

Communications Plan

City of Farmers Branch, Texas
2014-2017



**FARMERS
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City of Farmers Branch

Mission Statement

Our Mission at the City of Farmers Branch is to **build** a vibrant, **dynamic** community that consistently seeks to improve the **quality** of life for our residents.

Communications Department

Mission Statement

We tell the City's story.



Purpose

One of the strategic goals of the City of Farmers Branch is to **"provide extensive communication opportunities for informing citizens and allowing proper input on City operations, programs and policies"** (Core Value #8).

As a cooperative effort across departmental lines, with input from the Mayor and City Council, and members of the community, this Communications Plan is designed as a roadmap to achieve that strategic goal of communications and government transparency.

This plan, if crafted properly, will never be a completed instrument. Rather it will grow and evolve as a living, breathing document, adapting to changing times and technologies.

Challenges

While the "Information Age" offers opportunities for communication like no other era in human history, the present-day environment also presents specific challenges. The Internet is exploding with exponentially advancing quantities of text, video, illustrations, charts and photos. More than 90 percent of the population now has a cell phone and a rapidly growing percentage of those are "smart" phones. Paradoxically, however, this unprecedented access to information means that the competition for the end-user's attention is greater than ever before. As such, the City's communications strategies must be nimble, flexible and forever adaptable to change with the information landscape.

As if competition for news coverage in a major, metropolitan area weren't enough of a challenge, now comes the new age of news media. Websites, bloggers and "citizen journalists" of all varieties have crowded the landscape and blurred the line between what was thought of as "traditional" reporters and the community at-large. The City's communications strategies must use the latest tools to inspire news coverage from DFW-area media while keeping others informed via City media channels.



Elements

- ❖ **Guiding Values**
- ❖ **Target Audiences**
- ❖ **Goals and Strategies**
- ❖ **Communications Tools**

Guiding Values

This Communications Plan is based on the following values which guide its overall development and implementation. These values will help ensure that the City provides audiences with complete, accurate and timely information enabling them to make informed judgments.

Interactive

Open, two-way communication ensures that information is shared throughout the community and the organization so the City can effectively engage target audiences to build informed consent.

Proactive

Proactive communication allows the City to tell its story to enhance credibility and reduce the likelihood of inaccurate interpretations.

Decentralized

A decentralized communication system facilitates direct communication among elected officials, City departments and external audiences. Within this decentralized system there must remain a commitment to presenting a consistent, focused message.

Themed/Branded

A successful communication program builds on the City's brand and is more effective than a program with unrelated and scattered messages. Our communications should support, reinforce and reflect the City's brand, success, and our strengths, a businesslike attitude, strong vision and quality of life.



Innovative

A communication plan should welcome innovation by encouraging creative communications. A flexible attitude allows the City to adapt to the demands of a growing community and changing technology.



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Authorized Spokespeople

It is imperative that the City of Farmers Branch organizationally speaks with a singular voice. This is true of all external communication, whether it be a flier, poster, video or recorded communication with the news media.

1. The Communications Director will serve as the primary spokesperson for the City.
2. The City Manager and Managing Directors are always designated as City spokespersons.
3. Assistants to the City Manager will be trained as backup spokespersons.
4. Other staff members may be designated to speak to the news media on behalf of the City, but must be approved by the Communications Director or City Manager.



Target Audiences

We identify and prioritize our target audiences so we get the right information to the right people using the right tools. Our audiences consist of two main groups: external and internal. Within these groups are numerous sub-groups.

EXTERNAL AUDIENCES

Residents of Farmers Branch

A sound communications plan strengthens the relationship between City government and the people who live within the City limits. The most effective strategies will target specific subsets of this audience, including: neighborhoods, neighborhood associations, adults, youth, seniors and college students.

Businesses and their Employees

City operations and plans impact people who own and operate a business in Farmers Branch and their employees, including those who live outside of Farmers Branch.

News Media

News media include a variety of local, state and national print and broadcast sources. Their coverage of City government (or lack thereof) significantly influences the public's perception and awareness of City government.

Other Governments and Agencies

The City government often works in conjunction with numerous other government entities, such as the surrounding cities, the State, the counties, the school district, and planning organizations.

INTERNAL AUDIENCES

Members of the City Council and City Boards and Commissions

Citizens serving on the council and other boards and commissions - the City's decision makers - need to have the information and citizen input necessary to serve their community effectively.

City Employees

All City employees in all departments are in an integral part of the success of our communications efforts. All employees need to have ready access to news and information about the City because they are often a source of information to internal and external audiences.



Goals & Strategies

GOAL 1

Guarantee the City's Communications effort support the City Council's strategic plan.

STRATEGIES

1. Annually align Communications effort with the updated strategic plan.
2. Employ diverse Communications tools to achieve goals.
3. Increase awareness of strategic plan to staff.
4. Work with and support departments to educate public on specific projects.

