
2025 Issue Paper

Communications Officer, Capital Projects – contract to permanent

Purpose

This Issue Paper is to seek Council's approval to transition the current position of Communications Officer – Capital Projects from a three-year contract position to a permanent position, as of Q2 2025. This position provides enhanced communications support to the Public Works team, leading strategies and activities to:

- Increase awareness among internal/external target audiences of objectives and progress of capital projects;
- Enhance understanding of related budgetary and policy decisions and key partnerships; and
- Encourage public and staff engagement in critical consultation processes.

Background

This position was created in 2022 to support the County's increased pre-construction and construction activities on major capital and annual road and bridge rehabilitation projects.

Capital investments comprise approximately 40% of the County's total annual Capital and Operating budget. There is a high rate of interest from the public and media in the details of these expenditures. Timely, robust communications throughout the life of a project, positioned with the various channels where residents, partners, and stakeholders are accessing their news, is a critical element of any project's success. This builds community engagement and positive perceptions of the project as it progresses. Regularity of updates projects momentum, as well as transparency and accountability, reinforcing public confidence and trust in government management of public finances.

In addition to the importance of robust communications throughout the life of a project, infrastructure projects often receive funding from other levels of government and



community partners. Careful management of - often detailed - funder recognition requirements is also essential to maintain funder relationships.

Among others, capital projects currently underway or planned include:

- Golden Plough Lodge & Northumberland County Archives and Museum Redevelopment.
- Elgin Park Affordable Housing Redevelopment.
- Ontario Street Affordable Housing Development.
- Trent River Crossing and Arterial Road Network Project.
- County Road 64 Reconstruction.
- Brighton Joint Fire and Paramedic Base Project.
- Emergency Detour Route Project.

These projects collectively represent a multi-million-dollar investment over the long-term. In addition, the County undertakes an annual construction program of road and bridge rehabilitation. In 2023 this program represented an investment of over \$15 million in the County transportation network.

Value Proposition

There is a demonstrated value proposition for the organization in retaining this position.

- 1) First, it will enable the County to sustain increased outreach to residents, partners and stakeholders about priorities and services. This is due to the Communications Department's enhanced levels of service for meeting escalating demands for support. Some examples of increased service levels and outreach activities across the organization between 2021, and 2022 when this role was established, include:

- 190% increase in communications plans created (from 11 to 35).
- 133% increase in internal partners supported (Av. 6 to 14).
- 14% increase in proactive media releases (from 63 to 72).
- 35% increase in social media posts (396 to 536).

Additionally, maintaining this role will ensure continued capacity within the Communications Department to address more corporate strategic initiatives. In 2023, examples of this leadership have included development of Northumberland County's 2023-2027 Community Strategic Plan; creation of a public-facing Corporate Key Performance Indicator (KPI) Dashboard and the change



management strategies to support this roll-out; launching development of an Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation Action Plan; and development of a Communications Master Plan anticipated to be completed by the end of this year.

- 2) Second, this role will ensure continued dedicated strategic communications support for the Public Works Department for successful delivery of capital projects. Some examples of increased strategic planning and promotion of capital initiatives as a result of this role currently being embedded with the team include:
- 220% increase in Public Works communications plans (from 5 to 16).
 - 340% increase in Public Works media releases (from 5 to 22) and 70% increase in Public Works earned media coverage (from 77 to 131 articles).
 - 43% increase in Public Works social media posts (80 to 114).
 - Introduction of new tactics including project e-newsletters, dedicated consultation pages via the Join In Northumberland consultation portal, and significantly increased engagement with municipal and Indigenous partners.

Consultation/Options

In 2020 Northumberland County undertook a Modernization and Service Delivery Review (SDR) to identify opportunities to increase staff capacity, strengthen workflow and processes, and improve the efficacy of service delivery. The SDR involved a comprehensive assessment of service delivery processes and resourcing requirements across select areas of the organization, including the Communications Department.

The SDR determined that, based on current resourcing and demand as of January 2021, the Communications Department was understaffed by 0.9 FTE, with workload expected to double over the next one to three years based on demand forecasted by internal partners, further increasing this resource gap. This calculation was based on the two permanent staff resources dedicated to corporate communications activities, including the Director, and the Marketing & Creative Services Supervisor.

The Department has focused on process improvements to navigate increasing demand, implementing project management software to track project requirements and deadlines, properly allocate resources to best manage competing priorities, and forecast anticipated need versus resource availability for project scheduling. The team is also piloting a formal project intake process to eliminate process waste and improve efficiency.



