

CITY OF ASHLAND



COMMUNICATION PLAN

Background

In 1995, one of the City Council goals was “to improve communication to and from the City of Ashland and its citizens”. Subsequently, the Mayor appointed an ad hoc Citizen’s Communication Committee to help develop a plan to achieve this goal. The Committee began meeting in late 1995 and its plan was submitted to and adopted by the City Council in late 1996.

Staff developed the City’s first Public Information, Marketing and Communication Plan and it was adopted by the Council in September 1998.

In January 2000 the Council adopted the 2000-2001 Public Information and Communication Plan. It is included in this guide so that employees have a sense of the overall communication efforts of the City. This plan is updated yearly. This provides a year to year guide and overall framework for the City’s communication activities.

CITY OF ASHLAND

City of Ashland Communication Plan Introduction

The City of Ashland recognized the value of citizen involvement and the wealth of good information and resources the citizens of Ashland possess. It is important to increase the city's understanding of citizen concerns, ideas and values so they can be utilized to make better decisions. The City must identify, create and budget adequate resources to engage citizens and citizen groups to enable them to effectively become a part of the city's decision making process.

Much of the city's overall success is shaped by the quality of its communication efforts. Therefore, a proactive approach is needed to foster effective two-way communication.

DRAFT Values Statement

The City of Ashland takes pride in providing quality service with professionalism, integrity and honesty. The City of Ashland values citizen input and believes citizens should have a say in decisions about actions that could affect their lives. The City of Ashland respects the dignity, diversity and uniqueness of our citizens, the community and the environment. The principals of effectiveness, fiscal responsibility and safety guide us in enhancing the well-being of the community.

DRAFT Key Messages

- City activities and services have positive results for our community
- City services are essential to the quality of life in Ashland
- The City listens to its residents and values community input
- The City spends money wisely

Guiding Principals

Open Two-Way Communication – Ensure information is shared throughout the community and the organization emphasizing two-way informational flow.

Community Problem Solving – Provide citizens with complete, accurate and timely information enabling them to make informed judgments. This will help the City to make the best decisions.

Proactive – The plan attempts to give the City the opportunity to tell its story rather than rely exclusively on others to interpret the City's actions, issues and decisions.

Decentralized — Strengthen direct communication between elected officials, City departments and citizens rather than trying to funnel all information through a central point of contact or department. This provides for more knowledgeable discourse, strengthens accountability and also makes it easier to access or provide information on City activities.

Inclusive — Including everyone in the process builds teamwork and a feeling of belonging, breaking down feelings of us vs. them, which are common in many city governments and in many relationships of city government with citizens. The goal is to include everyone who cares to participate and to motivate those who are not currently engaged.

Strong and Consistent Messages — A successful communication plan is built on strong themes and is more effective than one with unrelated and scattered messages. The communication plan should support, reinforce and reflect the goals of the City government as established by the City Council and City management, thus underscoring the idea of an organization with one common purpose: the citizens.

Goals of the Communication Plan

- Ensure the Mayor and City Council are an active and integral part of the overall City Communication Plan.
- Improve City communication to and from Ashland citizens, businesses and organizations
- Improve two-way communication within the City organization
- Enhance and improve community and media relations
- Increase awareness, interest and participation of the citizens of Ashland in government goals and activities.
- Break down feelings of “us vs. Them” between city government and the residents of Ashland, between elected officials and staff and between departments and agencies.
- Increase awareness, interest and participation of City employees in the goals and activities of the City.
- Build organizational pride among employees and positive identification with the City government as a whole.

Targeted Audiences

Identifying and prioritizing target audiences are key components of a communication plan. Without such identification, a communication plan can slip into a “read-fire-aim” approach rather than a planned “ready-aim-fire approach.

Primary Target Audiences

- Citizens of Ashland
Citizens of Ashland are the highest priority targeted audience. Strengthening the relationship between city government and 20,000 residents is the starting point of a sound communication plan.
- Identified segment of Ashland citizens
Often, city projects, issues and programs directly affect a segment of Ashland citizens thus requiring specific targeted outreach to those citizens.
- Members of City boards, commissions and committees.
While these people are covered under the broad umbrella of #1, Citizens of Ashland,

the work they do on behalf of the community and government makes them a distinct and specific target audience.

