Strategic Communications Plan

City of Grand Rapids

February 14, 2018

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Section 1: Situation Analysis

Background

Grand Rapids is Michigan's second largest city. It's a city with a vibrant downtown, a dynamic business sector, diverse neighborhoods, an international art scene, world-class manufacturing, nationally recognized biomedical research and healthcare, innovative public transportation, spectacular outdoor attractions and a craft beer industry that has earned it the moniker Beer City USA.

It is also a city whose leadership has a clear vision for the 21st century, placing high value on community engagement, diversity, equity and inclusion, public service, economic development, philanthropy, entrepreneurialism, education, sustainability, collaboration and transparency. The leadership has a track record of setting policies that deliver quality public services to residents while implementing sound fiscal policies.

These strategic steps have delivered impressive outcomes. Grand Rapids routinely receives national recognition as one of the best places in the country to raise a family, work, start a business or simply visit as a tourist destination. Last year alone, *Forbes* and *Headlight Data* recognized Grand Rapids as the fastest growing economy among big cities and *Business Insider* named it the #1 city for millennial home buying in 2018.

By most accounts, Grand Rapids has a great story to tell. Despite this, the City has struggled to consistently and clearly communicate its aspirations and achievements to residents and stakeholders.

City officials have acknowledged the need to more consistently and adequately inform residents about issues, programs and initiatives that will have a direct impact on them or their neighborhoods and to regularly engage individuals in open and meaningful dialogue. This is particularly true when

it comes to communities of color, low-income residents and other historically marginalized populations.

In 2014, the City hired a director of communications to improve external communications. While the addition of this position was an important start, the City still found that it was not effectively communicating with all target audiences.

In 2017, City Commissioners took additional steps to improve the City's communications performance. It hired Truscott Rossman, a strategic communications firm, to conduct an audit of existing external communications practices, outline staffing recommendations and deliver a comprehensive strategic communications plan to reach external audiences.

The audit was delivered in early January 2018. In short, it confirmed what City leadership had anecdotally concluded – the City needs to do a better job communicating with the people and organizations it serves.

Key to the audit was the recommendation that the City establish and fully staff an Office of Communications to be led by a managing director. Truscott Rossman advised that the Managing Director of Communications must be an engaged member of the executive team. We emphasized that the office must be properly resourced: one person cannot do the job, and splitting communications functions among individuals scattered throughout the organization diminishes the City's ability to be strategic, well-coordinated, consistent and highly effective in its external communications.

The City Manager shared the audit and recommendations with the City Commission in early January. The City Manager and Deputy City Manager supported the staffing recommendations, and on January 11, announced the appointment of an acting Managing Director of Communications. Since that appointment, the City Manager (prior to his retirement), Deputy City Manager, acting Managing Director of Communications and others have been studying the structural recommendations and planning for staffing changes in 2018.

A Look Ahead

This document constitutes the strategic communications plan to guide the City – and specifically, the City's communications team – going forward. Truscott Rossman developed this plan in coordination with the former City Manager, Deputy City Manager, acting Managing Director of Communications and Assistant to the City Manager to address issues revealed through the audit.

We have structured this plan to complement staffing recommendations made in the audit. Those recommendations are reiterated in the strategic and tactical recommendations made in Sections 4 and 8 of this plan. Successful implementation of this plan will depend, in large part, on whether the City dedicates adequate resources and support to external communications.

Section 2: Goals

At the outset of our work with the City in August 2017, our team met with executive leadership to discuss and determine the steps that should be taken to improve the City's overall strategic communications practices.

Next, we conducted a series of one-on-one meetings in September 2017 with five of the six City Commissioners and Mayor Rosalynn Bliss. Those meetings helped us identify strategic communications challenges, priorities, expectations, goals and deliverables for this project.

Goals

Based on information provided in those meetings, as well as discussions about communications in City Commission meetings, we have identified the following goals that a strategic communications plan would be designed to advance.

Several are broad goals that apply organization-wide. Strategic communications will play a role in, but will not be exclusively responsible for, achieving these goals.

- Do a better job communicating with key audiences.

- Effectively and consistently inform a diverse population within the City of Grand Rapids about issues, programs and initiatives that affect them, their families, their neighborhoods or their businesses.

- Build trust between the City and the community.

- Build a shared community vision for our city.

- Build community ownership of City priorities and initiatives, and City ownership of community priorities.

- Advance economic and social equity within the City.

- Reach audiences outside the region with messages that attract visitors, talent, investment, partnerships and business.

These goals serve to guide the next steps in the strategic planning process, namely research and establishing communications strategies and objectives.

Section 3: Research – CGR Communications Audit

Field Work

With the executive leadership's support, we set out to perform a communications audit of the City's existing external communications practices, its processes, its brand consistency and its impact and relevance with target audiences. To do so, we gathered information from City departments, community groups, digital/social media platforms and media coverage. Our research included meetings or interviews with:

- 15 city departments/offices that communicate frequently with external audiences. The executive office, in consultation with City staff currently responsible for communications, identified and assisted in scheduling interviews with representatives of departments that communicate most frequently with external audiences.

- 15 community groups that receive regular communication from the City. They included neighborhood and business associations, improvement districts, faith-based organizations, minority agencies and philanthropic groups. The executive office and City Commissioners assisted in identifying several of these organizations.

The audit also included a comprehensive analysis of the City's digital platforms. This review included websites and social media accounts such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Finally, we reviewed earned media reports over the span of six months, from June to December 2017. We used media monitoring services to identify the number of local, statewide and national media reports about the City. We then broke down that coverage into two main categories:

1. Media reports that resulted from a news release or media advisory distributed by the City.

2. Media reports that were not the result of a news release or media advisory from the City.

This information allowed us to compare how frequently media announcements distributed by the City generated news coverage, as well as assess responsive earned media reporting on City events or actions that did not originate with a media announcement from the City.

Research Findings

We learned that while the City has made public commitments to improving its external communications, it has done so without adequate resources dedicated to the task and little to no strategic direction.

Communications functions are scattered throughout the organization rather than housed in a single, focused office or department. Without strategic foundation or oversight, communications duties are frequently performed with little coordination or awareness of branding protocols and are not as effective as they should be.

Media relations services are performed by the director of communications, who is currently housed in the Grand Rapids Police Department, and by GRPD and GRFD PIOs.

Our earned media analysis found 860 media reports posted over the six-month time frame. Approximately 300 stories resulted from the distribution of media materials by the City. The other 560 media reports were not prompted by the City. The majority of those stories fell into the category of crime, breaking news or crisis communications, which included coverage of the release of audio recordings from a GRPD telephone line.

Digital media responsibilities are split between the director of communications (GRPD and City of Grand Rapids Facebook pages), 311/customer service (City of Grand Rapids website), and multiple city staff members who have administrative responsibilities for their respective departmental social media pages.

With the launch of its new website, the City has embarked on a significant upgrade to its digital presence. This new, singular website should lay a strong foundation for a greatly improved digital presence; however, because it was not fully launched at the time of the audit, and we did not have admin access to it, we were not able to conduct an audit on the new site. The research we *were* able to conduct on the City's soon-to-be retired website, as well as on a handful of departmental

websites and multiple social media pages revealed that they are not managed in a strategic manner or curated in an organized way. Unless these management and curation functions change and are fully integrated into the Office of Communications, the new website will not serve as the dynamic, powerful communications and engagement tool that it has the potential to be.

Community relations functions are widely dispersed, with formal, planned activities led primarily by two teams: one in the Planning Department and the other in the executive office.

Additionally, the director of communications and personnel from other offices, such as the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, regularly distribute releases and email communications to various community groups. Also, the City Manager, Deputy City Manager and Police Chief regularly engage in community relations initiatives such as community listening sessions related to high-profile issues and projects.

While most community groups place a high value on communications from the City and appreciate the intentional steps the City is taking to improve the process, communications can lack timeliness, relevance to the audience, content clarity, and present language barriers.

