



# **STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**



**FEBRUARY  
2024**











# LETTER TO READERS

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Pitkin County is a thriving 975-square-mile area in the heart of the Central Rockies with 32 departments that serve nearly 18,000 community members. As needs in the county have grown, the number of county staff has increased—with the exception of the Community Relations department. The department has historically operated as a team of one. It became clear in 2022, at the tail-end of the COVID-19 pandemic, that the Community Relations team and the county’s communications and engagement function needed to grow in number and depth to not only respond to emergencies but the everyday needs of our communities, both external and internal.

It was clear during the pandemic that when resources—people and money—are put toward intentional communication and engagement, the result is exceptional. New expectations were borne during the COVID-19 incident for better quality and increased quantity of communications. The development of this communication plan focused on just that—defining what “better” means and creating a roadmap to get there.

As the county grapples with controversial projects and issues—as is the nature of local government—we need to continue to strive to provide not only transparent communication but ways to foster two-way dialogue and solicit feedback so community members feel included in decisions and trust they will not be left in the dark. This responsibility lies not just with the Community Relations department but with other county staff, as well.

This charge means doing things differently. Please read the following pages with an open mind and an eye toward a future where people have the information, resources, and services they need—when they need it.

*Marci Suazo*  
*Community Relations Manager*  
*January 2024*





# SECTION 1: THE PLAN FOUNDATION

This plan is meant to guide the work of Community Relations and the county. It is both actionable and aspirational, in order to meet our immediate and long-term goals. We will execute and optimize these strategies on an ongoing basis to ensure the community is receiving the information it needs to work hand-in-hand with the county.

Our goal is to help the county work in a more proactive, intentional way when it comes to communication and engagement which will ultimately better serve our constituents and external stakeholders as well as county employees.

**The plan consists of three distinct parts:**

- 1. External Communication and Engagement**
- 2. Internal Communication and Engagement**
- 3. Community Relations Strategic Operating Plan**

## **THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATIONS**

Pitkin County has committed to improving its overall communications to support the organizational vision, mission and values around these core tenants:

## **Transparency**

We are truthful in our interactions with the community.

## **Responsive**

We listen to our citizens and partners and adapt as needed.

## **Proactive**

We achieve our long-term goals by creating deliberate plans to guide our work, knowing there will always be reactive work along the way.

## **Accurate**

We are committed to giving accurate and timely information to the community.

## **Inclusive**

We make sure all voices are heard and all audiences are communicated with.

## **Equitable**

We use a broad range of tactics to meet people where they are.

**The plan's goal is to help the county work in a more proactive, intentional way when it comes to communication and engagement which will ultimately better serve our constituents and external stakeholders as well as county employees.**

# **THE ROLE OF ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION**

Pitkin County highly values community engagement and participation and has included it in the strategic communications plan. It is not a box to be checked, but rather an integral way of making decisions with the community's involvement. Communication and engagement work in tandem and support each other.





## **Engagement:**

An active relationship between the county and the community that includes any level of public participation; this typically encourages two-way dialogue.

## **Public Participation:**

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) views public participation as any process that involves the public in problem-solving or decision-making and uses public input to make sustainable decisions. It entails identifying problems and opportunities, developing alternatives and making decisions. The level of involvement spans from simple education efforts to working together collaboratively to voting, where the public makes the final decision.

**The Pitkin County Community Relations (CR) department was recently certified in the IAP2 framework. This will be the backbone for planning and executing engagement.**

# IAP2 SPECTRUM OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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 the 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 and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	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 influences the decision.	We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.



# RESEARCH AND KEY FINDINGS

## Research

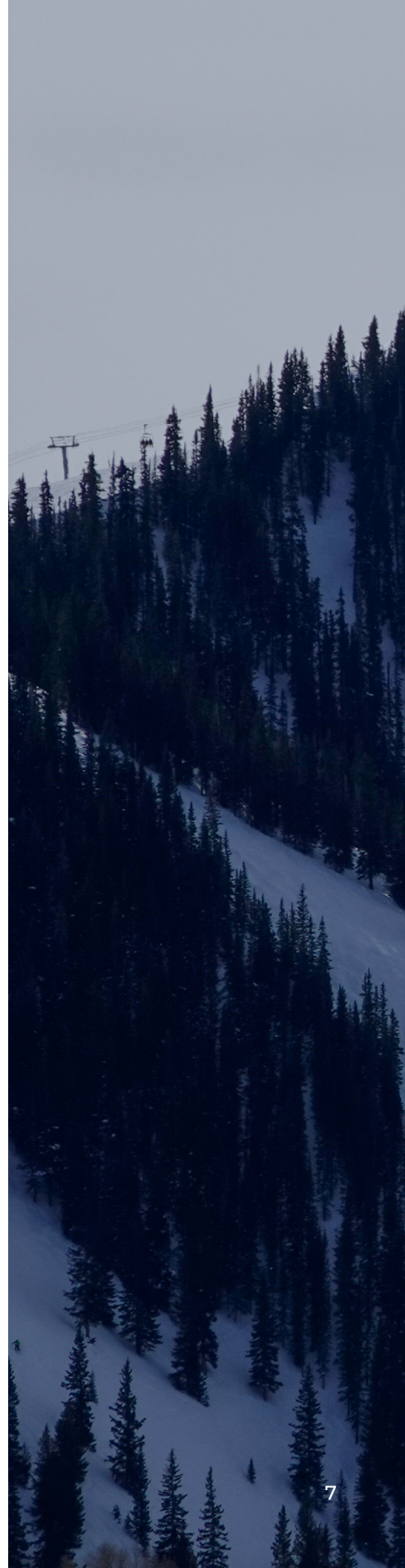
Planning projects typically start with research or talking with the people who spearhead the communication and engagement efforts as well as the audiences for which they are intended. The research process to create this plan consisted of:

- **Internal research**
  - Discovery sessions with 11 Pitkin County departments
  - Meeting with the equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) working group
- **Existing surveys**
  - Survey of employees
  - Survey of residents
- **Feedback and input from leadership (admin team)**

## Internal Research Findings

### Internal Listening: Department Discovery Sessions

Discovery sessions were conducted with 11 county departments to learn how communication and engagement are working currently, identify any gaps in resources or knowledge and determine how the Community Relations (CR) team can provide more effective leadership and improvements.





