



# Communications Plan

2018 - 2021

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## **Introduction**

The District of Sechelt Communications Plan outlines specific goals, strategies and actions to improve communications with key stakeholders and to promote the District to citizens and travelers.

The vision for this plan is to establish a collaborative, positive and accountable relationship with citizens. Proactive stakeholder engagement is the most effective way to communicate important District initiatives and foster an atmosphere of community collaboration and ensure an open and transparent democratic process.

The key to effective communication is to be relevant, accurate and current. It is important that every method used to communicate is done well. It must be honest, in plain language and it must be clearly branded as District communications.

The Communications Plan is a living document that outlines the goals and the work that needs to be done. From this plan will flow plans for specific departments or activities as well as protocol for effective communication. Subsequent surveys and discussions will aid in expanding or refining the plan.

The plan will be reviewed annually to ensure it is always meeting the needs of the municipality and to assign a budget to key initiatives each year.

## **Our current state**

Currently the District is in a position where communication is most often responding to an issue rather than communicating the District news ahead of community chatter or media stories. Departments conduct the business of their departments without the benefit of a proactive communications approach. This practice leads to inconsistencies in effective communications, misinformation in the public and, in some cases, a complete void of any communication at all.

With a Communications Plan and relevant policies and guidelines, the District can establish a proactive approach to communications and the Communications Manager can monitor and manage communications across the organization to ensure common, clear, consistent messaging.

## **Our stakeholders**

The District of Sechelt stakeholders include but is not limited to citizens, District of Sechelt staff and council, property owners, business owners, first nations, media, neighbouring municipal governments, regulatory bodies, economic development organizations, industry and business associations, contractors, recreation groups, community groups, environmental groups and tourism associations.

The demographic for the District of Sechelt is older than the provincial average. The median age is 56.2 compared to the provincial median of 43. Many of the citizens are retired and on a fixed income. The average household income in Sechelt is slightly below the provincial average \$71,147 in Sechelt compared to \$90,354 provincially.

## The process

This plan is based on the following research: interviews with senior staff, interviews with Council, a staff survey, media monitoring and social media scans as well as best practices in communication; in particular local government communication.

The research identified the strengths and weaknesses of the organization. The following SWOT analysis provided further insight into the strategies and actions that would be needed.

<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A dedicated Communications Manager position.</li> <li>• Direction from senior staff and Council to establish a culture of excellence and transparency in communications.</li> <li>• Administration staff with the knowledge and direction to improve communications and engagement opportunities.</li> <li>• A staff intranet to engage staff.</li> <li>• Red Tape committee committed to improving the citizen experience.</li> <li>• Established social media sites.</li> <li>• A website.</li> <li>• A team of dedicated professionals who can share their expertise with citizens.</li> </ul>	<p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A poorly used, difficult to maintain and difficult to navigate website.</li> <li>• Limited staff time to keep public information sources current.</li> <li>• Limited staff experience and expertise in developing graphically appealing material in plain language.</li> <li>• Limited financial resources.</li> <li>• Lack of any brand identity – this is also a strength as it is an opportunity to create one.</li> <li>• No templates from past communications to draw upon.</li> <li>• Many communications tools to be developed.</li> <li>• A poor social media following.</li> <li>• A livestreaming process that is not reliable.</li> </ul>
<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two well-read local newspapers and a local radio station.</li> <li>• A community active on social media.</li> <li>• A community with the time and desire to be engaged.</li> <li>• Neighbourhood community associations.</li> </ul>	<p><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A community that lacks trust in their local government.</li> <li>• A history of major political swings in Council.</li> <li>• A polarized community.</li> <li>• Correcting community misinformation takes time away from proactive communications.</li> </ul>

## Communications principles

- Provide information that is timely, clear, appropriate, accessible and responsive.
- Connect with citizens using channels and tactics that they prefer.
- Ensure appropriate and accessible feedback mechanisms are available.



- Identify and support opportunities for engagement to enlighten and inform public decision
- Constantly strive for communication excellence through regular measurement and evaluation of efforts.
- Consider the range of communication tools at our disposal and use those most appropriate to address the needs associated with each circumstance.
- Work collaboratively across the organization to ensure that information is thorough, factual and timely.
- Respect the access to information and privacy rights of citizens and employees.
- Strive to achieve a culture of two-way communication and communications excellence practices.

## **Ethics**

Ethical practice of public relations is defined by the Canadian Public Relations Society as:

- Transparent (honest, open, willingness to share information)
- Accountable (to our priority publics, our clients, our employers, our profession and to society)
- In the public interest
- Built on integrity and independence

The District of Sechelt will, in all communications, abide by these ethical standards.

## **Engagement**

Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision ought to be involved in the process. District of Sechelt staff will endeavor to provide opportunities for the public to provide feedback whenever possible. Staff will determine the level of participation based on the number of citizens impacted by the decision and/or the impact of the decision.

