COUNTY OF MARIN
PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

January 2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The County of Marin's mission is to provide excellent services that support healthy, safe and sustainable communities; preserve Marin's unique environmental heritage; **and encourage meaningful participation in the governance of the County by all**.

Encouraging meaningful participation requires transparency and coordinated, timely and accurate information provided in a way that people want to receive it.

In 2011, the Board of Supervisors asked for a renewed focus on public information efforts to better communicate with the community. This came in response to the financial downturn and the need to effectively communicate change; raised expectations for immediate information and opportunities for input consistent with advances in technology; and a continued desire to better coordinate County government's messages and stories, as well as present a cohesive identity to the public.

This plan serves as a roadmap to help respond to these challenges.

SUMMARY

- The County's approach to public communications is grounded in its mission statement and input from Board of Supervisor members, community partners and staff.

- The vision, mission, strategies and action steps reflect the County's core values, structure and modern methods of communicating, comprising a framework for a public communications program to be implemented over the next one to three years.

- The audience for Marin County government news is anyone who lives, works, recreates in the County. Community members largely received their news about Marin County government through print sources, according to the last community survey (2009). Online sources, however, are likely to surpass this in the future.

Vision
Increase public awareness, community engagement and build trust through the way the County communicates with the public

Mission
Provide timely, accurate, coordinated information in ways the public wants to recieve it

Strategy
1) Build a sustainable framework
2) Expand outreach to the public and media
3) Develop proactive methods

- The County has received fair to poor marks on how it communicates with the public. It uses a variety of methods to communicate to the media and directly to the public. Electronic methods have expanded with increased use of the website and social media, yet there is still a diversity of preferences on how people like to receive information from the County.

- The County has a department-centric system of managing public communication. Increased coordination was initiated last year to maximize resources and efficiency. Improvements include the adoption of an official County logo, creation of the Public Information Team; introduction of the "newsroom" on the web, as well as the development of policies and guidelines.
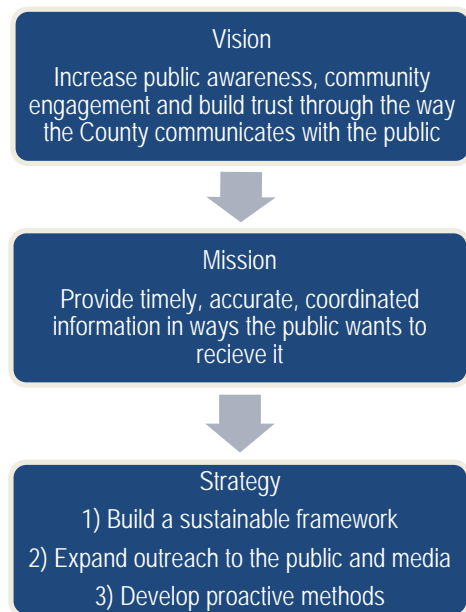
- Public agencies, including Marin County, are investigating the best means of effectively harnessing the power of social media to better serve the community. Marin County government has over a dozen Facebook sites with over 5,000 "likes" in total and five Twitter sites with 2,420 "followers" in total. Over 78,000 Marin residents have Facebook accounts, which is 30% of Marin's population; 30% of those with Facebook accounts are over age 45, and 13% are over the age 50

COUNTY OF MARIN
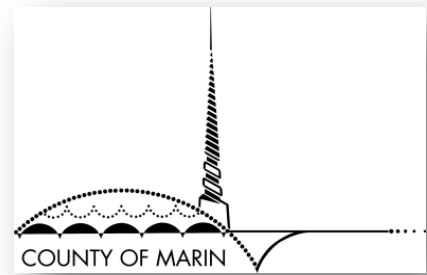
- Kay Productions, hired to perform an assessment of the County's public communications, identified key challenges and recommendations: formalize and centralize coordination for consistency and transparency; deploy a consistent image through use of the County logo and other branding techniques; develop talent within the organization by creating a training program to enhance staff communication skills; develop methods to support specific, targeted communication initiatives around controversial topics; and proactively building community relationships and enhance community partnerships.

- Recommendations were developed into three strategies, with action steps and detailed tasks, resulting in a workplan for the County's communication efforts over the next several years. The actions and tasks are not static and will adapt as circumstances change.

Public Communications Workplan: Strategies and Actions

1) Build a sustainable communications framework	2) Expand the County's reach	3) Develop proactive communication
• Centralize communications coordination and develop policies • Provide ongoing communications training • Coordinate County logo and use for unified portrayal of County government	• Bolster traditional channels • Use new media technologies • Continue website revision and develop strategy for marin.org	• Support and plan for targeted communication projects • Enhance direct communication and partnership with the community

INTRODUCTION

The County of Marin's mission is

> to provide excellent services that support healthy, safe and sustainable communities; preserve Marin's unique environmental heritage; *and encourage meaningful participation in the governance of the County by all*.

To encourage participation requires focus on what, how, where, and when we communicate so we can inform, educate and engage our community members. The need for this focus is more critical now than ever. The financial downturn of the last few years has required local government to seek partnerships and assistance with our community to sustain important services and ensure we continue to thrive, despite the "new normal" economy. Effectively explaining changes in services and engaging community members to help find solutions is critical in this climate.

At the same time, there is growing demand for prompt, coordinated and accurate communications, delivered through more contemporary channels, following advances in technology. The rise of social media and mobile devices has raised public expectations for immediate access to information as well as opportunities for feedback and input.

Finally, there remains the desire, first articulated in the County's 2001 Strategic Plan, to better coordinate our messages and tell our stories, and present a cohesive identity to the public. The recent 2011 Workforce Strategic Plan carries forward this intention of developing a culture that better communicates inside and outside the organization and engages our workforce.

This plan serves as a roadmap to help respond to these challenges.

The plan was formulated over the past year through the efforts of Kay Productions in concert with staff from the County Administrators Office, Information Services Department and input from the Public Information Team. Kay Productions, which serves as the executive producer of the County's G-channel (Government Channel) and consults with the County on public communication endeavors, was commissioned to evaluate the County of Marin's public communication efforts and recommend improvements.

Those recommendations have been translated into broader strategies and specific action steps, many of which were already started or completed, to guide a communications program for the next several years. Continued implementation and fulfillment of this plan hinges on coordinated, sustained focus and support.

The plan is based on contributions and insights from multiple sources, including:
- County Supervisors;
- Department heads;
- Members of the County's Public Information Team;
- Leaders of Marin community partner organizations;
- Peer California county governments with similar characteristics;
- Internal and external communications professionals;
- Existing County studies, including:
    - 2001 County of Marin Strategic Plan
    - 2005 Implementation Steering Committee Strategic Plan
    - 2007 Community Survey

The plan is outlined in the following sections and the appendices:
I.   Overview – Vision, Mission and Strategy for Public Communications
II.   Current Communication Practices – Our Audience, Methods and Organization
III.   Social Media Technology – Application to Marin County
IV.   Key Communications Challenges and Recommendations
V.   Strategies and Action Steps
VI.   Conclusion

Appendix 1: Review of Existing Community News Sources
Appendix 2: Departmental Communications Resources
Appendix 3: Summary of Communication Plan Surveys
Appendix 4: 11-Step Process for Targeted Communications Efforts
Appendix 5: Resources

I. OVERVIEW – VISION, MISSION AND STRATEGIES FOR PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Summary:
Any initiative needs a vision, mission and strategies for its success. The vision and mission for public communications in Marin County are based on the County's mission statement and input from interviews with Board of Supervisor members, community partners and staff. Three primary strategies to guide the County's communication efforts are summarized with action steps. The vision, mission, strategies and action steps reflect the County's core values, County structure and modern methods of communicating. Together, they comprise a framework for the County public communications program to be implemented over the next one to three years.

VISION

The vision for public communications is founded in the County's overall desire to encourage meaningful participation in the governance of the County by all.

The County will increase public awareness, encourage meaningful community engagement and build trust in government though the way it communicates to the public and media.
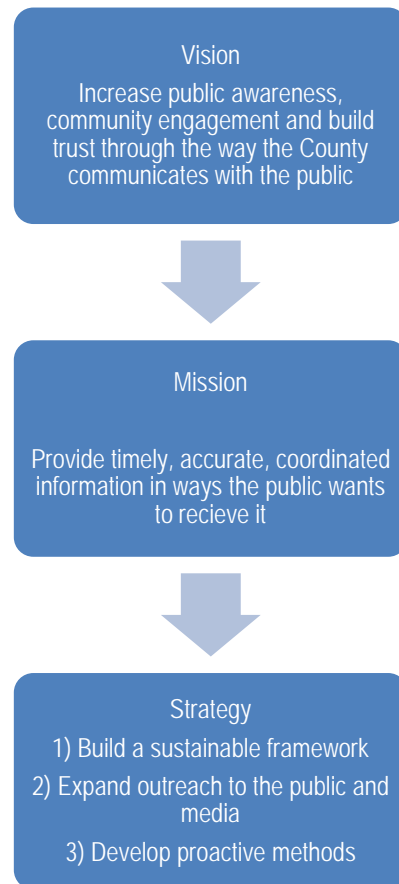
MISSION

The mission, or the path to fulfilling that vision, was developed in response to interviews and surveys of members of the Marin County Board of Supervisors, community partners, department heads and staff involved in communications as well as general information about our audience and public communication trends. It relies on fundamental public information principles and values specific to the Marin County organization

The County will proactively provide timely, accurate, coordinated and relevant public information in the way people want to receive and access information, and in a manner that elevates County staff expertise, promotes County values, and produces high quality communications.

STRATEGY

Strategies, or choices to best accomplish the mission given our resources, and the concomitant action steps, were developed in response to Kay Production's specific recommendations. These strategies respect the County's decentralized operations, diverse needs and fiscal reality:

1) Build a sustainable communications organizational framework;
2) Expand the County's reach to the public and media; and
3) Develop proactive methods of communicating.