# QUOTES:

**“We were too busy managing what we had on our plates. Strategic planning was integral to working in a new way. We started by giving the BOCC a vision of how investing into communications really serves people.” – Open Space & Trails**

**“People choose the avenue they are comfortable with and pay attention to what they want.” – Information Technology**

**“I can’t dedicate time to communications and do all the stuff I need to do. Right now our communications are scattered with no vision.” – Sheriff’s Office**

**“I’d like more intention on what and when information is rolled out.” – Human Resources**

**“We are very conservative with our communication budget because we want to focus on actually providing services.” – Human Services**

**“We don’t have the capacity to push it, or if we do...we need to do it the ‘right’ way and aren’t sure exactly what that is.” – Public Health**

**“We use lots of ammunition to fight the negative, which means there is not much left for positive or proactive communication.” – Airport**



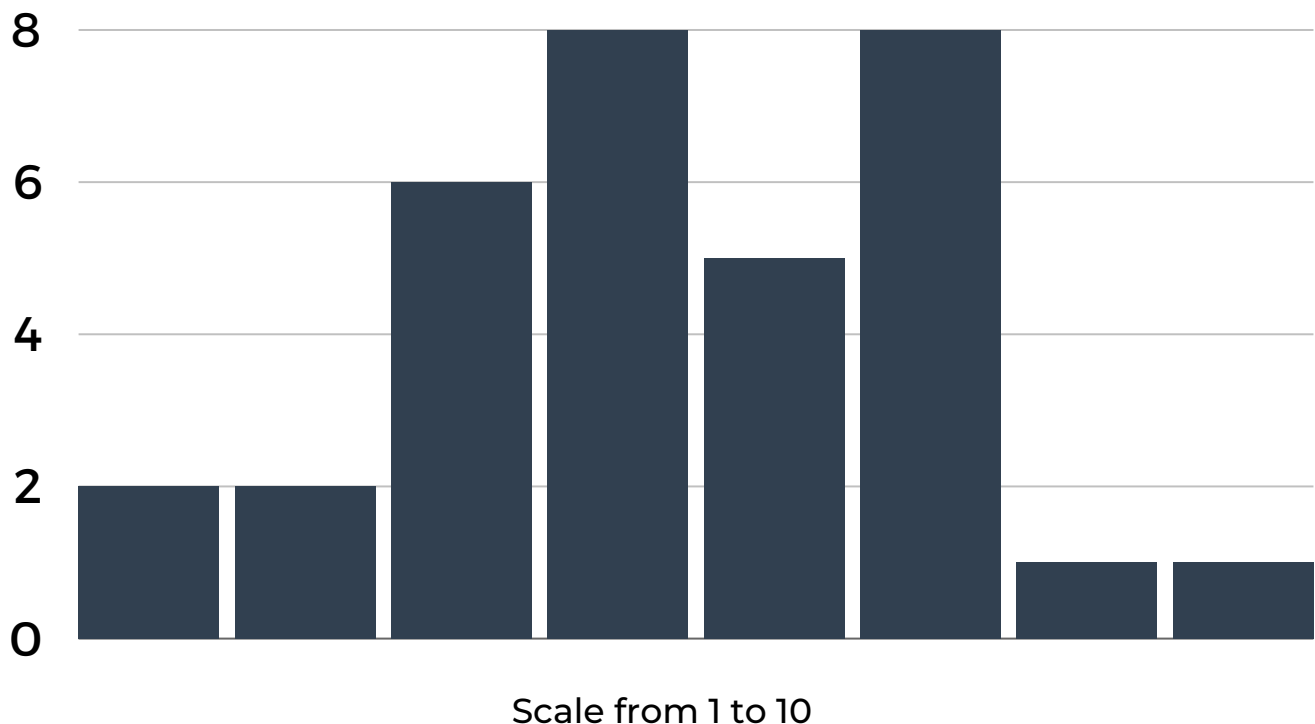
# DEPARTMENT SELF-EVALUATION

As part of each session, participants were asked, “How well is your department communicating with your audience(s) on a scale from 1 to 10.”

Participants took the liberty of voting for a 2.5, for example, when they couldn’t decide between a 2 and 3.

As you can see, the chart below represents somewhat of a standard bell curve, with most people landing in the middle with the sentiment of “We are doing okay but we could definitely do better.” Other comments included:

- Communication isn’t a priority in my job.
- We have room for improvement.
- It always feels reactive.
- We don’t have the expertise but want to learn.
- We need help with the “how” and the “why.”



# Pitkin County's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Initiative

In 2023, Pitkin County worked with a consulting firm to conduct an organization-wide analysis of existing practices and policies, and this work identified numerous actions and policies that are already incorporated into Pitkin County culture, while highlighting areas for improvement.

To ensure this important work is embodied in the county's communications, Manifest+Trulove, the team that helped develop this plan, has incorporated the recommended EDI tactics into the strategic communications planning methodology for departments.

## Existing Surveys

The county has a consistent track record of conducting an employee survey every two years and a public satisfaction survey every two years. This data informed the plans, goals, objectives and strategies outlined in this report.

- 2023 Employee Survey
- 2022 Internal Communications Survey
- 2023 Community Survey (Public Satisfaction Survey) results
- 2021 Community Survey results



# HIGH-LEVEL STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The guiding principle or North Star for successful, strategic countywide communication and engagement is:

***People have the information, resources and services they need—when they need it.***

You will see this lofty goal woven throughout the three plans below, as it is the overarching aim for the entire county. It is a way of thinking about—and conducting—communication and engagement that will facilitate a shift from the current blanket approach (all information to everyone) to a more project- or campaign-based process that focuses on the specific audience, the messages it deems important and the ways it receives information and gives feedback.

