

# VILLAGE OF ALERT BAY COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Adriana Proton  
Master of Public Administration candidate  
School of Public Administration  
University of Victoria  
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**Client:** The Corporation of the Village of Alert Bay

**Supervisor:** Dr. Kim Speers  
School of Public Administration, University of Victoria

**Second reader:** Dr. Herman Bakvis  
School of Public Administration, University of Victoria

**Chair:** Dr. Bart Cunningham  
School of Public Administration, University of Victoria

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Introduction**

Municipal governments have a variety of messages to communicate with their citizens and stakeholders, ranging from information on taxes to information on recreation programs. Generally, the larger the municipality, the more resources are available to dedicate to communications officers or departments. As a small municipality, the Village of Alert Bay (“Village” or “Alert Bay”) in British Columbia has limited resources—especially staff time—but wants to more effectively communicate with its citizens and stakeholders. As a remote island municipality, it also has unique economic and communications challenges due to location, overlapping relationships with other orders of government, and population demographics.

This report provides a current state analysis of Alert Bay’s communications framework and based on the results, recommends a strategy of smart communications practices to better serve its residents. To that end, the primary research question explored was: How can the Village of Alert Bay improve its communications to best serve its citizens and stakeholders?

The following secondary research questions were also examined:

1. How should the Village of Alert Bay manage its limited communications capacity?
2. What are smart practices for municipal social media?

### **Methodology and Methods**

A mixed methods research approach was used to formulate the communications strategy for Alert Bay.

A review of academic and public administration literature examined smart practices for internal and external communications, public engagement and barriers to effective municipal engagement, but was not expected to give a complete picture of best practices for small municipalities. A scan of other British Columbia (BC) municipal communications documents and key informant interviews with other small BC municipalities filled in the gaps.

The current state analysis of Alert Bay’s communications framework was created using data from a resident survey, Alert Bay staff and Council interviews, and organizational stakeholder interviews. A total of 23 interviews were conducted with three different groups.

### **Key Findings and Analysis**

The findings from the current state analysis are divided into seven themes: consistency and managing capacity, communications infrastructure, policy and process, customer interaction, content, social media, and challenges and barriers. These themes appeared throughout the interviews, survey responses, and smart practices.

The Cormorant Island resident survey, staff and Council interviews, and organizational stakeholder interviews revealed that Alert Bay needs to be more consistent at communicating. Its communications efficacy can be improved by consistency in communications medium, timing, and style. Its customers need to know when and where to find various types of messages, and be able to identify them as Village messages. There are many improvements that can be made to current communications mediums, and several recommended additions to communications infrastructure. For example, to increase capacity, the Village can expand its current email subscription lists, and start a volunteer appreciation program. A review of internal communications revealed that new internal communications infrastructure, such as regular staff meetings, is necessary to keep staff and Council adequately informed. Keeping staff and Council informed and maintaining a shared vision is a prerequisite for positive workplace culture, and supports external communications.

The research showed that small municipalities like Alert Bay are less likely to have written communications documents and to devote many resources to communications planning or activities. This is partly because small municipalities do not see communicating as a distinct function, but as part of administration as a whole. Alert Bay needs to plan for communication rather than simply operating so it is ready for unusual communications events that may require large-scale public engagement. Communications planning also makes communicating more intentional and proactive, rather than reactive.

External communications as defined in this study includes both customer interaction and intentional communicating. The findings show that previous unintentional communication has damaged the Village's reputation, but a focus on positive customer service throughout the organization, and helping customers through complex processes are steps that can contribute to improved public image. It was found that Cormorant Island residents were generally satisfied with the content of external communications messages, but Alert Bay citizens felt uninformed about Council business.

The other main external communications challenge identified was managing social media. Social media is not only a challenge for Alert Bay, but also for the many BC municipalities who have created social media policies in the past five years as social media use has increased. Social media is an unfamiliar communications tool for many municipalities, but managed well, it can offer inexpensive, responsive, and direct communication with residents.

## **Options to Consider and Recommendations**

This communications strategy is intended to provide Alert Bay with options for approaching its communications activities. Alert Bay staff and Council do not have much time to devote to communications given competing priorities and limited resources, so the overall recommendation is to prioritize communications planning enough to adopt this communications strategy and implement the recommendations. Within this strategy, there are four options for the Village to consider. The recommended option is principle-driven priority-setting. This entails adopting the five communications principles of consistent, audience-friendly, timely, accountable, and efficient communications, and developing yearly priorities based on these principles.

Alert Bay does not have the capacity to implement all possible improvements immediately. To work toward the communications principles, this report recommends five communications priorities for 2016, and three specific and measurable goals per priority. These goals include improvements to current communications processes and infrastructure, including social media. The suggested 2016 goals include creating a positive social media space, using clear policies and social media-friendly content. Since an informed public tends to be more engaged, improving public knowledge of Village activities is also an intended outcome.

This communications strategy is intended to provide a basis for Alert Bay to develop its communications for the next five years. The communications principles offer a long-term vision that the Village can use to guide future priority and goal-setting. The final option also supports future planning: to adopt an evaluation plan. At a minimum, communications activities should be evaluated annually. In addition to evaluating success, evaluation is an opportunity to reflect on communications priorities regularly for continued development as technology and circumstances change.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... i

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... ii

    Introduction ..... ii

    Methodology and Methods ..... ii

    Key Findings and Analysis ..... ii

    Options to Consider and Recommendations ..... iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS..... v

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES ..... ix

1.0 INTRODUCTION ..... 1

    1.1 Problem Definition and Context ..... 1

    1.2 Client ..... 2

    1.3 Project Objectives and Research Questions ..... 3

    1.4 Organization of Report..... 3

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW ..... 5

    2.1 Overview ..... 5

    2.2 Internal Communication ..... 5

    2.3 External Communication..... 5

        2.3.1 Communication Roles ..... 5

        2.3.2 Intentional and Unintentional Messages..... 6

        2.3.3 Communication Style ..... 7

        2.3.4 Communications and Local Government Legislation ..... 7

    2.4 Public Engagement..... 9

        2.4.1 Why Engage the Public?..... 9

        2.4.2 Levels of Participation ..... 9

        2.4.3 Best Practices for Public Engagement..... 10

    2.5 Challenges and Barriers ..... 10

        2.5.1 Public Disinterest ..... 11

        2.5.2 Demographics ..... 11

        2.5.3 Capacity..... 13

2.6 Summary .....	13
3.0 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS .....	14
3.1 Overview .....	14
3.2 Methodology/Research Design.....	14
3.3 Methods.....	14
3.3.1 Secondary Data: Literature Review.....	14
3.3.2 Secondary Data: Cross-jurisdictional Scan.....	15
3.3.3 Primary Data: Survey .....	15
3.3.4 Primary Data: Interviews .....	16
3.3.4.1 Group 1: Staff and Council Interviews.....	16
3.3.4.2 Group 2: Organizational stakeholder Interviews .....	17
3.3.4.3 Group 3: Municipality Interviews .....	17
3.4 Data Analysis.....	18
3.5 Project Limitations and Delimitations.....	18
3.5.1 Project Limitations .....	18
3.5.2 Project Delimitations .....	18
4.0 CROSS-JURISDICTIONAL SCAN .....	20
4.1 Overview .....	20
4.2 Municipal Communications Management in BC .....	20
4.3 Internal Communication .....	20
4.4 External Communication.....	21
4.4.1 Intentional Communications.....	21
4.4.2 Communications Challenges: Social Media .....	21
4.5 Summary .....	23
5.0 FINDINGS: LITERATURE REVIEW, CROSS-JURISDICTIONAL SCAN & MUNICIPALITY INTERVIEWS .....	24
5.1 Overview .....	24
5.2 Literature Review Findings.....	24
5.3 Cross-jurisdictional Scan Findings .....	24
5.4 Interview Group 3: Small Municipalities.....	24
5.5 Themes.....	25
5.6 Summary .....	26
6.0 FINDINGS: STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS .....	27

6.1 Overview .....	27
6.2 Interview Group 1: Staff and Council.....	27
6.3 Interview Group 2: Organizational Stakeholders.....	29
6.4 Themes.....	30
6.5 Summary .....	31
7.0 FINDINGS: SURVEY .....	32
7.1 Survey Demographics .....	32
7.2 Communication Preferences.....	32
7.2.1 Cost of Communications .....	35
7.3 Communications Problems .....	35
7.4 Summary .....	36
8.0 CURRENT STATE ANALYSIS.....	37
8.1 Consistency and Managing Capacity.....	37
8.2 Communications Infrastructure.....	38
8.3 Policy and Process.....	38
8.4 Customer Interaction .....	39
8.5 Content .....	40
8.6 Social Media .....	40
8.7 Challenges and Barriers .....	41
9.0 OPTIONS TO CONSIDER and RECOMMENDATIONS.....	42
9.1 Option 1: Principle-based Communication.....	42
9.2 Option 2: Priority-based Communication .....	44
9.3 Option 3: Principle-driven Priorities .....	45
9.4 Option 4: Evaluation .....	46
9.5 Recommendations .....	47
10.0 CONCLUSION.....	48
11.0 REFERENCES .....	49
12.0 APPENDICES .....	54
12.1 Appendix A: Considerations in Designing Public Participation Processes .....	54
12.2 Appendix B: Survey Questions .....	57
12.3 Appendix C: Interview Questions.....	60
12.3.1 Interview Questions Group 3 .....	60

12.3.2 Interview Questions Group 1 .....	60
12.3.3 Interview Questions Group 2 .....	60
12.4 Appendix D: Cost of Communications Mediums .....	62
12.5 Appendix E: Communications Mediums .....	64
12.6 Appendix F: Evaluation Criteria.....	66

**LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES**

Figure 1: Communications mediums used by survey respondents ..... 33

Figure 2: Top four communications medium preferences by survey respondents..... 34

Figure 3: Evaluation cycle ..... 46

Table 1: Themes from best practices in the literature review, cross-jurisdictional scan and municipality interviews..... 26

Table 2: Themes common to interviews with staff and Council, and organizational stakeholders ..... 30

Table 3: Option 1 communications principles ..... 42

Table 4: Public participation continuum..... 55

Table 5: Public participation steps, objectives and commonly used tools ..... 55

Table 6: Cost of communications mediums..... 62

Table 7: Recommended use of communications mediums..... 64

Table 8: Recommended evaluation criteria for 2016 communications goals ..... 66

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Problem Definition and Context**

The Village of Alert Bay (“the Village” or “Alert Bay”) is a remote municipality on Cormorant Island in British Columbia (BC), Canada. Alert Bay has found it difficult to maintain a positive public image with its citizens and to effectively communicate information to and receive feedback from the residents of Cormorant Island. The Village has also had difficulty generating interest in local government events.

There are a variety of groups that communicate with Alert Bay. Different types of messages may be intended for some or all of these groups. For the purposes of this report, the broadest group is customers, who receive goods or services from the Village, used here mainly in the context of customer service interactions with staff. Citizens and residents are customers when they interact with the Village about a specific service (Thomas, 2013, p. 786). This group can also include tourists, off-island contractors, off-island insurance customers, harbour users, and residents of nearby islands that have fewer local services. They form opinions about Alert Bay based on their customer service interactions, positive or negative, and expect good customer service.

Stakeholders are groups of people who communicate with the Village, including staff, Council, citizens, residents, neighbouring local governments and businesses. Organizational stakeholder refers to people affiliated with organizations who communicate with the Village, including neighbouring local governments, media and businesses. Infrequent or inadequate communicating with this group leads them to feel uninformed, or like they are a low priority for the Village. For example, businesses that do not understand their tax or utility bills may feel like they are in an adversarial relationship with the Village.

Staff and Council may be the stakeholders that are the most invested in the success of Alert Bay communications efforts. The Village of Alert Bay has eight full-time staff, four Councillors and a Mayor. Staff feel that they are doing their best to disseminate information to an disinterested public, while Council reports that they do not receive the public feedback given to the Village Office. Most staff and elected officials are Cormorant Island residents and customers of the Village in some way. Some are also Village contractors. It can be challenging for both these Village representatives and the public to balance the interests of these various roles.

Residents are Cormorant Island residents, including residents who do not live in the Village of Alert Bay. The Village has received complaints from non-Village Cormorant Island residents that they have not promoted public events outside of the Village. Sometimes, there is the perception that this is racially motivated. There are four governments in Cormorant Island’s small geographic area that govern what is essentially one community. This number of governments increases the number of websites, offices, and newsletters that residents get information from, making it difficult to stay up-to-date on each government’s events, programs and publications. The regional newspaper has little Cormorant Island coverage, and does not provide an adequate synthesis of island news and events.

The narrowest category of communications recipients is citizens, people who live in the Village of Alert Bay. Citizens elect the Mayor and Council, and expect to have some influence on municipal policy (Thomas, 2013, p. 786). After public engagement events, Alert Bay citizens have complained that they didn't hear about the event, and may take this as a sign that their opinion is not important. During events, such as weather alerts, ferry shut-downs, landslides or holiday service changes, citizens know that they can call the Village, but do not expect the Village to proactively provide information. Most Alert Bay citizens feel they don't have a good idea of what Council or the Village Office do in general, or what specific projects they are working on. Finally, there are negative feelings in the community about Public Works' perceived mistreatment of Public Works vehicles and equipment.

This project is designed to assist the client in resolving some of these problems by providing a list of communications options to consider implementing upon project completion.

## **1.2 Client**

The client for this project is the Corporation of the Village of Alert Bay, pop. 445 (Statistics Canada, 2013b). Alert Bay is located on Cormorant Island, accessible by six 40-minute ferry sailings a day from northern Vancouver Island. Like all BC municipal governments, Alert Bay operates under BC legislation, primarily the Community Charter, which outlines what it may do and must do, including communicating with its citizens under certain circumstances (see section 2.3.4). The Village has jurisdiction over a defined geographic area on Cormorant Island, and administers it with appointed staff and a Council that is locally elected every four years. It provides services to its citizens and customers, may enact bylaws and collect property tax.

Alert Bay works with the three other Cormorant Island local governments—'Namgis First Nation, Whe-la-la-u Area Council and Regional District of Mount Waddington (RDMW)—to provide services to island residents. The 'Namgis First Nation is home to the majority of Cormorant Islanders. Together with the Whe-la-la-u Area Council, which represents five First Nations groups and others of First Nations heritage, it occupies 2.48 square kilometres of Cormorant Island (Statistics Canada, 2013a). Ten homes are part of the RDMW, and Alert Bay occupies 1.73 square kilometres of the island, less than half of Cormorant Island's land area (Statistics Canada, 2013b).

The Village provides animal control, recycling, fire protection, and solid waste collection services to the whole island, and operates the only transfer station. The Village also operates the Small Craft Harbour and Visitor Centre, and is home to the only Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC) and Driver Licensing services on the island. Some responsibilities, such as emergency management, are shared. This service overlap means that many messages, such as those regarding taxes or elections, are only relevant to Alert Bay citizens, while others, such as recreation programming or recycling schedules, must reach all Cormorant Islanders.

Alert Bay has strong working relationship with its fellow Cormorant Island governments, exemplified by the Alert Bay Accord, created in 1999 and renewed in 2012. The Accord details joint goals and the spirit of partnership and cooperation that exists between the 'Namgis First Nation and the Village of Alert Bay (VOAB & NFN, 1999). The Village and Nation have regular meetings and communication between their

respective staffs and Councils to coordinate local events and shared services. Cormorant Island is served by four local governments, but in many ways it is one community, with one hospital, grocery store, gas station and fire department, and a shared island lifestyle.

### **1.3 Project Objectives and Research Questions**

This project assesses the current state of communications for the Village of Alert Bay by asking the primary research question:

How can the Village of Alert Bay improve its communications to best serve its citizens and stakeholders?

Secondary research questions examined were:

1. How should the Village of Alert Bay manage its limited communications capacity?
2. What are smart practices for municipal social media?

This project provides a current state analysis of Alert Bay's communications framework using findings from a Cormorant Island resident survey and stakeholder interviews, and recommends smart communications practices to better serve citizens and customers. Smart practice solutions for the issues identified in the research are derived from three sources: academic and grey literature, publicly available BC municipal communications documents, and interviews with other BC municipalities.

