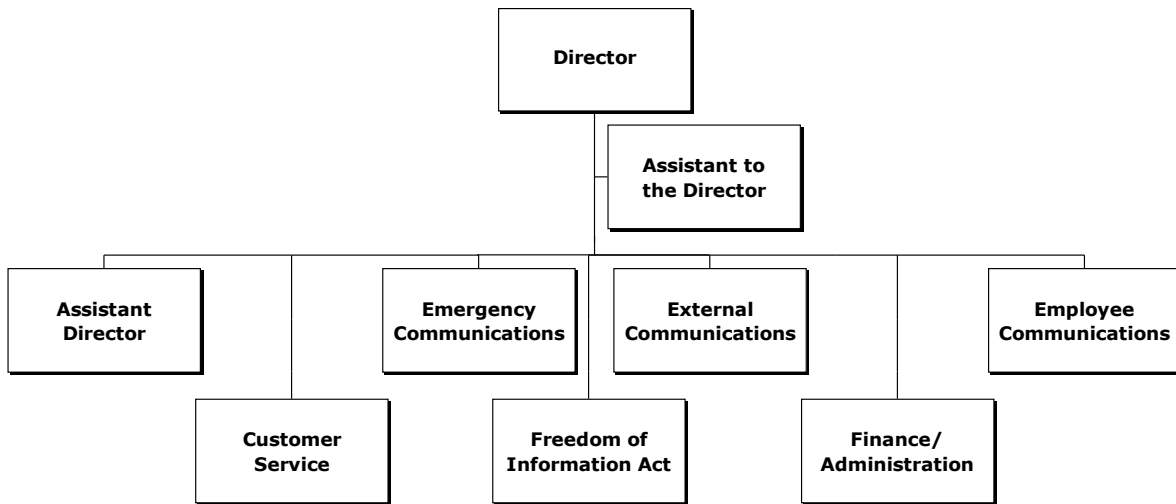


Office of Public Affairs



Mission

To lead coordinated communications and customer service from a countywide perspective that connects our residents with information about their government’s services, operations and policies. To increase public awareness of hazards and to communicate appropriate actions to take before, during and after emergencies. To ensure clear, open and timely communications to and from employees in order to maintain an informed and motivated workforce.

Focus

The Office of Public Affairs (OPA) provides essential information to the public, elected and appointed officials, County agencies and the media concerning County programs and services and is the central communications office for the County. The Director serves as the County media spokesperson, and as a liaison with the County Executive and the Board of Supervisors. OPA also manages countywide compliance with the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (VFOIA).

OPA coordinates a comprehensive, centralized public affairs program for the County and also provides communications consulting to other agencies. Employee internal communications, countywide Web content management, social media, customer service and emergency communications are also part of the agency’s critical functions.

The Office of Public Affairs supports the following County Vision Elements:

-  **Maintaining Safe and Caring Communities**
-  **Creating a Culture of Engagement**
-  **Connecting People and Places**
-  **Practicing Environmental Stewardship**
-  **Maintaining Healthy Economies**
-  **Building Livable Spaces**
-  **Exercising Corporate Stewardship**

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OPA focuses on three main areas of communication: external, employee and emergency. This structure facilitates the best use of OPA staffing to address the following strategic issues: enhance access to information both internally and externally; improve crisis and emergency communications; publish content through numerous tools and engage the public; provide information proactively to the media; and deliver communication consulting to agencies without public information officers, as well as support those agencies with communications staff. Strategies to address these critical issues include increasing collaboration with agencies, enhancing information on the County's intranet and internet, and continuing to explore tools for reaching diverse audiences.

OPA remains proactive in anticipating the needs of the public and media by providing timely information. In addition to managing the content on the County's new website at www.fairfaxcounty.gov, OPA oversees the use of several social media sites, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Nextdoor and Flickr, allowing direct communication with the public. The reach through these tools has grown exponentially over the past few years and enables the amplification of a common message through multiple channels.