## **External**

The goal is to resource county staff and vendors to more effectively communicate and engage with the public for a measurable impact. Because each campaign, communication and engagement opportunity—and its specific audience—has unique needs, learning how to engage with individual audiences becomes part of the process. Over time, each department and campaign will gain fluency around connecting more deeply with intended audiences.

Sample objectives include:

- County has a unified brand.
- Departments serve audiences and constituents better through intentional work guided by strategic planning.





- All departments have an employee to project-manage communication and engagement tasks.
- CR team has a clear protocol for supporting departments on a project basis.

## **Internal**

The goal is to develop an informed, engaged countywide workforce through a valuable internal communication framework.

Objectives include:

- Simplify and align internal communications across the organization.
- The entire county is communicating and engaging internally through an EDI lens.
- Support understanding of the communication campaign planning process and a simplified IAP2/co-design methodology.

## **Community Relations**

The purpose of the CR department is to lead, advise and resource the county and its vendors in creating higher-quality and more impactful communications, engagement and campaigns.



# SECTION 2: ABOUT PITKIN COUNTY

## Community Vision

Pitkin County will continue to be a healthy, safe, vibrant and sustainable community, enhancing the quality of life for everyone who lives, works and visits here while conserving the natural environment as the basis for our community's success.

## Organization Mission

Pitkin County government provides valued and high-quality public services supporting the health, safety and well-being of people and the natural environment.

## Pitkin County Organizational Values

Pitkin County embraces the following values to promote public trust and confidence in county government.

**Stewardship:** We strive to leave our natural environment, community, public assets and organization in better condition than we found them for current and future generations.

**Ethics:** We hold ourselves to high standards of honesty and dependability in the conduct of county business.

**Excellence:** We are committed to providing quality services that are accessible, accurate and innovative to meet our community's needs.



**Collaboration:** We work together as employees and with citizens and other government, nonprofit and private-sector organizations, helping one another succeed in promoting and achieving the public’s goals.

**Open communication:** We are committed to listening to our citizens and partners and to giving accurate and timely information.

**Positive work environment:** We appreciate dedicated and knowledgeable employees and support their professional and personal growth.

## **2024 Strategic Priorities**

The Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) and leadership team have identified the following focus areas, known as the Big Rocks, as priorities for the immediate future. These are reflected in the 2024 proposed budget:

1. Jail/criminal justice system
2. Climate change
3. Growth
4. Housing
5. Staff recruitment and retention
6. Airport modernization

Note that a comprehensive strategic planning process for the entire county will be initiated in 2024 with the intention of completing it within the year. The communication plan(s) can be reevaluated at that time to ensure continued strategic alignment.

## **A Decentralized Model**

Pitkin County is intentionally organized in a “decentralized” way, meaning that each department operates with great autonomy and independence—almost as its own business entity. Any business model has its strengths and weaknesses. But when it comes to communication, branding and sharing information, this model creates challenges that are described later in this report.



## The Brand

A decentralized business model leads Pitkin County to function and appear as a “family of brands” (i.e., each department has its own brand) rather than as a single entity. Many departments have individual logos, websites, social channels and distinct messages. These stylistic and messaging differences can cause confusion for internal and external audiences. The CR team has worked hard over the past year to foster some visual standardization through:

- Internal staff training on how to use effective communication tools to encourage consistency
- CR team managing and approving campaigns for departments to ensure consistency in internal and external campaigns
- Complete redesign of the Pitkin County website ([pitkincounty.com](http://pitkincounty.com)) to better align with the county brand
- Visual brand guidelines

To engender a higher degree of alignment for audiences, Manifest+Trulove recommends taking these efforts a few steps further to create key messages that can be used consistently across the county.

## Community Relations History

It is worth noting that the CR department consisted of one person for 20-plus years and then the position was vacant or in transition for a couple of years until the current manager was hired in 2022 and the two support employees became permanent full-time employees in late 2023.

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# SECTION 3: THE PLANS

## EXTERNAL PLAN

Overview: A plan for successful one- and two-way communication and engagement with the people who work in, live in and visit Pitkin County.

### *Current state*

As mentioned, the CR team was one person until very recently. This fact, combined with the county's decentralized model, have resulted in communication and engagement being done reactively (with little to no strategy) at a department level, with costly contractor support.

Currently, limited resources are a major obstacle for county departments. They have competing priorities and often lack time, people and/or budget.

Over the past year-plus, the CR team has become a resource for departments to help them execute tactical-based needs (mostly press releases, translations and some campaign-based work). They have worked hard to create a few “centralized” tools such as countywide advertisements and the Pitkin County Press newsletter.

### *Future state*

Per the overall recommendation above, a successful future means:

**People have the information, resources and services they need—when they need it.**





Acknowledging the CR team will likely never be able to handle all of the county's communication and engagement needs effectively, meeting this goal is largely dependent on the CR department's ability to enroll county employees (and external contractors and vendors) in the recommended methodologies for creating strategic, proactive communications and engagement.

Thus, improving external communications and engagement across the county becomes a change-management project—getting people to adopt new practices. It will require tremendous leadership and significant time from the CR team, backed by support from the manager's office and department and team leads. Success and progress can be measured by the specific goals noted in the plan below.

## **External Audiences**

The people who live, work and play in Pitkin County are the primary audiences for communication and engagement efforts outlined in the plan.

