



Legislation Text

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Staff Report for Citywide Communications Update

RECOMMENDATION

The City Manager recommends that the City Council review this update of existing citywide communications efforts and provide feedback and direction to staff on strategies to enhance and complement existing strategies.

BACKGROUND

One of the City Council's adopted citywide goals is to "*Support and implement programs, activities and strengthen communication that enhances the quality of life and wellness, celebrates the arts and diversity and promotes civic pride.*" In order to help achieve this goal, City staff implemented various communications-related initiatives designed to substantively broaden the depth and breadth of internal and external communications.

At the December 21, 2015 City Council meeting, staff presented a report that included an inventory of various communications platforms and efforts that were already in place at that time. In addition, staff presented recommendations for various new initiatives and strategies designed to expand the city's outreach efforts, which the City Council directed staff to implement. Those new efforts included:

- Expansion of citywide social media use;
- Launching of a Public Information Team (PIT Crew);
- Expansion of multi-lingual communications & outreach;
- Reinstatement of a quarterly community newsletter (*San Leandro CONNECT*); and
- Exploration of new and emerging communications platforms.

This report is designed to provide a progress report to the City Council on the above strategies and initiatives and related efforts. City staff also requests feedback from the City Council regarding their perceptions of the effectiveness of these efforts. To the extent the City Council would like to see any modification of these efforts, staff requests appropriate direction.

Analysis

Citywide communication is an important ongoing priority for the City Council and City Departments. Since January of 2015, the City Council and City staff have significantly expanded these types of efforts and have been working to achieve more centralized coordination of external communications and outreach. As outlined in the December 21, 2015 staff report, these efforts were initiated in order to help achieve the Council's goals as well as to address certain challenges identified by City leadership, which included:

- a desire to better coordinate the dissemination of news and information across all departments, using unified voice and branding;

- a need to expand outreach in multiple languages;
- a desire to reach a broader cross-section of the community;
- a desire to facilitate more information sharing among local residents, businesses, service clubs, community service organizations and non-profits;
- a need to increase citizen participation in governance; and
- a desire to re-establish a community newsletter.

Using the City Council's goals as a foundation, City staff discussed and shared best practices, challenges and new ideas regarding new ways to communicate citywide messaging using unified branding and voice.

As part of its actions on December 21, 2015, the City Council directed staff to implement the proposed new initiatives and to initiate efforts to address the pressing challenges mentioned above. Based on this direction, staff successfully implemented the following programs and initiatives in 2016:

Expanded & Coordinated Use of Social Media

Three new social media pages were created with the goal of having a citywide social media presence, including new "City of San Leandro" pages on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Staff also catalogued each of the various individual department pages and evaluated their effectiveness. Following an evaluation by the PIT Crew and City departments, several departmental pages were consolidated so as to eliminate duplication and make the pages easier to identify and follow by the public. City staff also expanded its usage of available analytical features of these social media platforms in order to better assess their usage. As of December 2016, the City's social media pages now have a combined total of 15,798 followers.

A breakdown of these figures, by platform, is provided below:

- Facebook: 9,877 followers;
- Twitter 4,632 followers; and
- Instagram: 1,289 followers

City staff continues to actively monitor these pages and explore ways to increase effectiveness in sharing new information about the city. Looking ahead, staff will continue to explore ways of increasing coordination across departments and monitoring new tools that become available. Staff will also continue to implement best practices, leverage departments' followings and strategically utilize paid advertisements to increase traffic to social media sites.

