable department heads for notification then watches to make sure that leads receive and begins acting upon notification.

- Complex requests are elevated to Rebecca if she is not the person on call (it's a four-week rotation).
- GOAL: RESPOND TO EVERY MEDIA REQUEST
- At first, media didn't like having to call just one number, leave a message, and wait. But now they know they'll get a solid response in a reasonable time, and they no longer complain.
- System is set up to be responsive 24/7.
 - Notifies by text, email and through an app
 - Transcribes reporter's message and records the audio too
 - Tracks the response across staff so it's easy to see where a response gets stuck
 - On-call comms staffer notifies city manager as updates are available; City manager keeps council and mayor apprised. ***"Keep city manager in the role of 'council contact' because that relationship is paramount."***
- Essentially, operate it like Incident Response when things get complicated.

Most Councilmembers forward media calls directly to comms, but some take interviews outside the system. This can be a challenge.

- When it comes to controversial topics or mistakes the city has to walk back, Rebecca applies a crisis comms approach to address the issue head-on in a human way, rather than trying to quiet an issue.
 1. Acknowledge the issue
 2. Apologize
 3. Offer steps forward
 4. Situational triage:
 5. Do they have good news to share? Council or mayor is spokesperson.
 6. Does the question relate directly to a department? Let the subject matter expert speak, department heads or staff with firsthand knowledge.
 - Comms team hosts media trainings for all staff every other month. People attend

if they want to brush up on skills, and if they're new hires or newly elected. It's open to all.

- Reporters share perspectives on what they need in an interview
 - Comms staff provides overview
 - Mock interviews are conducted
 - When department staff give an interview, they can ask comms team to be there. Comms always goes along when something might be controversial.
7. Are they providing an official statement or no one else is available? PIO is spokesperson.
 8. Is the issue related to emergency services? Put someone in uniform in front of the reporter.

Do they have bad news to report? That's generally the only time Rebecca serves as spokesperson.

- They've recently pivoted their social media approach to have personality traits and embody a cultivated voice.
 - Accounts are now more relatable
 - And they respond to misinformation (which they didn't do before)
 - Misinformation is met with friendliness, openness
 - It can be hard to "take the punches," and the tendency is to stop engaging, but as the voice is cultivated, more natural advocates step up to correct information organically.
- Communications in the 2020s HAS TO BE PROACTIVE. Reactive doesn't work.
 - Literally SHOW people the great work the city does.
 - Show potholes being filled, trees being trimmed and parks being maintained.
 - Talk about the number of new housing units approved, completed, etc. to show how the city is trying to address affordable housing.
 - If you don't literally SHOW these things, people assume you're doing nothing and their tax dollars are wasted.

- *“Trust internationally is at an all-time low for institutions, but trust in individuals is strong.”*

- The ROI has been tremendous: requests for information are down by half (records requests, calls for service, media requests)

Rebecca’s team recently fielded a media request for more information about something that is going RIGHT for the City. There is no better request than this.

Seattle City Council Communication Director Dana Robinson Slote

- Dana came to this position 9 years ago after staffing a state legislator in Olympia.
- There are about 12,000 city staff across 30 departments.
 - Each department has its own communication leaders, either full-time or as a part of their job.
 - There are about 50 positions with communications as some or all of the responsibilities. Add engagement, and there are far more.
- Communication is baked into the culture: There’s a universal commitment to tell the city’s story at every level.
 - The mantra of the office is *“Be visible and responsive”*—say something rather than nothing, even if the response is *“We hear you. We don’t have the answers yet but are getting more information...”*
 - Spends day in thirds:
 - 1/3 proactive communications
 - 1/3 reactive communications
 - 1/3 desk work, managing collateral, coaching team, writing, editing, etc.
- Priorities:
 - Media relations #1 – build relationships with reporters and bloggers
 - Social media #2 – not a place to BREAK news, critical to clarify misinformation
 - Everything else #3
- Communication staff work to identify issues as far into the future as possible – usually about 6 months.

- 9 councilmembers
 - 7 districted and 2 at-large
 - But city residents and media still operate as if every councilmember serves the whole city, so there is a lot of expectation setting and traffic directing work.
 - Each district has a community newspaper/blog.
- Council communication team = 3 staff
 - Each councilmember has 3 to 5 personal staff split between scheduling and policy.
 - Schedulers triage inboxes and take first crack at crafting responses to constituent requests.
 - Policy staff not only advise on policy decisions with research but also go out into the district to attend meetings and events, meet with constituents to keep conversations flowing.
 - The last mayor had 11 communications staff because that was core to her vision for the office; the new mayor is still assembling his team but has a lower emphasis on communications.
 - Similarly, councilmembers have varying interest in and comfort with communications, so each takes a customized approach.
- Councilmembers all have city-issued phones to archive texts etc.
 - They are empowered to text back placeholder information when they don’t have an answer and provide a status report (*“working on getting more information,”* etc.).
 - The City Clerk’s Department has an Ethics and Elections Commission that guides electeds on what can be said, how it can be archived properly for PRR.
 - Councilmembers have the option to set up any social accounts they want—the accounts must be separate from their personal and campaign accounts, though.