Vision
Increase public awareness, community engagement and build trust through the way the County communicates with the public

Mission

Provide timely, accurate, coordinated information in ways the public wants to recieve it

Strategy
1) Build a sustainable framework
2) Expand outreach to the public and media
3) Develop proactive methods

ACTIONS

The specific action steps are shown below for each strategy. More detail is provided in the section "Strategies and Actions."

1) Build a sustainable communications framework	2) Expand the County's reach	3) Develop proactive communication
• Centralize communications coordination and develop policies • Provide ongoing communications training • Coordinate County logo and use for unified portrayal of County government	• Bolster traditional channels • Use new media technologies • Continue website revision and develop strategy for marin.org	• Support and plan for targeted communication projects • Enhance direct communication and partnership with the community

II. CURRENT COMMUNICATION PRACTICES – OUR AUDIENCE, METHODS AND ORGANIZATION

Summary:
The audience for Marin County government news is anyone who lives, works, recreates in the County. The residential population has remained stable but will become older and more Hispanic by 2030. Community members predominately received their news about Marin County government through print sources, according to the last community survey (2009). Online sources, however, are likely to surpass this in the future.

The County has received fair to poor ratings on how it communicates in the past two surveys. The County uses a variety of methods to communicate to the media and directly to the public. Electronic methods have expanded with increased use of the website and social media, yet there is still a diversity of preferences on how people like to receive information from the County, with some individuals still preferring meetings or phone calls to staff people they know.

The County has a decentralized system of managing public communication. Increased coordination was initiated last year to maximize resources and time. Improvements include the adoption of an official County logo, creation of the Public Information Team; introduction of the "newsroom" on the web, as well as the development of policies and guidelines.

WHO IS OUR AUDIENCE AND HOW DO WE COMMUNICATE WITH THEM?

In the broadest sense, our audience for public information is anyone who lives, works or recreates in Marin County. Much of the County's information is generated to inform residents, community organizations, businesses, and other government organizations, or media that serve these groups. This represents a diverse group of people with varying needs and interests in the services of County government.

Marin's demographics have not changed significantly but shifts will occur over next 20 years as the County becomes more Hispanic and elderly

Compared to the rest of California and the San Francisco metropolitan region, the population of Marin County has not grown substantially over time and remains relatively homogenous. Between the 2000 U.S. Census and the 2010 Census, the total population of the County only grew from 247,289 to 252,409, or approximately 2%. Over 70% of the County remains White/Caucasian, although Marin's Hispanic population is expected to grow from its current 18% of the population to over 27% by 2020 [California Department of Finance estimates] and to 38% by 2030 [County of Marin Health and Human Services, 2010

Population by Race/ Ethnicity

— Marin White — Marin Latino — Marin Black — Marin Asian

196,567
181,215
163,149
144,597

101,974
71,141
47,170
27,508

Marin County Data Summary]. While some County communication is already translated into Spanish and other languages, in the coming decades the County may experience a need to do more in this area.
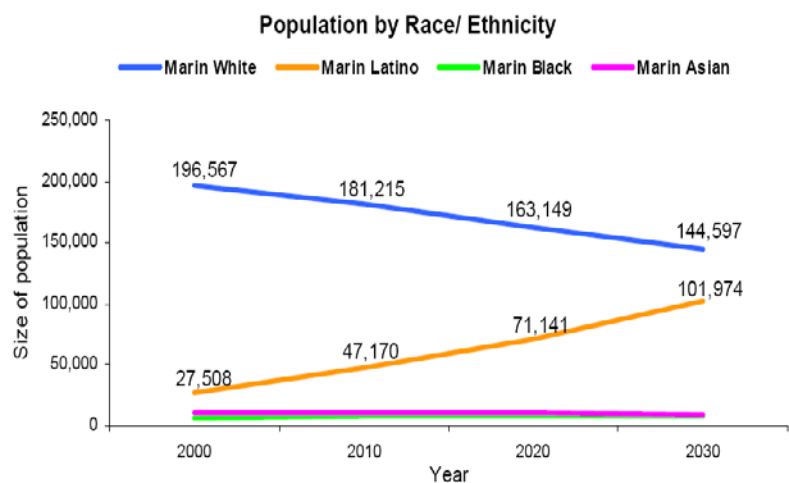
Population Projection Marin County 2030
(2010 Marin County Data Summary, HHS)
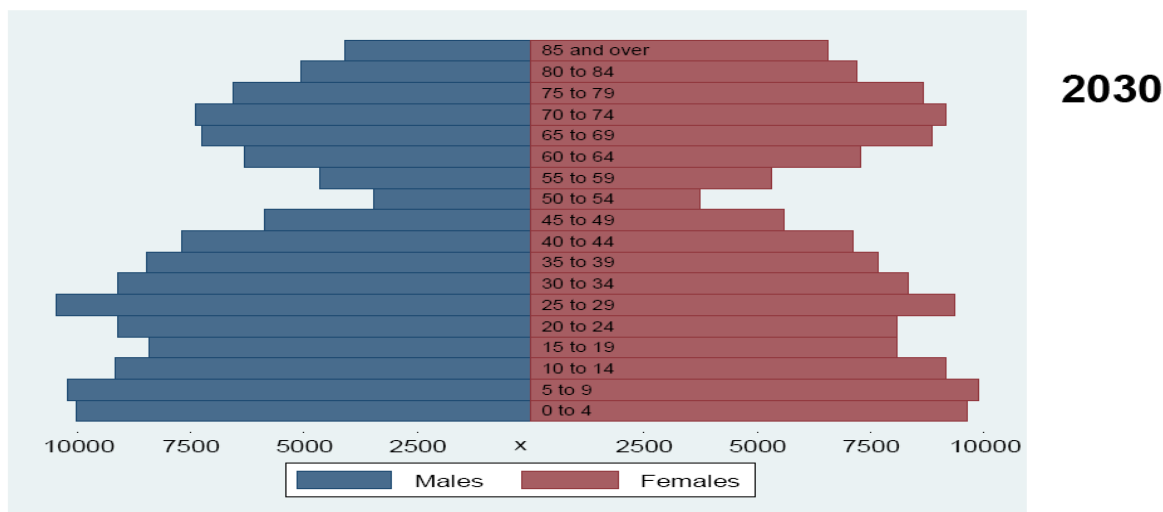
The County also has an older population compared to the rest of California, and that trend will continue. The median age is 44.5 compared to 35.2 in the State, with the population of those over 60 years comprising 24% of the total County population. The County's youth population (under 19) comprises 24% of the total. By 2030, the County is expected to see a greater elderly population as well as a greater youth population [County of Marin Health and Human Services, 2010 Marin County Data Summary]. These changes may also have implications on our methods of communication to the community. Further evaluation will need to be done in the future in concert with departments serving these groups.

The County has fair to poor communication ratings, reflecting challenges in differentiating County versus other government services

The 2009 Marin County Community Survey found that 65% of residents polled thought the County was doing a "Fair" to "Very Poor" job of providing information to them about priorities, programs and services (40% "Fair," 18% "Poor" and 7% "Very Poor"). These results did not substantively change since the 2007 communications survey, which showed 37% "Fair", and 19% "Poor" and 8% "Very Poor".

One challenge in communicating about the County of Marin is that most people do not know what services county government performs. This was reflected in the 2009 Community survey in which 22% of respondents couldn't name a county service they had used in the past year. Other respondents, however, did commonly cite the Library, Parks and Open Space, and County streets and roads as County services they used.

About 27% of the population of Marin lives in unincorporated areas and therefore receive municipal services from the County, as would residents of any city. The largest proportion of unincorporated residents lives in West Marin. The remainder, or 73%, live in one of the 11 cities of the county and also receive services from over 40 independent special districts. Therefore, many members of the public often fail to understand the distinctions between these public agencies and the various services they provide.

Most residents surveyed in 2009 received their County news from the daily, printed newspaper but those numbers are declining

In the 2009 Community Survey, the Marin Independent Journal was the most commonly cited source of residents' information about County government (41%), followed by the County's website (14%). This compares to the 2007 survey, when the Independent Journal was listed by 36% of respondents, followed by local television stations (11%) and the County website (10%). These do represent a shift from 2005 when half of respondents (50%) cited the Independent Journal as their primary source, followed by the San Francisco Chronicle (15%) and then internet and family/friends (12% each). Of the top sources, only the County website has increased from 2005 to 2009. The next survey, due in 2012, will likely show these numbers continuing to shift. The past 2009, survey results are shown below.

