



City of Dryden

Communications Plan

2023 - 2025



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VISION:

A communications program that lays the foundation for success toward a more informed and engaged community.



Introduction

This Communications Strategy represents a first for the City of Dryden. Its goal is to set clear direction for the municipality's first communications coordinator and activities over the next three years. It details realistic goals and objectives that will help lay a stronger foundation towards a more informed and engaged staff team and broader community.

The strategy is aligned with the City's Strategic Plan, where "Communications and Our People" is identified as a strategic priority, committed to responsive and transparent communication with employees and citizens. It is informed by both quantitative and qualitative research. It defines opportunities and actions for the City to improve internal communication and collaboration, implement consistent and effective practices related to communications management and public engagement, and strengthen the way Dryden shares its story with the community.

This strategy is a step forward for the City in meeting its mission to deliver sustainable municipal services and infrastructure with courtesy, integrity, transparency and fiscal responsibility.

Community Context

The City of Dryden is located in Northwestern Ontario, midway between Winnipeg, Manitoba and Thunder Bay, Ontario. Its population and tax rate have been on a decline since 2001. The City receives significant funding from other levels of government and community partners year to year in order to move forward important projects, such as the arena expansion, Age Friendly Action Plan, Municipal Modernization Program, Community Capacity Study and Business Gap Analysis, to name a few.

The City's partnerships with local Indigenous communities are strengthening as the municipality takes action on Truth and Reconciliation and works with First Nations to address important issues like homelessness, stigma, inclusivity and more. The Working Circle is at the centre of these efforts as a collaborative group of City staff and Indigenous representatives.

Media in Dryden is limited. Dryden Now is the online newspaper. The City's print newspaper, the Dryden Observer, stopped production in 2019. Media coverage in the community is reliant on a local radio station – CKDR-FM – to share municipal information. As such, the City needs to explore various ways to reach its diverse communities and more strongly become its own newsroom.

The City's first Communications Coordinator was hired in 2021. This role takes the lead for internal and external communications. Since onboarding, the Coordinator has been making progress in the areas of internal communications, social media, proactive communications planning, council decision reporting and more. Staff and the community want more. As seen in the analysis below, staff capacity is stretched in every department, but staff want to feel more informed. Residents, too, desire more information from and a stronger voice with their local government. Opportunities exist to leverage existing resources and community leaders to help tell the municipal story and enhance a culture where communications is top of mind.

Demographics (2022)

7,500

Population

~1,400

Indigenous population

48 years

Median age

\$82,000

Median annual household income



Communications Overview

Purpose

Effective communications support the organization through:

- Fostering an engaged/informed staff and community
- Strengthening community partnerships
- Supporting Strategic Plan deliverables
- Increasing a positive sense of community pride

Guiding Principles

- Proactive and positive
- Transparent
- Collaborative and consistent
- Human and engaging
- Accessible and clear

Core functions

- External communications
- Digital and social media
- Internal communications
- Council support
- Community engagement
- Media relations
- Issues management
- Branding and marketing

Target Audiences

- Residents
- Staff
- Council
- Businesses
- Dryden area municipal communities
- Community organizations and agencies
- Diverse communities in Dryden
- Potential investors
- Local Indigenous Communities, including the Working Circle
- Media (web and radio)

Research and Analysis

Methodology

This strategy is informed by the following research inputs:

- Internal interviews and survey
- Online public survey: 150 responses
- Municipal communications best practices – drawn from Redbrick Communications' 20-year history and expertise working in the sector
- Interviews with the following seven comparable municipalities

Municipality	Population
Yorkton, SK	16,280
Thunder Bay, ON	108,843
Newmarket, ON	87,942
Guelph, ON	143,740
Midland, ON	27,894
Orangeville, ON	30,167
Peterborough County, ON	83,651

Analysis (Strength, Challenges, Opportunities and Risks)

Strengths (Internal)

- New communications coordinator making a difference
- Management feels overall well informed
- Investment being made into the development of a communications strategy
- *City Chatter* and all-staff emails are effective

Challenges (Internal)

- Resourcing and workload make consistent communications challenging
- Staff's level of feeling informed depends on department/leadership
- Staff want to feel more informed, valued and recognized
- No central way of sharing/posting information for staff
- Not all staff have email
- Uncertainty from staff about how their input is used and link to resulting action

Opportunities (External)

