

2025

TOWN OF SMITHERS  
**COMMUNICATIONS  
PLAN**



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# INTRODUCTION

As part of the 2023-2026 Strategic Priorities Plan, Council identified the development and implementation of a Communications Strategy as a priority under the “Organizational Excellence” initiative. The purpose of this Communications Plan is to establish a structured approach to how the Town of Smithers communicates with its diverse community, aiming to create a clear and consistent roadmap with defined actions to improve internal and external messaging.

The Communications Plan will help the Town respond to the growing demand for transparent, efficient communication.

To inform this plan the Town undertook the following research and analysis:

- ▶ Internal interviews and survey
- ▶ Public survey (196 responses)
- ▶ Town Council Committee of the Whole
- ▶ Canadian municipal communications best practices drawn from the Communication Plans and strategies of 15 diverse communities across Canada.

We gratefully acknowledge that in Smithers we live, work and play on the unceded traditional territory of the Gidimt'en Clan of the Witsuwit'en people.



# THE TEAM

Reporting to the Director of Community Services, the Communications and Engagement department consists of one dedicated staff member (the Engagement and Communications Officer).

## *The key responsibilities of the ECO are:*



Planning, development and implementation of external and internal communication initiatives.



Media relations.



Strategic planning and implementation for various department's engagement efforts.



Website management.



Social media management.



Advertising and creation of promotional material.



Maintaining Town brand standards.



Crisis communication and issue management.



Evaluation, measurement and reporting on the effectiveness of communication strategies.

# AUDIENCES

The Town of Smithers is home to around 5400 residents and is a service hub for a surrounding region comprising a population of approximately 15,000 people. Smithers also has a diverse and engaged local community of non-profits, Indigenous organizations, businesses, industry partners, and recreation groups.

## EXTERNAL:

- ▶ Residents and Property Owners
- ▶ Visitors
- ▶ Regional Community Members
- ▶ Businesses and Investors
- ▶ Non-profit and Resident Organizations
- ▶ Media
- ▶ Indigenous Organizations and Communities
- ▶ Governments and Government Agencies
- ▶ Education Organizations

## INTERNAL:

- ▶ Town Council
- ▶ Employees
- ▶ Contractors and Consultants
- ▶ Fire Rescue Services
- ▶ RCMP

# SWOT ANALYSIS

As an initial step, the Town communications team conducted a SWOT analysis to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to its current communications efforts. This process enables Town staff to consider internal and external factors, providing valuable insights for shaping the plan and identifying tactics to enhance communication efforts.

## STRENGTHS

- ▶ New Engagement and Communications Officer position (2024).
- ▶ Direction from Council and senior staff to establish a culture of organizational excellence and strong communications strategy.
- ▶ A highly engaged social media following.
- ▶ An updated brand standards guide and redesigned logo (2025).
- ▶ A dedicated team of staff who strive to provide transparency and relevant information to the public.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- ▶ Very active community on social media.
- ▶ Recent surveys, like the Communications Survey, show a strong desire from the public to provide feedback.
- ▶ Underutilized methods of communication such as newsletters and e-newsletters, mail-outs and newspaper advertisements.
- ▶ Positive open communications with local media outlets.

## WEAKNESSES

- ▶ Website is challenging to navigate.
- ▶ Disjointed engagement and promotions from hired contractors.
- ▶ Inconsistent communication procedures from individual departments.
- ▶ Lack of procedures for internal communications.
- ▶ Lack of engagement and participation from hard-to-reach residents.
- ▶ Limited resources.

## THREATS

- ▶ Information Overload - competing with the constant influx of information on social media and other platforms, there's a risk of Smithers' messages getting lost.
- ▶ The spread of incorrect information on social media can create confusion and require extra resources to address.
- ▶ Declining engagement in traditional media.
- ▶ Accessible communication is a barrier for some residents.

# WHERE WE ARE

The Town of Smithers has taken significant steps toward improving its communication practices, starting with the creation of the Engagement and Communications Officer (ECO) position which was filled in March 2024. This is the first dedicated communications role for the Town. By centralizing communications under the ECO, the Town has shifted from a distributed approach to a more streamlined communications system. This ensures a singular voice for messaging, clear dissemination of information, and consistent branding application.

In September 2024, Council adopted the Town's first social media policy to guide engagement on digital platforms, an important step in ensuring professional and effective online interactions.

The Town's Brand Refresh Project, set to be completed in early 2025, will modernize the Town's image and provide updated branding guidelines for the organization.

