

Butte County Communication Plan

A Strategy to Enhance Communication with the Media, Citizens, and Employees

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CONTEXT

It is a new day in government communications. With the rapid development of communication technologies, it has never been easier to disseminate information and solicit citizen involvement. It has also never been harder to keep pace with the changes. The media, citizens, and employees expect a new level of openness and access. Without a consistent strategy driving our organizational communication efforts, Butte County runs the risk of miscommunication and missed opportunities.

Over the years, the degree to which the County has communicated effectively with the media, citizens, and employees has been largely dependent upon the individuals holding key positions. Some have been better than others at projecting an image of transparency and accessibility. The time has come to establish a more consistent and coordinated approach.

During a series of meetings in 2011, department heads identified a series of pressing county wide/cross-departmental issues for Butte County. One of the issues identified was the need to develop a comprehensive communication strategy for the County. To accomplish this goal, a group of department heads, with assistance from staff, established the Countywide Communication Strategy Work Team to make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors and implement the strategy.

MISSION

To develop a comprehensive communication strategy designed to improve internal and external communication, provide education, and enhance access to County information.

SCOPE

To review and make recommendations to improve communication through the development of a county wide communication plan.

COMMUNICATION PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

This document outlines short-term strategies to improve the way the County communicates with the media, the public, and employees. It is a working document that will be updated periodically to include additional goals to enhance the County's communication efforts. The following is a summary of the action steps included in this plan:

Media Relations

- Develop an online newsroom to serve as the central location for media information and resources, including media releases issued by individual departments.
- Establish RSS news feeds to notify the media when new content is posted to the newsroom pages.
- Identify primary and secondary news media contacts in each department and provide spokesperson training.

- ➤ Dedicate a newsroom page to promoting Board of Supervisors meetings. Preview newsworthy agenda items and provide links to background information and media contacts.
- Provide the media with a local perspective on national or statewide issues or trends.
- > Develop feature story ideas to promote County programs and services.

Social Media Presence

- Establish a limited social media presence for the purpose of distributing headlines and driving traffic to the County's website.
- Establish a Twitter account for Butte County, with sub-accounts for departments interested in using this social media channel.
- > Identify department representatives authorized to distribute information via Twitter.
- Establish guidelines for sending and responding to "tweets" at the department and administrative levels.

Website Enhancements

- Review the County's website and make recommendations to improve the content and design.
- Transition to a new content management system to make it easier for departments to design and maintain their web pages.

Employee Relations

- Expand the County's internal communication system to more effectively and consistently provide information to employees.
- Advance a management philosophy that supports open communication, team building, innovation, and training.
- Engage employees to heighten their sense of ownership and commitment to the organization's mission
- Periodically survey employees to gauge the effectiveness of the County's internal communication efforts.

A comprehensive communication strategy must address two broad audiences – internal and external. While some methods of communication meet the needs of both groups, they are addressed separately in this plan.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

MEDIA RELATIONS

To maximize news media coverage of County activities, it is important to make information readily available to the news media. The County also needs to be perceived as an authoritative, trustworthy, and responsive source of information. The table below summarizes the goals, strategies, and action steps to expand our media resources and strengthen the County's relationship with media professionals.

Goal	Strategy	Action Steps
Project an image of the County as trustworthy, innovative and responsive to the media.	Expand online media resources, incorporating new technologies to deliver information in a timely manner.	 ✓ Develop an online newsroom to serve as central location for media information and resources. ✓ Establish RSS news feeds to notify the media when new content is added to the newsroom pages. ✓ Utilize Twitter or other social media to allow the media to follow County news and information.
	Develop a network of experts within the County who are authorized and trained to speak with the media.	 ✓ Identify primary and secondary news media contacts in departments most likely to be contacted by the media. ✓ Develop and maintain an online directory of countywide media contacts. ✓ Provide spokesperson trainings to department media contacts. ✓ Develop best practices and guidelines for responding to the media.
Increase media coverage of County issues, programs and services.	Entice the media to consistently cover newsworthy items on Board of Supervisors agendas.	 ✓ Dedicate an online newsroom page promoting Board of Supervisors meetings. ✓ Preview newsworthy agenda items in headline format. ✓ Provide links to background information. ✓ Post related Board actions on meeting day.

Provide centralized access to media releases and alerts issued by all County departments.	✓ Post media releases to the online newsroom in addition to individual department websites.
Develop and promote story ideas to generate additional media coverage for Butte County.	 ✓ Provide the media with a local perspective on national or statewide issues or trends. ✓ Develop feature story ideas to promote unique or relevant programs and services.

SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

Social media is a modern version of the town square, where the community comes together to discuss and debate the issues of the day. While people have been gathering this way for a while, civic representatives have maintained a safe distance, unsure of when and how to make an entrance. That's starting to change. If they haven't already established a social media presence, most government agencies are at least entertaining the idea.

Social media, by nature, is interactive and can be used to encourage more community input and participation in government. Using social media to facilitate public discussion may be a long-range goal for Butte County. For now, however, the County will primarily use social media channels to distribute headlines to the public and the media, driving traffic to the County's website for more information.

The table below summarizes the steps the County will take to establish a limited social media presence. Should the County decide to expand its use to include managing an interactive presence, a more comprehensive set of goals, strategies, and action steps will be developed later.

Goal	Strategy	Action Steps
Use social media channels to provide timely information to the public and the news media.	Establish a limited social media presence for the purpose of distributing headlines and driving traffic to the County's website.	 ✓ Establish a Twitter account for Butte County, with sub-accounts for departments interested in using this social media channel. ✓ Identify department representatives authorized to distribute information via Twitter. ✓ Establish guidelines for sending and

responding to "tweets" at the
department and administrative levels.
Distribute guidelines to department
representatives.

WEBSITE ENHANCEMENTS

Implementing the previous two sections of this plan will drive more traffic to the County's website, making it even more important to maintain a consistent level of professionalism from page to page. While departments manage their own web pages, factors such as site design, online resources, and timeliness of information reflect on the County as a whole. This plan calls for a countywide website review and includes steps to enhance our organization's web presence.

Goal	Strategy	Action Steps
Enhance the County's website to provide information in a coordinated, professional, and	Ensure a consistent level of professionalism and relevant information across all department websites.	✓ Review department websites and make recommendations for improvement.
timely manner.	Make it easier for departments to design and manage their own web pages.	 ✓ Transition the County's website to a new content management system. ✓ Provide web page design and content management training to departments.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

Employees are the face and voice of any organization. To effectively serve as County representatives, they need to know what is happening and why. It is also important to encourage employees to share ideas to foster a greater sense of ownership and commitment to the organization's mission. This section of the plan outlines steps to build a more cohesive and engaged workplace community.

Goal	Strategy	Action Steps
Foster a workplace environment in which information flows freely and quickly in all directions.	Provide a "heads up" to employees in advance of rolling out new programs, implementing countywide changes, or issuing public	 ✓ Send information, updates, reminders, and alerts to employees via e-mail. ✓ Develop and distribute an e-newsletter or other publications containing information of interest to

	safety alerts.	employees. ✓ Develop and distribute periodic surveys to gauge the effectiveness of the County's internal communication efforts.
Engage employees to heighten their sense of ownership and commitment to the organization's mission.	Encourage employees to share ideas and provide feedback to improve the organization.	 ✓ Invite employees to brown bag lunches with the CAO. ✓ Encourage employees to submit ideas to an online suggestion box. ✓ Recognize employees whose ideas were implemented.
Advance a management philosophy that supports open communication, team building, innovation, and training.	Promote management theories and practices that motivate and engage employees.	✓ Provide countywide management trainings on topics such as strategic leadership, employee engagement, motivating the new workforce, and etc.
Improve internal communication within all levels of the organization.	Facilitate communication and teamwork among department heads to strengthen the organization from the top down.	 ✓ Continue monthly CAO meetings with department heads. ✓ Schedule management team meetings to share information, develop and review work plan priorities, and provide leadership training.
	Encourage department heads to develop and maintain internal communication systems in line with this plan.	 ✓ Develop a list of "best practices" that support and advance the County's philosophy of open communication, team building, innovation, and training. ✓ Review and discuss internal communication ideas with department heads. ✓ Recognize internal communication accomplishments at the department level.

The Butte County Communication Plan was developed by the Countywide Communication Strategy Work Team for approval by the Board of Supervisors.

Team Members:

Paul Hahn, Chief Administrative Officer
Brian Ring, Human Resources Director
Cathi Grams, Employment & Social Services Director
Linda Barnes, Treasurer-Tax Collector
Phyllis Murdock, Public Health Director
George Morris, Butte Fire Chief
Anne Robin, Behavioral Health Director
Bob Barnes, Information Systems Director
Sang Kim, Deputy CAO
Susan Peterson, Assistant Treasurer-Tax Collector