

Islands Trust Communications Strategy 2024

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1. Context

An updated communications strategy is a priority within the organization and is necessary to foster engagement with island communities and improve public trust in the organization through awareness and education.

Through effective planning and resource allocation, content about the Islands Trust’s mandate and commitment to Reconciliation, its programs, governance, and services can be widely shared at reasonable cost, encouraging public support and individual efforts to preserve and protect the 450 islands and surrounding islands in the Salish Sea.

This strategy is specific to Islands Trust Council, Executive Committee and local trust committees. Islands Trust Conservancy and Bowen Island Municipality have their own communication strategies and plans. Efforts will be coordinated when possible and practical.

This strategy is specific to communications and has been drafted with the expectation that a companion Islands Trust engagement strategy will be developed at a later date to support engagement on projects. This document has been created as an overarching strategy, with project-specific communications work plans to be companion documents.

2. Goals

1. **Recognize community interests** and respond with information that connects citizens, elected officials and staff:
 - 1.1. Create efficiencies for identifying public issues and listening and responding to the public by:
 - Identifying current and emerging resources for collecting citizen questions and concerns, including social media trends, and website forms
 - Ensuring the timely sharing of updates to elected officials, staff and citizens
 - 1.2. Be prepared by ensuring staff members understand their roles in the issues management process by:

- Updating procedures outlining best practices and desired outcomes
 - Determining the spokesperson on particular issues and topics, and make this information available to elected officials and staff
 - Prepare speaking notes as soon as information becomes available, regardless of if an issue is present at this point in time or not
- 1.3. Follow issues to identify and hear citizen concerns and prepare public information to address questions by:
- Identifying spokespeople
 - Preparing speaking notes
 - Preparing topical question and answers and adding to the Fact Check page
- 1.4. Increase elected officials use of social media by:
- Providing guidelines and best practices for elected officials and staff
 - Providing learning or training opportunities
 - Encouraging the opportunities for trustees to act as Islands Trust ambassadors
2. **Raise awareness** of Islands Trust work and its preserve and protect mandate through the development and publication of high quality digital and printed content. Also, raise awareness of department responsibilities and activities to the public, elected officials, and staff by:
- 2.1. Creating issue focused fact sheets and updates and distribute these to elected officials and staff
 - 2.2. Showcasing individual or team contributions from different departments social media, explaining what the staff are doing and how Islands Trust provides value to the community
 - 2.3. Continuing to communicate important Council and corporate decisions to staff
 - 2.4. Creating annual department communication work plans by working with directors and managers to identify routine annual communication priorities and activities for the coming year, as well as Strategic Plan and corporate projects.
 - 2.5. Determining budget and resource requirements for implementing this strategy and department annual department communication work plans
 - 2.6. Ensuring regular communication takes place across the organization to the public, staff, elected officials, and the media
 - 2.7. Updating procedure documents that contain best practices for communication processes
 - 2.8. Maintaining efficient and cooperative relationships with members of the media
 - 2.9. Providing training opportunities for staff that prepare communication documents
 - 2.10. Updating procedures and templates for common communication products, including graphic and layout products
 - 2.11. Developing an Islands Trust 101 presentation that can be customized for local trust areas
 - 2.12. Using all events as a communications tool to showcase the work Islands Trust does, its projects, its current engagement opportunities, or its achievements. Local trust committee meetings help people learn about projects, webinars educate people about IT programs that could be relevant to their lives, stand-alone events are opportunities to communicate to the public on all of the above. Islands Trust printed materials should be available at all in-person events or meetings, and there needs to be an Islands Trust slideshow/video that showcases Islands Trust projects or achievements, during meeting breaks on Zoom meetings
3. **Improve communication for engagement** with community by:

- 3.1. Supporting an organizational engagement strategy and toolkit with checklists and templates to ensure the application of guiding principles, a consistent engagement planning process, and metrics for engagement evaluation
- 3.2. Creating a communication work plan per engagement project, and providing communication support for this plan
- 3.3. Identifying engagement staff for each engagement and activity and create a communications plan to support the staff person tasked with the engagement activities. This is especially helpful when there is a staff person available that has connections to the local trust area, or is a resident
- 3.4. Communicate to the public, elected officials, and staff about partnerships with other organizations that have existing engagement tools or platforms that communities in the Trust Area can participate in (e.g. Comox Valley Regional District <https://engagecomoxvalley.ca/>)
- 3.5. Promoting popular information on website to make it easier to find and understand
- 3.6. Improving the live-streaming of local trust committee and committee meetings to include well-designed screens to be used during recesses, closed meetings, technical issues and other times when a placeholder image might be used
- 3.7. Explaining what Islands Trust is doing by describing how individual projects and initiatives support the Strategic Plan and the Object