TACTICS

1. Work with management staff to define annual efforts associated with City Council goals and objectives.
2. Ask specifically targeted questions on the bi-annual Citizen Satisfaction Survey, designed to gauge effectiveness of Communications tools.
3. Distribute copy of Strategic Plan to each department and make available on the City's Intranet site.
4. Provide specific communications assistance to departments as needed or upon request.

MEASUREMENTS

1. Completing the annual alignment.
2. Results of the Citizen Satisfaction Survey.
3. How many copies of the Strategic Plan are produced, distributed and how many times have the web versions been visited.
4. Number of hours spent on departmental assistance projects.

CALENDAR

1. Communications-related goals and objectives in the strategic plan will be updated in February of 2015, 2016 & 2017.
2. Bi-Annual Citizens Satisfaction Survey is scheduled for fiscal year 2014-2015 & 2016-2017.

3. The annually updated Strategic Plan will be made available in March of 2015, 2016 & 2017.
4. Specific assistance to departments is rendered as needed.

GOAL 2

Increase organizational awareness of the best use of internal and external communication channels and tools.

STRATEGIES

1. Use internal media, training and social media to promote and educate key audiences about external media channels.
2. Educate internal customers on currently approved use of City logo and imagery.
3. Ensure key department managers are trained in basic media relations in the event media response is necessary.

TACTICS

1. Design and launch new Intranet site for Farmers Branch employees.
2. Revise and update Farmers Branch Style Guide and disseminate to employees.
3. Conduct annual internal media relations classes with key managers and public safety employees.
4. Work with Human Resources to include education on communication tools in new employee orientation.

MEASUREMENTS

1. Accomplishment of the goal.
2. Accomplishment of the goal with revisions scheduled every three years.
3. How many students go through the class.
4. How many new employees receive the information on an annual basis.

CALENDAR

1. New Intranet site was launched in May of 2014.
2. Revised and updated Style Guide will be available in December 2014.
3. Annual media relations classes will be held in February of 2014, 2015 & 2016.
4. Communications education should be included in new employee orientation by June 2015.



GOAL 3

Work with the news media more efficiently and effectively.

STRATEGIES

1. Maintain networking/professional relationships with local and regional media outlets by remaining accessible and responsive to responsible media representatives.
2. Develop digital newsroom.
3. Educating newsrooms about the availability of digital news resources.

TACTICS

1. Respond to media inquiries within one hour of original call.
2. Coalesce best practices from other cities to create digital newsroom to enable news outlets to capture images / text / video on newsworthy stories they may not have been able to cover.
3. Produce annually updated media kit to include instructions on location and use of digital resources.

MEASUREMENTS

1. Record and report all media relations contacts (calls, email, texts).
2. Annual metrics on downloaded images / text / videos.
3. Number of kits distributed to local and regional news sources.

CALENDAR

1. Record-keeping of media relations contacts (calls, email, texts) will begin October 2014 and be updated monthly.
2. Digital newsroom is targeted for launch by April 2015.
3. Annual media kits will be produced / updated and distributed beginning October 2015.



GOAL 4

Use professional, high-quality media that reflects the City's reputation for excellence and reinforces the City's brand.

STRATEGIES

1. The Communications office will act as a clearinghouse for outgoing information.
2. The City logo, address and web URL will appear on all outgoing print or electronic publications, transmissions, broadcasts or e-communications, unless prior arrangements have been made.
3. The Communications office will work in tandem with Information Services for the appraisal and upkeep of audio-visual technology, both permanent and portable.
4. The video production services contract will be re-advertised for RFPs every three years.

TACTICS

1. All media releases, advertising placements, invitations, calendars, fliers, posters, brochures, magazines, catalogs and other printed publications shall be forwarded to the Communications office, subject to the following parameters:
 - Media releases:
 - All media releases shall be forwarded to the Communications office for approval and returned to the department by next business day.
 - Advertising placements:
 - All display advertising shall be forwarded to the Communications office for approval and returned to the department by next business day.
 - Invitations, calendars, magazines and catalogs:
 - All invitations, calendars, magazines and catalogs shall be forwarded to the Communications office for approval and returned to the department within five business days, unless prior arrangements have been made.
 - Fliers, posters, brochures and other printed publications:
 - All mass produced print material with a run greater than 100 shall be forwarded to the Communications office for approval prior to publication. Communications office shall return the proof to the department in question by next business day.
 - All mass produced print material with a run less than 100 shall be forwarded to the Communications office within five business days after printing for evaluation and markup for future reference.
2. Make available easy access to City and departmental logo files via shared drives or cloud space.

3. Coordinate with the Information Services Department to regularly appraise the state of the City's audio and visual equipment, both permanent and portable, with the intent of refreshing the technology at a maximum of five year intervals.
4. Compile a comprehensive list of video services required in order to advertise for RFPs in 2017.

MEASUREMENTS

1. Record of how many elements were submitted for approval.
2. Establishment of the logo files on a shared drive.
3. Execution of a contract with an A/V consultant for evaluation and appraisal of equipment and capabilities.
4. Execution of a contract with a video service provider in 2017.