- City Employees
People employed by the City of Ashland in its various departments are an integral part of the success of the communication plan. Each individual reflects the organization in their daily work.
- News media
The media are important because their coverage of the City government can have significant influence on the image of government by the public. Media includes a variety of print and broadcast.

Secondary Audiences

- People outside of Ashland, including area residents who primarily work and visit in Ashland
- Other local governments in the Rogue Valley, Oregon and beyond
- City government associations and organizations.

Strategies and Actions

Strategies

- Expand our communication research program, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods to measure attitudes and opinions.
- Continue to employ a multimedia and multilevel communication approach and monitor and fine-tune the existing communication tools and seek additional tools. What worked in the past may have outlived its usefulness and need to be abandoned and replaced with something else. Some people absorb information audibly and others absorb information visually. Be sure the communication tools are diverse in order to reach various segments of the targeted audiences.
- Use interactive communication tools and techniques wherever and whenever possible to involve target audiences in the communication process and increase their commitment to community problem solving.

Actions

- Research
Conduct attitudinal surveys and focus groups. The method of implementation should include a diverse set of tools rather than just one form (random telephone surveys) as in years past. The implementation must reach a broad spectrum of Ashland citizens so that the results accurately reflect the demographic make-up of the community.
- Communication Audit
Conduct a communication audit. It is useful to review the tools we have in place and our overall communication efforts in order to determine what more we could be doing. Use an outside firm to conduct a communication audit of the City's outreach tools to determine tools that may be outdated and tools that need to be added.

- **Communication Training**
Provide communication counseling and training for City officials and staff. This tactic includes communication counseling/training with the Mayor, Council Members, City Administrator and Department Heads as well as mid-managers and members of City commissions, committees and boards. We all think we do a good job of communicating, but without the benefit of others telling us their perception of how well we communicate we may never improve.

Communication Tools

External

City Source /Utility Bill Insert

Description: Monthly, 11x17 bi-fold/tri-fold publication in four colors. Included in utility bills, the insert includes information submitted by city commissions, city programs, meeting dates, tips, general information.

Objective: To provide general City information to the community.

Strengths: No postage required, easy to read, flexible and attractive format.

Weaknesses: Timeliness is limited to a six week advance deadline. Mailed only to utility accounts (nine bill cycles mailed over a period of four weeks).

Audience: All Ashland utility accounts (not all Ashland households).

Water Quality Report (H2O)

Description: 5.5 x 8 eight-page booklet in one color mailed each June to every Ashland household. Meets the EPA requirement of providing a Consumer Confidence Report (CCR) on the quality of Ashland's drinking water.

Objective: To exceed the EPA requirements and raise community's awareness of water as a precious resource, water conservation, water related capital project, Ashland's water system and more.

Strengths: The CCR provides an opportunity to provide additional information about water.

Weaknesses: None.

Audience: Mailed to all Ashland households.

Web Page

Description: Comprehensive web site designed to enable staff to post information from any desktop computer. The site contains news items, department listings, calendar of City meetings and events, agendas and minutes for all Commissions, Committees and Council. It offers easy access to City programs, services, documents and more. Viewers can request that news items agendas, calendar postings etc. be automatically e-mailed when posted.

Objective: To provide "one-stop" access to City information via the World Wide Web. Cross reference information so that it is accessible from a variety of entry points.

Strengths: Extremely flexible and easy to read with a powerful search tool. Easy to keep current and to add or delete information.

Weaknesses: Unable to provide on-line services such as permits, licenses etc. This will occur once the City has a web interface with our accounting software Eden and our GIS system. Is only available to citizens with Internet access.

Audience: Anyone with access to the Internet.

Web Page Survey Tool

Description: Simple surveys or questionnaires can be posted from the backend. Persons who have completed the survey can view results. Participation is limited to one entry per computer.

Objective: To provide citizen's with a means of commenting and providing input on City issues from their desktop.

Strengths: Extremely flexible.

Weaknesses: Only available to citizens with Internet access.

Audience: Anyone with access to the Internet.