However, the SDR noted that even with these improvements, the Communications Department – at its current size – would be challenged to meet forecasted demand without impacts to timelines and quality. To maintain service levels while volume of communications requests increases, one additional FTE resource would be required to close the gap.

Hiring a Communication Officer dedicated to communications and community engagement requirements for capital projects has enabled the Communications Department to:

- Support the Public Works team more effectively as development intensifies.
- Meet public expectations for communication, transparency, and accountability.
- Maintain capacity for focus on corporate strategic planning and proactive efforts.

With the department again facing a decrease in capacity with the Director role expanded to include accountability for the Information Technology Department in the fall of 2023, transition of the Communications Officer, Capital Projects from a temporary contract to a permanent resource will enable the department to continue meeting escalating demand within current service levels.

Financial Impact

The funding for this role is through infrastructure financing, with this role capitalized across the various capital projects undertaken by the County.

The financial impact of maintaining this position will be as follows, which includes both the salary, as well as benefits and other employer costs, and anticipated Cost of Living increases.

- **2024** – \$112,270 (Note: figure already built into budget based on previously-approved 3-year contract):
- **2025** – \$28,910 for Q1 (Note: figure already built into budget based on previously-approved 3-year contract). Additional funds for **Q2-Q4 2025** will be: \$86,730.
- **2026** – \$119,109

Risk Considerations

Maintaining the permanent staff complement of the Communications Department without the addition of this role will limit capacity to effectively support the Public Works Department with the strategic communications activities required for capital projects.



Insufficient communications planning and action risks impacting public perception of – and support for – projects, with reduced awareness of the rationale for a given project, of opportunities to provide feedback through consultation periods, and of the progress made and value being delivered for money. There is also the risk of project delays due to increased timelines for communications support.

Redirecting these permanent resources to increase focus on capital project communications is not a recommended solution, as this would necessitate a reduction in support for other departments. A reduction in support at a time when demands are already high and increasing risks driving departments to independently develop communications plans and materials to meet immediate needs, leading to inconsistent messaging, and look and feel of communications out to the community, ultimately impacting the professional image of the organization. Lack of central coordination of communications also risks potential damage to the County brand resulting from the absence of a 'standardized' Northumberland County voice, the lack of connection to the organization's strategic direction, and improper management of possible sensitivities.

Impacts to Member Municipalities/Partners

With this contract position in place, the Communications Department has increased outreach to and engagement with target audiences including community members, staff and councils of municipalities most directly impacted by a given project. This includes enhanced coordination and collaboration with member municipalities to ensure timely and consistent messaging to stakeholders. Transitioning this role to a permanent resource would ensure continued and progressive relationship-building and collaboration, and enhanced outcomes.

Included in 2023 Long Term Plan: YES/NO

The budget for this role is built into long-term plans up to the end of the first quarter of 2025, when the current contract concludes.



2024-2026 Issue Paper

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy

Purpose

This Issue Paper is structured to action commitments in Northumberland County's 2023-2027 Community Strategic Plan, with the development of an Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy for the organization.



Background

Northumberland continues to grow and welcome a more diverse population, with growth projected to reach over 122,000 residents by 2051, largely from GTA out-migration¹.

2023-2027 Community Strategic Plan

Recognizing that the County must continue to ensure responsive, inclusive services for increasingly diverse community members, stakeholders, and staff, the Principal Direction of the new Community Strategic Plan identifies a vision that:

“Northumberland is recognized as a vibrant and connected twenty-first century county. We embrace innovation, respect our natural environment, celebrate diversity, and care for one another. Together, we are shaping an inclusive, prosperous, and thriving community for all.”

While the entire strategic plan is rooted in this vision, **Pillar 3 - Foster a Thriving Community** – is where specific commitments are identified to foster a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization and community:

- **Strategic Direction:** The County fosters a liveable, healthy, and inclusive community, where diversity is celebrated and people from all walks of life feel a sense of belonging.
- **Guiding Principle:** The County upholds human rights and is committed to dismantling barriers in the way of creating an inclusive and equitable workplace and community.
- **Related Action:** Demonstrate leadership in the development of strategies and commitment of resources to advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion, both organizationally and within the community.
- **A further action under Pillar 1 – Innovate for Service Excellence – with related commitments is:** Implement policies and practices to ensure the County is an inclusive and equity-based employer of choice, where employees feel empowered to deliver exceptional service.