Godbe Research   2009 Resident Survey   Marin County

12. From what sources do you get information on County government? [OPEN ENDED. ALLOW FOR MULTIPLE RESPONSES.]

	2009	2007	2005
Marin Independent Journal (the IJ)	41%	36%	50%
Local TV station, please specify	8%	11%	14%
County website	14%	10%	11%
Internet	9%	9%	12%
Family/friends	3%	6%	12%
San Francisco Chronicle	9%	6%	16%
News Pointer	5%	6%	4%
County Supervisor's newsletters	3%	6%	NA
Local radio station	3%	4%	6%
Neighbors (word-of-mouth)	6%	4%	5%
The Pacific Sun	6%	4%	5%
Coastal Post	2%	2%	2%
Community Report	1%	2%	NA
Novato Advance	3%	2%	3%
Mill Valley Herald	2%	2%	2%
Community meetings	3%	1%	4%
Ross Valley Reporter	0%	1%	1%
Marin Scope	1%	1%	1%
County Board of Supervisors meetings	1%	1%	2%
Twin Cities Times	1%	1%	1%
G-Channel broadcasts (County video on demand)	1%	1%	NA
Santa Rosa Press Democrat	0%	0%	1%
San Anselmo Observer	0%	0%	0%
None of the above	6%	6%	5%
Other	27%	23%	24%
Don't Know/No Answer	3%	5%	4%

Major Sources of County Government Information

(percentage of respondents) 2009, 2007, 2005
Marin County Community Surveys

Legend:
- 2009 (green)
- 2007 (red)
- 2005 (blue)
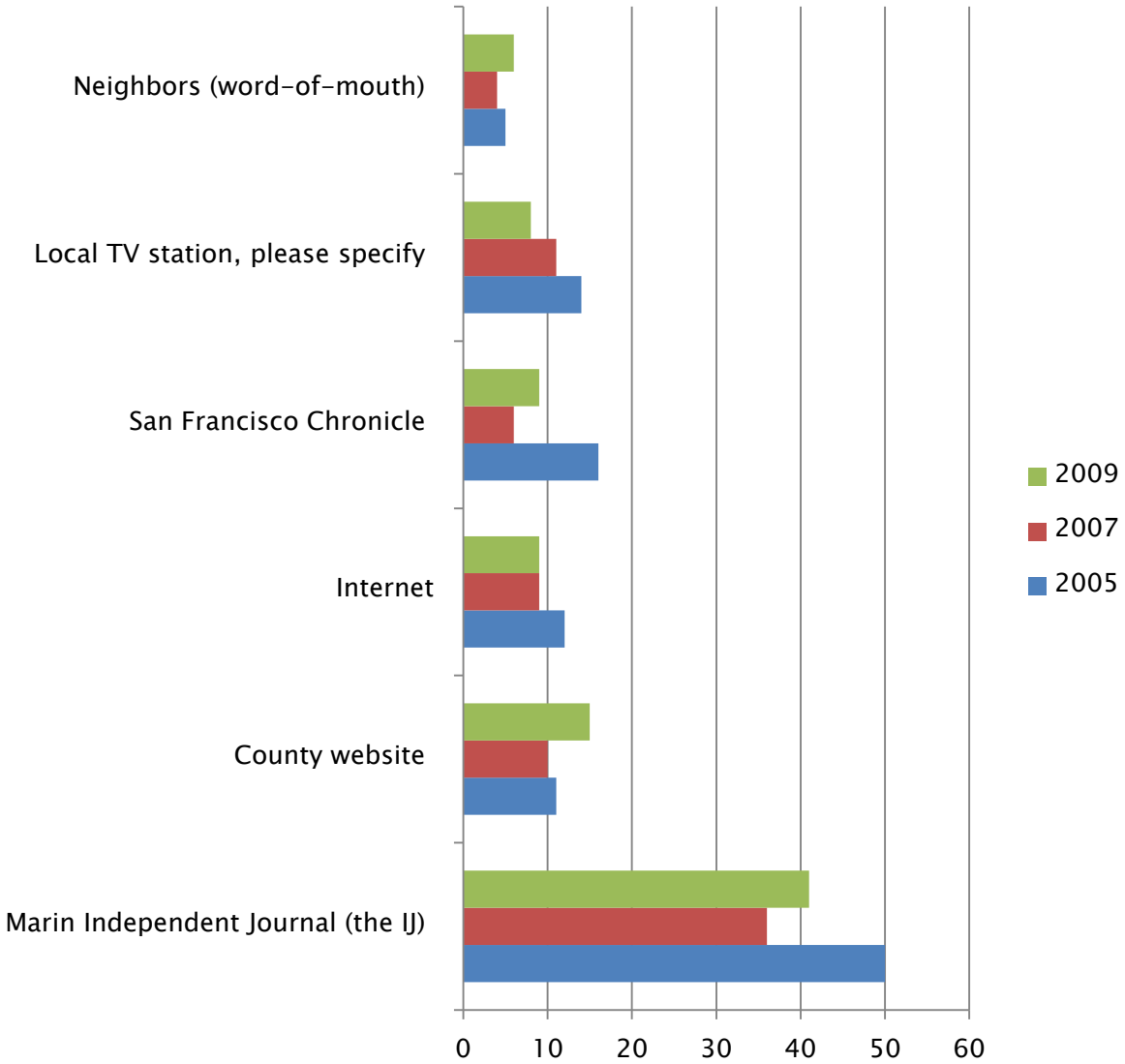
Community organizations rely on close contacts as well as emails, online sources and news releases

Kay Productions conducted informal surveys and interviews to gather input from community leaders on how the County communicates and to recommend improvement. Fourteen leaders of community organizations were identified and eight participated. The majority said they primarily get their information about the County through close contacts with County staff or liaisons or Board of Supervisors. Over half cited emails, press releases and the Cyber agenda and Board letters as other ways they receive information. A majority said they communicate to the County by first calling staff people they know.

Some community groups primarily get their information about the County through close contacts and County staff, liaisons or Board of Supervisors

All cited online sources as the way they and their members access information in general and as the direction their organization is moving. Improvements recommended included: face-to-face updates by the County to their organization; others said a regularly published online County newsletter or "Patch-like" online site would be useful; still others recommended an improved County website.

A shift to online sources for news has, is and will continue to occur

In 2011, informal surveys were conducted of the Board of Supervisors, department heads, community leaders and staff involved in communications. Responses from every group reflected a shift to online information sources. This shift is consistent with the Pew Research Center's *State of the News Media 2011, which* states: "...when it comes to the platform of choice, the web is gaining ground rapidly while other sectors are losing. When it came to any kind of news, 46% of people now say they get news online at least three times a week, surpassing newspapers (40%) for the first time."

Although few other newspapers were identified, there are a variety of news publications serving Marin County residents. A list of news sources (print and online) serving Marin County is listed in Appendix 1. Almost all print newspapers in Marin now have some online presence.

COUNTY'S CURRENT COMMUNICATION METHODS

The County communicates though the media and directly to the public through a range of methods

The County regularly issues to the media:

- news releases
- advisories, warnings, and alerts
- editorials or letters to the editor
- video public service announcement (to online media)

In 2011, the County issued greater than 70 news releases, exclusive of the Sheriff's Department, which issued approximately 64 releases last year (Only since January 2011 have all department press releases been coordinated and posted to the "newsroom" section of the website. Previous to this, releases were issued independently by departments but were not centrally tracked or posted online).

The County directly communicates with residents and community members through a variety of methods, including:

The County website: In 2011, the County's homepage was visited approximately 180,000 times by users, and 2,252,733 times when including all County-maintained webpages. When including all *page views* that were a part of each visit, the County received over 24 million views last year. How this compares to other organization's webpages will be evaluated in the coming year with the newly redesigned homepage, launched January 1, 2012. The County website also regularly adds news items on its homepage and in early 2011 started a "newsroom" link with all posted news releases. It also provides information about department programs and events.

Community website - marin.org: Starting in 1995 the County began a community-based website at www.marin.org, which was created to give Marin-based organizations and businesses the opportunity to tell the online community about their services and events. It has become a wealth of information for Marin residents and for viewers interested in all that our county offers. The site receives over 1 million page views monthly and there are 3,606 member listings. These numbers continue to climb.

Video - G-channel and YouTube: The County broadcasts ("webcasts") over the County's website all business meetings of the Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, Marin Transit, and Transportation Authority of Marin. These are available through the County's "G-Channel" (government channel) which is linked to the County's YouTube channel. The G-Channel also features County-produced public service announcements. In 2011, the G-channel was visited approximately 17,000 times by users. Since January 2008, the Marin G-Channel has had 63,984 views from all the videos that are uploaded on YouTube.

Public Broadcast Channel: The County contracts, through the Marin Telecommunications Agency, for public access television through the Marin Community Media Center (MCMC) for channels 26, 27, and 30, as well as Novato Public Access TV. The channels cablecast programming 24/7 to approximately 70,000 Marin County residents. The webcast meetings described above are played on the public access station as well as some of the County's public service announcements. MCMC and Novato Public Access is responsible for all programming.

Facebook: Facebook, although not a news source per se, is becoming a growing part of media strategy and communications. The County and its departments have nine Facebook pages listing events and news. In Marin County, there are approximately 78,000 individuals or entities with Facebook accounts. Moreover, over 259 Facebook members have "liked" the official Marin County Facebook page as of November 2011. These 259 Facebook members (aka "fans") are connected to over 85,000 Facebook members. Of the 259 Facebook fans, about 1 in 3 resides in Marin and over 60% are female. From August 19, 2011 to November 19, 2011, County staff

posted 23 entries (8 per month) that reached on average 85 unique users within the first 28 days of posting. More information is contained in the Social Media section of this Plan.
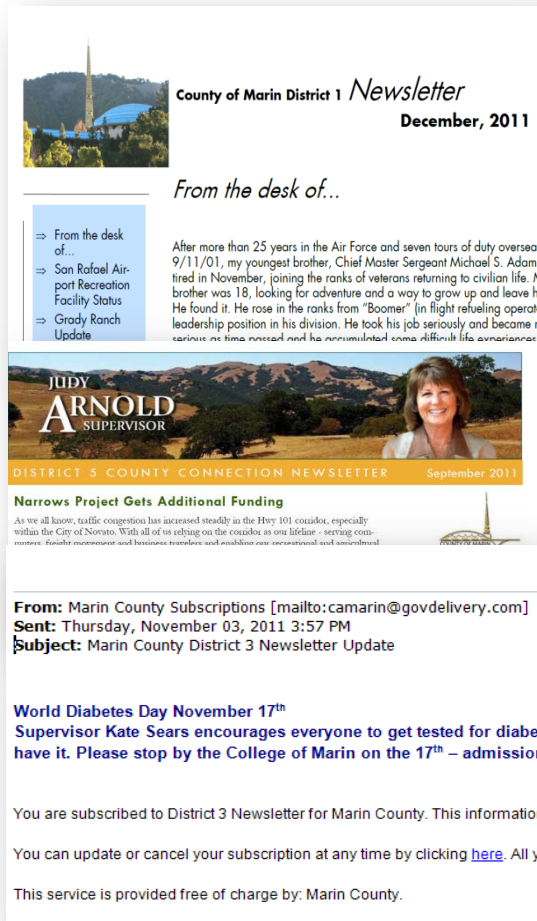
Twitter: Twitter is another social media platform with increasing usage. The County and its departments have 5 Twitter pages used for official County business. As of November 2011, the official Marin County Twitter page has 1,025 Twitter followers/subscribers. (Source: Twitter, November 28, 2011)

Newsletters and emails: Departments and several members of the Board of Supervisors regularly distribute newsletters. Some Board members also maintain email distribution lists and social media sites through which they broadcast updates and events applicable to their constituents.