Bellevue Chief Communications Office Brad Harwood

- Brad has been at Bellevue for 6 ½ years; served first as Deputy Communications Officer then took over as CCO in 2019.
- He reports to the city manager but coordinates fluidly with elected officials — he is responsible for keeping councilmembers updated in emergent situations.
 - Team of 11 staff—they do all internal and external communications for the city.
 - Staff are assigned by department and cover all aspects of comms for that department, from internal comms (more important in the past two years than ever before) to digital platforms to messaging and, when applicable, media responses.
 - Police and Fire each have separate PIOs but communication is seamless between Brad and these contacts.
- Prior to 2021, comms leads were housed in individual departments and collaborated with CCO/deputy-CO in a “matrix” style of organization. In 2021, all comms staff were consolidated/centralized into a single team, now providing services to departments.
 - The change has made it much easier to tell a more comprehensive and cohesive story, allows more time for proactive work and increases the level of consistency between departments in terms of what and how things are communicated.
 - The shift went smoothly because the communicators had already established a good rapport.
 - The shift has also resulted in a steady stream of well-branded, positive content across all channels.
- The neighborhoods team does citywide outreach and is housed in the Community Development Department. It seeks input on development/ planning decisions but also hosts cultural conversation and community-building activities.
- The Bellevue City Council has two staff in total— coordinators who are responsible for scheduling, support and one-off requests.
 - The coordinators rely on Brad’s team for communication services and collaborate on preparing talking points for events.
 - Councilmembers may maintain social media accounts on an individual basis and are responsible for proper archiving/ public records responses on their accounts. This gives them a level of freedom and independence.
 - Council has its own set of rules and best practices for communications.
 - Councilmembers don’t produce newsletters, but there’s a Council Roundup news release posted after each council meeting (drafted by Brad’s team) and a column in the citywide newspaper produced by the city 3x/yr.
- Crisis/emerging issue outside of normal working hours:
 - Often originates with Police or Fire, and their PIOs take first lead then brief Brad.
 - Brad is always on-call. He can designate his deputy when he is on vacation, but no set rotation for on-call duties.
 - Brad keeps council and city manager updated throughout.
- Press protocol:
 - Main point of contact for all media inquiries: Brad
 - Brad determines spokesperson
 - Subject matter expert or PIO for related department
 - Mayor speaks on behalf of council but sometimes taps specific councilmember(s) if issue is relevant to them
 - City manager speaks on operational decisions like hiring department heads
- Priority communications channels
 - Website is the city’s primary communication platform.
 - The website distributes text and email alerts on a subscription basis.

- Google Translate is enabled and does help people find answers to questions, based on survey feedback.
- Social media is high priority too because residents love it and want more of it.
- *It's Your City* newspaper delivered to each household is highly popular three times annually.
- YouTube is growing in importance, and there are still a lot of untapped opportunities to engage residents there.
- The city has a chief DEI officer, a direct peer of Brad's, also housed within the city manager's Office. The DEI officer has four direct reports and advises City policies and procedures in line with DEI best practices.
 - Half of Bellevue's residents are people of color.
 - Council has tasked comms team with building a comprehensive communication strategy, and DEI will be a key part of it.
- The Puget Sound media landscape is a challenging one.
 - Few Seattle-based journalists take the time to cross the bridges except for police-related activity.
 - The Bellevue Reporter produces very little original content anymore.
 - High turnover at the Seattle Times and Seattle's TV stations has made it nearly impossible to develop proactive relationships with reporters and overarching strategies for media relations.
 - Increasingly, Bellevue views itself as its own media organization and is looking for ways to share more stories through existing city programming, then amplify it across all city-owned channels. It may explore new avenues like podcasts to share information with residents.

Appendix 3: Materials Audit

As part of the research for the city, JayRay evaluated the effectiveness of five communication platforms and tools. A proven and standardized assessment form was used to establish rankings and provide input for recommendations on a scale of 1-5, with 1 representing strongly disagree, and 5 representing strongly agree.

