




BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: CEO
Department No.: 012
For Agenda Of: May 12, 2015
Placement: Departmental
Estimated Time: 45 minutes
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Department Director
Mona Miyasato, County Executive Officer 
Contact Info: Terri Nisich, Assistant County Executive Officer (568-3400)
SUBJECT: **Countywide Strategic Communications Plan**

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Other Concurrence:

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors:

- a) Receive and file report summarizing findings and recommendations of the Countywide Strategic Communications Plan prepared by SAE Communications;
- b) Provide direction to staff, as appropriate; and
- c) Determine the above actions are exempt from environmental review per CEQA Guideline Section 15378(b)(5), since they are a government activity that does not involve a commitment to a specific project that may result in a potentially significant effect on the environment.

Summary Text:

Based on discussion by the Board of Supervisors during the Fiscal 2014-2015 budget deliberations and recommendations by the County Executive Officer regarding the need for improved County external and internal communications, SAE Communications was retained in the fall of 2014 to provide two main areas of service: a) prepare a comprehensive Strategic Communications Plan; and b) provide ongoing communications advice and assistance. Ongoing advice and assistance continues, and staff is recommending to the Board a review and discussion of the Strategic Communications Plan.

Background:

Need for and Goals of the Strategic Communications Plan

In 2010, the County eliminated a Director of Communications position. This position was responsible for coordination of countywide communication to the media and public, and served as the lead for emergency communications. Since that time, there has been less coordination, training, and proactive generation of countywide news and information. While various County departments have full or part-time public information staff (such as Sheriff, Fire, ADMHS, and Public Health), there is no position dedicated to looking across all departments to effectively generate information for the media and public, coordinating among departments, and helping departments best communicate issues of greatest public interest.

This function has been led by an executive in the CEO's office (currently the Assistant CEO and previously the Assistant to the CEO) who has been able to dedicate less than 10% of their time to strategic communication issues. The County recently reclassified a position to a Public Engagement Coordinator. The role is to provide technical support and assistance coordinating and posting to the County's social media accounts, updating the website, providing video assistance, monitoring media, and sending out information to the press.

In order to enhance internal and external communications, the CEO's Office retained SAE Communications, in the fall of 2014, to evaluate our communications needs and to develop a plan to best utilize County resources. The goals of the Strategic Communications Plan are to:

- Analyze existing communications programs and materials;
- Assess the perception of the County's communications efforts among a variety of constituencies;
- Identify opportunities to increase the effectiveness of communications processes and tools, and
- Recommend specific action steps that will enhance the County's future communications success.

In addition to the plan preparation, SAE provided immediate and effective assistance to the County in the aftermath of the Isla Vista tragedy, assisting the CEO's office and ADMHS, and has since helped other departments on better structuring information to the public and media.

Development of the Plan

Creation of the plan included interviews with the County Executive Officer, the Assistant County Executive Officer, and the Public Engagement Coordinator; individual interviews with County Supervisors and their staff; individual interviews with department and agency directors and senior staff; individual interviews with community leaders; and interviews with news media representatives. In addition, an online survey of County employees was conducted; and evaluations of County printed and electronic materials, social media content, media coverage, and the County's web site were undertaken.

There are several sections included in the Plan and discuss in detail numerous aspects of the research findings and recommendations. These include:

- Research Results Overview
- Situation Analysis
- Communication Goals
- Communication Objectives
- Audiences

- Organizational Key Messages
- External Communications Strategies
- External Communications Tactics
- Internal Communications Strategies
- Internal Communications Tactics
- Program Evaluation

Recommended Strategies to Improve Communications

The heart of the Plan includes recommended strategies and tactics. There are eight overarching external communications strategies which emerged as the research, challenges, opportunities, goals and objectives were developed. Approximately 45 individual tactics are recommended to carry out these eight external tactics. As the Plan was in progress, staff began implementing some of the strategies, which are noted below. The strategies include:

- 1. Department Public Information Team** – Leverage the communications resources and expertise within each County agency to benefit the County as a whole and to support all communications with residents through the creation of an interdepartmental public information team (with representatives of all departments).

Status: Staff re-launched this program (“PIT Crew”) in January 2015 with monthly meetings of representatives of County departments. Discussion topics are focused on communication needs and tailored trainings. Staff feedback has been very positive. In addition to training on how to prepare communications plans for specific County initiatives, a master communications calendar has been created and training has begun to prepare for emergencies/disasters.

- 2. Strategic Counsel/Key Messages** – Institutionalize the role and importance of strategic communications planning and key messages throughout the organization.

Status: Progress has been made in 2015: a half-day management team training program attended by 43 staff was conducted by SAE. The focus was on key messaging, effective communication strategies, techniques, and trends.

- 3. Media Relations** – Educate residents via proactive efforts with local media to generate information and news about County priorities.

Status: In the few months since receipt of the Communications Plan, new targeted media briefings have been developed to better educate and inform our local media of significant projects, such as the Goleta Beach revetment application to the Coastal Commission, and various new ADMHS programs.

- 4. Direct Communications Channels** – Increase awareness of County programs and services via pushed information channels as well as via the creation of a dialog with residents using Social Media tools.
- 5. Visual Tools** – Generate confidence and engagement through visually-oriented stories about County employees and strategic use of video.