Launch of Public Information Team (PIT Crew)

In the first quarter of 2016, the City Manager's Office launched and continues to facilitate a citywide team that is comprised of at least one staff member from each city department who has responsibility for external communication matters in their department. The PIT Crew meets monthly to share information, receive training, and collaborate on upcoming communications-related initiatives. The team also developed several new long-term goals and proposed actions designed to increase the effectiveness of the city's communications efforts. They include:

Goal: Achieve Coordinated and Consistent Communications

Proposed Actions to Achieve Goal:

- Formally define the meaning of “City Sponsored event” and ensure communication and outreach planning efforts for such events are coordinated across departments
- Develop standardized branding, letterheads, stationery and related materials for use by all city departments
- Increase monitoring of city websites and ensure pages are actively refreshed as necessary

Goal: Improve Interdepartmental Communications Using Available Tools

Proposed Actions:

- Expand usage of Sharepoint (the City’s internal collaboration and document management platform), including development of internal calendar of events, initiatives and meetings.
- Leverage existing internal and external publication & outreach avenues
- Create internal matrix that specifically identifies the staff from each City department who have responsibility for external outreach and communications

Goal: Enhance Coordination of Media Outreach & Response

Proposed Actions:

- Coordinate social media postings via the PIT crew
- Expand cross-departmental collaboration when responding to media inquiries
- Share press and media contacts across departments
- Push targeted media releases
- Actively monitor and track press & media coverage

Multilingual Communications and Outreach

The City Council allocated \$50,000 to implement the City’s Multilingual Communications and Outreach Program in June of 2016. With these funds, staff purchased simultaneous interpretation equipment that is now made publicly available for City-sponsored events and meetings. Following the purchase of the equipment, Spanish and Chinese simultaneous interpretation services have been provided at three City Council meetings, two community meetings, and one public event.

In addition to interpretation, City departments now regularly place advertisements in non-English publications such as *Vision Hispana*, *World Journal* and *Sing Tao* to announce bid opportunities, community meetings and events.

Looking ahead to the future, staff will continue to explore additional ways of expanding multi-lingual outreach, including the development of translated community outreach materials such as program information, events and important policy updates.

Reinstatement of Quarterly Community Newsletter

Beginning in the first quarter of 2016, the City Manager’s Office reinstated the community newsletter, formerly titled “San Leandro News”, which was dormant from 2014 to early 2016 due to staffing limitations. The first issue of San Leandro *CONNECT* was released in February of 2016 and has since been published quarterly with an option to download and print. *CONNECT* provides a forum for residents to receive news and information about upcoming projects, programs, or events that would be of interest to local residents. Certain sections of the newsletter remain throughout the year, with each quarterly edition providing a departmental or service area focus, as follows:

Quarterly Focus Areas:

- Quarter 1 - Budget & Finance
- Quarter 2 - City Services and Public Works
- Quarter 3 - Community Development
- Quarter 4 - Public Safety

Recurring Sections:

- Welcome Message from the Mayor
- Policy Updates
- City Council goals-related content
- Capital Improvement Program (CIP) updates
- Department Contact Information

San Leandro CONNECT has 404 active subscribers and is distributed citywide. Residents can find printed copies in every City-operated library, community center, and at many departmental front counters. The newsletter is also advertised via social media and reaches an average of 400 people on social media every quarter.

In addition to the quarterly newsletter, the City of San Leandro is piloting a *San Leandro CONNECT Monthly*. This is a monthly, half-page color publication in the San Leandro Times which serves as yet another way of disseminating City-related information to the general public, such as important events, meetings and City Council initiatives. The first edition of *CONNECT Monthly* was published on Thursday, September 22, 2016.

Emerging Platforms

New technologies continue to expand public expectations from local governments. Staff continues to track and monitor emerging platforms and check for compatibility with City use. As new tools become available, staff will attempt to explore those platforms to determine whether they could assist the City in better disseminating news and information, while balancing budgetary and staffing constraints. In the meantime, staff continues to make every effort to productively use existing platforms.

Conclusion

Communication with community residents and stakeholders is a basic obligation of local governments and forms an essential component to good governance. The City of San Leandro is committed to finding new ways of improving communication with its residents, businesses and community organizations and will continue to improve existing platforms while exploring new ones to better serve the community.

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