

# Office of Public Affairs

## Mission

To lead coordinated communications, customer service, language access and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests from a countywide perspective that connects County 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, transparent, and timely communications to and from employees to maintain an informed and motivated workforce.

## Connection to the Countywide Strategic Plan

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors adopted the first-ever Countywide Strategic Plan on October 5, 2021. The Countywide Strategic Plan serves as a road map to help guide future work, focusing on the 10 Community Outcome Areas that represent the issues of greatest importance to the community, and uses our One Fairfax equity policy to invest in people and places that have limited access to opportunity. On February 20, 2024, the second Annual Report on the work of the strategic plan was released to the public. The report contains point-in-time progress highlights for each of the community outcome areas, plus three data dashboards and data stories that are being replicated across all of the outcome areas, and a number of additional initiatives to embed the elements of the plan within department-level work. The report also includes a Year Three Implementation Model, which will engage hundreds of County subject-matter experts to identify and champion the specific strategies that will move forward to implementation under the guidance of the Board of Supervisors. For more information on the Countywide Strategic Plan, please visit [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/strategicplan](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/strategicplan).



Community Outcome Area	Vision Statement
<b>Effective and Efficient Government</b>	<i>All people trust that their government responsibly manages resources, is responsive to their needs, provides exceptional services and equitably represents them.</i>

## Focus

The Office of Public Affairs (OPA) is the central communications office for the County and provides essential information to the public, elected and appointed officials, County employees, and the media concerning County programs and services. 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 editorial planning, social media, website content, emergency communications, compliance with the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (VFOIA), language access, and customer service.

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: enhancing access to information both internally and externally; improving crisis and emergency communications; publishing content through numerous tools and engaging the public; providing

information proactively to the media; and supporting agencies that do not have their own public information staff, as well as coordinating with those agencies that do have embedded communications staff. Strategies to address these critical issues include increasing collaboration with agencies, enhancing information on the County's intranet and internet websites, 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 website at [www.fairfaxcounty.gov](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov), OPA oversees the use of several social media sites, including Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, Instagram, and Nextdoor, 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.

OPA is also responsible for coordinating countywide compliance with the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, 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: ensuring agency compliance with a countywide FOIA policy, VFOIA, and other state and federal records laws; providing quarterly training on these laws and policies to County employees; ensuring open and collaborative communication with designated agency points of contact; and administering a centralized system to track all FOIA requests.

Finally, OPA oversees the County's language access program to ensure that equitable considerations are given when developing policies, practices, and budget decisions. The program addresses language barriers residents face by providing equal access to County services, programs, benefits, and information to all residents, regardless of their English language proficiency. It also promotes cultural competency, enhances the efficiency of the County's translation process, and strengthens partnerships to meet the needs of the County's multilingual and cultural communities.

### **External Communications**

OPA provides leadership and counsel 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](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov)
- NewsCenter
- Facebook (English and Spanish)
- X
- Instagram
- Nextdoor
- YouTube
- Public Input for Inclusive Community Engagement
- GovDelivery Daily and Weekly Email Newsletters
- Media Relations
- 703-FAIRFAX Phone and Email Customer Service
- County App
- Podcasts, Internet Radio, and SoundCloud
- Printed Materials

## **NewsCenter**

NewsCenter ([www.fairfaxcounty.gov/news](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/news)) serves as the central focal point for publishing news articles. 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.

## **Daily and Weekly Emails**

OPA has traditionally disseminated a daily email featuring a compilation of the day's headlines. However, a notable shift occurred in late FY 2023 when OPA revamped its communication strategy. OPA introduced a more user-friendly and engaging email format, incorporating lead articles, headlines, and related social media content. This revamped daily email is now distributed to a widespread audience, reaching thousands of recipients. In addition to the enhanced daily communication, OPA reinstated the *Weekender* weekly email. This communication channel serves to highlight noteworthy weekend events for the community to participate in. Both the daily and weekly emails have evolved into significant tools for OPA's outreach efforts and will be integral metrics to evaluate OPA's reach and impact in FY 2024 and beyond.

