



701 East Broadway, Columbia, Missouri 65201

Department Source: City Manager

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: February 16, 2026

Re: Amending Chapter 2 of the City Code to create a Communications Department; amending Chapter 19 of the City Code relating to unclassified service; amending the FY 2026 Annual Budget Appendix – Authorized Full Time Equivalent (FTE) position identification summary; amending the FY 2026 Classification and Pay Plan

Impacted Ward: Citywide

Executive Summary

The City Manager proposes the creation of a Communications Department. The discussion below outlines the purpose and benefit of the restructure. These include enhancing our external communication, streamlined internal communications, and advancing an overall communications strategy for the City of Columbia. Staff recommend amending Chapter 2 and Chapter 19 of the City Code to create the department and reclassify several positions.

Discussion

As we continue to work to improve our connection with our residents, how we tell our story and share information is more vital than ever. To ensure our messaging is consistent, professional, and impactful, the City Manager proposes establishing the Communications Department.

The Communications Department will serve as a central resource to amplify our outreach, empowering the City of Columbia to be more transparent, engaged, and proactive in its public dialogue.

As a strategic hub for public engagement and communications, the Communications Department will also streamline how we listen to and share information with our residents, ensuring our city remains transparent and deeply connected to the community.

The Communications Department is designed to facilitate and enhance the City's connection with the public, fostering a culture of transparency and proactive engagement across all community touchpoints.

With inadequate communications, we can find ourselves at a strategic disadvantage. If we don't tell our story, someone else will. Strong public communication will allow the City to control the narrative regarding its mission, values, and achievements. It should prevent the public or the media from making assumptions based on incomplete or inaccurate information.

Clear public communication demonstrates accountability for the City's actions. Clear and consistent communication is the cornerstone of public trust. By improving how we share

information, we commit to an environment of accountability in which the community can feel confident and secure in the City's operations.

With more efficient communication, you begin to truly earn community buy-in. Through engagement (town halls, Let's Talk Local, etc.), you turn the community from passive observers into active participants.

Primary goals of the department include:

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

Around 2016, in an effort to centralize communications, the City established the Community Relations Department, which coordinated services to connect citizens with the City, including the City Channel, City Source Newsletter, news media relations, meeting services, legislative affairs, public records requests, and the City Contact Center. Prior to its establishment, some of those functions were managed by the Public Communications Office. The office was managed within the City Manager's office but funded through internal service charges.

Around 2021, the Community Relations Department was dissolved, with its functions decentralized and absorbed by other departments.

The new department will adopt a hybrid approach to communications: individual departments will retain their Public Information Specialists, while the Communications Department will manage the City's overall branding and messaging. By establishing a collaborative approach that enables cross-departmental meetings, shared messaging principles, coordinated storytelling practices, internal communication standards, and communication readiness, we will ensure strategic, sustainable communications.

This approach will establish consistent citywide messaging. The messaging will be adopted from the City's Strategic Plan and informed by the community survey, Community Summit,



and other engagement initiatives. This effort will create standardized communication templates (press releases, media advisories, flyers, reports, FAQs, social media posts, etc.) to ensure the City speaks with a unified voice.

It will better communicate the City's story. Messaging will be enhanced through a coordinated communication approach that supports proactive, intentional communications and incorporates input from all departments. This should enable the City to communicate more effectively on major projects, initiatives, and community issues, and to discuss them in a timely, consistent, and strategic manner.

This approach will better prepare the City to respond to emergencies by developing a crisis communication strategy. This included developing a unified plan, conducting simulations, and finalizing standard operating procedures (SOPs) to guide emergency response. To address misinformation, the City will create proactive, preemptive messaging around high-risk topics.

As proposed, the Department will consist of 25 full-time permanent positions and 4 part-time temporary positions, including 1 new full-time permanent position: Communications Director. In the new alignment, three positions will be reassigned downward, three positions will have title changes, and one position will move from unclassified to classified service. Attached are the amendments to the classification and pay plan, the amendment to Sec 2-177 of the City Code creating the Communications Department, and the amendment to Sec 19- 4 revising the definition of unclassified service.

Fiscal Impact

Short-Term Impact: N/A
Long-Term Impact: N/A

Strategic & Comprehensive Plan Impact

Strategic Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Organizational Excellence, Secondary Impact: Not Applicable, Tertiary Impact: Tertiary

Comprehensive Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Primary, Secondary Impact: Secondary, Tertiary Impact: Tertiary

Legislative History

Date	Action
N/A	N/A

Suggested Council Action

Passage of the ordinance.