RVTV

Description: Public access television. Live broadcasts of all City Council, Planning Commission and Park Commission meetings. Broadcasts are replayed twice per week until the next meeting. Town Hall, a live call-in television show, is broadcast live once per month (4th Tuesday) and replayed periodically until the next live show. RVTV also posts information slides on channel 31.

Objective: Use public access television to provide information about City issues to the community.

Strengths: Reliable and knowledgeable staff, who are always willing to help and to improve coverage.

Weaknesses: Program scheduling is confusing. Difficult to determine what time City programs will air. Television viewers tend to "surf" channels and land on the public access channels by chance.

Audience: Rogue Valley Cable Television viewers.

Brochures

Description: A variety of brochures are created in-house, including Conservation, Electric Rates, Sample Utility Bill, ADA Services, Adopt-a-Street and more. These are placed in display racks at City Hall and at the Civic Center. They are mailed in response to inquiries and used as a resource by front-line staff.

Objective: To provide brief easy-to-understand information about City services and programs.

Strengths: Inexpensive, simple, easy to create.

Weaknesses: Limited distribution.

Audience: Ashland residents.

Assorted Printed Materials

Description: Flyers, door hangers, postcards, maps, etc. are created as needed to provide information about City program and issues.

Objective: Support other communication tools with printed materials for targeted audiences.

Strengths: Provides specific information designed to targeted audience. E.g., door hangers for hotels to hang on bathroom doors asking guests to re-use towels to help reduce laundry thereby conserving water. Tent cards for restaurants alerting customers that water is served on request.

Weaknesses: Limited materials can be made in-house; most materials must be printed professionally.

Audience: Various targeted audiences depending on the message.

News Releases

Descriptions: A prepared news or publicity item about City of Ashland business. News releases should be timely and relevant and contain the facts of the information. The release should include basic information: who, what, where, when, why and how.

Objectives: To provide the local media timely, accurate, and useful news about the City of Ashland. Releases are emailed to the local media.

Strengths: Easy to write and distribute.

Weakness: Not always "picked-up" and used by the media.

Audience: Local media.

Display Advertisements:

Description: The City occasionally places display advertisements in local newspapers.

Objective: To call attention to City programs and upcoming public meetings.

Strengths: Easy to read, City logo catches readers attention. Ads are recognizable as City of Ashland.

Weaknesses: Expensive, short shelf life. Competes with many other ads in a variety of size and design.

Audience: Ashland residents.

Public Service Announcements (PSA):

Description: 30 second ad spots that air randomly on cable television.

Objective: To call attention to City programs and upcoming public meetings.

Strengths: Inexpensive, broad distribution, recognizable as City of Ashland information.

Weaknesses: Airs during non prime time, limited creativity, competes with many other ads.

Audience: Ashland residents.

Public Meetings

Description: In addition to the regularly scheduled Council and assorted Committees and Commission meetings, which are always open for public comment, other public meetings targeted towards specific issues are also held as needed; Strawberry Lane, Helman Street, Railroad District, Siskiyou Boulevard, TOT etc.

Objective: To present the community with an opportunity to express opinions and give input on specific City issues.

Strengths: Attendees hear the opinions of others and have a greater appreciation for the issue as a whole beyond their own personnel opinions.

Weaknesses: Often attracts the same people again and again.

Audience: Either broad base citizenry, or specific targeted group.

Internal

Employee Newsletter

Description: 8 x 14 single sheet full color newsletter distributed to all employees each month. The newsletter includes information on benefits, computer tips, new and retiring employees and more.

Objective: Keep employees informed about issues that affect them directly including benefit changes, computer training opportunities, new employees, etc.

Strengths: Simple, easy to produce inexpensive.

Weaknesses: Can be time sensitive.

Audience: All City employees.

All Users E-mail

Description: Each City employee receives E-mail directed to "all users". E-mails include news releases, Council agendas, minutes, training opportunities etc.

Objective: Ensure that employees hear news from the organization before reading it in the papers or hearing it "on the street".

Strengths: Quick and timely information.

Weaknesses: Not all employees check their e-mail on a regular basis.

Audience: Employees

Department Head Meeting

Description: Directors of the various departments gather each week to review up-coming Council meetings, action items and to keep each other informed of issues in their own

departments. The meetings provide an opportunity for department heads to keep abreast of what is happening in all departments.