Developing an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy

With the development of an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy, Northumberland County will create a set of intentional, organized goals and actions to combat racism and hate, and promote diversity, equitable access, and inclusion within municipal operations, services, and our community.



The benefits of embracing diversity in both the workplace and the community are well-summarized in the City of Oshawa's Diversity and Inclusion Plan:

- **Improved organizational performance** - This includes higher job satisfaction, increased employee engagement, and greater productivity and service delivery.
- **Expanded access to global and domestic talent pools** - Current and future labour force needs will demand increased immigration to fill the gaps in skilled job opportunities. Global competition for this pool of skilled talent requires ...a welcoming place to live, work, learn and play.
- **Enhanced economic growth** – Diverse communities bring with them culturally specific languages, practices, and connections that enable both the (municipality) and local business to flourish by delivering first-rate and socially aware services. Immigration, and in-country migration patterns provide access to new and wider markets domestically and globally. Newcomer Canadians, in particular, bring with them technical training and skills that can contribute to the success of local industry and (public) institutions, as well as create new businesses and employment opportunities.
- **Enhanced innovative competency** – Diverse communities tend to be more resilient to rapid technological change because they often have a deeper and broader repository of knowledge and expertise. Moreover, diversity equates with creativity in that it allows for multiple voices and perspectives when approaching complex challenges. The resultant ability to think outside the box offers a competitive advantage for the (municipality) and for businesses within its borders.
- **Strengthened social cohesion and social capital** – Accessible services and employment opportunities maximize capacities for stronger and safer neighbourhoods and build trust in public institutions and processes.
- **Increased vibrancy** - Diverse cultures create a more robust and exciting cultural milieu, contributing to the arts, culture and cuisine that shape (a community). Valuing and showcasing this diversity

¹ Province of Ontario. *A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*. August 2020. Page 94, Schedule 3 – Distribution of Population and Employment for the Greater Golden Horseshoe to 2051. Retrieved from <https://files.ontario.ca/mmah-place-to-grow-office-consolidation-en-2020-08-28.pdf>



will draw yet more communities, businesses, and events to the area, thus contributing to both the cultural and economic dynamism of (the community) as a destination.

- **Upgraded social and institutional learning** – Diversity enriches the flow and consumption of knowledge and information by opening up space for new perspectives and inspiring reflexive rather than routinized behaviour. As a result, inclusive action stimulates the learning capacity of public and private organizations, making community institutions more creative, flexible and adaptable.²

Without a framework currently in place, the County lacks mechanisms for:

- Gathering reliable insight into employee and community member experience.
- Identifying gaps in talent attraction and retention, and in service quality and accessibility.
- Measuring the impact/business value of actions taken.

While these specific insights are not currently available to the County, qualitative and quantitative data that exists in support of this direction includes:

- Developing an EDI Strategy, and demonstrating leadership in equity, diversity and inclusion, was one of the most repeated points of input from County staff across the organization during the development of the 2023-2027 Community Strategic Plan.
- From a regional perspective, while Statistics Canada does not capture the rate of police-reported hate crimes in Northumberland, the rate of police-reported hate crimes in the neighbouring Peterborough Census Metropolitan Area **was the second highest of Canada's 35 census metropolitan areas in 2021**. This included the City of Peterborough along with surrounding villages, townships, and First Nations. At 18.7 cases per 100,000 residents, this rate was well above the national average of 8.8 cases per 100,000 residents.

While this is not to suggest that Peterborough's numbers can be extrapolated as a measure for Northumberland, it does point to the systemic nature of racism in mixed urban/rural communities in the region, and the work that there is to do.

Key components of an EDI Strategy would address identified gaps, including:

- Data collection and analysis, including a County staff census

² City of Oshawa. *Oshawa Diversity and Inclusion Plan*. October 2017. Pages 5-6. Retrieved from <https://www.oshawa.ca/city-hall/resources/Research-Report--Diversity-and-Inclusion-Plan.pdf>



- Policy development
- Workforce diversity and inclusion actions
- Equitable service delivery assessments and actions
- Inclusive governance and representation initiatives
- Focused collaboration with external partners
- Education and awareness, and accessible communications
- Evaluation and reporting mechanisms

The role for municipalities in EDI leadership

The Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities – a network of municipalities through the Canadian Commission for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – identifies 10 Common Commitments for signatory members seeking to improve their policies and practices against racism, discrimination, exclusion, and intolerance. These commitments are structured around three areas of municipal responsibility:

1) The municipality as a guardian that respects the public interest

- Increasing vigilance against systemic and individual discrimination.
- Monitoring discrimination in the municipality and taking action to address it.
- Supporting individuals who experience discrimination.
- Providing police services that are exemplary institutions for fighting discrimination.

