



# REPORT

To: Chair and Directors

Report Number: ADM-BRD-543

From: Corporate Administration

Date: November 21, 2024

**Subject: 2025 Communications Staffing Considerations**

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## **RECOMMENDATION: [Corporate Weighted]**

That the Regional Board approve the addition of a full-time Communications Coordinator position, allocated 100% to Function 100 – Administration in the 2025 Financial Plan; further, that the Regional Board give pre-budget approval for the position so that it can be posted as soon as possible.

## **BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:**

The Peace River Regional District (PRRD) Communications Department requires a full-time (FTE) Coordinator to address critical gaps in public engagement, proactive communications and organizational resilience. This role will strengthen capacity to mitigate major miscommunications risks, equip the department and organization to communicate during multiple emergencies, assist with local events and support the development of a vital Organizational Communications Plan and essential policies. It will also allow for the revisiting of valuable recommendations from an external 2021 communications audit.

At its Regular Meeting held September 12, 2024, the Regional Board passed the following motion:

*MOVED, SECONDED and CARRIED,*

*That the Regional Board authorize participation and participation levels as specified in the following list of Community Parades and Special Events in 2025:*

- 1. Fort St. John Canada Day Parade – Fire Truck Only (Charlie Lake Fire Department)*
- 2. Taylor Gold Panning Parade – Fire Truck Only (Charlie Lake Fire Department)*
- 3. Chainsaw Carving in Chetwynd - Booth Rental*
- 4. Pouce Coupe Canada Day Parade - Sticker Wrapped PRRD Fleet Vehicle*
- 5. Fort St. John Canada Day Parade - Usage of PRRD Flat-Deck Trailer*
- 6. Dawson Creek Fall Fair Parade - Usage of PRRD Flat-Deck Trailer*
- 7. Hudson’s Hope Christmas Parade - Usage of PRRD Flat-Deck Trailer*
- 8. Santa Claus Parade in Fort St. John - Usage of PRRD Flat-Deck Trailer*

The addition of a full-time Communications Coordinator would enable the organization to deliver these events and also upgrade the level of service provided by the Communications staff to all departments seeking their assistance. While the need to hire dedicated consultants to lead major public engagement projects would not disappear entirely, there would be an improved ability to support a variety of PRRD projects that include public engagement and communication. The Communications staff would also be better positioned to support the external contractors with their efforts to ensure uniformity of tone, language, and PRRD branding on all projects, whether led in-house or externally. ‘Appendix A – External

Consulting Costs' shows the over \$2M spent on external consultant expertise on major projects as an illustration of the complexity of projects undertaken by the PRRD in recent years.

The PRRD Communications team is currently just two positions, both of which have been vacant or subject to turnover in the past 5 years. This staffing level is below comparable local governments in BC. The constraints of a small staff dedicated to communications result in a base level of operational service and increased organizational and reputational risks.

The Communications Department oversees many different strategic and operational activities such as but not limited to:

- Public engagement across diverse channels.
- Media relations.
- Internal and external communications support for all departments.
- Issues management and crisis communication dissemination.
- Development and implementation of communication plans and strategies.
- Management of digital platforms and social media.
- Management of brand, reputation and website.

In addition to these core functions, the Communications team needs to commence undertaking to develop and/or update several overdue critical deliverables such as but not limited to:

- Implementation of recommendations from the 2021 Communications Audit. (Community Engagement Guide, Crisis Communications Plan, Communications Policies).
- Organizational Communications Plan.
- Organizational policies (see attached business case).
- Content migration and development for the new PRRD website.

The current two-person team is struggling to meet the increasing demands for public engagement, media relations, internal and external support, and increased public presence at special events as identified leading to:

- Inability to complete critical deliverables identified in the [2021 Communications Audit](#).
- Limited communications support for complex regional initiatives such as the North Peace Regional Park (North Peace Fall Fair, Spencer Tuck Engagement, NP Pool replacement engagement).
- Limited capacity for public engagement.
- Increased risk of communication breakdowns internally and externally.
- Staff burnout leading to turnover with associated knowledge loss and decreased efficiency during recruitment and training periods impacting all departments.

