



Town of Garner Strategic Communications Plan

*Adopted by the Town Council
April 2017*



garnernc.gov

INTRODUCTION

THE TOWN OF GARNER HAS MADE remarkable advances in its communications capacities and efforts since it hired its first full-time communications professional in October 2010. Over the last six and a half years, the Town has 1) gained the ability to reach tens of thousands of people per month through a growing variety of means; 2) raised Garner's profile significantly in the region while markedly improving its image; 3) dramatically increased the effectiveness of marketing and promotion of Town events and programming; 4) enhanced the Town's ability to engage residents; 5) become recognized as a leader for its communications initiatives; 6) and won numerous statewide and national communications-related awards, including the All-America City Award.

This Strategic Communications Plan is intended to build on that progress and to provide a roadmap for the Town's communications to continue helping to move Garner forward over the next several years. This new plan establishes multiyear goals, objectives and initiatives that support the Town-wide Strategic Plan (adopted by the Town Council in October 2016). The four goal areas identified in this plan are 1) communications capacities, 2) innovation and efficiency, 3) community engagement and 4) marketing and branding.

The plan assumes that, for the foreseeable future, Town communications will face the dual challenges of a rapidly growing and evolving community and a tumultuous media landscape marked by disruptions but also significant opportunities.

Given this dynamic environment and the fluidity of certain initiatives in this plan, staff has refrained from codifying specific key messages, brand statements or brand promises in this document. All of the Town's communications efforts, however, should relate back to the four goals of the Town-wide Strategic Plan: 1) fiscal responsibility (FR), 2) efficient and timely service delivery (SD), 3) orderly growth (OG) and 4) quality of life (QL). As a result, there is referencing of the Town's Strategic Plan throughout this document's section on goals, objectives and initiatives.

HOW THIS PLAN RELATES TO THE PRECEDING PLAN

THE TOWN COUNCIL ADOPTED the Town of Garner's first Strategic and Crisis Communication Plan in September 2010 and adopted an update in November 2012. That document enshrined numerous important communications policies, including a formal crisis communication policy, and these have guided the Town since the document's original approval.

This new plan does not incorporate those existing policies. The existing Council-approved policies—which remain in effect—will be combined with other Town policies in a project being led by the Town Clerk's Office. (One of the initiatives in this plan, however, is to revisit Town communications policies with an eye toward making appropriate updates and revisions.)

S.W.O.T ANALYSIS OF TOWN COMMUNICATIONS

CURRENT STRENGTHS OF TOWN COMMUNICATIONS

- Established public information program headed by accomplished professional
- Advanced communications means and capacities now in place
- Town communications have broad reach thanks to array of platforms and capacities.
- Town consistently produces award-winning work
- Highly effective ability to craft appropriate messaging for successful initiatives
- Strong, highly productive relationship with PEG Media Partners
- Good in-house talent and communications initiatives in various departments with overall coordination through communications manager
- Growing understanding and appreciation within Town government of the importance of effective communications and marketing

CURRENT WEAKNESSES OF TOWN COMMUNICATIONS

- Lack of adequate staff to meet communications needs and to further ability of communications manager to focus on bigger-picture strategic work
- Inconsistency in the look and feel of some Town publications and other communications materials
- Lack of a brand strategy and brand identity rooted in meaningful research and evidence-based understanding of audiences and perceptions of Garner
- Limited ability to reach non-English-speaking residents
- Occasional misunderstanding in community and sometimes within the Town government of the distinction between the mission of a government communications unit and the mission of the privately owned media

OPPORTUNITIES FOR TOWN COMMUNICATIONS

- Organize Town communications capacities and devise appropriate strategies to mold Town communications into a more cohesive whole
- Use Town's/PEG Media's strengths in video production to reach audiences across multiple platforms
- Support communications division with understanding that it is a way of helping all Town departments to achieve their goals and initiatives
- Use market research to create comprehensive brand strategy and brand identity with suitable messaging to achieve marketing goals
- Capitalize on partnerships in region to more effectively market Garner
- Enhance partnerships in community to become better at reaching all segments of the community
- Improve outreach to underrepresented parts of the community, including non-English-speaking residents

