

Decisions on Communications & External Relations

September 1, 2017

Overview of the Decisions

Strong communications are crucial to ensuring Cooperative Extension is known and recognized in the State of Wisconsin and beyond for its educational programs, applied research, and as a resource for unbiased and research-based programming. Innovative marketing and branding, using relevant digital platforms, are necessary to reach our partners and audiences.

Building upon earlier work group recommendations and analysis provided by Huron, the Executive Sponsors and the Chancellor decided to create a new **Office of Communications & External Relations** (“Communications”) that will be responsible managing and overseeing all communications, marketing, and external relations efforts across Cooperative Extension. This office will report up to the Dean or Dean’s designee for Cooperative Extension.

Cooperative Extension will expect Communications to be responsible for the following functions across all levels of Cooperative Extension:

Table 1: Functions owned by the Office of Communications & External Relations

Function	Description
External Relations	Building relationships with external stakeholders and interested parties through effectively communicating organizational goals and initiatives and advancing a positive image and reputation of Cooperative Extension. Planning, developing, and distributing all communications on behalf of Cooperative Extension and the major units in the division to external stakeholders.
Marketing and Branding	Review and approve communications, graphic elements and publications not led by Communications to ensure consistent marketing and branding across Cooperative Extension.
Media Channels and Public Relations	Managing external communication and media channels, through both paid and earned media. This includes reviewing and distributing press releases and media advisories on behalf of all Cooperative Extension programs and advising staff on effective communication to their targeted audiences.
Website	Developing and maintaining the website and platform for Cooperative Extension and units within the division.
Social Media and Other Digital Platforms	Communicating on behalf of Cooperative Extension through social media and managing Cooperative Extension’s accounts through social media systems and other digital communication platforms.
Event Coordination	Coordinating and managing events with external stakeholders and major internal events.
Internal Communications	Planning, developing, and distributing regular communications on behalf of Cooperative Extension and the major units in the division to faculty and staff.

While Communications will be responsible for ensuring appropriate communications and marketing efforts within and on behalf of Cooperative Extension, faculty and staff within Cooperative Extension will be still be responsible for communicating with internal and external audiences regularly to support their educational programming and other activities. Communications will continue to be responsible for ensuring faculty and staff are equipped with the tools and training they need to effectively communicate to external audiences and to escalate issues appropriately to Cooperative Extension leadership.

Given the communications needs across Cooperative Extension, this office will be responsible for regular communications and marketing efforts for the following organizational structures:

- Cooperative Extension as an institution;
- Departments, Institutes and most Centers;
- Zones.

This means that certain organizational structures, such as Branded Programs, Areas, and County Offices, will manage their communications and marketing efforts while leveraging the training, support, and tools offered by Communications.

Organizational Structure

Communications efforts are currently distributed throughout the organization in:

- Dedicated positions focused on communications in the Dean's Office, Cooperative Extension Technology Services (CETS), and Program Areas; and
- Educators, specialists, and general administrators who are primarily responsible for other duties.

Through their assessment process, Huron identified that these efforts account for roughly 7 FTE in current communications positions, which includes current vacancies.

This new Communications office will consolidate current communications and marketing efforts by integrating positions and responsibilities from the Dean's Office, Program Areas, and CETS. Communications will be led by a Director of Communications & External Relations, who will report to the Dean or Dean's designee. The Director will have a team of staff who will be largely co-located in Madison, WI but select members of the team may be embedded in other units that they serve as needed.

The office will be comprised of three teams providing direct support, training and policy making in the following areas:

- a Communications team focused on public relations,
- a Digital team focused on web, social media and other relevant emerging communication platforms, and
- an External relations team focused on governments relations and supporting partnerships.

Table 2: Positions within the Office of Communications & External Relations

Position Title	Responsibilities
Director	Leads the Office of Communications & External Relations and ensures the office meets its goals, establishing the overall communications strategy and plan for Cooperative Extension, collaborating with leadership and communicating directly with external audiences on behalf of Cooperative Extension.
Communicators	Approximately 3 FTE: Manages and develops communications on behalf of certain units or groups within Cooperative extension by: writing, editing, and distributing written communications; managing and communicating through social media; managing relationships with media organizations; developing scripts and presentations for verbal communications; maintaining and updating websites; evaluating the effectiveness of communications activity; and training faculty and staff on appropriate communications delivery as needed.
Event Coordinator	Assists with coordinating large events across Cooperative Extension, including communicating about, planning for, budgeting, and organizing the events. Negotiates contracts with vendors for hotels, travel, room reservations, and manages ongoing vendor relationships. Trains faculty and staff as needed to ensure effective project management of all event types. Serves as a member of the External Relations team within Communications.
Digital Media Specialist	Develops, manages, implements, and monitors Cooperative Extension's online and social media presence, strategy and activity. Trains faculty and staff as needed and supports Communicators and the distributed units in executing the digital strategy. Serves as a members of the Digital team within Communications.
External Relations Coordinator	Builds relationships with external stakeholders and interested parties through effectively communicating organizational goals and initiatives and advancing a positive image and reputation of Cooperative Extension. Represents Cooperative Extension at external events and contributes to external communications. Serves as a member of the External Relations team within Communications.
Graphic Artist	Creates designs, including for a variety of e-platforms and print, edits photography, and ensures graphics meet branding policies and requirements. Serves as a members of the Digital team within Communications.
Web Designer	Manages the front-end web design of the public facing websites for Cooperative Extension (WordPress currently) by creating visually appealing sites with user-friendly design, clear navigation, and brand consistency. Executes a cohesive website strategy and trains faculty and staff as needed. Serves as a member of the Digital team within Communications.
Web Developer	Develops the back-end of the public facing websites for Cooperative Extension (WordPress currently), including coding, customizing, and modifying layouts and formats, and training faculty and staff as needed; requires expertise in web applications and programming languages like HTML, CSS, JavaScript, JQuery and API's.X. Serves as a member of the Digital team within Communications.