## **Social Media**

OPA continues its social media publishing role leading daily information dissemination on multiple County platforms that reach the community. OPA also leads the entire County social media program, including oversight, approving new accounts, analyzing metrics from all County accounts, setting standards, and working in partnership with more than 80 social media publishers across the County. This role is essential as social media tools constantly evolve and change. A continued area of focus is addressing legal issues related to official social media accounts. The law is generally years behind where society is, so courts are issuing rulings that impact the County in many ways. OPA has worked closely with the Office of the County Attorney to address evolving legal requirements for official social media accounts.

## **County Website**

OPA continues its work to support the County website in many ways, including managing key pages, setting content policy, metrics tracking, accessibility support, usability testing, consultation with agencies, and working with the Department of Information Technology (DIT) to plan the next phases and features of the County's website ([www.fairfaxcounty.gov](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov)).

## **Community Engagement**

OPA has taken on a leadership role for Inclusive Community Engagement in partnership with One Fairfax and the Department of Neighborhood and Community Services. This work will lead to process improvements, standards, coordination and ensuring a more equitable way for the County to engage the community. OPA oversees the County's new online public engagement platform, Public Input, that continues to roll out to other departments.

## **Digital Team**

Within external communications, OPA's digital team continues its focus on the following areas:

- Developing policies and governance for the website, social media, and related digital tools
- Providing strategic and tactical counsel
- Training digital publishers
- Maintaining a suite of metrics
- Enhancing capabilities during emergencies and public health crises

## Customer Service

OPA's customer service team continues to serve County residents in a variety of ways. OPA staff are frequently the first point of contact for residents, whether they are visiting the Government Center in person, calling 703-Fairfax, or emailing the County's primary inbox.

The customer service team often serves as a bridge, linking residents to the appropriate agency to assist them with their needs. The team takes ownership of residents' unique situations and works on their behalf to connect them with the services and programs they need. This includes contacting numerous agencies to find the correct entity to address the resident's questions or concerns.

The customer service team assists the public through the following channels:

- 703-Fairfax (324-7329) Telephone Line
- 703-Fairfax (324-7329) Voice Mailbox
- 703-Fairfax Email Inbox
- Public Affairs Email Inbox
- Customer Service Center located inside the Government Center Building

Additional functions handled by the customer service team include:

- **Homeowners Association (HOA) List** – OPA maintains a list of more than 2,400 Community and Homeowners Associations, which County agencies use to communicate with residents. In addition to County agencies using the HOA list, the general public uses the public affairs email address to request HOA contact information.
- **Public Meetings Calendar** – OPA maintains a list of authors and gives County employees access to post public meetings. OPA then approves the meetings on the County website.
- **Customer Relationship Management (CRM)** – The customer service staff updates and maintains OPA's CRM, which is the primary system that the customer service team uses to look up contact information for County agencies, as well as other state and local agencies to connect the public with the appropriate department or agency to assist them.
- **Equipment Loan Program** – OPA maintains an equipment loan program that provides podiums, sound systems, cameras, and other essential items to agencies for events like groundbreaking and ribbon-cuttings.

The 703-Fairfax Customer Service Center is a hybrid workplace with at least one customer service representative onsite to serve walk-ins and answer calls remotely. The information desk served more than 10,000 visitors in FY 2023, a 27 percent increase over FY 2022.

In FY 2023, the number of calls increased by 12 percent. This increase in calls shows that phone interactions remain an essential communication channel for residents as they allow for urgent matters to be resolved quickly and complex issues to be explained thoroughly. The table below shows the change in volume between FY 2022 and FY 2023 for the different functions managed by the customer service team.

Customer Service Functions	FY 2022	FY 2023	% Change
<b>703-Fairfax Calls</b>	31,485	35,193	12% increase
<b>703-Fairfax Voicemails</b>	5,099	3,131	39% decrease
<b>Information Desk Walk-ups</b>	7,960	10,104	27% increase
<b>703-Fairfax Emails</b>	3,817	3,350	12% decrease
<b>Public Meeting Posts</b>	1,250	1,390	11% increase
<b>Equipment Loan</b>	43	35	19% decrease

### **Employee Communications**

OPA serves as the central hub for countywide internal communications, playing a pivotal role in supporting the unique communication needs of individual agencies, and providing strategic consultation and managing executive communications to employees. The agency is instrumental in helping agencies craft and amplify crucial information for the workforce. OPA also coordinates and implements communications plans and strategies aligned with major County priorities.

