Communication Plan

A strategic guide to RDOS corporate communications.
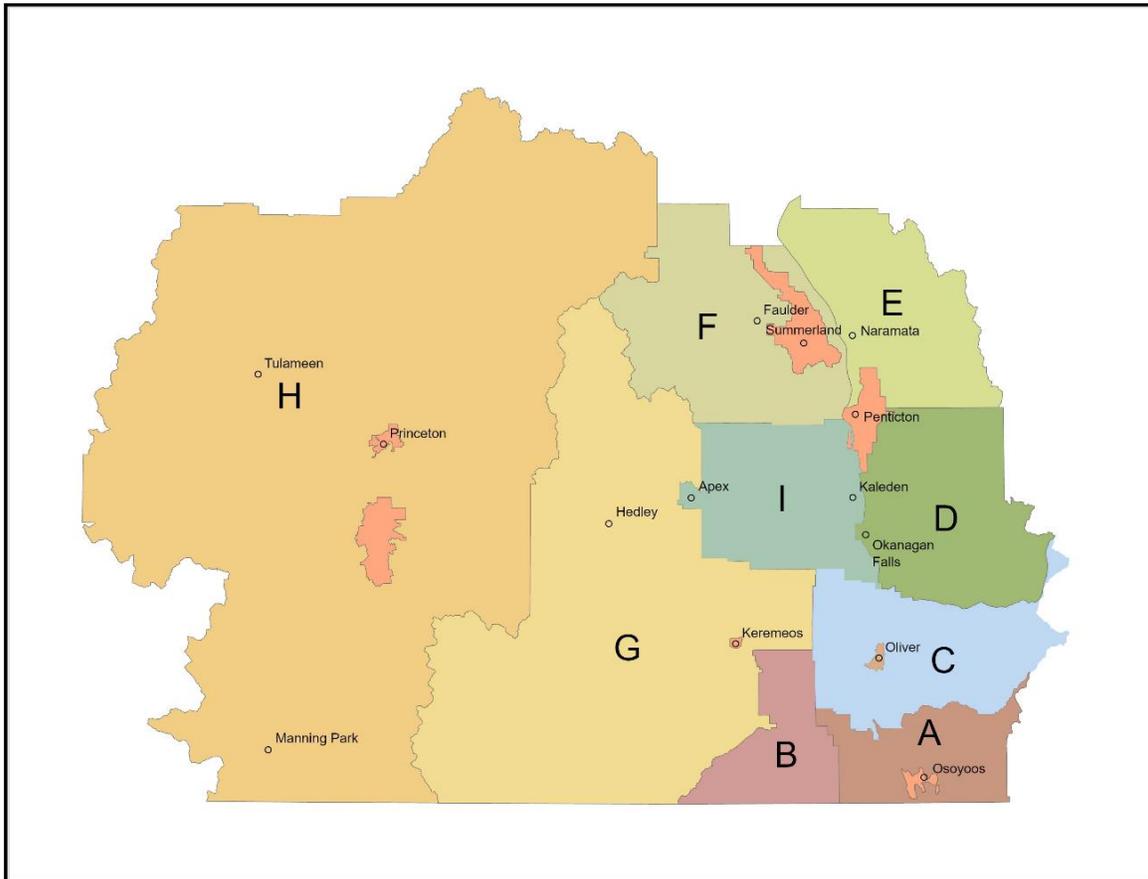
October 5, 2022 FINAL VERSION

Content

_____

Some elements of this plan used with permission from Regional District of North Okanagan (RDNO).

Executive Summary

Corporate communications is a rapidly evolving field which incorporates multiple disciplines and distribution channels.

In local governments, corporate communications perform three essential functions:

- Managing the reputation of the organization
- Informing residents, elected officials, staff, and visitors
- Effective and timely two-way communication and public engagement

In government organizations, the challenges and opportunities of corporate communications are different from the private sector. A large, diverse audience has a stake in the operations of the organization and the media actively watches with a critical lens. Additionally, the scope of services and projects is wide and complex. Because of this, the Communication Plan (the Plan) is an important step in ensuring a consistent, professional voice is put forward on behalf of the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS).

The position of Communications Coordinator is new to the RDOS as of 2020. As such, the scope of the plan will focus on building a solid foundation based on policies and procedures, evaluating current communication processes, and establishing effective policies to provide long-term communication success.