- Radio is a main source of information that could be leveraged more
- Communications coordinator role can help improve proactive communications
- Social media is an effective tool (esp. Facebook); opportunity to strengthen and increase value
- Working Circle is positive step forward with Indigenous engagement and can be built upon
- City has a robust stakeholder list that could be leveraged

Risks (External)

- Residents feel they are getting too little information from the City
- No print paper: City needs to become own newsroom and help local radio station be aware and report stories
- Public not aware of processes or where money is coming from and how must be used, any mandates (e.g., grants) – can be annual funding too
- 11 social media channels – dilutes information and requires more staff resources
- Public feels that engagement and hearing from the community should be stronger
- Paid radio advertising is expensive and can be cost prohibitive

Strategic Communications Priorities

This strategy includes five strategic communications priorities. These priorities were developed based on internal and external research, including feedback from staff through surveys and interviews, meetings with external stakeholders, results of a public survey, and review and analysis of the City's existing communications activities. The priorities are also based on comparator municipal research, including interviews with six municipalities in Ontario and one in Saskatchewan, and municipal best practice.

The strategic priorities form the basis of this Communications Plan and will guide communications activities from 2023-2025.



1

Build a strong culture of internal communications. Building a strong communications culture at the City starts from the inside out. Dryden should work toward building an internal communications culture where staff feel valued, informed and part of a team.



2

Strengthen storytelling. We engage people by sharing stories that resonate. Strengthening storytelling will help draw people in and build a captive audience when Dryden needs to share information. Storytelling includes both the narrative aspect as well as visual elements.



3

Engage in proactive, planned communications. Successful communication should be proactive and planned. Goal setting and communications calendars play a key role in focusing communications efforts so that the City can engage effectively with its audience and build a stronger relationship with residents.



4

Strengthen the City's social media presence. Residents rely on social media to get the accurate, up-to-date municipal information they need. It's a critical tool to share information and engage with residents. Dryden should seize the opportunity to strengthen its social media presence through proactive planning, developing and issuing more content, and better social media management practices.



5

Adopt a consistent approach to public engagement. Dryden is rich with stakeholder groups that want to have a say in City matters. Adopting a solid framework for public engagement, and investing in training opportunities, will help streamline the City's approach and improve its engagement efforts with residents.

Objectives and Implementation Plan

To achieve communications objectives and improve Dryden's overall communications function, the City should begin to implement deliberate, measured actions over time. These actions will be phased in beginning in 2023. The objectives are organized below by communications priority. In some cases, objectives fall under more than one priority and are listed more than once.



1 Priority: Internal Communications

Objective: Establish regular, consistent, and reliable communications with staff

Action	Details	Lead
Set out a clear vision and goals to achieve.	To build a consistent internal communications program, the City should begin by identifying its vision and goals for sharing information with employees. All internal communications initiatives should connect back to the vision and goals.	CAO
Set clear expectations of leaders to be visible, meet regularly with teams and make it easy for them to share information.	Leaders play a critical role in establishing a strong culture of internal communications. Starting from the top, the CAO should set clear expectations of department leaders to be visible, meet regularly with teams and make it easy to share information by ensuring leaders are briefed on initiatives before the entire staff team and providing materials to support their communications with staff, including key messages, Q&As, training opportunities, etc.	CAO
Leverage monthly manager meetings (meetings where there is a representative from each department) to: • flag upcoming communications needs, program or service changes and potential stories • Establish clearer roles and expectations for proactive communications. • Set up follow-up meetings to develop communications plans and timelines	With a small corporate communications team, individual departments play a key role in the success of Dryden's internal and external communications activities. Identifying one person per department to serve as the communications lead will provide corporate communications with a simple way to connect with the entire organization and share information.	Communications, Department Managers