5 = STRONGLY AGREE | 4 = AGREE | 3 = NEUTRAL | 2 = DISAGREE | 1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE

Social Media Channels (Facebook and Twitter)	
Purpose of communication is clear	4
Target audience is clear. Piece is appropriate and useful to the audience	4
Pages are informative and well organized	3.3
Pages use a consistent voice	3.6
The accounts as a whole help tell the story in a meaningful way	3
Pages enhance understanding of Tacoma and the city's priorities	3.6
The pages have a consistent look and feel	3

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create profile images specifically for the size/specs of the individual platform. For example, the rectangle image does not work well in the circle profile space on both Twitter and Facebook. This makes sharing content easier.
- Synthesize your Facebook intro (currently: We provide Tacoma residents with high quality, innovative and cost-effective municipal services.) and Twitter bio (currently: Nestled on the shores of Puget Sound in Pierce County #Tacoma is Washington's third-largest city.). While they do not have to be identical, they should feel the same. Social media is a space where you can humanize the City of Tacoma—it's important to do so here. This also creates shareable content.
- Consider using bit.ly or something similar to create shorter, succinct and branded links. Be sure to remove the https:// and/or www. From the beginning. These are not necessary and add clutter to posts and hinder sharing.
- Council meeting announcements and links to

the latest CityLine episode have a consistent look and feel. Consider expanding this consistency across all content.

- Consider posts after council meetings about meaningful decisions or recognition.
- Consider different messaging techniques to address negative sentiment, such as crisis communication contexts, training, etc.
- Consider balancing sentiment by adding in information and positive stories about existing programming and local businesses.

49% of social media users say sharing allows them to inform others of products they care about and encourage action.

Source: The New York Times Consumer Insight Group

Website Home Page - cityoftacoma.org	
Purpose of communication is clear	3.75
Target audience is clear. Piece is appropriate and useful to the audience	3.5
Page is informative and well organized	3.25
Page uses a consistent voice	3.5
The page as a whole help tell the story in a meaningful way	2.25
The page enhances understanding of Tacoma and the city's priorities	2.75
The page has a consistent look and feel	3.5

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The five rotating banners at the top are ideal placement for Tacoma's top priorities. Some of the banners have different voices and the photos/text on a few of the banners overlap with the footer text.
- Consider designing images so copy isn't covered when it is on the site.
- "What's Going On," "In the News, and "Looking Ahead" can be confusing. "What's Going On" could be events, could be current projects or could be news.
- Contacts in right column are helpful.
- Navigation is well organized but visually overwhelming. May be good to add a frequently used services area or a sub menu.
- Consider implementing a more branded look and also ensure that these are in fact the top priorities of the city. If they are not the top ongoing priorities, perhaps title this section for what it is (monthly updates).
- Consider giving COVID-19 its own tab rather than a yellow box.
- Consider mentioning Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging efforts. The homepage is also prime real estate to mention of Tacoma's mission, vision, strategic plan or future outlook. Placing this content on the homepage is an opportunity to share with visitors the hopes and dreams for the city.

- The page is outdated and can easily be freshened up with cleaner fonts, crisper images and logos, and more vibrant colors and photos. Tacoma is a photogenic place and there is an opportunity to use its visual beauty to captivate website visitors.
- Ensure links are not broken. (ex. Dining & Nightlife)

It takes 50 milliseconds for users to form an opinion of your website.

Source: Carleton University Study

People remember only 10% of information for three days, on average; stronger photographs and compelling visuals can improve recall to 65%.

Source: Microsoft Corp Advertising Insider

Press Release Sample (Tidy-Up Tacoma)	
Purpose of communication is clear	4.3
Target audience is clear. Piece is appropriate and useful to the audience	3
Copy is informative and well organized	3.6
Copy uses a consistent voice	4.3
The material as a whole helps tell the story in a meaningful way	2.6
Copy enhances understanding of Tacoma and the city's priorities	3.6
The material has a consistent look and feel	3.5

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Clarify the action you would like visitors to take. (ex. public participation) Consider changing the subhead of the release to communicate the action you want from someone who reads this release.

Strengthen opening copy by explaining the why or the desired outcome of the information. “We are announcing” intros are not as engaging as calls-to-actions as “hooks” for the reader and reporters.

Include the tidy-up link much higher up in the release, rather than at the end.

Consider moving most critical areas “above the fold” such as four areas of focus.

Ensure all release quotes engage the reader to take action, especially quotes from elected officials.

Consider unifying the visual brand of all communication pieces. Press release should look similar to other communications pieces - from imagery to font -and mirror the webpage using the city seal.

43% of people admit to skimming material

On average, 5x as many people read the headline as read the body copy.