The Plan was created using feedback from the 2020 Citizen Survey and follow-up survey, a review of best practices for local government communications, and a review of similar plans for industry comparison.

Four distinct areas of communication are: External, Internal, Media Relations, and Board

Objectives for each area are included, as well as recommendations, strategies, and tactics. Some strategies and tactics are tangible, achievable actions, and some are intangible principles and strategies to incorporate into communication best practices. Unless otherwise noted, all tactics and strategies in the Plan will be led by the Communications Coordinator.

Given current best practices and trends, focus will be given to growing digital channels, in particular, the "owned" channels. "Owned" communication channels refer to tools that the RDOS has absolute control over, like the website. By focusing on this, the RDOS is not wholly susceptible to policy or algorithm changes by third parties such as social media platforms.

In acknowledgment of the broader communication spectrum of tools, owned channels will be complemented by the use and participation on other platforms such as social media and information releases. The digital communication field is one that is in constant flux and change, and the RDOS will adapt as needed. The Community Champions program is intended to assist with non-digital communication such as notice boards and phone trees.

Two-way communication is a key pillar of the Plan. Two-way communication allows organizations to communicate with residents, visitors, partners and other interested groups and individuals directly and replaces the old, one-way "push" communication methods. By encouraging and participating in two-way communication, the RDOS will be positioned to be responsive to the information needs of the public, staff, and the Board, and encourage strengthened public engagement.

This is an evolving strategy for the RDOS. Project-based communication plans and communication policies will follow the strategies and principles in this document. The Plan will help build the communication capacity and allow the RDOS to develop relationships built on trust and authenticity.
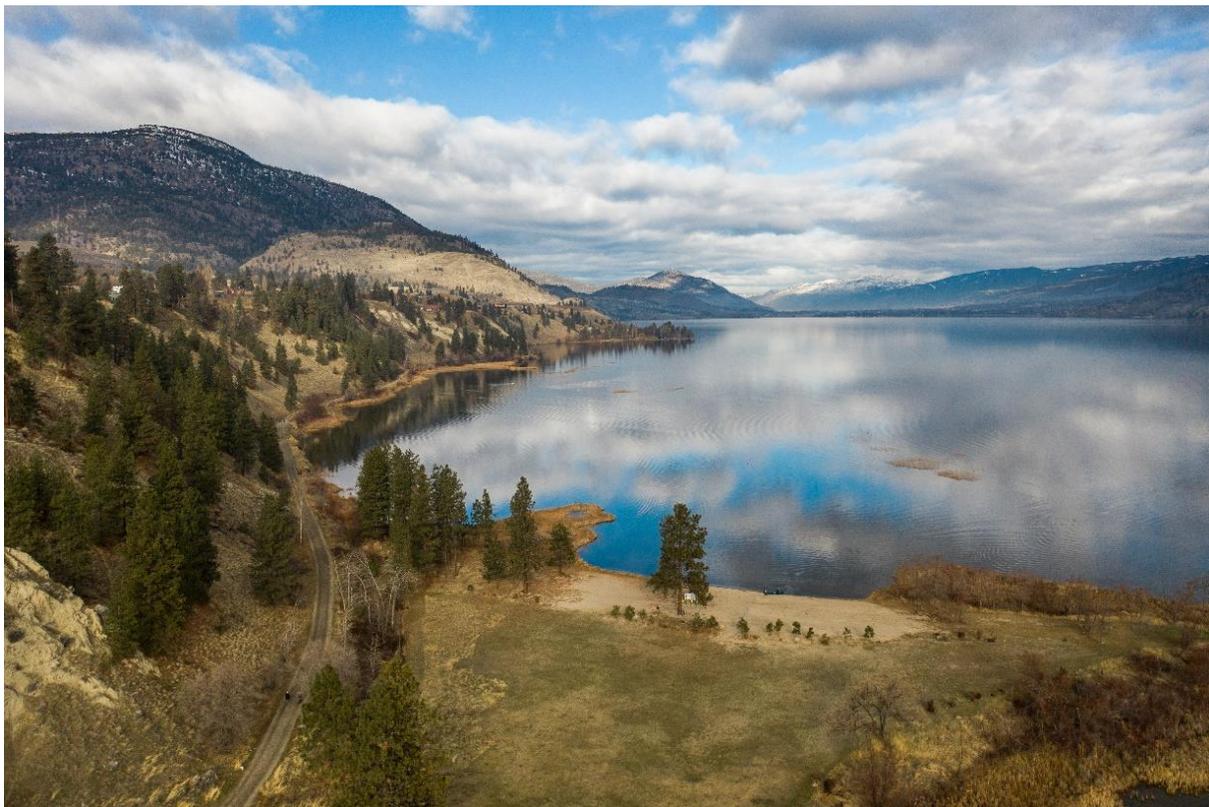
Success of the Plan