FY 2018 represented the first full year of the countywide Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) program in OPA. The focus is on coordinating compliance with the VFOIA, promoting the County's commitment to transparency, improving the efficiency of the VFOIA response process, monitoring requests and enhancing accountability. Strategies to address these goals include implementing a countywide FOIA policy, providing quarterly training to County employees, ensuring open and frequent communication and collaboration with agency points of contact, and establishing and maintaining a centralized system to track all FOIA requests.

External Communications

OPA provides critical leadership in communicating with many external audiences about important issues, deadlines and events. This includes serving County residents, the business community, nonprofits, faith communities, media and many other key groups by sharing relevant, timely and actionable information through the following tools:

- www.fairfaxcounty.gov
- NewsCenter
- NewsWire
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Nextdoor
- YouTube
- Flickr
- SlideShare
- Surveys
- Media
- 703-FAIRFAX Phone and Email Customer Service
- Mobile Apps
- Podcasts, Internet Radio, Spanish Language Radio and SoundCloud
- Email Newsletters
- Printed Materials

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NewsCenter

In FY 2018, OPA continued to build on its successful Fairfax County Government NewsCenter platform, which serves as the central focal point for publishing news for residents. OPA's vision for NewsCenter is simple: to selectively package, promote and publish relevant, timely and actionable audience-focused information for the community. Most of the content focuses on the needs of residents and what is practical in their daily lives. NewsCenter has been recognized with several awards, including a Governor's Technology Award and a National Association of Counties Achievement Award.

Social Media

OPA continues its social media publishing and oversight role, approving new accounts, analyzing metrics from all County accounts, setting standards and working in partnership with more than 70 social media publishers across the County. This role is essential as social media tools constantly evolve and change. A new area of focus in FY 2018 was addressing legal issues related to official social media accounts. The law is generally years behind where society is, so courts are just starting to issue rulings that impact the County in many ways. OPA has worked closely with the Office of the County Attorney and the Board of Supervisors to address these new legal requirements for official social media accounts.

By engaging the public every day in answering questions and providing information, OPA enables Fairfax County residents to better understand how their government works and the services it provides. For example, Facebook surveys show that more than 85 percent of respondents agree that OPA's use of social media helps them understand their government better. During the March 2018 wind storm, that satisfaction number reached 93 percent on Nextdoor.

County Website

In FY 2017 and FY 2018, OPA heavily invested staff time to partner with the Department of Information Technology to reconstruct the County's website. The two agencies developed the website's structure, designed new webpages, migrated content from the existing site, trained County staff on how to use the new web content management software, and led usability testing with members of the public. This complicated, yet necessary project required many hours of staff work and dozens of opportunities for community feedback for a project that featured four main goals:

1. Refine the information architecture.
2. Redesign the website.
3. Rethink search results.
4. Replace the core content management system.

OPA continues its work to support this new website in many ways, including metrics tracking, accessibility support, usability testing, consultation with agencies, and working with DIT to plan the next phases and features of fairfaxcounty.gov.

Digital Team

Within external communications, a newly-formed OPA digital team will continue its focus on the following areas:

- Developing policies and governance for the website and social media
- Creating staff content submission processes
- Providing strategic and tactical counsel
- Training web and social media publishers
- Maintaining a suite of metrics

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- Enhancing capabilities during emergencies

Employee Communications

OPA's internal communications efforts have advanced with the elimination of the County's print employee newsletter. The new Team Fairfax Insider (TFI) blog on FairfaxNet (the county's Intranet) allows for more agile, informative and engaging internal communications and makes sharing relevant and actionable information with the County workforce more efficient and effective. Benefits, new technology, learning opportunities, career management and communications from County leadership remain priorities for the workforce.

TFI, in its new blog format, continues to be an important source of information on key topics that impact all employees and also provides a valuable forum for executive communications and the Employees Advisory Council. It works in concert with NewsLink and the FairfaxNet Spotlight section. Fairfax County's NewsCenter continues to repurpose content from TFI, highlighting the work of County staff. The new format gives employees the opportunity to weigh in on stories, ask questions and make suggestions.