Source: HubSpot Marketing Statistics

Council Newsletter (District 1, February 2022)	
Purpose of communication is clear	3.6
Target audience is clear. Piece is appropriate and useful to the audience	3
Piece is informative and well organized	3
Piece uses a consistent voice	4.3
The material as a whole helps tell the story in a meaningful way	2.6
The piece enhances understanding of Tacoma and the city's priorities	2.3
The material has a consistent look and feel	4.3

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is a very strong consistent voice, look and feel compared to other communications.
- All the links to additional info and resources are good.
- Consider shortening. A six-page email is too long and risks losing readers.
- Keep in mind that most are reading this on a handheld device.
- Consider a bulleted list at the top that links to sections/topics for easy navigation.
- The sections are extremely text heavy and could easily be tightened up to be more succinct. Again, bullets could be used to help readers navigate (also very helpful for those who skim).
- Consider using bold or all caps for sub-headers rather than underline. Some readers may confuse underlined text as hyperlinks.
- Content includes a lot of government terminology and jargon.
- Consider to simplifying the language.
- A brief description about the geographic area of his district might be helpful at the top.
- Ensure updates are bite-sized giving a bullet point summary of your work/accomplishments from the month and a list of what to you will be working on in the next.

Readers only consume 20% of content on a page.

Source: Nielson Norman Group

80% of people never read beyond the headline.

Source: Copyblogger

Appendix 4: Sample Tools

SAMPLE MASTER EDITORIAL CALENDAR

Link: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18r4DTQ5pUkO6ePBfJLh3qu5lAfJ3c2gEWSBjfF-unEo/edit?usp=sharing>

DRAFT MASTER EDITORIAL CALENDAR								
Week of	Council Focus Story		Content Owner	News Angle	Video/Images	Approvals	Channels	Content folder
Publish during this week	Name, one of 6 focus areas	Topic	Specialist	Why should they care? What can we tell them?	What can we show/who can we interview	Who needs to approve?	Which communication channels will be used? (Major initiatives will have a workplan around this.)	Link to a content folder
7/4/22								
(Add more rows each week as needed. List only high priority stories. As you prioritize you will establish the number of high-priority stories within the team's capacity to manage. Focus time on high-priorities understanding some lower priority work must stop.)								
7/11/22								
7/18/22								
7/25/22								
8/1/22								
8/8/22								
8/15/22								
8/22/22								
8/29/22								
9/5/22								
9/12/22								
9/19/22								
9/26/22								

SAMPLE PROJECT INTAKE FORM

Marketing and communication work takes time. Communicating with MCO early in the planning process helps ensure your project gets the support you desire. It is especially important to share the level of priority this project has for your department. By completing this form, you provide the information we need to do quality marketing and communication.

Name _____ Phone _____ Email _____

Department _____ Project Name _____

Date _____

Department Priority

Is this project one of your department's top #/of priorities for communication support this year?

Yes No

If you are unsure, please discuss with your supervisor or department head.

Council Priority

Is this related to one of the City Council's six priorities? Please check which one.

_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

Checklist

- As soon as you are aware of a potential project, email your MCO contact to make them aware of potential needs and general timeline.
- Complete this form to the best of your ability, email it to your MCO contact and set up a time to review the information. If you are unsure who to send this to, please call MCO at _____.
- Follow the guidelines to the right to allow for adequate time for MCO to support your project. If you are unsure, please ask your MCO contact.

Estimated Timelines
Messaging for City Response: ____ hours
Marketing Campaign: ____ months
News Release: ____ week
Video: ____ weeks
Flyer: ____ weeks

Timeline:

When do you need this communication product or when do you need the marketing campaign to begin?

Background/Overview:

Provide a brief explanation of project, challenges to communication and benefits to residents. Please attached your project plan if possible.

Goal:

What is your intended outcome? What do you want people to do? If it is a campaign, do you have specific metrics you want to reach (# of people to an event? # to sign up for a program?)

Budget:

What is your budget for this work if it requires printing, advertising or other hard costs?

Key audiences:

Name the 3-5 most important groups of people to reach with this information.

Translation/Transcreation needs:

What translations are needed for your key audiences?

Key Messages:

What are 3-5 things you want your audience to know? Of those, what is the most important?

Call to Action:

Please provide the website URL, phone number or other resource you are directing people to for further information or registration.

Deliverables/Communication Tools and Distribution Planning:

If you have an idea of what communication tools you need, please list them here along with your plans for distribution. For example, if you need a flyer, do you have a plan for distributing it? If you need a video, do you have a plan for how you will promote it to get your audience to view it? Your MCO contact will help you plan these tactics or review your existing plan.

Communication Tool	Distribution Plan

Thank you!