Ensuring the success of the Plan will require the support and commitment of the Board of Directors and staff. To provide effective advice and support, information must be promptly shared with the Communications Coordinator.

The RDOS has a unique structure that creates an environment where multiple, diverse projects and priorities are being worked on consecutively. These initiatives all require communication support, which is why scalability has been included in this plan.

InterCom Committee

A key factor in the success of the plan is the Communications Committee (InterCom). When internal communication functions well, information moves smoothly to the Board of Directors and the public.

InterCom includes at least one appointed member from each department who is involved in creating and sharing information on behalf of their department. As per the InterCom Terms of Reference (see appendices), members are the designated staff for public engagement projects and initiatives. The committee meets once monthly to share resources and experiences while discussing RDOS projects and initiatives. This process helps staff feel empowered and knowledgeable about RDOS projects and initiatives. It also helps improve the accuracy and timeliness of external information.

InterCom agendas are shared in advance for consideration and to put forward suggestions or issues for discussion. Meeting minutes and action items are available for all staff on the RDOS intranet (EDMS). Other department representatives are encouraged to attend when discussing complex items.

InterCom provides opportunities to develop procedures and outline expectations when creating unique public engagement initiatives such as videos or interactive web pages. The committee is also a shared space for departments to discuss website responsibilities, best practices, and training requests.

InterCom provides guidance to ensure information aligns with corporate goals and is consistent in tone.

Communications Overview

As the RDOS adopts practices and strategies in this plan, the reach and strength of RDOS communications will grow. Along with the reach, the expectations from the public, media, Board of Directors and other local governments will become more demanding. With a staff complement of one and support from an Administrative Assistant (as of October 2021), the improved and accelerated communication function will drive the need for additional resources.

Regional Trails Map
Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen

Legend
—— Override 1
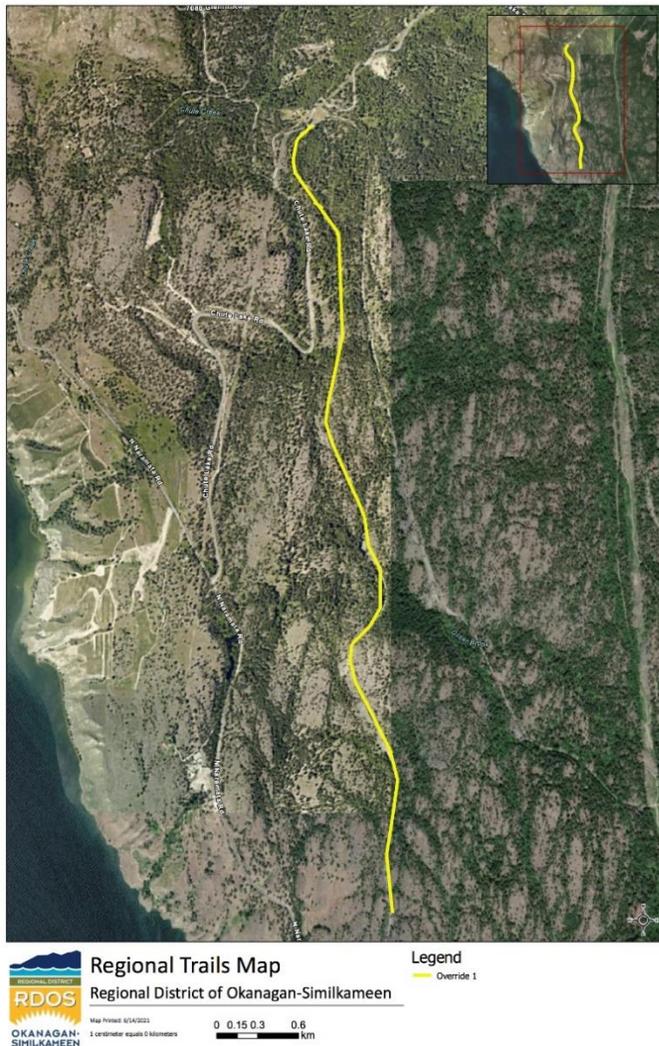
Evaluation Measures