This report contains the following deliverables:

- Municipal communications literature review
- Cross-jurisdictional scan of BC communications documents, policies and practices
- Survey analysis and thematic interview analysis
- Current state analysis of Alert Bay communications framework
- Communications principles, goals and means of reaching them
- An evaluation plan for strategy implementation
- Public engagement guidelines

The intention of the report is that the Village of Alert Bay staff will use the results to create a new communications infrastructure, to improve the use of current communication resources, and to communicate more consistently with all stakeholders than in the past. Based on the findings, staff need to have routine and reliable methods of communication and know which methods to use in various situations. Moreover, the public needs to know where they can go to find out the information they need. Formal communications strategy and policies are intended to improve overall consistency of processes and policies, with the intention of maintaining communications consistency as staff changes. Finally, the process of creating a communications strategy is an opportunity for stakeholders to reflect on how Village communications are working for them.

### **1.4 Organization of Report**

This report has ten sections, followed by references and supporting appendices. The next section reviews the academic and public administration literature about communications. Section three describes the methodology and methods used to collect data for this project. Section four reviews the publicly available communications documents from other BC municipalities. Sections five to seven describe the findings, grouped by the purpose of the data. Section five describes municipal communications best practices, summarizing the literature review and cross-jurisdictional scan, and describing the findings of interviews with other BC municipalities. Section six and seven inform the current state analysis with findings from stakeholder interviews and a Cormorant Island resident survey, respectively. Section eight is the current state analysis of Alert Bay's communications, and discussion of how best practices can be used to manage Alert Bay's communications challenges. The penultimate section offers some options for consideration, including suggested communications principles, priorities and goals. The conclusion is a summary of the report, reflecting on what is unique to Alert Bay and what can be useful to other small municipalities.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Overview**

This section of the report explores the academic and public administration literature available on municipal communications. Policies and practices found in other municipalities' communications documents are in section four, the cross-jurisdictional scan.

Local government communications strategies increasingly focus on public engagement as citizens call for transparency and opportunities to be involved in decision-making (AGBC, 2008, p. 1; Graham & Philipps, 1998b, p. 2). The academic and public administration literature contributes evidence on how to overcome barriers in civic communications and reveals best practices for effective engagement. Unfortunately, there is little literature that addresses challenges specific to communication in small municipalities.

Based on the Village of Alert Bay's needs, this literature review concentrates on three areas: best practices for internal and external communications, public engagement, and addressing challenges to effective communication.

### **2.2 Internal Communication**

The goal of internal communication is to have the right information flowing at the right time between staff and Council. The point of contact between staff and Council is the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), who is usually the supervisor of all municipal employees, and is the only person who regularly reports directly to Council. Information from staff goes through the CAO to Council, and from Council through the CAO to staff. A robust information flow in both directions ensures that neither staff nor Council feels isolated or "out of the loop". Council needs information to facilitate decision-making, and staff needs information to best be able to follow policy and handle issues.

In addition to internally generated information, information from the public is often conveyed via front-line municipal staff. Depending on the size of the municipality, the availability and public profile of Councillors, and the issue at hand, the public may choose to contact the Village Office or their elected officials. Because most incoming information is directed to the municipal office, there should be routine communications methods in place to inform Council about issues that arise, without communicating the minutiae of daily operations or management.

Municipal elections take place every four years, which often means a change in elected officials. Although this change may disrupt routines, it is a built-in opportunity to re-evaluate processes, including internal and external communications practices.

### **2.3 External Communication**

#### **2.3.1 Communication Roles**

Council, staff and citizens all have a role in civic communications. Communication must be a two-way street, with Council and staff producing outgoing messages, and citizens or stakeholders providing

feedback (Walker, 1997, p. 11). Municipalities do not know how well they are serving their citizens unless they receive feedback from them (De Jager, 2014).

Outgoing communication is a responsibility of all staff and Council (Walker, 1997, p. x). However, elected officials should be the municipal spokespeople (Dienerova, 2006, p. 73). Staff support Council by providing technical expertise as necessary (Chadwick, 2012b, p. 32-33), and by handling routine daily communicating (Cuff, 2014, p. 32). Staff should support Council's public speaking role, but should generally not be those in the media spotlight.

Staff and Council represent the municipality, and must be aware that their comments will be taken as the view of the municipality. If a staff member disagrees with a Council decision, it is inappropriate for them to air their views publicly (Chadwick, 2012b, p. 34). Council members should also publicly support Council decisions. They may disclose that they argued against a course of action, but after a decision has been made, continued dissent can erode public trust and impede future decision-making.

There are multiple channels of communication flowing from a municipal government. Each department may be responsible for its own communications, the communications department may produce all messages, or the communications department may review all messages. In smaller municipalities, there may be one person who directs or reviews all messages. Types of communication campaigns also vary, from liaising with the media about a specific topic, to public education, to public consultations (Walker, 1997, p. 97).

The person with the most expertise in crafting communications should create and target messages. When content relates to technical details, the subject expert must also be involved to check that the final product is accurate. The more important the message, the more proofreaders and experts should review it (Chadwick, 2012b, p. 34).

### ***2.3.2 Intentional and Unintentional Messages***

Communications include not only messages carefully crafted for the public, but also the organization's public image and reputation, which may be communicated by demeanour of staff, appearance of public areas, condition of equipment—anything that represents the organization (Walker, 1997, p. x-xi, 6, 9, 10). It is the municipal representatives that the public sees regularly who have opportunities to make a positive or negative impression (Weeden, 2015, p. 10). Negative public image and reputation may be easily formed and very difficult to change (AGBC, 2008, p. 1). One of the best ways to improve or maintain public image is to encourage a "customer service" approach to all municipal business (Dienerova, 2006, p. 78). Pleasant customer service experiences that minimize bureaucratic processes make it more likely for Council plans and policies to succeed (Hume, 2015, p. 23).

Intended communications can also have unintended effects. Overly optimistic claims and half-hearted public engagement are more likely to damage a municipality's reputation and relationship with citizens than improve it (Walker, 1997, p. 9; City of Victoria, 2010, p. 2; AGBC, 2008, p. 1). It is crucial to be realistic when communicating with stakeholders (AGBC, 2008, p. 1). Citizens may be temporarily

pleased to hear ambitious announcements, but will view future announcements cynically if promises are not realized.

### **2.3.3 Communication Style**

Communicating can be viewed as a purely functional task, or can be used as a tool to enhance municipalities' credibility and public image (Walker, 1997, p.2). Whether a municipality prioritizes communications can depend on budget and capacity. However, a municipality will have to communicate some information at some point, and it is in all stakeholders' best interests to do it in an efficient and appealing manner.

Basic communications style guidelines should be applied consistently so that information is easy to digest, easy to produce, and conveys desirable characteristics about a municipal government (Chadwick, 2012b, p. 36):

- External and internal messages should be as simple and informative as possible, without jargon and unnecessary words (Walker, 1997, p. 8).
- Visual aids such as photographs, infographics and bullet points can be used to simplify or illustrate the message.
- An informal, conversational tone can help to build a rapport with citizens (Chadwick, 2012a, p. 76).
- Visually, it is best for the communication style to be consistent with other municipal publications (Dienerova, 2006, p. 77). This could include consistency with communications templates, or just the use of the same fonts, colours and graphics.

The above guidelines can apply to more than just single messages such as media releases or advertising. For example, there are thousands of active municipal bylaws that are difficult for even municipal employees to decipher. If they were written in clearer, jargon-free language, it would be easier for citizens to comply with regulations. It would also contribute to a positive, bureaucracy-free public image (Jersak, 2015, p. 26).

The above guidelines are general, and may depend on the type of message. Jargon-free, understandable language is always advisable, but it may be appropriate to use more formal language for more formal messages. For example, an informal tone would likely not be received well in messages about property taxes, or in the advertising that is legally required by the Province of British Columbia.

### **2.3.4 Communications and Local Government Legislation**

The British Columbia government delegates power to BC municipal governments through provincial legislation. The Community Charter, Local Government Act and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPPA) are the primary legislation affecting local government communications responsibilities. This legislation requires local governments to communicate certain information to the public in certain ways, e.g. advertising requirements for Council meetings, tax sales or municipal elections.

The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) has overall responsibility for complying with legislative requirements, but it is often the corporate officer who is most familiar with the legislation and who performs these communications tasks. Failure to comply with legislation can result in municipal processes and Council decisions being overturned, costing the municipality time and often money, and damaging its reputation.

Generally, messages about meetings, tax sales and elections only need to be managed by the municipality's officer responsible for them, but everyone working for a municipality must have some knowledge of FOIPPA. FOIPPA states that all public records must be available to the public, unless they will be published or released within 60 days, relate to abortion services, or unless releasing them would be harmful to:

- Law enforcement
- Intergovernmental relations or negotiations
- The financial or economic interests of a public body
- The conservation of heritage sites
- Individual or public safety
- Business interests of a third party
- Personal privacy (*FOIPPA*, 1996, s. 12-22).

FOIPPA also limits what personal information a public body can collect, how it can be collected, and what personal information it can release. For example, a municipality cannot require the public to sign in at a Council meeting, nor publish the names of those members of the public present at a meeting. They cannot freely give out information that was collected for one purpose if it is requested for another. (*FOIPPA*, 1996, s.32).

The person responsible for FOIPPA in a municipality should review its collection of personal information annually and every time processes and policies change, to ensure that it is in compliance with the legislation. That person should also be sure that the employees who collect or divulge information—likely most of them—know the guidelines and review them regularly. It can be challenging in small municipalities to convince employees and members of the public that certain information cannot be given out, but it is easier for staff to enforce the rules when they feel confident they know and understand them.

Municipalities have one person or department which is responsible for responding to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. In small municipalities, it is usually the corporate officer. A municipality can make it easier to comply with freedom of information (FOI) requests by ensuring that personal and work emails are not mixed in the same account, and that all emails sent via municipal email accounts are professional. Although there may only be one person who must be very familiar with the details of the legislation in order to process FOI requests, all municipal employees need to be aware of their responsibility to keep records.

The complex practice of municipal records management depends on varied legislation requiring different types of records to be kept for different periods of time. As with FOI requests, there is one

person or municipal department that should be very familiar with records management, but municipal employees also have guidelines to follow for all communications they handle. Emails should be backed up regularly and not deleted without direction from the office's records management professional, and paper correspondence should be retained.

## **2.4 Public Engagement**

### **2.4.1 Why Engage the Public?**

Public engagement can be defined as, "proactive efforts to involve people in deliberating public issues and in helping to solve public problems (Barnes & Mann, 2011, 58)," a definition that encompasses everything from public education to volunteering. Effective public engagement informs officials and staff and builds a sense of community while giving citizens and other stakeholders the opportunity to learn about municipal governance and contribute to decisions.

Many public officials believe that giving citizens more decision-making power is risky and may lead to ill-considered decisions (AGBC, 2008, p. 17). However, government decisions are better received when stakeholders feel that their views have been taken into account (AGBC, 2008, p. 5), which often means that stakeholder-informed decisions are longer-lasting (AGBC, 2008, p. 6, 11; IAPPC, 2015, para. 5). This is why the public is often engaged on controversial decisions, such as the 2011 BC Harmonized Service Tax referendum. Even engagement with a low level of public involvement can be a step toward transparent governance (AGBC, 2008, p. 20). Meaningful public engagement is a key step in demonstrating trustworthiness and building trusting relationships with citizens.

Municipalities are required by law to conduct certain public engagement, such as public consultation and a public hearing during the development of an Official Community Plan (see section 2.3.4 for more about communications and BC legislation). Failure to comply with legislation could cause bylaws, including Official Community Plans, to be overturned. This would affect any decisions that had been made based on the overturned legislation, and cost a municipality a great deal of time, if not money. Each public engagement needs to be designed for the situation. Public engagement for an Official Community Plan should not be the same as engagement to choose library hours; each engagement would likely have more than one approach to target different groups of residents (Froman, 2015, p. 11; Dane, 2015, p. 13).

### **2.4.2 Levels of Participation**

Engagement is not one-size-fits-all. Each individual issue may require a different type of engagement or public approach (AGBC, 2008, p. 15). Participation can be thought of on a continuum of involvement (see Appendix A). For example, the public is not very involved when a government is engaging them to inform or gather information, but would be extremely involved in partnership, when the government has engaged the public to be instrumental in decision-making, implementation, or both (AGBC, 2008, p. 6). In general, Canadian municipal public engagement is moving away from one-time, one-way communication methods toward more comprehensive engagement strategies that can allow two-way communication and participation that continues throughout a project or process (Froman, 2015, p. 11).

Because public participation may happen in a variety of ways, part of the process includes informing citizens what information is needed, and how it will be used (AGBC, 2008, p. 5). Otherwise, citizens who think they are helping to design a building will be irritated to see their input used only to choose paint colours. In general, the sooner citizens are engaged, the better. Communications strategies should be built into complex projects—planning, infrastructure, bylaw changes—from the beginning (Dane, 2015, p. 13). This way, potential communications problems can be planned for, input can be more easily incorporated, and citizens are more likely to feel satisfied (Limani, 2015, p. 31).

### **2.4.3 Best Practices for Public Engagement**

“The optimal result is that both government and citizens have confidence that the recommended direction is sound and best represents the public interest (AGBC, 2008, p. 1).”

Public engagement is usually intended to build a sense of community, improve public image and the relationship between government and citizens, and to better solve municipal problems (Barnes & Mann, 2011, p. 59-60). Some processes intended to engage citizens are ongoing, such as regular social media activity, or communicating with a group of people willing to regularly give feedback, such as the City of Vancouver’s “Talk Vancouver” program. Others might be used mainly to engage people on a specific topic, like a referendum or poll. Many types of communication could be used for either, including town halls and surveys.

Effective public engagement can be difficult to define. Municipal officials may feel that it is most important to get the right information to citizens, or get a certain result on a referendum, while citizens want to feel that their views are heard. Municipalities can maximize their impact if they know what their goals are when they try to engage their citizens (Barnes & Mann, 2011, p. 61). Engagement will not succeed if there is not enough time, if a decision cannot be changed, or if there are not enough resources (Graham & Philipps, 1998b, p. 7-8).

It is relatively easy to produce outgoing public engagement messages, but it is more difficult to ensure that the quality of feedback is consistently high and useful to the municipality (Barnes & Mann, 2011, p. 59) and that the public is satisfied with their involvement. In BC, the public is often satisfied with the process, but not the follow-up (AGBC, 2008, p. 11). If the public is unaware of the result of consultation, or if there is not clear evidence connecting public input and results, they are likely to feel that they were used to legitimize a decision (AGBC, 2008, p. 17).

The AGBC recommends seven steps for designing a successful public participation (2008, p. 22). An adapted version of these guidelines are included in Appendix A.

## **2.5 Challenges and Barriers**

Alert Bay has several challenges to communication and engagement, including reaching certain demographics, lack of resources, managing social media and public disinterest. These topics are common to most municipalities, but differ in scale of the problem and the possible solutions. In the literature, many of these topics, such as seniors outreach, are dealt with individually or in different

contexts, such as outreach for businesses, or hospital-patient communications, rather than in the context of municipalities.

### **2.5.1 Public Disinterest**

In a survey of American municipal officials, 70% agreed that citizens care about helping to solve local problems. However, 70% also thought that “public apathy and ambivalence,” was the greatest barrier to public engagement, with 75% of officials believing that citizens only engage in emergencies or if issues are personal to them (Barnes & Mann, 2011, p. 60). Many citizens will not engage unless there is a problem (Walker, 1997, p. 13). The public is most interested in giving input when a decision will affect them personally in a negative way (AGBC, 2008, p. 16). However, governments should review their public participation recruitment techniques before they assume that low participation is due to lack of interest (Graham & Philipps, 1998b, p. 9, 13).