Objective: Ensure that all departments are familiar with broad issues related to City business.

Strengths: Regular face-to-face contact between department heads.

Weaknesses: Information is not always communicated to department staff.

Audience: Department Heads

Department Meetings

Descriptions: Each department meets regularly to exchange information and to update each other on issues and activities within the department and other departments.

Objective: Share information with all department employees about department business and citywide business.

Strengths: Provides an opportunity for employees to "catch-up" and "check-in" with each other.

Weaknesses: Because of busy schedules and conflicting meetings, department meetings are not always held on a regular basis.

Audience: Employees.

Paychecks Stuffers

Description: Occasionally information such as the United Way Campaign, changes in benefits etc, is included with employee paychecks.

Objective: Alert employees to changes in benefits, opportunities etc.

Strength: Easy to reach all employees.

Weakness: Often the material is not read.

Audience: Employees

Mid-Manager Meetings

Description: Twice per year, mid-level managers meet to review city business, discuss upcoming projects, challenges etc.

Objective: Familiarize managers with one another, develop common bonds discuss common concerns issues.

Strength: Presents the opportunity to share information face-to-face and to establish and maintain bonds between departments.

Weaknesses: Meetings can be rushed and due to the size of the group can be somewhat daunting.

Audience: Mid-level managers.

Employee Communication Guide

Description: Award-winning comprehensive handbook for all employees which includes information on the use of City graphics, city templates, working with the media, citizen participation, conducting meetings and more.

Strength: Easy to read, easy to reference.

Weaknesses: None

Audience: Primarily managers and support staff.

Talking Points

Description: Reference sheet provided to employees and Mayor and Council related to specific and often complicated issues. Talking Points generally contain the basics: who, what, where, when, why and how of an issue and enable employees to become familiar with an issue quickly and respond factually to citizen questions.

Strength: Easy to read, easy to reference.

Weakness: None

Audience: Primarily front line staff: both internal and field personnel.

Communication Tools Eliminated

Due to budget constraints, the following communication tools have been eliminated over the past few years.

Budget in Brief

Description: 5.5 x 8.5 eight-page booklet in two colors.

Objective: To provide basic information about the current fiscal year budget. Includes pages called "Where the money comes from" and "Where the money goes". Mailed every July.

Strengths: Easy to read simple layout "not overwhelming".

Weaknesses: Attempts to simplify a very complex subject.

Audience: Mailed to all Ashland households.

Citizen Survey

Description: A community attitude and opinion survey is conducted every two years. A total of 400 interviews are conducted via phone. The sample size ensures a 95% confidence level with a margin of error not greater than $\pm 5\%$. This means that if the survey were replicated using the same methodology, 95 times out of 100 the same percentages would emerge within a range of $\pm 5\%$.

Objective: The overall objective of the research is to measure change in the community's attitudes and opinions.

Strengths: Relatively quick and simple. Provides quantitative data.

Weaknesses: Many households have caller ID features on their phones and will not answer the phone if the number is not one they recognize. Consequently numerous calls must be made before attaining the target sample of 400. There is a concern that the survey does not accurately reflect the age demographics of the community. Does not provide qualitative data.

Audience: City Council and City staff.

Videos

Description: RVTV produces three to four educational/informational videos each year for the City. Recent videos include, Conservation, Siskiyou Boulevard, Welcome to Ashland, AFN etc. The videos run prior to or immediately following an RVTV City of Ashland broadcast. They are also available free of charge for citizens to borrow through the City Recorder's office and the Ashland Public Library.

Objective: Provide visual and audio information on City issues and projects.

Strengths: Very effective communication tool. Professional and informative.

Weaknesses: Very limited audience/distribution. Requires a lot of staff time/coordination but is seen by very few people. (Staff is looking into the possibility of streaming the videos on the City's web site and expanding distribution.)

Audience: Citizens of Ashland.

Employee Advisory Committee

Description: A representative of each of the five unions, of confidential employees, of mid-managers and of managers meet periodically to discuss employee relations and areas of potential improvement.

Strength: All segments of employees are represented allowing an opportunity for all "voices" to heard.

Weakness: Does not meet regularly. Issues and solutions can add to already heavy workloads.

Audience: Employees