



Report and Recommendations

# COMMUNICATIONS FOR A NEW FORM OF GOVERNMENT



## When the pandemic started, the City of Portland had...

- 75+ communications staff
- Housed in 25 bureaus and offices, each with its own brand
- 200+ separate social media accounts
- No citywide communications templates, tools or resources
- No central communications staffing or leadership
- No citywide channels to streamline essential information for Portlanders

Great information (and lots of it!) was going out.

But there was no infrastructure to synthesize, simplify and broadcast that information for our community -- or provide resources and support within our organization.

While this gap is a problem anytime, it's especially harmful during a public health and economic crisis.



### The Unified Communications Pilot was born.

Funded by the American Rescue Plan, a pilot project was launched to build communications infrastructure that delivers essential citywide information to Portlanders.

New resources, tools and strategies deployed by the pilot project also provide a bridge into Portland's future form of government. We have the opportunity to learn from the lessons of the past few years and invest in efficient, effective and equitable communications systems going forward.

# WHERE WE'VE COME FROM





### **City of Portland social media**

Instagram, Twitter and Facebook accounts feature original citywide content and amplified bureau content, providing a trusted source for civic news and events.



### **Crisis communications support**

When a storm, a natural disaster or a strike impacts services, Unified Communications supports bureaus by creating and sharing messaging.



### **Templates, tools and resources**

Graphic design templates, logos and photography are available on the intranet, saving staff time and creating a consistent, quality look and feel.



### **Communications strategy**

From houselessness to the economy, city policy priorities benefit from cohesive messaging and outreach. The Unified Communication Pilot has taken initial steps and identified future opportunities.



### **Coordination and collaboration**

Communicators gather for twice-a-week huddles to tackle emerging issues, monthly steering committee meetings to develop strategies, and quarterly forums to share knowledge and build relationships.



### **Equipment library**

Staff reserve cameras, interpretation equipment and event supplies from the library, expanding access to tools and reducing duplicate purchases.



### **Website strategy and citywide content**

In partnership with city technology experts, communicators are helping set strategic priorities for Portland.gov to deliver critical information to our community.

# TODAY: CITYWIDE COMMUNICATIONS





**About 75 staff across city bureaus focus on communications as their primary job function.**

They do a wide range of work to connect Portlanders with city programs and services and meet legal obligations.

- Write press releases and respond to media requests
- Design flyers, fact sheets, mailers and more
- Produce and manage content for digital newsletters and Portland.gov
- Communicate with City of Portland employees
- Produce photos and videos that highlight City services
- Develop, post and manage social media content
- Respond to public records requests
- Comply with language and disability access requirements, and advance best practices
- Become experts in complex topics, so they can explain that information to community members and journalists
- Lead and coach communications teams

# TODAY: BUREAU COMMUNICATIONS





Voter-approved changes to Portland's government create an opportunity to optimize communications. In 2023, city communicators, collaborators and leaders helped develop recommendations with support from outside experts.

## STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

135

City communicators  
Close collaborators  
Bureau directors  
City council staff

83% say unified communication is a priority or top priority for the city.

### Highest-Ranked Needs

- Messaging and media strategy for cross-bureau priorities
- Crisis communications
- Language access and digital accessibility services
- Strategic communications planning
- Consistent approach to web content
- Cohesive brand identity



## COMMUNITY INPUT

- One-third of residents find it difficult to contact the city
- East Portland residents and people of color are more likely to find it difficult
- Most residents want to make information easier to find and understand how community input leads to change