The true impact of this Plan will be seen over the long-term as procedures, tools, and processes become ingrained in the operations of the RDOS. Objectives and key performance indicators (KPI) will be determined for individual campaigns, and analytics will be used as hard metrics. Sentiment, awareness, quality of engagement, and noticeable changes in the reputation of the RDOS will be used as soft metrics.

Corporate Communications – Vision

The organization envisions RDOS Communications to be a timely, reliable and trusted source of information, easily identifiable as coming from the RDOS that is transparent, responsive, inclusive and accountable.

Corporate Communications – Mission

To initiate and implement sound policies, best practices and procedures that are concise, consistent, trusted and effective.

Core Values

Truthfulness: Truthful, complete information shared by the appropriate person will strengthen the RDOS's image as an authority. Information will be accurate and timely. If information cannot be provided, the reason why will be provided.

Grammatical correctness: The RDOS strives to ensure messaging and branding is grammatically correct and true.

Clarity: Increase awareness and reinforce the value of the RDOS and its services. Information will be concise, accessible and in plain language whenever possible.

Consistency: Present a consistent image, messaging, and branding. The RDOS will be known to use a "nothing about us, without us" approach when information sharing or project planning involves Indigenous communities.

Tone: The tone used in RDOS communications will be authoritative, approachable and direct. Focus on using one voice rather than information coming from various departments

Accessibility: The RDOS strives to communicate in a clear, meaningful and relevant manner using plan language whenever possible.

Visual Standards and Branding

Ensure a consistent look and branding throughout the organization.

Use RDOS logo consistent with Corporate Identity Guide.

Departments will route all requests for external uses of the RDOS logo to Legislative Services for consideration.

Identify ways to incorporate multiple forms of media into communication, such as video and images, and adapt to changing environments and audience needs.

Purchase relevant, environmentally sensitive branded promotional items as giveaways to strengthen brand visibility.

Build a stock of reusable RDOS branded functional items like a pop-up tent, podium, and banners.

Departments will use photo releases for all submitted images, and model releases when clearly, identifiable people appear in pictures excluding public events.

Build a library of owned visual assets, including photograph, videos and graphics.

Communication Strategy

This Communication Strategy directly ties in with the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS) Key Success Driver 2: Optimize the Customer Service Experience.

The purpose of this strategy is to identify the organization's communication principles, objectives and key messages. This is a living document and should be reviewed from time to time. Expectations of personal conduct and use of social media are covered under a separate policy.

External Communications Objectives

- Proactively share information in an engaging and effective way
- Disseminate information in a timely manner
- Be known as a reliable and trustworthy source of accurate information
- Expand public knowledge and engagement of government services and activities
- Encourage two-way communication between government and citizens
- Share information in a reliable, consistent manner that is easily identified as coming from the RDOS (consistent messaging, branding, image, voice)
- Be known to consider intergovernmental relations when making decisions

- ➢ Review corporate identity guide and incorporate any updates to bring it into line with standard municipal branding, messaging and best practices
- ➢ Review templates of brochures, posters, and other material for consistent branding, update or "refresh" as needed and standardize voice
- ➢ Review peripheral pages (Director Facebook pages and websites, other area websites such as Okanagan Falls) for the same consistency and branding/image considerations
- ➢ Update website to present with a modern layout, empower residents with prominent search function, have documents available (document library, broken links); promote as reliable, "hear it here first" source
- ➢ Social media will always drive traffic back to main website: www.rdos.bc.ca

Users of the corporate website will be empowered to locate relevant and accurate information without making formal requests for routine documents.

Audiences - Internal

- Regional Board
- RDOS staff and management
- Regional committees
- RDOS volunteers

Voyent Alert! can be used to connect with Microsoft Teams.