OPA actively collaborates with internal communications partners, such as the Department of Human Resources and the Department of Information Technology. This collaborative approach ensures that OPA effectively reaches all County employees with pertinent information regarding programs, services, events, training, benefits and policies.

OPA also supports the County's intranet, FairfaxNet, by managing content development and ensuring effective content management. This includes the creation of tools to assist agencies in their communications efforts and internal tracking and processing. FairfaxNet, with an average of nearly 13,000 unique visits per month, stands as the primary repository for employee information and resources.

NewsLink, the daily email newsletter, is distributed to over 12,000 employees each workday, providing easy access to a wide range of information, covering topics from training to Open Enrollment. OPA also maintains a countywide calendar on FairfaxNet, highlighting key dates and events for employees. Given the shift to virtual environment for many trainings and events, this centralized calendar provides convenient access to online offerings.

Additionally, OPA offers guidance and training on internal communications, including eliminating internal print communications tools and maximizing use of the County intranet. Blogs remain a popular tool, improving efficiency and reach of agency communications.

OPA will continue to implement and coordinate additional products and tools for internal communications, reflecting the attributes of a high-performance 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.

### **Emergency Communications**

As required by the Fairfax County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP), 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 that OPA must continue to recognize and adapt to effectively distribute emergency news and information to various audiences and stakeholders. As such, OPA uses multiple communication tools and channels. These include the emergency information blog, ([www.fairfaxcounty.gov/emergency/blog](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/emergency/blog)); County website; Facebook; X (both County and agency-specific accounts); YouTube; Instagram; Nextdoor; Flickr; SoundCloud; emails, text and pager messages from Fairfax Alerts and the Employee Alert Network (EAN); online Fairfax County Government Radio ([www.fairfaxcounty.gov/radio](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/radio)); podcasts; the emergency information hotline and internal hotline numbers for County employees; video (online and on Channel 16); media interviews; and the County mobile app.

OPA continues its involvement on the County's Exercise Planning Team in planning County tabletop and functional exercises to ensure smooth operations during emergencies. OPA staff also participate in countywide exercises, as well as participating in the exercise simulation cell (Sim Cell) and Emergency Operations Center for larger, multi-agency and department-specific events.

### **Virginia Freedom of Information Act**

OPA provides the public and media access to Fairfax 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, coordinates the County's compliance with VFOIA, and provides strategy and direction to agencies on how to efficiently respond to the growing volume and complexity of FOIA requests.

The goals of the countywide FOIA program are to: 1) coordinate compliance with VFOIA; 2) promote the County's commitment to transparency; 3) improve the efficiency of the FOIA response process; and 4) enhance monitoring and accountability of FOIA requests. In order to achieve these goals, the countywide FOIA program team conducts VFOIA compliance training on public records and public meetings, ensures frequent and meaningful collaboration among all County agencies on improving the FOIA response process, administers the countywide FOIA tracking application and generates annual FOIA reports to measure the impact of FOIA countywide, and provides subject matter expertise to all Fairfax County agencies; Board, Authorities, and Commissions; and Board of Supervisors' offices. In furthering OPA's strategic goals, the following training and FOIA performance metrics demonstrate the County's continued commitment to improving FOIA compliance and the FOIA response process:

#### *FOIA Trainings Offered*

- 25 training events
- 587 attendees

#### *FOIA Requests*

- Total FOIA requests: 17,349
- FOIA requests managed by OPA: 1,114
- Total FOIA fees assessed: \$109,173

Additional performance metrics and data are published annually in the FOIA Annual Report, which is provided to the County Executive and made available to the public and media on the County's website.

### **Fairfax County Language Access Strategy**

Fairfax County's Language Access Program (LAP) ensures that the County embodies social equity, race, immigrant integration, and social justice into policies, practices, programs, and budget decisions to create equitable outcomes. This program is key to ensuring the equitable distribution of communication of benefits, services, and resources to all County residents, regardless of their English proficiency. It also aims to serve the 31 percent of County residents with limited English proficiency (LEP) who identify themselves as speaking English "less than very well."

