LOB #37:

COMMUNICATIONS MANAGEMENT, COORDINATION AND SUPPORT FOR AGENCIES / COUNTYWIDE INITIATIVES

Purpose

The Office of Public Affairs assigns its staff to support County agencies that do not have their own public information officers (PIOs) or communications specialists. OPA communicators support those agencies with media relations, communications strategy, marketing, news releases, publications, events, etc. OPA currently has 11 staff members assigned as communications consultants to the 29 agencies listed below. However, it should be noted that none of these staff is assigned full-time to these duties; they all also contribute to OPA's other Lines of Business (LOBs). There are 5/5.10 FTE positions associated with this LOB.

- Administration for Human Services
- Board of Supervisors
- Cable Communications and Consumer Protection
- Civil Service Commission
- Clerk of the Circuit Court
- Clerk of the General District Court
- Code Compliance
- Community Revitalization and Reinvestment
- County Attorney's Office
- County Executive's Office
- Elections
- Emergency Management
- Facilities Management
- Financial and Program Auditor
- Finance
- Human Resources
- Human Rights and Equity Programs
- Information Technology (including Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act Compliance Manager)
- Internal Audit
- Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court
- Management and Budget
- Planning Commission
- Planning and Zoning
- Prevent and End Homelessness
- Public Safety Communications
- Public Works and Environmental Services
- Purchasing and Supply Management
- Tax Administration
- Vehicle Services

OPA also supports agencies that have their own communications staff to ensure there is a common message across the entire County and to provide strategic guidance on complex issues.

Description

Responsibilities of this LOB include the following:

Communication/Media Support for BOS Meetings and Committee Meetings
The Director of OPA or an OPA staff member is always in attendance at the Board of Supervisors meetings to gather information on County issues in order to respond to questions from residents, the media and County staff. At the conclusion of each Board meeting, the OPA Director writes and distributes an email summarizing the highlights of the meeting. The email is sent to the BOS, the Senior Management Team and lead communicators in the County. That script is also used to record a podcast of the meeting highlights that is distributed to the public. In addition, an OPA staff member is present at Board committee meetings to respond to media inquiries related to the Board agenda and committee issues.

Public Information Officer Support
All public information officers and communications specialists in the County have a dotted-line reporting relationship to the OPA director. With this structure, the OPA director is able to provide guidance and support to County communicators on a day-to-day basis in addition to emergency situations when more than two agencies are involved. The OPA director holds monthly meetings with all County communications staff to ensure PIOs and Communications Specialists can discuss key issues with each other. In addition, agencies that do not have their own communications staff are supported by OPA to provide strategic guidance and handle many day-to-day communications issues.

Communication Seminars/Training
To support the BOS' emphasis on marketing the County, OPA coordinates media relations training, social media training and occasional professional development seminars for County staff. The media relations training provides tips to staff on how to handle interviews with the media, including what rights and responsibilities both the reporter and interviewee have. The social media training provides an overview of emerging technologies that employees need to be aware of, as well as what the County policy is for utilizing this media. All County staff that are responsible for managing a social media platform for their agency must complete this OPA training. Previous seminars have included "A Marketing Toolbox," "Successful Media Relations" and "How to Plan an Event."

Publication, Editing and Design
OPA designs, writes, reviews and edits brochures, newsletters, correspondence and other printed and online materials for individual County agencies and for countywide initiatives. Recent examples include designing logos and assisting with communications for the "Slow Down" and "Shovel Your Snow" campaigns.

Special Events
OPA coordinates ribbon cuttings, groundbreakings, and dedication ceremonies for other agencies, in addition to countywide events such as summits and the inauguration for the Board of Supervisors, the Sheriff, the Clerk of the Court, the Commonwealth's Attorney and the members of the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District. Responsibilities include planning; scheduling; logistics; designing, creating and distributing invitations; designing and creating programs; marketing; coordinating with Board members and other County staff; and other duties as necessary.

Audiovisual Equipment
OPA maintains an inventory of audiovisual equipment (e.g., podiums and microphones) as well as ceremonial supplies to loan to Board members and other agencies.

Photographic Services
OPA coordinates photographic services for a wide variety of events that are posted on the County's website; the Intranet site; the employee newsletter, Team Fairfax Insider; on the County's photo gallery sites, Flickr and Instagram; and distributed to the media.

Benefits

OPA performs a critical role for many external audiences regarding important issues, deadlines and events. This includes serving County residents, the business community, nonprofits, faith communities, media and many other key stakeholders by sharing relevant, timely and actionable information through the following tools:

- County website
- NewsWire
- NewsCenter
- Emergency blog
- Mobile apps
- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Channel 16
- Periscope
- Flickr
- SlideShare
- Surveys
- Podcasts
- Media Outreach
- 703-FAIRFAX Phone and Email
- Ask Fairfax! Online Discussions
- SoundCloud
- Fairfax County Government Radio
- Email Newsletters
- Printed Materials

In FY 2014 and FY 2015, the Office of Public Affairs led and or coordinated external communications for many countywide topics, including public safety issues, the opening of the Dulles Rail Silver Line; development in Tysons, Springfield and Lorton; elections; budget; human service; taxes; a neighborhood anti-speeding initiative; shoveling snow; and more.

OPA ensures that County communicators adhere to the "common message, many voices" philosophy by sharing information in a timely manner with PIOs and communications specialists in all agencies. OPA also supports all agencies, whether or not they have a designated communicator, by providing strategic guidance in the areas of messaging, websites, media guidance, social media policies and training, coordination across agency lines, audio (podcasts and radio) and visual (YouTube) training, and more. Agencies, and the County as a whole, benefit when OPA is at the table for key issues to ensure that all areas of communications are addressed at the beginning of an initiative. Additionally, OPA holds a monthly meeting for lead PIOs to regularly share information.