KNOWN AND ANTICIPATED THREATS TO TOWN COMMUNICATIONS

- Diminished capacity of community newspaper to cover the community
- Pressure on Town staff to perform communications and marketing duties not appropriate to mission of Town government
- Residents getting information from sources that are not credible and accurate
- Marketing and branding efforts not rooted in accurate assumptions and lacking in adequate information and evidence to support successful initiatives
- Community growth overwhelms ability to provide adequate service



GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND INITIATIVES

COMMUNICATIONS CAPACITIES

GOAL STATEMENT: Continue to build the Town's communications channels and overall reach (QL 2.3)

OBJECTIVE 1: Grow Town's social media followings, engagement and reach

- **INITIATIVE 1:** Continue using analytics to make decisions about what to post and when and to better understand our followings
- **INITIATIVE 2:** Better coordinate posts across all Town social media properties using content calendar and other strategies
- **INITIATIVE 3:** Continue strategic use of advertising to promote or "boost" posts

OBJECTIVE 2: Create new communications products and update existing ones

- **INITIATIVE 1:** Refine and enhance website content
- **INITIATIVE 2:** Examine possibility of using blogs to reach both general and some targeted audiences
- **INITIATIVE 3:** Evaluate print and electronic publications and determine how well they meet our existing and emerging communications needs

OBJECTIVE 3: Explore new ways to maximize use of award-winning video capabilities

- **INITIATIVE 1:** Produce short videos with Town departments to meet specific needs and reach specific audiences
- **INITIATIVE 2:** Continue and build up new series of videos on Garner schools to enhance their image
- **INITIATIVE 3:** Create videos that are more journalistic in nature (e.g. videos about public safety issues in community)

OBJECTIVE 4: Use data-driven approaches to communication when possible

- **INITIATIVE 1:** Continue using Google Analytics to discern trends and key information about how visitors are using website
- **INITIATIVE 2:** Take advantage of GPAC ticket sales data to learn more about how we reach audiences
- **INITIATIVE 3:** Obtain research to develop brand strategy and brand identity

OBJECTIVE 5: Build and maintain strong relationships with regional and community partners (SD Objective 1)

- **INITIATIVE 1:** Continue working with Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau on visitors guide advertorial and other promotional opportunities for Garner

- **INITIATIVE 2:** Make additional use of League of Municipalities Here We Grow website to promote bond program and other initiatives
- **INITIATIVE 3:** Continue partnering with Chamber of Commerce and other stakeholders in Garner to promote events, educate residents and market Garner
- **INITIATIVE 4:** Continue working to get media coverage of positive stories in Garner



INNOVATION AND EFFICIENCY

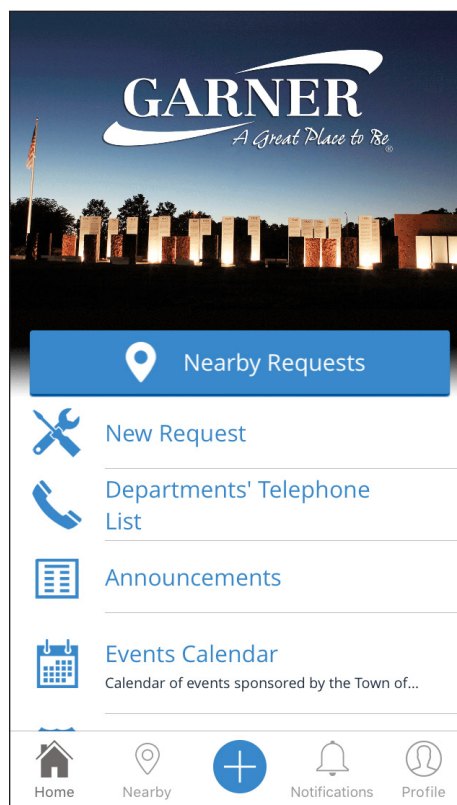
GOAL STATEMENT: Identify and implement new technologies and communications platforms that are appropriate to Town needs (SD 2.3)