The International Association of Public Participation’s Public Participation Spectrum will provide a guide for public participation in Sechelt.



	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternative and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspiration, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

## GOAL ONE – Improve internal communications

Improve the quality and timeliness of internal communications. Staff should feel valued and respected as well as having all of the information they need to do their jobs and feel connected to the organization. Improved internal communications can assist in facilitating that.

### Strategy

Make information about District activities, new initiatives, programs, Council decisions and hot topics easy to access.

### Proposed Actions

- Promote and leverage the intranet for frequently accessed information.
- Invest staff resources in keeping the intranet up to date, engaging and useful.





- Subscribe employees and to the District website so they receive emails when a news release or job is posted. Ensure this is part of the email set up for all new employees.
- Ensure staff areas for outside workers have bulletin boards that are regularly updated with distributed information to all staff including emails sent to all staff.
- Standardize agenda items for department meetings. Establish this standard with staff input.
- Install monitors in all staff lunchrooms to host shared information. \$<sup>1</sup>

### Strategy

Ensure all employees feel included and have a strong connection to the organization.

#### Proposed Actions

- Develop staff orientation process that introduces them to the organization and the expectations of the organization as separate from the expectations of the specific job responsibilities.
- Provide an opportunity for all new employees to have a one on one meeting with the CAO.
- Increase opportunities for employees across the organization to collaborate through cross-departmental projects, initiatives, and teams.
- Continue to inform employees of matters affecting them before informing the public and develop protocol for employees to provide information on emerging issues in their departments.
- Provide access to electronic resources in a space accessible to employees, such as a computer in the lunchrooms, for outside workers. \$
- Regularly survey employees to determine what methods of communication they prefer and what information they would like to receive.

### Strategy

Increase knowledge of departmental objectives and activities across the organization.

#### Proposed Actions

- Develop an interdepartmental Communications Committee to share communications challenges between departments and improve external communications.
- Ensure processes and staff resources are allocated to ensure key department initiatives are shared on the intranet.
- Establish terms of reference, regular meetings and reporting out structure for the Red Tape committee.
- Include a weekly poll in the staff intranet.

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<sup>1</sup> A \$ at the end of an action item indicates a cost may be attached to the item either in contractor services or physical purchases like equipment, advertising or printing.



## **GOAL TWO – Increase capacity to communicate with and engage citizens in meaningful ways.**

### **Strategy**

Annually review this Communications Plan for relevance and develop work plans and budgets for specific action items.

### **Proposed Actions**

- Annually review the Communications Plan prior to the budget process to determine organization communications goals for the year and address them in work plans and budgets.
- Identify annual communications priorities for each department and address them in the department work plans and budgets.
- Dedicate an employee in each department to be the public point person to gather and distribute information. This should be the same person that sits on the Communications Committee.

### **Strategy**

Standardize common operational procedures to communicating the District's messages and receiving feedback from citizens.

### **Proposed Actions**

- Draft procedures and establish standards for responding to Council correspondence.
- Develop a District communications policy to set communications standards for the organization.
- Develop a social media policy to guide effective engagement.
- Develop an engagement page on the website to host documents, maps, contact information, discussion forums, timelines and surveys on major projects and initiatives. \$
- Create regular patterns of work across the organization for listening to citizens, sending out messages, alerting the media, hosting events, updating the website, informing employees, etc. Ensure that key public-facing staffs receive accurate, timely information in this process.
- Ensure the District logo and branding is present in all communication tools.
- Research and develop an effective way to share the questions and answers to frequently asked questions with the public to ensure equal access to the information such as a fact check page on the website.
- Develop consistent times when staff are available for face to face meetings with the public to allow reception staff to book appointments with citizens as needed.
- Maintain cooperative relationships with media.
- Provide staff with the training and guidelines necessary to promote community engagement. \$
- Use the communication section of council reports to outline communication and engagement requirements.
- Install a Development and major projects interactive map on the website to inform the community of developments and projects. \$



### Strategy

Define and embrace the corporate identity of the District and translate it into how we do business with our customers through responsible, professional and transparent interactions so that all citizens receive quality customer service and results.

#### Proposed Actions

- Define the corporate identity.
- Empower staff to speak on behalf of the District and take action where appropriate.
- Provide employees with the resources to follow through with citizen inquiries.
- Develop an employee ambassador program to educate employees and encourage better quality engagement with citizens. \$
- Provide employees with appropriate customer service training. \$
- Educate and demonstrate ethical practice in business operations and communications.

### Strategy

Improve communications tools and standardize the use of them.