6. **Electronic Community Relations** – Create an electronic community relations program to communicate and connect with residents.
7. **Spanish-language Outreach** – Increase awareness among Spanish-speaking residents regarding County services via a media relations program and direct communications tools.
8. **Emergency Public Information Plan** – Ensure life- and property-saving information reaches those impacted during and after a natural or man-made disaster.

Status: Prior to the initiation of the Communications Strategy an internal public information team comprised of three Lead PIOs, three Deputy PIOs, and support personnel from throughout the organization, was in place. This effort combined with the support of Emergency Public Information Communicators (EPIC) formed the foundation of a core emergency public information team designed to work in three shifts in the event of an emergency and EOC activation. The newly-revised PIT Crew bolsters this effort and is working with OEM to ensure life- and property-saving information is disseminated during a major incident. In April, the PIT Crew received refresher training on the role of the PIO in a disaster. In May, the PIT Crew will conduct a table-top exercise and it will be active in support of the June Southern California-wide large scale exercise.

In addition, two main internal communications strategies were identified which are designed to reach employees. The following internal communications strategies are recommended to engage and inform employees:

1. **Develop a broad-based communications program** – Increase awareness among employees by implementing a variety of communications vehicles which reach employees via the most convenient tool possible.
2. **Create an engaging Intranet site** – Embark on an internal communications and education program to convey to all County employees their importance within the organization and organizational goals/programs through a robust Intranet.

Recommendations on Highest Priorities and Effective Organizational Structure

In addition to the communications strategies and tactics, the Plan provides two additional areas of recommendation regarding priorities and staffing. Some of the recommendations can be implemented in the short and medium-term, within existing resources, while others are longer-term and will require additional funding.

1. **Priority Implementation** – The chart on page 45 of the attached report captures the highest priority tactics recommended by SAE to take place in the first year following the adoption of the Plan. Some of these will not be achieved in the first year without additional dedicated resources for staff (see below #2) or other enhancements. Other items such as the training and programming, and outreach can be achieved within the County's staffing framework. Items such as the development of a citizen request management program referenced does require further review and cost analysis before pursuing.
2. **Public Information Program Organizational Structure** – The Plan also makes several recommendations regarding a public information program organizational structure.

- Establish a Public Information Office or formalized function
- Create a Public Information Officer position
- Create position responsible for internal communications
- Unify website, graphic design, video production capability into the new Public Information Office
- Evaluate CSBTV, video production workload, production output

SAE found that “those interviewed for this Plan expressed significant frustration that the County does not have a single senior manager responsible for overall strategic communications” and has therefore recommended that a Public Information Office staffed by a dedicated senior communications advisor (e.g., Public Information Officer or similarly titled position) be established for an organization of the size and complexity of Santa Barbara County.

It was also noted that during a disaster, there is currently no senior professional communicator whose primary duty is to lead the County’s public information program to ensure residents receive vital incident information. Sheriff and Fire PIOs are responsible for their respective areas and do not play a role in looking at the Countywide needs of a major incident and staffing the critical PIO function in the Emergency Operations Center as was needed in the Zaca, Gap, Jesusita and Tea Fires.

Should funding constraints make creation of this new function unattainable in the 2015/16 fiscal year, staff recommends to continue retention of an outside communications consultant to provide as-needed services. SAE Communications has been on retainer since November of 2014. The firm’s two principals, led primarily by Sheri Benninghoven, have provided effective and immediate assistance to create communications plans for various projects and issues. Staff recommends a continued relationship until such time as a full-time PIO has been created. Should no additional funding be provided, staff will evaluate what recommendations can be implemented given existing resources.

Next Steps

Staff will develop an implementation plan of the recommendations, categorized by activities that can be achieved in the short-term, medium-term and longer-term, within existing staff and resources, with contracted services, or without any new resources. Those that can be accomplished will be integrated into work plans for the coming year.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

There is no fiscal impact of receiving this report.

During the 2014/15 Budget adoption, \$40,000 was allocated through a one-time budget expansion for public information services. In addition, \$35,000 from department savings was provided by the CEO’s office to augment the funding and provide for the preparation of the communication strategy and PIO retainer services for SAE Communications. A budget expansion request for a PIO position and support costs for 2015/16 fiscal year was presented to the Board of Supervisors for consideration during the April 2015 budget workshops. Should a full time PIO and commensurate program costs not be approved for 2015/16, it is recommended that SAE continue their consultation at a month retainer cost. The CEO’s office has submitted a budget expansion request for \$50,000 in ongoing funds to support this contract for FY 2015/16, should the PIO position not be funded by your Board.

Fiscal Analysis:

Funding Sources	Current FY Cost:	Annualized On-going Cost:	Total One-Time Project Cost
General Fund	\$35,500.00		\$ 35,500.00
State			
Federal			
Fees			
Other:			
Total	\$ 35,500.00	\$ -	\$ 35,500.00

The plan was \$35,500, a \$40,000 one-time allocation of general fund monies occurred at the adoption of the 2014/15 Budget. This was augmented with CEO departmental savings in the amount of \$35,000 in order to prepare a communications plan and to secure related PIO consulting/retainer services. The preparation of the plan was \$35,500, and the PIO retainer services are \$36,000 (\$4,000 per month for a period of 9 months) plus any applicable travel costs.

Key Contract Risks:

Staffing Impacts:

Legal Positions: **FTEs:**

Special Instructions:

Attachments:

County of Santa Barbara Strategic Communications Plan – April 2015

Authored by:

Terri Nisich, Assistant CEO

cc: