Public Information Office
Strategic Communications Strategy

13 February 2009

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CountyStat Principles

- **Require Data Driven Performance**
- **Promote Strategic Governance**
- **Increase Government Transparency**
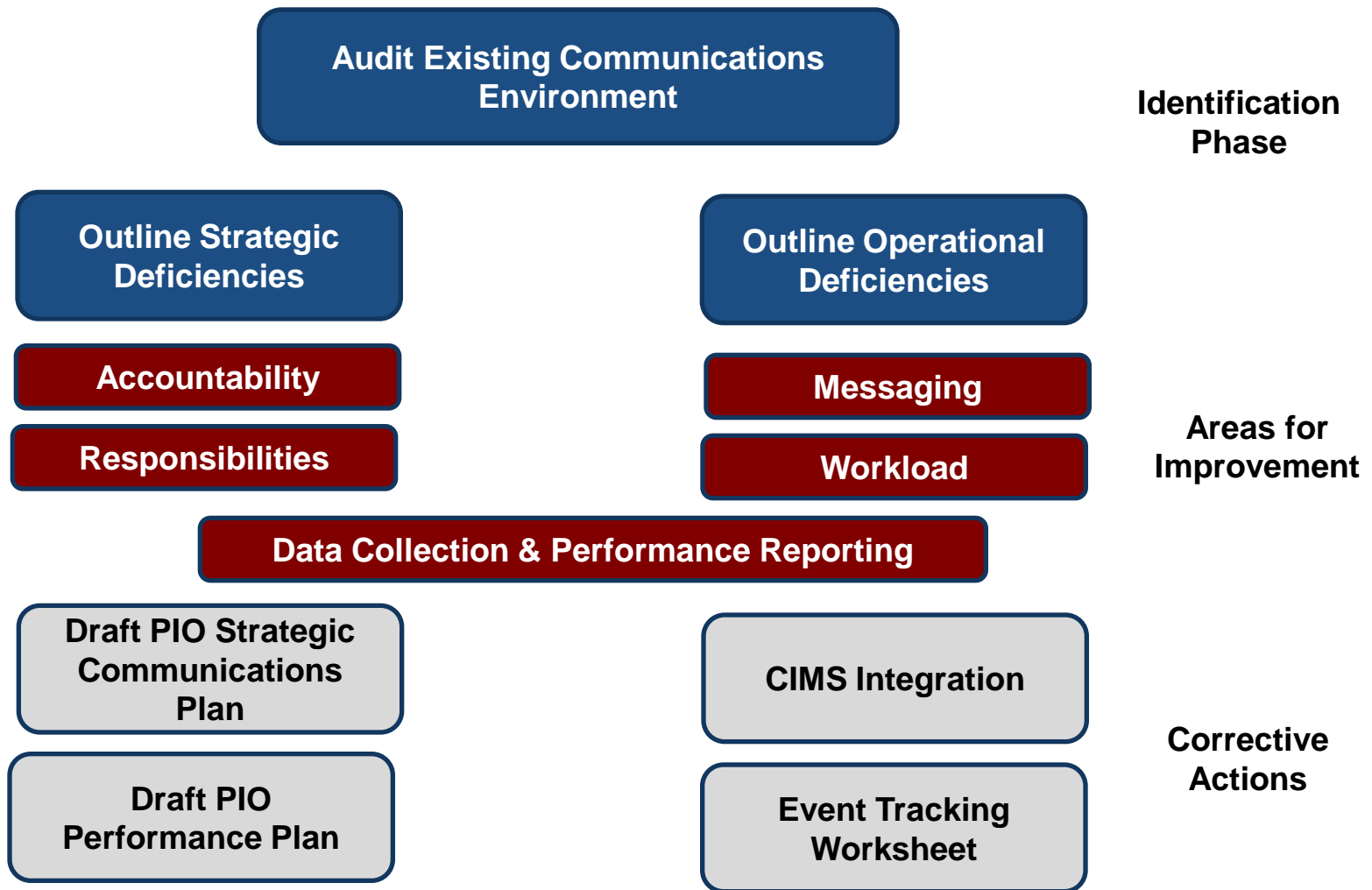- **Foster a Culture of Accountability**