The Office of Cable TV Administration currently reports to the Managing Director of Public Services and is focused, primarily, on the City's Cable TV station – Grand Rapids Information Network (GRIN). This channel is the government leg of local PEG broadcasting, with the other two partners being GRCC/GRPS operating the education channel and Community Media Center operating the public/community access channel.

GRIN produces and airs a small amount of original content – including some Spanish-language programming – and is carried through all local cable providers as part of their local service agreements. The City does not actively market the channel or its programming.

Additionally, the Office of Cable TV Administration has been called upon by various departments to assist in video production and live streaming. These requests have increased in recent years and the Office accommodates them if staff has time/capacity, if the requesting department agrees to allow the content to air on GRIN, and if the Office has the equipment to handle the request.

Departments use the videos on their Facebook pages and YouTube channels, and they are typically repurposed on the City's primary social media platforms.

Finally, the City's Graphic Designer is currently housed in the Planning Department. This person is part of the Community Engagement team and provides graphic design services for the Planning Department as well as for other City departments, upon request.

While the Planning Department has significant graphic design needs, the majority of graphic design work is conducted for other departments. Despite that, no formal protocols are in place for evaluating and prioritizing requests, and no billing structure is in place to bill general fund departments for services.

The Graphic Designer has also initiated work on a brand standards manual for the City, however, given departmental project demands, he has not had the time and resources to complete the project.

Please refer to the January 8, 2018 City of Grand Rapids Communications Audit for a full report of Truscott Rossman's communications research findings.

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Section 4: Strategies & Objectives

Based on our research, we recommend that the City employ the following strategies to achieve communications goals.

Strategies

STRUCTURE AND PROTOCOLS

- Establish a communications staffing structure that enables the City to strategically and effectively inform and engage a diverse population and tell its story to a broad audience inside and outside the region.

- Establish and institutionalize protocols that facilitate proactive, consistent, coordinated and engaging communications.

- Establish, institutionalize and maintain brand standards.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

- Deliver clear, relevant and timely information to diverse audiences including residents, neighborhoods, community groups, businesses and partner organizations.

- Listen. Continue to engage diverse voices, including residents, neighborhoods, community groups and the business community in meaningful and appropriate ways.

- Maintain consistent and clear lines of communication between our police department and organizations that represent communities of color; include rank and file officers, when appropriate.

- Deepen relationships with Urban Core Collective (UCC), Grand Rapids Association of Pastors (G-RAP), NAACP and other organizations representing historically marginalized communities within the City of Grand Rapids.

MEDIA RELATIONS

- Establish protocols within the Office of Communications to effectively communicate with media outlets in proactive and responsive situations.

- Identify a diverse group of City representatives who are knowledgeable and authorized to speak to the media about subjects of interest to the media.

- Establish or strengthen relationships between local media, including minority-owned and focused media outlets, and key City leaders.

DIGITAL MEDIA

- Build and maintain a digital presence that reaches target audiences and engages residents, neighborhoods, community groups, businesses and partner organizations in a positive and responsive way.

- Streamline the City's digital and social media presence.

- Leverage digital and social media to engage historically marginalized communities.

- Build a rapport on digital platforms with reporters who cover the City to build open lines of communication.

Objectives

We have identified the following objectives as steps to support the strategies and advance the goals outlined above.

- Increase awareness and utilization of City programs, assets and services that can enhance residents' quality of life.

- More effectively and consistently reach historically marginalized communities where they live.

- Increase positive and proactive interactions between communities of color and the Grand Rapids Police Department.

- Increase the frequency of positive or neutral earned media coverage and placement – including digital reporting – about City programs, community initiatives and achievements.

- Increase frequency of City messaging in earned media coverage.

- Establish brand guidelines, train department personnel in application and mandate compliance.

- More fully and regularly engage Spanish speaking communities in City communications.

- Make better use of data to help understand our audiences and more effectively communicate with the community.

- Leverage the power of social media to listen to our community, gain insight into their priorities and be more responsive to their needs.

- Leverage positive coverage on digital platforms to advance community goals.

- Establish forward-looking master digital media calendar that organizes daily messages across departments, offices and related business entities.

- Identify digital and social media best practices and ensure departments are well-versed in how to implement these practices.

- Combine or delete redundant social media accounts, website(s) and apps.

- Double the City's number of Likes on Facebook by 2019 through organic posts and paid advertising, i.e., increase main CGR Facebook page likes from 14,671 to 29,350.

- Follow best practices by generating 1 - 2 social media posts per day for each account; post more frequently to keep followers apprised of important time-sensitive developments.

Section 5: Target Audiences

Our charge was to develop a strategic communications plan to guide communications with the City's external audiences. We have not considered nor are we specifically addressing internal audiences in this plan.

Local

- GR residents

- GR neighborhood associations

- GR neighborhood business associations

- GR Improvement Districts (DID, BID, CID)

- GR advocacy groups, social service agencies and other non-profits

- Key economic development and urban planning partners

- GR area chambers of commerce and business groups

- Investors and property managers in our neighborhoods and downtown

- Municipal and County partners in neighboring and suburban communities

- GR higher educational institutions - public and private

- GR area primary and secondary educational institutions

- GR faith-based organizations

- GR arts and cultural institutions and initiatives

- Key GR philanthropic partners

- Key GR area healthcare organizations

- GR area media

- GR social media influencers, i.e., local individuals with large followings on Twitter and Facebook and who regularly lead and engage in discussions about socially relevant topics and community activities and initiatives

Regional / National

- State and federal elected officials representing Grand Rapids

- Federal administrative departments with regulatory oversight over Grand Rapids initiatives

- Governor's office and other State of Michigan administrative departments

- Statewide and regional business organizations

- Statewide advocacy groups, social service agencies and other non-profits, including those serving targeted populations

- Statewide and national philanthropic partners

- Relevant statewide media outlets

- Relevant national media outlets

Section 6: Messages

We have proposed messaging that applies globally to the City of Grand Rapids, regardless of the project, program, service or department. Due to the breadth and depth of City services provided organization-wide, we have not suggested program-specific key and secondary messaging at this time. Should program-specific messaging support be required in the future, the Office of Communications would lead that effort in consultation with the appropriate department representatives.

Key Messages

The City of Grand Rapids' motto is "Motu Viget" - strength in activity. Importantly, the seal that carries the motto features a hand holding the scales of justice. Justice requires equity and fairness in all action - we must work and grow together for the benefit of all.

These visionary founding principles instruct the City to be just, move forward together and aspire to be more. They are the principles that guided previous strategic initiatives such as the City's Sustainability and Transformation plans, as well as the community's area specific plans and GR Forward. It is fitting that they guide the City's strategic communications, as well.

Now more than ever, strength in activity, guided by justice, matters. We have used these core values as the foundation for the City's key messaging. These overarching messages are clear and universally applicable to all that the City is and does as an organization.

- Grand Rapids is a vibrant, collaborative and welcoming community.

- Our city's strength is rooted in the vision, collaboration and action of our residents.

- Together with the community, we have the confidence to lead, the courage to change and the vision to grow.

Secondary Messages

The following secondary messages add detail and further define the key messages. As a City, we demonstrate strength in activity by:

- Collaborating with diverse community groups to build an inclusive and welcoming city.

- Providing an open and transparent style of government - where public input is encouraged.

- Promoting economic prosperity for all through intentional investments and partnerships.

- Implementing policies that encourage improved housing affordability and choice.

- Collaborating with community groups to develop equitable and effective police policies and procedures.

- Partnering with business and economic development leaders to create a community where business can thrive.

- Supporting entrepreneurship and innovation through public - private partnerships.

- Serving as a leader in fiscally sound governance.

- Providing the infrastructure for safe and accessible transportation and mobility for all.

- Creating a vision for our river corridor that fosters economic growth and enjoyment for all.

- Serving as a steward of our natural resources and fulfilling our sustainability goals.

- Engaging with our municipal neighbors to enhance the quality of life in the region.

- Partnering with educational leaders to elevate our community's academic endeavors.

- Encouraging our youth to engage in community initiatives that help them and our City grow.