OPA is also focused on supporting the communications needs of County employees, providing consultative support for agencies, projects and initiatives on topics ranging from risk communications to the use of internal workspaces to maximizing the effectiveness of countywide internal communications tools.

In FY 2019, OPA is working in partnership with the Department of Information Technology in support of implementation of an updated FairfaxNet. This implementation will provide new tools for even more effective collaboration and teamwork. OPA offers consultation and training to agencies transitioning away from print or exploring new communications tools. Blogs remain the tool of choice for most agencies that have eliminated their internal print publication, with response continuing to be positive. Fairfax County's Geographic Information Services Division and the County's web team both launched blogs during FY 2019. In addition to efficiency and reduced costs, blogs allow agencies, divisions and teams to share their content more easily beyond their own staff. Blog posts from numerous County agencies are highlighted in the internal daily email, NewsLink.

OPA also produced and distributed 245 NewsLink emails to employees in FY 2018, featuring announcements, classes, events and resources, upcoming retirements and leave donation requests. Additionally, the daily NewsLink includes a comprehensive list of links to media coverage regarding Fairfax County. This service is both more efficient and cost-effective than media monitoring services that provide similar functions.

OPA maintains a countywide calendar of key dates and events for employees through FairfaxNet. In FY 2019 and beyond, OPA will continue to implement and coordinate additional products and tools for internal communications, reflecting the attributes of a high-performance 21st century workforce.

Emergency Communications

As required by the Fairfax County Emergency Operations Plan, OPA coordinates and disseminates all emergency information related to major incidents affecting more than two County agencies. Accordingly, OPA continues to recognize emergency communications as one of its major lines of business and the need for continued emphasis on emergency communications and dissemination of emergency information to the public, Board of Supervisors, County employees, and other partner agencies and stakeholders, including the media.

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During activations of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), OPA staff are key players in the incident command organizational structure, serving as the EOC Command and General Staff Public Information Officer (PIO), while the Director of OPA serves on the Senior Policy Group of key County leadership. Additional OPA staff serve in the Joint Information Center (JIC) as assistant PIOs, creating and disseminating all emergency-related content during an EOC activation. OPA opens the County's JIC, which serves as the central clearinghouse for emergency information, whenever the EOC is activated above a monitoring level.

The increased use of communication tools and the changing way residents receive information means the OPA must recognize and adapt in order to be able to effectively distribute emergency news and information to various audiences and stakeholders. As such, OPA uses multiple communication tools and channels. These tools include the emergency blog, (www.fairfaxcounty.gov/emergency/blog); the County website; Facebook, including Facebook Live video; Twitter (both County and agency-specific accounts); YouTube; Instagram; Nextdoor; Flickr; SoundCloud; iTunes; emails, text and pager messages from Fairfax Alerts and the Emergency Alert Network (EAN) for employees; Fairfax County Government Radio online (www.fairfaxcounty.gov/radio); podcasts; the emergency information hotline and internal hotline numbers for County employees; RSS news feeds; video (in addition to YouTube, OPA utilizes video online and on Channel 16); media interviews; the County mobile app; regional websites such as www.ReadyNOVA.org; conference calls; and Ask Fairfax online chats.

Emergency blog views, while relatively steady during calendar years 2014 through 2016 – 439,280 views in CY 2014, 337,290 views in CY 2015 and 349,248 in CY 2016 – decreased in calendar year 2017 to 94,108 views due to fewer major storm events.

- CY 2013 – 250,443 views / 117,220 visitors
- CY 2014 – 439,280 views / 194,704 visitors
- CY 2015 – 337,290 views / 156,739 visitors
- CY 2016 – 349,248 views / 158,533 visitors
- CY 2017 – 94,108 views / 56,732 visitors
- CY 2018 – 156,121 views / 100,028 visitors (through Aug. 30)

It should be noted that views/visitors on the blog are greatly influenced by emergency events – such as large-scale emergencies like Hurricane Sandy in October 2012 (390,720 views, the highest monthly number of visitors ever) – and winter weather events such as snow, which traditionally occur in January and February.