Develop a communications framework/guide	A simple guide that provides communications timeline needs to departments can help promote more proactive planning and stronger communications to the public. The guide can include a checklist about when to communicate, how long in advance to prepare etc.	Communications
Weekly "what's happening" email from CAO's Office	Create a simple email template and share a weekly all-staff email that includes brief, high-level updates with links to more information when needed. Avoid one-off emails from the CAO when possible. Developing a regular email schedule sets the expectation of consistent communication from leadership and should reduce the volume of one-off update emails.	From CAO, drafted by Communications
Explore feasibility of adopting an Intranet platform for information sharing.	An Intranet platform will provide staff with a "one stop shop" to get information and engage with the City. An Intranet would help: • Provide more easily searchable content • Ability to sign up to receive updates • Eliminate the need for a shared drive • Streamline communications processes by offering a single space for employees to connect. • Reduce the number of all staff emails. • Allow for more staff recognition and celebration of communications "wins." • Reduce confusion and information overload when onboarding new employees, adopting new policies and procedures, etc.	Communications
Publish <i>City Chatter</i> newsletter to quarterly instead of monthly.	With consistent information sharing through weekly CAO emails (and eventually, the Intranet), the <i>City Chatter</i> newsletter should move to quarterly publication. Content should include: • Broad updates and initiatives (regular business should be shared through weekly emails and Intranet). • Celebrating City and communications "wins." • Celebrating employee success. • More photos and visuals.	Communications with support from Department Leads
Develop a content calendar for corporate communications (internal and external). (<i>Cross posted under Proactive, Planned Communications</i>).	Each month, Communications should work with department leads to develop a content calendar. The calendar should identify: • Planned internal and external communications initiatives. • Opportunities to communicate, e.g., planned community events, holidays and other celebrations, City initiatives, etc. • Timing and type of content (e.g., staff email, social media, news release, post on website, etc.). • Roles and responsibilities. • Timing of regular meetings with department leads.	Communications, All Staff

Objective: Engage and involve staff in proactive two-way information sharing.

Action	Details	Lead
When asking staff for feedback, ensure that any outcomes/results are reported back with how staff feedback impacted actions / results.	To improve engagement and confidence in the corporate communications function, it's critical that any feedback sought is reported back to staff. Staff should be left feeling as though feedback provided is meaningful which should help increase the quality and timeliness of staff input in key initiatives.	Communications
Promote communications wins.	Communications success should be shared with staff. This can happen through the weekly CAO emails, the <i>City Chatter</i> newsletter, the Intranet, and directly through department leads. Success can include things like positive media coverage, feedback from the community, engagement from the community, event attendance, positive community initiatives, etc.	Communications and Department Leads
Establish a formal staff recognition program / acknowledgement.	Recognizing success and hard work will improve employee engagement. It should align with the CAO's vision for internal communications as noted above. Staff can be recognized through: • Weekly CAO emails • Intranet posts • Public social media posts (with permission from staff) • <i>City Chatter</i> newsletter • Over time, develop a formal staff recognition that includes incentives, perhaps a City award program, downloadable thank-you cards	HR; Communications and Department Leads

Objective: Break down departmental barriers and lay the foundation for cross-department information sharing

Action	Details	Lead
Establish regular touchpoints with departments and the full team to map out communications needs and opportunities	Department lead should meet regularly with Communications to ensure the regular flow of information. This will help reduce surprises and improve overall information sharing.	Communications and Department Leads



2

Priority: Storytelling

Objective: Improve storytelling to strengthen the City's relationship with residents

Action	Details	Lead
Create and implement a process to share City accomplishments with the community.	Staff should feel confident about when and how information should be shared with the broader community. The process should include: • Clear criteria for what types of information should be shared with the community, covering all municipal departments. • A simple form that allows staff to input information related to an initiative, including photos, documents, etc. • Established lead time for sharing initiatives (e.g., if a road is going to be repaired in June, staff should know that they need to provide information to Communications at least two weeks in advance, etc.). • Feedback provided back to staff on results of the communications initiatives to create buy-in for ongoing information sharing. Feedback can be shared with department lead by Communications at regular meetings.	Communications
Enhance use of photography and video. <i>(Cross posted under Social Media).</i>	Simple photos and videos are powerful communications tools. Smartphones and editing apps make it easy. Corporate Communications should be equipped with a high-quality smart phone to capture photos and video of local events, City initiatives, staff at work, and more. It takes practice to get to a place of comfort, and over time, photos and video should become a regular part of communicating any City initiative.	Communications
Create graphics that tell a simple story. <i>(Cross posted under Social Media).</i>	Graphics posted on social media should include large text in plain language. More details can be included in the body of the post and/or on the City's website. Graphics should grab attention and provide a snapshot of the story. Communications should have access to guides for plain language. Leverage existing tools, including Canva, to continue to create graphics.	

