

# COMMUNICATIONS PLAN OVERVIEW

## OVERVIEW

This is a condensed version of the County of San Luis Obispo's full communications plan, which addresses opportunities that can improve the County's overall communications with citizens and employees. The 33-page plan includes a 10-page situation analysis that examines the County's current communications efforts and includes research conducted by Administrative Office staff and outside agencies.

The majority of the plan will be implemented by the County Administrative Office, in collaboration with other County departments, while other portions of the plan, such as website development and design, will be managed by other departments. Contact the County Administrative Office at (805) 788-2778 to view the Communications Plan in its entirety.

## GOALS

1. Increase awareness of County government and its services.
2. Increase citizen engagement with County government.



## STRATEGIC APPROACH

Bring County departments together to foster meaningful relationships with each other and County residents by tapping into and harnessing the already strong sense of community here. Enhance the County's ability to raise awareness of its programs and services and increase citizen engagement by developing, launching and applying a unified County brand and taking a multimedia approach to communications, using tools that are easy and effortless for both citizens and employees to use on a regular basis.



## PRIORITY PUBLICS

The following primary publics, or target audiences, are the focus of this communications plan. While there may be other publics that the County inevitably reaches through the strategies outlined herein, the following three publics are important because they have the highest potential to be influenced by the County, and, at the same time, the County would also be very vulnerable if it didn't reach out to these publics.

1. **County residents**
2. **County employees**
3. **Industry peers**



## KEY MESSAGES

Message strategy: The County needs to humanize itself in order to engage citizens, and one way to do that is to use a more conversational tone in its messaging for both internal and external communications. Most residents and employees feel a sense of community pride and ownership and the County can reflect that same sense of pride and ownership while also connecting with its audiences by using inclusive language like "our," "we" and "us."

## TACTICS/INITIATIVES

### 1. CREATE CLEAR COUNTYWIDE BRAND IDENTITY & GUIDELINES

The County currently has an identity crisis. As a government organization, the County of San Luis Obispo doesn't have a clear brand identity or brand standards, the lack of which has contributed in the misuse of the County seal as a logo as well as the creation individual department brands. The County needs a brand that all departments, employees and citizens can identify with and be proud of.

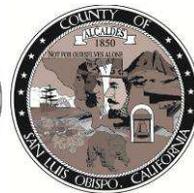
To be clear, a brand isn't just a logo. It is a promise an organization makes to its customers and publics. A logo is simply the visual representation of that promise. Currently, the County seal has been used as the organization's unofficial logo, but because there are no guidelines on how to use the County seal, there are multiple versions being used in a variety of colors. At the same time, many departments have their own logos with their own brand standards that are separate from the County's overall brand identity.

The County should explore the branding process and develop a new brand identity, or refine its current brand, and standardize how that brand is represented across all departments in all communications.

The branding process will be broken out into two collaborative phases: (1) Design and (2) Launch. Departments will be encouraged to gradually transition to the new design as stock of materials using the old brand is depleted. The County Administrative Office will lead this project and will regularly solicit input and feedback from employees, elected officials and SLO County residents.

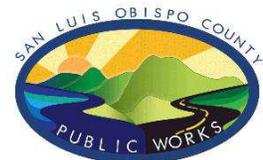
## CURRENT VARIATIONS OF THE COUNTY SEAL

*Board-Approved*



*Unapproved*

*Other County Logos*



At the end of this branding process, departments might be able to keep their individual logos, but they may be asked to change the colors and/or fonts to fit with the new countywide brand, or at least use their logo in conjunction with the new County brand. However, the County may find during the branding process that this doesn't make much sense and that the departments should eliminate their individual brands altogether.

**2. DESIGN AND DEVELOP A NEW COUNTY WEBSITE**

The County shall work together to develop, design and launch a new streamlined, user-friendly website that is dynamic, interactive and reflects the County brand. The new website should allow the County to demonstrate its core organizational values while also increasing transparency and citizen engagement.

**3. CONTINUE PRODUCING AN INTERACTIVE ANNUAL REPORT ONLINE**

Once a year, the County recaps all of the significant accomplishments and challenges it faced in the previous year. This is an opportunity to engage the public in a creative way that clearly demonstrates the value of County programs, projects and services. The Administrative Office will continue to produce this report every year, coordinating with departments and elected officials to develop content that resonates with local residents and taxpayers.

**4. ADVERTISE VIA THE COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER TVS & PUBLIC ACCESS CHANNEL**

The County has several assets that are underutilized, one of which includes the new HD TVs in the County Government Center lobby just outside of the Board Chambers, as well as Public Access Channel 21. When there isn't a public meeting in the Board Chambers, the TVs in the lobby could potentially highlight County department activities. These highlighted activities would only feature County-sponsored events, programs, videos, projects, etc. The County would need to develop guidelines and procedures for allowing departments to be included in the highlights, and the County would need to determine who is ultimately responsible for what information is displayed on those TVs.

**5. ESTABLISH AN ENGAGEMENT TEAM TO FOCUS SPECIFICALLY ON INCREASING CITIZEN AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

The County needs to do a better job of engaging its citizens and employees, and one way to do that is to shine a light on the great things that happen here but most people aren't aware of. It is recommended to create an Engagement Team, made up of current County employees who are passionate about storytelling and engaging their coworkers.