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Agenda

- **Welcome and Introductions**

- **Current Communications Environment**

- **PIO Strategic Communications Plan**

  - Mission and Vision

  - Interagency Collaboration

  - Daily Operational Communications

  - County Policy Communications

  - Emergency Communications

- **PIO Messaging Lessons Learned and New Practices**

- **Integration of CIMS System into PIO Operations**

- **Wrap-Up and Follow-Up Items**

Overview of PIO Strategic & Operational Planning Process

Audit Existing Communications Environment

Identification Phase

Outline Strategic Deficiencies

Outline Operational Deficiencies

Accountability

Messaging

Responsibilities

Workload

Areas for Improvement

Data Collection & Performance Reporting

Draft PIO Strategic Communications Plan

CIMS Integration

Draft PIO Performance Plan

Event Tracking Worksheet

Corrective Actions

Follow-Up Items

- **Follow-Up From Previous Meeting**
  - Develop internal strategic planning processes and procedures that allow for the alignment of resources to priority activities.

  - Conduct brainstorming activities that align core PIO functions to an overall internal strategic management approach.
    - **Status:** Developed Strategic Communications Plan in conjunction with CountyStat

  - Identify the key cross-departmental deficiencies regarding the written documents (letters, emails, announcements, speeches, etc.), develop a process, and identify resource needs to address these inadequacies in a timely manner.
    - **Status:** Examining potential utilization of DTS County Issues Management System (CIMS)

Current County Communications Environment

- Communications within the County Government are and always have been decentralized, because program managers within departments and offices have the subject matter expertise to develop, edit and determine the message to the public.

- The County Executive and CAO have delegated to department directors discretion to communicate directly to the public on issues of concern, consistent with coordination with the PIO and subject to accountability exercised by the County Executive and the CAO.

County Executive and CAO oversight is ongoing, punctuated by meetings and performance evaluations.

Core Functions of PIO Operations

- **Promotes the County Executive's priorities and ensures that they are communicated clearly and accurately.**

- **Reaches out and works with County departments and agencies to develop and implement strategies for communicating key messages and persuading the public that they are getting good value for their tax dollars.**

- **Gets out in front of and manages challenging issues by making sure that available information is accurate and complete and that the information is presented in context.**

- **Develops interesting and relevant television programs for the County cable channel to educate and inform cable subscribers about County services and issues.**

- **Adheres to the legal requirements of the Maryland Public Information Act.**

PIO Internal Operations: Structure and Practice

PIO "Beat" System

- The various County departments and agencies are each considered a "beat" (or area of responsibility) that is assigned to one of our Public Information Officers.

- For example, one PIO is responsible for public safety agencies as beats, while another PIO has transportation, another has libraries and environmental protection, etc.

- PIO system provides a "resident expert" in the office on various issues, and it gives the departments and agencies a point of contact within our department.

County departments seek PIO direction whenever they receive a press inquiry, are experiencing a potential or real operational problem, are planning a publicity campaign or public event, or are addressing a critical long-term project

PIO Strategic Communications Plan

- **Outlines PIO mission and vision**

- **Documents existing efforts to build interagency collaboration**

- **Illustrates communications framework during three types of issues**

  - Daily Operational Issues

  - County Policy Issues

  - Emergency Issues

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PIO Strategic Mission and Vision

Mission

- The mission of the Public Information Office is to: Provide timely, accurate and effective communication with the public, the County Executive, departments and agencies, media, County employees, the County Council and other elected officials, businesses, civic groups and every other segment of the Montgomery County community through the mass media, Internet, publications and graphics, and cable television programming.

Vision

- The Public Information Office works closely with departments and agencies on communication strategies in order to ensure that the County Executive's priorities are being promoted clearly and accurately.

- Central to effective communications is the ability to maintain core functions while consistently embracing new technologies that ensure correct and complete information reaches the intended audience.

PIO Interagency Collaboration

- The Public Information Office regularly collaborates with County departments and agencies in promoting programs and services, and in educating the public about critical issues through press events, cable television shows, web pages, newsletters and other communications.

- The Office also collaborates with outside entities such as public utilities, other jurisdictions and local and national businesses as needed to promote joint programs, policies and other issues, and to coordinate a united response to significant water main breaks, power outages, weather, and other emergencies.

County Departments with Internal PIO Function
Police
Fire and Rescue Services
Transportation
Health and Human Services
Economic Development

County Daily Operational Communications

All daily operational information protocols are at the departmental level.

County Daily Operational Communications Framework

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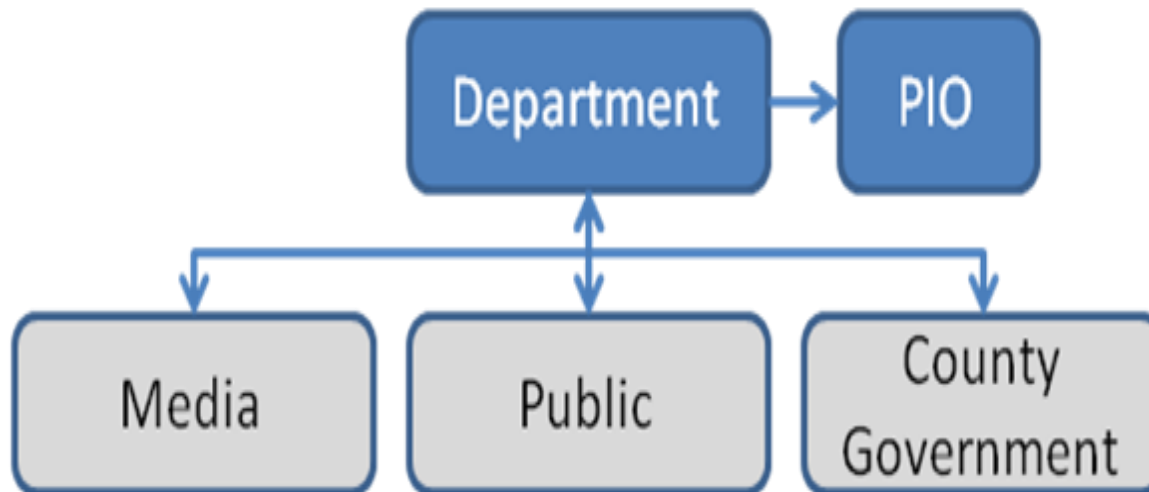
County Daily Operational Communications

- Individuals with communications and marketing responsibilities are responsible for coordinating internally and multi-departmentally to assure the information and outreach media selected will support another department's efforts if necessary.

- The PIO is available to assist County departments and offices when needed with graphics, layout and marketing, or content recommendations.

- The PIO facilitates the process of developing a "common message" and communication strategy to ensure the consistency of information provided to the public, communities, and the private sector.

- Formal guidance is documented in the PIO-distributed, "Working with the Media Guide" handout.

County Policy Communications

The PIO, as the lead agency for public information, is responsible for coordination of the public information operations during the articulation of any county-wide policy messages.

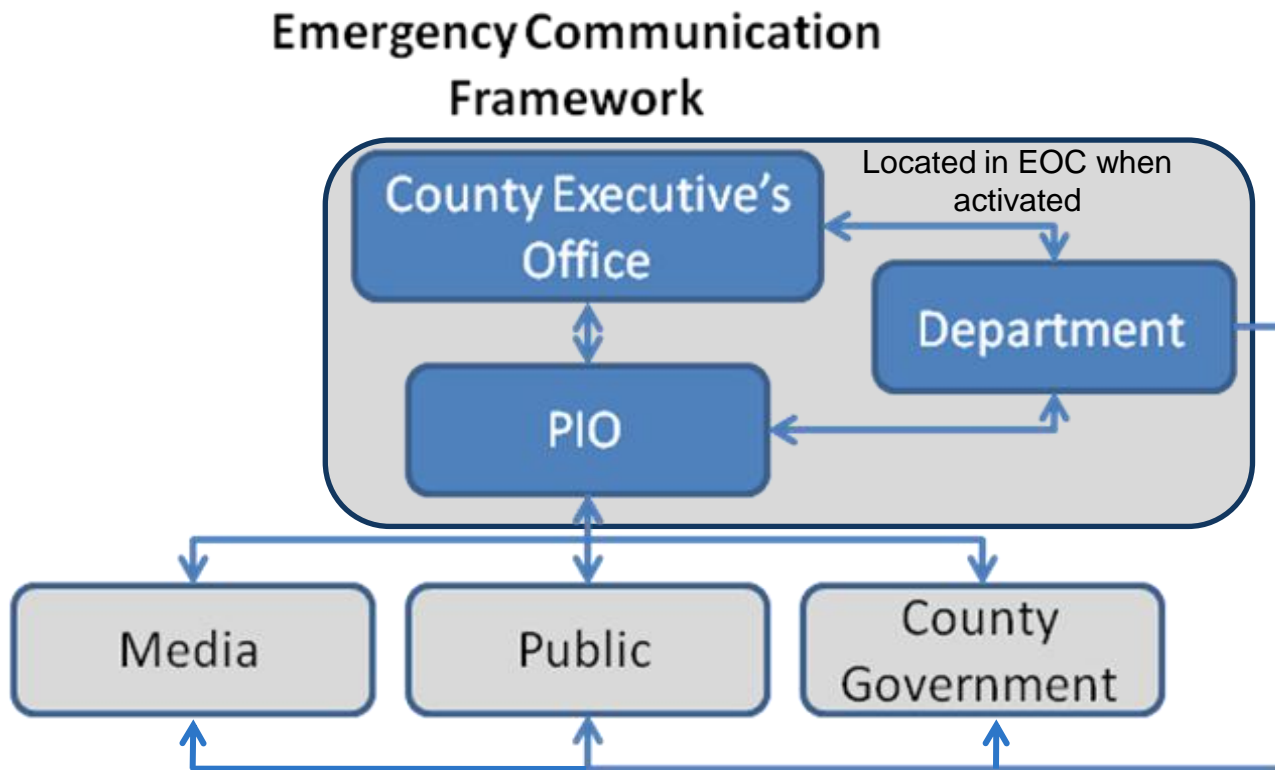**County Policy Communications Framework**
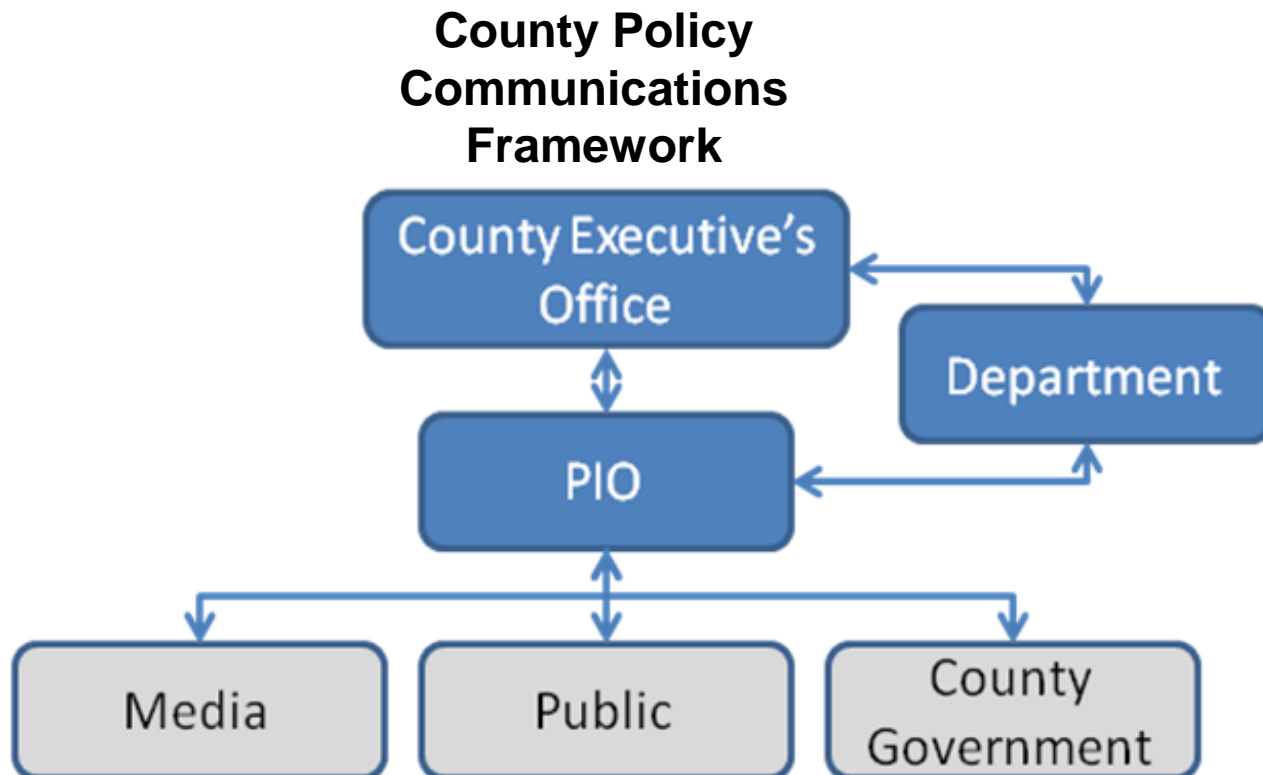
County Policy Issue Communications