OPA also plays a key role in the region as its staff either chairs or vice chairs R-ESF (Regional Emergency Support Function) 15, which brings together communicators from many jurisdictions in Northern Virginia, Washington, D.C. and Maryland.

Mandates

This Line of Business is not mandated.

Trends and Challenges

With the appointment of a new director in early 2015, there have been several changes in the past year and a half, including additional emphasis on collaboration across County agencies. OPA now holds editorial meetings three times per week to plan how the County will communicate about key issues and message development. Personnel from other agencies, including the Police Department, Fire and Rescue Department, Health Department and Channel 16, attend these meetings on a regular basis to share news from their areas and to coordinate messages on upcoming topics. Other agencies participate when appropriate.

A recent trend has been increased strategic communications planning with the County's public safety agencies. OPA has partnered with the relevant agencies to provide guidance and assistance on several issues in the recent past.

OPA has also worked closely with a number of County agencies on internal communications issues, including FairfaxNet. When the intranet migrated to SharePoint, OPA and DIT were chiefly responsible for ensuring agency content was migrated correctly. This involved training nearly every agency on the proper procedures and offering guidance on their content. These efforts continue to this day as FairfaxNet evolves and adds additional capabilities.

OPA also maintains the Communications Toolkit which is governed by the Communications Policy, both of which are available for employee review on FairfaxNet. The Communications Toolkit gives employees quick access to County procedures, standards and guidelines about communications. The goal is to ensure that County communications have a cohesive look, feel and message. It contains information about out-of-office email and voicemail standards; business card, letterhead and memo templates; required elements for publications; online and social media policies; photo, audio and video guidelines; resources for communicators; and more. It was renamed from the Communications Strategy and redesigned in 2013 so employees could more easily get information that is relevant to their daily jobs. It is an ongoing to challenge to enforce the contents of the Toolkit, but OPA has increased its efforts to educate staff, including speaking at every New Employee Orientation – Part 1 session.

Resources

Category	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Adopted
LOB #37: Communications Management, Coordination and Support for Agencies / Countywide Initiatives			
FUNDING			
Expenditures:			
Compensation	$410,236	$383,079	$406,363
Operating Expenses	35,387	38,882	33,451
Work Performed for Others	(73,126)	(74,476)	(68,750)
Total Expenditures	$372,497	$347,485	$371,064
General Fund Revenue	$0	$0	$0
Net Cost/(Savings) to General Fund	$372,497	$347,485	$371,064
POSITIONS			
Authorized Positions/Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)			
Positions:			
Regular	6 / 5.4	6 / 5.4	5 / 5.1
Total Positions	6 / 5.4	6 / 5.4	5 / 5.1

Metrics

Metric Indicator	FY 2013 Actual	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Estimate	FY 2017 Estimate
NewsWire Posts	1,762	1,754	1,869	1,800	1,800
Average Monthly Communications Toolkit Users	NA	NA	NA	659	660
Agency satisfaction with services OPA provides	NA	NA	8.74	9.00	9.00
Ask Fairfax Chat questions answered	407	147	255	250	250

The number of NewsWire Posts has remained fairly constant over the past few years, although there was a 6.6 percent increase from FY 2014 to FY 2015, likely due to higher than usual media and community interest in public safety issues such as police use-of-force incidents and an in-custody death investigation, as well as public health issues such as measles and Ebola. With the introduction of NewsCenter at the beginning of FY 2016, which will address some of the topics that previously would have been covered in NewsWire, the Office of Public Affairs (OPA) does not anticipate significant growth in NewsWire. Still, it will remain a valuable means of rapidly disseminating important information to the public and the media. As OPA develops more experience with NewsCenter, additional metrics will be developed to measure the efficacy of that tool.

OPA maintains a Communications Toolkit with countywide standards on FairfaxNet that employees can access to ensure that they are in compliance with County communication policy. Staff from OPA attends each monthly New Employee Orientation – Part 1 session to let new employees know about this valuable source of information. In addition, OPA only recently obtained a report to measure the number of Communications Toolkit users, which is anticipated to remain relatively static over the next few years.

Although a trend analysis on customer satisfaction is difficult to establish because of the lack of survey data from previous years, the results from the FY 2015 OPA survey will establish a baseline for future years. The results show that internal customers (including other agency public information officers, members of the senior management team and employees throughout the County who have utilized the services provided by OPA) are very satisfied with the assistance they have received. Overall, on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being poor and 10 being excellent, the average response on the level of satisfaction with service received was 8.74.

According to the survey, the top five services, and the percentage of people who used them, are:

- Social media (65 percent)
- Support for countywide initiatives (60 percent)
- Employee/internal communications (52 percent)
- Web content (50 percent)
- Media relations (46 percent)

The majority of the people who completed the survey (44 percent) noted that they worked with OPA 1-3 times over the past year, while nearly 30 percent said they partnered with OPA more than 10 times during the year, and another 19 percent fell in the 7-10 times during the year category.

The majority of survey respondents indicated that OPA helped them reach their communications goal, with 86 percent saying that they were satisfied with the outcome and only 7 percent were not. The other 7 percent did not answer that question. OPA plans to administer the survey annually to continue to improve service to agencies.

As another means to connect with the public, OPA has been holding online "Ask Fairfax" chats where interested individuals can ask questions and have them answered in real time by County experts. Examples include wildlife, emergency preparedness and transportation, among a wide range of other topics. The number of chats and the corresponding number of questions answered are a function of the issues generating interest in a chat, which fluctuates considerably from year to year with a high of 407 in FY 2013 to only 147 in FY 2014, but increasing to 255 in FY 2015. OPA will continue to remain responsive to interest from the public and input from agencies on topics of interest for these chats.