Factors that influence the public to participate are:

- The opportunity for face-to-face discussion with decision-makers or experts
- Getting relevant information ahead of time
- Receiving a summary of public input after consultation
- Being informed how their input was used after consultation (AGBC, 2015, p. 16)
- Showing residents how changes will impact them
- Offering both quick and in-depth options for giving feedback
- Offering a balanced view of the options, with pros and cons (Biggs, 2014, p. 27)

Most residents are not interested in contributing to routine municipal operations. Elections at all levels of Canadian government show that there are many people who do not even vote, mainly because of lack of political knowledge (Limani, 2015, p. 32). However, it may be easier to involve a greater number of people and get valuable input if engagement can be made accessible, fast and fun. For example, most people are far more willing to spend five minutes online giving their opinion than physically going to an event for several hours (Biggs, 2014, p. 26). They are more likely to want to re-engage in future if they feel that their input has been meaningful (Biggs, 2014, p. 27-8). People who are engaged with their local governments between elections are also more likely to vote (Limani, 2015, p. 32).

### **2.5.2 Demographics**

There is literature available on engaging people who are poor, single parents, immigrants, and other harder-to-reach groups, but for Alert Bay, many of these groups do not exist in large numbers, or do not have the same barriers preventing effective communication. Organizations in Alert Bay struggle to reach youth, those without computers, those who do not leave the home, and non-citizen residents. The resident survey showed that communicating with seniors is not currently a problem, but they are a large and growing section of the population, and this plan may be reviewed in coming years to ensure that the lines of communication remain open.

Youth are the age group most likely to be uninvolved with their municipality or feel indifferent to local politics and public administration (Walker, 1997, p. 133). Municipal youth voter turnout has decreased (Sokolowski, 2014, p. 15). They tend to become more interested in local government as they age and consume more municipal services (Walker, 1997, p. 138). It is still important to reach them; even youth too young to vote in civic elections may be the target audience for recreation or other municipal messages, and engaging people at a young age may ultimately increase voter turnout and overall citizen participation (Vrbanovic, 2015, p. 20). Getting youth interested in their municipal government is also a good way to encourage them to study public administration and return to their home towns (Graves, 2015, p. 21).

In addition to the challenge of disinterest, youth also have different habits of gathering information than older citizens. Municipalities pay to advertise in newspapers in order to comply with legislation, but many people under 30 do not read papers (Walker, 1997, p. 134-35; Hume, 2011, p. 70). A comprehensive, functional and attractive website is necessary to communicate with young people (Walker, 1997, p. 91; Hume, 2011, p. 70), who are much more likely to get information about their municipal government online or not at all.

Best practices for reaching youth include:

- Events or programs specifically designed to introduce youth to public administration, such as youth councils, civics/social studies projects, job shadowing, or youth memberships in civic organizations
- Educational opportunities that provide hands-on learning
- Effectively using technology that youth are more likely to participate in or consume, such as social media and the internet
- Taking care to tailor communications material to young audiences by using younger staff or Council to deliver the message
- Keeping the message short
- Keeping in contact with schools or teachers who may request information or material for students (Walker, 1997, p. 134-135)
- Ensuring that young municipal staff members are supported and encouraged, with mentoring programs, recognition, and professional development (Vrbanovic, 2015, p. 19)
- Participating in youth-oriented community events (Solokowski, 2014, p. 16).

Social media is increasingly a part of everyone's lives, but there are still many municipalities which do not use it to its full potential or at all. Reasons may be lack of resources, and questions of security and usability (Fruechting, 2015, p. 21). Although the benefits are many—faster contact with citizens, contact with more citizens, free communications tools and enhanced customer service—managing social media also takes a great deal of staff time (Weeks, 2015, p. 14). Small municipalities may not have adequate capacity.

### **2.5.3 Capacity**

Municipal communication practices vary according to capacity, which is closely related to size. It is also related to necessity: municipalities who have to communicate with their residents about something regularly are more likely to have a system or policy in place. Larger municipalities have a greater capacity to hire communications officers or to have communications departments. For some medium-sized municipalities, funding for communications may depend on political will. Generally, smaller municipalities also have fewer people to communicate to, and may more easily rely on unofficial communication such as word-of-mouth. When budgets are limited, communications tend to be a low priority for local governments (Hofmann et al., 2013, p. 388).

There are some communications activities that may not be within reasonable staff or financial capacity—such as telephoning a list of people when there is a job opportunity, or doing a mass mail out of the job posting. However, some tasks which seem cumbersome can be made simpler using technology. For example, it is possible to connect a sign-up list on the website to a management tool such as MailChimp. When someone signs up for a certain list, such as “Newsletter” or “Job opportunities,” the office staff can use MailChimp to send an email to that list.

Staff ability can be a limiting factor, especially in a small municipality with a limited hiring pool. However, it may be possible to contract to a specialist either for training or regular work. It is possible to stretch capacity by using technology, but prioritization is also key. Messages, communications mediums, or funding for a specific purpose may be prioritized. It is more important to update the municipal website regularly than to update the website and three social media accounts sporadically (Dienerova, 2006, p. 77).

There is also limited capacity for audience attention. The public will become fatigued if they are regularly recruited for public consultation, especially if the results are disappointing or not well-publicized. In order to maintain public confidence, it is best to only engage the public when an issue is likely to interest them, when public opinion will have the most impact, and when the consultation can be carefully planned.

### **2.6 Summary**

Alert Bay can learn from the policies of larger municipalities and adapt academic findings to develop its own communication goals. It is not necessary to have communications policies for every eventuality, but a strategy outlining municipal communication goals, and practices intended to reach those goals, can lead to better consistency and coordination. These policies can also help staff and Council be aware of the practical actions associated with their communications roles and responsibilities. While there is technology available that can stretch capacity, it is better to grow communications activities slowly and remain consistent than overreach the Village’s capacity. Finally, public consultation should be conducted with care and honesty, and should always include some kind of follow-up to inform participants how their input was used.

## **3.0 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

### **3.1 Overview**

This research project uses mixed methods methodology, with qualitative and quantitative methods used to gather data (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003, p. 165). Methods include a literature review, a cross-jurisdictional scan of communications documents produced by other BC municipalities, a Cormorant Island resident survey, interviews with staff and Council, and interviews with six key informants in other similarly small and remote BC municipalities. Primary data was gathered to assess the current state of communications in the Village of Alert Bay, and secondary data was reviewed for best municipal communications practices. The focus of this project is to evaluate the efficacy of the Village's communications and suggest evidence-supported improvements.

### **3.2 Methodology/Research Design**

The methodology used for this project's research is a program evaluation methodology that questions whether communications activities for the Village of Alert Bay are efficient, adequate and effective (McDavid, Huse & Hawthorn, 2013, p. 18). "Village of Alert Bay communications" is essentially an informal program, and can be assessed by how well it is working for residents, staff and Council. Since communications is an ongoing process, this is a formative evaluation that seeks to provide evidence for how the Village should communicate in the future (Patton, 2002, p. 218).

Both qualitative and quantitative data was gathered, in a mixed-methods research design, but the data is mainly qualitative. Both quantitative and qualitative data are equally important to the current state analysis of Village of Alert Bay communications, but it is mainly the qualitative data that provides evidence on how to improve communications practices. Data was collected concurrently, and mixing occurred during data collection, analysis and interpretation (Creswell et al. 2003, p. 165). Methods were mixed not only overall, but also within the same instrument, a resident survey.

The survey of Cormorant Islanders' communications preferences and experiences shows quantitative evidence for communications preferences, but also provided an opportunity for qualitative responses in open-ended questions. Three sets of interviews provide further qualitative data, including interviews with local key informants.

### **3.3 Methods**

#### ***3.3.1 Secondary Data: Literature Review***

Academic and public administration communications literature was reviewed, with a focus on the three areas most relevant to Alert Bay: best practices for internal and external communications, public engagement, and strategies to face communications challenges. Sources included books, scholarly journal articles, Municipal World magazine articles, and government publications. These were found both using Google, Google Scholar and UVic Summon. When available, documents about civic communications were prioritized, but more general literature about communications was also used.

This review provided some insight into the topic of municipal communications as a base for primary data collection, although much of the literature on the subject is either very broad or is on topics most relevant to large municipalities. There is little specifically written about communications in small municipalities. In areas where the primary data collection showed there was room for improvement, the literature review revealed best communications practices that could be implemented in Alert Bay.

Search terms included the following, and variations thereof: civic engagement, municipal communications, limited capacity communications, internal communications, stakeholder communications, municipal communications challenges, municipal social media, public disinterest, public participation, communications style, municipal Council communications, and civic communications roles.

### ***3.3.2 Secondary Data: Cross-jurisdictional Scan***

The cross-jurisdictional scan is a scan of publicly available communications documents from other BC municipalities. Many of the communications documents online are from municipalities that are much larger than the Village of Alert Bay. They offered a useful overview of the types and formats of municipal communications documents, and in some cases, policies were equally applicable to small and large municipalities, such as social media style guidelines.

The smallest municipality with communications documents readily available online was the District of Barriere, pop. 1773 (Statistics Canada, 2012). Most of the largest municipalities in BC had one or more communication policy documents online, either on their website or linked to the Civic Info BC website. The most useful resource was the document resource search available on Civic Info BC because rather than searching the internet, it only searches civic documents uploaded to Civic Info BC. In a Civic Info search using the keyword “communications,” all results were pertinent. Google was also used to find documents that were online but not on Civic Info.

### ***3.3.3 Primary Data: Survey***

Primary data was collected to provide a current state analysis of Village communications practices. Stakeholders included staff, Council, Village citizens, Cormorant Island residents, and other organizations communicating with the Village, such as other governments, media, and island businesses. Data from Cormorant Island and Village citizens was gathered through a survey on individual communications experiences and preferences (see Appendix B). Although there are only around 445 Village citizens, approximately 1000 people were potential survey candidates as Cormorant Island residents. The survey allowed for efficient quantitative and qualitative data collection from the Village’s primary communications audience.

The goal survey response was a minimum of 50 survey responses, with a minimum of 10 responses in each of the following overlapping groups: age 18-35, age 36-59, age 60+, Village citizen, and Cormorant Island (non-Village) resident. Age groups were important for data collection, since different ages tend to prefer different communications methods. It was also important that not only Village citizens were

recruited, to gain the perspective of non-Village residents who are also consumers of Village communications. The minimum response numbers were achieved in all categories.

The communications survey was available to all Cormorant Islanders online on Fluid Surveys, an online survey business with data storage in Canada, and on paper in the Village Office. A link to the online version was distributed with the electronic version of the Village newsletter, *The Echo*, and it was posted on the front page of the website. Posters posted on public bulletin boards and offices island-wide advertised the location and availability of the paper and online survey. Participants were also recruited in person at the Village Office. Of 126 paper surveys distributed, 50 were returned within the data collection period of 45 days. Six surveys were returned online within the data collection period, for a total of 56 completed surveys.

Surveys were returned to the Village Office. This building is a central meeting place that many people visit daily when they pick up their mail at the adjoining post office. It is the location of the only ICBC and driver licensing office on Cormorant Island. Surveys were returned to a drop box located in the Village Office entryway, and a private location was provided at the Village Office for participants wishing to complete the survey on site. The survey was anonymous, so it is possible that surveys were completed by people who were also interviewed later.

### **3.3.4 Primary Data: Interviews**

#### *3.3.4.1 Group 1: Staff and Council Interviews*

Staff and Council are stakeholders who are not only consumers of Village communications, but also producers. They participated in one group of interviews as key informants. Key informants often understand the research and can act in a role similar to the colleague of the researcher (Dexter, 2012, p. 7), and these key informants were particularly suited for that task. Staff and Council are the most familiar with how communication currently works, and are those who will be implementing and using the new strategy. Interviews with them provided data on how communications currently work and whether they find it efficient, adequate and effective.

All Village of Alert Bay staff members and Council were emailed about the project and asked if they were interested in giving their input on current communications practices and needs. Those who wished to participate were scheduled for interviews during work hours, when convenient for them and their departments. Those who did not respond were asked in person if they wished to participate. There were seven potential staff candidates and five Council candidates. All but one participated. Interviews took place in person in the Village Office and were recorded by iPhone recording app AudioMemos.

The interviews were semi-structured so that answers could be easily compared to each other, but to allow for unanticipated topics or perspectives (Patton, 2002, p. 347; Barriball & While, 1994, p. 330). Each participant was asked the same seven questions (Appendix C), with follow-up questions as needed to clarify answers or pursue further insight. The questions discussed were about usual communications topics, mediums, communications issues and ideas for improvement.

#### *3.3.4.2 Group 2: Organizational Stakeholder Interviews*

Eight key informants were contacted for the opportunity to give their input on how they would like to communicate with the Village of Alert Bay. These individuals were chosen as representatives of Cormorant Island businesses, non-profit societies, First Nations governments, local communications specialists, other island governments and North Island media in frequent contact with the Village of Alert Bay. They were the people most likely to be aware of Village communications from a non-Village organizational perspective, and therefore well-informed, well-connected, and with the knowledge about organizational patterns and behaviour that is desired in key informants (Patton, 2002, p. 321; Kumar, Stern & Anderson, 1993, p. 1634). Those chosen did not have any kind of special relationship with the Village Office, or its staff and Council.

Potential interviewees were contacted using either email or telephone—whichever was publicly available. Six interviewees were attained with further follow-up. The interviews took place mainly in person at the Village Office, but also by telephone, according to the interviewee's preference. Interviews were recorded by iPhone recording app AudioMemos, for in-person interviews, or TapeACall, for phone interviews.

The interviews included questions about communications experiences and preferences from an organizational point of view, and explored opportunities for communications collaboration (see Appendix C). Each interviewee was asked the same eleven questions in a semi-structured interview, with follow-up questions as needed to clarify answers or pursue further insight.

#### *3.3.4.3 Group 3: Municipality Interviews*

There were not many communications documents available from municipalities close to the size of Alert Bay (pop. 445). To supplement the publicly available municipal communications documents, interviews were conducted with representatives of similarly small and remote municipalities.

The target number of small municipality interviews was six to eight. The 2014 Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) Network book lists municipality size and contact information for all BC municipalities. Municipalities were chosen as potential interview candidates based on population and distance from a city. Eight municipalities with between 345 and 545 citizens were emailed, asking for an interview with the person most familiar with communications practices. All were at least two hours away from any town with a population of 15 000 or more, and therefore similarly remote. Median ages were also similar to Alert Bay's 50 years (Statistics Canada, 2013a), ranging from 42 to 63 in the 2011 Canadian Census. Unfortunately, Census information on percentage of First Nations population was not available for most of these municipalities. Recruitment continued by telephone until the minimum number of interviewees were found. The people interviewed were key informants, the staff members most familiar with communications practices in their municipality. Interviews were conducted by telephone and were recorded by iPhone app TapeACall.

All six interviewees were asked the same 14 questions, depending on their available time (Appendix C). Some interviews were condensed and questions skipped as necessary. Interviews were semi-structured,

with follow-up questions as needed to clarify answers or pursue further insight. Questions explored the topics of: services provided, special demographic concerns, communications satisfaction, communications contractors, Council communications, and medium of communication.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

The surveys contained mainly quantitative data, and were analyzed by entering the responses into Microsoft Excel. The purpose of the quantitative data was to answer questions about the communications preferences of five different groups, and of the Cormorant Island population as a whole. Basic Excel analysis provided the percentages of people responding to questions in various ways. Few survey respondents answered the open-ended survey questions, which were mainly opportunities to elaborate on the quantitative questions.

The interviews, which comprised the majority of qualitative data, were analyzed using a thematic content analysis to find patterns and themes within sets of interviews (Patton, 2002, p. 453). The three sets of interviews were transcribed, and each group of interviews was analyzed for common categories, then identifying themes (Green et al., 2007, p. 548-9). Analysis was inductive, using the interview content to find themes rather than applying predetermined themes (Patton, 2002, p. 452). Although there are similarities between thematic indices due to the common subject matter (see Appendix C for interview questions), each interview group had its own thematic index. The thematic indices were refined by re-reading the transcriptions and applying the coding. The interviews were coded a final time with the last versions of the indices. Both transcriptions and coding were done without specialized software.

### **3.5 Project Limitations and Delimitations**

#### ***3.5.1 Project Limitations***

The information gathered for this project was limited by what data was available. In the cross-jurisdictional scan, as expected, it was impossible to find small communities dealing with exactly the same set of communications challenges as Alert Bay. Alert Bay is more than two hours away from the closest city, is small (pop. 445 [Statistics Canada, 2013b]), is isolated by water, and shares 4.5 square kilometres with three other governments, two of which are First Nations. There is also little information on strategies to target various sections of the population for some, but not all messages.