Overall, the Town has made significant progress in strengthening communications both internally and with the public, but there are still opportunities for improvement, which are outlined in this plan.



# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

These overarching principles guide us throughout our planning, implementation, and ongoing evaluation processes. These priorities were developed based on internal and external research, including staff and public surveys, alignment with Council's Strategic Priorities, organizational goals, municipal best practices, and a review and analysis of the Town's existing communication activities.



## 1. AUDIENCE FOCUSED:

Tailor communications to meet the needs and preferences of the community.



## 3. BUILD A CULTURE OF PROACTIVE COMMUNICATION:

Anticipate information needs and share timely updates to prevent misinformation and confusion.



## 2. INCLUSIVE:

Ensure communication is accessible, respectful, and free from bias.



## 4. FOSTER ENGAGEMENT AND UPHOLD PUBLIC TRUST:

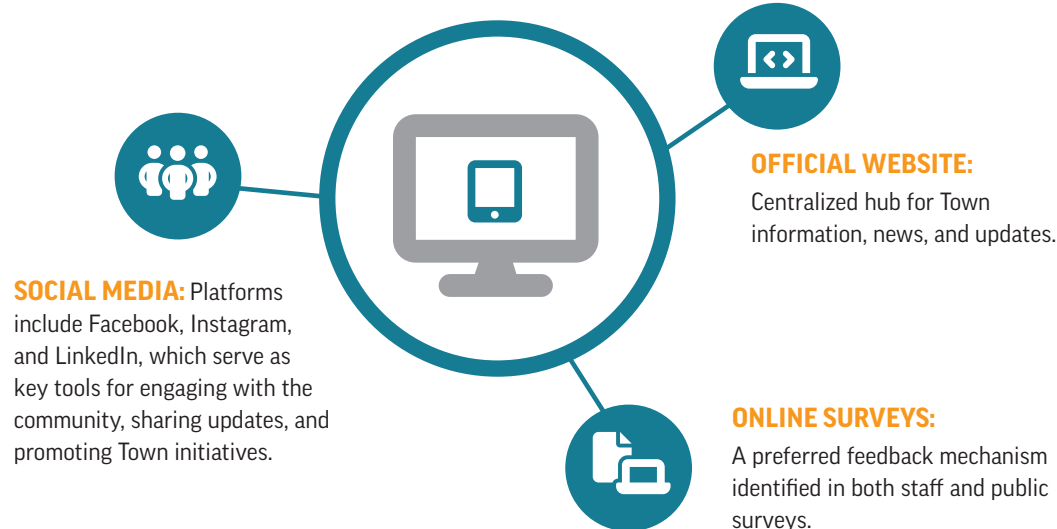
Build confidence through consistent, transparent, and proactive communication.



# COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

The Town of Smithers continues to utilize a variety of communication tools to ensure information is accessible and reaches target audiences. A mix of traditional media, print materials, digital platforms, and community relations methods broadens the reach within our community.

## DIGITAL



### OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH:

Exploring alternative digital avenues like [e-newsletters](#), notification systems, and dedicated engagement platforms will enhance our ability to reach diverse audiences. While social media offers powerful engagement opportunities, it also requires vigilant monitoring and issues management to address misinformation effectively. Town Council adopted a [Social Media Policy](#) in September 2024, and this will continue to be updated, and enforced to maintain a productive social media experience for users and communications Staff.

## PRINT

**MAILOUTS:** Direct outreach to homes and businesses for critical updates.

**BROCHURES AND LEAFLETS:** Distributed to share concise and accessible information.

**FACT SHEETS AND SIGNAGE:** Provide clarity on projects and initiatives.

**TRADITIONAL MEDIA:** Newspapers remain an important channel for reaching specific demographics.

**POSTERS:** Displayed on community bulletin boards to promote events, feedback opportunities, and updates.

## COMMUNITY RELATIONS

**MEDIA RELATIONS:** Building strong relationships with local media outlets, including newspapers and radio stations, ensures consistent and accurate coverage of Town news and initiatives.

**ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS:** Hosting public engagement sessions facilitates two-way dialogue and strengthens trust in the municipality.

**COMMUNITY EVENTS:** Meet members of the public where they are by participating in community events and allowing open dialogue.

## INSIGHTS AND FUTURE DIRECTION

Reaching audiences through their preferred method is the foundation of effective municipal communications. Social media continues to be a powerful engagement tool, promoting dialogue and connection. In the public communications survey, Facebook was highlighted as both the most utilized platform and the preferred method for receiving Town updates.