Support / Proof Points

Given the breadth and depth of City services and activities, there are dozens of potential proof points that validate the key and secondary messages. The following facts, statistics and anecdotes are examples of these supporting messages.

As specific needs arise, the Office of Communications would be responsible to assist City departments, offices and leadership in developing additional relevant support and proof points.

COMMUNITY-POLICE RELATIONS

- While we consider improved community-police relations to be a top priority, we acknowledge there is much work to be done.

- In 2017, the City established the Police Policy & Procedures Review Task Force to review our police department policies and procedures, identify those that may result in racial bias and recommend changes based on national best practices.

- Our police department has instituted cultural competence and implicit bias training for all our police officers.

- Our police department works to connect with our community's youth through the Chief's Youth Advisory Council, Youth Police Academy, the Police Explorer Program, and the department's partnership with Boys and Girls Clubs, including Pathways to Policing.

- We've renewed efforts to advance SAFE goals by allocating more staff time and resources to fostering meaningful partnerships with community organizations, businesses, public institutions, nonprofits and grassroots groups to reduce violence in our community.

- As part of the 12-Point Plan, implemented a body camera policy that serves as a state-wide model.

- In 2017, improved hiring practices to encourage a more diverse police force.

EQUITY, INCLUSION AND ACCESS

- In 2017, the Community Relations Commission adopted and the City Commission unanimously approved the "Equal Services Regardless of Immigration Status and/or National Origin" or "Equal Services" policy. This policy supports our community's commitment to be a welcoming and inclusive city.

- In 2017, the City launched the Grand Rapids Racial Equity Initiative to increase equitable employment, reduce racial disparities, increase transparency and accountability, and identify ways for community stakeholders to work together to advance racial equity.

- The City is addressing the community's need for affordable housing through Housing NOW!

- The City is working with the National Equity Project to train the City's top management to advance racial equity outcomes in every department.

- The City and our police department have implemented new hiring practices designed to increase diversity and ensure that our organization better reflect our community.

- Grand Rapids was selected as one of five cities nationwide to participate in the first-ever "Racial Equity Here" cohort with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- In 2016, the City Commission adopted the Grand Rapids Vital Streets Plan to guide the City's investments in accessible, inviting and safe streets that serve all people in our community – no matter what mode of transportation they use – manage stormwater runoff and protect the quality of our river and surrounding waterways.

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- The City is investing $25 million each year in Vital Street maintenance, rehabilitation and construction. As a result, 58 percent of City roads are now in good or fair condition, compared to 36 percent in 2014. We are well on our way to our goal of 70 percent by 2030.

COMMERCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- The City's economic development department, DDA and other economic development partners collaborate on the Grand Rapids SmartZone, Tax Free Renaissance Zones, Brownfield Redevelopment Tax Incentives, and a variety of other creative development tools and incentives designed to make Grand Rapids a great place to do business.

- In 2017 alone, *Forbes* and *Headlight Data* recognized Grand Rapids as the fastest growing economy among big cities.

- The City's economic development report cites $173 million in new private investment generating 835 jobs.

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

- The City draws 30 percent of its energy needs from renewable sources and is working to increase that amount to 100 percent by 2025.

- The City has been a leading partner with Grand Rapids Whitewater, DGRI, Grand Valley Metro Council and the local philanthropic community in advancing a plan to revitalize the Grand River and restore the namesake rapids and wildlife habitat for all to enjoy.

- In 2017, the City broke ground on a biodigester and sludge treatment system, an innovative solution to turn food waste into energy. Upon completion in 2019, the biodigester will produce about 60 percent of the electricity needed to operate the City's Water Resource Recovery Facility.

GENERAL SERVICES

- Grand Rapids was selected to participate in Bloomberg Philanthropies national What Works Cities initiative. Through this program, Grand Rapids aims to become a national leader in using data to increase government effectiveness and improve services to residents.

- The City has launched a responsive, secure and user-friendly website geared toward the end-users: residents.

- Grand Rapids has transformed its customer service through implementation of 311.

- The City is working to make this a safe community for pedestrians and cyclists:

  o Grand Rapids was the 1st city in Michigan to adopt a rule requiring five feet of clearance between a passing vehicle and a cyclist.

  o In conjunction with its five-month *Driving Change* campaign, the city saw a 40-percent drop in bicycle-involved crashes in 2016.

  o The City Commission recently passed an ordinance that requires motorists to stop at crosswalks where pedestrians are present.

Calls to Action

These messages drive audiences to take action and often relate to specific programs and initiatives, i.e. participate in a community listening session, complete a survey or attend an event. However, for purposes of this plan, we have included some broadly applied calls to action here.

- Visit grandrapidsmi.gov for more information.

- Call 311 for answers about City services.

- Make your voice heard! Join a citizen board or commission.

- Be informed! Attend a commission meeting or watch it live on Facebook.

- Download our new, all-in-one app on Android and Apple devices today! (See Digital Tactical Recommendations, below.)

- Want to stay in the know? Subscribe on our website for everything City of Grand Rapids [URL]

Section 7: Messengers

Well-Prepared Spokespersons

A key aspect of the City's communications strategy is its responsibility to disseminate vital information to the public through trained and prepared messengers. These messengers serve as spokespersons for the City. They must be fully informed about the relevant issues and comfortable speaking to the media or in large groups. It's also important that the roster of spokespersons reflect the diversity within the City staff and our community.

We anticipate that the following individuals, among others, would be called upon to serve as spokespersons for the City due to their expertise and/or their position. Spokespersons would be determined based on issue and opportunity:

PRIMARY SPOKESPERSONS

- Rosalynn Bliss, Mayor

- City Commissioners

- City Manager (TBD)

- Eric DeLong, Interim City Manager

- Amy Snow-Buckner, Acting Managing Director of Communications

- Chief David Rahinsky, Grand Rapids Police

- Sgt. Cathy Williams, Grand Rapids Police PIO

- Sgt. Terry Dixon, Grand Rapids Police

- Chief John Lehman, Grand Rapids Fire

- Lt. William Smith, Grand Rapids Fire PIO

POTENTIAL SECONDARY/TOPICAL SPOKESPERSONS

- Deputy Chief Eric Payne, Grand Rapids Police

- Deputy Chief David Kiddle, Grand Rapids Police

- Steve Guitar, Media Relations Manager

- Suzanne Schulz, Managing Director, Design, Development, Strategic and Enterprise Services

- Kara Wood, Managing Director, Economic Development

- Josh Naramore, Manager, Mobile GR and Parking Services

- Mari Beth Jelks, Managing Director, Administrative Services

- Tom Almonte, Managing Director, Public Services

- Connie Bohatch, Managing Director, Community Services

- Asante Cain, Assistant to the City Manager

- Stacy Stout, Assistant to the City Manager - Neighborhood Coordinator

- Evette Pittman, Supervisor, Office of Special Events

- David Marquardt, Director, Parks & Recreation

- James Hurt, Director, Public Services

As the City develops its roster of spokespersons, we recommend that those who are less experienced in public speaking and/or in serving as media spokespersons participate in some level of speaker and/or media training.

