



## CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP CITY OF BAY CITY

Tuesday, January 28, 2025 at 5:00 PM  
COUNCIL CHAMBERS | 1901 5th Street

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### COUNCIL MEMBERS

**Mayor:** Robert K. Nelson

**Mayor Pro Tem:** Becca Sitz

**Council Members:** Benjamin Flores, Jim Folse, Bradley Westmoreland, Blayne Finlay

#### Vision Statement

We envision Bay City as a thriving, family-centered community where our citizens can live, work, worship, and play, while welcoming visitors to experience our beautiful environment and diverse culture.

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### AGENDA

**THE FOLLOWING ITEM WILL BE ADDRESSED AT THIS OR ANY OTHER MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL UPON THE REQUEST OF THE MAYOR, ANY MEMBER(S) OF COUNCIL AND/OR THE CITY ATTORNEY:**

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE MAYOR THAT COUNCIL WILL RETIRE INTO CLOSED SESSION FOR CONSULTATION WITH CITY ATTORNEY ON MATTERS IN WHICH THE DUTY OF THE ATTORNEY TO THE CITY COUNCIL UNDER THE TEXAS DISCIPLINARY RULES OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT OF THE STATE BAR OF TEXAS CLEARLY CONFLICTS WITH THE OPEN MEETINGS ACT (TITLE 5, CHAPTER 551, SECTION 551.071(2) OF THE TEXAS GOVERNMENT CODE).

### CALL TO ORDER AND CERTIFICATION OF QUORUM

### PUBLIC COMMENTS

### REGULAR ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION, CONSIDERATION AND/OR APPROVAL

1. **Presentation ~ Receive and discuss Communications Assessment.** Samantha Denbow, Communications and Cultural Arts Director & Cooksey Communications

### ADJOURNMENT

### AGENDA NOTICES:

**Attendance By Other Elected or Appointed Officials:** It is anticipated that members of other city board, commissions and/or committees may attend the meeting in numbers that may constitute a quorum of the other city boards, commissions and/or committees. Notice is hereby given that the meeting, to the extent required by law, is also noticed as a meeting of the other boards, commissions and/or committees of the City, whose members may be in attendance. The members of the boards, commissions and/or committees may participate in discussions on the same items listed on the agenda, which occur at the meeting, but no action will be taken by such in attendance unless such item and action is specifically provided for on an agenda for that board, commission or committee subject to the Texas Open Meetings Act.

### CERTIFICATION OF POSTING

This is to certify that the above notice of a Regular Called Council Meeting was posted on the front window of the City Hall of the City of Bay City, Texas on **January 25, 2025 before 5:00 p.m.** Any questions concerning the above items, please contact the Mayor and City Manager's office at (979) 245-2137.



**CITY OF BAY CITY**  
1901 FIFTH STREET  
BAY CITY, TEXAS 77414  
(979) 245-2137  
FAX: (979) 323-1626

## AGENDA ITEM SUBMISSION FORM

Any item(s) to be considered for action by the City Council, must be included on this form, and be submitted along with any supporting documentation. Completed Agenda Item Submission forms must be submitted to the City Secretary's Office no later than 4:00 p.m. on the Monday of the week prior to the Regular Council meeting.

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**Requestor Name:** Denbow, Samantha **Date Submitted:** 1/16/2024  
*Last, First* *MM/DD/YYYY*

**Requestor Type :** City Staff **Meeting Date:** 1/28/2024  
*Citizen/City Staff/Council Member* *MM/DD/YYYY*

**Position Title** Communications and Cultural Arts Director  
*For City Staff Only*

**Agenda Location:** Workshop - Presentation  
*(e.g.: Consent Agenda/ Discussion Item/ Public Hearing/ Executive Session/ Presentation)*

**Agenda Content:**

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**Presentation – Receive and discuss Communications Assessment.**

**Executive Summary of Item:**

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As part of Strategic Plan Goal 2: Community and Civic Engagement, Cooksey Communications was contracted to conduct a Communications Assessment for the City of Bay City as part of the process of recruiting a Public Information Officer.



cooksey

# Bay City Communications Assessment

January 28, 2025



cooksey

# Cooksey Communications

2024 Small Agency of the Year | Public Relations Society of America, Dallas Chapter

## Project Team:

- Dorothy White, Assistant Vice President Public Sector Practice Group
- Tom Bryson, Vice President Public Sector Practice Group
- Haaris Ahmed, Assistant Account Executive
- Collin Yoxall, Account Supervisor

# Good Communications = Good Strategy

In support of Bay City's vision and mission and the Core Values of Integrity, Excellence and Transparency, City leadership seeks to improve its communications and engagement with its residents, businesses and visitors

These efforts directly support Strategic Plan Goal 2: Community and Civic Engagement



# Project Objectives

1. Evaluation of current communications-related operations, resources and technology
2. Identification of gaps and opportunities
3. Identification of skill inventories for communications staff
4. Proposing strategies and tactics for creating a successful communications organizational structure
5. Proposing strategic deployment of required resources and technology
6. Developing quantifiable metrics for ongoing evaluation