Residents: Property owners, renters, seasonal workers

Businesses: Owners and employees

Visitors: Tourists, business travelers, extended networks of residents

### **Local Agencies and Other Government Organizations**

City of Aspen, Town of Snowmass Village, Colorado Department of Transportation, Roaring Fork Transportation Authority, U.S. Forest Service, Regional public safety, fire and emergency management, State and federal governments, Regulatory agencies

## **Partner Organizations**

Aspen Chamber Resort Association - Aspen School District - Local nonprofits that support the community with mental health, crisis, food and more - Large employers such as Aspen Skiing Co. and Aspen Valley Hospital

## **Key Influencers**

Pitkin County audiences that have the potential to provide information, influence perceptions and/or impact policy or operations

## **Media**

Local newspapers, radio and other mediums

## **Elected officials**

Aspen City Council members; Snowmass Village Town Council members; Basalt, Carbondale and Glenwood Springs leaders and councilmembers; Eagle County BOCC; Garfield County BOCC

## **Neighborhood and Community Groups**

- HOAs
- Caucuses

# **Communication and Engagement Goals, Objectives and Strategies**

**GOAL:** Resource county staff and vendors to more effectively communicate and engage with the public for a measurable impact.

## **SUCCESS: Improved communications and engagement impact with external audiences**

“As an employee I know how to create the right impact with the least amount of effort and to ensure that my communication and engagement work is valuable.”

## **Greater public satisfaction with the process of engagement**

“The process is clear, my voice is heard and I’m aware of how decisions are getting made.”

## **Greater public satisfaction with the ease of getting the information they want**

“I can find what I need when I am actively looking, more so than in the past.”



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Objective 1

**Train staff and vendors on the difference between communication and engagement and when each is needed.**

### **Strategy 1: Develop reference materials and guidelines.**

- Create easy-to-understand definitions of communications and engagement to distinguish each term.
- Develop simple flowchart-style references for when to use each.
- Audit current tools and methods to create a chart showcasing which tool is used to inform vs. engage (i.e., newsletter vs. listening session).
- Provide recommendations for which tools or methods could be used and how to use them.
- Engage staff and vendors in a communication vs. engagement learning campaign to organize and align people around the updated approach to when and how to use each with various audiences.



## **Objective 2**

### **Continue to develop a unified, consistent brand for the county.**

#### **Strategy 1: Develop a county narrative and key messaging.**

- Contract with a brand-focused writer to create the narrative, Big Rock messaging and department boilerplates.

#### **Strategy 2: Continue to refine brand standards.**

- Refine library of templates for PowerPoint, email signatures, etc.
- Support brand consistency in department and vendor communications for brand compliance.

#### **Strategy 3: CR team acts as an advisor on all Big Rock initiatives to ensure the county's voice and communications and engagement methods are represented.**

- A CR representative is part of all Big Rock teams.
- A CR representative works closely with communication, engagement or facilitation consultant(s) working on these initiatives.

#### **Strategy 4: Centralized communication tactics are refined to best represent the county as a whole.**

- Reevaluate the process for collecting/distributing information for the Pitkin County Press, countywide advertisements such as Pitkin County Minute, Grassroots Channel 11, etc.

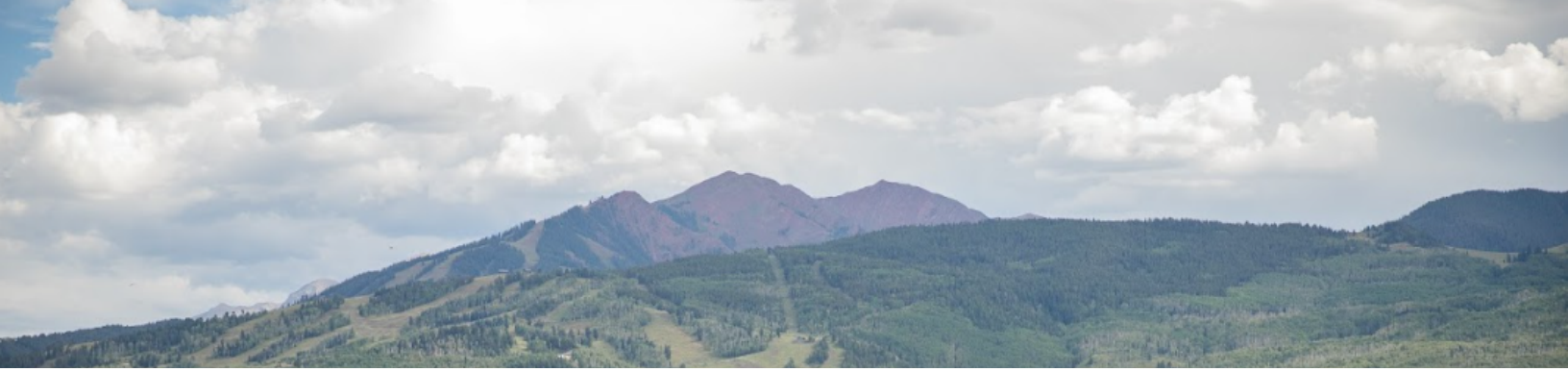
#### **Strategy 5: All external digital platforms align with the county brand.**

- Work closely with IT to audit all department standalone websites (those not part of pitkincounty.com) and social channels.

#### **Strategy 6: All contractors and vendors are skilled brand ambassadors.**

- Train all contractors on brand standards and county best practices.





# RECOMMENDATIONS

**Objective 3: Departments serve audiences and constituents better through intentional work guided by strategic planning.**

**Strategy 1: CR team, with support from consultants, teaches key departments how to create 12-month strategic communication plans.**

**Strategy 2: CR team meets with departments annually to evaluate and update the plans.**

**Strategy 3: CR team develops communication and engagement methodologies for consistency and increased impact.**

- CR team documents a communication campaign planning process using this tool as a springboard.
- CR team documents a simplified IAP2 process.

**Objective 4: All departments have an employee to project-manage communications and engagement tasks.**

**Strategy 1: CR works with department directors to identify a person internally for the “department communicator” role.**

- Department communicators become part of the County Communicators Group.
- Department communicators receive ongoing training from industry experts and CR team on how to guide projects.