Internal Communication Objectives

- Break down silos and provide opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing
- Staff are confident that their knowledge is current, reliable and accurate
- Foster an environment that understands Communication and inter-related government operations across departments
- Encourage an environment of fun

Information releases will be shared on the staff Intranet and shared with the Board in advance of posting on the RDOS website or sending to the email distribution list, which includes media. Internal communications should be delivered either in-person, by phone or email.

Internal Communications

Regional Board	Directors seeking assistance from staff will email RDOS Communications.
	Directors are expected, to some degree, to share relevant RDOS information with their Electoral Area. This could include phone tree, Facebook page, posting on notice boards, or nominating a Community Champion for their area who would do the same.
	Information releases will be shared with the Board in advance via email.
RDOS Staff and Management	Managers will share information with staff in-person whenever possible. All results from Board decisions made during meetings should be shared, not just department specific decisions. Staff and management should check the staff Intranet on EDMS daily for updates, and Board Tracker.
InterCom Committee	Each department will have a representative on the committee to discuss upcoming projects and related communication plans. Each committee member is expected to share the information with their department to assist with any cross-departmental logistics and to help keep staff informed. Minutes from these meetings will be posted to the staff Intranet for all staff.
Regional Committees	Communication channels will be via email, phone or in-person with appropriate RDOS staff and relevant management. Committee members will be given copies (digital or paper copy) of their Terms of Reference and any applicable bylaws (service area tax requisition, zoning and OCPs). Staff will review these documents annually with the committees.
Volunteers	Channels include email, phone or in-person. Volunteers are encouraged to share official RDOS with their communities. Volunteers will be asked to sign photo release forms upon signing up for any photo opportunities at events.
Community Champions	Phone, email and Voyent Alert! Information releases and other notices will be shared in advance whenever possible. Paper copies will be printed by Community Champions.

Audiences - External

- RDOS residents, property owners and visitors (rural and urban)
- Member municipalities, including mayor, council and staff
- Indigenous communities
- Media

External communication should be delivered using all available distribution methods including Voyent Alert!

External Communications Objectives

- Be known as a reliable, responsive organization that engages and listens to its residents
- Information from the organization is trusted as relevant, accurate and true
- Provide residents with the ability to easily access routine information, empowering the public to find answers to their questions in a timely manner

How will the RDOS achieve this?

The actions below can be prioritized for "quick wins," some recommendations may require a Request for Proposal or quotation for services to facilitate.

External Communications

RDOS residents, rural and urban	RDOS website, Regional Connections, Facebook, Twitter, Webex, information releases and notices posted on community notice boards, Community Champions, and email sent to homeowner associations. The RDOS encourages phone trees amongst rural communities without Internet access, fire hall notice boards posted by Fire Chiefs, community hall notice boards, recreation centre notice boards, mail out, and RDOS newsletter. Note: the RDOS does not post to community Facebook group pages. Directors and residents are encouraged to share RDOS official posts to their group pages.
Member municipalities (mayor, council and staff)	Email, phone call, in-person as required. RDOS website, social media. Municipal representatives on the Board are encouraged to share information with their councils and appropriate staff as decisions are made. RDOS and member municipalities should share social media posts regarding shared initiatives to encourage greater dissemination of regional information.
Indigenous Communities	Phone call, in-person and email as required. Indigenous communities are to be consulted early in project planning, and are invited to review all information releases which include them. The RDOS will follow the principle of "nothing about us, without us" regarding Indigenous communities.
Media	Information releases will be shared via email. Once approved for release, the link will be posted to Hot Topics and sent to the media. No "cherry-picking" media – all information releases and advisories are sent to all local and regional media at the same time.

Media Relations

Objectives

- Foster good working relationships with the media
- Ensure that the RDOS has a consistent image and voice
- Share accurate information with the media
- Proactive media relations
- Prepare backgrounders, fact sheets, frequently asked questions, or other appropriate documents for the media
- Identify newsworthy stories and present them to the media in a compelling way
- Amplify select articles about the RDOS by sharing links through the Board
- Intranet and social media
- Encourage staff to share milestones and good news with InterCom or the Communications Coordinator in order to share the information with the media

Communicating on behalf of the Regional District

- Members of the Regional Board, the Chief Administrative Officer, and Senior Managers are authorized to communicate on behalf of the Regional District in interviews, publications, information releases, on social media sites, and related communication
- Other staff may represent the Regional District if approved by a senior manager to communicate on a specific topic.