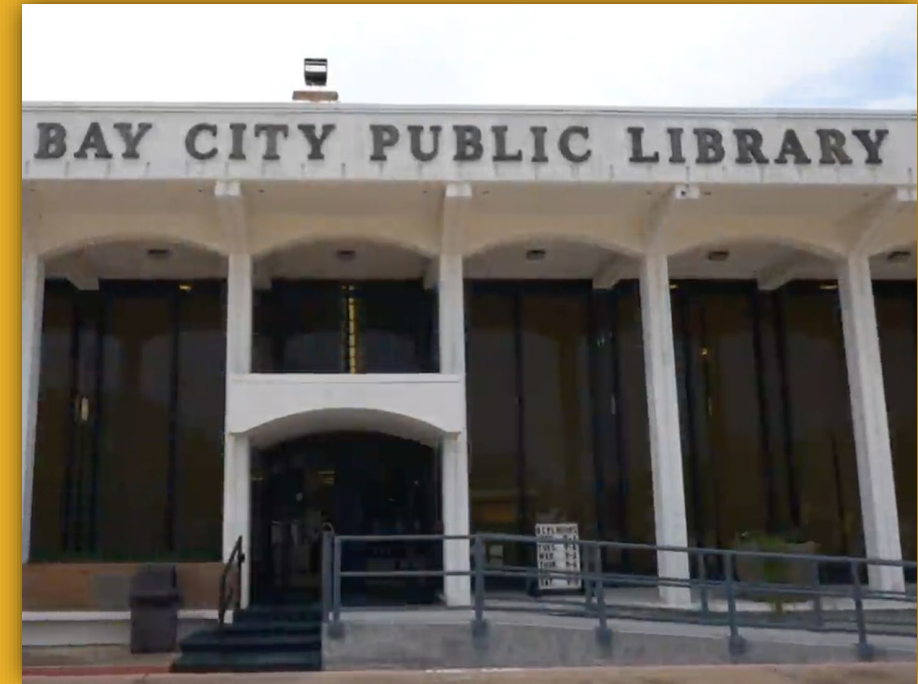
# Methodology

- Benchmarking Research of Peer & Aspirational Cities
- Communications Channels Analysis
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Ongoing Update Meetings with City Representative



# Situational Analysis

- The City has worked to improve its capabilities to communicate with its residents and businesses during situations specific to City functions and services
- However, many communications functions are still decentralized, particularly those related to day-to-day activities and special events



# Situational Analysis

- Some departments have developed specific logos with little or no visual or messaging connectivity to the overall organization
- It is important to note that these departments have good communicators, and their expertise and engaged audiences should support efforts to improve the overall communications program



# Benchmarking

- In consultation with the Bay City team, peer/aspirational cities were selected for comparative purposes
- Three Texas cities were selected that were similar in size (peer) or with more structured communications operations (aspirational):
  - **Anna** | Pop. 16,896
  - **Angleton** | Pop. 19,429
  - **Hurst** | Pop. 40,413
- Additional data from **Mont Belvieu** (Pop. 7,654) comes from Cooksey's exclusive 2024 Insights Index survey



# Benchmarking Takeaways

- Benchmarking respondents indicated the primary under-communicated audiences were consistently older adults (often not digital users) and non-English speakers
- Several respondents indicated that their departmental size and capacity have grown to better meet community needs
- Several have employees who wear multiple hats, and several utilize contractors to support communications operations



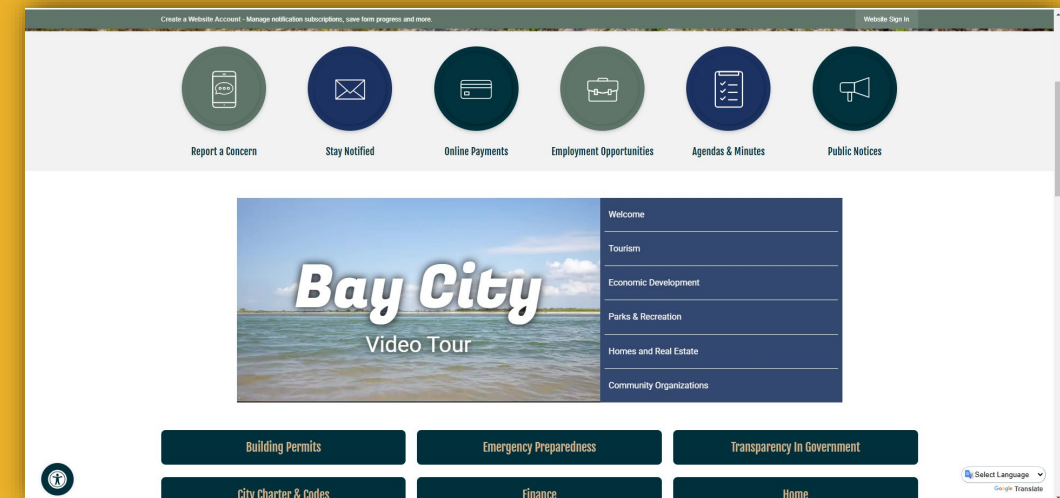
# Benchmarking Takeaways

- Many respondents utilize brand guides, strategic communications plans, online surveys, translation tools and graphic design programs to improve their communications outputs and results
- Most respondents indicated their municipality had 10 or more social media accounts, not all of which are managed by the Communications Department



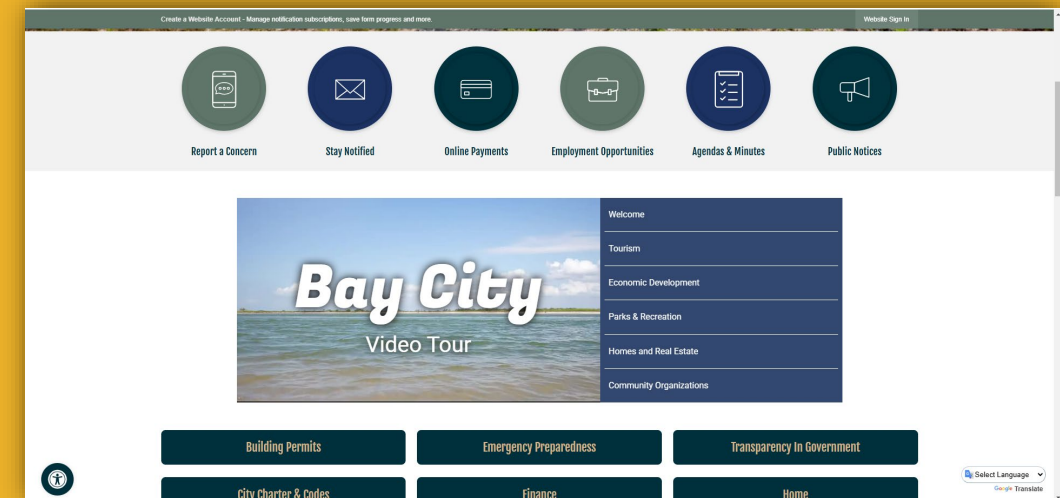
# Channels Analysis

- Communication pieces from the City lack a consistent brand or “voice”
- Social media graphics are often too busy, messaging is inconsistent and not optimized for specific channels
- We saw several inactive social media accounts that should be re-utilized or discarded