- Jan/Feb 2014 – 247,298 views
- Jan/Feb 2015 – 185,245 views
- Jan/Feb 2016 – 300,298 views
- Jan/Feb 2017 – 19,251 views (no significant snow storms)
- Jan/Feb 2018 – 34,022 views (another mild winter for snow)

With just 19,251 views in January/February 2017, due to an extremely mild winter with no appreciable snow until March (35,614 views), total CY 2017 blog views reflect a substantial decrease from previous fiscal years, down to 94,108 from the FY 2016 level of 349,248. January/February 2018 views were up over 2017 to 34,022 views, an increase of 14,771. Views on the emergency blog are up in 2018 (as of August 30) by over 61,000 views, with four months still remaining in the calendar year.

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Worth noting about blog views is that in addition to the actual number of views, each time an article/update is published, approximately 4,600 email subscribers, 320 blog followers via the WordPress ecosystem and 255,000 Twitter followers receive the complete article and therefore do not need to visit the blog for the information. While a valuable service, this distribution does decrease the number of views/visitors to the blog since all the information from that post is in the recipient's email inbox, social media or RSS feed integration. There is also no way to quantify how many of these email/social media followers then share our information with their followers.

It is also worth noting that OPA does not rely on the emergency information blog as the sole communications tool to reach the public who use a variety of methods to receive their information such as Facebook, Twitter, Nextdoor, Instagram, traditional media, etc.

In addition to emergency communications and response, the Emergency Information Officer and other OPA staff as necessary continue to be involved in planning County tabletop and functional exercises to ensure smooth operations during actual emergencies. In FY 2018, OPA participated in two significant exercises – one locally focused on a complex, coordinated attack at multiple locations in Fairfax County and a regional exercise to test the County's Radiological Emergency Response Plan, as well as the region-wide Atlantic Fury exercise in May 2018.

Virginia Freedom of Information Act

OPA furthers public access to County information and public records through the countywide FOIA program. In response to the General Assembly amending Section 2.2-3704.1 and enacting a new Section 2.2-3704.2 of the VFOIA of the Code of Virginia, which became effective July 1, 2016, the Board of Supervisors established a countywide FOIA program.

The countywide FOIA officer serves as Fairfax County's main point of contact for FOIA requests and coordinates the County's compliance with VFOIA, providing strategy and direction to agencies on how to respond to the growing volume and complexity of FOIA requests.

OPA executes the countywide FOIA policy through strategies that ensure a compliant, efficient and transparent FOIA response process. The goals of the program are to coordinate compliance with VFOIA, promote the County's commitment to transparency, improve the efficiency of the FOIA response process, and enhance monitoring and accountability of FOIA requests.

Since its establishment in FY 2017, the countywide FOIA program has strengthened compliance with VFOIA, implemented a countywide FOIA policy, partnered with DIT to develop and implement a countywide FOIA tracking solution, updated the County's FOIA webpage to provide requesters with pertinent and easy-to-read information on submitting a FOIA request, collaborated with and provided clear and consistent guidance to all County agencies, and provided quarterly FOIA compliance training to County employees.

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Budget and Staff Resources

Category	FY 2018 Actual	FY 2019 Adopted	FY 2019 Revised	FY 2020 Advertised	FY 2020 Adopted
FUNDING					
Expenditures:					
Personnel Services	\$1,664,122	\$1,814,485	\$1,814,485	\$1,862,486	\$1,882,433
Operating Expenses	95,663	147,501	306,628	147,501	147,501
Subtotal	\$1,759,785	\$1,961,986	\$2,121,113	\$2,009,987	\$2,029,934
Less:					
Recovered Costs	(\$288,181)	(\$239,882)	(\$239,882)	(\$239,882)	(\$239,882)
Total Expenditures	\$1,471,604	\$1,722,104	\$1,881,231	\$1,770,105	\$1,790,052
AUTHORIZED POSITIONS/FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT (FTE)					
Regular	21 / 21	21 / 21	21 / 21	21 / 21	21 / 21
1 Director	2 Information Officers IV	2 Information Officers I			
1 Assistant Director	1 Public Safety Information Officer IV	1 Administrative Assistant V			
1 Management Analyst IV	4 Information Officers III	2 Administrative Assistants IV			
2 Management Analysts II	2 Information Officers II	1 Administrative Assistant III			
1 Communications Specialist I					
TOTAL POSITIONS					
21 Positions / 21.0 FTE					

