

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 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.

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

NewsCenter

In FY 2019, 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 2019 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.

County Website

OPA continues its work to support the County's new Web site 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 www.fairfaxcounty.gov.

Digital Team

Within external communications, a newly-formed OPA digital team began focusing 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
- Enhancing capabilities during emergencies

Employee Communications

OPA is the central source of information for County internal communications; provides strategic consultation on important initiatives and projects; and coordinates and implements communications plans and strategies for major County priorities. The agency also plays a key role in helping agencies develop and amplify important information for the workforce.

NewsLink, the daily email newsletter, continues to be distributed to more than 12,000 employees each workday and includes essential information on everything from parking modifications to Open Enrollment, as well as a comprehensive source for media coverage of Fairfax County. The Team Fairfax Insider blog is a valuable tool for distributing countywide internal information, allowing for quick turnaround, sharing and interactivity. Insight from County leadership, learning opportunities, benefits and technology are among the priority areas of interest for employees. OPA also maintains a countywide calendar of key dates and events for employees through FairfaxNet. OPA will continue to implement and coordinate additional products and tools for internal communications, reflecting the attributes of a high performance 21st century workforce.

In addition to NewsLink and FairfaxNet, OPA has renewed the use of online chats as a means of communicating with County staff and in 2019 began a series of popular monthly in-person chats with the County Executive.

Major internal projects in the past year included the first updated County employee handbook in over a decade, developed in partnership with the Department of Human Resources. A new compact format and online focus make the updated handbook more practical, useful, and economical. The implementation of One Fairfax and the development of a countywide strategic plan have also been major areas of focus over the past year. Both initiatives include significant internal and external components and require employee knowledge and engagement to be successful. Additionally, OPA continues to offer guidance and training on internal communications, including providing support to agencies that are eliminating the use of internal print communications tools and maximizing use of the County intranet.

OPA's partnership with the Department of Information Technology in advancing internal tools remains strong, including in support of the implementation of an updated FairfaxNet, which launched in FY 2020. This implementation will provide new tools for even more effective collaboration and teamwork.

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.

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 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's Web site; Facebook; Twitter (both County and agency-specific accounts); YouTube; Instagram; Nextdoor; Flickr; SoundCloud; emails, text and pager messages from Fairfax Alerts and the Emergency Alert Network (EAN); 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 remain consistent, although they have decreased since the yearly high in calendar year 2014. This can be attributed to an increased use of social media tools for the dissemination and receipt of emergency information, and in the case of 2017's decrease, a year with relatively few storm events.

- CY 2019 – 134,393 views / 73,109 visitors (through August 2019)
- CY 2018 – 236,331 views / 152,458 visitors
- CY 2017 – 94,108 views / 56,732 visitors
- CY 2016 – 349,248 views / 158,533 visitors
- CY 2015 – 337,290 views / 156,739 visitors
- CY 2014 – 439,280 views / 194,704 visitors
- CY 2013 – 250,443 views / 117,220 visitors

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 2019 – 98,369 views
- Jan/Feb 2018 – 34,022 views (mild winter for snow)
- Jan/Feb 2017 – 19,251 views (no significant snowstorms)

With 2019's snow, blog views in January/February increased over the past two years, almost tripling from the previous year and over five times that of 2017.

In addition to emergency communications and response, OPA continues its involvement in planning County tabletop and functional exercises to ensure smooth operations during actual emergencies. For example, in FY 2019, OPA participated in the regional Capital Fortitude exercise, a health-related scenario of an anthrax attack. OPA staff participated on the exercise planning team, as well as in the exercise simulation cell (Sim Cell) and Emergency Operations Center for the multiday event.

Virginia Freedom of Information Act

OPA enhances public access to County information and public records through the 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 efficiently respond to the growing volume and complexity of FOIA requests.

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. The OPA FOIA program achieves these goals through the provision of FOIA compliance training, frequent collaboration and coordination with all County agencies on improving the FOIA response process, refining an application that tracks FOIA requests countywide to ensure compliance and efficiency, and publishing an annual report both internally and externally that provided key data on FOIA requests countywide.