Section 8: Tactics and Tools

Tactics & Tools

We recommend applying the following communications tactics and tools to support the strategies and pursue the goals and objectives outlined earlier in this plan.
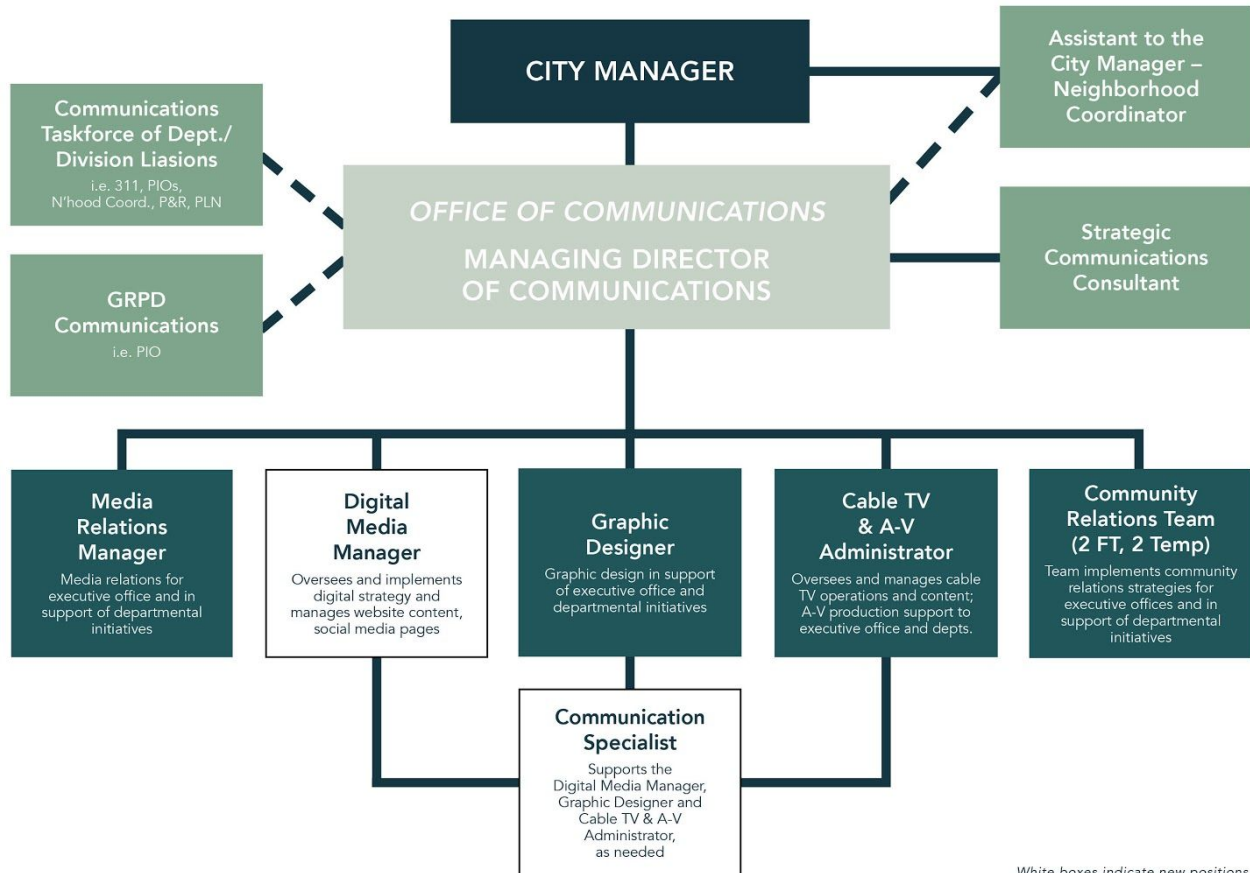
GENERAL

1. **Establish and fully staff an Office of Communications to be led by a Managing Director of Communications.**

Description: The Managing Director of Communications must be an active and engaged member of the executive team. Additionally, the office should be properly resourced. We recommend a staff comprised of a Media Relations Manager, Digital Media Manager, Graphic Designer, Cable TV & A-V Administrator, four-person community relations team and a Communication Specialist (two of these are new positions; the others would be positions currently housed in other City departments).

Consistent with the City's strategic recruitment efforts, those involved in recruiting, evaluating and hiring new positions in the Office of Communications should be intentional in efforts to build a well-qualified team that is reflective of our community.

Please see details about staffing recommendations in the subsections, below, as well as in the "Recommendations" section of the January 2018 City of Grand Rapids Communications Audit. See page 28 and Appendix A for a recommended Office of Communications organizational chart.

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS

CITY MANAGER

Assistant to the City Manager – Neighborhood Coordinator

Communications Taskforce of Dept./ Division Liasions
i.e. 311, PIOs, N'hood Coord., P&R, PLN

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Strategic Communications Consultant

GRPD Communications
i.e. PIO

Media Relations Manager
Media relations for executive office and in support of departmental initiatives

Digital Media Manager
Oversees and implements digital strategy and manages website content, social media pages

Graphic Designer
Graphic design in support of executive office and departmental initiatives

Cable TV & A-V Administrator
Oversees and manages cable TV operations and content; A-V production support to executive office and depts.

Community Relations Team (2 FT, 2 Temp)
Team implements community relations strategies for executive offices and in support of departmental initiatives

Communication Specialist
Supports the Digital Media Manager, Graphic Designer and Cable TV & A-V Administrator, as needed

White boxes indicate new positions.

2. **Form an Interdepartmental Communications Task Force.**

Description: The task force will be responsible for taking communications issues to the Managing Director of Communications, sharing information about priority departmental initiatives with other task force members, providing input on the shared Master Content Calendar (see Media Relations

and Digital Media Tactics, below) and relaying communications issues back to their respective departments, divisions or offices.

Process: The Managing Director of Communications will chair the task force. Heads of departments, divisions and offices that frequently engage in external communications will appoint staff members to represent their respective teams – one per department/division/office. The appointed individuals should be familiar with the external communications priorities and practices within their departments. The task force will meet frequently, i.e. weekly, in order to keep interdepartmental lines of communication open and ensure well-coordinated and comprehensive communication.

3. **Develop a comprehensive City of Grand Rapids Crisis Communications Plan**

Description: Whether it's a natural disaster, act of terrorism, violent crime or internal criminal behavior, The City must be prepared to communicate about a wide range of potential crises quickly, effectively, through multiple channels and to a variety of local and potentially national audiences. This demands both preparation and the agility to shape the response to the specific situation.

A strategic crisis communications plan would be designed to:

● Prepare City leadership to quickly and effectively take control of communications related to a crisis and manage the clear dissemination of information to all relevant audiences as necessary and appropriate, including but not limited to residents, community organizations, area business leaders, the media, elected officials and community partners.

● Ensure that City spokespersons are accessible, responsive, forthcoming, thorough, organized and focused on solutions throughout the crisis response.

● Maintain the high integrity of the City's brand.

Process: The Managing Director of Communications would lead development of this plan in close coordination with executive leadership and key department heads.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

A significant factor in the City Commission's decision to hire a strategic communications firm was the desire to improve communications with the community. Recent events involving the Grand Rapids Police Department and minority communities amplified the need to assess current communications practices employed by the City and determine how those practices should change to better communicate with all residents.

Based on our research, we have identified several communications opportunities and tactics the City should implement to improve communications with the community and, in turn, improve overall community relations.

1. **Create a community relations team within the Office of Communications, and establish a community relations lead who will manage the team and report directly to the Managing Director of Communications.**

Description: Create this team by consolidating all community engagement functions currently housed in the Planning Department within the Office of Communications. (This includes two permanent FTEs and two temporary FTEs.)

The team would be responsible for advancing community relations strategies in support of the City Commission, executive office and departmental initiatives. This includes project-based and issues-based community relations.

2. **Formalize community relations services for City departments and establish protocols for reviewing, prioritizing and accommodating departmental requests.**

Description: These protocols will provide clarity and uniform practices for submitting and fulfilling departmental community relations requests and will allow the City to more effectively leverage this communications tool.

Process: The Managing Director of Communications and the community relations team would work together to develop these protocols. Final protocols would be shared with executive leadership and with departments via the Interdepartmental Communications Task Force.

3. **Continue to consistently implement community engagement tactics and processes identified on the Combined Engagement Map. Update the map as needed.**

Description: This comprehensive Combined Engagement Map was developed by the community engagement team within the Planning Department and identifies a range of community relations tactics and processes used to inform, consult, involve, collaborate with and empower members of the community on various departmental projects, events, meetings and initiatives. The community engagement team has used the map to guide community relations activities in support of various City departments.

Process: Please see Appendix B for details.

4. **Continue to consistently implement the public engagement tools and process plan developed by the Planning Department community engagement team for all Planning Department projects.**

Description: This comprehensive process plan is designed to support various types of planning projects, from long-range planning to zoning to road construction, and takes into consideration all local ordinances and statutory requirements for public hearings, notices and other public communication.