- The PIO provides the necessary guidance and coordination for the County Executive Offices and departments when issuing policy guidance.

- The threshold for determining if a message is a policy issue is the determination of the County Executive's Office with input from county departments.

- Once deemed a policy issue, the PIO will collect, organize, analyze, summarize, and disseminate information provided by various sources.

- The particular tool that is chosen to inform the public will depend on the perceived urgency in getting the information to the public as well as the staff's judgment as to which tool, or set of tools, best accomplishes the objective.

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County Emergency Communications

Time sensitivity and potential hazards are the key factors to consider when determining whether communications relate to an emergency incident.

Emergency Communication Framework

County Executive's Office

Located in EOC when activated

Department

PIO

Media

Public

County Government

County Emergency Communications

- The major difference in the emergency framework is utilization of departments as direct communicators to the public, county government, or media when time constraints or subject matter expertise are required.

- Often emergencies require the County to stand-up the Emergency Operations Command (EOC) which allows for co-locating all the departments providing subject matter expertise in the same place as a PIO supporting message delivery.

- Due to their subject matter expertise and unique training on emergency communication platforms, departments are often responsible for disseminating information that has been vetted by the County Executive's Office and the PIO.

- During major emergencies, notifications to the public are made through a layered system.

- Individual notifications must relate to the hazard and potential harm that the condition may pose to the community.

County Emergency Communication Platforms

Emergency Communication Platform	Description
National Emergency Alerting System	The primary and most consistent means of notifying the public during an emergency is through the EAS notification that preempts radio and TV broadcasting.
TV, Radio, and Other Broadcast News	The PIO provides necessary information, contacts news outlets, and provides access for additional information or interviews, as appropriate, during an emergency.
NOAA Weather Alert Powered Radios	Notification is provided based on zip code for alerts on various types of emergencies, mostly natural disasters.
Text Alerting Systems	Subscribers to "Alert Montgomery" will receive text messages to their cell phones, pagers, PDAs, or email in the event of an emergency.
Reverse "911"	During an event that requires immediate action, the County can provide messages to the public at a rate of 3,000 per hour using internal phone lines and 180,000 per hour using external lines.
Hotline Responses	The County has used hotlines during past emergencies to answer specific questions from the public or provide additional information.
Door-to- Door	In the event that door-to-door contact is required for an emergency, such as an evacuation, the County may mobilize first responders, work force, and/or volunteers to implement such contact.