# Channels Analysis

- City website content should be reorganized to prominently feature the most-requested or higher-priority information
- Website photos should also feature more people and not just scenery



# Interview Takeaways

- Residents need to feel confident in the City's ability to provide useful, accurate information, whether related to an emergency or day-to-day needs
- A more centralized model could facilitate more consistent, professional writing and tone for the City
- The City lacks a brand message or image that reflects its characteristics and values
- The City struggles to reach non-English speakers and non-digital audiences



# Interview Takeaways

- Local newspapers and radio stations should be engaged to help bridge audience gaps
- Employees need to be a prioritized, well-informed audience since they serve as the City's ambassadors to the community
- Bay City should expend more energy in telling its success stories and emphasizing its progress and growth



# Recommendations

1. Conduct a full branding study to create a brand identity and voice for the City government entity and all departments, understanding that such an undertaking requires appropriate time and attention to develop a sustainable brand that will stand the test of time.
2. Create a Strategic Communications Plan to set standards and processes.
3. Empower your Communications Department to be the authority on internal and external communications processes and standards for the City organization.



*Associated with Strategic Goal 2: Community and Civic Engagement, Strategy 1*

# Recommendations

4. Strengthen your arsenal of communications tools by consistently driving the public to a well-maintained website and engaging in locally recognized communications platforms.
5. Review your social media strategies to ensure you're using available platforms to reach target audiences more effectively.
6. Focus on consistent, accessible internal communications to ensure employees have information they can share with residents and customers.



*Associated with Strategic Goal 2: Community and Civic Engagement, Strategy 1*

# Recommendations

7. Hire a primary communications manager with the experience and skills required to command respect from the rest of the organization and to lead the implementation of the updated policies and protocols.
8. Consider future staff or contract positions to meet the organization's needs.



*Associated with Strategic Goal 2: Community and Civic Engagement, Strategy 1*

# Questions?







City of Bay City  
**Strategic Communications  
Assessment**

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January 2025



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# Executive Summary

As the seat of Matagorda County, the City of Bay City has a strong historical presence and provides a variety of local attractions and amenities in Bay City itself and the surrounding communities within the county.

The City's vision is to grow its diverse culture through a united and collaborative effort. City leadership envisions a thriving family-centered community where citizens are involved in future development. Bay City wants its citizens to work, play, worship and shop in the community while welcoming visitors to enjoy the friendly environment and amenities that residents and business owners have created. The City states its mission as follows:

***The City of Bay City promotes economic growth and invests in quality-of-life initiatives through collaboration. We respond promptly and professionally to residents' concerns, and strive to deliver superior municipal services.***

In support of this vision and mission and the Core Values of Integrity, Excellence and Transparency, City leadership seeks to improve its communications and engagement with its residents, businesses and visitors. In 2024, the organization began reviewing its current processes and resources for communicating with the community and engaged with Cooksey Communications to assist with this process.

After reviewing current City materials, channels, and survey results, interviewing many stakeholders and conducting benchmark research (outcomes are detailed later in this report), the Cooksey team makes the following recommendations, which are detailed beginning on page 14.

## ■ **Recommendation 1: Conduct a full branding study to create a brand identity and voice for the City government entity and all departments.**

Create a brand identity that can be utilized to support a unified voice for communications, engagement, and marketing and allow each department to highlight its unique function and purpose.

## ■ **Recommendation 2: Create a Strategic Communications Plan to set standards and processes for all departments.**

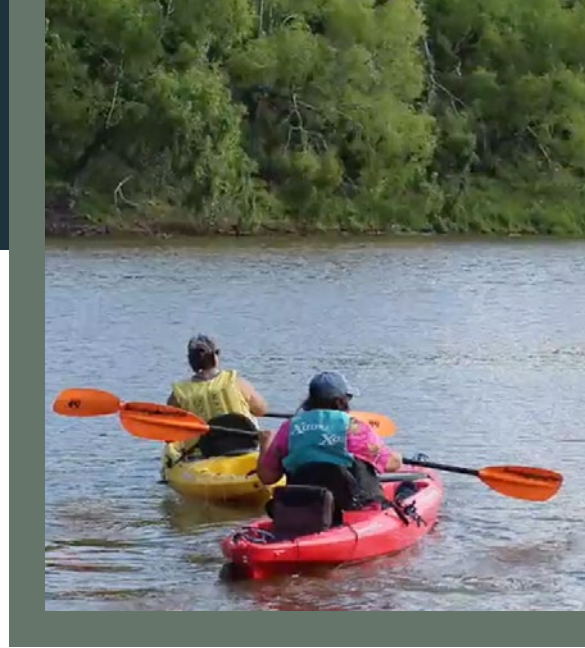
Lay out a prioritized plan for managing messaging and processes throughout the organization that supports the City's overall brand identity and mission.

## ■ **Recommendation 3: Empower your Communications Department to be the authority on internal and external communications processes and standards for the City organization.**

Give the Communications Department the authority to work across departmental lines and with elected officials to create collaborative processes for reviewing and approving communications assets and engagement efforts.

## ■ **Recommendation 4: Strengthen your arsenal of communications tools by consistently driving the public to a well-maintained website and engaging in locally recognized communications platforms.**

Utilize specific communications channels to reach specific target audiences while ensuring that the details of each message/initiative are easily accessible on the City website. Over time, train your audiences to check the website first when they have questions.



■ **Recommendation 5: Review social media strategies to ensure using available and relevant platforms to reach target audiences more effectively.**

Analyze which audiences each channel is reaching and craft messages to better engage each audience. Channels should also be reviewed objectively to consider effectiveness and ongoing purpose.