Process: Please see Appendix C for details.

5. **Strengthen coordination between community relations teams at the City.**

Description: Managing Director of Communications and community relations team should meet regularly with the Assistant to the City Manager - Neighborhood Coordinator to ensure strong and strategic coordination of community relations activities organization-wide.

6. **Office of Communications staff assist Neighborhood Coordinator in developing a communications plan to support the Neighborhood Connectors program.**

Description: Both teams should collaborate on developing a tactical plan designed to proactively and consistently reach and engage historically marginalized residents and residents in neighborhoods without highly structured neighborhood associations.

7. **Managing Director of Communications will establish a regular meeting schedule with community organizations representing historically marginalized communities within the city.**

Description: Build on the relationships begun by the former City Manager, Deputy City Manager, and Neighborhood Coordinator and schedule regular meetings to open a direct line of proactive communication between the Office of Communications and the Urban Core Collective (UCC), Grand Rapids Association of Pastors (G-RAP) and other community organizations. These meetings are for the purpose of exchanging information, ideas, priorities and concerns.

Process: Extend invitation for the meetings. Managing Director would take relevant information, ideas, priorities and concerns back to executive leadership and Interdepartmental Task Force for consideration and possible future action as determined by City leadership.

8. **Set protocols to regularly inform community organizations.**

Description: Communications practices designed to reach community organizations with information of interest to their constituents. Protocols will ensure a consistent, relevant flow of information to these groups.

Process: The Managing Director of Communications and community relations team would work together to develop these protocols. Final protocols would be shared with executive leadership and with departments via the Interdepartmental Communications Task Force.

Sample Protocol:

- Develop weekly summary email for community organizations to recap key community issues and development topics.

- Develop monthly email or newsletter for community organizations to recap and look ahead to key community issues and development topics.

- Determine which City announcements require immediate distribution.

- Work with the Interdepartmental Task Force to identify and prioritize potential issues and programs of interest to community groups.

- Determine which community organizations would benefit from receiving City information in both English and Spanish.

- Conduct annual online or email survey regarding the distribution of information and the content included in those communications.

9. **Community relations issues management protocols**

Description: Communications practices designed to respond to escalating community events or issues of interest or concern to community organizations or their constituents. Established protocols will ensure a timely, consistent and relevant flow of information to community groups and foster a stronger level of engagement between the City and its community organizations.

Process: The Managing Director of Communications would work with the Office of Communications staff — community relations team, Media Relations Manager and Digital Media Manager — to develop relevant protocols. Final protocols would be shared with executive leadership and with departments via the Interdepartmental Communications Task Force.

Sample Protocol:

- Develop criteria that define when an event or issue becomes a subject of widespread concern to parts or all of the community. When it's determined that an event or issue meets state specified criteria:

- Engage the Office of Communications team in rapid response assessment, planning and implementation, including media relations, community relations, digital communications, and A-V (i.e. video blogs), if appropriate. (Also see Recommendation #9 under Digital Media tactics.)

- Conduct ongoing discussions with executive leadership and relevant department managers to ensure a full understanding of the situation.

- Identify and equip media spokespersons.

- Keep direct lines of communication open with relevant community groups as the situation develops.

- Monitor, update and respond on social media outlets with heightened urgency. (See Recommendation #9 under Digital Media tactics.)

- Develop criteria that define when an issue escalates to a crisis level, at which time, the crisis communications plan would be implemented.

10. **Establish a regular schedule of community center visits**

Description: Establish a regular schedule of proactive community engagement opportunities for City leadership and staff (i.e., Executive staff, department/office representatives and, possibly, City Commissioners). These would be regularly scheduled visits to various community centers throughout the city where City representatives would make themselves available to discuss City programs and services, hear from residents, and share concerns and ideas.

Process: The community relations team would identify and work with community centers in each ward to establish a schedule of monthly meetings. For example, the 1st Wednesday of the month,

the City meet-and-greet would be at a center in the 1st Ward, the 2nd Wednesday in the 2nd Ward and the 3rd Wednesday in the 3rd Ward.

The topics and City representatives would change each month. The community relations team and Managing Director would work through the Interdepartmental Task Force to identify which topics should be covered each month and who is assigned to represent the City. The topics would be added to the Master Content Calendar. City Commissioners from each ward would have the option to join City staff based on availability.

11. **Regularly update list of community organizations that receive City communications.**

Description: Our community is constantly growing and evolving. While the City currently has a strong base list of community organizations, it is important that information reach all community audiences. Therefore, the City must take proactive steps to ensure new or underserved groups are part of the information distribution process.

Process: Community relations team would conduct annual review of community organization distribution list and update it as needed.

MEDIA RELATIONS

Developing an effective media relations strategy is a fundamental component of the City's overall communications plan. In our democracy, the media views itself as the Fourth Estate, a watchdog for the public, entrusted to monitor the actions of government agencies. Consequently, the media has a strong interest in covering the policies, programs and actions of city operations. When those policies, programs or actions meet with disfavor from residents or sectors of the community, the local media will likely commit a higher level of reporting resources to the subject. Such was the case in 2017 as the City dealt with several incidents involving the Grand Rapids Police Department and the minority community in Grand Rapids.

As noted earlier in this report, our research shows the City must have a multifaceted media relations strategy that outlines communications tactics under proactive and responsive circumstances. By doing this, the City will be better positioned to clearly communicate its actions and the decisions behind them.

We have identified several communications tools and tactics the City should develop and implement to effectively and strategically handle media relations. They are outlined below.

1. **Establish a Media Relations Manager position within the Office of Communications.**

Description: This position will be responsible for managing all media relations matters. This includes developing and maintaining media contact lists, writing and/or editing media releases, scheduling and distributing media releases, responding to media inquiries, working with the City's executive officers and departmental spokespeople to schedule media interviews, developing messaging when appropriate and maintaining professional relationships with local media outlets.

This position will report to the Managing Director of Communications.

2. **Develop a Master Content Calendar**

Description: This calendar should outline the schedule for distributing proactive media materials. It should highlight the planned release of all information for the upcoming month. It should be updated weekly, or as needed, based on new developments.

Process: The Media Relations Manager would oversee and update the calendar. The Media Relations Manager would communicate regularly with relevant department managers through the Interdepartmental Task Force and individually, as needed, to identify and prioritize content.

3. **Establish protocols to handle media inquiries.**

Description: These protocols will provide clarity and uniform practices for handling media inquiries.

Process: The Managing Director of Communications and Media Relations Manager would work together to develop these protocols. Final protocols would be shared with executive leadership and with departments via the Interdepartmental Communications Task Force.

Sample Protocol:

- All inquiries are submitted/directed to the Media Relations Manager for consideration.

- Media Relations Manager notifies Managing Director of Communications.

- Media Relations Manager coordinates the City's response with appropriate executive leadership and then arranges media access to the relevant department spokesperson.

- Media Relations Manager works with the relevant department spokesperson to develop key messages on the specific subject.

- When possible, the Media Relations Manager accompanies City spokesperson during media interviews.

4. **Establish protocols for media release and advisory distribution.**

Description: These protocols will provide clarity and uniform practices for the distribution of all media materials.

Process: The Managing Director of Communications and Media Relations Manager would work together to develop these protocols. Final protocols would be shared with executive leadership and with departments via the Interdepartmental Communications Task Force.

Sample Protocol:

- The Media Relations Manager works with relevant executive leadership and Task Force members to schedule the release of information. Scheduling is informed by the Master Content Calendar and finalized by the Media Relations Manager.

- The Media Relations Manager determines the media targets.

- The Media Relations Manager arranges media access to the relevant department spokesperson as needed.

- Media Relations Manager works with the relevant department spokesperson to develop key messages on the specific subject.

- When possible, the Media Relations Manager accompanies City spokesperson during media interviews.

5. **Refine protocols for the distribution of information to the media by the Grand Rapids Police and Fire Department Public Information Officers.**

Description: These protocols will provide uniform practices for the coordination and handling of media by the police and fire department PIOs.