During an emergency, there are seven major communications platforms that are currently available for emergency notification.

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Water Main Break: 14 June 2008

- **Incident Overview**
  - A WSSC water main break located at Muncaster Mill Rd. at Meadowside Lane (south of the nature center) affected water pressure in areas north of the Beltway, including Wheaton, Glenmont, Olney, Burtonsville, Gaithersburg and Germantown. County facilities and businesses in those areas were closed due to the lack of water, and residents with low water pressure were concerned about water safety.

- **Response Overview**
  - Activation of the Montgomery County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in Gaithersburg, MD.

- **Areas For Improvement**
  - Information was not posted on the County website immediately, so residents looking for more information on the home page did not find it until an hour into the work day.
  - Alert Montgomery message did not go out at 5:30 a.m. when appropriate due to the lack of available trained staff

- **Corrective Actions**
  - Additional Public Information staff members have been trained to post emergency information on the County home page, and it is now office policy that information will be posted as soon as possible.
  - Public Information Office PIOs have been trained to serve as backup emergency alert "senders" so that messages can go out in a timely way.

Water Main Break: 23 December 2008

- **Incident Overview**
  - Water main break at River Road and Fenway Dr in Bethesda, MD, resulted in a flood of water down River Rd. stranded nine vehicles during the rush hour commute, and rolled one vehicle with occupants trapped inside.

- **Response Overview**
  - Significant public safety response and Level 2 (Partial) Activation of the Montgomery County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in Gaithersburg, MD.

- **Communications Response Changes Based on Previous Incident**
  - Sent preemptive message regarding water quality- "WSSC reports 2-3 hours to isolate water main break and possibly an additional 4 hours to re-pressurize water in Montgomery County. Water quality has not been impacted."

- **Areas for Communications Improvement**
  - Reaching out with timely information to residents who do not receive their news from traditional sources has long been a challenge.

- **Corrective Actions**
  - Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were used to provide information about the River Road water main break. The number of followers and fans to these information sources has been steadily increasing ever since.

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PIO Lessons Learned and New Practices: Emergency Communications

- **Identified Area for Improvement:**
  - Timely notification of Alert Montgomery subscribers

- **Identified Solution:**
  - The Office of Public Information has trained its public information officers to send out Alert Montgomery messages to the more than 22,000 subscribers in the event that the Office of Emergency Preparedness staff is unable to do so in a timely way.

  - The two offices coordinate efforts to ensure that duplicate messages are not sent to the Alert Montgomery subscribers.

PIO New Practices

- **During the past few months, the office has incorporated new procedures into its best practices to ensure that communications with the public are more timely and that they reach out to as many residents as possible**

- **Since September 2008, the office has added the following procedures:**

  - Post information regarding emergency weather and other incidents immediately (as soon as the details are confirmed by a public safety agency or the County's Office of Emergency Preparedness) on the County home page

  - Send a cell phone message immediately via Twitter regarding useful information and changes in County operations from the MontgomeryCoMD account on Twitter

  - Email a press release or media advisory immediately to the office's email distribution list (currently numbering 364 addresses), which includes reporters, editors, elected officials and individuals who ask to subscribe to the office press releases