The Town's communication toolkit will be continually refined to address evolving needs, optimize reach, and ensure all audiences have access to timely, accurate information.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

# GOAL 1

### EXPAND AWARENESS OF TOWN PROJECTS AND DECISION-MAKING

#### PROPOSED ACTIONS:

- ▶ Publish Council highlights on Facebook and the website following Regular Council Meetings.
- ▶ Create an organization-wide communications calendar to schedule communications and engagement campaigns, activities, and events.
- ▶ Use a mix of communication tools for information sharing, including traditional, online and social.
- ▶ Ensure project leads liaise with  munications staff to create pre-communications/engagement plans and post-project communication updates.
- ▶ Develop a newsletter, with both online and print distribution .
- ▶ Maintain good working relationships with local media by engaging early and often regarding Town matters.
- ▶ Implement a new process for public budget engagement.

# GOAL 2

## ENHANCE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESSIBILITY

### PROPOSED ACTIONS:

- ▶ Build trust in the Town by showcasing municipal achievements, highlighting the people behind the services, and fostering connections between staff and the community.
- ▶  Ensure writing is in plain language, short sentences, organized structure, active verbs and phrases, and avoiding jargon or acronyms.
- ▶ Follow the recommendation set out in the Smithers Accessibility Plan by ensuring public communication materials (or accessible versions) meet Canadian Institute for the Blind (CNIB) Clear Print Accessibility Guidelines, are written in plain language and are available in hard copy print versions.
- ▶ Use inclusive language that is free from words, phrases or tones that reflect prejudiced, stereotypes or discriminatory views.
- ▶ Have all Town feedback opportunities available in digital and print options 
- ▶ Continue livestreaming all Council meetings.
- ▶ Use simple photos and videos on social media.
- ▶ Undertake a website audit and upgrade project using the current Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.
- ▶ Provide timely, accurate, and clear information to residents on their preferred channels.
- ▶ Take ownership by encouraging all staff and Council members to actively listen to citizens, incorporate their feedback, and communicate information on behalf of the Town.

# GOAL 3

## INCREASE ENGAGEMENT AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE TOWN'S DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

### PROPOSED ACTIONS:

- ▶ Incorporate the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation into the Town's engagement process for projects.
- ▶ Be visible and active in the community, including setting up in public spaces for engagement sessions.
- ▶ Reach people through online and in-person surveys.
- ▶ Introduce simple polls or short surveys on social media to periodically "check-in" with the community and encourage engagement outside of formal activities.
- ▶ Ensure public engagement is considered early in project planning, including adding a communication and engagement section to staff reports.
- ▶ Highlight "What We Heard" reports and how responses directly impact the decision-making process.

**IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation**

IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION

|                           | INFORM                                                                                                                                                   | CONSULT                                                                                                                                          | INVOLVE                                                                                                                                                                                   | COLLABORATE                                                                                                                                                               | EMPOWER                                                    |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL | To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions. | To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.                                                                            | To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.                                        | To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.                     | To place final decision making in the hands of the public. |
| PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC     | We will keep you informed.                                                                                                                               | We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. | We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. | We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible. | We will implement what you decide.                         |

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# GOAL 4

## BUILD STRONG INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

### PROPOSED ACTIONS:

- ▶ Set clear expectations of leadership to be visible, meet regularly with teams and make communicating important information with team members a priority.
- ▶ Continue having a placeholder for ongoing or upcoming communications needs at senior management meetings.
- ▶ Inform employees of matters affecting the Town before informing the public.
- ▶ Regular emails to all staff to provide high-level updates on Town initiatives, Council decisions, and projects.
- ▶ Develop a quarterly staff newsletter detailing staff achievements, milestones, events, updates on projects, and learning opportunities.
- ▶ Utilize surveys to gather staff feedback and ensure any outcomes/results are reported back with how staff feedback impacted actions/results.
- ▶ Host all-staff meetings to ensure all employees are informed about the Town's major projects, strategic priorities, and upcoming activities and potential challenges.

# GOAL 5

## CREATE A CONSISTENT BRAND AND IMAGE FOR THE TOWN OF SMITHERS

### PROPOSED ACTIONS:

- ▶ Centralize all creation, review and approval of external promotions or advertisements to the Engagement and Communications Officer.
- ▶ Create standardized internal documents and include orientation on brand guidelines for staff and consultants.
- ▶ Continue phasing in the new brand standards and logo for all new assets, documents, public displays etc.