2) The municipality as an organization that upholds human rights

- Providing equal opportunities as a municipal employer, service providers, and contractor.
- Supporting measures that promote equity in the labour market.
- Challenging discrimination and promoting diversity and equal opportunities in housing.

3) The municipality as a community that promotes diversity

- Involving citizens by giving them a voice in anti-racism initiatives and decision-making.
- Challenging discrimination and promoting diversity and equal opportunities in education and other forms of learning.



- Promoting the respect, knowledge, and appreciation of cultural diversity and the inclusion of Indigenous and Racialized communities in the cultural fabric of the municipality.³

These commitments form a solid foundation on which to create a municipal EDI Strategy, advancing initiatives designed to:

- Improve municipal practices to promote social inclusion;
- Establish policies to eradicate all forms of racism and discrimination; and
- Promote human rights and diversity.

Northumberland County's commitment to an equitable, diverse, and inclusive community

Northumberland County's commitment to fostering an equitable, diverse, and inclusive community is well-established.

In June 2020, residents of Cobourg and the surrounding area participated in a peaceful demonstration of support for the Black Lives Matter movement and for protesters in the United States, following the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. In a statement to the community, then-Northumberland County Warden Bob Sanderson indicated, on behalf of County Council:

“(It is important to acknowledge that) racism persists in our community and our country, including anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, and racism against other People of Colour. From this starting point, our efforts must demonstrate a genuine determination to root out and eliminate discrimination of all forms from our institutions and our neighbourhoods... We recognize that there is still more work to do, in particular to directly address the harmful impacts of racism and hate... (Northumberland County today) reaffirms a commitment to breaking through silence, confronting racism, protecting human rights and removing barriers to equality. Together we are united around a common purpose of building a more welcoming, resilient and inclusive community, and ensuring a strong and vibrant Northumberland for future generations.”

³ Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities. *A Guide for New and Established Members*. Canadian Commission for UNESCO. Retrieved from <file:///C:/Users/campbellk/Downloads/ToolkitCoalitionInclusiveMunicipalities.pdf>



The County's EDI Strategy will unite under common direction, and build upon, initiatives, programs and actions already undertaken to affirm and advance its commitments.

Consultation/Options

Municipalities throughout Ontario and across Canada have or are beginning to implement EDI strategies and plans within their organizations, pertaining to areas including but not limited to strategic planning, recruitment, retention and employment practices, training, program and service delivery, and public communication and outreach.

In formulating this proposal, Northumberland County consulted either directly with, or reviewed reports and plans from:

- Town of Cobourg
- City of Peterborough
- City of Oshawa
- City of Guelph
- City of London

Financial Impact

The development of an EDI Strategy will have the following levy impact:

- **2024** – \$60,000 to engage an external facilitator for development of the strategy.
- **2025** – \$25,000 to address initiatives within the work plan.
- **2026** – \$25,000 to address initiatives within the work plan.

Risk Considerations

The risks in not having an EDI Strategy in place include but are not limited to:

- Missed opportunities for talent attraction and innovation.
- Ineffective service design, quality, accessibility, and delivery.
- Legal liabilities and reputational damage.
- Reduced opportunities for government grant funding.
- Employee disengagement and attrition.
- Ineffective/limited community engagement and missed community needs.



- Diminished public trust.

Impacts to Member Municipalities/Partners

In developing and implementing a strategy and action plan for the County, any tools, policies, programs, or materials developed will be made available to member municipalities to support integration with their operations.

Included in 2023 Long Term Plan: YES/NO

No, this is a new proposal, not previously included in the long-term plan.

2024 Issue Paper

Website Redesign

Purpose

This Issue Paper is to identify the rationale for a redesign of five Northumberland County websites and to recommend a budget for this undertaking.

Background

Northumberland County's corporate website – Northumberland.ca – is one of the organization's most prominent communications vehicles. In the first three quarters of 2023, nearly 215,000 unique users visited the website over 310,000 times.