This team's objectives will include:

- a. Establish monthly internal and external e-newsletters by January 2016.
- b. Maintain an average e-Newsletter open rate of about 40% throughout the year.
- c. Maintain an average click-through rate of about 6% throughout the year.
- d. Assist with the logistics of an Open House, and other events as needed, that will be entertaining for staff and the public to attend.

**6. USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO CONNECT WITH PRIMARY PUBLICS**

The County has an opportunity to foster relationships with citizens and employees by proactively engaging these publics on social media. By developing a comprehensive social media strategy, each department will be able to foster relationships with their publics by building trust through communication, responsiveness and transparency.

A department that chooses to utilize social media for its outreach efforts will need to dedicate appropriate resources (staff and time) to develop and implement a social media strategy that ties back to the County's organizational values, mission and vision for our community. This strategy should be flexible, but must identify roles/responsible parties, goals/objectives, tactics or actions, the type of content to share via social media, as well as management guidelines that staff can follow as they manage the pages and content.

The Administrative Office's Communications Analyst will assist departments in developing these strategies, so that they can make social media work for them in productive and effective ways.

**7. BUILD AND MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIPS WITH INDUSTRY PARTNERS AND INDUSTRY MEDIA**

The County Administrative Office will pitch story ideas to industry partners and industry media on a monthly basis, and tag appropriate news media and industry partners on Twitter whenever Tweeting relevant news with links to more details.

**8. BUILD AND MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIPS WITH LOCAL MEDIA**

The County Administrative Office will pitch story ideas to local media each week and, when possible, include an image, graphic or video to accompany the pitch. According to a [recent survey of journalists by PWR New Media](#), journalists prefer to receive press releases by email with context and links to more detailed info, high-resolution images and multimedia content. According to the survey, 77 percent of respondents said they were more likely to cover a story if they had easy access to relevant images. Departments will also be encouraged to share relevant images with their respective story ideas or news releases.

## MONITORING & MEASUREMENT SYSTEMS

1. Generate a monthly communications report that tracks:
  - a. Number of fans on social media. Monthly goal will be to increase fans and followers by:
    - i. 288 new fans/followers per month on Facebook.
    - ii. 110 new followers per month on Twitter.
    - iii. 149 new followers per month on LinkedIn.
    - iv. 1-2 new subscribers per month on YouTube.
  - b. Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn engagement rates and YouTube video views.
  - c. E-newsletter sign-ups, open rate and click-through rate for both the public and employee newsletters.
  - d. Website sessions, pageviews and bounce rates for both [www.slocounty.ca.gov](http://www.slocounty.ca.gov) and [www.slocountyannualreport.com](http://www.slocountyannualreport.com) that reports on County employees and the general public (tracked by Internet Service Provider).
2. Create an annual communications survey that tracks brand awareness of the County and asks specifically how people hear about news, programs, projects and services from the County.
3. Survey e-Newsletter subscribers bi-annually to understand engagement with content and revise as needed.
4. Track the run rate of all County press releases and pitches to local and industry media.

## TIMELINE

	2015					2016											
	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
assigned to:																	
Admin	Brand identity and guidelines																
Depts						Transition to new brand identity											
Admin	Annual Report																
IT	Website Replacement Project																
Admin	Advertising Guidelines																
Depts						Begin advertising on Downtown County Gov Center lobby TVs											
Admin/Depts	Establish Engagement Team																
Engagement Team						Develop and distribute monthly e-newsletters											
HR/Engagement Team		Plan Open House, coordinate w/Depts															
Depts that focus on outreach	Use social media to connect with target audiences																
Admin	Build and maintain relationships w/Industry partners and media																
Admin/Depts	Build and maintain relationships w/local media																

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Administrative Office’s Communications Analyst will manage many of the projects listed above with the exception of the website replacement project, which will be managed by IT, and the e-newsletters, which will be managed by the Engagement Team in collaboration with other departments.

Departments will play a key role in the branding process, participating in focus groups and providing valuable feedback on the overall County brand and guidelines. The Administrative Office Communications Analyst will facilitate the branding process, including all focus groups, and coordinate with departments to ensure that the branding process is a successful effort to unify the County.

This Communications Plan is an overarching plan for the County, but it in no way is meant to centralize the County’s communications, nor is it meant to replace any department’s communications efforts. However, this plan may guide a department’s communications as needed over the coming year.

Throughout the implementation of this Communications Plan, departments may be contacted by the Administrative Office for stories that will be told using a multimedia approach, including videos, photo slideshows, infographics and more. The Administrative Office’s Communications Analyst will play a support role to departments, offering higher-level strategic advice and necessary trainings on a regular basis, but departments will be responsible for telling their own stories via press releases, story pitches to the media, social media, e-newsletter articles, and other methods of spreading the word on certain issues.

This Communications Plan is meant to unify and streamline the County’s communications to provide employees and the public with a better understanding of the County’s projects, programs and services. The plan’s success depends on the full cooperation and collaboration of County departments in telling these stories in meaningful ways that will resonate with the County’s primary publics.