CALENDAR

1. Annually updated and reported statistic
2. To be accomplished in August of 2014.
3. To be accomplished in October of 2014.
4. As the current contract was signed in 2014, the next RFP and associated contract would be due in the winter/spring of 2017.

GOAL 5

Develop internal communications systems to exchange accurate and timely information that advances an effective work culture, in accordance with internal policy direction.

STRATEGIES

1. Promote the employee Intranet site "Farmers Branch Connection" as a one stop shop for all employee information.
2. Provide departments an opportunity to share departmental news they need promoted or communicated either to the public or internally to employees.
3. Work with Human Resources to develop a consistent method of pushing information out to employees.
4. Provide weekly Quickhitters from Directors Meeting to be shared with all employees by email and posted to the City's intranet site.



TACTICS

1. Provide internal marketing materials to all departments to display and remind employees about what is available on the intranet.
2. Ensure the City's intranet site is current with dynamic content and "Fingertip Info."
3. Schedule weekly and monthly rundown meeting for department point people to attend and share information.
4. Use the Branch Life corporate culture development program to advance internal, working knowledge of the City's communications channels.
5. Prepare a weekly synopsis of topics covered topics at each week's Directors Meeting.

MEASUREMENT

1. Conduct an internal survey to gauge usefulness of the intranet to employees and to gauge whether recent communication efforts have been effective.
2. Survey each department bi-annually to gauge whether rundown meetings are capturing their communication needs.
3. Using the City Intranet, provide a mechanism for feedback from employees.

GOAL 6

Measure the effectiveness of communication efforts and develop new approaches to reach target audiences.

STRATEGIES

1. Identify and evaluate all the City's communications elements.
2. Provide an opportunity for citizens to share opinions about how they prefer to receive city information.
3. Provide an opportunity for visitors to provide feedback about how they learned about an event or program.
4. Provide an opportunity for employees to share opinions about how they prefer to receive employee news.

TACTICS

1. Conduct a communication audit every three years by collecting a summary of everything done in the past year to complete to evaluate.
2. Use website analytics to evaluate what assets people are using to access the website.
3. Participate in the bi-annual citizen satisfaction survey and ensure the right communication questions are being asked.
4. Capture visitor feedback at events via random crowd surveys.



5. Participate in the annual internal service survey to gauge employee opinions on internal communication.
6. Provide a way for employees to submit feedback via the City's Intranet

MEASUREMENT

1. Review materials from the three year audit and determine whether the content and types of media being offered is in line with the City's demographics and communication goals
2. Using the results of the Citizen Survey, determine whether current communication efforts are in line with the results of the survey
3. Work with community groups/volunteers to obtain feedback at events and activities specifically asking how they heard about the event and how they'd like to hear about it in the future
4. Using results from the internal employee survey and feedback received through the City's intranet site, evaluate whether current communication tools are still appropriate

GOAL 7

Explore and implement new and innovative technology, digital platforms and social media trends to enhance online communications with citizens and meet community needs.

STRATEGIES

1. Use new technology to develop cutting-edge web analytics
2. Stay informed on industry innovation and new products coming to the market
3. Ensure the website is relevant and easy to use
4. Expand the City's social media reach
5. Move towards implementing a responsive website
6. Ensure that all social media accounts are in line with the City's brand, are current and managed appropriately

TACTICS

1. Investigate new vendors for website analytics
2. Attend relevant industry conferences, webinars and continued learning opportunities to learn about new technology
3. Conduct a website usability test
4. Investigate adding website responsiveness to the next re-design of the site
5. Develop a social media "training" for all staff managing City social media accounts to communicate best practices
6. Develop and implement a social media policy



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MEASUREMENT

1. Conduct an evaluation of available web analytic products
2. Prototype on a trial basis at least two new technologies a year
3. Use website usability results to implement changes immediately
4. Monitor all social media accounts to evaluate if there has been an increase in quality and if the City's branch is used appropriately
5. Evaluate whether participation on City social media has increased. Both in likes and engagement. Target a 15 percent increase in overall participation in the first year.



Communications Tools

A. External

1. Main City Website - www.farmersbranchtx.gov
 - a. Newsflash Module
 - b. Alert Center Module
2. Branch Bulletin - weekly eNewsletter, delivered on Wednesdays
3. Branch Mail - single subject eNews blasts, delivered as needed
4. Branch Review - printed Newsletter, delivered once a month via resident water bills
5. Branchblog – a regularly updated blog, accessible via the City’s website and concentrating on “smaller” stories that may not otherwise get good play
6. FBTV - Time Warner cable channel 16 / AT&T Uverse channel 99 and streaming online
7. News Releases
8. News Interviews
9. Special Presentations - including Town Hall Meetings, special events media and announcing or emceeding City events and functions
10. Print collateral - Flyers, brochures, signage
11. Photography
12. AM Radio
13. Word of Mouth
14. Social Media - including, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest and Instagram
15. Speakers Bureau

B. Internal

1. Intranet
2. Employee Newsletter
3. BranchLife