■ **Recommendation 6: Focus on consistent, accessible internal communications to ensure employees have information they can share with residents and customers.**

Your employees should be your best ambassadors and conduits for informing your community. Prioritize them as an audience and equip them to meet these needs. Many cities fail to value internal communications, but its importance cannot be overemphasized.

■ **Recommendation 7: Hire a primary communications manager with the experience and skills required to command respect from the rest of the organization and to lead the implementation of the updated policies and protocols.**

As the City crafts a job description for this role, to report to the Communications and Cultural Arts Director, pursue the experience and skillsets needed to implement the recommendations and activities detailed in this report.

■ **Recommendation 8: Consider future staff or contract positions to meet the organization's needs.**

As budgets allow, make plans to enhance your staffing to fill gaps in the skillset pool currently available in the organization.



# Charge to the Consultant

In July 2024, the City of Bay City requested a proposal for a strategic communications consultant to conduct an audit of the City's existing communications materials and processes. The intended result was to review its needs to develop a fully staffed, dedicated Communications and Marketing Department, uniting the efforts to generate a report offering a third-party, candid review of the City's communications efforts, staffing, resources, tools, processes and outcomes. This would be accomplished by:

1. Evaluation of current communications-related operations, resources and technology
2. Identification of gaps and opportunities
3. Identification of skill inventories for communications staff
4. Proposing strategies and tactics for creating a successful communications organizational structure
5. Proposing strategic deployment of required resources and technology
6. Developing quantifiable metrics for ongoing evaluation

Based on this analysis, the report would also highlight recommendations to guide the future growth and direction of a newly established communications department.

Upon completion of the assessment, the information and recommendations will be used to update the City's communications policies and procedures and to create various plans to provide the department with strategic and procedural guidance.

## About Cooksey Communications

The City of Bay City engaged Cooksey Communications in August 2024 to conduct the strategic communications assessment and produce all the requested deliverables. The agency was selected based on its proposed approach, cost considerations, strong reputation among municipal communications professionals, and deep bench of expertise in working with Texas municipalities and public entities.



# Methodology

The strategic communications audit efforts began with an initial planning meeting, during which Cooksey's team visited with City Manager Scotty Jones and Samantha Denbow, Director of Communications and Cultural Arts. Cooksey used that initial kickoff meeting as an opportunity to gain insights into the City's communications resources and goals, gather key materials that the City desired the consultant to review (budgets, organization charts, existing community survey data, communications and marketing documents, etc.), discuss key stakeholders who needed to be involved in and interviewed for the project, identify peer/aspirational cities on which benchmarking research needed to be performed and to lay out a process for working together over the succeeding weeks and months.

Subsequent to the initial kickoff meeting, Cooksey developed an even more detailed timeline laying out the project schedule, including when the City could expect key deliverables and milestones from the consultant. The Cooksey team developed a formal list of proposed interviewees (with help from the City in providing names and contact information, as well as grouping recommendations) and a set of questions for each interviewee or group, as well as questions for benchmark entities.

Working together required consistent two-way communication, so the consultant team engaged in a bi-weekly touch-base call or meeting with the Director of Communications and Cultural Arts.

While the consultant team was conducting the interviews and survey, Cooksey reviewed the City-provided communications and marketing materials in great detail and analyzed their quality, impact and message consistency, among other attributes. Additionally, Cooksey conducted primary research to benchmark Bay City's resources and goals against those of several peer or aspirational Texas cities - namely Anna, Angleton and Hurst. In an effort to enhance the efficiency of hours and costs associated with this portion of the project, Cooksey utilized its extensive catalog of recent benchmarking research wherever possible so additional, independent research requirements could be kept to a minimum.



# Situational Analysis

Bay City has been a mainstay of the Texas Gulf Coast region for more than 100 years. Throughout its history, the community has experienced both rapid growth and slowing economic conditions. From 1980 through 2020, the city's population stayed relatively constant. However, in the mid-2020s, Bay City is experiencing growth in the business, industry and residential sectors.

Due to its proximity to the Texas coast of the Gulf of Mexico, a nuclear power plant, and chemical production facilities, the City has depended heavily on Matagorda County resources for communications support in emergency scenarios. The City has worked to improve its capabilities to communicate with its residents and businesses during situations specific to City functions and services.

However, many communications functions are still decentralized, particularly those related to day-to-day activities and special events. Some departments have developed specific logos, with little or no visual or messaging connectivity to the overall organization. It is important to note that there are good communicators among these departments, and their expertise and engaged audiences should be used to support efforts to improve the overall communications program.

Historically, various City departments have managed their own messaging to the community they serve directly, primarily through Facebook. The City also maintained general City channels. Here are the current social media accounts:

#### City of Bay City

- Facebook
- Instagram
- X (Twitter)
- YouTube

#### Bay City Library

- Facebook (two accounts - Bay City Library and Sargent Branch Library)
- Instagram
- YouTube

#### Riverside Park

- Facebook
- Instagram
- X (Twitter)

#### Parks & Recreation

- Facebook
- Instagram
- X (Twitter)

#### Bay City Police Department

- Facebook

#### Bay City Municipal Court

- Facebook

#### Tourism

- Facebook - Visit Bay City and Day of the Dead
- Instagram

During the last year, the City has begun organizing certain resources to better address communications in a coordinated manner by moving Communications, Library, Tourism and Cultural Arts under one director. That director has been proactively working with local government communicators from other cities to learn more about policies, best practices and other improvements.



