

# City of Columbia Communications Department

A Decentralized  
Newsroom  
Approach to  
Strategic  
City Comms



# Presentation Highlights

- Communication department vision and goals
- Newsroom Model approach
- Strategic Communication Plan goals

# Communications Department Vision

Department will function as a strategic hub for Citywide messaging and engagement. It is built around a hybrid model that balances centralized messaging with the operational flexibility that departments need.

Incorporates:

- Creative Services and Marketing staff
- Engagement and Public Communications staff
- Contact Center staff

# Key Takeaways

- This is **NOT** centralized communications – departments will retain communications staff
- The Communications Department will **SUPPORT and COORDINATE** department communications, not control them
- Communications Department staff will ensure **Citywide brand and message consistency**
- This approach prioritizes **Citywide consistency** while ensuring **departments retain their voices and identities**

# Communications Department Goals

- **Enhancing External Communication:** Responding to resident inquiries while also utilizing data to proactively share information on topics of interest to our residents.
- **Media & Public Relations:** Managing the City's public presence, coordinating all media inquiries and proactively pitching stories to local and national media.
- **Crisis & Reputation Management:** Serving as the central point of contact for all public-facing inquiries to ensure timely and accurate information is provided during critical situations.

# Communications Department Goals

- **External Storytelling:** Actively sharing our milestones, successes and impact with the public through media outlets and digital platforms.
- **Streamlined Internal Communications:** Improving the flow of information across departments to reduce "siloed" working.
- **Content Strategy:** Overseeing production of newsletters, social media content, multimedia content packages and the City's overall digital footprint.
- **Brand Alignment:** Ensuring all external and internal materials reflect our core values and visual identity.

# City Newsroom Model

The Newsroom Model will ensure the Communication Department operates like an internal media organization. It blends departmental communications, design assets, social media, web content and the video content into one coordinated storytelling operation.

- Content flows into a single, shared communication system
- Public Information Specialists act as “beat writers” – providing story leads and context while ensuring the department’s voice is retained
- Communication Department supports departments with templates, multimedia assets, branding and marketing, and coordinated messaging

# Strategic Communication Plan

Along with the Newsroom Model, staff have developed a foundational strategic communications plan, which focuses on putting essential structures, standards and practices in place to support clear, consistent and purposeful communication Citywide. It is structured around the following goals:

- Establish Consistent Citywide Messaging
- Communicate the City's Story
- Ensure Crisis Comms Readiness
- Establish Internal Communications Plan

# Goal 1: Consistent Citywide Messaging

Establishment of a Citywide messaging framework will ensure:

- All City communications will be grounded in the Strategic Plan and the City's vision, mission and values
- Communications will also be informed by related initiatives such as the annual Community Survey, Community Summit feedback, the City's Comprehensive Plan and more
- Communication from departments will still reflect their respective unique identities and use departmental messaging bases

# Goal 1: Consistent Citywide Messaging

Working with other City departments, this will also ensure the following:

- Updated Citywide communication policy
- Updated brand and style guide – this time, with feedback from departments and department-specific styles
- Branded templates that departments can use for:
  - Reports, newsletters, flyers, handouts, brochures, etc.
  - Social media and web graphics
  - Short- and long-form videos
  - Press releases, media FAQs, etc.

# Goal 2: Communicate the City's Story

Utilizing the Newsroom Model, the Communication Department will develop:

- A coordinated monthly communications plan with input from all departments
- An annual editorial calendar that will reflect major initiatives, projects, recurring communication topics and more from all City departments
- Multimedia communication packages that support major City and department initiatives

# Goal 3: Ensure Crisis Comms Readiness

Working with City departments, the Communications Department will establish:

- A Citywide crisis communication plan that adheres to best practices while also reflecting the specific needs of departments and the community
- Department crisis communication SOPs that ensure crisis communication messaging and responses are consistent Citywide
- Proactive messaging around major issues and topics that are frequent subjects of misunderstanding and misinformation

# Goal 4: Establish an Internal Communications Plan

Working with City departments, the Communications Department will establish:

- A comprehensive internal communications plan that includes:
  - Standardized internal communication templates (Citywide updates, project highlights, leadership messages)
  - Regular calendar for employee recognitions
  - Survey on employee communication preferences

# Questions?