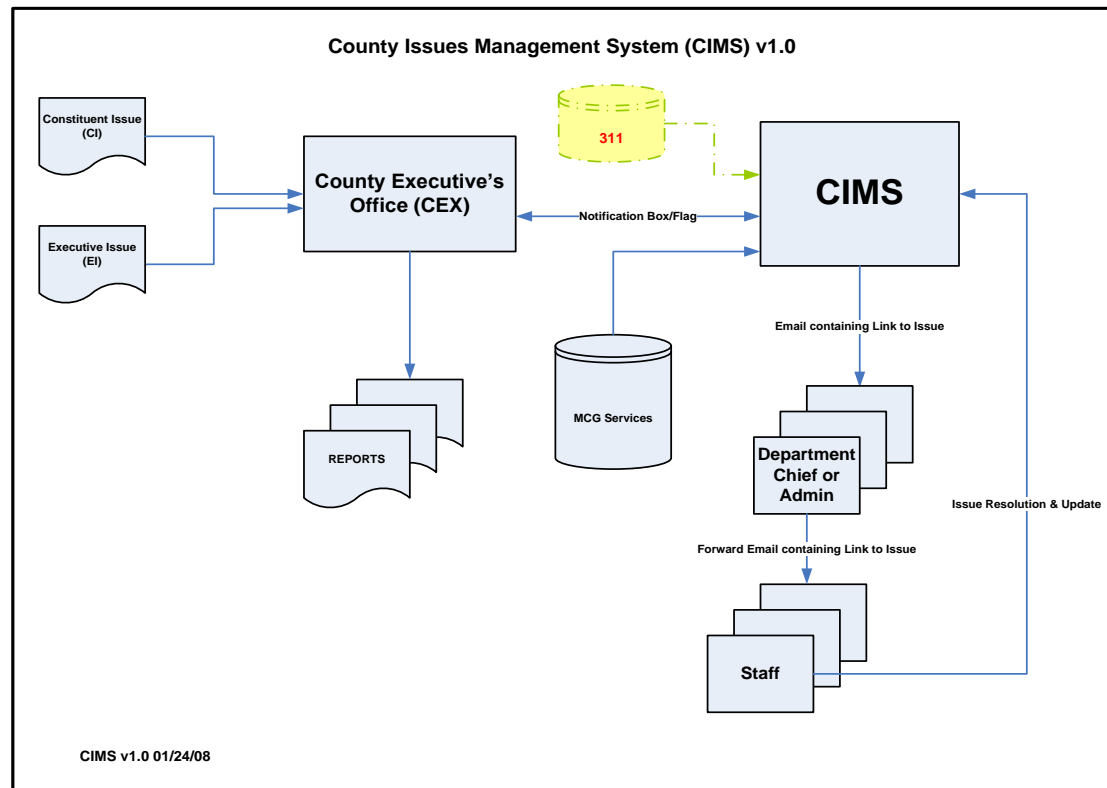 - Post immediately a note on the Montgomery County Government page on Facebook

Potential Future Enhancements in PIO Operations

- **Identified Area for Improvement:**
  - Issue and data tracking capability; unity of messaging; accountability

- **Potential Identified Solution:**
  - Integration of existing Department of Technology Services (DTS) County Issues Management System (CIMS)

- **Potential PIO Operational Enhancements:**
  - Increase capacity to track multiple issues simultaneously with assistance of cutting-edge technology
  - Expedite communication interactions between departments through the use of a common enterprise system
  - Allow for easier recreation of events when conducting post-incident analysis