The information was also likely affected by participants' familiarity with the researcher and the researcher's familiarity with the community and Village as a Village staff member. Participants were all informed that they were not required to participate, could withdraw their consent at any time, and that their data would remain confidential. However, an outsider may have been able to collect more neutral information and produce a more neutral analysis.

#### ***3.5.2 Project Delimitations***

This project addresses general communications practices for the Village of Alert Bay, but not those that are not the Village's responsibility or those that are unnecessary for a small municipality. Emergency management communication will not be discussed since a collaborative system is already in place. It also does not discuss marketing or advertising with external parties about tourism or economic development. The Village of Alert Bay operates the Alert Bay Visitor Info Centre in the absence of a Chamber of Commerce, but the goal of representing Alert Bay's interests with other entities on the North Island relates only to advertising Village events and initiatives and best serving Alert Bay's citizens and stakeholders.

This strategy does not include separate policies or guidelines for the creation of corporate, electronic, or social media communication policies.

## **4.0 CROSS-JURISDICTIONAL SCAN**

### **4.1 Overview**

The jurisdictional scan supplements the literature review with evidence from BC local government communications policies. Even more than the academic and public administration literature, these policies show what the current municipal communications issues are and how—or whether—municipalities are addressing them. The cross-jurisdictional scan is intended to fill in the gaps of the literature review, with a focus on how BC municipalities manage communications, and how they are approaching the challenge of social media.

### **4.2 Municipal Communications Management in BC**

BC municipalities have a wide range of sizes and resources, and address communications in a number of ways:

- Council communications policy
- Volunteer communications liaison
- Communications officer
- Communications department
- Regional communications officer (shared among multiple local governments)
- Standing communications committee
- Project-specific communications strategy
- A comprehensive communications strategy
- A combination of the above
- No formal communications policies, departments, committees, or positions

When there is staff or Council time dedicated to communications, it is more likely that a municipality has adopted a comprehensive approach. Conversely, one-off policies are often in response to a perceived problem, and have a variety of goals. Some policies are specific to one area of communications, such as the District of Barriere’s Council Policy on Electronic Communications (2012). Communications strategies tend to be broader and usually cover a variety of topics. They may be either general guidelines, or range from the general to the specific, such as the City of Victoria’s Civic Engagement Strategy (2010).

The most practical communications strategies reviewed for this project identified the current state of a local government’s communications practices, and their communications priorities. They then listed practical actions required per priority. These strategies differentiated between external and internal communications: whether messages are intended to inform staff and Council, or to inform the public.

### **4.3 Internal Communication**

Internal communications is a topic of several BC municipal communications documents, with the goal of having a well-informed staff and Council (District of Maple Ridge, 1998). Internal communications is not only essential to smooth daily operations by facilitating customer service and eliminating duplication of

effort, but can also improve workplace culture. Organizations that plan for strong internal communications are more likely to have employees motivated to achieve organizational goals (District of North Vancouver, 2003, p. 5-6). There should be one or more systems in place to share information—regular staff meetings, an intranet, weekly email updates (District of North Vancouver, 2003, p. 6). Staff should first hear about municipal news internally, but also have a responsibility to keep themselves informed (District of Maple Ridge, 1998, p. 3, 7).

Some municipalities have detailed internal policies describing how corporate, electronic, media correspondence, etc. should be handled (District of Peachland, 2012; Sunshine Coast Regional District, 2010; District of Barriere, 2012). Small municipalities such as Alert Bay have a limited number of staff handling correspondence, and specific correspondence policies are not usually necessary. However, correspondence guidelines can help ensure consistent practices through organizational changes.

#### **4.4 External Communication**

##### ***4.4.1 Intentional Communications***

No matter the size of the municipality, municipalities have the same goals for their messages, of consistently and efficiently reaching the correct audience and having an intended effect (e.g. making residents more informed about emergency preparation). Municipalities are more likely to be successful with these goals if there is a communications policy in place detailing who communicates, with whom, on what topics, what medium of communications is used, the style of communication, and when the communication happens (District of North Vancouver, 2003, p. 1). As much as possible, communication should be intentional. The more thoroughly it is planned, the more intentional it can be.

Intentional communications can be achieved by communicating proactively and integrating communication. Integrated communications refer back to themselves rather than to outside sources, for better control of the message and for ease of use (City of Parksville, 2011, p. 2). Resources should be found in one place, such as on one external website (District of North Vancouver, 2003, p. 1-2). The more information the public has or can easily find about a local government, the more likely they are to have a positive view of them. As social media has become more popular, many local governments have embraced it as a way to provide the public information quickly and inexpensively.

##### ***4.4.2 Communications Challenges: Social Media***

There are a multitude of recent local government social media policies, which illustrates the fact that social media is a new challenge for municipalities (City of Chilliwack, 2014; City of Nanaimo, 2011; City of Parksville, 2012; District of Lake Country, 2011). Citizens and communications experts are telling municipalities that they should have a comprehensive, easy-to-use website and a social media presence, but the necessary expertise and the potential pitfalls can be dismaying.

Social media, including internet platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and Youtube, has become an integral part of communicating personally and professionally (City of Nanaimo, 2013, p. 5). Local governments must recognize that social media is a unique communications medium that is not

suited to all messages. It is excellent for emergency communications, event information, and recreation, but usually inappropriate for controversial topics or those requiring a lengthy message. Although social media has disadvantages, it can reach a wide variety of stakeholders quickly and at very little cost, other than staff training (City of Parksville, 2011, p. 1).

Social media policies usually outline how a municipality should conduct its own social media relations, but also may suggest guidelines for staff and Council on their own social media pages (City of Nanaimo, 2011, p. 3). There can be a thin line between personal and professional use of social media, which can cause privacy and confidentiality issues. Staff or Council may have personal social media accounts that become associated with their professional lives, or they may have accounts that are variously used for personal or professional purposes. Some material that is appropriate for a personal social media account may not be appropriate for public consumption, and inappropriate material can damage organizational credibility. It can be difficult to regulate social media and to apply the same care to those messages when much of their appeal is the ability to respond quickly.

There are advantages to embracing social media, such as better contact with youth, a more approachable public image, and being able to receive and answer questions quickly. However, disadvantages can also be numerous, including the difficulty of ensuring a consistent message throughout the organization. Social media users also tend to expect an immediate response, even more than for email. There is also a greater danger of posting “involuntary information,” which the City of Nanaimo describes as information mistakenly posted, “due to misunderstanding the technology or by accident,” (2011, p. 2) than with more familiar technology. It can be time-consuming to monitor several social media accounts, and the possibility of online interactions to be less civil than face-to-face interactions can be stressful for staff, and detract from the intended message.

Basic social media guidelines should be applied consistently to save time and ensure that social media is used in a manner consistent with municipal goals and values:

- All social media should supplement and be secondary to the municipal website (City of Parksville, 2011, p. 2; District of Lake Country, 2011, p. 3).
- Social media should be handled by the person with the most expertise in communicating and social media. They should understand the municipality’s communications policies, the platform’s policies, the appropriate content, and have the appropriate technical expertise.
- Accounts should be monitored daily (District of Lake Country, 2011, p. 2) to post, respond to activity, and maintain appropriate content (City of Parksville, 2011, p. 2).
- It is appropriate to respond to negative comments respectfully and with facts (District of Lake Country, 2011, p. 2; District of Maple Ridge, 1998, p. 11; Chadwick, 2012a, p. 16).
- Social media is the appropriate place to post multimedia, such as photos and videos.
- Lighter topics such as recreation and local events are more suitable for social media than serious or controversial topics likely to draw negative comments.
- Inappropriate content, including content that is unrelated, discriminatory, slanderous, obscene, embarrassing, misleading, illegal, promotes illegal activity or compromises safety, security or privacy, or seems to be posted just to get a reaction (“trolling”) should be removed (District of

Lake Country, 2011, p. 3-4). It may or may not be appropriate to send a neutral message to the poster to explain content removal.

As seen in the above list, social media can be high maintenance. Fortunately, it is not an essential part of communicating for a small municipality. For governments that do want to use social media, it may be advisable to start one platform at a time to maintain consistency.

#### **4.5 Summary**

Canadian municipalities scale their communications resources according to their capacity, but all municipalities can benefit from evaluating their communications practices and setting communications priorities. Identifying actionable items to improve communications practices makes it easier for staff to achieve those priorities. This scan of communications documents revealed that priorities are often based on emerging challenges, such as social media. Social media is a new and complex communications area for municipalities, as evidenced by the number of Canadian municipalities which have found it necessary to create social media policies. Since Alert Bay struggles with capacity, this is an opportunity to decide whether social media's benefits outweigh its costs.

## **5.0 FINDINGS: LITERATURE REVIEW, CROSS-JURISDICTIONAL SCAN & MUNICIPALITY INTERVIEWS**

### **5.1 Overview**

This findings section summarizes the data from the literature review, cross-jurisdictional scan and municipality interviews. They are grouped together because they have the same purpose, of providing possible solutions for the Village of Alert Bay's communications challenges. A comparison of themes from each section illustrates where the findings were the same, and where they differ.

Each of the three research methods imperfectly addresses communications challenges in small municipalities, and each has gaps that are filled by the other methods. Despite these differences, the themes in each were similar, and the scope ranged from the pragmatism of small municipalities, to the literature's theoretical best practices.

### **5.2 Literature Review Findings**

The literature review provides the most theoretical information of the three methods. As expected, academic and public administration literature offers little specific to small municipalities. The case studies in the literature featured cities applying new technology to specific challenges. Many municipal communications best practices do not apply to small municipalities who may not have the same problems nor the resources needed for the solutions. The most useful data were the general guidelines for public engagement, communications style, and municipal communications roles, which could form the basis for any municipal communications strategy.

### **5.3 Cross-jurisdictional Scan Findings**

The cross-jurisdictional scan reviewed documents that were created by municipalities and are presumably in use. The findings are more practical than the literature review, but since there were no documents from similarly small municipalities, they are not always applicable. The cross-jurisdictional scan is a reminder that good communications planning provides staff and Council with practical guidelines and enough detail to work toward priorities, rather than vague generalities. Practicality is also the reason why there are very few communications policies that exist in small municipalities—they are not as rich in the resources of time, money and staff expertise.

### **5.4 Interview Group 3: Small Municipalities**

The literature review and cross-jurisdictional scan were not expected to contribute much information about practices in small municipalities. As part of the primary research for this strategy, interviews were conducted with other small BC municipalities. Representatives of six BC municipalities with between 345 and 545 citizens—within 100 of Alert Bay's 445—were interviewed. Like Alert Bay, many of these municipalities serve populations that include not only citizens of their municipalities, but residents of the surrounding areas. The interview questions asked about communications mediums, what messages they were used for, and how well they were perceived to serve their purpose. The questions also asked

about experiences solving communications problems with limited resources, including staff time (see Appendix C).

The interviews with small municipalities revealed the pragmatic approach of other small BC municipalities to communicating. Like Alert Bay, none of these communities had written communications policies, nor staff time devoted to communications planning. Most of the staff members interviewed were surprised to have been contacted about communications. Communications was secondary to day-to-day operations. They did not think they had much to offer because they didn't think they really "did" communications; they did not think of communicating as something distinct from administration. The interviews revealed that they often had the same challenges, but did not necessarily have solutions for them. This is partly due to limited time, and partly because they believed some challenges are permanent, such as citizen disinterest.

Their most successful communications policies included being accommodating, consistent, and positive. Two-thirds of these municipalities had policies of being as accommodating as possible, having an open door policy, or always taking time to sit down with citizens and listen. Respondents thought of this as a way that a small municipality can best care for its citizens.

Municipalities said that they were as consistent as possible, with a small staff. They described being more consistent with communication medium than with communications timelines. All municipalities interviewed had websites, with some updating them in-house and some contracting maintenance out. However, most also believed that newer technology isn't very important to their citizens. All of these villages prioritized mail-outs, newsletters and bulletin boards over social media and the internet.

The topics they found difficult to communicate about included policies and processes, partly from resident unfamiliarity, and partly resident resistance to bureaucracy. Other than that, these municipalities attributed disinterest to a natural disinterest in routine topics and the tendency to act only when an issue has become urgent.

All but one municipality had some kind of regular informal event where citizens could speak to an elected official face-to-face. These include mayoral office hours, the opportunity to make appointments with the Mayor, regular town halls, and Council cafes, where members of Council would set up a table at a well-frequented locale and chat with residents about Village business. These events were dependent on the willingness and availability of Council.

All acknowledged that their resources, especially staff time, were limited. Most stretched their capacity by maintaining strong reciprocal relationships with volunteers and volunteer organizations. Volunteers help these municipalities produce newsletters, spread the word in emergencies, maintain extensive gardens and manage harbours. In return, these municipalities provide equipment, insurance, guidance, and volunteer appreciation programs and events.

## **5.5 Themes**

The best practices from the literature review, cross-jurisdictional scan, and small municipality interviews had similar themes: capacity, challenges and barriers, policy and process, and communications readiness. Despite these themes, the different points of view means that there is little overlap in content. In Table 1 below, content that was found in both sets of interviews is in bold.

**Table 1: Themes from best practices in the literature review, cross-jurisdictional scan and municipality interviews**

Theme	Literature review	Cross-jurisdictional scan	Municipality interviews
Managing capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capacity dictates communications resources</li> <li>Staff ability affects capacity</li> <li>Communicate consistently within capacity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social media requires consistent daily effort</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do not have much communications capacity</li> <li>Use volunteers to increase capacity</li> <li>Resources best spent face-to-face</li> </ul>
Challenges & barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Resident disinterest</b></li> <li>Reaching youth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Style consistency</li> <li>Social media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Resident disinterest</b></li> <li>Can't reach everyone</li> </ul>
Policy & process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider engagement in all planning processes</li> <li>Start engagement early</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy &amp; process should support actual use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small municipalities less likely to see a need for written guidelines</li> <li>Be accommodating</li> </ul>
Communications readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communications strategy prepares for readiness in all situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internal communications supports external</li> <li>Plan for intentional communications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No staff time for communications planning</li> </ul>

## 5.6 Summary

The literature review, cross-jurisdictional scan, and small municipality interviews provide different data using different methods, but are all intended to address best communications practices in a small municipality. The cross-jurisdictional scan and literature review agreed that the single most valuable communications tool is simply communications planning. The interviews with small municipalities, however, revealed that small municipalities view communications planning as an unnecessary luxury. All three methods identified capacity as a major challenge, but this suggests that the greatest challenge for a small municipality is simply prioritizing communications planning with such a limited capacity.

## **6.0 FINDINGS: STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS**

### **6.1 Overview**

The interview findings section summarizes the data from the first two groups of interviews, with Alert Bay Staff and Council, and Cormorant Island organizational stakeholders, and compares them by theme.

Group 1 was eleven Council members and Village staff. Group 2 was comprised of six key informants, including business owners, contractors, media representatives, local communications specialists and staff from other Cormorant Island governments. The interview data contributed to a current state analysis of Village communications. Most importantly, these interviews gathered data from the people who will be using and developing the strategy.

### **6.2 Interview Group 1: Staff and Council**

The interviews with Alert Bay staff and Council made it clear that communication means different things to different people. Topics discussed included personal relationships, roles of staff and Council, and personal relationships to technology. Both staff and Council acknowledged the challenge of filling different roles at different times—Councillor or contractor, staff member or customer. Several members of staff and Council also provided input from the perspective of the business community. The most challenging issues identified were internal communication, appropriate citizen interaction, organizational capacity, and communicating about change.

Internal communication was a strong theme throughout the interviews with staff and Council, particularly the communication between staff and Council. Several staff felt uncomfortable communicating honestly with Council, and Council felt that there was not enough public feedback reaching them through staff. Both staff and Council felt that there was not a mechanism in place for Council to be appropriately informed about Public Works, causing internal misconceptions about Public Works and hindering decision-making.