In September of 2018, the countywide FOIA program, in close partnership with staff in the Department of Information Technology, achieved the Virginia Governor's Technology Award for "IT as Efficiency Driver" for the development and implementation of a centralized application to track FOIA requests countywide. This application enhances monitoring and accountability of FOIA requests.

Pandemic Response and Impact

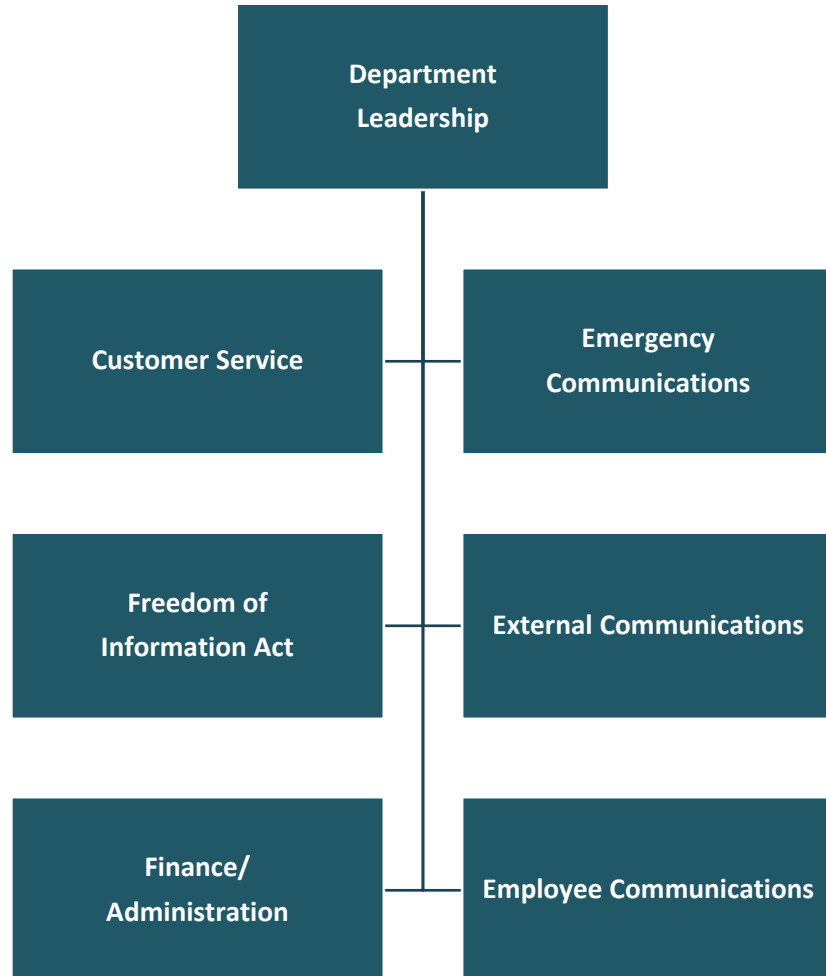
OPA began coordinating COVID-19 communications during the first week of March 2020, and activated its Joint Information Center on March 13. Initially located at the Health Department, with support from other county PIOs, the JIC went virtual in early April. The agency also stood up a dedicated page on the County public web site (www.fairfaxcounty.gov/covid19) in mid-March to provide one central location for COVID-19 related information from the County. The web site includes data; health and safety information; assistance and support for the business community: guidance on donating and volunteering; and a language portal which provides translated documents, video and audio in Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese, Arabic, Urdu, Farsi, American Sign Language and others. Additionally, the County's Emergency Blog has pushed out information to subscribers and others on key components of the County's response. OPA worked with the Office of Emergency Management to create COVID-19 text alert features in both English and Spanish, which allowed users to subscribe for regular text updates. County social channels have been an extremely effective tool for sharing County information about the pandemic. Twitter, Facebook, and NextDoor netted 9,532,846 COVID-related impressions between March 12 and May 13, 2020. OPA has also utilized audio and video extensively, in collaboration with Channel 16, to reach residents and the business community. In addition to leading countywide external communications, OPA has supported the Health Department in all facets of its communications efforts, including a countywide mailing, message coordination and a paid media campaign.