# Gaps & Opportunities



| GAPS                                                                                                                                  | OPPORTUNITIES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Lack of consistent brand identity</b>                                                                                              | A few departments have created logos they use, but the City uses a seal-type logo. A full branding study will help the City develop a brand identity and voice from which key messages, an official logo and other visual branding elements can be derived.                                                                                   |
| <b>Inconsistent or fragmented messaging across different departments</b>                                                              | Grant oversight authority for all city marketing and communications from any department to the Director of Communications or their designee to create collaborative, consistent and strategic messaging. Also, create a central, shareable content calendar to coordinate messaging across departments.                                       |
| <b>Lack of consistent policies, standards and procedures</b>                                                                          | Create an overarching Strategic Communications Plan with supporting policies to guide communications priorities, standards and protocols. Develop and implement a training program for staff and elected officials.                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Difficulty reaching many community audiences due to the use of limited communication channels</b>                                  | Ensure the website is well maintained and offers timely and ongoing information on public needs and frequent requests. Use social channels to drive people to the website for more details. Other communications formats can reference website resources, providing links and/or QR codes.                                                    |
| <b>Communications seem to be mostly Facebook-centric.</b>                                                                             | Consider additional tools and channels to reach various demographics in the community better. Partner with local newspaper(s) and radio to reach those who seek more traditional information sources. Use printed utility bill inserts. Remember to provide and promote in-person opportunities to share City information and resources.      |
| <b>City employees lack information about activities and resources beyond their departments</b>                                        | Develop a regular internal newsletter or other information source to help keep employees updated about internal and external initiatives. Your employees can help share important information with residents they encounter on and off the job. Equip and empower them to do so.                                                              |
| <b>Lack of tools, resources to develop clear "lanes" of responsibility to maximize existing efforts and create a unified program.</b> | Take the time to identify and collaborate with all currently conducting communication/engagement activities on behalf of City departments or functions. Take advantage of their experience in developing a plan to create a more structured, collaborative communications program that consistently represents the City's vision and mission. |

# Peer & Aspirational City Benchmarking

In consultation with the Bay City team, peer/aspirational cities were selected for comparative purposes. Three Texas cities were selected that were similar in size (peer) or with more structured communications operations (aspirational): Anna, Angleton and Hurst. Additional data from Mont Belvieu comes from Cooksey's exclusive 2024 Insights Index survey.

The information to follow summarizes key takeaways from the benchmarking research. The appendix provides a detailed breakdown of responses to benchmarking questions.

Benchmarking respondents found that the primary under-communicated audiences were consistently older adults and non-English speakers. Respondents noted that older populations did not use social media often and would defer to newspapers, traditional television and local radio stations.

Various departments mentioned that they began as small, one to three-person operations that have since grown to include more people and a greater capacity for communications improvements. Many departments still have employees who wear multiple hats within the municipal organization. As some departments have expanded, so has contracting out certain work like video production and graphic design, though some departments choose to keep that in-house.

Social channels that are consistently used include Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. Some respondents mentioned using e-newsletters and quarterly magazines outside social media and a city website, which can be available as physical copies. Across respondents, social media is typically run by one or two individuals.

Some respondents said they did not have a formal review process but instead chose to have their work carefully reviewed by various team members when able. Communications departments would review work like social graphics and releases done by other departments. One respondent did have a formal ticketing system that would organize whether work would be coordinated internally or with outside vendors. Expenses related to services like printing or advertising are the responsibility of the requesting department. While not universal, several respondents mentioned having a formal brand guide or adhering to strict branding guidelines determined by the communications department's employees. The respective communications departments review and approve branding before sharing. Tools to improve a communications department include strategic communications plans, online surveys, translation tools and graphic design programs like Canva.

**Full benchmarking data can be found in the appendix attachments.**



Some respondents shared examples of various policies provided in the appendix.

|                               | Bay City                                                                                                     | Anna                                                                     | Angleton                                                                                    | Hurst                                                           | Mont Belvieu*                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Population</b>             | 17-18,000                                                                                                    | 27,000                                                                   | 20,206                                                                                      | 40,000                                                          | 9,600                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Personnel (in Comms)</b>   | 1 FTE + support from departments                                                                             | 2 FTE + contractors                                                      | 2 FTE + contractors                                                                         | 2 FTE + 2 contractors                                           | 3 FTEs                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Funding (General Fund)</b> | \$137,600**                                                                                                  | \$100,000 (not including salaries)                                       | N/A                                                                                         | \$162,000 (not including salaries)                              | N/A                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Channels</b>               | Website, social media, emergency notification system (phone, text, email), e-newsletter, issue reporting app | Website, social media, e-newsletter, print advertising                   | Social media, city magazine, Genasys Community Notification System, iWorks Ticketing System | e-newsletter, website, utility bill inserts, quarterly magazine | Print newsletter, video programming, news releases, social media, info signage/ displays, text/phone/ email emergency alerts, Citibot AI Chat |
| <b>Social Media</b>           | 26 accounts, 6 handled by communications staff                                                               | 14 social media accounts including Facebook, Instagram, X (just in case) | Three are handled by the communications dept. including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn       | 18 social media channels                                        | 10 social media channels, 6 handled by communications dept.                                                                                   |

\*Mont Belvieu data is from 2024 Cooksey Insights Index survey.

\*\*Estimated first year budget.



# Communications Channels Analysis

## A. Brand and Graphics

Regarding branding and graphics, Bay City's approach needs to be updated. Whether it is the City's logo, internal human resources newsletters, press releases or parks documentation, Bay City uses different branding and brand standards, with little connective tissue between them. Bay City would benefit from a more professional look while maintaining an authentic, local tone. For example, graphics were often done in Microsoft Word Art. While this is not unusual for a smaller organization, these resources are useful but lack the professional look and tone that should be used in municipal communications. Likewise, infographics, meant for easy consumption by the public, should be more visually appealing and of higher quality than much of what we saw during our analysis.

The City should consider a branding study to determine an effective, memorable brand that reflects its best traits and creates an easily recognized look. Then, it should empower communication staff members with the tools to create professional content for all of Bay City's channels. Clip art and stock photography should be used very rarely, if ever.

An empowered communications department (see recommendation 1, page 14) should also work closely with internal content producers to help them adopt and support the new brand and provide a process for reviewing and approving content from those producers. The brand study process should identify existing branding that should be maintained with an updated City brand. For example, a separate tourism brand, (called Visit Bay City, TX: Where Country Meets The Coast!), is strong and does not need realignment.