Staff and Council agreed that people tend to see what impacts them personally and have a hard time seeing the big picture. This ranges from the public's tendency to place too much importance on visual Public Works issues, like potholes and grass cutting, to some staff not understanding how their work furthers organizational priorities. Some staff and Council felt that others were overstepping their communication roles. This was largely an issue of staff or Council members using their influence to circumvent processes for themselves or others.

Customer interaction is challenging for staff, with all but one staff member reporting that they regularly have negative experiences with customers. Customers may have difficulty finding the information they are looking for on their own, resulting in staff fielding more phone calls than necessary. Office staff reported receiving frequent phone calls for phone numbers, hours of operation and garbage pickup schedules, which should be unnecessary in such a small community, especially when this basic information is usually available online, on posters, and in the Village newsletter.

The majority of staff also reported being asked about Village business when not working. Staff have interactions with upset customers, have to resist attempts to socialize while working, and feel like the public doesn't always do their part to follow processes and inform themselves. Most staff felt that this was inevitable—no matter what the Village does, there will continue to be some disrespectful and uninformed customers.

Based on staff and Council reports, the Village struggles to communicate about change. The public and some staff feel resistant to change, especially if they don't understand why changes are made. Most staff and Council view the Village's poor public image, especially the image of the Public Works department, as a legacy problem. They perceive that residents remember negative experiences or contentious Council decisions for years. It is not only the public that see Public Works as inefficient and careless, especially with equipment. The majority of interviewees indicated that they did not have current criticisms of the department, other than not understanding Public Works priorities. Past unintentional communication has left a long-lasting impression.

Although there were a lot of communications problems identified, Council and staff also had ideas about how to improve them. The five areas that Council and staff identified as quick fixes were the newsletter, customer service, relationships, the website, and the public agenda. The suggestions centred around proactively supplying more information in more appealing ways:

- Publicizing the Public Works priority list in the Village newsletter
- "Holding customers' hands," through bureaucratic processes
- Asking businesses to update their information and provide more signage
- Reducing website clutter (note: website has been re-developed since interviews)
- Highlighting upcoming items of interest in the public Council meeting agenda

Staff and Council also wanted there to be better communications infrastructure in place:

- Better ways of sharing information amongst the team
- Having a regular informal event for the public that offers face-to-face time with Council
- Communications contingency plans for tough issues

There was no one type of communication that staff and Council did not want to use. There was general consensus that residents want to be able to communicate anonymously and on social media, but that these mediums are challenging to manage. Staff and Council responses were inconclusive on policies to enable feedback and minimize negativity.

More than half of Council and Staff were concerned about organizational capacity. The interviewees repeatedly said that there was always more work than they could manage. Some had a defeatist attitude about the prospect of improving communications practices: it was just another project to be started and abandoned. Even among the optimists, there was a strong feeling that the Village should improve communications infrastructure already in use before adding to it.

Staff and Council were apprehensive that they might be asked to use technology they were unfamiliar with. To some degree, communications technology is dependent on current staff ability and inclination.

Alert Bay does not place importance on staying up-to-date with technology. Hardware is replaced when it no longer functions, and software is generally one to two versions behind the current version. As in many small municipalities, the hiring pool is limited, so technological ability cannot be a strong priority. The Village manages technology in-house as much as possible, with contractor assistance with installation and troubleshooting as needed. Staff and Council agreed that everyone would be happier and more productive doing what they are best at.

### **6.3 Interview Group 2: Organizational Stakeholders**

Six interviews were conducted with Cormorant Island key informants chosen to represent a variety of local perspectives, including local communications experts, media, neighbouring governments, community organizations and businesses. On the positive side, all of Group 2 expressed a neutral or high opinion of the Village's communication. Several Council and community members were satisfied with the means, quality, and timeliness of messages and feedback, suggesting that usually, staff is friendly, information is readily available and that when people have serious complaints, they are heard.

However, half of Group 2 had had a negative Village communications experience due to information not reaching them on time, or the Village not responding to queries in a thorough or timely manner. This resulted in residents missing an event, feeling like they were not important to the Village, and/or feeling like the Village did not care about them or their part of the community. Most interviewees found at least a few areas for improvement, with only two of 17 Group 1 and 2 interviewees opining that communications were functioning optimally. More than one person described staff in general as "cold," and unwilling to accommodate customers.

The majority of Group 2 interviewees believed that the information is available, but that residents, including themselves, don't always fulfill their responsibility to inform themselves. While it would be convenient if the Village had more email reminders, for example, they didn't expect a greater volume of messages or more communications medium options. Several expressed a desire to be more involved with the municipality and learn more about Council, but were too busy. One person felt that the current efficiency and value of communications was already high and hoped that the Village would stick with the "cheap and cheerful," mediums and messages that work.

Social media is cheap but not always cheerful. One interviewee had experience with social media from an organizational perspective, and suggested that the best way to manage a Facebook page is closely monitoring it. This allows staff to remove unproductive and abusive posts. Although some Cormorant Island residents feel that deleting posts is censorship, the interviewee stated that their organization finds it more important to offer a positive and constructive social media space.

The following suggestions for communication improvement were mentioned by more than one person. Interviewees thought that it would be helpful and informative for them to know more about who plays what role on staff, to better direct their questions when they arise. Representatives of organizations who communicate with the Village wanted there to be a stronger reciprocal relationship. The Village should consistently pass on event information and job postings, as examples, rather than sporadically. Lastly, interviewees felt that they got friendly and efficient customer service for simple transactions, but

not throughout more complicated processes. They wanted the Village to follow up with them in a timely manner and help them through municipal or ICBC issues, without being made to feel like they were wasting someone’s time.

### 6.4 Themes

Table 2 lists four themes from Group 1 and 2 interviews, and how they fit the content: Content that was found in both sets of interviews is in bold.

**Table 2: Themes common to interviews with staff and Council, and organizational stakeholders**

Theme	Group 1: Staff & Council	Group 2: Organizational Stakeholders
Communications infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Improve and maintain current communications methods</b></li> <li>• <b>Work with local organizations to improve their public information</b></li> <li>• Improve internal communications structure, especially re: Public Works</li> <li>• Have plan in place for tough issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Improve and maintain current communications methods</b></li> <li>• <b>Improve connections with stakeholder organizations</b></li> </ul>
Customer interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Need to help customers through complicated processes</b></li> <li>• Customers circumvent processes, leading to negative service experiences</li> <li>• Add informal Council-public event</li> <li>• Not enough public input reaching Council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Need to help customers through complicated processes</b></li> <li>• Need to be more responsive, welcoming to queries</li> <li>• Improve communications trust with better consistency and timing</li> </ul>
Content development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Facilitate understanding of “big picture”</b></li> <li>• Provide more information about Council business</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Poor understanding of “big picture”</b></li> <li>• More information about Village structure and roles</li> <li>• More proactive informing welcome but not necessary</li> <li>• Do not allow negative social media content</li> </ul>
Challenges and barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Residents do not self-inform</b></li> <li>• Role confusion</li> <li>• Resistance to change</li> <li>• Legacy negative public image</li> <li>• Staff uncomfortable being honest with Council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Residents do not self-inform</b></li> </ul>

## **6.5 Summary**

The attitude of the organizational stakeholders interviewed was understanding towards the Village, despite some communications disappointments. They wanted greater consistency, the opportunity for more information sharing, and more accommodating Village staff, both in Administration and Public Works. The attitude of staff towards the public was more resigned than understanding. They felt that customers circumventing processes made their jobs more difficult. Both perspectives suggest that customer service can be improved. There is also an opportunity to improve internal communications for better teamwork and a common vision between staff and Council.

## **7.0 FINDINGS: SURVEY**

Cormorant Island residents were surveyed about their communications preferences and experiences communicating with the Village. The findings are described in this section.

### **7.1 Survey Demographics**

The communications survey was available to all Cormorant Island residents so that non-citizen customers/stakeholders would also be represented. Cormorant Island is split into four areas: Alert Bay (population 445 and 38% Indigenous in the 2011 Census), Regional District of Mount Waddington (RDMW) land, which encompasses 10 dwellings on Cormorant Island, 'Namgis First Nations land, and Whe-la-la-u land, which is a council of several First Nations. Other than the 10 RDMW homes and the Village of Alert Bay, Cormorant Island is First Nations.

The survey results did not show any strong differences between the responses of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The five overlapping groups from which responses were sought are: age 18-35, age 36-59, age 60+, Village citizen, and non-Alert Bay Cormorant Island resident.

Respondents were 59% female and 41% male. By age, 18% were 18-35 years old, 32% 36-59 years, and exactly half were age 60 and over. 48% of respondents were white, 29% First Nations, 2% Asian, and 21% did not disclose their ethnicity. This would be an accurate representation of ethnicities in the Village of Alert Bay, but since the entire island was included in the survey, First Nations respondents are underrepresented.

Alert Bay's high seniors' population was predicted to be a communications challenge, but seniors seem to be comfortable with the communications methods in use. They are happy to stop by the Village Office to get paper copies of communications like the Village newsletter, flyers and the paper version of the survey. Fifty percent of survey respondents were age 60 plus, and respondents in this age category were the most likely to attend a Council meeting.

82% of respondents lived in the Village of Alert Bay, with 11% on 'Namgis land on Cormorant Island, 4% in the Whe-la-la-u, 2% in the RDMW, and 2% in other areas. Other areas include nearby sparsely populated islands that rely on Alert Bay for services. The geographic and ethnic distribution reflects a natural disinterest in something that mainly affects Village citizens. Group 2 key informant interviews also revealed a survey fatigue that is greater for members of the 'Namgis First Nation than other Cormorant Islanders, due to frequent treaty consultation and other community engagement opportunities.

### **7.2 Communication Preferences**

Respondents were asked which methods of communication they currently used. 86% of respondents had access to mail, 77% used the Post Office bulletin board, 73% email, 63% the Village newsletter, 61% telephone, 46% TV, 43% radio, 41% Facebook, 39% text messages, 32% Village brochures, 29% the Village website, 27% the North Island Gazette, 14% Twitter and 11% YouTube.

In addition to the communication mediums listed on the survey, 27% of respondents also used other local bulletin boards, including the bulletin board at the grocery store and the board outside the hair salon/gym.

**Figure 1: Communications mediums used by survey respondents**

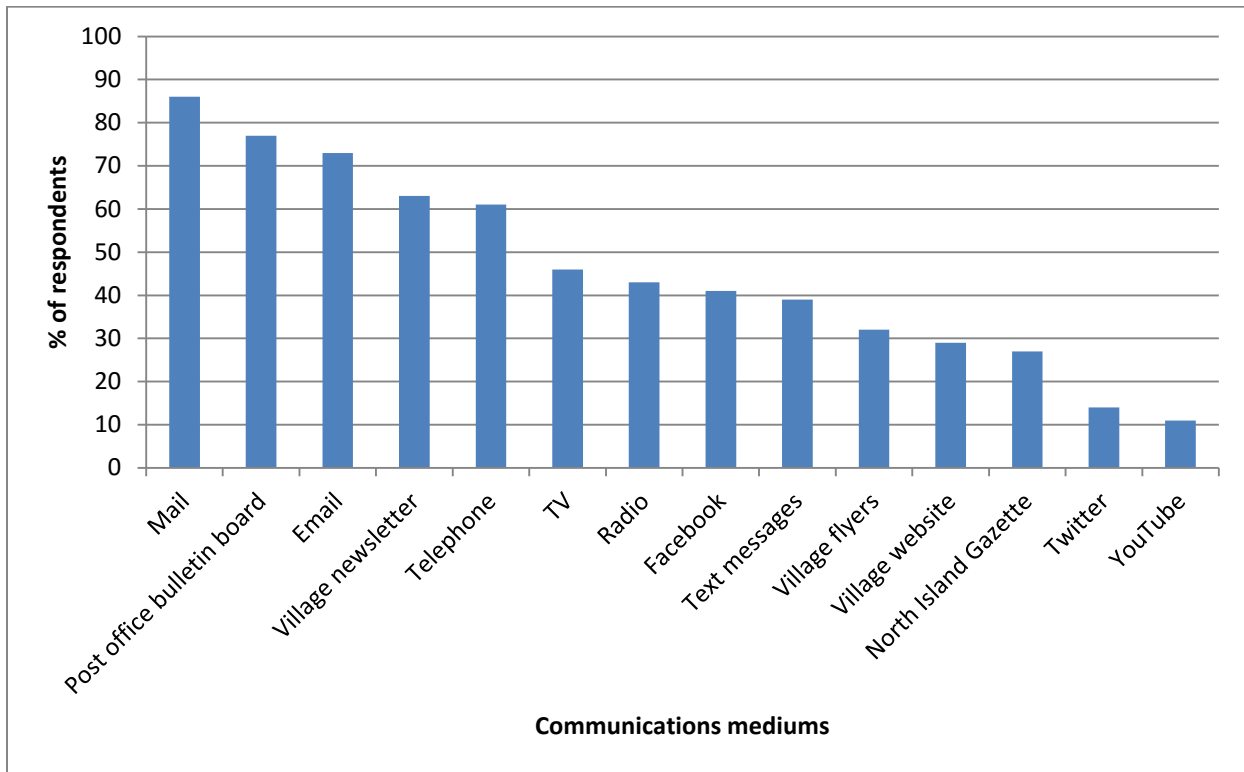


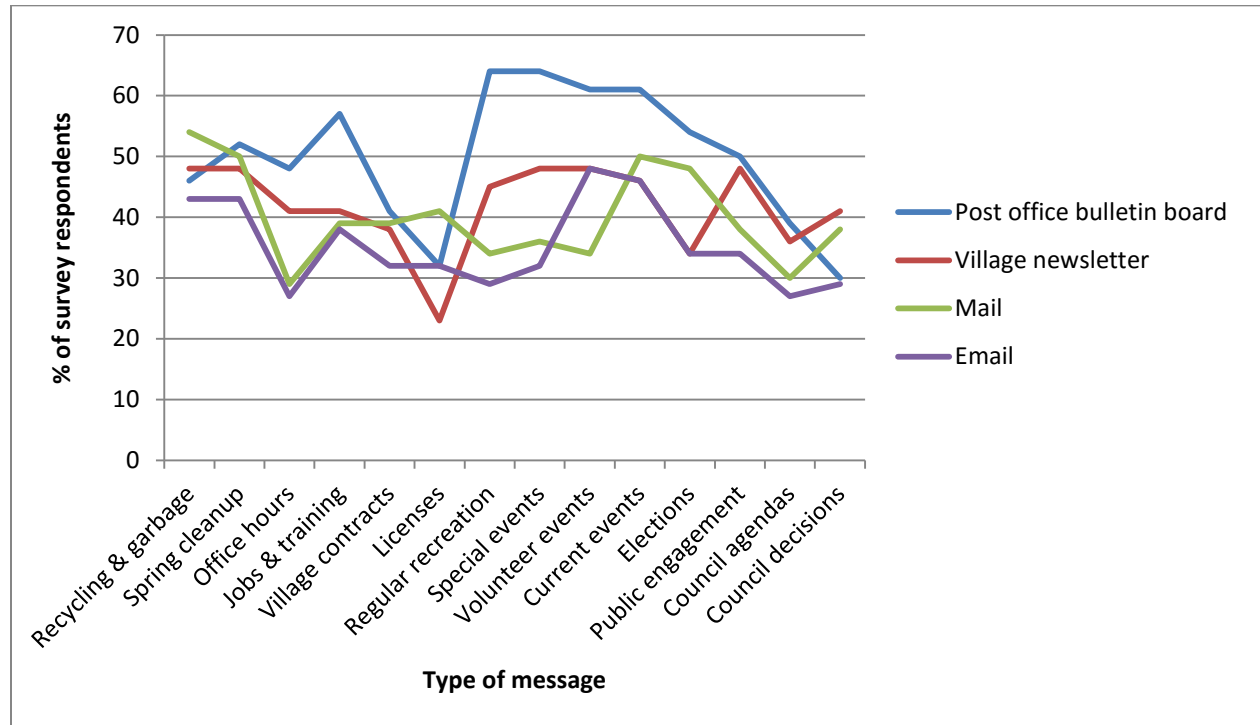
Figure 1 shows the communications mediums used by survey respondents, in percentages from most to least used. The communications medium that the greatest number of respondents used was mail, meaning that mailouts are the single best way to reach everyone. Since there is no option that all respondents use, it is best to use multiple communications mediums. For example, utility bill due dates could be included in the mailed or emailed bill and also advertised in the newsletter. Currently, email is only used as a utility billing option and a newsletter delivery option. It may be an underutilized option, due to the high percentage of users (73%) and low cost.