**Strategy 2: CR continues to develop and promote the resource library for department communicators to access as needed**

## **Objective 5: CR team acts as a strategic planning resource.**

### **Strategy 1: CR team has a clear protocol for supporting departments on a project basis.**

- Create a step-by-step process that includes job tickets, project questionnaires, evaluation and more.
- Develop a process or framework for evaluating whether the CR team can do the work.
- Establish a list of trusted contractors to do strategy, content writing, outreach and engagement, marketing, graphic design, photography, videography, advertisement placement, etc.

## **Objective 6: The entire county is communicating/engaging through an EDI lens.**

**Strategy 1: Building off of the County’s EDI process for the county as a whole, Community Relations will bring an EDI lens, including translation and bicultural communications, to its work (including annual department sessions and project-based work).**

**Strategy 2: Empower all dept. communicators to be their own EDI resource.**

- Identify training opportunities specifically for communicating to diverse audiences.

**Strategy 3: Build relationships with organizations that serve diverse communities (English in Action, Valley Settlement, Voces Unidas).**

**Strategy 4: Work with the IT department to comply with all new local government ADA policies in external and internal communications.**

## **Objective 7: Improve efficiency through transparency.**

**Strategy 1: Department communicators coordinate more efforts more often and more effectively to find economies of scale and collaborative opportunities.**

- Sharing of projects and efforts becomes a key piece of the monthly County Communicators Group meetings.
- Create more buy-in for the countywide comms/engagement calendar.



# PERFORMANCE METRICS - MEASUREMENT

Success is only evident if the metrics reflect it. For external communication and engagement, the best way to measure success is to compare community survey results from year to year. For instance, between 2014 and 2021, constituents became less and less satisfied with their opportunities to engage with the county on important issues. Our goal would be for the average satisfaction rating to rise in 2025. Manifest+Trulove would also like to consult with the community survey team to suggest ongoing questions that would garner good benchmarks for this work.











# INTERNAL PLAN

## Overview: Communicating to all Pitkin County employees

### Current/Future State

#### **Current**

Currently, internal communication within the county is like a tsunami or tidal wave. Anything and everything that departments want to share with employees is pushed out via the Pitkin County Information Network (PCIN), employee newsletter, HR emails and all-county emails. Because of this information overload, many important messages are being lost. There is also confusion regarding where to find certain information, as there are numerous websites and repositories.

#### **Future**

Similar to the external future, a successful internal future will mean:

*Employees have the information, resources and services they need—when they need it.*

This will involve starting a ruthless vetting process to determine which information goes out when and devising a very clear organizational system so that employees can know where to find certain information. It could also include a new tool (i.e., app) that would put the information employees need at their fingertips. Again, success and progress can be measured by the specific goals noted below in the plan.

# Audiences

Internal audiences are often secondary in communications plans. However, keeping staff informed builds ambassadors and positively impacts operations. Providing access to messaging, tools and best practices helps to deliver a consistent message to employees.

Pitkin County internal audiences include:  
BOCC- Admin team/manager’s office - Directors/managers -  
Employees - Professional contractors and vendors

## Pitkin County by the numbers:



397 total employees



143 of whom work in the field



254 are more desk oriented in an office setting

Since COVID-19, many employees have the option to work remotely; 173 are hybrid while 201 work onsite at all times



12 locations total



Aspen Main St. administration office

**As these facts make evident, there isn’t one way to reach all employees, so diversified communication channels are needed.**





# COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

**GOAL:** Develop an informed and engaged countywide workforce through a valuable internal communication framework.

**SUCCESS:** Qualitatively, success looks like:

Improved communications and engagement impact across employee audiences

“I—as an employee tasked with communication roles—know that my communication and engagement work is valuable. I want to learn how to create the right impact with the least amount of effort, with help from the CR team and contractors.”

Greater internal satisfaction with the process of engagement

“The process is clear. I feel included and aware of how decisions are getting made by leadership or other decision-makers.”

Greater satisfaction with the ease of getting the information

“I can find what I need when I am actively looking, more so than in the past.”

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

**Objective 1: Simplify and align internal communications across the organization.**

**Strategy 1: Define the communications method/tool/software to be used when and for what purpose.**

- Simplify methods to a flowchart (i.e., what is posted on PCIN vs. all-staff email vs. employee newsletter, HR website, etc.) with clear directions for staff to follow.

**Strategy 2: Train and support staff on a “simplest method possible framework” evaluation for communicating.**

- Create a list of questions to guide individual communication that may include: what is the purpose, who needs to know, what is the easiest way to communicate with them in the fewest steps?

### **Strategy 3: Develop prioritization methods to decrease information overwhelm.**

- CR team works with leadership and HR to create focus areas or themes for internal communication each month or quarter.
- CR team creates and implements a vetting process for employee newsletters, all-county emails and PCIN.
- CR team works with departments to audit their website architecture and content.

### **Strategy 4: Make all employee information (HR) easy to find and accessible.**

- Create a webpage or mobile app that helps employees get the information they need quickly.

### **Strategy 5: Improve communication from leadership to directors to managers to staff and ultimately to BOCC (and visa versa).**

- Revisit the manager's chat.
- Train new directors on what/how/when information should be shared and with whom.
- Revitalize the director toolkit to disseminate information to teams.
- Create a guide for BOCC communication—when, why, how employees should communicate with BOCC.
- Institute a channel of communication from BOCC to leadership, directors, managers and staff.

### **Strategy 6: Establish clear expectations for employees.**

- Create rules for how often employees need to check PCIN and/or other important channels for internal information.

## **Objective 2: The entire county is communicating/engaging internally through an EDI lens.**

### **Strategy 1: Shift away from a digital and deskbound communication style bias.**

- Create non-digital communication tactics as part of all projects/initiatives (i.e., in-person meetings, bulletin board signs, audio content such as podcasts, etc.)

### **Strategy 2: Provide communications in Spanish and English.**

- Create protocols for what information is offered in Spanish.