Northumberland County introduced the current website in April 2019. At that time, the website had not been refreshed in over 10 years. With the rate of information and technology change, industry best practice is for websites to be refreshed every two to three years, with benchmarking for government websites set at closer to every five years. Modernization was urgently required to enable:

- Mobile-friendly/responsive design
- Compliance with Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)
- Digital service delivery such as online payments and form submissions
- Improved access to timely information and alerts

The redesigned Northumberland County website achieved all of these objectives. In addition, the updated framework streamlined website management across multiple County lines of business by enabling the creation of microsites instead of standalone websites.

Microsites are small, specialized websites that appear to the public as independent websites but are actually built within the County's larger corporate website architecture. Microsites are regarded, in the website 'back-end', as simply additional pages on the corporate website, with a modified design/look and feel.



With the launch of Northumberland.ca in 2019, four standalone department websites were integrated into the corporate website architecture. This ensured the above-noted upgrades were applied across all County website properties and ensured one single architecture for support by the Communications and IT teams. These websites included:

- Business & Entrepreneurship Centre Northumberland (BECN)
- Ontario Agri-Food Venture Centre (OAFVC)
- Welcome to Northumberland (Settlement Services)
- Housing Help Northumberland (Community & Social Services)

With Northumberland County as the co-lead for communications and community engagement for the Ontario Health Team of Northumberland, a microsite was also established on the County's website architecture for this body, to be managed by the County Communications Department.

Rationale for 2024 redesign

The County is seeking to redesign the corporate website and four department microsites in 2024 for two reasons.

- 1) **Modernization and navigation:** April 2024 will be six years since work began on the last refresh of the corporate website. A focused redesign project will enable the County to:
 - a. Evaluate and refresh all content for relevance, ensuring this resource remains an accurate and trusted source of information for the community.
 - b. Explore a mobile-first design, recognizing the growing use of mobile devices as the primary device for internet access.
 - c. Enhance user experience, reorganizing information for improved navigation/'findability' and improved storytelling.
 - d. Modernize architecture to ensure continued compliance with Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) as technology evolves.
- 2) **Provider technology changes:** Northumberland County's current website host has advised that they will be shifting all clients to a new content management platform – the back-end architecture for the website. This transition will require a redesign based on new layout templates, and migration of all website content. There will be a cost for this transition, and there will also be changes to the annual cost structure for hosting the website.



Consultation/Options

The County's website provider has advised that it will discontinue support for the current website platform in approximately 2026, necessitating migration to their new platform. The total estimated migration costs for the County's corporate website and four department microsites is approximately \$90,000 in one-time set-up and migration fees, including:

- **\$18,928** for installation and setup of the main County website and sitemap in the new Content Management System.
- **\$11,150** for migration of all content.
- **\$12,500** per microsite (\$50,000 total) for migration.
- **\$9,600** for integration of the County's Active Directory with platform user accounts, enabling website administrators to access the back-end via single sign-on.

Furthermore, under the current model, the County's annual website hosting fee is \$7,624, with no additional charges for microsites. This is because microsites are perceived in the back-end as simply additional pages of the corporate site.

The provider has advised that, following transition to the new platform, microsites will be regarded as independent, smaller websites. Annual fees for the corporate website will jump to over \$12,000 annually, with fees of \$1,800 annually for each of the four microsites (or \$7,200 total).

Given the estimated costs for this transition, staff is recommending that a full website redesign be achieved through a competitive procurement process.

The Communications & IT Departments will seek proposals from website solution providers, evaluate options, and source a solution that will deliver the greatest value. This process will include consultation with website users – staff, partners, and community members - to inform design.

Financial Impact

Staff recommends the following budget for the redesign of the County website:

- **2024** – \$100,000 + HST for website redesign.
- **2025** – no impact
- **2026** – no impact



Risk Considerations

The main risk consideration for this undertaking is cost optimization. Given the County's website provider will be retiring, by 2026, the current Content Management System on which Northumberland.ca is built, a redesign will be required. Given the estimated costs for the proposed transition to the new provider platform, staff is recommending that a full website redesign be achieved through a competitive procurement process.

Impacts to Member Municipalities/Partners

N/A

Included in 2023 Long Term Plan: YES/NO

A full website redesign has not been built into the County's long-term plan. The refresh planned for 2024 was anticipated to be managed within existing budgets. Given notice from the County's current website provider of the intent to migrate all clients to a new content management platform – with related cost implications – the County will initiate a Request for Proposals in 2024 from website solution providers for a full redesign, and source a solution that will deliver the greatest value.