The addition of a Communications Coordinator position would respond directly to these issues and allow the department to:

- Review and develop deliverables identified in the 2021 Communications Audit.
- Enable the development of an Organizational Communications Plan in 2025.
- Enable the development of essential organizational policies.
- Enhance public engagement and attention to rural community needs.
- Lead and deliver content development for the new PRRD website in 2024 – 25 including updating content to legislated accessibility standards such as text to speech.

- Strengthen interest and rights holder analysis and targeted outreach for diverse demographics.
- Provide expert guidance and oversight on accessibility and inclusivity in communications.
- Effectively support crisis communications as alternate Information Officer for EOC as personnel activation is required even when contractors may be later secured, and/or in multiple emergencies.
- Establish a clear career progression within the department in alignment with the Strat Plan objectives of employee development and retention.
- Enhance organizational reputation as an employer in the region.
- Uphold best practices in local government communication.

**ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:**

1. That the Regional Board provide further direction.

**STRATEGIC PLAN RELEVANCE:**

- Human Resource Management
  - Establish a Corporate Employee Development Program
  - Develop an Employee Retention and Recruitment Strategy
- Collaboration and Cooperation with First Nations

**FINANCIAL CONSIDERATION(S):**

All wage implications are based on current rates within the collective agreement and are subject to change under a new Collective Agreement with CUPE Local 2403.

Approval of this position would add \$113,435 in annual wages including benefit costs to Function 100 Budget in the 2025-2029 Financial Plan. While this represents an increase in personnel costs, it is expected to result in long-term cost savings and improved operational efficiency through:

- Decreased recruitment and training costs associated with high turnover.
- Improved project outcomes and reduced delays through enhanced communication support.
- Enhanced efficiency in rural community engagement and consultant support.
- Better risk management through improved communication capacity.
- Internal capacity to undertake and/or complete key deliverables such as a new PRRD website.
- Maximized return on \$2M+ consultant investments through local expertise and oversight.
- Strengthened ability to meet provincially legislated accessibility requirements.

**COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATION(S):**

Enhanced organizational communications capacity as outlined in the background portion of this report and in the attached business case.

**OTHER CONSIDERATION(S):**

None.

**Attachments:**

1. Business Case - Communications Department Additional FTE

External Links:

1. [April 15, 2021 Committee of the Whole Meeting](#) – See Item 4.1 “Mickelson Consulting Inc. – PRRD Communications Audit Presentation”

### Appendix A – External Consulting Costs

To provide context for the scale and complexity of the PRRD’s communication needs, the following table outlines recent major projects that required external public engagement consultants and their total costs:

Determined Projects (2023 – 2026)	Consultant	Value
Regional Growth Strategy (2023 – 2025)	Ecoplan Consultants	\$ 204,240.00
Climate Resiliency Plan (2021–25)	Pinna Consultants	\$ 74,450.00
North Peace Leisure Facility Public (NPLF)	Mickelson Consulting	\$ 25,000.00
NPLF Community Engagement Plan (2024-25)	Mickelson Consulting	\$ 10,000.00
NPLF Community Engagement Initiative	Mickelson Consulting	\$ 324,580.68
Area D Fire Protection Feasibility Study (2024)	Firewise Consultants	\$ 30,000.00
North Peace Regional Park Public (2024)	Expedition Management	\$ 100,000.00
Spencer Tuck (2024-25)	Lee and Associates	\$ 87,488.50
Firesmart (2024-26)	Mammoth Consultants	\$ 510,000.00
Blackfoot Park *signage design	Taliunus Consultant	\$ 1,350.00
Chetwynd Land Fill Replacement Public	Tetra Tech Consultants	\$ 282,031.42
Regional Bylaw	TBD	TBD
BBLF Phase4A (2023-25)	Tetra Tech Consultants	\$ 378,158.90
		\$2,027,299.50

The cumulative expenditure on external consultants for public engagement is substantial. These projects and their cost evidence the increasing complexity of the projects requiring public engagement undertaken by the PRRD.