## **Objective 3 - Support understanding of the communication campaign planning process and a simplified IAP2/co-design methodology.**

### **Strategy 1: Train staff on best practices to help them better project-manage comms/engagement for their departments.**

## **Performance Metrics - Measurement**

The best indicator of success for internal communications and engagement is a positive change in employee survey results regarding how informed they are and how easy it is to find information. Manifest+Trulove would also like to consult with the employee survey team to possibly add pointed questions to help track progress over time.



# COMMUNITY RELATIONS STRATEGIC OPERATING PLAN

Overview: This section defines the role of the Community Relations team and how it works with departments to fulfill communication and engagement needs and goals.

## Overall Department Challenge, Strategic Goal and Necessary Change

Even if the current CR team grew exponentially, it still couldn't effectively handle all communication and engagement needs, internally and externally, for a county with 397 employees and 39 departments spread over 12 locations and 945 square miles.

Acknowledging this truth means the department must develop and use systems across the organization to improve the county's communications and create more effective and inclusive engagement with constituents.

## Current State

Currently, there is a lack of organizational clarity around the CR department's role, including how it serves the county as a whole. This is largely due to little to no organizational history for strategic communications and engagement. The department is entrenched in a pattern of reactive project work with a history of saying "yes" to other departments' requests as a way to build relationships. CR is seen as a service bureau or "order taker" rather than as a leader, mentor or educator.

The department is constantly pressed for time, with a high volume of small projects and large-scale needs. The time pressure is confounded by cumbersome internal systems, folders/files and platforms for communication, along with a lack of communications and engagement best practices and resources. The longstanding department of one person grew quickly in response to a crisis—COVID—versus growth being an intentionally developed long-term vision.



# Future of the Community Relations Department

## Community Relations Department's Vision and Purpose

**Vision:** The CR department is the team and change agent for steering the county's desire to improve communication and engagement. It will be responsible for ushering every department and vendor and contractor toward getting people the information, resources and services they need—when they need it.

**Purpose:** The CR department's purpose is to lead, guide and resource the county and its vendors in creating higher-quality and more impactful communications, engagement and campaigns.

This revised purpose requires the Community Relations department to spend the next few years building systems and processes that support the county as a whole, enrolling internal partners in this trajectory as they:

1. **Lead:** Run, engage and manage priority strategic external communication/engagement/campaigns and countywide internal communication.
2. **Guide:** Work closely with county communicators and Big Rock initiative teams to align external communication, engagement and campaigns with the county brand.
3. **Resource:** Spearhead continued improvement of department communication/engagement/campaigns with vendor support, guidelines, documentation, and training at a systems level.

### CR Team Values

Overarching ground rules for how the CR department aims to interact with others:

- **Innovation:** Create a learning culture, gain knowledge and collaborate to leverage individual team members' backgrounds and strengths.
- **Empowerment:** Uplift one another and other departments.
- **Transparency:** Prioritize honesty and letting people know what CR is working on and why.
- **Boundaries:** Create and communicate a clear prioritization of time and resources; embrace the ability to say "no" for the greater good.
- **Efficiency:** Work effectively together across departments and vendors.

### CR Department Current Team

Communications Manager  
Bilingual Communications Specialist  
Communications Specialist

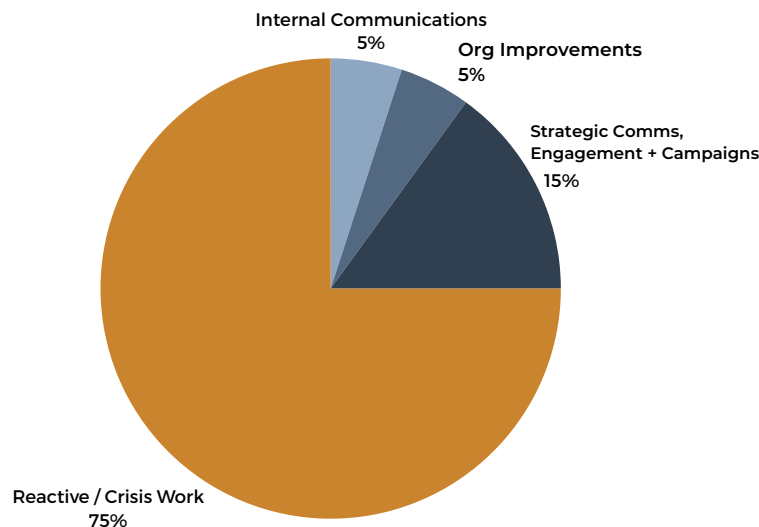


# COMMUNITY RELATIONS TEAM 2-YEAR HIGH-LEVEL WORK PLAN

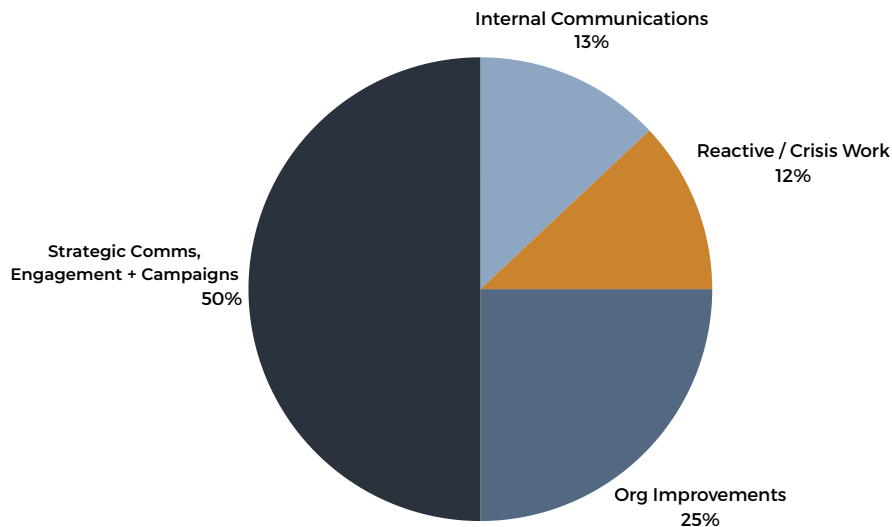
The Community Relations team will put most of its time toward priority strategic communication, engagement and campaign work. The remaining time will be split across three areas: organizational improvements, internal communications and reactive/crisis needs.

