

# Communications Strategy

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This Communications Strategy is an evergreen document under ongoing review and revision, at the minimum annually.

The Implementation of an organizational communications strategy for Island Community Services will aid in:

- achieving overall organizational objectives;
- engaging effectively with stakeholders;
- demonstrating the success of agency work;
- ensuring stakeholders understand what Island Community Services does;
- changing behaviour and perceptions when necessary;
- generating funding, volunteerism, and other forms of support.

## Purpose of this Document

Since Island Community Services was established as a BC Society in 1975, services have expanded to an agency with over 100 staff and dozens of volunteers with 10 operational centers on Salt Spring Island and running over 40 programs in 10 program areas.

There is great range and diversity in the program areas and the demographics of those served and, therefore, a myriad communication fronts for the organization with funders, clients, other community organizations and the general public.

This document is not intended to be a crisis management strategy, but instead a document that should guide the agency away from experiencing crisis. While this may not always be possible, the aim is to be viewing the overall Communications Strategy through a lens of proactive management.

Nor is this document is intended to be a detailed Communications Workplan that outlines tasks and timelines. Such workplans would flow from this strategy and be geared to the issues and opportunities of a specific period of time being guided by this strategy.

The Communications Strategy is, therefore, not a communications plan for each of the service areas and projects. It provides a structure in which to frame messages and project plans utilizing a wide variety of tools and tactics on an operational level including, but not limited to:

- Placed news articles
- Advertisements
- Website publication
- E-mail newsletter
- Public meetings
- Public surveys
- Digital media marketing (e.g. Salt Spring Exchange)
- Posters
- Brochures
- Public events and meetings
- Private events and meetings
- In-person communication directly to stakeholders
- Publications and report (i.e. Annual Report)
- Signage

In most cases, the external communications of the organization are focused on a specific project or service area or a limited combination (e.g. Housing First or Harvest Food Programs).

There are some opportunities to discuss the organization as a whole and to highlight the diversity and breadth of the organization. In some cases, this can be highly supportive, or even central, such as in the case of fundraising, funding applications and donor relations.

## Communication Objectives

The communication objectives are based on and are derived from the agency Strategic Plan which is reviewed and updated annually by the Board of Directors, ensuring that communications activity supports organizational objectives.

Each organization stated objective is examined for communications potential and a strategy is devised for how to achieve, or help to achieve, that organizational objective from a communications perspective.

A similar translation is then possible to determine the best targeted messaging that can then go to support that communication objective. Targeted messaging will take into consideration the specific demographic or audience that should receive that message.

The third consideration is how to best reach that audience using the tools and medium listed above. There are many mediums used to reach specific and general audiences and the deliberate decision making around how best to reach which specific audience is a critical component of communications strategy. This process moves a Communications Strategy into a developed set of tactics and plans for a specific purpose at a specific time.

It may be, and often is, the case that the medium available to reach a target audience is going to expose the message to a much broader audience (i.e. Driftwood, Salt Spring Exchange). Unless there are special considerations that create some harm from this, the downside is limited to potential over-saturation of messaging leading to supporter fatigue.

Strategic Direction	Operational Objectives	Communications Objectives
<b>COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS</b>	1.1 - Develop a comprehensive communications strategy to increase the awareness and support for Island Community Services.	Regularly showcase organizational successes in the local media documenting outcomes
		Capitalize on events, topical issues, newly released information to report to community on active program areas and their objectives, highlighting current issue and over time showcasing the range of program areas and people served.
		Engage donors in important events and milestones for the organization
		Produce and distribute Annual Report to funders, donors (hard copy) and any others through website publication.
		Engage funders and other stakeholders imparting the gaps and shortfalls in funding and its impacts.
		Ensure external communication is coordinated to ensure a positive, deliberate and unified message.
		Appeal to the local community regarding volunteer opportunities.
	1.2 – Develop, support, and strengthen community partnerships and inter-agency relationships.	Build and maintain strong relationships with the local government and other local non-profits as champions and advocates of the agency by providing a regular flow of information.
		Engage community stakeholders in reaching and implementing local solutions and increasing vocal support for resources in community
		Open and maintain dialog with other local non-profits on activity and capacity of the agency.
		Showcase successful partnerships and collaborations in the community (e.g. Work BC, Inter-agency Housing Coalition)
	1.3 - Support and enhance internal communication within the organization.	Develop innovative communication platforms and technologies to facilitate internal (and external ) communication (web, google suite, social media)