Board

- Establish the Board Chair, or their designate, as the primary spokesperson for the Regional District on regional matters. The Chair is authorized to release information releases on behalf of the Regional District and provide media interviews in relation to any Board position.
- Other members of the Regional Board are secondary spokespersons for the Regional District on regional matters.
- The Electoral Area Director or designate is the primary spokesperson for their electoral area on matters pertaining specifically to their electoral area.
- Prepare the spokesperson for media interviews. The spokesperson is responsible for notifying the Communications Coordinator of interview requests.

Departments:

- Ensure inquiries from the media are given high priority and responded to as quickly and efficiently as possible. This is done by advising the Communications Coordinator.
- Media monitoring to identify major coverage or trends.
- Promptly address typos, misinformation, and misquotes.

Media Release Template

Revisit the process of creating documents with Chair's signature to the media release better fit with best practices, and ensure documentation standards are being met.

Media Training

Coordinate and deliver media training to the Board, managers and subject-matter experts in the organization. Include information about communication and social media policies.

Distribution

Directors

As stewards of their communities, Electoral Area Directors are asked to share relevant information with residents and visitors. Directors can share Facebook posts, information releases, and other RDOS information. This can be done by posting notices in the community including notice boards.

Department Staff

As subject matter experts, department staff will be responsible for creating information releases. Once the information release has been approved by the department Manager, it will be emailed to the Manager of Legislative Services and Communications staff for final review. This will ensure corporate consistency, tone and branding. RDOS Communications will forward the information release to the Board Chair for approval.

Community Champions

The RDOS will work with Directors, staff and Community Champions to maintain an inventory of notice boards including those owned by the organization (fire halls and parks) as well others maintained by Okanagan Regional Library, community groups and associations including water operators. Community Champions will be asked to post on various notice boards.

Website

Working with Information Services, InterCom will evaluate the layout and functionality of the RDOS website. Residents and visitors may not be aware of the various services provided by each department. This may require tabs to be reorganized and labelled with drop-down menus listing topics and services. A prominent and updated search function will enable users to search for entries efficiently, rather than navigating through many different tabs.

The website should be maintained with the same schedule as the Local Government Management Association (LGMA) Records of Classification System that applies to the RDOS records. Content should be available for the current year, plus one and then archived.

This will help ensure that the information is current, and will help the RDOS facilitate Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and releasing routine information.

Peripheral websites will be reviewed for relevancy. RDOS Director Websites and social media channels belong to the individual Director. Electoral Area News web pages on the RDOS website will be maintained by RDOS staff. Further details will be included in the Social Media strategy.

Social Media

The purpose of the Social Media strategy is to provide direction on corporate use of the RDOS social media platforms and ensure alignment with corporate strategic plan goals.

Social media channels will serve as informal, two-way communication options for the public. People expect a personal level of communication when interacting on social media, which is less corporate.

Social Media Engagement

People also expect responses. Enabling comments allows others to see questions they may have, and can provide answers as they read the responses. It also helps staff see if messages are being shared clearly and concisely.