Radio was recommended by interviewees, although not preferred by many survey respondents. The closest radio station, broadcasting from Port Hardy, is only available sporadically on Cormorant Island. Communicating via the radio station would be a better way to communicate with non-Islanders about island events.

The Village publishes its own monthly newsletter, consisting mainly of island event reporting, event announcements and Council news. Most of the content is created by Village staff and there are few independent submissions. More than half of all respondents read the newsletter, which is one of the most time-intensive and purposefully crafted Village communications, but this number may be skewed

because it is likely the same people coming to the office to pick up the newsletter who picked up the survey.

**Figure 2: Top four communications medium preferences by survey respondents**



As seen in Figure 2, survey respondents chose the communications mediums they preferred for 14 kinds of messages, from recreation programming to Council decisions. The four most used communications mediums were also those consistently preferred for all messages: mail, the post office bulletin board, the Village newsletter and email. Fifty percent of respondents wanted to receive messages via the post office bulletin board, 43% through the Village newsletter, 40% by mail, and 34% by email. The runners-up, in order of preference, were flyers available in the Village Office, Facebook, other bulletin boards and the Village website. As seen below in 8.1.3, some people did not know about Facebook or the website, and many found them difficult to use, which likely influenced preference.

The majority of respondents chose multiple communications methods for the 14 kinds of messages. They did not want to hear about current events only on the bulletin board. Although the bulletin board was the top choice overall, respondents slightly preferred the Village newsletter for messages about Council agendas and decisions.

Respondents were also asked what new feedback methods they would use, if available. 45% were interested in a suggestion box, 43% a yearly survey, 27% an informal town hall, 23% a dedicated Facebook Village feedback page, 16% having lunch hour chats with Councillors, and 5% Twitter.

### **7.2.1 Cost of Communications**

The survey asked respondents what their preferences were apart from how realistic various communications methods might be due to cost or time constraints. For example, without subscribing to an automated call service, it is not feasible to telephone a list of people to notify them of anything other than an emergency or significant interruption of services. Mail was a strong communication preference for most survey respondents for most messages, but it is not financially feasible to use often. It either costs \$0.85 per addressed item, or approximately \$90 for a mail out (plus the cost of materials) to send the same item to all 550 post office boxes. If there was one mail out per week, the annual cost would be around \$5000 plus a minimum of \$1000 for materials. A monthly message might be feasible, but sending a municipal newsletter to people who do not find it relevant is inefficient, and sending it by lettermail requires more time and money.

The Village of Alert Bay does not have communications-specific funding—rather, it is part of different budget items. For example, the cost of printing the newsletter is part of the photocopying budget, and all postage is generally in one budget. However, communications mediums do have different costs of both staff time and money. Some communications mediums are necessary, such as having a website and telephones, but cost may help prioritize other mediums.

Mail, the newsletter, the website, newspaper ads, and town halls are the most expensive communications mediums, with the other options—bulletin board, email, telephone, Facebook, flyers, Twitter, suggestion box, and surveys—virtually free. The communications mediums that take the most time are lettermail, the newsletter, telephone, Facebook, the website, survey and town hall, although all methods of communication require staff time. See Appendix D for a detailed table of communications costs by medium.

There appears to be little appetite for automated text message or telephone services. They were not researched, nor was YouTube, TV advertising, or radio advertising.

### **7.3 Communications Problems**

Communications issues identified in the resident survey included a difficult-to-use website and a lack of awareness of the Village website and Facebook page. 45% of respondents had never used the Village website, and most of them commented that they were not aware it existed. Others found the website hard to navigate and did not trust that online resources would be up-to-date. 80% of respondents had never used the Village Facebook page. Some did not know it existed, some did not use Facebook, and some did not use it because it was not updated regularly.

The Village also struggles to distinguish its messages from others. In addition to the people who were unaware of communications resources such as the website, many people were unaware of recent Village events, or mistook other messages for those of the Village. For example, one survey response criticized the Village's style in a mailed out flyer in blue all-caps, but the flyer in question was actually campaign material from a Council candidate. Both interview and survey respondents suggested that the

most effective medium of communication is word of mouth, which largely operates without the Village's influence.

Respondents were asked if they wanted less, the same or more information about a variety of topics. The majority of respondents wanted more information about Council decisions, but for all other topics, they were satisfied with the amount of information they received. A minority wanted to hear more about job and training opportunities, Village contract opportunities, volunteering, and current events.

The North Island Gazette is the regional paper that all legally required notices are posted in, but only 27% of survey respondents read it. This low readership could be due to historically low coverage of Alert Bay events in the regional paper. Alert Bay is part of the reporting area for the North Island Gazette, based in Port Hardy, on Vancouver Island. An on-island Gazette correspondent sometimes attends Council meetings, but the meetings are not regularly reported on in the Gazette.

## **7.4 Summary**

The resident survey did not uncover much surprising data, but it confirmed the importance of using multiple communications mediums for the same message and suggested that the public is generally content with Village communication activities.

The largest gap is a lack of information about Council business. The majority of respondents were satisfied with the amounts of information they were getting about all topics except Council decisions. This may be partly because they are not receiving the messages—only a quarter of survey respondents say they have access to the regional paper and the Village's legislatively required notices. As an additional barrier, these notices and the publicly posted Council agendas are not formatted in an audience-friendly way.

Cormorant Island residents are most likely to use local, low-tech communications mediums. Four of the top three preferred communications methods are low-tech: the post office bulletin board, mail, and the Village newsletter. Email, while a popular communications medium, is only used regularly by the Village for individually targeted messages, as a utilities billing option, and as a newsletter delivery option. As seen in Figure 2, people want to receive email messages about more topics, such as volunteer events. The Village website and Facebook were not as popular, but many survey respondents also didn't know about them, found them confusing due to layout or other design problems, or didn't use them because they were infrequently updated. Despite only 41% of respondents using Facebook, it was the 6<sup>th</sup> most preferred communications method. There is room to improve and expand use of computer-based communications mediums.

## **8.0 CURRENT STATE ANALYSIS**

This section synthesizes the findings of sections six and seven to provide a current state analysis, organized by theme. Each theme has a discussion of how the best practices from sections two, four and five can be applied to Alert Bay's communications challenges. This section reconciles the gap between the preferences and suggestions of interview and survey respondents, and what is feasible for the Village.

### **8.1 Consistency and Managing Capacity**

Alert Bay does not communicate consistently, but this is not due to lack of capacity, rather, to lack of consistent process. The communications mediums that the Village of Alert Bay uses are appropriate in terms of efficiency, cost and public approval. However, they should be used more consistently, and the use of some mediums, such as email subscription, can be expanded to improve communications capacity.

Survey respondents were generally satisfied with communications mediums, but indicated a desire for an anonymous feedback method. Council, staff and community members reported the perception that there is no point in giving the Village feedback because there is not an efficient process to handle feedback. Council feels they do not get the public's input, and the public feels that they will never get a response. Two options for increasing public input are developing an anonymous feedback option, and hosting informal Council events.

A public input option popular among Group 3 BC municipality interviewees was regularly-scheduled, informal events with Council, while Council and staff felt that most people would feel comfortable giving input anonymously. However, it is difficult for an organization to act on anonymous feedback, and verifying anonymous complaints would be time-consuming. In order for the public to feel their suggestions were being noted, there would have to be a way of reporting on the anonymous comments. None of the BC municipalities interviewed had anonymous feedback options. Anonymous feedback may fill a communication gap, but it is better to do less communicating well than more communicating poorly.

This report recommends that since Alert Bay already has public input options in place, it should improve them before introducing more. In this case, a focus on improving customer service, helping customers fill out forms, and making a commitment to respond to them may make the Village seem more feedback-friendly. This approach was used in four of six municipalities interviewed. Alert Bay should focus on building relationships in these individual interactions, and with its partner organizations.

Alert Bay needs to be more consistent at sharing information with partner organizations like the North Island Gazette and the 'Namgis First Nation, which increases the audience it can reach. It is extremely cost-efficient to build relationships with volunteer groups and to partner with other organizations to spread the word. In exchange for reciprocal advertising, equipment loans and accommodating support, the Village can build relationships, save money and improve civic engagement. Currently, Alert Bay's

only regular recognition program is its Citizen of the Year award. The first step is to encourage volunteering by establishing an ongoing volunteer appreciation program, including annual events.

## **8.2 Communications Infrastructure**

In most cases, the Village should improve its current communications infrastructure before expanding communications infrastructure. Recommended new infrastructure includes a volunteer appreciation program, as described in 9.1, possible new internal communications infrastructure, and expanded email sign-ups via the website and MailChimp.

More than 70% of survey respondents use email, and email was in the top four preferred communications mediums, yet Alert Bay only uses it for individual messages, newsletter delivery and utilities bills. The Village already uses MailChimp to send out the online version of the newsletter. This saves staff time since subscribers can sign themselves up on the website. MailChimp can have multiple subscriber lists, and the website can have multiple options for sign-up. Based on resident survey responses, recommended additional email lists include job postings/contracts, recreation, special events, and before- and after- Council messages.

In addition to this external communications infrastructure, the Village needs to review its internal communications. Internal communications was not identified as a key area for improvement before the staff and Council interviews. However, these interviews revealed a disconnect between staff and Council, and between management and staff. Some staff and Council felt that current communications volume was inadequate, leaving them out of the loop. Others felt that the relationship was more adversarial than trusting, and felt that staff and Council did not work together as a team. Strong internal communication is team-building, and weak internal communication not only erodes workplace culture and job satisfaction, but also customer service. Staff should never hear about Village news from a customer, and they need to have the correct information to give to customers. Council should be informed of major Village issues so they are not blindsided by residents. There should be a separation between staff and Council, but each person should have a general awareness of all Village activities, a shared vision, and a sense that they are on a team with everyone else.

This report recommends that staff and Council review their respective internal communications and decide what internal infrastructure they want to use to communicate. This may require new communications infrastructure, such as weekly staff meetings, a weekly schedule/newsletter, or brief morning meetings. For Council, it could be Citizen Comment summaries, meetings with staff, or Committee of the Whole Public Works meetings. Internal communication is vital to overall communications success, and Alert Bay is encouraged to prioritize it.

## **8.3 Policy and Process**

The Village of Alert Bay does not have written communications policies. It communicates largely in a routine but inconsistent way, without following style guidelines or checklists. Administrative staff have ad hoc communications routines for newsletter creation, Facebook posts, poster creation, sharing news, etc. This suggests some degree of consistency, but only if the routine is always the same, and if they

have ample time to complete tasks. This system does not efficiently use staff resources or provide consistency, especially when staff are away.

In comparison to unwritten policies, written policies are more likely to be understood and followed consistently. For the best consistency month-to-month, during staff vacations and during staff turnover, the Village needs written policies. These policies should address areas of confusion and inconsistency, including social media, communications timelines, and consistent use of communications mediums (see Table 7).

#### **8.4 Customer Interaction**

Interviews and the survey revealed that the Village of Alert Bay has a mixed reputation. Complaints mainly centre on the perception of past Public Works equipment misuse, unpopular Council decisions, and the Village Office not being consistently helpful. Although it is impossible to make all customers happy, unintentional communications have damaged public image. This could include negative customer service experiences, unfriendly demeanour of staff or Council, or dinged equipment. It can be difficult to change public image, but the best way to do so is to make future interactions with customers as professional, accommodating and friendly as possible. Since all staff interact with the public occasionally, all should be familiarized with this strategy, with their role as Village ambassadors, and should attend customer service training.

In addition to establishing consistently warm and helpful customer service in all areas of the organization, the most requested improvement is better helping customers through complex processes. This includes complex ICBC and Driver Licensing transactions, and civic processes such as tax sales, subdivisions, new construction and foreshore leases. It also includes resident initiatives such as creating a new museum, starting a new recreation program, building a swimming pool or wanting the area in front of a business to be a “No Parking” zone. These are issues where most people do not know the process. They may not even know whether the Village can help them with their issue. Organizational stakeholder interviews indicate that Alert Bay can do a better job of assisting customers with complex issues. This includes welcoming and friendly customer service, explaining processes, offering estimated timelines and explaining delays, and assisting customers to fill out forms (e.g. Citizen Comment forms).

There will always be processes that seem onerous to customers. Many of these customers will feel confused, impatient and irritated at bureaucratic processes. One of the best ways to build relationships is to be as accommodating as reasonably possible to help customers through complex processes. This is time-consuming, but the more positive interactions customers have with the Village, the more quickly it can rehabilitate and maintain a positive public image.

Having a positive public image is likely to encourage more residents to engage with the Village regularly, and to participate in public engagement processes. There is a lot of academic and public administration literature about public engagement. The literature shows that it is important to consider public engagement from the start of many municipal processes. The Village has not always engaged the public successfully, mainly due to short term planning, inconsistent advertising and lack of enticements such as refreshments and door prizes. For public engagement guidelines, refer to Appendix A.

## **8.5 Content**

Most survey and interview respondents are satisfied with the information they are getting from the Village. The areas where information is lacking are: what citizens and customers can do at the Village Office, who to speak to about what, and Council business. There is no mechanism for citizens to find out what Council is doing, without searching out the agenda or minutes or attending a meeting. There is usually very little, if any, public attendance at Council meetings. The agenda and minutes are not formatted in an audience-friendly manner, and do not provide details about agenda items or the context of decisions.

This report recommends that staff create before- and after- Council meeting messages, intended to inform citizens what their Council is doing. These messages should be relatively short, and summarize or explain items that may be of interest to the public. They should be shared using the guidelines in Table 7: via subscribed email list, newsletter and website. There have been monthly newsletter articles from a Councillor in past newsletter issues, but these are usually about Village business in general.

The most carefully crafted communication that the Village produces, the Echo newsletter, is only produced once a month. While the resident survey showed it is well-regarded, it is not produced often enough to be responsive and provide proactive information to residents. It also does not have very many contributors providing varied information and perspectives. Citizens want the newsletter to expand, and be more of a village newsletter than a Village Office newsletter. This could be achieved if there were more community members contributing to the Echo. With enough community interest, it might even be possible for community members to take over newspaper production. Two of six Group 3 municipalities have monthly or biweekly newsletters produced by volunteers. Developing content about Village activities leads to better community understanding of Village business, and a more informed public is a more engaged public.

## **8.6 Social Media**

One of the secondary research questions is: What are best practices for municipal social media? Social media was identified as a challenge by Alert Bay staff and Council. They felt that residents want to have the communication option of Facebook, but weren't sure how to manage the negative aspects, such as complaints and internet trolls.

Social media was not one of the four top communications choices for survey respondents. Staff and Council also doubted the necessity of using it on a small, slow-moving island. However, the resident survey indicates that four in ten Cormorant Islanders currently use Facebook, and a scan of Alert Bay Facebook groups shows that there is an active local Facebook community sharing rides, selling items, advertising businesses and event planning, among other uses. Facebook is an excellent way to quickly share events and safety warnings. The proliferation of North Island event pages and local bulletin board-type pages indicates that there is a social media audience waiting. Instead of warily and inconsistently using social media, the Village should create and enforce policies that promote positivity on its page.

Before continuing to use Facebook, however, Alert Bay needs to re-establish its Facebook page. It is currently set up as a person named AlertBay Echo rather than as a government organization. In a Facebook search of “Alert Bay” it does not appear in the results, making it very difficult to find unless one has Facebook friends already connected with it. Since there is no cost to having a government organization page, the only barrier to changing the Facebook page to an organization page is the time required to set up the new page, and the effort of informing Facebook users to “like” the new page instead of being Facebook friends with AlertBay Echo.

Alert Bay does not actively use Twitter, but the Alert Bay Twitter account automatically re-posts Facebook status updates from AlertBay Echo. This social media platform currently requires very little maintenance and occasionally provides a way for people to find information or connect with the Village. It provides little benefit, but at no cost and minimal staff time.