Process: GRPD and GRFD PIOs would work with the Media Relations Manager and the Managing Director of Communications to develop these protocols. Final protocols would be shared with the respective chiefs and executive leadership.

Sample Protocol:

- GRPD and GRFD PIOs collaborate with the Media Relations Manager to plan the distribution of proactive story pitches.

- All media responses to story pitches are handled by the Media Relations Manager.

- The Media Relations Manager works with the relevant department PIO on key messages on the specific subject.

- When possible, the Media Relations Manager accompanies the department PIO during media interviews.

6. **Establish protocols for issue and crisis communications.**

Description: These protocols will provide uniform practices for handling issue and crisis communications situations and would be in place until a comprehensive crisis communications plan can be developed.

Process: The Managing Director of Communications and Media Relations Manager would work together to develop these protocols. Final protocols would be shared with executive leadership and with departments via the Interdepartmental Communications Task Force.

Sample Protocol:

- All issue or crisis related subjects require engagement by the Managing Director of Communications, the Media Relations Manager and any other relevant communications staff.

- Managing Director of Communications and the Media Relations Manager consult with executive leadership.

- Managing Director of Communications and the Media Relations Manager work with executive leadership and the relevant spokesperson to develop key messages on the specific subject.

- Media Relations Manager coordinates the City's response with appropriate executive leadership and then arranges media access to the relevant spokesperson.

- When possible, the Media Relations Manager accompanies City spokesperson during media interviews.

- Digital Media Manager implements Rapid Response program (see Recommendation #9 under Digital Media).

7. **Engage and strengthen relationships with minority media outlets**

Description: This tactic is intended to help the community relations lead (title TBD) and team strengthen relationships with Grand Rapids' minority media outlets and improve the flow of information to marginalized communities. This action will create a direct line between minority media and the community relations team.

Process: The Media Relations Manager and the community relations lead (title TBD) would meet with editors and community reporters from each Grand Rapids minority publication a minimum of two times per year. Additionally, the City may:

- Submit guest columns from City leadership on topics of interest to minority media on a quarterly basis.

- Arrange profile interviews of City leadership and staff with minority media outlets to showcase inclusive initiatives within the City.

Relevant media targets include:

- Grand Rapids Times

- El Vocero

- El Informador

- Latino News

- WYGR-FM (94.9 FM)

- WNWZ-AM/FM (1410 AM & 104.9 FM)

- WPRR-AM/FM (Various stations in GR)

8. **Conduct regular, proactive media meetings.**

Description: This tactic is intended to provide background information to members of the media and strengthen relationships with key media personnel in the Grand Rapids market.

Process: The Media Relations Manager should arrange meetings with news managers and key reporters from two outlets each month. One member (TBD) of the City's executive team should accompany the Media Relations Manager for these meetings. The choice of which City executive should be partly based on upcoming communications initiatives. Relevant media targets include:

- MLive-Grand Rapids Press

- Grand Rapids Business Journal

- MiBiz

- The Rapidian

- Rapid Growth Media

- GRNow

- Grand Rapids Times

- El Vocero

- El Informador

- Latino News

- WOOD-TV

- WXMI-TV

- WWMT-TV

- WZZM-TV

- WGVU FM/TV

- GRTV

- WYCE-FM

- Iheartmedia Group - WOOD AM/FM & Others

- Cumulus Media Group - WLAV-FM, WJRW-AM & Others)

- Townsquare Media Group - WGRD-FM/WNWZ-FM & Others

- Michigan Radio (West Michigan)

- WYGR-FM (94.9)

- WPRR-AM/FM (Various stations in GR)

9. Increase Office of Communications oversight of messaging from City spokespeople on topics covered in the media.

10. **Conduct media spokesperson training.**

Description: This tactic is intended to ensure stronger brand messaging in all media interviews.

Process: The Media Relations Manager would schedule media training sessions with executive staff and departmental spokespeople. They would be provided guidance on:

- Key messaging

- How to stay on message

- How to structure their comments

- Non-verbal communication tips

DIGITAL MEDIA

Developing an effective digital media strategy is a fundamental component of the City's overall communications plan. It both supports and promotes the City's traditional communications activities while serving as a conduit for residents to directly engage with the City. The successful implementation of a comprehensive digital media strategy will ensure that residents view the City as responsive, engaged and informative.

The primary challenge to bringing the City's digital and social media presence to the next level is twofold: (1) no single individual is tracking results and ensuring posts are crafted according to best practices, and (2) up until the launch of the new website, there has been no centralized website that communications staff can access and update with relevant content for sharing on social media. Moreover, some of the City's social media accounts are redundant or not active at all.

Utilizing a Master Content Calendar to ensure all facets of the City's communications, including digital media, are working in lockstep coupled with the consistent implementation of digital and social media best practices will help the City effectively and professionally reach target audiences.

To that end, we have identified several communications tools and tactics the City should develop and implement to effectively and strategically handle digital media. They are outlined below.

1. **Hire a Digital Media Manager**

Description: The Digital Media Manager will oversee and guide digital strategy across all City departments, manage and update City of Grand Rapids website content and social media pages, and provide backup admin support on departmental social media pages.

Specifically, the Digital Media Manager would set up and manage the City's Master Hootsuite account, including access for departmental admins who have been trained and are responsible for managing their specific social media accounts; train and assist departmental social media admins. This includes reviewing, approving and suggesting edits to social media content; manage content generation and ensure that the Master Content Calendar is updated with that information; track and analyze all social media performance metrics; set quarterly/yearly goals and hold admins to account.

The DMM would also be responsible for managing content strategy for the City's website, fully leveraging the power of this communications tool and ensuring integration with other communications functions.

2. **Develop and implement a program of weekly social media posts (as part of the Master Calendar) that promote various aspects of the City of Grand Rapids.**

Description: This program of weekly social media posts would assist the City in generating content to achieve the objective of 1 - 2 posts per day for each social media account. Of course, this effort would be in addition to the timely, "as it happens" type of social media content.

Process: The Digital Media Manager (DMM) would work with the Managing Director of Communications, relevant department and office social media managers to develop the weekly program. This content should be coordinated through the Interdepartmental Communications Task Force.

Sample Protocol:

- DMM develops program of posts.

- DMM works with department and office social media managers to source and generate content biweekly or monthly for the proceeding two-week or monthly period. Some potential ideas are:

  a. Vibrant downtown: New businesses opening; existing "cool" ones

  b. Dynamic business sector: New investments, job numbers, where to find a job, interesting business-led initiatives

  c. Diverse neighborhoods: Upcoming events, neighborhood news

  d. International Art Scene

  e. Public Transportation

  f. Local and National Recognition/Awards

  g. Content posted by CGR-related entities, like the police and fire departments

- DMM updates Master Content Calendar with forward-looking posts for approval and assists in implementation (posting) where/if necessary.

3. **Gather ideas from the social and digital tactics of peer and major cities, like New York. The NYPD has a very active social media presence, and its Instagram is a huge success. This effort would be led by the DMM.**

Description: This effort will ensure the City is implementing a social media strategy – and the attendant tactics – that draw from the successful strategies and tactics of peer and major cities. Since social media is continually evolving, this should be an on-going (but not cumbersome) effort.

Process: DMM would research peer and major city best practices, review with Managing Director and incorporate them into the City's efforts, including the Master Content Calendar.

4. **Develop a "Neighborhoods" brand and program to populate the City's website and social media – including departmental social media.**

Description: The Neighborhoods brand and program would feature the good things happening in the City's neighborhoods. Working with the Neighborhood Coordinator, Neighborhood Connectors and neighborhood associations, the communications office would source content that highlights positive news, upcoming events and related stories that would be posted on the City's website – preferably in a specialized sub-section of the website – and then shared on the City's social media.

Process: The Office of Communications would develop the brand and program, and would work with the Neighborhood Coordinator, Neighborhood Connectors and neighborhood associations to generate content about positive stories happening throughout Grand Rapids.