OBJECTIVE 1: Explore more extensive use of online/cloud-based tools to efficiently produce graphics, publications and other communications products

- **INITIATIVE 1:** Expand use of online apps (free or low-cost) to do graphics and design
- **INITIATIVE 2:** Learn more about advanced capabilities of website's content management system, especially as they might relate to e-notifications and blogging
- **INITIATIVE 3:** Use latest apps and other technologies to produce quick videos "on the fly"
- **INITIATIVE 4:** Explore viability of live streaming of news and events

OBJECTIVE 2: Use emerging technologies and faster internet service to enhance access to government information (SD 4.2)

- **INITIATIVE 1:** Once internet service allows, find way to live stream and/or live broadcast Town Council meetings
- **INITIATIVE 2:** Explore possibility of creating "open-data" system that would allow residents to obtain raw data from Town
- **INITIATIVE 3:** Stay abreast of latest trends and developments that enable better engagement with residents
- **INITIATIVE 4:** Find ways to better utilize garner info app



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

GOAL STATEMENT: *Inform and educate residents and promote ways for residents of all backgrounds to become involved in Town decision-making processes (QL Objectives 2 and 3)*

OBJECTIVE 1: Keep residents informed about bond program (FR 1.2)

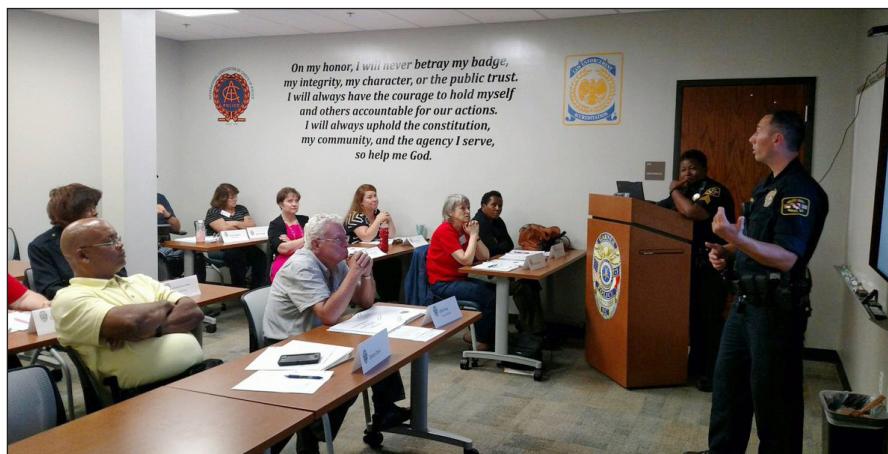
- **INITIATIVE 1:** Maintain bonds pages on website, including embedded Google map that offers overview of bond projects
- **INITIATIVE 2:** Use video and social media to keep residents abreast of latest bond program developments
- **INITIATIVE 3:** Hold events that celebrate major milestones in bond program

OBJECTIVE 2: Support and encourage an active and engaged citizenry (QL Objective 2)

- **INITIATIVE 1:** Offer opportunities for residents to be better educated about and participate in local government (QL 2.1)
- **INITIATIVE 2:** Promote opportunities to participate on boards and commissions (QL 2.2)

OBJECTIVE 3: Embrace diversity and be responsive to the changing demographics of the community (QL Objective 3)

- **INITIATIVE 1:** Engage underrepresented communities and entrepreneurs (QL 3.1)
- **INITIATIVE 2:** Encourage broad-based participation in educational, civic and leadership opportunities (QL 3.3)
- **INITIATIVE 3:** Support Town departments—in particular the Police Department and Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department—in outreach efforts to all segments of the community (QL 1.1)



MARKETING AND BRANDING

GOAL STATEMENT: Create outstanding communications products and messaging that enhance Garner's image and achieve greater consistency (OG 3.2, 3.3; QL 2.3)