2024 Issue Paper

Communications Master Plan implementation

Purpose

This Issue Paper is to seek Council's approval is for implementation funding to advance initiatives identified within the Communications Master Plan, currently under development for completion by the end of 2023.

Background

In 2023, Northumberland County launched the development of a Communications Master Plan. This plan will guide Northumberland County in the delivery of two-way communications with the residents we serve, over a 10-year period.

It will establish a strategic framework for engaging and exchanging information with the public based on industry (communications) and sector (government) trends, benchmarks, and best practices; technology and emerging tools; and research into the ways in which target audiences prefer to hear from, and communicate with, their local government, with an implementation plan to track progress and measure success.

Trends

The field of communications has changed dramatically over the last ten years. Government communicators must be prepared to address trends such as the proliferation of online news and information sources, the decline of traditional newsrooms, advances in digital integration and audience segmentation, and developments in technology. Consistent with these changes, taxpayers today have increased expectations of government around timely access to information, two-way communication, and engagement in decision-making.

Modern communications practices are also required to ensure Northumberland County remains responsive to the community as it grows and changes. Provincial planning forecasts indicate that the local population will grow to 122,000 residents by the year 2051. As noted in the Executive Summary of the Growth Management Report from the County's Official Plan Update process, Northumberland County is located on the Outer Ring of the eastern region of the Greater Golden Horseshoe and is therefore "forecast to experience significant outward growth pressure...largely from the eastern and northern Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area."



Between 2016 and 2051:

- The 75+ age group is forecast to represent the fastest growing population age-group.
- However, the County is also anticipated to accommodate a growing share of young adults and new families seeking competitively priced home ownership and rental opportunities, with growth in this group anticipated to be primarily driven by net migration.

Delivering leading service to increasingly diverse stakeholders will require monitoring of sector and demographic trends, and careful listening to feedback from target audiences about their information needs and preferred channels for engaging with local government, in order to customize outreach plans and ensure content that resonates.

Anticipated Action Items

Through the establishment of a Communications Master Plan, the County will foster a community that is more informed about County services, and more engaged in shaping municipal priorities, policies, and programs, ultimately building greater satisfaction with, and trust in, local government.

This plan will position the County to:

- Properly anticipate, plan for, and address the changing communication and engagement needs of our community.
- Leverage new technology and systems to deliver meaningful outcomes.
- Build mutually beneficial relationships with key stakeholders that drive trust.
- Ensure the Communications Department is positioned with the skills, structure, and training to support the organization over the long-term.

While the Master Plan will not be completed until the end of 2023, implementation funding is anticipated to support efforts such as:

- Website user experience testing to identify gaps and needs for an effective redesign.
- Audience research to inform development of more targeted content strategies.
- Adoption of new tools and techniques to strengthen the County's digital marketing practices.
- Facilitation services to support development of an internal communications strategy.



- Market research to inform a refresh of municipal strategic plan for the next term of Council.

Consultation/Options

From May through November 2023, development of the Communications Master Plan has involved research and consultation including:

- Research into global trends and standards, and industry and sector best practices, through organizations such as the UK Government Communications Service (GCS), International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS), Registered Graphic Designers (RGD), International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC), and studies from organizations such as Edelman and Deloitte.
- Interviews with leading municipalities – four Canadian and one American.
- Interviews with journalists from four local media outlets covering print, radio, and online news.
- Interviews with all members of County Council.
- Interviews with all members of the County senior leadership team.
- A survey of 140 County staff across all departments.
- A round-table discussion with community development stakeholders from the fields of manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, business, housing development, workforce development, social services, faith community, training and education, non-profit sector, and newcomer Canadians.
- Round-table discussions with Communications leads from Northumberland member municipalities.
- Together with member municipalities, a joint survey of community members, with nearly **640** responses.

Financial Impact

Staff is recommending a budget of \$25,000 each year over the next three years to support implementation of the Communications Master Plan.

- **2024** – \$25,000
- **2025** – \$25,000



- 2026 – \$25,000

Risk Considerations

An absence of funding for action items identified in the Communications Master Plan risks ineffective implementation of the Master Plan, resulting in either significantly extended timelines or opportunity fully lost for generating results.

Impacts to Member Municipalities/Partners

The County has collaborated with all member municipalities on a joint approach to community consultation during development of this plan. The data gathered through this undertaking will inform the Communications Master Plan and will also be shared with member municipalities to inform lower-tier municipal communications and community engagement strategies and activities. The County will also share insights gleaned through research of trends and best practices.