FY 2020 Funding Adjustments

The following funding adjustments from the FY 2019 Adopted Budget Plan are necessary to support the FY 2020 program. Included are all adjustments recommended by the County Executive that were approved by the Board of Supervisors, as well as any additional Board of Supervisors' actions, as approved in the adoption of the Budget on May 7, 2019.

- ◆ **Employee Compensation** **\$67,948**
An increase of \$67,948 in Personnel Services includes \$38,080 for a 2.10 percent market rate adjustment (MRA) for all employees and \$29,868 for performance-based and longevity increases for non-uniformed merit employees, both effective July 2019.

Changes to FY 2019 Adopted Budget Plan

The following funding adjustments reflect all approved changes in the FY 2019 Revised Budget Plan since passage of the FY 2019 Adopted Budget Plan. Included are all adjustments made as part of the FY 2018 Carryover Review, FY 2019 Third Quarter Review, and all other approved changes through April 30, 2019.

- ◆ **Carryover Adjustments** **\$159,127**
As part of the FY 2018 Carryover Review, the Board of Supervisors approved funding of \$159,127, including \$9,127 in encumbered funding in Operating Expenses and \$150,000 in unencumbered carryover in Operating Expenses associated with gang prevention awareness and education efforts.

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Key Performance Measures

Indicator	Prior Year Actuals			Current Estimate	Future Estimate
	FY 2016 Actual	FY 2017 Actual	FY 2018 Estimate/Actual	FY 2019	FY 2020
Percent change in Facebook reach (main account)	74.5%	(6.7%)	1.5% / (23.1%)	7.0%	0.0%

A complete list of performance measures can be viewed at
<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/budget/fy-2020-adopted-performance-measures-pm>

Performance Measurement Results

OPA’s platforms to deliver information continue to meet the public’s changing expectations. From NewsCenter, a countywide news and engagement website, to social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Nextdoor, Flickr and SlideShare, OPA strives to provide a variety of means for the public and the media to receive County-related information and engage with their local government.

The County’s main Facebook account is currently used as a performance measurement indicator to track the growth in use of that predominant social media tool for customers – the public and the media – to obtain important information about Fairfax County. However, major changes by Facebook in the last fiscal year led to an overall 25 percent decline in impressions across all accounts during FY 2018. For the main County account, the decrease was 23 percent. This was mainly due to Facebook’s changes to algorithms that determine who sees posts, as well as their elimination of bot accounts, which is where an automated software program creates and controls fake Facebook accounts, often for the purpose of advancing a particular view or sowing discord.

Facebook remains a critical platform for the County’s 20+ accounts to share information and OPA will continue publishing content to the main account and provide oversight to all accounts. After several years of significant growth in the main County Facebook account, impressions leveled off in FY 2018 at 5.6 million (down from 7.3 million in FY 2017). The decrease also reflects another mild winter experienced as previous years’ severe weather resulted in considerably more posts and reach than in FY 2017 and FY 2018.

The efficiency of Facebook reach per dedicated FTE increased significantly as OPA redirected resources from Facebook (from 2.5 FTE to 0.75 FTE) in order to staff other essential communication tools such as Nextdoor, Instagram and the County website.

The percentage of respondents satisfied with the County’s main Facebook information was 85 percent for FY 2018. OPA anticipates that to increase to 87 percent in FY 2019 and FY 2020, while Facebook reach is expected to remain at 6 million for both years.