Email broadcasts: The County encourages the public to sign up for email news or events on topics of interest to them. Departments send information to those distribution lists, as well as other lists they might have, on updates, events or information about particular topics or programs. In 2011, over 250,000 updates were distributed through this service.

Direct public information also includes one-to-one interactions with County that occur through the course of providing services to the community, including: telephone calls, over-the-counter services, group and individual meetings, working with constituents, etc.

COUNTY'S COMMUNICATION ORGANIZATION

The County has a decentralized system for generating content and is beginning to better coordinate distribution

Currently departments largely produce and distribute their own public information independent of one another. Electronic distribution – through a website or social media – is done by departments sometimes in concert with the Information Systems and Technology (IST) department. An attempt for a more centralized process occurred with the creation of a Public Information Officer (PIO), per the recommendations of the 2001 Strategic Plan. However, this position was eliminated in 2005 due to budgetary constraints. Currently, departments have varying levels of capacity and need for producing and distributing public information. While all departments have their own websites, some of which are hosted outside of the County's IST department, some also have their own unique websites for targeted programs or services. (A complete listing of these websites can be found in Appendix 2). Some departments have

staff who regularly attend to communication needs for their department while others do not.

In 2011, in tandem with Kay Production's recommendations for improvements, several initiatives began to better coordinate information production and distribution:

Coordinating news releases via the "Newsroom" on the web – Until this year, news releases to the media were not tracked and housed in one place; departments sent them out individually, on their own unique letterhead, and did not store them in a central location. A "newsroom" feature was added to the County homepage this year which lists all County news releases to the media. Training was also given to County staff on how to do a press release on a standard template.


Public Information Team – Greater coordination has also begun through the creation of the Public Information Team (PIT). To ensure consistency of message, share resources and knowledge, and more effectively plan for, produce and distribute information, PIT began in January 2011.

Led by the County Administrator's Office, PIT is an inter-departmental team comprised of staff from all departments and all levels of the County organization who have responsibility for public information. The group meets monthly to provide useful, "hands-on" information, materials and presentations. Meetings typically include a brief presentation of the communications projects produced that month and a communications presentation, training session or discussion. When appropriate, guest speakers, trainers or outside experts attend. In order to provide additional expertise and training resources in these efforts, the County retained the services of Kay Productions.

Editorial Calendar – An editorial calendar was created to forecast and track department needs, but primarily video production (public service announcements). This tool has been used to plan and coordinate resources among departments and will be expanded.

Working groups and ad hoc committees – A social media working group was formed to help develop a social media policy and provide input on further social media initiatives. An adhoc committee of department heads also was created to review applications of the County logo (see below).
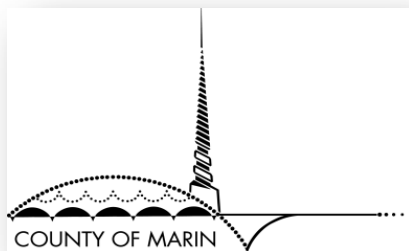
Various department identities ("brands") exist and efforts are underway to unify them under a primary, unified County identity Departments with more "public facing" services and missions have created unique brands and graphic identities to distinguish their services and identities, as in the table shown below. These logos are helpful for the public to identify a particular service but do not always clarify that these entities are part of the County family, and for most, serving under one elected body, the Board of Supervisors.

This past fall, the County adopted a common logo (shown at left) that had previously been in use by approximately half the departments as its official logo. The logo is a hand drawing produced by the firm of Aaron Green, the renowned San Francisco architect who was an associate of Frank Lloyd Wright and who completed the construction documents for the Civic Center after Wright's death.

The intent of adopting the logo, which had been in use by the County as its unofficial moniker for over 50 years, is to provide a common and unifying identifier to the public yet still allow departments to express their distinction in a coordinated way. As a start, department stationery was revised this fall for a coordinated and unified look, with the County logo as primary. The logo's official adoption and use may assist in removing confusion about what services are provided by the County of Marin.

Current Department Logos

Emergency response communication is provided by the Sheriff's Office

Emergency communication is a critical component of any communication organization. Emergency communication is unique and often handled in a public safety department. The Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services (OES) provides emergency management services for the County, including its eleven cities and towns and over 300 special districts. OES coordinates emergency operations activities among all the various local jurisdictions and develops written guidelines for emergency preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation to natural or man-made disasters, and technological disasters. During an activation period, the OES calls upon County staff from various departments in order to fill designated roles. One such role is the Lead Public Information Officer (PIO), who coordinates public information activities throughout the County Operational Area, ensuring that the media and residents are fully informed on all aspects of the particular emergency. The Lead PIO also supervises the Gathering, Writing, Production, and Analysis Group (GWPA), which may include several Deputy PIOs.

Marin's communication organization is not unique compared to other counties

Five comparable counties were also surveyed by County staff to understand how they organize their communication efforts. Two of the five have a Public Information Officer with the remainder allocating PIO duties to other staff or relying upon a decentralized system (each department handles their own communication). Four of the five said traditional press releases were the primary means of external communications. Aside from staff costs for a PIO, if there is one, most counties reported having no communications budget or allocating funds on a per project basis.

Suggested improvements from County Board and staff

As part of the interviews and surveys conducted for this study among department heads, Board members and/or their aides, 24 interviews were conducted by Kay Productions. In general, there was enthusiasm for a unified communications approach, and a desire to centrally coordinate communication resources so they could be efficiently shared across departments. There was also interest expressed in expanding outreach through contemporary media options including online applications and social media. A desire was also expressed for the creation of guidelines for effective public service announcements and media communications that promote transparency while being realistic

regarding staffing resources. In addition, there was strong interest expressed for the ongoing department website improvements to move forward expeditiously.

As part of this study, members of the Public Information Team were also surveyed. They saw the coordination value highest in providing communication training to enhance skills in working with the media (e.g. being interviewed, creating stories and public service announcements, using social media, etc) as well as sharing strategies, knowledge and information on working with the media and the value of public engagement. (Please see Appendix 3 for complete survey information.)

III. SOCIAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGY –IT'S APPLICATION TO MARIN COUNTY

Summary:
Social media has created a new electronic forum through which people can interact socially. Public agencies, including Marin County, are investigating the best means of effectively harnessing the power of this new technology to better serve their community. Use of social media is becoming ubiquitous with every demographic adapting to its use, although it is still more prevalent among younger residents. The County has over a dozen Facebook sites with over 5,000 "likes" in total and five Twitter sites with 2,420 "followers" in total. Over 78,000 Marin residents have Facebook accounts, which is 30% of Marin's population; 30% of those with Facebook accounts are over age 45, and 13% are over the age 50

Social Media is a new way of community building through interaction

According to Merriam-Webster, social media refers to various "forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content". Using web 2.0 terminology, social media websites not only give users information, but also facilitate two-way interaction with users while providing that information. This interaction can be as simple as a website asking a user for comments, or it can become increasingly complex, as shown by websites that make recommendations for new products or services based upon the ratings of other people with similar interests. In short, social media has created a new electronic forum through which people can interact socially. Not surprisingly, many public agencies, including Marin County, are investigating the best means of effectively harnessing the power of this new technology to inform and serve community members.

To date, the following departments have launched their own Facebook and Twitter pages:

Department	Social Media Sites	Likes or Followers
Marin County	Maringov	259
	Maringov	1,025
Community Development Agency	MarinLCP (Marin Local Coastal Plan)	121
Cultural and Visitor Services	Marin Center	817
	Marin County Fair	1,906

	marinfair	149
Department of Public Works	Marin County Dept of Public Works	75
District Attorney	Marin County District Attorney	49
Farm Advisor	Marin Gardeners – Marin County	272
Fire	Marin County Fire Department	127
	marincountyfire	540
Marin County Free Library	Marin County Free Library	70
	marinlibrary	239
Marin County Parks	Marin County Parks	187
	marinparks	467
Sheriff-Coroner	Marin County Search and Rescue	991
Individual Accounts	Some department staff and Board members have individual accounts that advertise County news and events	

Source: Facebook and Twitter, November 28, 2011

The County Administrator's Office, Human Resources staff and the Office of County Counsel are also in the process of drafting a County of Marin social media policy to guide staff on how these social media tools can be appropriately used for County business.

Facebook has wide appeal in Marin County and not just among the young

Although some might speculate that social media (such as Facebook) are only being used by younger residents, Facebook's analytics data reveals surprising insights:

- There are presently over 78,000 users with Facebook pages listing their place of residence as Marin County (or nearly 30% of the County's population). This is over double the circulation of the largest local newspaper in Marin, which has a circulation of 30,000.
- Out of all Marin's Facebook users, the largest age demographic is between the ages of 36 and 45.
- Users over the age of 50 make up 13% of all of Marin's user base. This equates to 9,040 people.
- There are 18% more female Facebook users in Marin than male

- There are 2,000 Marin Facebook users whose primary language is Spanish
- Travel is the activity area with the greatest interest listed, followed in order by outdoor fitness, cooking, and food & dining.