<b>SUSTAINABILITY</b>	2.1- Improve service quality and accountability through annual review, evaluation, and accreditation of core service areas and new services. (CARF accreditation 2024)	Communicate the excellent standards and commitment to continuous improvement of ICS 3rd party endorsement by communicating that ICS participates in a variety of reviews, inspections and audits for programs, facilities and administrative management.
	2.2- Invest in good relationships with stakeholders and external contributors to maintain the organization’s financial health.	Maintain open lines of communication between ICS and stakeholders and external contributors demonstrating transparency and appreciation.
	2.3 – Maintain a strong and clear connection with the community to understand their needs of today and what their needs will be tomorrow.	Reporting to community and funders on successes and needs of the organization (and the community)
<b>ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY</b>	3.1 – Invest in the Board’s governance literacy understanding.	
	3.2- Effectively communicate and transfer knowledge between the governance board and operational teams.	Facilitate internal communication channels
	3.3 - Create a governance recruitment, retention and on-boarding strategy.	communication to support board recruitment as, or if, needed

## Audiences and Messages

There are a large number of different audience types that Island Community Services communicates to externally and each warrant consideration for what messages and which channels are best suited. Different stakeholders need different information in order for them to most effectively play their role in supporting organizational success.

The following list represents the most prevalent types of audiences that the organization interacts with on an ongoing basis.

- Service Users / Consumers
- Support People of Consumers
- Government (Local / Provincial / Federal)
- Supporters (Donors / Volunteers / Funders)
- Advocates
- Influencers (e.g. Division of Family Practice, local government)
- Local Residents
- Local Business
- Local Non-Profits and Partner Organizations

For the purpose of mapping out key communication messages, these audiences are grouped in the following way with messaging based on communication objectives as well as the role that each play in supporting the programs and services of Island Community Services.

Audience	What they need to know	Key communications messages
Service users	What we offer them	The array of programs and services provided in broad and specific terms
	How to access our services	How and where to contact and access services
	We maintain the highest standards of quality in our services.	The agency and all programs are client centred
		We are trustworthy and reliable We are accredited by 3rd party
Government	What we want to see changed in policy and practice	Community needs are not being met and specific changes in policy and practice will help
		They have a responsibility to support the community needs by ...
	We are an influential stakeholder	The policy environment around any particular issue and what has to change to meet community needs  We are a well-respected organisation with community needs driving our agenda

Audience	What they need to know	Key communications messages
Supporters / Donors	You can support the community by supporting us	We rely on donations to be able to provide for the basic needs of the most vulnerable community members
		We are a charity and provide official tax receipts
		There are many ways to support including donations, volunteer, patronizing social enterprise, employment
		There are many ways to donate including ways with tax advantages with securities, bequests, monthly donations etc
		We are responsible and conscientious about applying donations to where they are needed most and can have most impact
		Our administration is a low percentage of budget and is necessary to be able to provide the programs and services

Audience	What they need to know	Key communications messages
Local Residents / Business / Non- Profits	Our role in meeting community needs	We are a voice in support of community needs and its most vulnerable members
		many programs are contracted service provision with government bodies
		We are a solid and reliable institution providing central support for the community
	how they can support us	There are many ways to add value and create synergies including community partnerships, fundraising and donations, and advocacy in the community.

## Evaluating success

It is critical to implement and monitor feedback on the communications efforts of the organization to evaluate the success of messages and methods. There are some tools that are available that are more objective than others such as:

- website analytics;
- funding increases / decreases;
- media coverage (quantity and success in transmitting messages);
- project success / failure.

These are all vulnerable to confounding factors and need to be put in context of anything influencing these indicators such as political, economic or other factors outside the control of the organization.

Where possible, metrics for success of specific campaigns should be decided upon in advance.