## B. Social Media

Bay City has several areas for improvement in social media, such as content and the channels the city decides to utilize.

Regardless of social platforms, Bay City channels frequently overuse graphics with cluttered text to communicate vital information. While easy to do, this practice of using text and graphics is unsuitable for photography-focused platforms like Instagram. It also does not use alt-text, a best practice for letting the visually impaired engage with content. Many accounts are inactive and frequently share calendar events from other social channels. By "inactive" accounts, we mean accounts that show little-to-no signs of recent activity, such as posting about recent events, original content posted within the past several weeks or months, or referencing past events in recent posts.

Regarding inactive accounts, the Cooksey analysis found the following Bay City Accounts were inactive:

- Library (YouTube)
- City of Bay City (X, formerly known as Twitter)
- City of Bay City (YouTube)
- Riverside Park (Instagram)
- Riverside Park (X, formerly known as Twitter)

Inactive accounts should be re-utilized or discarded. As mentioned, many of Bay City's social channels merely repeat content as calendar events from other city social accounts. Social channels assigned to specific parts of the organization, from the municipal court to public works to the city's "Master" accounts, should post content of relevance to the nature of that account. Amplifying relevant messages from other city channels is acceptable, but only when the content is appropriate to the account.



On the positive side, the videos for the Bay City YouTube channel, homepage and Visit Bay City tourism webpage are professionally produced and highlight the city's rich history and culture. We strongly encourage greater investment in visual storytelling and placement on the appropriate channels.

## **C. Website**

Bay City's various websites, including those for City government and tourism, are strong and serviceable but could use improvements.

The City website, [cityofbaycity.org](http://cityofbaycity.org), is a standard CivicPlus website, including a Google auto-translate feature. A well-produced video introducing Bay City plays below the fold of the homepage. It is recommended that the video be moved upward, taking the place of the cacti photograph, which, although beautiful and well-composed, does not tell viewers much about Bay City. The split between the topline navigation menu, middle action buttons and 12 buttons below the video makes navigation confusing. Instead, we would recommend nesting most city functions under the navigation bar in the submenus and keeping direct links from the homepage for only the most commonly used City services, such as paying parking tickets. Work with your customer-facing staff and website analytics to quantify those most widely requested services or frequently asked questions to help drive those navigation priorities. The home page should never be "finished" but rather in a constant state of evolution depending on the end-user preferences.

The "news" section of the homepage should be updated to show the latest news items (such as the review of the FY 2024 Strategic Plan). The section only features ways to follow emergency alerts and less pressing city news. This will require a directed effort, but one that will pay off in greater community consumption of City-related news and information.

Finally, we recommend using photographs of people and recognizable scenes of local life for city websites. A city website is likely the first impression a non-resident will have of the community before visiting; showing static scenes of natural beauty, while nice to show off, does not capture the people and community that inhabit the area.

# Interview Takeaways

The Cooksey Team engaged in a series of Zoom interviews with City of Bay City staff and representatives from the Community Development Corporation, the Chamber of Commerce, Matagorda County Emergency Management and Matagorda County Economic Development Corporation to better understand their perspectives and opinions of the City's communications strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Below are key takeaways from these interviews:

Several interviewees said that a communications department's primary goal is to provide citizens with accurate and prompt information with a consistent voice. Residents should feel confident in the City's ability to provide information for all occasions, from public events to times of crisis.

Interviewees proposed various milestones that a new communications department should achieve in their first year, such as establishing a structured chain of communication within the department, committing to a consistent logo and branding style (including graphic design and writing style) and creating a stronger connection to outside communications entities like the newspaper and radio station. Another goal was to establish a regular internal and external newsletter to be disseminated to all other departments.

Many felt Bay City's branding required an update to reflect the city's geographic traits and values. The City's base logo is a circular shield with the State of Texas included. Several interviewees felt it was too generic and did not convey much personality. Another common branding goal was to improve Bay City's messaging across departments to make writing more professional.

All interviewees recommended hiring a bilingual employee (fluent in Spanish) as a resource for the rest of the department. The interviewees also preferred an employee resource with a deep knowledge of social media and Artificial Intelligence tools and a firm understanding of press release writing and formatting.

Most interviewees strongly believed a centralized communications model would improve consistency across municipal messaging thanks to a central source. A central source could also effectively disseminate important information to the "first audience," aka internal stakeholders. City employees must be ready to answer questions about events, policies and crises with the same up-to-date information as every other employee. Interviewees felt that a centralized model would allow internal stakeholders to become a uniform point of contact for news outlets, radio and community inquiries.

Employees are comfortable overall with the current process of communicating with the public during times of crisis. There was notable improvement between the previous and current administrations. Now the City and County need to work on and refine their communication processes during crises. Some have expressed the need for a PIO to prepare the mayor's statements. Facebook and text messages were largely successful during crisis events to keep citizens informed.

Interviewees expressed concern regarding two demographic groups they struggle to reach: native Spanish speakers and older populations. Many interviewees were frustrated with older individuals adept at using social media and would discover those individuals in Facebook groups spreading misinformation about the City. The local newspaper and radio station are the only forms of mass media consumed outside of Houston media. Utilizing those channels to broadcast the City's events and goals would be very helpful.

Interviewees recommended that Bay City promote its successes more and emphasize growth, not just for residents but also for tourists. One interviewee noted that Bay City residents on the county's outskirts rely on Bay City for information, especially during crises; these individuals need to be communicated effectively to Bay City residents, businesses, media and other stakeholders.



# Detailed Recommendations

Establishing an effective Communications Department requires an investment of time and deliberate thought to assemble appropriately qualified team members and to create strategic and operational processes. This time investment is critical to ensure the development of an effective, efficient and impactful communications program, including policies and workflows that fit with your organization's structure and culture. It is essential to set realistic short and long-term goals to allow a newly formed Communications Department to build sustainable success.