Office of Communications and External Relations Org Chart

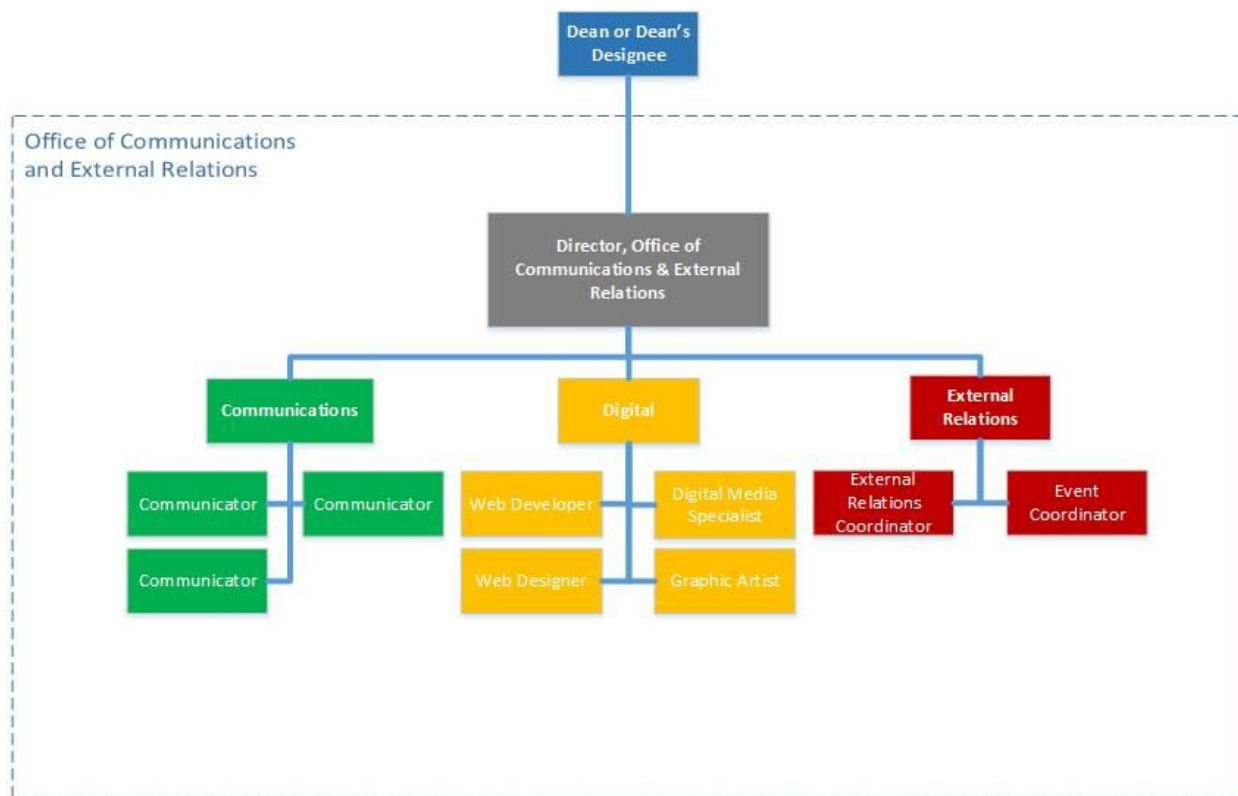


Figure 1. Organizational Chart for the Office of Communications and External Relations

Rationale for the Decisions

Consolidating the communications functions into the Office of Communications & External Relations will allow Cooperative Extension to standardize and streamline processes, provide a higher level of expertise, reduce the overall effort expended on communications, and ensure consistency in communications and voice across the organization. We recognize the need to increase Cooperative Extension's presence in traditional and digital media outlets while highlighting our staff as expert resources available in counties throughout the State of Wisconsin. The new Office of Communications and External Relations will allow Cooperative Extension to increase visibility for the work we do in a strategic and measurable manner.

Past project work also identified the need to improve administrative efficiencies:

- The [gap analysis](#) carried out by the initial nine work groups identified the need for innovative branding and marketing to ensure Cooperative Extension is recognized in the State of Wisconsin and beyond for its educational programs, applied research, and as a resource for unbiased and research-based programming.
- The findings from the original [work groups](#) also emphasize the need for career advancement opportunities and the ability to develop specialized skills. In this new office, communications

professionals will be able to collaborate and learn from each other, rather than being dispersed among different program areas as a lone communicator.

Next Steps

1. Transition staff:
 - o Communicators currently housed in Program Areas and the Office of the Dean and Director will be transitioned to the Office of Communications and External Relations.
 - o The web team, currently housed in CETS, will be transitioned to the Office of Communications and External Relations.
2. We will carry out recruitments for vacant or newly created positions. The hiring priorities, process and recruitment timeline will be identified by the Director once initial staff are transitioned into the office and will be shared in future communications.