#### Proposed Actions

- Investigate a module for the District website to make it easier for citizens to report concerns regarding District infrastructure or bylaws. \$
- Contract a developer to do a complete rebuild of the district website including bringing content up to date and written in plain language, improved navigation and, improved features such as online payments and applications. \$
- Purchase an app that includes the following functions: allows for two way communication between the City and citizens; provides garbage and recycling schedule reminders, provides snow removal or parking reminders, and allows for targeted specific emergency messaging (ie: evacuation of a neighbourhood). \$
- Develop a protocol for website content.
- Develop sign guidelines. \$
- Develop brand guidelines including plain language guidelines to ensure a common, clear and timely voice in all messaging.
- Develop a communications protocol in a flow chart format to assist staff in determining what steps to take in effective communications.
- Conduct a review of all print communication tools for appropriateness, relevance and branding.

### Strategy

Develop a media relations strategy

#### Proposed Actions





- Provide more information on critical or complex issues through media packages, media briefings, and more face-to-face time with key reporters.
- Consistently identify newsworthy stories and present them in a way that's compelling.
- Ensure inquiries from the media are given a high priority and responded to as quickly and efficiently as possible.

## **GOAL THREE- Build the District's reputation as a desirable place to live and do business**

### **Strategy**

Increase awareness of the quality of life in Sechelt.

#### **Proposed Actions**

- Pursue opportunities to contribute articles profiling Sechelt to local and provincial publications.
- Allocate staff resources to work more closely with Sunshine Coast Tourism and Sunshine Coast Regional Economic Development Organization to leverage opportunities to promote Sechelt.
- Leverage opportunities presented by other organizations to market Sechelt. \$
- Continue bi-annual community satisfaction surveys and make improvements where appropriate. \$
- Pursue opportunities to highlight success stories.
- Purchase branded promotional material. \$
- Use contests and games to promote quality of life in Sechelt.
- Share more practical information with citizens such as garden tips from the parks team, composting information, bear aware tips, etc. Use our in-house expertise to share information with citizens.
- Develop a Welcome package for new residents highlighting life in Sechelt, providing practical information and a welcome letter from the mayor. \$

### **Strategy**

Increase awareness of business opportunities in Sechelt.

#### **Proposed Actions**

- Have Council play a more active role in their liaison appointments and bring back to the Council table suggestions for improvements in the business community.
- Encourage regular staff to staff meetings with the Chamber of Commerce and the Sechelt Downtown Business Association to gather feedback from businesses and share information with businesses.
- Actively share good news with the business community.
- Develop a New Business package with a welcome letter from the mayor and practical information for new business owners. \$
- Streamline development processes to support economic development objectives and communicate that to the business community.



### Strategy

Develop an issue management protocol to effectively identify, monitor and respond to issues.

#### Proposed Actions

- Explore the possibility of establishing an issues committee to identify and review the status of issues and the organization's response.
- Develop tools to be used across the organization (risk analysis template, communications plan template, key message template).
- Prepare employees to be ready and accessible to respond to inquiries.

### Strategy

Enhance the issues management capacity of all employees.

#### Proposed Actions

- Training session and guide for all current employees.
- Provide training as part of new employee orientation.
- Conduct boundary and environmental scanning; review on a regular basis to identify emerging issues, top issues, etc.

## GOAL FOUR – Increase citizen engagement and knowledge of the public process

### Strategy

Develop a public engagement strategy to guide the public consultation process.

#### Proposed Actions

- Create more opportunities for public feedback on a variety of platforms.
- Ensure all opportunities for feedback are authentic and the information gathered is used.
- Embrace innovative consultation strategies and opportunities.
- Increase public awareness of engagement opportunities. \$
- Enlist the support of Council to participate in engagement opportunities.
- Provide staff with training in the International Association of Public Participation foundations. \$

### Strategy

Create more opportunities for feedback and increase participation.

#### Proposed Actions

- Coordinate events in conjunction with popular public gatherings.
- Plan events in advance to access prime advertising opportunities.



- Identify barriers that may exist to public participation and how these barriers influence citizen turnout.
- Communicate the purpose of the event and the event details on multiple platforms.
- Share contact lists between departments for mail outs and emails to contact more people.
- Create a communications and engagement plan for every major project or initiative.
- Create online opportunities with better ease of use on website

### Strategy

Inform citizens regarding how to get involved and stay informed about local government.

### Proposed Actions

- Educate citizens about the role of Council.
- Educate citizens about the role of local government.
- Provide opportunities for citizen participation by providing information on multiple platforms.
- Use plain language in all publications.
- Participate in Local Government Awareness Week.
- Work with SCRD on communications of shared projects.
- Install signs at all capital project sites.
- Communicate the status of all capital projects.

### Evaluation

Provide quarterly reporting on social media analytics to the senior leadership and Council. Evaluate the success of the communications projects based on feedback from the Interdepartmental Communications Committee, employee surveys, website and social media metrics and levels of community engagement at public events.

On an annual basis:

- Review action items completed to date and evaluate what is working and what can be improved.
- Conduct peer reviews of communications policy and protocol.
- Provide a summary report of communications projects.