A County social media strategy is being developed given its growing use

Given the growing importance of this method, staff has been developing a social media strategy to enhance our communication efforts and better coordinate among departments. Some of the components of that strategy include:

- Design Marin County Facebook and Twitter sites to be visually appealing and consistent with the County's identity
- Ensure a consistent look or identity marker among all department social media sites
- Develop ways to inform and promote programs, services, projects and issues to the public
- Write inviting posts and allow the public to interact with us and share our content with others
- Explore and utilize monitoring tools to track performance and other relevant data
- Provide County employees training on social media policy including tools, usage and procedure
- Create an interactive calendar with search functions for County meetings and community events
- Create a centralized repository listing existing and emerging social media tool and applications
- Utilize the Social Media Taskforce comprised of department social media coordinators to obtain input on technical, administrative and policy issues

As social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and others become ever more ubiquitous, it is clear that residents of virtually every demographic are adapting to this new method of receiving and sharing information. These factors therefore highlight the need for Marin County government to continue to expand the ways by which it can harness the benefits of these cutting-edge tools.

Data for "Maringov" (*name of Marin County's Facebook page*)

People Who Like Your Page (Demographics and Location)   See Likes

Gender and Age?

	13-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Female 63%	0.77%	1.9%	8.5%	17%	18%	17%
Male 33%		1.2%	3.5%	8.1%	12%	9.2%
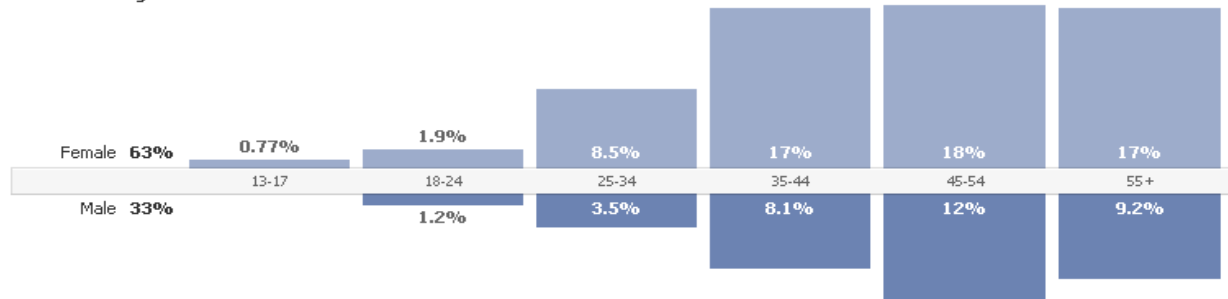
Countries?

250	United States of America
1	Philippines
1	Thailand
1	Panama
1	Mexico
1	Costa Rica
1	Italy
1	Nigeria

Cities?

64	San Rafael
27	San Francisco
19	Novato
13	Seattle
11	Santa Rosa

Languages?

249	English (US)
7	English (UK)
1	Spanish

COUNTY OF MARIN

Age Distribution of Facebook Users in Marin County
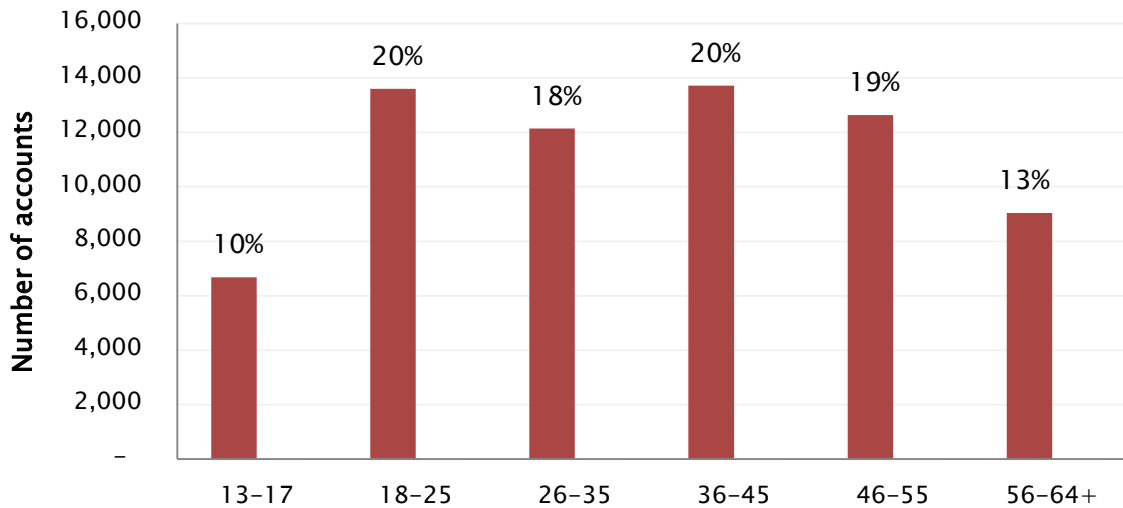
Facebook Accounts in Marin County by Community (as of Nov 2011)

Community	Registered users over 13 years of age	Community	Registered users over 13 years of age
Belvedere	300	Nicasio	140
Bolinas	420	Novato	20,440
Corte Madera	2,220	Olema	less than 20
Dillon Beach	160	Point Reyes Station	460
Fairfax	2,540	Ross	480
Forest Knolls	140	San Anselmo	3,760
Inverness	240	San Geronimo	160
Kentfield	980	San Quentin	240
Lagunitas	140	San Rafael	28,420
Larkspur	1,720	Sausalito	3,120
Marin City	560	Stinson Beach	240
Marshall	80	Tiburon	2,160
Mill Valley	8,580	Tomales	120
		Woodacre	280
		Total	78,100

IV. KEY COMMUNICATIONS CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary:
Kay Productions identified key challenges and recommendations for the County to consider as it formulates a more coordinate communications program. The primary recommendations involve three general areas:

- *formalize and centralize coordination for consistency and transparency and deploy a consistent image through use of the County logo and other branding techniques*
- *develop talent within the organization by creating a training program to enhance staff communication skills. As part of this training, a first priority is using social media and other "new technologies', as this will be critical to proactively position the County to communicate now and in the future*
- *develop methods to support specific, targeted communication initiatives around controversial topics and proactively building community relationships and enhance community partnerships*

As part of the development of this document, Kay Productions conducted surveys and interviews with a wide array of stakeholders, leading to the identification of seven key communication challenges and recommendations to address these challenges. These recommendations are the foundation of the strategies goals and action steps described in Section 4.

Centralize coordination

Challenge 1: Lack of administrative processes to prioritize projects, provide consistent messaging across departments, and track results.
The County's department-centric management model presents some inherent hurdles for both internal and external communications. As a result, County communications efforts and messages as a whole to the public can at times be spotty, and often lack the power and visibility possible with a coordinated effort. In addition, the benefits of efficiency in planning, production and distribution of communications resources and content can be lost.

Recommendation: Coordinate communication efforts among departments
Providing focused and more centralized coordination will support departments in identifying their communication needs; improve the efficiency of communications resources across the organization; maximize ongoing training opportunities for County staff, and result in the production of consistent, quality communications to the public.

Develop communication policies for social media, media producers, PIT charter brand use guidelines

Challenge 2: The County lacks policy and procedural clarity around the use of social media and other emerging technologies, resulting in a lack of consistency across departments.
The County's lack of codified procedures has lead to inconsistent and at times arbitrary application of procedures and usage of new technologies. Several policies, including a charter and guidelines, are recommended to support the successful implementation and department-wide adoption of these initiatives:

Recommendation: Provide County Communications Policies
These should include formalized:
1) Communications Policy;
2) Social Media Policy;
3) External Digital Media Producers Policy;
4) Public Information Team Charter; and
5) Guidelines and Instructions for Use of the County Brand

Challenge 3: Insufficient tools, resources and training to enable all departments to maximize efficiencies and reach the largest possible audience with consistent messages and quality content

Provide communications training for staff ongoing

The level of communications expertise among County staff varies widely, including familiarity with and use of communication resources and tools. County public communications will benefit from coordinated training and experience, inter-departmental cooperation, and leveraged campaigns.

Recommendation: Provide ongoing communications training

All departments should gain the skills required to initiate and produce consistently professional, quality communications. In written, video, online, live or social media formats, County communications should be of consistently high quality, and presented by trained department staff or identified experts, with centrally coordinated distribution.

Use latest tools to expand communication channels like online sources and social media

Challenge 4: Lack of consistent use or institutional knowledge in the area of new media technologies

Technological advances are rapidly changing the way people communicate with one another. In particular, social media and other electronic forums are rapidly replacing traditional print or in-person forums. Nevertheless, the County has not yet fully embraced these new technologies.

Recommendation: The County should proactively position itself to communicate with the Marin community using the latest available tools

As a means of achieving this objective, it is recommended that County communications channels be updated and expanded through a coordinated shift from traditional, printed communication outlets to online sources, including social media. When feasible, content should also be made available in multiple languages.

Coordinate use of County logo and standards

Challenge 5: Inconsistent usage of letterheads, styles, and logos across County departments

Since the adoption of the 2001 Strategic Plan, the County has recognized the need for a consistent graphic identifier to increase the community's awareness of its services, and to recognize that the County's 22 departments with varied services and lines of business are all part of one collective organization under the Board of Supervisors. The adoption in late 2011 of the Aaron Green logo and specified graphic elements therefore represented an important step in this direction. Nevertheless, more work needs to be done in order to ensure consistent usage of the logo and graphic elements across all departments.

Recommendation: Centrally coordinate County logo and ensure consist use and adherence to standards

With the adoption of the County logo, a style guide should be developed, distributed and adhered to with some degree of discipline to ensure consistency and maintenance of the symbol as the County's brand. Expansion of the logo and clear guidelines as to its use with department logos should be developed.

Develop internal "communication teams" for targeted efforts

Challenge 6: The County has experienced difficulty communicating its story and effectively utilizing media and responding to contentious issues or projects of long-term duration or scope

In order to diffuse acrimony and garner public confidence in the County's capacity to resolve controversial projects or issues, a more targeted approach to public communications is recommended. Examples of controversial projects or issues include County pension liabilities, efforts to comply with state affordable housing mandates; stream and creek protection in West Marin; and various other land use proposals.