The resident survey revealed that regardless of age, respondents can be grouped based on ability and preference for online communications mediums. Some people strongly prefer online resources, and some people strongly prefer traditional resources such as phoning or posters. Anything that is advertised should be advertised using technologies preferred by both groups. If something is predominantly advertised on Facebook and the Alert Bay website, it may miss one group; if it is predominantly on paper, it may not be seen by people who rely on the internet to find out about events.

## **8.7 Challenges and Barriers**

There are several challenges to effective communication for Alert Bay: resident disinterest, a legacy negative public image, and public recognition of Village messages. The Village must also overcome its own scepticism about communications. Interviews with staff and Council revealed that some of them think that communications practices are fine as-is, that the problems can't be solved, that the Village has little influence on island communications, and that resources and capacity should be used to solve more important problems.

One of the secondary research questions was: How should the Village of Alert Bay manage its limited communications capacity? Effectively managing capacity is the greatest communications challenge the Village faces. Like the Group 3 small municipality interviewees, the perception of lack of capacity leads the Village to deprioritize communicating. In each of the above sections, the question could be asked: Should staff really use their valuable and limited time to create communications policies, use social media, take more time with customers, or review internal communications? Alert Bay needs to discard the idea that it cannot or should not solve these problems. If it chooses to prioritize communication, it is likely to be rewarded with a stronger team, greater citizen trust, better preparedness for unusual communications situations, and a more engaged public.

## 9.0 OPTIONS TO CONSIDER and RECOMMENDATIONS

This section offers communications options intended to answer the primary research question: How can the Village of Alert Bay improve its communications to best serve its citizens and stakeholders? Recommendations include proposed communications principles for the Village of Alert Bay and immediate communications goals. The means for achieving them include improvements to current communications practices and infrastructure.

### 9.1 Option 1: Principle-based Communication

*Develop yearly communications goals based on the five communications principles of consistent, audience-friendly, timely, accountable and efficient communications.*

The principles in this option offer a long-term vision of effective communications. In the table below, each principle is described. In addition, Alert Bay-specific goals and means of achieving them are organized by principle. Goals may be chosen from this table, or may be anything that contributes to one or more principles, including:

- Develop content to submit to the North Island Gazette/work with local Gazette correspondent for better regional representation
- Develop informal events for the public to chat with Council
- Develop communications templates and style guide for consistent aesthetics in Village messaging and merchandise
- Develop annual infographics about different departments, e.g. number of FOI requests, number of ICBC transactions, etc.
- Establish schedule for confirming that all information on website and other Village publications is up-to-date
- Review information in outside websites and publications for accuracy
- Develop original Twitter content
- Develop an annual Youth Council event
- Develop templates and schedule for annual predictable messages
- Create computer-friendly template for online newsletter
- Establish schedule for reviewing communications policies

**Table 3: Option 1 communications principles**

Principles	Objectives	Means
<b>CONSISTENT</b> Messages can be found in the same place at the same time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only communicate within the Village’s capacity</li> <li>• Village representatives have consistent information</li> <li>• Fewer phone calls to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build communications capacity slowly</li> <li>• Approach communications methodically—use checklists and guidelines (see Appendix E)</li> <li>• Create internal communications infrastructure for regular information sharing</li> <li>• Update information sources regularly</li> <li>• Ask businesses to update their contact</li> </ul>

	<p>staff asking for basic information such as hours and phone numbers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audience finds information easily</li> </ul>	<p>information with the Village</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use Committee of the Whole meetings or develop other communications infrastructure to discuss Public Works with Council</li> </ul>
<p><b>AUDIENCE-FRIENDLY</b> Messages are appealing and understandable. Provide friendly customer service.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Messages capture attention</li> <li>• People are aware of events</li> <li>• People find it pleasant to do business with the Village</li> <li>• Audience understands intended message</li> <li>• Communications build relationships</li> <li>• Messages are informative and interesting</li> <li>• Messages are attractive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simplify messages</li> <li>• No jargon or unnecessary words</li> <li>• Friendly, informal, positive tone in less serious messages</li> <li>• Use multimedia, photos, bullet points and infographics often, especially in online messages</li> <li>• Informal, face-to-face opportunities with elected officials</li> <li>• Friendly, accommodating service, “hand-holding” through processes</li> <li>• Review Council agendas and highlight potential items of public interest</li> <li>• Keep website organization intuitive</li> <li>• Solicit newsletter material from community members</li> <li>• Establish annual volunteer appreciation event</li> <li>• Establish ongoing volunteer appreciation program</li> <li>• Develop message templates and style guide for consistent aesthetics</li> </ul>
<p><b>TIMELY</b> Messages are proactive and/or responsive.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prompt and systematic response to requests</li> <li>• Don’t rely on people to inform themselves by asking questions</li> <li>• Messages answer the questions people are asking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform unhappy customers of the process to resolve their complaint and a realistic timeline</li> <li>• Plan communications early in a process</li> <li>• Anticipate and provide answers for possible questions</li> <li>• The more controversial/important an issue is, the more thoroughly communications need to be planned</li> </ul>
<p><b>ACCOUNTABLE</b> Messaging is responsible and realistic. Processes are transparent.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build and maintain trust</li> <li>• Trustworthy and responsible public image</li> <li>• Public engagement processes are satisfying to stakeholders</li> <li>• Provide more “behind-the-scenes” information about municipal processes</li> <li>• Gain objective coverage of Council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind Village representatives of the importance of honesty and following through</li> <li>• Explain rationale behind controversial and important decisions to staff and public</li> <li>• Follow public engagement guidelines in Appendix A: engage early and inform until the end</li> <li>• Remind staff of their role and opportunities to communicate intentionally and unintentionally</li> <li>• Feature regular Council/staff message in newsletter</li> <li>• Develop before and after Council meeting messages</li> <li>• Set organizational goals for complaint resolution</li> </ul>

	decisions	timelines <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admit responsibility for errors</li> <li>• Solicit “behind-the-scenes” newsletter material from staff and Council</li> <li>• Build relationship with North Island Gazette and help them find local correspondents as needed</li> </ul>
<b>EFFICIENT</b> Messages are targeted, respectful of the audience’s time and demonstrate judicious use of resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximize resources, especially money and staff time</li> <li>• Use technology to increase capacity</li> <li>• Do not waste audience time</li> <li>• Audience mainly receives information they find relevant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritize communications for appropriate allocation of time and funding</li> <li>• Offer communications options; e.g. various mediums, email subscription to different topics</li> <li>• Don’t over-communicate—no spam, reasonable volume and length of messages</li> <li>• Build and maintain relationships with neighbour governments, media and community groups</li> <li>• Use the most appropriate medium(s) for the message</li> <li>• Produce messages in both paper and online versions</li> <li>• Use automated processes to stretch capacity</li> <li>• Do not over-use communications that are fatiguing to audience, such as surveys</li> </ul>

Considerations: The principle-based option offers a clear vision of effective communication, but allows the Village the choice of where to devote its resources to achieve this vision. Many of the recommendations above are more structured versions of processes and communications mediums already in use. It is not feasible to try to achieve all of these goals immediately, so Council and staff should set priorities for each year. This option may seem overwhelming unless priorities and specific goals are set.

## 9.2 Option 2: Priority-based Communication

*Develop up to five communications priorities each year and up to three specific and measurable goals per priority.*

The priorities and goals below are examples of goals for 2016. These are based on needs identified in this communications strategy, but the Village can choose to develop its own focus, narrow or broad.

Priority 1: Improve internal communications

1. Present communications strategy to staff and Council.
2. Identify internal communications infrastructure and timelines for communicating with staff.  
Identify internal communications infrastructure and timelines for communicating with Council.
3. Ensure that each staff and Council member knows how their role contributes to the vision and success of the Village.

#### Priority 2: Make external communications more intentional

1. Make Facebook page an “organization” page.
2. Put social media policies on Facebook page.
3. Customer service workshop for all staff, emphasizing positive, intentional communication.

#### Priority 3: Make external communications more consistent

1. Set timelines for all external messages, including email responses, FOI requests, newsletter release, website update, Facebook and Twitter monitoring, and pre/post Council meeting messages.
2. Identify steps for responding to complicated customer requests, including estimation of timelines and explanation of process.
3. Consistently post information in the same places by following Appendix E table.

#### Priority 4: Develop communications content

1. Develop before- and after- Council meeting messages to inform public about agenda and decisions.
2. Advertise for community member(s) to contribute to newsletter and website.
3. Develop newsletter and website content describing roles of specific staff and Council positions, and capacities of the Village.

#### Priority 5: Increase communications capacity

1. Develop volunteer appreciation program, including an annual event and ongoing recognition.
2. Develop communications contact list for media and partner organizations.
3. Set up email sign-up lists on website for job postings/contracts, recreation, special events, and Council messages, in addition to current newsletter sign-up.

Considerations: Priority-based communicating may be a simpler, more responsive and seemingly more achievable option that may be a good fit for Alert Bay’s limited capacity. It does not offer an overall communications vision.

### **9.3 Option 3: Principle-driven Priorities**

*Develop yearly priorities based on the five communications principles of consistent, audience-friendly, timely, accountable and efficient communications.*

This option is a combination of Options 1 and 2. It encourages the Village to adopt the communications principles in Table 3 and use them to guide communications development. The priorities and goals in Option 2 may be used for 2016.

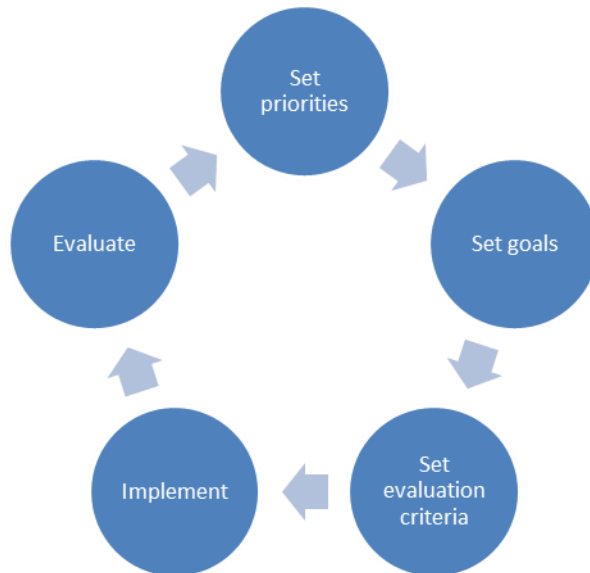
Considerations: This option requires staff and Council to be aware of both the communications principles and the current communications priorities. As the most comprehensive option, it may seem excessive or too time-consuming.

#### 9.4 Option 4: Evaluation

*Develop an evaluation plan for 2016 communications priorities and goals, and use it to evaluate progress and set future goals.*

Evaluation should be incorporated into every municipal program. Evaluation shows whether goals are achieved, and planning for evaluation from the beginning of a program helps to create specific, measurable goals.

**Figure 3: Evaluation cycle**



The two steps below are the recommended evaluation plan:

1. Evaluate the goals of each communications priority, using the evaluation criteria in Appendix F.
2. Conduct an anonymous online communications survey for staff and Council, including questions to evaluate:
  - General understanding of communications strategy
  - Understanding of how their role contributes to organizational vision and success
  - Understanding of how customer service and public conduct shapes the Village’s reputation
  - Satisfaction with internal communications—is internal communications consistent, audience-friendly, timely, accountable and efficient?
  - The survey should include an opportunity for general comments on communications

Considerations: Evaluation of communications goals can be scheduled quarterly, semi-annually, or at a minimum, annually. Evaluation can be incorporated into strategic planning. Reviewing and resetting priorities and goals naturally follows from evaluation.

## **9.5 Recommendations**

The recommended option is 3, which is the most comprehensive approach. This option, “Principle-driven Priorities,” requires communications goals to both align with Alert Bay’s communications priorities, but also the communications principles of consistent, audience-friendly, timely, accountable and efficient communications. Although it has the potential to seem overwhelming, the communications principles are intended to facilitate communications planning by providing a vision and guidance for developing yearly priorities.

Options 1-4 list many suggestions for current and future priorities and goals, which are not all immediately achievable. Alert Bay should set goals that can be achieved with limited staff resources to build confidence in the strategy. The easiest way to implement this option may be to focus on the priorities and goals for 2016, and then review and re-introduce the principles during 2017 communications planning.

This report also recommends Option 4, Evaluation. If capacity is not so limited that this would detract from municipal operations, it is highly recommended that Alert Bay build evaluation into its communications practices.

## **10.0 CONCLUSION**

Communicating is a part of everything a municipality does, whether intentional or unintentional. Without planning, they can inadvertently send the wrong message and damage public image. It is relatively simple to create a list of communications mediums and guidelines for using them, but it is more challenging for an entire organization that is constantly communicating to follow them consistently. The communications principles identified in the recommendations are intended as guideposts to help achieve communications goals.

Although the Village of Alert Bay's circumstances and challenges are the focus of this strategy, other small municipalities face some similar challenges, such as limited capacity and adapting to new technology. Rather than creating policies on a case-by-case basis, an organization's practices should develop intentionally. The adoption of principles consistent with organizational values helps to ensure that communications practices serve the needs of the municipality and stakeholders.

Limited capacity was a challenge identified in Alert Bay and other small BC municipalities. Planning for communications in a small municipality requires a communications champion on senior staff or Council so it is not sidelined in favour of more urgent issues. It requires a systematic approach to communicating, and to achieving communications goals. A lot can be accomplished gradually, if limited staff time can be directed toward achievable and measurable goals.

Other than capacity, the main problems identified by the client, staff and Council of the Village of Alert Bay were poor public image, ineffective two-way communications with residents, and low resident engagement. How can the Village of Alert Bay improve its communications to better serve its citizens and stakeholders?

When there are communications choices, it can make the choice that is in the best interests of the municipality and stakeholders. It can sincerely attempt to be consistent, audience-friendly, timely, accountable and efficient when communicating. Finally, it can build positive relationships with citizens, stakeholders, neighbouring governments and community organizations so they will trust in its best intentions.

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## 12.0 APPENDICES

### 12.1 Appendix A: Considerations in Designing Public Participation Processes

Adapted from the Auditor General of British Columbia (2008, p. 20-34).

1. Determine who the decision-maker is, what the pending decision is and who will be affected.
  - ✓ Impacts can be direct or indirect
  - ✓ Are there any unintended effects?
  - ✓ Who are the affected groups?
2. Decide if public participation should be used.
  - ✓ Are there any legal obligations to meet?
  - ✓ Are there other governments affected?
  - ✓ Will the public be significantly impacted?
  - ✓ Do we need more information to make a decision?
  - ✓ Do we know what public opinion is?
  - ✓ Will it be a controversial decision?
3. Determine the issues related to the decision for each of the affected parties.
  - ✓ What is the public perspective on the issues?
  - ✓ What is the history of the issues?
4. Determine the level of public participation that the decision-maker needs and what to consult on.
  - ✓ What additional information is needed to make a decision?
  - ✓ What form does engagement need to take to be meaningful and credible?
5. Determine the public participation methods best suited to the needs of participants.
  - ✓ Are there any social or cultural considerations?
  - ✓ Are there any timing issues?
  - ✓ Are there opportunities or limitations for technology?
6. Determine how public participation is to support and link to the decision.
  - ✓ What are the key decisions needing input?
  - ✓ What kind of participation is needed to contribute to the decisions?
7. Determine how the results are to be used
  - ✓ How will public input be recorded and analyzed?
  - ✓ How will the public know they've been heard?

**Table 4: Public participation continuum**

	<b>Level 1- Low public participation</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 4</b>	<b>Level 5- High public participation</b>
<b>Activity</b>	Inform/educate	Gather information	Discuss	Engage	Partner
<b>Commitment</b>	To inform the public.	To listen to and acknowledge the public's concerns.	To work with the public to exchange information, ideas and concerns.	To seek advice and innovations from and amongst various public parties	To work with the public to implement agreed-upon decisions.
<b>Objective</b>	To provide balanced and objective information to support understanding by the public.	To obtain feedback on analysis, alternatives and/ or decisions.	To work with the public to ensure that concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.	To facilitate discussions and agreements between public parties to identify common ground for action and solutions.	To create governance structures to delegate decision making and/or work directly with the public.