Internally, OPA developed a coronavirus information section for the employees' site on the County intranet, including forms, instructions and other Human Resources information, updates, and guidance on technology (i.e., teleworking), facilities, travel, purchasing and equipment, among other considerations. OPA has also worked with its HR and OEM partners to develop a new employee alert COVID-19 category for text and email updates, facilitated mobile, and non-network access to the County intranet, and collaborated in the development and distribution of executive communications.

The FOIA team is responding to an increase in requests since the start of the pandemic and has assisted the County Attorney's Office and the Office of Clerk Services regarding evolving issues around public meetings as well as Boards, Authorities, and Committees (BACs) in the context of the pandemic. The FOIA Team received and/or coordinated 151 FOIA requests from March 1 to May 1, 2020, a 17 percent increase over the same period in 2019. The customer service team continues to assist members of the public via phone and email. Both teams are working primarily remotely.

OPA anticipates continuing to respond to the extensive public and internal communications, FOIA and customer service needs associated with the pandemic for the foreseeable future.

**Organizational
Chart**



Budget and Staff Resources

Category	FY 2019 Actual	FY 2020 Adopted	FY 2020 Revised	FY 2021 Advertised	FY 2021 Adopted
FUNDING					
Expenditures:					
Personnel Services	\$1,664,861	\$1,882,433	\$1,882,433	\$1,951,195	\$1,882,433
Operating Expenses	172,398	147,501	280,649	147,501	147,501
Subtotal	\$1,837,259	\$2,029,934	\$2,163,082	\$2,098,696	\$2,029,934
Less:					
Recovered Costs	(\$298,011)	(\$239,882)	(\$239,882)	(\$239,882)	(\$239,882)
Total Expenditures	\$1,539,248	\$1,790,052	\$1,923,200	\$1,858,814	\$1,790,052
AUTHORIZED POSITIONS/FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT (FTE)					
Regular	21 / 21	21 / 21	21 / 21	21 / 21	21 / 21

FY 2021 Funding Adjustments

The following funding adjustments from the FY 2020 Adopted Budget Plan are necessary to support the FY 2021 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 12, 2020.

FY 2021 funding remains at the same level as the FY 2020 Adopted Budget Plan.

Changes to FY 2020 Adopted Budget Plan

The following funding adjustments reflect all approved changes in the FY 2020 Revised Budget Plan since passage of the FY 2020 Adopted Budget Plan. Included are all adjustments made as part of the FY 2019 Carryover Review, FY 2020 Third Quarter Review, and all other approved changes through April 30, 2020.

Carryover Adjustments \$133,148
As part of the FY 2019 Carryover Review, the Board of Supervisors approved funding of \$133,148, including \$114,398 in encumbered funding in Operating Expenses and \$18,750 in unencumbered carryover in Operating Expenses to support news and social media monitoring needs.

Position Detail

The FY 2021 Adopted Budget Plan includes the following positions:

OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS – 21 Positions			
1	Director	4	Information Officers III
1	Assistant Director	2	Information Officers II
1	Management Analyst IV	2	Information Officers I
2	Management Analysts II	1	Administrative Assistant V
1	Communications Specialist I	2	Administrative Assistants IV
2	Information Officers IV	1	Administrative Assistant III
1	Public Safety Information Officer IV		

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 recent years led to an overall decline in impressions across all accounts during FY 2018 and FY 2019. This was mainly due to Facebook's changes to algorithms that determine who sees posts, as well as their elimination of bot accounts.

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. The decrease also reflects another mild winter experienced as previous years' severe weather resulted in considerably more posts and reach than in FY 2018 and FY 2019.

The efficiency of Facebook reaches per dedicated FTE increased as OPA redirected resources from Facebook (from 2.5 FTE to 1.5 FTE) 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 91 percent for FY 2019. This increased from the previous year more than expected. OPA anticipates it will be 90 percent in FY 2020 and FY 2021, while Facebook reach is expected at five million for both years.

Indicator	FY 2017 Actual	FY 2018 Actual	FY 2019 Estimate/Actual	FY 2020 Estimate	FY 2021 Estimate
Percent change in Facebook reach (main account)	(6.7%)	(23.1%)	7.0%/ (9.9%)	(0.9%)	0.0%

A complete list of performance measures can be viewed at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/budget/fy-2021-adopted-performance-measures-pm>