Recommendation: Support sustained and targeted communications efforts by identifying and training internal "communication teams"

The County should develop an approach and provide the resources required for targeted communications efforts, including a disciplined team approach and staff members trained in managing communications processes over time. In every format, including online blogs and postings, live interviews, press releases and public meetings, the County should strive to remain transparent and accessible throughout the duration of the project or issue.

Build community partnerships and participation through traditional and new methods of engagement

Challenge 7: Difficulty positively communicating with the community on controversial and divisive community issues

At times, the County can appear defensive or bureaucratic when trying to educate and inform the public about its actions involving controversial community issues. While many staff are well versed at communicating at community meetings or public gatherings, there are varying degrees of comfort and openness to working with the public and answering questions among other staff, and there is no guidance on successful practices or methods.

Recommendation: Proactively build community relations and partnerships by purposely engaging community members and organizations through traditional and new methods and testing new forms of participation Traditional methods could be such things as regular in-person updates to community groups and inclusion of County news in their newsletters; newer methods could include online tools that seek public comment or ranking of policy ideas and new formats for public meetings and forums that invite engagement and public decision making. As these methods are explored and put into practice, they should be documented so others in the organization can learn and apply these tools.

V. STRATEGIES, ACTIONS AND TASKS: A COMMUNICATIONS WORKPLAN

Summary:
The recommendations from the prior section were developed into three main strategies and several action steps and further detailed tasks. This becomes the workplan for the County's communication efforts over the next several years.

The challenges and recommendations in the previous section have been incorporated into three broad goals with specific action steps to be implemented over the next 1-3 years. As this plan has been in progress for the last year, many of these actions have already begun.

1) Build a sustainable communications framework	2) Expand the County's reach	3) Develop proactive communication
• Centralize communications coordination and develop policies • Provide ongoing communications training • Coordinate County logo and use for unified portrayal of County government	• Bolster traditional channels • Use new media technologies • Continue website revision and develop strategy for marin.org	• Support and plan for targeted communication projects • Enhance direct communication and partnership with the community

1. Build a sustainable communications framework

Many of the challenges point to the absence of a centralized communications program or identifiable organization to be responsible for and assist in public information efforts. Coordination has begun with the creation of PIT and the adoption of a countywide logo. While coordination can be enhanced and some work centralized to maximize resources, the generation and production of public information should still occur within departments, by those most closely involved with particular programs or projects.

1.A   Centralize communications coordination and develop communication policies

Tasks	Who's Responsible	Timing
1) Coordinate key communications functions by maintaining and supporting a permanent work group - the Public Information Team (PIT) - led by the County Administrator (CAO) and supported by communications experts. Each department shall designate a PIT Crew representative.	CAO/Departments	In progress
2) Maintain a single County Communications Editorial Calendar to	CAO	In progress

	efficiently & equitably share resources across departments, coordinate major news stories and events throughout the year.		
3)	Centralize distribution of department press releases and announcements to County Website through the CAO;	CAO	In progress
4)	Department distribution lists will be shared and centrally accessible.	Departments	FY 2011-12
5)	Develop Communications Policies to provide consistency and transparency, such as:		
	• Centralized Communications Policy;	CAO	FY 2012-13
	• External Digital Media Producer Policy (including guidance on use when existing resources are booked);	CAO	FY 2011-12
	• Checklist/Guidelines for video production	CAO	In progress
	• Social Media Policy	CAO	In progress
	• and PIT Charter.	CAO	FY 2012-13
6)	Create a single repository for Department Newsletters and Publications	Departments	FY 2012-13
7)	Maintain an internal site for employees to easily access communications resources.	CAO	Completed
8)	Maintain a public site – "County Newsroom" where the public can access the latest County news and press releases	CAO	Completed
9)	Retain consultant(s) or staff to assist in expanded communications efforts	CAO	FY 2011-12

1.B Provide ongoing communications training

Tasks		Who's Responsible	Timing
1)	Provide social media training for varying levels of understanding and skill, tied to County's social media policy	CAO	FY 2011-12
2)	Use PIT as way to regularly provide ongoing communications support, training and a forum for efficiently sharing expertise and solutions. Utilize the collective knowledge, skills and abilities of the Public Information Team (PIT) to improve County communications internally and with the public.	CAO	In progress

3)	Provide training tools to assist with the creation of high quality communication products, such as:	CAO	
	• Press release templates		Completed
	• Tips for working with the media		Completed
	• Interviewing skills		Completed
	• Writing Q&As		FY 2012-13
	• Newsletters		FY 2012-13
	• Tips for Effective PowerPoints		FY 2012-13
4)	Design an annual communications training program for PIT and other department communicators with an established budget. To reduce costs, evaluate in-house staff to do the training	CAO	FY 2011-12
5)	Investigate training to enhance personal communication skills. Such training could include effective storytelling for leadership; one on one evaluations and coaching on presentation skills, etc ,	CAO	FY 2012-13

1.C Coordinate County logo and branding style for unified portrayal of County government

Tasks	Who's Responsible	Timing
1) Provide centralized access to digital logo images and stylebook and templates of common types of communications, e.g. press releases and letterheads that incorporate the logo	CAO	Completed
2) Ensure adoption by all departments under the authority of the Board of Supervisors of new letterhead	Departments	FY 2011-12
3) Centrally coordinate a launch of the brand, with the launch of the website, new "marincounty.org" and unified phone number -473 prefix	CAO/IST	Completed

2. Expand the County's Reach

A clear direction is to enhance the County's distribution of information – print and video - through traditional as well as new technologies, such as social media. Traditional channels include direct distribution of material, such as sending information via email. One improvement would be internally shared County distribution lists (if not prohibited by the recipient). Another is indirect distribution, such as through association with organizations and groups by being included in their websites, calendars and newsletters, as well as local media, online journalists and bloggers. New methods include social media. The County is also updating its website for greater searchability, better organization of information, and more online services. It will also integrate social media into the website.

2.A Update and expand traditional channels of communication to expand the base of recipients to whom communications are directed

Tasks	Who's Responsible	Timing
1) Identify and reach out to community organizations, other government organizations, and non profits with websites, newsletters or calendars as a venue for County news or important information	CAO/ Departments	FY 2012-13
2) Explore developing a countywide newsletter for biweekly or monthly publication (either in print or online)	CAO	FY 2012-13
3) Explore cross promotion of the different County-sponsored sites and communication venues – Public Access television, website, social media sites, printed publications	CAO	FY 2012-13
4) Investigate demand for multi-lingual versions of printed, video and audio content or identify when appropriate,	CAO	FY 2012-13
5) Expand communication of Board of Supervisor actions and policy in conjunction with Board meetings or events	CAO	FY 2011-12
6) Investigate willingness and policies around targeted paid advertising or marketing	CAO	FY 2012-13

2.B Use and maximize "new technologies" such as social media

Tasks	Who's Responsible	Timing
1) Train staff in social media technologies linked to new social media policy (see Goal 1B- Training)	CAO	FY 2011-12
2) Develop a Facebook strategy, such as updating the main County page to provide a consolidated approach, so one site is primary for all information about the County	CAO	FY 2011-12
3) Investigate a County blog with same or rotating authors	CAO	FY 2012-13
4) Employ tools to assess online discussion and comment about the County in social media networks and in print	CAO	FY2013-14
5) Hire or dedicate existing staff to be charged with centrally managing the County's social media accounts, ensure relevant information is posted and comments responded to as necessary, as well as being the central maintainer of web content for the County homepage when the new website is released	CAO	FY 2011-12

2.C Continue website redesign

Information Systems and Technology department has been working on a revised website for the County homepage and department pages that will provide more intuitive ways to access information and perform online services.

Tasks	Who's Responsible	Timing
1) Complete homepage web redesign, with greater searchability, more intuitive organization of information and more online options. Launch date is January 1, 2012.	IST	Completed
2) Develop style guide for web authors to ensure consistent content	CAO/IST	FY 2011-12
3) Complete department webpage redesign, with same enhanced features as homepage using new content management system to allow departments to more easily update their own pages	IST	FY 2012-14
4) Evaluate next steps and options for marin.org	IST	FY 2012-13
5) Create a library for better access to, search storage of videos on the web	IST	FY 2012-13

3. Develop proactive communication and public engagement

To assist the County in effectively communicating with the public and media on controversial or divisive issues, the following actions are proposed to provide tools to support proactive communication. Development of "communication teams" around issues and a step-by-step process or methodology can better equip staff to respond to emerging community issues or controversial media topics. Exploring traditional and newer methods of community engagement are also proposed to support meaningful public participation and development of positive relationships with our community members.

3.A Support and plan for targeted communication initiatives

Tasks	Who's Responsible	Timing
1) Develop and train staff on the 11- step process to support communication initiatives around specific issues through the "development communication teams." See Appendix 4 for process	CAO	FY 2011-12
2) Expand the base of trained county staff available to successfully address the media and the public in multiple formats and maintain a regularly updated list of department staff trained and willing to handle	CAO	FY 2012-13

Tasks		Who's Responsible	Timing
	short-term, high profile communications		
3)	Develop questionnaires or checklists to help staff quickly develop key messages; identify a core group of staff or experts ready to assist in crafting messages	CAO	FY 2012-13
4)	Develop systems to quickly respond to feedback from the public in a manner demonstrating that the County is paying attention and willing to adopt good ideas, or adopt new policies when necessary	Departments	FY 2012-13

3.B Enhance direct communication and partnerships with the community

Tasks		Who's Responsible	Timing
1)	Develop a speakers bureau to give regular updates of County issues or initiatives to community organizations, other governmental agencies or resident associations	CAO	FY 2013-14
2)	Explore new methods of enabling the public to communicate and provide feedback to the County, including **311** systems or a centralized call center	CAO	FY 2013-14
3)	Explore new methods and models of community engagement, such as interactive forums, online issue tools that allow comment and ranking of issues	CAO	FY 2011-13
4)	Explore regular district video reports	CAO	FY 2012-13

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The County of Marin has not historically maintained a formal communications program and arguably has not needed one. Residents and other community members have long received information about the County from traditional sources, and with the advent of the internet, many now also receive information from online sources. Marin County is also very rooted in community relationships. Given its relatively small size and pattern of slow growth, many residents have long tenure in the county, and those interested in government affairs have developed relationships with their elected representative or their aides, as well as other County staff. Departments with a need for public information and community relations have succeeded in the existing system, with their own online presence, printed material, newsletters, community meetings, one-on-one discussions, or daily customer service.