One comment seen repeatedly on the RDOS Facebook page is related to development notices; legal descriptions can be confusing and the audience just wants to hear the purpose in plain language.
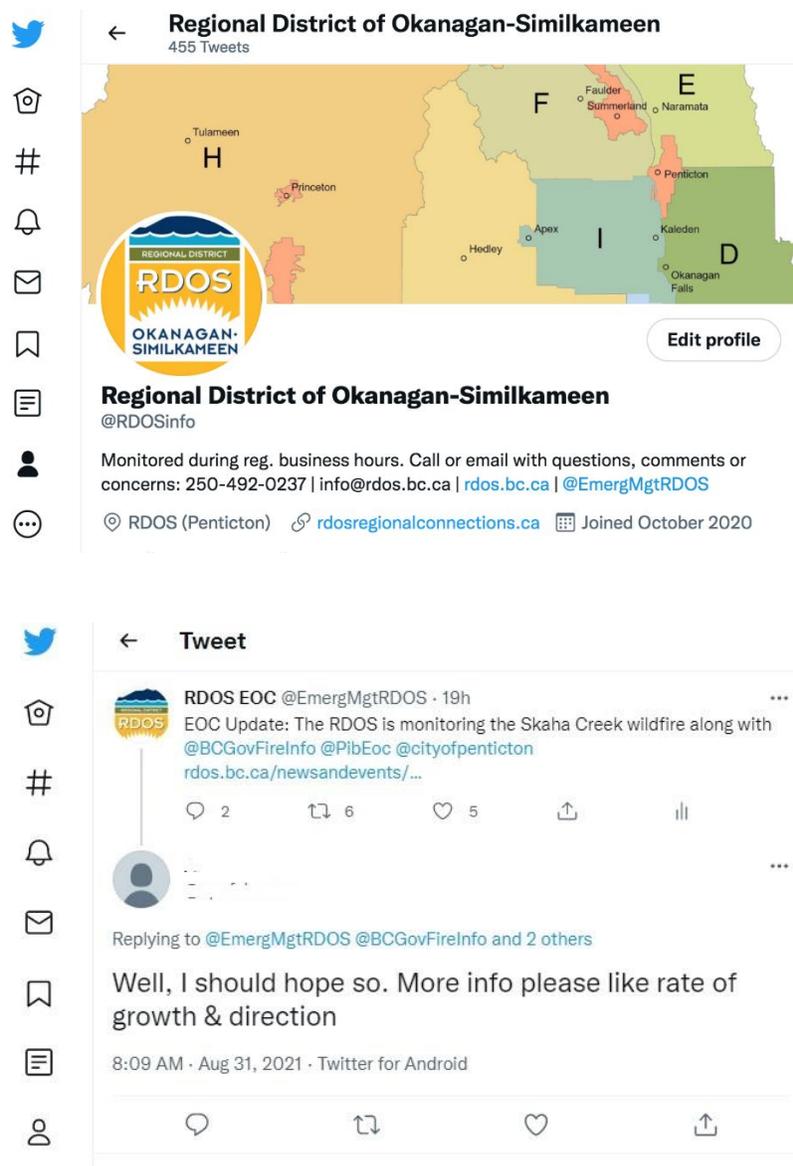
Public Engagement Planning

Developing a thorough Communication Plan in the early stages of RDOS projects and initiatives will help ensure all public engagement requirements are being met.

The Public Engagement Strategy template is available to assist with large-scale projects.

Project coordinators and department managers are responsible for ensuring communications plans are created and implemented, and tracking public engagement initiatives and timelines.

Successful public engagement requires the RDOS to ensure information is delivered to the intended audience in a timely manner.

When feedback is requested, the RDOS needs to document and share the results to show the information has been received and understood.

COMMUNICATION PLAN

Media Interview Tips
- ➢ Know your message
- ➢ Know your audience
- ➢ Be confident
- ➢ Look confident
- ➢ Stay in your lane

Know your message: be prepared
- ☐ Prepare bullet points and practice delivering your answers out loud
- ☐ Anticipate difficult questions (expect curve balls)
- ☐ Prepare transition statements but avoid verbal crutches

Know your audience: stay on message
- ☐ What message or information do you want to share?
- ☐ Who is your audience?
- ☐ Consider all mediums (TV, radio, podcast, web, print)

Be confident: annunciate and own the material
- ☐ Speak clearly and slowly
- ☐ Keep it casual and conversational
- ☐ Remember to breathe
- ☐ Remember to SMILE
- ☐ Pick up your energy
- ☐ Positive body posture
- ☐ Use proper grammar

Look confident: dress the part
- ☐ Dress appropriately; solid colours, no loud patterns
- ☐ No logos other than your brand or partners
- ☐ Fix your hair
- ☐ Use face powder/cover-up to control shine (very important)
- ☐ Look in the mirror in advance (check your teeth)

Stay in your lane: you are the subject matter expert
- ☐ Speak to your area of expertise
- ☐ Don't speak for other companies, organizations, or partners
- ☐ Don't get drawn into commenting on areas outside your comfort zone

Do your research
- ☐ Know who you are speaking with
- ☐ Consider microphones live and maintain professionalism at all times

If you don't know the answer or are unsure about what to say, it is better to say anything. Offer to get back to the reporter with accurate information. Be sure to follow up with the reporter as soon as you have the facts.

Appendices

Community Champions Terms of Reference – available upon request

Community Champions Administrative Report – For Information Only September 23, 2021

(Corporate Services Committee - page 40)

Communications Policy – Amended Board Resolution dated May 20, 2021

InterCom Terms of Reference - available upon request