With this in mind and based on the findings and takeaways from the content reviews, interviews, benchmarking research and the City's expressed goals and needs, the Cooksey team puts forth the following recommendations:

## ■ **Recommendation 1: Conduct a full branding study to create a brand identity and voice for the City government entity and all departments, understanding that such an undertaking requires appropriate time and attention to develop a sustainable brand that will stand the test of time.**

- Review existing logos in use to consider whether they fit into the overall brand identity as sub-brands or should be replaced or adapted as part of a new logo family.
- Consider how certain functions, such as public safety and the airport, might incorporate the new logo/brand.
- Create a consistent color palette and library of key messages, preferred images and other visual branding elements.
- Train all potential users on using the brand identity and create a review and approval workflow to ensure consistency.

**Implementation Considerations:** A full brand study can take six to nine months, depending on the depth or complexity of the research and public input process. The City should work toward including this project in their next fiscal year budget. Implementation of the resulting logo and brand elements can be phased in based on costs and resources, often taking two or more years, depending on signage, infrastructure and hardscapes that might be involved.

*Associated with Strategic Goal 2: Community and Civic Engagement, Strategy 1*

## ■ **Recommendation 2: Create a Strategic Communications Plan to set standards and processes for all departments.**

- This plan should include brand standards as outlined in the recommended brand identity study and outcomes.
- This plan should include a process guide outlining review processes, roles and responsibilities for the various department-specific social media channels, a style guide and an ongoing content calendar process.
- This plan should include the creation of needed policies, including but not limited to the following:
  - Social Media Policy - including legal implications and issues, criteria for creating/maintain a department/program channel, employee conduct on social media, how City Council accounts are managed, etc.
  - Training plan for staff, elected officials and members of boards and commissions.
  - Editorial policies to explain what content is eligible for City-owned channels and why, how content is submitted and prioritized, etc.
  - Who speaks for the City under specific situations or conditions, including specific roles and responsibilities for City Management, departmental staff and elected officials.
  - Use of AI tools for communications
  - Media Relations - a plan to develop stronger relationships with local news entities.
  - Crisis communications plan with response templates (for crises of various types, including natural disasters).



**Implementation Considerations:** Developing a Strategic Communications Plan should begin as quickly as possible after hiring a new communications manager. Policy templates and samples are available in the appendix of this document and through professional organizations such as the Texas Association of Municipal Information Officers (TAMIO). Make use of and customize those to meet Bay City's specific needs. Prioritize policies for social media and crisis communications.

*Associated with Strategic Goal 2: Community and Civic Engagement, Strategy 1*

### ■ **Recommendation 3: Empower your Communications Department to be the authority on internal and external communications processes and standards for the City organization.**

- City leadership must give the Communications Department the authority to make decisions about messaging content and quality, including the authority to review the effectiveness of various channels and communication tools.
- The Communications Department should identify those managing internal or external communications processes in various departments and establish an ongoing training and collaboration process to increase quality and consistency. This process could include regular meetings, training sessions, a shared content calendar and content management resources to give everyone involved visibility into upcoming communications priorities.
- The Communications Department should be authorized to work with City Management to provide training and feedback to elected officials who produce social media or other types of content related to City activities and information.
- The Communications Department should have the authority to approve or deny requests for new social media accounts and review whether existing accounts effectively reach target audiences. The Communications Department should work with department social media account managers to establish messaging "lanes" and reposting protocols.
- The Communications Department should be empowered to ensure that brand standards are followed through centralized graphic design and video services and/or the creation of templates for departments to use through other programs or platforms such as Canva.

**Implementation Considerations:** The policies and protocols for these processes should be established as soon as possible after hiring a communications manager. Create a cross-functional team comprising those who handle communications/public engagement functions throughout the organization. Utilize that team as an ongoing resource for creating communications content and processes, with regular meetings for planning and training.

*Associated with Strategic Goal 2: Community and Civic Engagement, Strategy 1*

### ■ **Recommendation 4: Strengthen your arsenal of communications tools by consistently driving the public to a well-maintained website and engaging in locally recognized communications platforms.**

- Ensure the website is well maintained with timely and ongoing information the public can easily use for reference. Then, consistently drive audiences to the website for their needed information, whether it's short-term, such as a special event, or long-term, such as frequently requested City services.
- Review the website's navigation priorities to ensure the most current and frequently needed information is easily available. Work with your customer-facing staff and website analytics to quantify the most commonly requested services or often asked questions to help drive those navigation priorities.
- Develop closer relationships with local news media entities to ensure they have access to current, accurate information and to build more opportunities for positive news stories.
- Work with the local newspaper(s) to create a regular monthly page or half-page that serves as a print newsletter. The newsletter should include upcoming event announcements, seasonal reminder messages, public engagement and education information, etc. Compare the cost of this tactic versus producing and mailing a print newsletter.
- Consider utilizing utility bills to send important City announcements as printed inserts/linked messages or as part of the bill itself.
- Work with the local radio station to provide no cost or low-cost public service announcements about upcoming events or key seasonal reminders. Consider whether a regular monthly talk show could be produced to discuss upcoming events and key initiatives.
- Remember the importance of building public trust through in-person communications by hosting regular public engagement events. These might be town hall meetings with interactive public input or simply tables/booths at other events/festivals to share information with the public about City services and initiatives.

**Implementation Considerations:** First, focus on website navigation, how frequently needed information is accessed, and how time-sensitive news and information are displayed. The new Communications Manager should take time to visit local news entities to begin developing those contacts and relationships. Begin studying your options and costs for producing a regular printed update or newsletter. Utilize your cross-functional communications team to create strategies for in-person public engagement activities outside of routine government meetings. Consider how to best utilize facilities and events that are already frequented by your target audiences. Start small and build on successes.