LAP is centered around the four goals of 1) promoting cultural competency, 2) enhancing the efficiency of the County's translation process, 3) strengthening partnerships to meet the needs of the County's multilingual and cultural communities, and 4) addressing language barriers residents face by providing equal access to County services, programs, benefits, and information to all residents, regardless of their English language proficiency. These goals are supported by oral interpretation, written translation, and other resources. OPA's Language Access Program team includes two in-house translators in Spanish and in Korean. All departments can submit requests for translation in the two languages rather than paying for the service to a vendor.

The County's Language Access Program director and coordinator will work with all agencies to offer interpretation and translation qualification assessments to see whether the bilingual employees qualify to provide the service. The agencies are encouraged to have these employees review the translated documents completed by the language vendors. In addition, employee trainings will be provided periodically with a focus on:

- The importance of providing language access services;
- Policies and procedures related to providing language access services;
- How to effectively and respectfully communicate and interact with LEP individuals;
- Procedures to request and work with an interpreter;
- How to use the language access database to record and capture data and;
- Usage of plain language when writing any content.

### **Multilingual Communications**

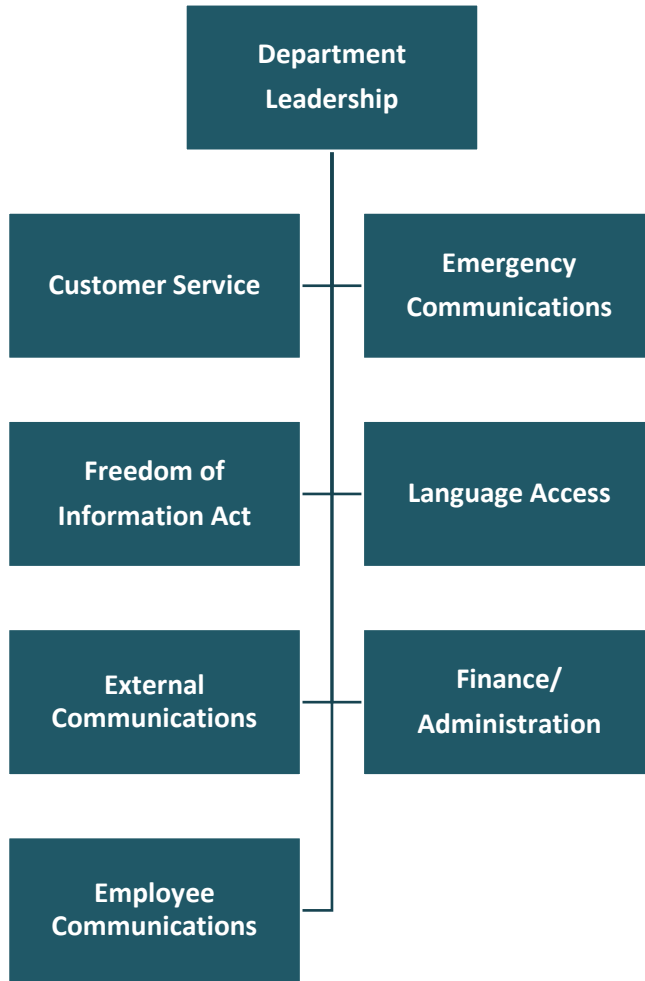
#### **Social media**

OPA created the County's first Spanish language Facebook and X pages in 2020. These pages have quickly become a vital resource for agencies to communicate with the County's growing Spanish-speaking community.

#### **In-Language Media**

The Spanish-language media strategy was established in 2020. Continued coverage by Spanish-language networks such as Univision, Telemundo, and other such media outlets have become a priority for the County.

## Organizational Chart



## Budget and Staff Resources

Category	FY 2023 Actual	FY 2024 Adopted	FY 2024 Revised	FY 2025 Advertised
<b>FUNDING</b>				
<b>Expenditures:</b>				
Personnel Services	\$2,010,973	\$2,889,897	\$2,889,897	\$2,933,363
Operating Expenses	251,698	254,169	320,012	254,169
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$2,262,671</b>	<b>\$3,144,066</b>	<b>\$3,209,909</b>	<b>\$3,187,532</b>
Less:				
Recovered Costs	\$0	(\$239,882)	(\$239,882)	(\$239,882)
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$2,262,671</b>	<b>\$2,904,184</b>	<b>\$2,970,027</b>	<b>\$2,947,650</b>
<b>AUTHORIZED POSITIONS/FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT (FTE)</b>				
Regular	26 / 26	26 / 26	26 / 26	25 / 25