This is a huge and potentially uncomfortable shift away from the department's current time allocation. It will require a significant prioritization of work and the ability to say "no" to most requests from departments while relying on contract support to help fulfill department needs that are not handled internally. This means less saying "yes" to all asks and tasks and more directing departments to the resources they need.

## Current CR Dept. Time Allocation



## Proposed 2-Year CR Dept. Time Allocation



# COMMUNITY RELATIONS DEPARTMENT

## 2-YEAR PLAN AT A GLANCE

<b>Strategic Communication, Engagement and Campaigns</b>	For the CR team to lead and create higher-quality communications, engagement and campaigns.	Run, manage and lead priority department, leadership and BOCC projects.	Create higher-quality communications, engagement and campaigns.	External
		Hold strategic planning sessions for known-need departments (Public Health, Human Services, Sheriff, Community Development, Public Works, Clerk and Recorder, Manager's Office).	Identify needs. Prioritize department resources to execute on projects.	External and Internal
		Hold strategic discovery sessions with many other departments.	Introduce more departments across the county to a strategic, proactive approach to comms, engagement and campaigns.	External and Internal
		Oversee outsourced priority projects.	Align vendors with the county's best practices for higher-quality products.	External
		Analyze project performance and impact; cultivate a learning culture.	Develop a reporting system that uses metrics to track impact and needed improvements, aiming for a clearer understanding of what strategies, tactics and activities are achieving desired results.	External and Internal
		Continue to develop a unified and consistent brand for the county.	Develop templates and guidelines for staff and vendors to ensure consistent branding across all internal communications while honoring a decentralized model.	External and Internal
<b>Internal Communications (Partnership with HR)</b>	Develop an informed and engaged countywide workforce through a valuable internal communication framework.	Audit all internal communications to review format, platform, frequency and effectiveness.	Partner with HR to identify opportunities to streamline, combine and schedule messages.	Internal
		Develop a lightweight landing page or app to centralize existing and new resources.	Simplify how employees find answers to common needs and in creating communications, engagement and campaigns.	Internal
		Create a work plan for internal communication improvements.	Create a roadmap for top-priority improvements.	Internal
<b>Organizational Improvements (Resourcing, Mentoring, Training)</b>	Develop methodologies, procedures and resources to support higher quality communications, engagement and campaigns created in a decentralized model.	Train staff and vendors on the difference between communication and engagement and when each is needed.	Create centralized best practices and recommendations for strategic communications and a simplified IAP2/co-design methodology.	External and Internal
		Develop, then implement a countywide crisis communication plan.	Create a foundational plan to protect county and constituent interests.	External and Internal
		Optimize the County Communicators Group monthly meeting.	Create a highly valuable meeting to support countywide learning and growth.	Internal
		Create a robust pool of approved vendors.	Establish a suite of support to help department staff effectively execute on projects.	External
		Evaluate current countywide and dept. projects and methods for impact.	Gain the knowledge and ability to recommend which projects to continue, adjust or stop.	External and Internal
		Curate shared media list.	Build a centralized, updated list for staff and vendors to leverage media in comms.	External
		Champion EDI in comms and engagement.	Work closely with internal staff to develop EDI best practices in communication and engagement in alignment with evolving countywide EDI work.	External and Internal
<b>Reactive/Crisis</b>	Reserve time for real-world needs.	Allocate time for crisis and reactive communications.	Budget approximately 750 hours of the department's capacity for a normal, yearly level of unplanned crises and reactive comms across the county.	External and Internal



# 3 TO 5 YEAR STRATEGIC AIM

## County-Level Strategic Communications and Engagement Aim

By now the methodologies, resources and learning mindset have been infused across the county's departments. The county is learning how to implement communications, engagement and campaigns in a more impactful and refined way rather than structurally changing how this work gets done. Now it's time to ramp up and keep improving.

Specifically, some departments will be completing highly improved, much more impactful work while others will be on the cusp. Strategic planning sessions across the county will continue to be an instrumental planning tool to daylight and prioritize the most impactful work.

Sharing and aggregating lessons learned for county staff and vendors will help support continued improvements.

The sports car is built—now it's time to get better at driving it.

## Community Relations Department Aim and Time Allocation

With the bulk of foundational work completed in the initial 2-year timeframe, the CR team aims to increase its time allocation for strategic communications, engagement and campaign work in the 3- to 5-year timeframe. Less time is needed for improving internal communications or organizational improvements. However, the yearly volume of reactive communications and crisis communications likely stays the same.

A key area of work for the CR team is developing a vision for how the county can increase communications, engagement and campaign capacity with additional staff. This model will acknowledge the county's desire for a decentralized model of work while aiming for more internal support for the county's needs. The working model will build capacity, consistency and thus impact. See graphic below.