5. **Develop and engage a list of social media influencers, including elected officials, business leaders and community organizers who can help push and promote the City's message. This is especially relevant for engaging traditionally marginalized communities.**

Description: Engaging a list of influences will help Grand Rapids spread and promote its message. The social media influencers should be in Grand Rapids and active on social media. For example, elected officials should include those in Grand Rapids, Kent County, State House and Senate

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members who represent parts or all of Grand Rapids, and statewide elected officials. This list of influencers should also include active community organizers and potentially business leaders.

Process: Consistently engaging this list via tagging, Liking, sharing and reTweeting, etc., will create a positive feedback loop where they'll be more likely to share the City's content in the future. For example, when crafting a web post and related social media content as part of the "Neighborhoods" brand and program recommendation (recommendation #3, above), the DMM would tag the relevant Neighborhood Connectors/accounts and alert relevant community-based influencers publicly or privately to help spread the word. This effort should be led by the DMM in close coordination with the Media Relations Manager and Managing Director of Communications.

6. **Develop a Twitter list of all reporters covering the City, follow their activity and engage with them when appropriate.**

Description: Reporters are very active on Twitter. Build a list of their Twitter accounts to monitor their activity and look for opportunities to engage with them, including ReTweeting/Liking positive stories, correcting the record and/or by providing "tips" for upcoming news-worthy stories. This has the added benefit of enabling the City to get ahead of a bad news story that first pops up on Twitter. Actively following this list will ensure the City can stay ahead of the curve and be as responsive as possible to reporters and residents.

Process: The DMM and Media Relations Manager would work together to identify all relevant reporters and their handles. The DMM would put them in a Twitter List that can be followed by members of the Office of Communications. The Media Relations Manager would lead engagement with reporters on Twitter and guide other members of the Office of Communications to follow, message and retweet reporter content when appropriate. The Media Relations Manager and the DMM would be responsible for keeping the list up-to-date (new reporters, account changes etc).

7. **Develop design templates for use on social media across departments with an easy-to-use digital design tool.**

Description: Using a tool like Crello or Canva will enable non-designers to produce professional looking content.

Process: DMM would select the tool and would work with the Graphic Designer to create design templates. DMM would provide departmental social media administrators training in its application.

8. **Develop and implement city-wide digital and social media best practices and mandatory training program for employees who will be posting to City digital media services and accounts.**

Description: Digital and social media best practices are a set of guidelines on how to craft digital and social media content to be as engaging and effective as possible. These best practices will ensure the City's social media is implemented consistently across all accounts. In part, the best practices can be based on the qualitative analysis. For example, ensuring that high-quality images that follow the City's brand guidelines are used where appropriate and that links are removed from posts once they've "attached."

Process: The DMM would develop and codify the City's digital and social media best practices along with the training program for employees who will be posting to City digital media services and accounts. In close coordination with departments and offices, the DMM would conduct trainings – either in person or via screen-sharing software – with current employees who are responsible for posting to City social media accounts.

9. **Utilize the paid version of Hootsuite to manage, generate and approve content across all of the City's social media accounts.**

Description: Hootsuite is one of many apps that can be used to manage several social media accounts simultaneously. Hootsuite enables organizations to divy up responsibility to teams and individuals with moderation. For example, a social media post could be scheduled by an employee and then reviewed and approved by the DMM.

Process: The DMM would set up Hootsuite, ensure all relevant social media accounts have been added and add all appropriate employees to the "team." DMM would train employees on how to use Hootsuite.

10. **Develop a Rapid Response program along with the necessary protocols for responding to resident and media inquiries related to sensitive issues and crises.**

Description: The digital Rapid Response program would exist within the Office of Communication's Crisis Communications Plan (see Recommendation #3 under General Tactics and Tools, above) and would be integrated into issue and crisis communications protocols discussed in Recommendation #6 under Media Relations.

Using Hootsuite Insights (enterprise edition), the DMM can set up Hootsuite to email her/himself and other Office of Communications team members notifying them of any "hits" related to the City during crisis situations. Moreover, the Office of Communications should leverage a service like TV Eyes or Meltwater to monitor radio and broadcast coverage for any mention of the City.

11. **Reflect, promote and leverage all traditional media efforts undertaken by the communications department.**

Description: Ensure that all traditional media efforts are promoted through the City's social media accounts where appropriate. For example, if an interview is given to WZZM and aired, the DMM should capture that and share it on the City's social media (or share the news organization's social media post itself).

Process: This process would largely be done as part of the Master Content Calendar maintenance. Traditional media efforts that exist in the Master Calendar should have digital media efforts backing them in each case. It is the DMM's job to ensure this happens.

12. **Develop and implement an ongoing digital advertising campaign targeting residents that live in Grand Rapids and encouraging them to Like the City of Grand Rapids Facebook page.**

Description: Generally, Likes cost ~$0.30. Facebook estimates there are 300,000 people in Grand Rapids between the ages of 13 and 65+ (Facebook estimates this figure based on users who set their current city as Grand Rapids). With a budget of $10,000, the City could reach between 9,100 and 57,000 people who list Grand Rapids as their city each day – easily reaching the entire audience over a 30-day window. Facebook estimates that this would generate between 3,600 and

22,500 Likes. This budget is easily adaptable and once the City's digital footprint increases, organic engagement should help drive additional growth.

13. **Develop an "all-in-one" mobile application that combines all the existing official CGR mobile apps and their functions into one, centralized mobile clearinghouse.**

Description: This would encourage a higher adoption rate among residents and enable CGR to send "push alerts" to mobile devices for important information. This new app would include functions like, but not limited to:

- Public safety issues/events

- Road construction/closures

- News and press releases

- Upcoming events

- Available parking & mobility services

- Voter information

- Bill payment

For example, the GR 311 app only has between 500 – 1,000 installations in the Google App Store. GR PayIt has between 1,000 – 5,000 installations. There's also a GR Park app that assists users in finding available parking and has between 1,000 –5,000 installations. This app uses CGR's actual logo though it's unclear if it's an "official" City app. Nonetheless, combining this functionality into an "all-in-one" solution will improve the user-experience for residents.

Process: Work with the City's current app developer, PayIt LLC, to determine if the functionality laid out above is possible to build with their existing platform. An app with the functionality laid out above can cost between $10,000 and $30,000.

14. Retain and maintain active and effective social media accounts; merge or delete redundant and/or unused social media accounts.

Description:

We recommend merging the following social media pages with the main City of Grand Rapids page (CGR) if allowed by Facebook (Facebook can reject the request(s)). The goal of each social media page is to ensure target audiences see and engage with your content. The following pages don't have enough followers or engagement to meet that criteria and would be more successful reaching target audiences through the City's main page.

- Mobile GR and Parking Services

- Water Department

- Office of Special Events

- Office of Diversity and Inclusion

- Community Relations Commission

If the City chooses not to merge one or more of these pages, or if Facebook rejects the merger, we recommend either deleting the page and incorporating its content into the Master Calendar or consistently sharing the page's content to the City's main page.

We recommend maintaining the following social media pages:

- Fire Department

- Our Community's Children

- Development Center

- Environmental Services

We recommend merging the following social media pages:

- Police Department and Police Department Recruitment

- Parks and Recreation, Rosa Parks Circle Ice Rink and Indian Trails Golf Course

We recommend deleting the My GR City Points page.

CABLE TV AND A-V

The City has an opportunity to more effectively leverage and coordinate Cable TV and A-V services with other communications functions by consolidating these functions within the Office of Communications, formalizing and expanding A-V production services for City departments, and providing Cable TV and A-V staff with the technical resources and equipment to meet the changing demands of the public.

Specific tactics include:

1. **Bring the current Cable TV Administrator (and current support staff) into the Office of Communications.**

Description: This position will be responsible for fully integrating cable TV and A-V functions into communications strategies and leveraging the power of these tools to more effectively inform and engage the public.

This position will report to the Managing Director of Communications.