Objective: More proactive and consistent media relations

Action	Details	Lead
Develop a simple media relations policy.	A simple media relations policy will help guide Dryden's media relations approach by identifying: • A list of key local reporters • When to reach out to media • Who speaks on behalf of the City • A designated media contact	Communications
Strengthen relationships with local reporters by engaging media early and often.	Local media are a key resource in improving Dryden's relationship with residents. With the loss of the local print newspaper and lean newsrooms, municipalities have an opportunity to provide media with a complete story to share on local news websites and through radio. Regular opportunities to provide media with upfront, plain language information on City initiatives include: • Council meetings • Public works (planned work, progress updates, completion) • Local events • Parks and recreation updates • Annual Holiday message from CAO	Communications
Consult media	Reach out to media to better understand their interests, needs, how best to package stories to make it easier for them to report and access the information they need.	Communications
Provide media with plain language, news-style content that includes creative material (photos, graphics, videos, etc.).	News releases and other media notices should be in plain language with news-style quotes and a designated contact for more information. Providing reporters with photos, video or graphics helps them tell the City's story, from start to finish.	Communications, Department Leads



3 Priority: Proactive, Planned Communications

Objective: Improve communications mindset at the City (proactive vs reactive)

Action	Details	Lead
Begin to integrate communications reminders, touchpoints, etc. into regular processes.	Every City staff member should operate from the perspective of a communicator. Over time, staff should be able to identify and act upon communications opportunities and effectively move them forward. Actions can include: • Communications form provided to all staff to facilitate information sharing and identify communications opportunities. Form should identify opportunity, background, key points, lead time required, etc., and can be shared with Corporate Communications to execute. • A <i>Communications</i> heading added to regular reports. • Council Agenda to be shared with Communications as soon as finalized with key matters highlighted.	All Staff, Communications

Objective: Move to proactive vs reactive communications

Action	Details	Lead
Communications Coordinator to attend regular management meetings.	The Communications Coordinator should continue to attend regular management meetings so that they can identify and act on communications opportunities and spot issues in a timely manner. Communications' ability to respond to emerging needs requires background knowledge on departmental activities. Also, attendance at management meetings will help drive home the importance of communications amongst staff.	CAO, Communications, Managers
Establish regular touchpoints with departments and the full team.	Department leads should meet regularly with Communications ensure the regular flow of information. This will help reduce surprises and improve overall information sharing.	Communications and Department Leads
Develop a content calendar for corporate communications (internal and external). (Cross posted under Internal Communications).	Each month, Communications should work with department leads to develop a content calendar. The calendar should identify: • Planned internal and external communications initiatives. • Opportunities to communicate, e.g., planned community events, holidays and other celebrations, City initiatives, etc. • Timing and type of content (e.g., staff email, social media, news release, post on website, etc.). • Roles and responsibilities. • Timing of regular meetings with department leads.	Communications, All Staff



4

Priority: Social Media

Objective: Build a stronger social media presence by producing more high-quality content

Action	Details	Lead
Consolidate the number of social media channels	The City, including Fire Services, currently manages 11 social media accounts across four platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok). Spreading social media efforts across many accounts requires significant staff resources and can dilute information. Consolidating existing accounts into one corporate presence, plus a presence for additional service areas such as Fire, should help focus staff efforts on content production, engagement, and monitoring.	Communications
Develop a content calendar	Develop a monthly social media calendar that identifies: - Planned posts, including creative content - Social platform - Post timing Additional posts should be shared as needed with the social media calendar identifying content that can be created ahead of time (e.g., Council meeting reminder, minutes of Council meeting posted, planned news release, public holiday, etc.).	Communications, Department Leads
Enhance use of photography and video. <i>(Cross posted under Storytelling).</i>	Simple photos and videos are powerful communications tools. Smartphones and editing apps make it easy. Corporate Communications should be equipped with a high-quality smart phone to capture photos and video of local events, City initiatives, staff at work, and more. It takes practice to get to a place of comfort, and over time, photos and video should become a regular part of communicating any City initiative.	Communications
Create graphics that tell a simple story. <i>(Cross posted under Storytelling).</i>	Graphics posted on social media should include large text in plain language. More details can be included in the body of the post and/or on the City's website. Graphics should grab attention and provide a snapshot of the story. Communications should have access to guides for plain language. Leverage existing tools, including Canva, to continue to create graphics.	Communications
Develop simple guidelines for staff who post to social media.	Adopting a "red light, yellow light, green light" approach will help guide staff's efforts in responding to comments and engaging with residents.	Communications, Outside Resources for Examples and Templates