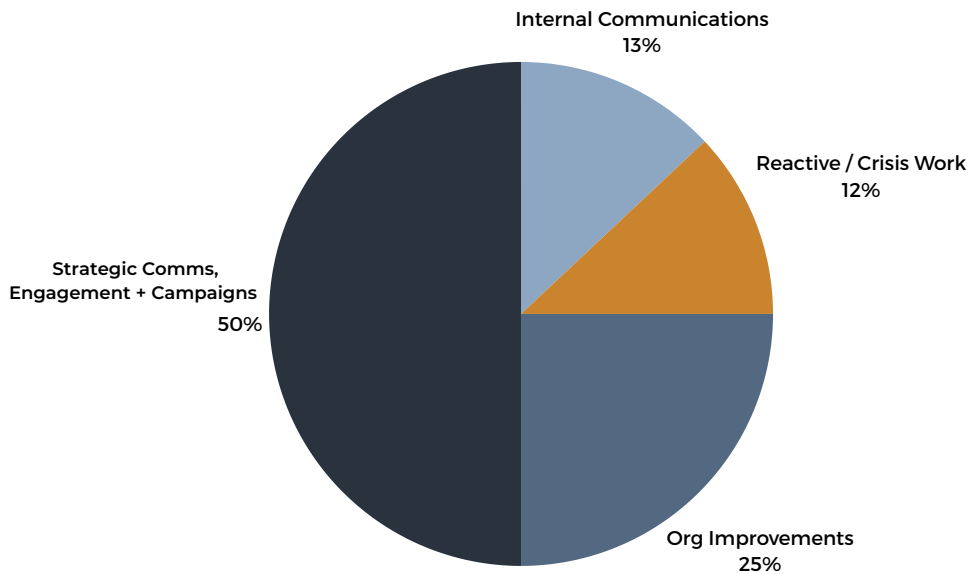
The Community Relations team deepens its leadership role across the county. With more time to focus on strategic projects—across more departments—the CR team can lead and guide more departments and thus the entire county to greatly improve communications, engagement and campaigns.

Finally, the CR team can begin to modernize how work gets done. Improvements in systems, platforms and technologies can be implemented.



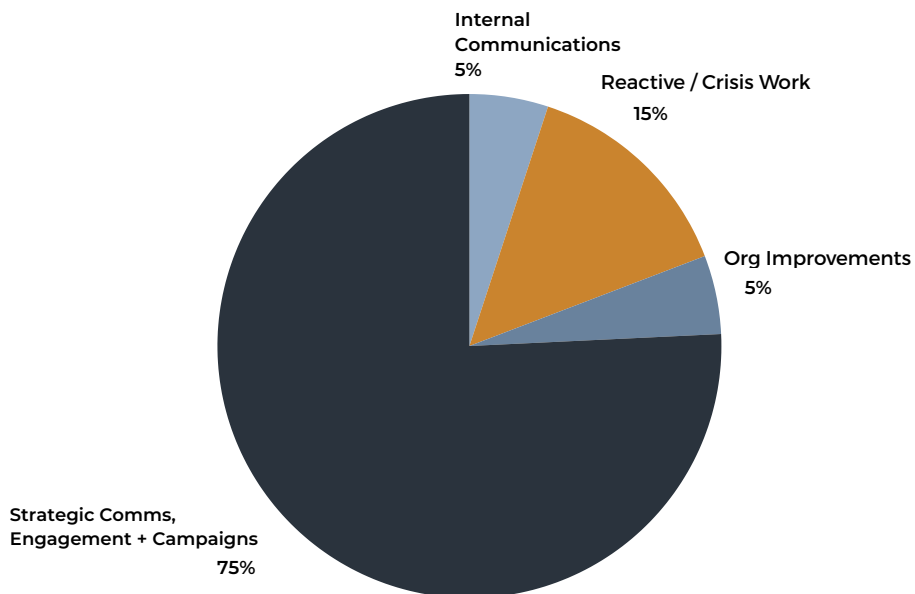
# PROPOSED CR DEPARTMENT TIME ALLOCATION, FUTURE PATH

## Next 2-Year CR Dept. Time Allocation



Leading, Advising, Resourcing = Proactive

## 3- to 5-Year CR Dept. Time Allocation



Leading, Advising, Resourcing = Proactive





# RECOMMENDATIONS OF STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Specific objectives, strategies and tactics have been woven into the plan in the appropriate places, i.e., internal, external or CR plan. This section highlights several high-level ideas, concepts and recommendations that support the implementation of the plan. A key finding and recommendation is that technology and tools are not the path for implementing this change. This change requires a deep commitment to enrolling people in a new way of working. You'll notice our recommendations focus mostly on people rather than technology or software solutions.

## **Manage the change to strategic communications and engagement by leading strategically and by example—visibly.**

- The core mechanism for staff to act strategically will be to first align leadership and CR team on priorities/work plans, then to engage staff around the change.
- Create a culture of strategic prioritization by role-modeling “saying no,” defining work into distinct projects, setting goals and measuring results and then completing or recommitting to deepening engagement in projects. Know when projects can move from a strategic priority needing a high level of engagement to an ongoing “maintenance” mode, and shift who does that work.
- Create a culture of learning by daylighting the concept of “doing for impact” vs. “doing to do.”

- Engage staff and vendors in a communications vs. engagement campaign over time will ensure change becomes reality instead of documentation that collects dust.

## **Develop the CR team into a visible role model of a highly functional, empowered, decentralized team.**

- Support team manager's ability to direct and lead change on the CR team and across the organization.
  - Coach on how to be more of a director and change agent rather than a manager of projects; slow down and enroll others across the county in a major change initiative.
- Develop the CR team into an empowered and engaged team as a model for how to continue to decentralize.
  - Coach the entire team on how to work cross-functionally, coordinated yet independently; move the needle on role clarity and control of work; shift from delegating to staff from a "to-do list" to staff being able to own, manage and report up and out on strategic work plans.

## **Simplify and aggregate current technology and platforms.**

- Before new technology or platforms are introduced, a major simplification initiative should be adopted for all internal and external communications. The county has an overwhelming number of channels and volume of communication. Prioritizing methodology for effective communication and engagement over technology, the CR team should lead a major simplification of current tools to the point that actual needs are recognized. Then, in 3 to 5 years, new technologies can be explored.
  - E.g., Possibly centralize and funnel the bulk of internal communication to the newsletter from the suite of all possible internal communications channels; engage staff in deciding which methods work best across departments; daylight limitations to centralized communication.

## **Develop a crisis communications plan.**

- This project is already underway, with the hope of completing it early summer 2024.