4. **Build trust** with the public, by:

- 4.1. Simplifying language and take advantage of opportunities for informal dialogue
 - 4.2. Promoting Islands Trusts social media accounts and work to attract more followers, from a diverse group of islands residents
 - 4.3. Promoting trustees as Islands Trust ambassadors, real people from the communities who are reliable sources of information
 - 4.4. Provide staff with corporate clothing to wear in the field or when working with the public
 - 4.5. Continuing to upgrade the website to ensure consistency of search results, simplifying where simplification is possible and providing the information the public use most often on main pages
- Ensuring communications are in line with the *Islands Trust Identity Guide* so colours and fonts are recognizable consistent and language is appropriate.

3. Principles

When creating communications plans or content it is important to keep several principles in mind. This will create a unified tone and style, which will be recognisable as the overall tone of Islands Trust.

Islands Trust communications need to be:

- **Accessible** – Communicating in a clear, meaningful, and relevant manner to the intended audiences with simple plain language whenever possible
- Focused on **Reconciliation** – Applying Indigenous style principles from the *Islands Trust Identity Guide*
- **Accurate** – Providing accurate information, limited use of adjectives
- **Creative** – Creating captivating and memorable content, including celebrating positive stories
- **Consistent** – Communicating in a well-written and designed way that is aligned with the *Islands Trust Identity Guide*

- **Measured** – Communication is effective and efficient, and can be based on metrics, goals and best practices
- **Timely** – Ensuring information is relevant and useful

4. Target Audiences

- **Primary:** Community members and organizations in the Trust Area
- **Secondary:** Provincial, municipal and local government bodies; First Nations governments in the Trust Area; media
- **Tertiary:** Islands Trust staff

5. Tools and Tactics

All communications will rely on the website as a base. The primary tools to achieve Islands Trust’s communications goals and priority programs and services are:

- Publications (digital and print)
- Website
- E-subscriber messages and e-newsletters
- Flyers and mailing packages
- Sandwich boards
- Printed posters/signs
- Paid advertising in newspapers and online media,
- Media releases and earned media
- Direct emails and phone calls with community members, media and other interested and affected parties
- Events - online and in person
- Social media - paid for and organic

Social media will be used to showcase content available on the website, mailed to new residents, new reports, and new tools. While different projects or themes will use additional communication tactics to suit different audiences and comply with procedures and regulations, social media will, as much as possible, represent a broad spectrum of what is happening at Islands Trust. Implementing this process will take several months to set up but will be ongoing; providing open and easily accessible content based on Islands Trust work.

Social media posting will allow more people to understand:

- The value of Islands Trust
- The services it provides and does not provide
- The projects underway
- Initiatives from other organizations that are interesting and relevant
- The information available on the website.

Specific projects, events, or programs that are not run by Islands Trust but may further the mandate of Islands Trust can be featured. For example, an event organized by another government focused on rainwater harvesting is of interest to the Islands Trust's audiences. It will, therefore, be on Islands Trust What's New section and/or social media when appropriate and where timing allows, with a focus on Islands Trust captions and, if possible, graphics. Staff will develop a companion procedure to clarify which items may be shared and when.

6. Evaluation

Communications efforts need to be measured and evaluated continuously to gauge effectiveness, engagement and sentiment. Without pre-existing data on which to base this strategy, the strategy will be adjusted as engagement data becomes available.

Relevancy and engagement of communications content can be analysed through:

- **Social Media** platforms are excellent sources of engagement data on social media platforms. Trends and preferences will be simple to identify through analytics as well as through commentary in Facebook groups or post comments
- **Website analytics monitoring software** monitors and analyses webpage visitors and link clicks, allowing for focused improvements to the website
- **Trustees and the public** will be able to provide more community-based feedback on how other communications efforts are being received
- **Meeting attendance**
- **Monitoring online feedback** through the website