# APPENDIX

## PROPOSED ACTIONS

## TIMELINE

### GOAL 1

#### Goal 1 - Expand Awareness of Town projects and decision-making

|                                                                                                                                             |         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Publish Council highlights on Facebook and the website following Regular Council Meetings.                                                  | 2025    |
| Create an organization-wide communications calendar to schedule communications and engagement campaigns, activities, and events.            | 2025    |
| Use a mix of communication tools for information sharing, including traditional, online and social.                                         | Ongoing |
| Ensure project leads liaise with Communications staff to create pre-communications/engagement plans and post-project communication updates. | Ongoing |
| Develop a newsletter.                                                                                                                       | 2025    |
| Maintain good working relationships with local media by engaging early and often regarding Town matters.                                    | Ongoing |
| Implement a new process for public budget engagement.                                                                                       | 2025    |

## PROPOSED ACTIONS

## TIMELINE

## GOAL 2

## Goal 2 - Enhance Transparency and Accessibility

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Build trust in the Town by showcasing municipal achievements, highlighting the people behind the services, and fostering connections between staff and the community.                                                                                                                                    | Ongoing |
| Ensure writing is in plain language, short sentences, organized structure, active verbs and phrases, and avoiding jargon or acronyms.                                                                                                                                                                    | Ongoing |
| Follow the recommendation set out in the Smithers Accessibility Plan by ensuring public communication materials (or accessible versions) meet Canadian Institute for the Blind (CNIB) Clear Print Accessibility Guidelines, are written in plain language and are available in hard copy print versions. | 2025    |
| Use inclusive language that is free from words, phrases or tones that reflect prejudiced, stereotypes or discriminatory views.                                                                                                                                                                           | Ongoing |
| Have all Town feedback opportunities available in digital and print.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Ongoing |
| Continue livestreaming all Council meetings.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Ongoing |
| Use simple photos and videos on social media.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Ongoing |
| Undertake a website audit and upgrade project using the current Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 2025    |
| Provide timely, accurate, and clear information to residents on their preferred channels.                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Ongoing |
| Take ownership by encouraging all staff and Council members to actively listen to citizens, incorporate their feedback, and communicate information on behalf of the Town.                                                                                                                               | Ongoing |

## PROPOSED ACTIONS

## TIMELINE

## GOAL 3

### Goal 3 - Increase Engagement and Public Participation in the Town's Decision-Making Processes

|                                                                                                                                                              |         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Incorporate the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation into the Town's engagement process for projects.                                                       | 2025    |
| Be visible and active in the community, including setting up in public spaces for engagement sessions.                                                       | 2025    |
| Reach people through online and in-person surveys.                                                                                                           | Ongoing |
| Introduce simple polls or short surveys on social media to periodically "check-in" with the community and encourage engagement outside of formal activities. | 2026    |
| Ensure public engagement is considered early in project planning, including adding a communication and engagement section to staff reports.                  | 2025    |
| Highlight "What We Heard" reports and how responses directly impact the decision-making process.                                                             | 2025    |

## PROPOSED ACTIONS

## TIMELINE

## GOAL 4

## Goal 4 - Build Strong Internal Communications

|                                                                                                                                                                       |         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Set clear expectations of leadership to be visible, meet regularly with teams and make communicating important information with team members a priority.              | Ongoing |
| Continue having a placeholder for ongoing or upcoming communications needs at senior management meetings.                                                             | Ongoing |
| Inform employees of matters affecting the Town before informing the public.                                                                                           | Ongoing |
| Regular emails to all staff to provide high-level updates on Town initiatives, Council decisions, and projects.                                                       | 2025    |
| Develop a quarterly staff newsletter detailing staff achievements, milestones, events, updates on projects, and learning opportunities.                               | 2025    |
| Utilize surveys to gather staff feedback and ensure any outcomes/results are reported back with how staff feedback impacted actions/results.                          | Ongoing |
| Host all-staff meetings to ensure all employees are informed about the Town's major projects, strategic priorities, and upcoming activities and potential challenges. | 2025    |

## GOAL 5

## Goal 5 - Create a Consistent Brand and Image for the Town of Smithers

|                                                                                                                                             |             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Centralize all creation, review and approval of external promotions or advertisements to the <u>Engagement and Communications Officer</u> . | 2025        |
| Create standardized internal documents and include orientation on brand guidelines for staff and consultants.                               | 2025        |
| Continue phasing in the new brand standards and logo for all new assets, documents, public displays etc.                                    | 2025 - 2027 |