Integrate polls and surveys into regular social media content to encourage engagement and check the pulse of the community. <i>(Cross posted under Public Engagement).</i>	Simple polls and surveys can be included with Twitter and Facebook content to periodically “check in” with the community and encourage engagement outside of formal opportunities.	Communications
Standing item at regular communications meetings.	Social media should be discussed at each regular communications meeting. Department leads can contribute post ideas and make communications aware of upcoming initiatives that require developing social media content.	Communications, Department Leads
Invest in content management software.	Applications such as Hootsuite, Sprout Social, etc. provide the ability to schedule posts in advance, promote staff collaboration, and offer detailed reporting.	Communications
Share reports to demonstrate results	Communications should share monthly social media metrics at regular communications meetings to demonstrate success and identify shortfalls.	Communications



5

Priority: Public Engagement

Objective: Adopt a consistent approach to public engagement

Action	Details	Lead
Roll out and ensure understanding of public engagement framework.	Public engagement framework should guide approach.	Communications
Simple planning template.	Adopt a simple planning template to guide engagement efforts for individual initiatives.	Communications, All Staff
Invest in formal training.	The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is the international organization advancing the practice of public participation. IAP2 offers training for anyone involved in public participation and community engagement. At least one staff member should enroll in IAP2's <i>Planning for Effective Public Participation</i> and <i>Techniques for Effective Public Participation</i> courses to become IAP2 certified. Training can be completed virtually.	Communications

Objective: Engage more regularly and effectively

Action	Details	Lead
Integrate polls and surveys into regular social media content to encourage engagement and check the pulse of the community.	Simple polls and surveys can be included with Twitter and Facebook content to periodically “check in” with the community and encourage engagement outside of formal opportunities.	Communications
Be more visible in the community with regular touchpoints.	Look for opportunities to “check-in” and engage with community partners at events and stakeholder group meetings. Examples include: • Providing an update at a community meeting • Sitting in on a community meeting • Connecting directly with community leaders ahead of formal engagement activity	CAO, Communications

Evaluation and Measurement

Evaluation and measurement play a key role in successful implementation of a strategic communications plan. Some initiatives will do a great deal to move the needle toward a more informed and engaged community. Others may fall flat. Regular evaluation and measurement allow staff to take stock of what’s working, demonstrate results, and pivot to new tactics when needed.

Communications Objective	Measurement
Establish regular, consistent and reliable communications with staff.	• Monitor achievement of internal communications goals. • Leaders are meeting regularly with teams. • Department leads established. • Staff response to weekly CAO email. • Staff response to and participation in <i>City Chatter</i>. • Content calendar developed each month. Calendar is well used.
Engage and involve staff in proactive two-way information sharing.	• Positive feedback from staff. • Staff are participating in engagement opportunities (i.e., providing information for <i>City Chatter</i>, sharing social media posts, etc.).
Break down departmental barriers and lay the foundation for cross department information sharing.	• CAO, Communications and Department Leads meet regularly to share information.
Improve storytelling to strengthen the City’s relationship with residents.	• Staff consistently share information with Communications. • Majority of communications include photos, graphics or video.

More proactive and consistent media relations.	• Simple media relations protocol created. • Increase in media inquiries. • Increase in media interest in and coverage of City priorities.
Improve communications mindset at the City.	• Staff consistently share information with Communications. • "Communications" section included in regular reports.
Move to proactive vs reactive communications.	• Communications coordinator attends regular management meetings. • Staff consistently share information with Communications. • Content calendar developed each month. Calendar is well used.
Build a stronger social media presence by producing more high-quality content.	• Over time, social media efforts are focused on fewer accounts. • Content calendar developed each month. Calendar is well used. • Each social media post includes a photo, graphic or video. • Red Light, Yellow Light, Green Light guidelines developed, finalized and shared with staff who post to social media. • Consistent growth in impressions, engagement and followers over time. (Measure monthly, quarterly and annually).
Adopt a consistent approach to public engagement.	• Public engagement framework finalized. • Simple planning template created. • Communications Coordinator enrolled in IAP2 training.
Engage more regularly and effectively.	• Increase in attendance at engagement opportunities. • Increase in public feedback on City initiatives.



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