Included in 2023 Long Term Plan: YES/NO

Implementation funding for the Communications Master Plan has not previously been identified within long-term financial plans.



2024 Issue Paper

Communications Intern

Purpose

This Issue Paper is to seek Council's approval to extend the Communications Department's recruitment of student support from one four-month summer student position to one annual, year-round student intern position, beginning in 2024.

The Communications Intern will support the mandate of the Communications Department: to effectively inform residents and stakeholders about County programs and services, and to foster public engagement with local government to help shape municipal priorities. Creation of this position will also establish an opportunity to cultivate a pipeline of potential Communications candidates interested in public service careers.

Background

The Communications Department derives substantial value from engagement with summer students. The ability to assign projects, research, and tactical communications to a student resource has had a significant impact on the department's ability to sustain service levels during the summer months, where holiday scheduling and also the convergence of several high-priority annual projects can create capacity limitations.

The Communications Department is seeking to extend this summer student position into a year-round student intern position to address two factors:

- 1) In the fall of 2023, the Director of Communications role expanded to include accountability for the Information Technology Department. The integration of these two divisions will create value for the organization ranging from improved alignment between communications strategies and technology initiatives, and improved data-driven decision-making, to more agile response to technology trends, and efficient crisis management.

This transition did also result in capacity impacts to the Communications Department, with the loss of 50% of the Director's time to address corporate communications requirements. With the ensuing redistribution of projects and priorities within the team, recruitment of a year-round intern will partially address capacity gaps, minimizing impact to service levels resulting from this change.



- 2) Recruitment of a student resource will help to address increasing demand for creative services (graphic design, photography, and multimedia). With the proliferation of digital channels where residents and stakeholders access information, and the reliance of these mediums on eye-catching images, videos, and graphics to stimulate audience engagement, the Communications Department has seen increasing demand for multi-channel communications campaigns and visually engaging content.

In 2022, the Marketing and Creative Services Supervisor produced over 150 visually engaging graphic design and multimedia products, including publications, marketing materials, videos, and signage. This number is on-track to nearly double in 2023, with over 250 creative services projects delivered as of the end of the third quarter. This demand is furthermore expected to climb following the fall 2023 closure of community newspapers in Northumberland, and the redirection of print advertising budgets to digital channels.

A dedicated student intern would support the department in the planning, development, and delivery of print, digital and multimedia communications that enhance public, stakeholder, and staff awareness of and engagement with the County programs and services.

The student employment period will typically run in four-month intervals in alignment with the term systems of post-secondary institutions - periods of approximately 16 – 17 weeks. However, some co-op and internship programs are structured around longer periods of 8 months to a year, and the County would also be interested in exploring these opportunities.

Consultation/Options

In discussion with the CAO, addressing capacity gaps within the Communications Department through employment of a student resource was identified as a cost-effective measure for sustaining service levels.

The alternative to creating a year-round student intern position would be to maintain the previously-approved four-month summer student position to ensure coverage for the most critical period of capacity gaps within the department. Projects and timelines would then be prioritized as required with consideration to available resources, anticipating extended timelines for delivery, and reduced program coverage.



Financial Impact

Staff recommend the following budget – representing job rate, plus employer costs, plus anticipated Cost of Living Adjustment – be allocated from the levy for the retention of an annual, year-round Communications Intern for the Communications Department. The \$12,115 already approved for the recruitment of a four-month summer student will be incorporated into the new levy amount proposed:

- **2024** – \$28,552 (new levy) + \$12,115 (pre-approved) – assumes a staffed position 8 months of year one.
- **2025** – \$50,350 (new levy) + \$12,480 (pre-approved)
- **2026** – \$51,736 (new levy) + \$12,980 (pre-approved)

Risk Considerations

The absence of a resource to mitigate capacity gaps within the Communications Department presents the risk of reduced service levels, resulting in extended timelines for internal partner support and project delivery, and reduced program coverage.

Impacts to Member Municipalities/Partners

N/A

Included in 2023 Long Term Plan: YES/NO

A four-month summer student position is currently included in the Communications budget and long-term plan.

Staff is seeking to extend this position to an annual, year-round student intern position, beginning in 2024. The request for levy funding for an additional eight months of student support per year is a new proposal – not currently in the long-term plan.