*Associated with Strategic Goal 2: Community and Civic Engagement, Strategy 1, Strategy 5*

■ **Recommendation 5: Review your social media strategies to ensure you're using available platforms to reach target audiences more effectively.**

- Make a list of your target audiences and the channels that are likely to be most effective in reaching them, such as digital, print, signage, etc.
  - For example, older audiences might be better reached via local newspapers or Facebook, while younger audiences who might otherwise ignore government communications might be better reached via Instagram or YouTube.
- Review social media analytics to measure how well each account is reaching specific audiences.
- Create messaging strategies to reach specific audiences "where they are," which means messaging on Facebook will be crafted differently to reach younger audiences on Instagram, for example.
- Utilize this same data to consider whether some accounts for departments or platforms should be consolidated or eliminated. You're not "married" to any given platform. That said, any consideration of sunseting a social media channel should be considered carefully from all angles.
- Consider using a social media management service to centrally post, schedule and react to the City's various social channels.

**Implementation Considerations:** Engage your cross-functional communications team to assist with this analysis, identify successful tactics and make decisions about the future of certain channels. This collaborative approach will help build buy-in and uncover additional insights about how these channels are functioning.

*Associated with Strategic Goal 2: Community and Civic Engagement, Strategy 1*

■ **Recommendation 6: Focus on consistent, accessible internal communications to ensure employees have information they can share with residents and customers.**

- Many employees are Bay City residents and can help serve as conduits for sharing information with other residents as part of their daily responsibilities or simply as neighbors.
- Develop a regular internal newsletter or information source to help keep employees updated on internal and external initiatives. This resource must be provided digitally and in a printed/posted format since many employees do not have email.
- Consider whether a more detailed informational resource needs to be provided for public-facing employees to equip them to answer inquiries from the public.

**Implementation Considerations:** The City is already working to develop a regular internal newsletter. Consider the best methods for getting information to all employees. Email should be utilized for those who have regular access but consider whether posting a printed newsletter in break rooms is sufficient. Consider creating some type of informational kiosk or ask supervisors to have regular team meetings to make announcements and hand out copies of the printed newsletter, which is an effective tactic. Your cross-functional communication team might be helpful in this planning process. Establish a process and timing for this process and reevaluate it after six months to consider improvements.

*Associated with Strategic Goal 2: Community and Civic Engagement, Strategy 1*

■ **Recommendation 7: Hire a primary communications manager with the experience and skills required to command respect from the rest of the organization and to lead the implementation of the updated policies and protocols.**

- This individual must have the experience to serve as a leader of the organization's communications activities and as a trusted advisor to their superiors while performing the function of Communications Manager. They must be able to implement and manage good policies and processes and coach and mentor less experienced communicators within the organization, some of whom might be more tenured and experts in their fields. Many department team members handling communications may be versed in conveying necessary facts and details. However, for the City to speak with "One Voice" will, more often than not, require this position, or designee, to rewrite all incoming messages for "voice" before being disseminated.

- This individual should be capable of working with external entities, such as the Matagorda County emergency communications personnel, to develop effective partnerships and protocols for various joint communications efforts.
- This individual will also serve as the City's primary spokesperson and should be well-spoken, confident and able to handle unpredictable situations. They should also have experience working with local media for both good news and bad news situations. Ideally, this person should be fluent in Spanish and English or have bilingual support staff who are easily accessible to provide assistance as needs occur.

**Implementation Considerations:** We are aware that the City is already planning to hire this position as soon as possible. Cooksey will assist with recruitment by helping craft a job description, reviewing candidates and assisting with the screening and interviewing process. The recommendations in this assessment and the resources available in the attached appendix will provide key resources to support the new hire as that individual develops the strategic framework for the communications function. Budgets should allow for membership in professional organizations such as but not limited to Texas Association of Municipal Information Officers (TAMIO) and City-County Communications and Marketing Association (3CMA). Such organizations provide for ongoing professional development and a network of peers for idea-sharing and support.

*Associated with Strategic Goal 2: Community and Civic Engagement, Strategy 1*

## ■ **Recommendation 8: Consider future staff or contract positions to meet the organization's needs.**

- While the new communications manager will be directly involved in content creation and production, it's important to allow that individual the bandwidth to plan strategically and manage processes.
- Analyze departmental content creators' and managers' strengths and weaknesses to prioritize what skills need to be supplemented in the central communications department to maximize effectiveness.
- Look first at creating a multi-media content producer position to support website, social media and print productions with writing, graphics, photo and video skills. Understanding that finding one individual who is strong in all of these areas might be difficult, consider which skills to prioritize based on available resources.
  - Various titles might be applicable to this role, depending on the prioritized skill sets. The job description should enumerate those priorities. Examples: Communications Specialist, Multi-Media Communications Specialist, Digital Communications Specialist.
- Consider creating more specialized positions (contract or full-time) to better support video, photography and graphic design needs. These needs should be evaluated as your organization progresses through the implementation of your strategic plan to grow your communications program and the skills already available within the organization should be considered.

**Implementation Considerations:** A review of existing staff's skills is important to the implementation of this recommendation. The Communications & Cultural Arts Director and the new communications manager will need time to analyze those resources before determining what skillsets to add to the centralized communications team. If it's possible to add an additional position before the end of the current fiscal year, plan to do so. Otherwise, submit the additional position in the next budget cycle, whether it's a permanent employee or contractor.

*Associated with Strategic Goal 2: Community and Civic Engagement, Strategy 1*



# APPENDIX

- 1** Cooksey Public Sector Insights Index 2024 – Key Takeaways (PDF)
- 2** Bay City Benchmarking Tracking spreadsheet (Excel)
- 3** City of Angleton Corporate ID Package (PDF)
- 4** City of Angleton Communications Survey (PDF)
- 5** City of Angleton Generative Artificial Intelligence AI Chatbot Usage Policy (PDF)
- 6** City of Angleton Policy Against the Use of TikTok on Government Phones (PDF)
- 7** City of Angleton Social Media Policy (PDF)
- 8** Hurst City Survey – Communications Answers (PNG)
- 9** Job Description Samples
  - a. Aledo Communications and Engagement Manager
  - b. City of Odessa Communications Specialist
  - c. Bell County Public Information Officer
  - d. City of Hutto Executive Director of Communication
  - e. City of Dayton Marketing & Communications Intern
  - f. City of Brady Communications-Marketing Specialist