



BUSINESS CASE: COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT ADDITIONAL FTE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

This role directly supports PRRD strategic priorities:

- Enables proactive communication and meaningful public engagement
- Strengthens emergency response and risk management capabilities
- Builds organizational resilience through cross-training and knowledge retention
- Supports the development and implementation of a unified Organizational Communications Plan
- Allows for actioning of 2021 audit recommendations and the creation of essential strategic policies
- Strengthens capacity to cultivate relationships with First Nations partners

CURRENT SITUATION ASSESSMENT

- Communications operating with minimal staff (1 -2 persons); reactive with little proactive capacity
- One staff member on-call for EOC activations 100% of off-hours, risking burnout and a risk liability in multiple emergency scenarios even if intent is to hire contract staff for EOC, initial response requires immediate personnel activation until contractors can be secured
- Significant vacancies and turnover 2022-2024 causing perpetual department instability
- \$2M+ complex regional projects (2023-2026) by external consultants requiring robust local public engagement not consistently supported
- No overarching Organizational Communications Plan to align internal and external communications
- Strategic policies not developed or implemented
- Recommendations from 2021 communications audit investment not considered
- No capacity for comprehensive cross-training, risking knowledge loss and service disruptions



RECOMMENDED SOLUTION

CREATE A NEW FULL-TIME " COORDINATOR" POSITION TO GROW DEPARTMENT CAPACITY IN SUPPORT OF:

- Strengthening proactive communications, rural engagement and issues management
- Providing crucial local context for consultant-led projects to maximize outcomes
- Ensuring consistent emergency coverage and ability to manage multiple concurrent incidents
- Supporting the development and implementation of an Organizational Communications Plan
- Revisiting valuable 2021 communications audit recommendations
- Developing essential strategic policies

ADDITIONAL STRATEGIC POLICIES INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:

- ◆ Directors' Social Media Policy
- ◆ Communications Social Media Policy
- ◆ Media Relations Policy
- ◆ AI Usage Guidelines and Policy
- ◆ Crisis Communications Policy
- ◆ Community Engagement Policy
- ◆ Website Content Management Policy
- ◆ Internal Communications Policy
- ◆ Photography and Video Policy

BENEFITS AND RISKS

BENEFITS

- √ Enable critical cross-training, knowledge transfer and professional development
- √ Improve employee work-life balance, retention and organizational resilience
- √ Proactive public engagement rebuilding trust and reducing misinformation
- √ Maximize value from consultant investments through local context expertise
- √ Ability to support more local events and parades participation
- √ Robust emergency coverage and risk reduction with ability to manage multiple incidents
- √ Progress on a unifying Organizational Communications Plan to align efforts
- √ Action key 2021 audit recommendations and develop strategic policies
- √ Improve employee retention, morale and continuity through sustainable workload
- √ Enhance organizational resilience via cross-training and knowledge transfer



RISKS OF NOT PROCEEDING

- ! Continued reactive communications and lack of issues management eroding public trust
- ! Inability to properly contextualize and support \$2M+ in consultant-led regional projects
- ! Burnout and turnover from 100% off-hours on-call coverage and heavy workload
- ! Major service disruptions and knowledge loss due to lack of cross-training
- ! No capacity to develop critical Organizational Communications Plan
- ! No capacity to develop essential strategic policies
- ! Stagnant communications maturity amid growing demands and complexities
- ! Lost opportunity to action valuable 2021 audit recommendations
- ! Inability to meet provincially legislated 'accessibility' requirements (for website content)

FINANCIAL JUSTIFICATION

- √ Improved retention and knowledge transfer reducing costs of turnover, retraining and gap support
- √ Outsourcing to consultants and/or part-time staff is more costly including long-term costs of not addressing sustainable capacity building, emergency coverage, cross-training, strategic planning and policy development
- √ Fewer project delays and issues through proactive communications and local context
- √ Prevention of rippling costs from mishandled issues (e.g. possible legal, staff time to rebuild reputation and gain public trust)
- √ Maximized value of \$2M+ consultant investment via internal, local expertise, oversight and knowledge transfer

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

1. Board Approval (Months 1-2)
2. Union Consultation (Months 1-2)
3. Recruitment and Onboarding (Months 3-6)
4. Development of Organizational Communications Plan (Months 12-18)
5. Revisit and Possibly Action (some) 2021 Audit Recommendations (Months 6-24)
6. Development of Additional Strategic Communications Policies (Months 6-24)
7. Enhancement of Cross-Training and Knowledge Transfer Systems (Months 6-24)

CONCLUSION



An additional Coordinator is a vital investment to proactively strengthen public engagement, manage communications risks, action 2021 external audit insights and build long-term resilience through the development of crucial policies and a unifying Organizational Communications Plan. The PRRD Board is asked to consider approving this strategic new position to enable the Communications Department to effectively support the region's evolving needs beyond an essential -services only approach.