**Table 5: Public participation steps, objectives and commonly used tools**

<b>Steps in Decision-Making Process</b>	<b>Objectives of Participation</b>	<b>Examples of Participation Tools</b>
Identify the problem and decision needed	To understand background and decision to be made	Press release, website announcement
Undertake research	To receive information about	Issue paper, presentation

	issues to be addressed	
Establish decision parameters/ performance objectives	To understand decision parameters and performance objectives	Open house, public meeting
Develop options	To discuss issues and concerns and contribute to potential solutions	Workshop, online forum
Evaluate options	To receive feedback on options	Survey, telephone interviews
Decide	To communicate decision and how participation inputs were used	Letter, website announcement

## 12.2 Appendix B: Survey Questions

1. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Age- please circle:

18-35

36-59

60+

3. Ethnicity- In your own words, what is your race or ethnicity?

\_\_\_\_\_ Prefer not to answer

4. Place of residence- please circle:

Alert Bay 'Namgis First Nation land (on Cormorant Island) Whe-la-la-u

Regional District/Sandyville (on Cormorant Island) Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. What methods of communication do you currently use? Circle all that apply.

Mail	Post Office bulletin board	Brochure/flyer at Village Office
Radio	North Island Gazette	Alert Bay Echo monthly newsletter
TV	Telephone	Facebook
Alert Bay website	Email	Text messages
Twitter	YouTube	

Other community bulletin board (write locations): \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. For each type of communication, what is your preferred way to receive news or information from the Village of Alert Bay?

Please check any that apply.

a. Recycling and garbage pickup, transfer station hours

\_\_\_By mail

\_\_\_Radio

\_\_\_Text to your cell phone

\_\_\_Post Office bulletin board

\_\_\_Telephone

\_\_\_Twitter

\_\_\_Other community board

\_\_\_TV

\_\_\_Youtube

\_\_\_Flyer at Village Office

\_\_\_Village website

\_\_\_Alert Bay Echo newsletter

\_\_\_Email

\_\_\_Other: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_North Island Gazette

\_\_\_Facebook

\_\_\_Not interested in this

b. Spring Clean-Up

c. Village Office, Campground, Visitor Centre hours

d. Village job openings and training opportunities

- e. Request for proposals (such as construction projects)
- f. Animal and business license renewal
- g. Regular recreation programming (yoga, karate, bowling)
- h. Special entertainment/recreation events (magic show, roller skating, Canada Day)
- i. Volunteer events (village clean-up, trail clean-up, gardening)
- j. Cormorant Island current events (credit union information, ferry closures, etc.)

K-N ALERT BAY CITIZENS ONLY:

- k. Municipal elections
- l. Village open houses and public consultations
- m. Council agendas (how do you want to know what Council will be discussing?)
- n. Council decisions, including fees and charges bylaws, zoning, etc.

7. Would you like more or less information about the following subjects:

- |   |                               |                                      |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Recycling and garbage pick-up                     | <input type="checkbox"/> more | <input type="checkbox"/> same amount | <input type="checkbox"/> less |
| Transfer station/landfill hours and events        | <input type="checkbox"/> more | <input type="checkbox"/> same amount | <input type="checkbox"/> less |
| Village office/campground/visitor centre hours    | <input type="checkbox"/> more | <input type="checkbox"/> same amount | <input type="checkbox"/> less |
| Village/town job openings                         | <input type="checkbox"/> more | <input type="checkbox"/> same amount | <input type="checkbox"/> less |
| Village/town request for proposals                | <input type="checkbox"/> more | <input type="checkbox"/> same amount | <input type="checkbox"/> less |
| Animal/business license renewal                   | <input type="checkbox"/> more | <input type="checkbox"/> same amount | <input type="checkbox"/> less |
| Regular recreation programming                    | <input type="checkbox"/> more | <input type="checkbox"/> same amount | <input type="checkbox"/> less |
| Village special entertainment/recreation events   | <input type="checkbox"/> more | <input type="checkbox"/> same amount | <input type="checkbox"/> less |
| Volunteer events (trail clean-up etc.)            | <input type="checkbox"/> more | <input type="checkbox"/> same amount | <input type="checkbox"/> less |
| Current events (credit union closure, etc.)       | <input type="checkbox"/> more | <input type="checkbox"/> same amount | <input type="checkbox"/> less |
| Taxes   | <input type="checkbox"/> more | <input type="checkbox"/> same amount | <input type="checkbox"/> less |
| Utilities   | <input type="checkbox"/> more | <input type="checkbox"/> same amount | <input type="checkbox"/> less |
| Village open houses and public consultations      | <input type="checkbox"/> more | <input type="checkbox"/> same amount | <input type="checkbox"/> less |
| Spring clean-up                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> more | <input type="checkbox"/> same amount | <input type="checkbox"/> less |
| Council agendas (what Council will be discussing) | <input type="checkbox"/> more | <input type="checkbox"/> same amount | <input type="checkbox"/> less |
| Council decisions including bylaws                | <input type="checkbox"/> more | <input type="checkbox"/> same amount | <input type="checkbox"/> less |
| Municipal elections                               | <input type="checkbox"/> more | <input type="checkbox"/> same amount | <input type="checkbox"/> less |

8. If the Village had any of the following ways for you to give feedback, would you use them?  
Circle any that apply.

Yearly survey

Suggestion box

Dedicated Facebook forum

Twitter

Informal “town hall” or lunch meetings with Mayor and/or Councillors

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Have you ever used the Village of Alert Bay’s website? Why or why not?
10. Have you ever used the Village of Alert Bay’s Facebook page? Why or why not?
11. Do you read the Alert Bay newsletter, the Echo? Why or why not?
12. Would you like to read about Alert Bay news such as Council business in the North Island Gazette?
13. What was the last Council meeting you attended? Why did you attend it?
14. What would make you want to become more involved in Council and Council decisions?  
Volunteering (gardening, trail clean-up, Village clean-up)? Recreation programming (participating or volunteering)?
15. Did you hear about the Official Community Plan review process this spring and summer? Do you know what the official community plan is? Did you attend an open house or give the Village your feedback in any way? Why or why not?
16. In the last 6 months, has there been an occasion where you missed a Village event or a deadline because you did not receive news about it or because the information provided was incomplete?  
Please provide details:
17. Do you have any other suggestions or comments about how the Village of Alert Bay communicates with you?

## **12.3 Appendix C: Interview Questions**

### **12.3.1 Interview Questions Group 3**

1. Do you feel that residents know about the programs and services you offer?
2. What programs and services do you have the most trouble disseminating to people? Why?
3. How do your citizens engage with Council? Do you hold “town hall” meetings or other informal meetings with Council? Are your Council meetings televised?
4. Are you satisfied with the feedback that you get from residents? (Do you get feedback about your programs, policies and services? Is it constructive?) How do you get most of your feedback?
5. Does your municipality have any demographic or other characteristics that affect communications practices (e.g. high seniors’ population, poor computer access)?
6. If so, what have you done to better serve that population or address the problem?
7. How else do you communicate with your citizens/other interested groups? About Council agendas and Council decisions?
8. Do you provide services only to citizens or to other groups as well? Are your communications the same to citizens and to other groups?
9. How important is your website to your communications? How often do you update it? What kind of service do you have (Telus? Local web designer? In-house?)
10. Do you use Twitter? Facebook? What kinds of messages do you use them for?
11. Do you have a local newspaper?
12. Do you have a newsletter published by the Village/similar organization?
13. How important do you find the local newspaper in communicating with citizens? Are Council meetings and events reported in the paper?
14. Do you survey your residents on a regular basis? How often? What topics?

### **12.3.2 Interview Questions Group 1**

1. What does the public ask you about when you are at work?
2. Is there a better way for them to get that information?
3. What does the public complain about?
4. Is there a better way for them to get their feedback to Council/the office?
5. What are the biggest problems with Village communications practices, in your opinion?
6. How do you think we can improve communications to make your job easier?
7. Is there any medium of communication that you would not want to use at work?

### **12.3.3 Interview Questions Group 2**

1. What kind of organization are you? (Non-profit, business, etc.)
2. What is your relationship with the Village of Alert Bay? (Service provider, service user, etc.)
3. What information do you depend on the Village of Alert Bay for?
4. How do you get that information?
5. Are there any problems with that communication?
6. Is there a better way for you to get that information?
7. Would you find a yearly survey, suggestion box, Facebook forum, Twitter, or informal Council sessions useful for giving the Village feedback?

8. Do you have any other comments about how we can improve communications with you?
9. Would you be interested in collaborating with the Village of Alert Bay when there are messages that your organization is also interested in disseminating?
10. How would you see that collaboration working?

## 12.4 Appendix D: Cost of Communications Mediums

This table lists communications costs, specific to the Village of Alert Bay. The most expensive and time-consuming communications mediums are shaded grey.

**Table 6: Cost of communications mediums**

Communications medium	Cost (\$)	Staff time	Comments
Mail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$90 for mailout to all 550 PO boxes</li> <li>• \$0.85 per lettermail item</li> <li>• Paper, toner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create flyer</li> <li>• Stuff and stamp envelopes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mailout goes to all Cormorant Island residents, not just Village citizens</li> <li>• Lettermail better to target citizens, but costlier and time-consuming</li> </ul>
Bulletin board		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create poster</li> <li>• Maintain bulletin board</li> </ul>	
Email		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create automated sign-up</li> <li>• Create template</li> <li>• Create message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More staff time required for set-up than ongoing use</li> </ul>
Newsletter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper, toner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-3 days staff time per month: write, format, solicit content, fold, deliver</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost and time dependent on number of pages</li> </ul>
Telephone		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dependent on number of people called; can be very time-consuming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not feasible except for emergencies, without automated calling service</li> </ul>
Facebook		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor daily</li> <li>• Update daily-weekly</li> </ul>	
Flyers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create flyer</li> </ul>	
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yearly maintenance fee \$190-250 (USD exchange rate dependent)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update daily-weekly</li> </ul>	
North Island Gazette	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$\$\$ for ads, free for submissions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create submission</li> </ul>	
Twitter		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create tweet</li> <li>• Monitor daily</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Twitter expected to require less</li> </ul>

			monitoring than Facebook due to lower island usage
Suggestion box	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical box, maintenance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check regularly</li> <li>Respond/react to suggestions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need response protocol</li> </ul>
Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paper, toner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create survey</li> <li>Test survey</li> <li>Create online version</li> <li>Analyze data</li> <li>Report to public, Council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creates survey fatigue</li> <li>Creates expectation of action</li> </ul>
Town hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refreshments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After-hours staff time</li> <li>Location, material reparation</li> <li>Report/follow-up to public, Council</li> </ul>	

## 12.5 Appendix E: Communications Mediums

**Table 7: Recommended use of communications mediums**

Legend: C=Council news, E=Events, I=Island news, J=Job postings, R=Recreation

Medium	Details	Distribution method	Ideal for:
Facebook	Village page Event pages Community pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write/share post</li> <li>Post multimedia</li> <li>Create event page</li> </ul>	E I J R
Flyer		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Available in Village Office</li> </ul>	E R
MailChimp	Email mailing list	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Customer subscription via website to topics of interest</li> </ul>	C E I J R
'Namgis First Nation	Weekly newsletter Monthly newsletter Facebook page	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contact 'Namgis communications department</li> </ul>	E I J R
North Island Gazette	Weekly regional paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hot Spots North Island events</li> <li>Local correspondent</li> <li>Written submission e.g. Mayor's message</li> <li>Paid advertising</li> </ul>	C E I J
Poster		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Post office bulletin board</li> <li>Shoprite bulletin board</li> <li>Drugstore bulletin board</li> <li>Visitor centre case</li> <li>Email to neighbouring communities/organizations to post</li> </ul>	E J R
Radio	Local station in Port Hardy CFNI 1240 AM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contact radio station</li> </ul>	E I
Twitter	Village account	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>140-character "tweet"</li> </ul>	E I J R
Village newsletter	Monthly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paper copies available in post office lobby, Village Office</li> <li>Email distribution list</li> <li>Post on website</li> <li>Delivery to Shoprite, drug store, ferry waiting room, visitor centre, health centre</li> <li>Mail to neighbouring municipalities</li> </ul>	C E I J R
Website	Event calendar News item	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create event listing</li> <li>Write news post</li> <li>Update banner</li> </ul>	C E I J R

	Announcement banner		
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## 12.6 Appendix F: Evaluation Criteria

**Table 8: Recommended evaluation criteria for 2016 communications goals**

Communications priority	Goal	Evaluation criteria
Improve internal communications	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Present communications strategy to staff and Council.</li> <li>2. Identify and implement internal communications infrastructure and timelines for communicating with staff. Identify and implement internal communications infrastructure and timelines for communicating with Council.</li> <li>3. Ensure that each staff and Council member knows how their role contributes to the vision and success of the Village.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Has there been a presentation of the communications strategy to staff and Council? Has there been an opportunity to review the strategy with each person?</li> <li>2. Has internal communications infrastructure for staff been identified and implemented? Are staff satisfied with communications (SURVEY)? Has internal communications infrastructure for Council been identified and implemented? Is Council satisfied with communications (SURVEY)?</li> <li>3. Has the CAO or Mayor spoken with each staff and Council member about their role? Do staff and Council feel they understand how their role contributes to organizational success (SURVEY)?</li> </ol>
Make external communications more intentional	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Make Facebook page an “organization” page.</li> <li>2. Put social media policies on Facebook page.</li> <li>3. Customer service workshop for all staff, emphasizing positive, intentional communication.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Has the Facebook page been deleted and replaced with an “organization” page?</li> <li>2. Are the Village’s social media policies visible on the Facebook page?</li> <li>3. Have all staff attended a customer service workshop? Do staff understand how positive customer service improves public image (SURVEY)?</li> </ol>
Make external communications more consistent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Set timelines for all external communications, including email responses, FOI requests, newsletter release, website update, Facebook and Twitter monitoring, and pre/post Council meeting messages.</li> <li>2. Identify steps for responding to</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Have timelines been set for these messages? Are the appropriate staff members aware of the timelines? What is the percentage of communications that meet the timelines?</li> <li>2. Is there a written policy on how to handle complicated customer requests? Are the appropriate staff aware of it? Has the Village explained the appropriate process (and legislation) to each customer with a complicated request? Does the Village generally meet the estimated timelines for</li> </ol>

	<p>complicated customer requests, including estimation of timelines and explanation of process.</p> <p>3. Consistently post information in the same places by following Appendix F table.</p>	<p>completing customer requests?</p> <p>3. Do the appropriate staff members have a copy of Appendix F? In a random review of each type of message, is the Village following Appendix F?</p>
Develop communications content	<p>1. Develop before- and after- Council meeting messages to inform public about agenda and decisions.</p> <p>2. Advertise for community member(s) to contribute to newsletter and website.</p> <p>3. Develop newsletter and website content describing roles of specific staff and Council positions, and capacities of the Village.</p>	<p>1. Does the Village produce before- and after- Council meeting messages regarding agenda and decisions? Are they audience-friendly and released in a timely and consistent fashion? Are they released via all appropriate mediums?</p> <p>2. Has the Village regularly produced audience-friendly advertisements looking for contributors? Has the Village solicited content from specific community members if there was little response? Are there more community members contributing to the newsletter and website?</p> <p>3. Is there newsletter and website content describing these positions and Village capacities?</p>
Increase communications capacity	<p>1. Develop volunteer appreciation program, including an annual event and ongoing recognition.</p> <p>2. Develop communications contact list for media and partner organizations.</p> <p>3. Set up email sign-up lists on website for job postings/contracts, recreation, special events, and Council messages, in addition to current newsletter sign-up.</p>	<p>1. Is there a volunteer appreciation program, including an annual event and ongoing recognition? Was there an anonymous survey after the event to measure volunteer satisfaction?</p> <p>2. Is there an updated communications contact list for media and partner organizations? Do the appropriate staff members have the list?</p> <p>3. Does the website have these email sign-up lists? Is content sent out each month, at a minimum, for each list? Is content audience-friendly? Does it link back to the website?</p>