Yet our world is quickly changing. Rapid advancements in information technology have dramatically expanded the amount of information that can be transmitted electronically. More recently, social media is fast becoming the "normal", if not primary, form of communication for many people. Furthermore, these realities have not only changed the tools people use to communicate, but also their expectations for communication. For instance, more people now rely upon peer reviews found online rather than experts, and they expect to have input and feedback opportunities because technology has made it relatively easy to do so.

In this context, public agencies are reducing resources, with fewer staff and services. Expenses for communications or public information positions seem extraneous in this environment. At the same time, the "silver tsunami", or wave of retirements is on the near horizon. For Marin County government, it is anticipated that 1 in 4 staff will likely retire (not just be eligible to retire) in the next five years. Who will replace them, and will they have the long tenure and trust of their residents, non-profits, and businesses that were built over a career? Are those in the world of public service best equipped to communicate with those they serve without those years of familiarity and trust, and institutional knowledge behind them?

 The conflict created by these changes - greater expectations for information, meaningful communication, and opportunity for input, and yet reduced resources for services - opens the door for community frustration and disengagement. The goals and action steps provided here are therefore intended to do just the opposite. In other words, ensuring transparency and meaningful community participation in the governance of this County requires accurate, reliable, timely and coordinated delivery of public information. This plan's goals are not static and will adapt as circumstances change. Most are operational changes that don't require additional funding. Others do. Fortunately, there may be economies of scale that can be realized by centralizing functions and associated costs as recommended.

In the end, the success of the County's public information program will also rely on measuring the outcomes of the program. The next community survey, likely in 2012, will do just that by gauging changes in perceptions about the County and how people get their news about County government. Continued monitoring of online information, social media sites, and associated analytics will also provide feedback for our efforts. According to an old adage, virtually all problems are communication problems. As a result, we must continuously strive to build trust in government through our communications with our community.

News Sources in Marin County

Name of Publication	Frequency of Distribution	Print	Electronic	Approximate Circulation
Marin Independent Journal	Daily	30,041 (Sunday) 27,027 (daily)		
Ark	Weekly	6,000		
Coastal Post	In suspension			
Echo Times (College of Marin)	Monthly			
Marin Scope (includes six community newspapers, including Novato Advance, San Rafael News Pointer, Twin Cities Times, Ross Valley Reporter, Mill Valley Herald, and the Sausalito Scope)	See below	See below		
Mill Valley Herald	Weekly	5,600		
News Pointer	Weekly	5,400		
Novato Advance	Weekly	7,400		
Pacific Sun	Weekly	22,000		
Point Reyes Light	Weekly	2,100		
San Rafael Newspointer	Weekly	5,200		
Ross Valley Reporter	Weekly	5,900		
Sausalito Scope	Weekly	1,100		
Twin Cities Times	Weekly	7,500		
West Marin Citizen	Weekly	1,200		
The Patch	Daily		N/A	

Radio:
KWMR provides local news for communities throughout West Marin. The station presently has approximately 800 active dues paying members, and estimates that they reach approximately 10,000 listeners.

APPENDIX 2: DEPARTMENTAL COMMUNICATIONS RESOURCES

In addition to the primary departmental websites, many departments also maintain a suite of other discretely-titled webpages for specialized projects or programs, including:

Library:
www.marinlibrary.org
www.onebookonemarin.org

Cultural and Visitor Services
www.marincenter.org
www.marinfair.org
www.mcera.org

Farm Advisor:
www.GrownInMarin.org
www.marinMG.org (Marin Master Gardeners – maintained by the County Farm Advisor)
www.suddenoakdeath.org

DPW
www.maringreenguide.org (esources for environmentally sound products and practices)
marin.onerain.com/home.php (Real-Time Rainfall, Creek Stage, and Weather Data)
www.mcstoppp.org(Marin County Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program)
www.marinwatersheds.org/rossvalleywatershed-org/index.html
www.walkbikemarin.org
www.MarinRecycles.org
www.marintransit.org

CDA
rbra.ca.gov/ (Richardson's Bay Regional Agency)
www.marinhousinghelp.org
www.marinlcp.org (The Local Coastal Program)
www.future-marin.org (The updated Marin Countywide Plan)
www.marinsustainability.org
www.marinsolar.org
www.maringreenbuilding.org
www.maringreenbusiness.org
www.marinenergywatch.org
www.marinhousingworkbook.com/

APPENDIX 3: COMMUNICATION PLAN SURVEYS

The *2009 Marin County Community Survey* found that 65 percent of residents polled thought the County was doing a "Fair" to "Very Poor" job of providing information to them about priorities, programs and services (40% "Fair," 18% "Poor" and 7% "Very Poor"). These results did not substantively change since the 2007 communications survey.

To understand current County communication successes, challenges and needs, informal surveys were conducted of four groups:

- Marin County Board of Supervisors and County department heads
- The Public Information Team (PIT) – 2 surveys
- Marin County community leadership
- A sample of California county governments

The questions in each survey were developed to provide an accessible method for efficiently gathering information and feedback. The surveys indicate a notable change in the way people access news and information in general. The public will also be surveyed as part of the new County website in FY 2011-12.

In 2009, the Marin Independent Journal was the most mentioned source of residents' information about County government. In 2011, Communication Plan survey responses in every group reflected a shift to online information sources. This shift is consistent with the Pew Research Center's *State of the News Media 2011* that states:

"…when it comes to the platform of choice, the web is gaining ground rapidly while other sectors are losing. When it came to any kind of news, 46% of people now say they get news online at least three times a week, surpassing newspapers (40%) for the first time."

A summarization of the results from the three groups surveyed follow.

Summary: Marin County Staff Survey

The Marin County Internal Survey focused on County staff and surveyed current communications perceptions, challenges and suggestions. The staff survey objectives were to:

- Understand current staff knowledge and perceptions of communication
- Understand current staff views of the importance of both internal and external communications
- Define the scope of work, i.e. the nature and volume of what is actually produced annually by staff, and what they would like to produce if provided sufficient resources
- Understand and assess staff needs, including current projects and communications training that could immediately be addressed
- Assess whether current County communications methods should change or expand to reflect changes in public access and use of information

This survey was conducted either in person or by written questionnaire. All departments and members of the Board of Supervisors who wished to participate were interviewed. A total of 24 interviews were conducted. Many interviews included input from multiple participants in a single session, i.e. Supervisors and their Aides; department heads and staff; and the initial meeting of the Public Information Team (PIT) – with approximately 35 members attending.

Though it is clear that some departments have more need than others for communications resources, trends emerged that are consistent across a majority of departments. These include:

- Enthusiasm for a unified communications approach
- Interest in both communications and media training
- Acknowledgement of the benefits of an Annual Editorial Calendar to enable the County to plan and produce seasonal and event-driven topics, and to spread finite communication resources across departments over the year
- Interest in the creation of a digital media library suitable for department uses in print, online and live communications
- Enthusiasm for expanding our reach and audience via contemporary media options including online "apps" and social media forums
- Interest in department-appropriate, targeted distribution lists
- Desire for templates and guidelines that outline required/useful information for effective public service announcements (PSA) and media communications
- Desire for an approach that informs, promotes transparency, provides access, yet is also realistic of staffing limitations
- Avid desire that the ongoing implementation of department-specific websites move forward expeditiously

Summary: Marin County Public Information Team Surveys (2)

The first PIT survey was conducted within the first four months of the first meeting. This survey specifically focused on areas of communications training member would find useful, and provided the following list of desirable communications topics:

Tactical strategies for working with the media

- How to build working relationships with media personnel
- How to identify bona fide bloggers/media outlets
- Strategies for media damage control
- Reps from Press - forum to meet reps; hear their perspective/needs
- Marketing and Outreach
- What tools are available
- Strategies to make County stories stand out
- Strategies to reach a broader demographic
- Producing videos and podcasts
- How to use social media
- PPT to video; RSS feeds access
- Targeted distribution lists
- Streamlining the media release process
- Disseminating County services offered

How To:

- Interview/Be Interviewed - on camera training
- Deal with an adversarial group
- What to say and what not to say
- Run a press conference

- Organize public meetings and forums
- Live "There is no question we can't answer."
- Reach out to employees and engage them
- Understanding the role of OES; Joint Information Center

The second PIT survey was conducted online in July of 2011, and focused on surveying for member satisfaction with the content and process of the work group. The results included these points:

- Most respondents cited training in communications skills – media, interview, PSA creation, public communications, social media – as the top gain for them from their participation in PIT, with meeting counterparts in other departments also important
- Other lessons or information they felt would benefit County colleagues included hearing success stories from other departments and learning more about how communications work within the County; Creativity and innovation are possible without high costs; The value of public outreach
- Slightly more than half of the respondents felt they had the authority to make decisions on public communications or respond to the media
- PIT members also provided additional good suggestions that are being considered, and in the case of a preference for MINE over SharePoint as the primary site for PIT online info, the transfer and reorganization on MINE is already in process

Summary: Marin County Community Leadership Survey

The Marin County Community Leadership Survey focused on the leaders of organizations that represent coalitions of Marin County nonprofits and for-profit groups. To encourage participation, the respondents were asked four questions that surveyed current perceptions, experiences, and suggestions for communications between the County and the organizations. The Community Leadership Survey objectives were to:

- Provide an efficient, informal process to seek input from the leadership of community organizations and associations that work with the County
- Define ways the County can better communicate with community partners and the public
- Assess whether current County communications methods should change or expand to reflect changes in public access and use of information

Fourteen leaders of community organizations were originally identified to provide a sample of opinion. Two individuals headed multiple organizations consolidating the survey number to twelve. Eight participated(*) Each interviewee was at a Director or Board President level within the organization. This survey was conducted by phone.