OBJECTIVE 1: Continue and enhance marketing and promotion of Garner in the Triangle region and beyond (OG 3.2, QL 2.3)

- **INITIATIVE 1:** Explore ways in which a research-based approach could improve Garner's branding and marketing efforts
- **INITIATIVE 2:** Refine and revise key messages for both the community and the Town government
- **INITIATIVE 3:** Look for new opportunities (paid and free) to promote Garner
- **INITIATIVE 4:** Extend Town's track record of producing award-winning products that enhance Garner's image and profile
- **INITIATIVE 5:** Determine staffing level and skill sets needed to meet the quantitative and qualitative challenges in effectively branding and marketing Garner
- **INITIATIVE 6:** Assist employees and residents in becoming Garner's brand ambassadors.

OBJECTIVE 2: Achieve more consistency in Town's communications materials and messaging

- **INITIATIVE 1:** Attain greater cohesiveness in print and electronic materials
- **INITIATIVE 2:** Continue to pursue training opportunities for staff in various departments who communicate with public
- **INITIATIVE 3:** Revisit existing communications policies and make any necessary revisions or updates

OBJECTIVE 3: Support Economic Development in bolstering the Town's competitiveness for regional economic activity and marketing product inventory (OG 3.2, 3.3)

- **INITIATIVE 1:** Produce videos to meet department's marketing needs
- **INITIATIVE 2:** Produce print and electronic publications to continue promoting Garner as a great place to live, work and play
- **INITIATIVE 3:** Assist in creating presentation materials and other materials Economic Development may need for specific purposes
- **INITIATIVE 4:** Collaborate with Garner Revitalization Association and downtown development manager to promote their initiatives and events

OBJECTIVE 4: Support PRCR (including GPAC) in marketing and promotion of events, programming and facilities (QL Objective 4)

- **INITIATIVE 1:** Work with GPAC staff to hone strategies for promoting shows (QL 4.3)
- **INITIATIVE 2:** Partner with PRCR staff to educate residents about Garner Recreation Center programming
- **INITIATIVE 3:** Finish creating facilities and parks videos and update as needed
- **INITIATIVE 4:** Continue working with PRCR staff to assist in marketing and promotions as needed
- **INITIATIVE 5:** Work with PRCR to create, produce and distribute videos and other marketing materials for the Town's signature special events

APPENDIX A

TOWN'S POTENTIAL AUDIENCES

- Town residents
- Traditional broadcast and print media
- Non-traditional media (such as bloggers)
- Town elected officials
- Town employees
- Local business community (including Chamber members)
- Residents of the region
- Visitors
- People who might attend a Town event or participate in Town programming
- Community organizations
- Businesses potentially relocating to Garner
- Residents potentially moving to Garner
- Town's regional partners in economic development, planning, lobbying and providing services (e.g. Wake County Economic Development, CAMPO, N.C. League of Municipalities, City of Raleigh Public Utilities)
- Regional and statewide marketing and promotional organizations (e.g. Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau)
- Audiences accessible through social media

APPENDIX B

TOWN'S COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS AND ASSETS

- Meetings
- Social media
- Emails/email blasts
- Town of Garner website
- Videos (online)
- Public, educational and governmental (PEG) channel
- NextDoor.com
- Town of Garner citizen newsletter
- Posters, signs and flyers
- garner info app
- Town of Garner Intranet site (for employees only)
- Newspaper articles and ads
- Presentations
- News releases
- Letters
- Publications (reports, guides, brochures, booklets, etc.)
- Handouts at meetings
- Banners
- Blogs
- Door hangers
- Town employees and residents
- Elected officials
- Television PSAs /news/commercials
- Radio ads and PSAs
- Garner 101, Citizens Police Academy and Citizens Leadership Academy
- Neighborhood Watch and other neighborhood-based groups
- Mass mailings/direct mail
- Reverse 911 call with recorded message
- Promotional items (pens, magnets, etc.)
- Regional/national/international media
- Special events (informational booths, announcements, etc.)
- Utility bill inserts

Stay Connected!



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