## FY 2025 Funding Adjustments

The following funding adjustments from the FY 2024 Adopted Budget Plan are necessary to support the FY 2025 program:

**Employee Compensation** **\$194,956**  
 An increase of \$194,956 in Personnel Services includes \$57,773 for a 2.00 percent market rate adjustment (MRA) for all employees and \$48,229 for performance-based and longevity increases for non-uniformed merit employees, both effective July 2024. The remaining increase of \$88,954 is included for employee pay increases for specific job classes identified in the County's benchmark class survey of comparator jurisdictions.

**Reductions** **(\$151,490)**  
 A decrease of \$151,490 and 1/1.0 FTE position reflects reductions utilized to balance the FY 2025 budget. The following table provides details on the specific reductions:

Title	Impact	Positions	FTE	Reduction
Eliminate Vacant Information Officer III Position	This reduction eliminates 1/1.0 FTE Information Officer III position that has been vacant for more than three years. Given the length of time this position has been vacant and the OPA's ability to absorb the associated workload across the remaining staff, it is not expected that this reduction will adversely impact agency operations.	1	1.0	\$101,490
Realize Savings Associated with Non-Merit Personnel	This reduction realizes savings of \$50,000 in non-merit personnel budget and is based on the current use of non-merit staff. It is not expected that this reduction will impact agency operations since it aligns budget to actual expenditures.	0	0.0	\$50,000

## Changes to FY 2024 Adopted Budget Plan

The following funding adjustments reflect all approved changes in the FY 2024 Revised Budget Plan since passage of the FY 2024 Adopted Budget Plan. Included are all adjustments made as part of the FY 2023 Carryover Review and all other approved changes through December 31, 2023.

**Carryover Adjustments** **\$65,843**  
 As part of the FY 2023 Carryover Review, the Board of Supervisors approved funding of \$65,843 in encumbered carryover in Operating Expenses.

## Position Detail

The FY 2025 Advertised Budget Plan includes the following positions:

OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS – 25 Positions			
1	Director	1	Public Safety Information Officer IV
1	Deputy Director	3	Information Officers III [-1]
2	Management Analysts IV	2	Information Officers II
5	Management Analysts II	2	Information Officers I
1	Communications Specialist IV	1	Administrative Assistant V
1	Communications Specialist I	2	Administrative Assistants IV
2	Information Officers IV	1	Administrative Assistant III
-	<b>Denotes Abolished Position(s) due to Budget Reductions</b>		

**Performance  
Measurement  
Results by  
Community  
Outcome Area**

**Effective and Efficient Government**

OPA’s platforms for information delivery consistently meet the evolving expectations of the public. From NewsCenter to social media tools such as Facebook, Instagram, and Nextdoor, OPA strives to offer diverse channels for residents to access County information and engage with their local government.

The County’s main Facebook account serves as a key performance indicator to monitor the increasing use of this predominant social media tool by both the public and the media seeking important information about Fairfax County. However, challenges arise due to ongoing changes in Facebook’s algorithm and content delivery to users’ news feeds, impacting the growth of organic reach year over year. To address this, OPA plans to invest more in paid social media to complement organic reach and ensure wider dissemination of critical information.

Despite the challenges, Facebook remains a critical platform for the County’s 20+ accounts to share information. OPA will continue publishing content on the main account and three other Facebook pages it manages (Disabilities, Environment, and Spanish language), while maintaining oversight of all accounts.

Efficiency in Facebook reach per dedicated full time equivalent (FTE) has undergone changes as OPA optimized resources from Facebook, reducing the FTE from 0.75 to 0.50. This change has enabled the staffing of other essential communication tools, enhancing overall operational efficiency.

Community Outcome Area	FY 2021 Actual	FY 2022 Actual	FY 2023 Estimate	FY 2023 Actual	FY 2024 Estimate	FY 2025 Estimate
<b>Effective and Efficient Government</b>						
<b>Effective Technology and Quality Facilities</b>						
Percent change in Facebook reach (main account)	(0.3%)	25.7%	(8.1%)	30.5%	6.7%	4.2%

A complete list of performance measures can be viewed at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/budget/fy-2025-advertised-performance-measures-pm>