2. **Formalize and expand A-V production services for City departments and establish protocols for reviewing, prioritizing and accommodating departmental requests.**

Description: These protocols will provide clarity and uniform practices for submitting and fulfilling departmental A-V production and live-streaming requests and will allow the City to more effectively leverage videos as multi-platform communications tools.

Process: The Managing Director of Communications and administrator would work together to develop these protocols. Final protocols would be shared with executive leadership and with departments via the Interdepartmental Communications Task Force.

3. **Share departmental videos across multiple channels.**

Description: Leverage the full value of compelling departmental videos by sharing and cross-promoting content on various City digital channels.

Process: The Office of Communications team would develop content sharing protocols. The office would share the protocols with the Interdepartmental Task Force and work with the task force and Master Content Calendar to schedule and disseminate video content.

4. **Regularly livestream or capture community meeting video (i.e., Commission Night Out, Planning Commission meetings, community listening sessions), upload content to digital platforms and edit it to air on GRIN.**

Description: City leadership and departments/offices notify the Office of Communications of upcoming meetings and request video support.

Process: The Managing Director and Cable TV & A-V Administrator would develop protocols for requesting video and live streaming support and share the protocols with City leadership and department/office heads through the Interdepartmental Task Force.

Additionally, through regular task force meetings, the Office of Communication would assist in identifying video and live-streaming opportunities to add to the Master Calendar.

BRANDING AND DESIGN

City department personnel stated the need for a consistent and complete set of brand standards to guide visual and written communications. They welcome and request guidance in this area and suggest that the City make an investment in completing a brand standards manual and offer training on its application.

The need for City-wide graphic design support goes hand-in-hand with the need to establish consistent brand standards. Nearly every department representative interviewed has either called on the Graphic Designer for support or expressed frustration that there is no formal graphic design staff or team to provide that service.

The City has an opportunity to take great strides toward elevating the visual quality and consistency of its brand by formalizing and resourcing City-wide graphic design services within an Office of Communications.

Our recommendations in this area follow.

1. **Bring the Graphic Designer, currently part of the Planning Department, into the Office of Communications.**

Description: The Graphic Designer would report to the Managing Director of Communications and would provide graphic design services to the executive office and City departments and offices as needed. This person would also be responsible for leading development and implementation of a City of Grand Rapids Brand Standards Manual.

2. **Formalize and expand graphic design services for City departments and establish protocols for reviewing, prioritizing and accommodating departmental requests.**

Description: These protocols will provide clarity and uniform practices for submitting and fulfilling departmental graphic design requests and will allow the City to more effectively maintain its brand.

Process: The Managing Director and Graphic Designer would collaborate on a plan to formalize graphic design services to City departments; establish protocols for reviewing, accommodating and prioritizing departmental requests; and share those protocols with the executive office and City departments via the Interdepartmental Communications Task Force.

3. **Develop a comprehensive City of Grand Rapids Brand Standards Manual to guide visual and written communications.**

Description: A Brand Standards Manual – or Brand Style Guide – is the document that defines and presents examples of how your brand looks and sounds in public-facing materials (i.e., collateral

materials, digital media, videos, media materials, etc.). It provides guidelines related to visual presentation of the name and logo, including color palette, placement, etc. It also defines your brand's voice – the personality of your brand – and tone – the mood or attitude expressed in written content. The purpose of these guidelines is to assist City staff and others in the use of the City's proprietary marks and corresponding language so that the organization accurately and consistently conveys its brand, mission and identity.

Process: The Graphic Designer and Managing Director would lead this initiative, giving consideration to the voice/tone standards and writing style guidelines that have already been developed for web content. Once complete, the manual would be shared organization-wide with instructions on its application and adherence mandated by executive leadership.

4. **Create and share digital and traditional design templates.**

Description: The Graphic Designer would develop shareable design templates for common digital and traditional communications tools such as e-newsletters, email marketing pieces, e-vites, memos and formal letters. These templates would provide department staff attractive "plug-and-play" communications tools that meet brand standards and are flexible enough for various applications.

Process: The Graphic Designer and Digital Media Manager would identify digital marketing platforms for use organization-wide. They would also provide training to department staff charged with using the platforms. The Graphic Designer would share templates (including Illustrator, InDesign or Photoshop as appropriate) via a sharing site, such as Dropbox, Crello or Canva.

Section 9: Monitoring and Evaluation

We propose the following benchmarks be used to evaluate whether the organization is achieving its objectives and advancing its goals.

It is important to note that much of what the City aspires to accomplish is relational. The City has prioritized improvements in the way it communicates with the community, in part, to better understand community needs, to increase trust and to build more authentic and meaningful relationships with the people and organizations it serves. While we included concrete measurables where possible, it is difficult to quantify trust or measure the strength of a relationship.

Measurables

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

- Relocation and full integration of current Planning Department Community Engagement staff in the new Office of Communications.

- Current Community Engagement Map and Planning Department Community Engagement Process Plan are assessed, updated as needed and fully integrated into Office of Communications protocols and practices. (See Appendices B and C.)

- Protocols in place that enable the Office of Communications to better inform and engage community organizations – i.e., weekly email updates, monthly community newsletter, and regular meetings with key community organizations – are established and consistently implemented.

- Protocols in place that enable the City to quickly and more effectively anticipate and address community concerns and de-escalate tensions surrounding sensitive issues are established and consistently applied.

- Increased attendance at and engagement in community meetings and events.

- Community organization distribution list is updated annually.

MEDIA RELATIONS

- Integration of Media Relations Manager in the Office of Communications.

- Increase the number of positive or neutral media stories involving the City.

- Increase the number of stories that contain key messaging from the City.

- Increase inclusion of City messaging in Grand Rapids minority media outlets.

- Quarterly appearances by staff on local public affairs broadcasts to discuss City programs.

- Conduct background meetings with relevant media outlets each year.

DIGITAL MEDIA

- Digital Media Manager is hired and integrated in Office of Communications.

- Achieve a post frequency of 1 - 2 per day for every City social media account.

- Achieve an engagement rate of 6% or higher across all City Facebook pages.

- Maintain or improve engagement rates for all City Twitter and Instagram accounts.

- Increase rate at which social media drives residents back to the City's centralized website

- Grow the number of Likes and Followers on all of the City's social media accounts on a quarterly basis. Note: The Digital Media Manager should set these benchmark goals with department social media admins based on their review of relevant social media metrics.

- Achieve a 100%, 1-hour response time to Facebook messages across all City Facebook pages.

- Achieve a 100% response rate to all relevant Facebook comments/questions within 24 hours.

- Consistently implement social media best practices across all City social media accounts.

- Launching an "all-in-one" mobile app that combines the various functions of existing, official City of Grand Rapids mobile apps and adds to that functionality.

CABLE TV & A-V

- Current cable TV staff is reassigned and fully integrated in the new Office of Communications.

- Establishment and consistent application of protocols that enable the Office of Communications to better meet departmental A-V needs.

- Regular live-streaming of key City meetings, such as City Commission, Planning Commission, Police Policy and Procedures Review Task Force, Community Relations Commission, etc.

- Strategic use of video storytelling, video blogs, and other A-V tools by departments throughout the organization.

BRANDING & DESIGN

- Current Graphic Designer is fully integrated in the new Office of Communications.

- Protocols in place that enable the Office of Communications to better meet departmental design needs are established and consistently applied.

- Completion of a comprehensive brand standards manual.

- Brand standards manual is shared organization-wide and departmental personnel are trained in its application.

- Organization-wide adherence to City of Grand Rapids Brand Standards, i.e. consistent logo and brand messaging on all outgoing communications materials.

Evaluation

The Managing Director of Communications and Office of Communications team will meet regularly to discuss progress toward goals, check in on measurables, and make course adjustments, as needed.

We recommend quarterly written reports for presentation, as appropriate, to the City Manager and/or City Commission.

Section 10: Appendices

Hyperlinks to Appendices

APPENDIX A - **OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS ORGANIZATIONAL CHART**

APPENDIX B - **COMBINED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MAP**

APPENDIX C - **PLANNING DEPT. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS & TOOLS**

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