*Source: 2022 Portland Insights Survey*

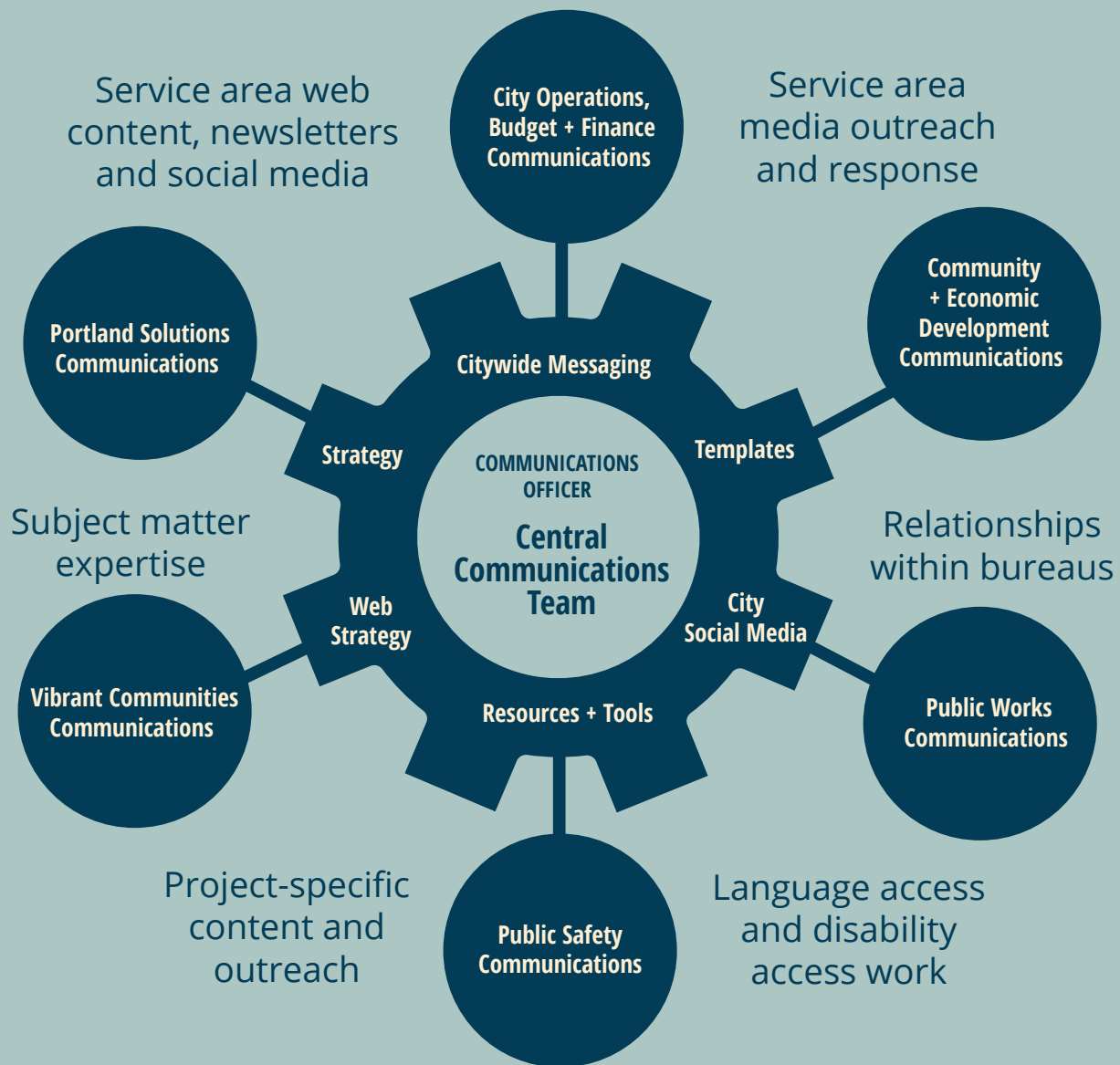
## PEER CITY RESEARCH

- Most large cities use a hybrid model: A central team provides strategy and resources. Communicators embedded in programs do day-to-day work, bringing subject-matter expertise.
- Defining goals and roles is essential.
- Central teams often have 20+ staff.

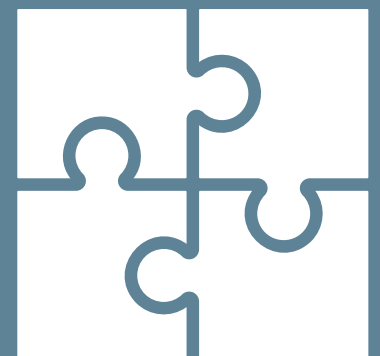
# CRAFTING A VISION FOR THE FUTURE



Central leadership, strategies and resources  
+  
Embedded expertise and capacity



**RECOMMENDATION:  
HYBRID MODEL**



## Phase 1: Lay the Foundation

- Expand existing central communications resources and structures that benefit employees and the public
- Appoint an executive communications leader and a central communications team of 8-10 staff
- Develop a charter that defines central and bureau communications responsibilities
- Begin creating resources for all city staff

## Phase 2: Align Service Areas

- Align bureau communications with new city org chart
- Communications officer and deputy city administrators engage communications staff in assessing each service area's resources, gaps and opportunities
- Deputy city administrators propose an integrated communications model within their service area for the 2025-2026 budget
- Senior communications leader in each service area serves on a communications leadership team for the city, facilitated by the communications officer

## Phase 3: Assess and Improve

- Assess communications resource levels, gaps and opportunities across service areas
- Recommend any changes to structure or resource allocation to align with city needs
- Assess and refine central, elected office and service area communications roles and responsibilities

2023  
to  
2024

2024  
to  
2025

2025  
and  
beyond

# RECOMMENDATION: PHASED APPROACH