- The majority of respondents said they primarily get information about Marin County government through their close contacts with County staff including liaisons, department staff and members of the Board of Supervisors
- Five cited emails, press releases, Cyber Agenda and Supervisors' letters; one sited the IJ online
- The majority said they communicate information to the County or ask county-related questions by first calling County staff members they know
- Seven said the County website would benefit from greater clarity and flow of information
- Respondent suggestions for ways the County can improve its communication efforts with partner organizations:
    - Four said a face-to-face update by the County to their organization at least annually would be ideal and very desirable
    - Five said a regularly published online County newsletter or Patch-like site would be the second choice and very useful
    - One suggested using mandated juror attendance as an opportunity to provide County information to residents
    - One suggested greater access to Public Records online and fees payable via an online service such as Pay Pal
- All cited online sources as the way they and their members access information including online – newsletters, list serves, phone apps, Google searches
- All cited online distribution as the direction their organization is moving for ease of access, environmental, and cost reasons

*Participants: Marin Canal Alliance; West Marin Chamber of Commerce; Environmental Education Council of Marin; Marin City Community Services District; Marin Visitors Bureau; Marin Center for Volunteers and Non-Profit Leadership; Marin Link; Marin Builders' Exchange

Summary: Comparable County Governments Survey

The Comparable County Governments Survey focused on five California county governments that share similar characteristics with the County of Marin. Information about their current communications processes was requested for comparison of services, costs and potential options that could be applied to County communications. This was an oral survey coordinated by the County Administrator's Office. CAO staff also conducted follow-up calls. The five counties who responded were:

- San Mateo
- Napa
- San Luis Obispo
- Santa Cruz
- Sonoma

The summarized results are:

- Two counties currently have a working PIO
- One county eliminated the PIO position in the last year and shifted those duties to a Government Affairs Manager (GAM); The GAM position is slated for elimination in FY 2011-12.
- Approximate stated salary range for the two counties with PIOs was $77K-105K; The GAM salary was estimated to be "equivalent to a Deputy County Administrator"
- One county handled communications independently by individual departments
- Two others handled communications through non-PIO staff
- Four counties reported that traditional "press releases are the primary form of external communications."
- One county reported a desire to transition from press releases as their primary form of communication
- All five counties reported that few, if any, PSA/videos are created
- One county never uses outside vendors; Four counties use them infrequently
- One county estimated that they had a $300,000 annual communications budget, inclusive of the GAM salary; Three counties reported they have no communications budget; One county reports "$10K if formally budgeted annually with additional funds allocated on a per project basis.
- Social media networks; One county reported a single Twitter account – mostly used for disaster purposes. No Facebook presence; One county reported that while some departments have pages, there is presently no County-wide Facebook or Twitter page; Three counties reported they were in varying, early stages of drafting and applying social media policies; No specific funds budgeted for social media were reported
- Three counties use local public access at a wide range of costs and services ranging from $3K-15K annually. One of these counties eliminated a $40K supplement to their local public access station in 2011.
- One county reported that their PIO's primary duty is to coordinate external communications in a centralized manner and lend assistance to departments as needed.

APPENDIX 4: 11 STEP PROCESS FOR TARGETED COMMUNICATIONS EFFORTS

Time allocated to targeted communications and outreach efforts is often undermined by shifting demands and limited staffing resources. Acknowledgement of the value of targeted communications efforts is essential to success, and consistency over time yields the best results. Three recommended staff roles are defined in Step 2 below.

The eleven steps that follow provide a suggested process appropriate to targeted communications efforts. Steps 1-5 provide the foundation for a communications initiative over time. The order of the remaining steps may vary by project.

Step 1: Proactively identify and prioritize projects or issues for which targeted communications efforts are needed. Centralized communications coordination through the County Administrator's Office (CAO) will support ongoing evaluation of issues or projects and identification of those requiring a focused communications plan.

Step 2: Once a project or issue has been identified, a Communications team should be formed with team members fulfilling the following roles:

- A subject matter expert – a trained County staff member associated with and knowledgeable about the project or issue.
- A communications leader for the department – the designated primary contact for internal as well as any external communications experts.
- A content developer – supports the communications leader by providing assistance in writing, distribution and outreach.

Depending upon the size or scope of the project or issue, one staff member may have the ability to fulfill multiple roles. The team may also draw on external communications expertise where feasible.

Step 3: The Communications team begins to develop the sustained communications plan by answering the following questions:

- Who is the target audience?
- What are the essential messages to share?
- How are the messages delivered?

Step 4: Based on the projected arc and any specific events tied to the project or issue, the team develops a Communication timeline and key milestones.

Step 5: The team makes an initial evaluation of the project to determine the most appropriate distribution channels suitable for the campaign. These channels could include hardcopy, online content, live interviews, and small-group stakeholder or large public meetings. Over time, the team should reevaluate the project or issue in order to make necessary updates or adjustments.

Step 6: The team develops distribution lists of both relevant media and community groups or organizations that can help disseminate project or issue-related information and message points.

Step 7: The team develops accurate, accessible content for outreach materials in hardcopy and online formats – including flyers, press kits and releases, brochures, FAQ sheets, PSA videos and multimedia content related to the project or issue.

Step 8: The team schedules and coordinates any live interviews and public meetings. At minimum, this coordination should include:

- Time, Date, Location
- What media will likely attend?
- Who will the County invite to attend?
- What is the format e.g. live interview, single presenter, panel discussion?
- How will questions be asked?
- Who is presenting on behalf of the County?
- What are the questions that are likely be asked?
- Development of the answers to these questions
- Coordination of rehearsal(s) for the event
- Support materials at the event
- Required equipment and facility logistics
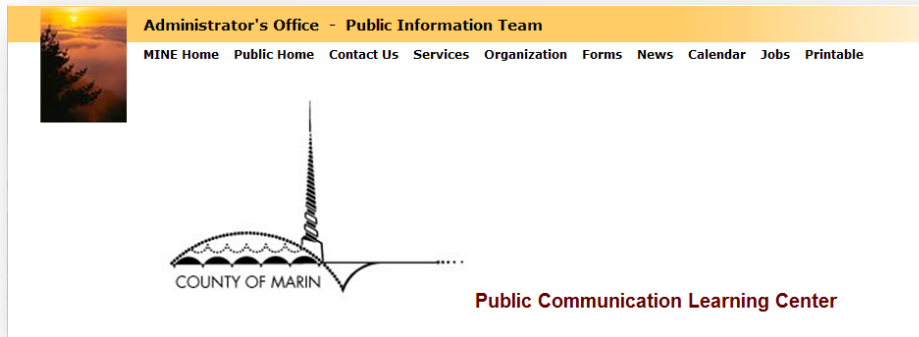- Coordination of video recording of the event, if necessary

Step 9: The team coordinates an accessible means of both soliciting community feedback and responding to that feedback in a timely manner, including active, regular monitoring of online and print sites for commentary and public opinion about the project. Dedicated phone numbers and websites can also be considered.

Step 10: The team provides a means for project updates to the public and expected timeframes.

Step 11: At the close of the project, the communications team engages in a de-briefing process that includes a review of the campaign and a brief written or video archive that can be shared in order to expand the abilities of other staff members and future teams.

APPENDIX 5: COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND RESOURCES

All resources are on the County's MINE under "Public Communications Learning Center"

Administrator's Office - Public Information Team

MINE Home   Public Home   Contact Us   Services   Organization   Forms   News   Calendar   Jobs   Printable

COUNTY OF MARIN

Public Communication Learning Center

LEARNING CENTER

Communication Guide

- **How to write a media release**
  - Quick Start Guide Update
  - News release template
    - .doc
    - .oft (outlook email; right click to save)
  - News advisory template(events; less official news)
  - Video release template

- **How to produce a Public Service Announcement** (a short video)

- **Tips on working with the media**

Presentation Handouts

- **Publishing content on the Patch**
- **Emergency Preparedness**
  - Presentation Handout

COUNTY COMMUNICATION

County of Marin Identity Style Guide (Download style guide, official logos, Futura fonts, etc.)

Communication Contact Changes (Email, Email Signature, Phone, Stationery)

Ordering Preprinted Stationery (Read Communication Contact Changes first)

- Price estimate calculator

- Print Shop Requisition form

- Vendor list *(coming soon)*

Website Redesign Update

- Website name survey results and FAQ responses

- Board letter (6/21/11)

Frankly Speaking

County Communication Plan *(coming soon)*

SOCIAL MEDIA

Help promote our County or your department's official social media sites in your email signature! (Instructions)

- **Social Media for Local Government**: presentation by Joey Schepp
- **Who is in charge of my department's social media site?**
- **Email request for a Facebook / Twitter message release**
- **County social media sites**
- Social Media Toolkit *(coming soon)*

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

What is a Public Service Announcement?
We generally refer to a Public Service Announcement (PSA) as a short video - usually under a few minutes - intended to raise awareness of a program/service/issue; affect public attitudes; and potentially stimulate action.

PSAs

- **How to produce a PSA**
- **Be the first to know**: Using Reel Director
- **Public Speaking**: On camera interview and public speaking tips