CIMS Purpose and Design

- County Issues Management System (CIMS) is a web application designed to enable designated County staff to more effectively and efficiently manage, maintain, monitor, and respond to County executive issues and constituent issues as well as correspondences.
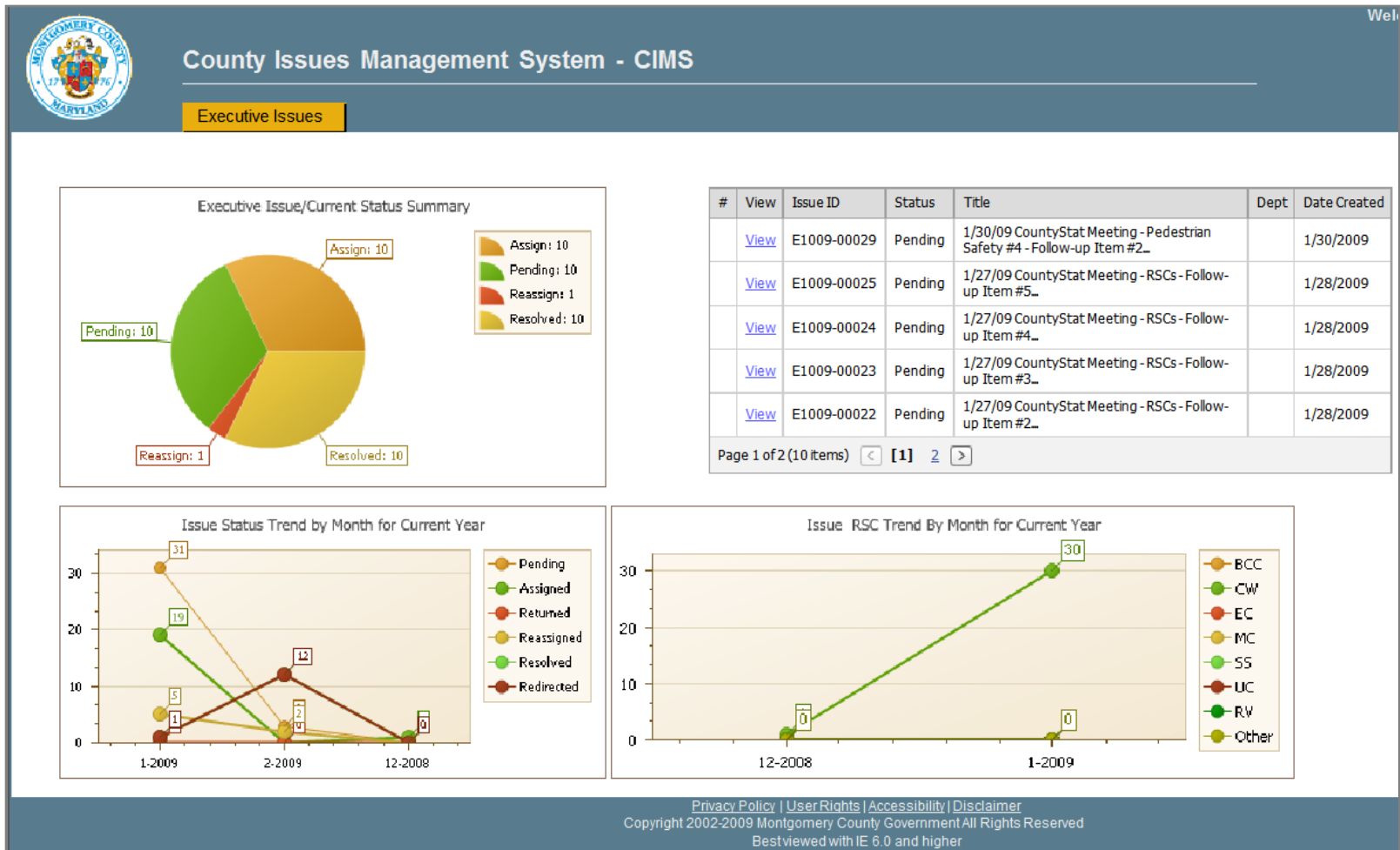

County Issues Management System (CIMS) v1.0

Constituent Issue (CI)

Executive Issue (EI)

311

County Executive's Office (CEX)

Notification Box/Flag

CIMS

REPORTS

MCG Services

Email containing Link to Issue

Department Chief or Admin

Issue Resolution & Update

Forward Email containing Link to Issue

Staff

CIMS v1.0 01/24/08

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CIMS Integration into PIO Daily Operations

Step 1: PIO staff enter issue(s) into CIMS system

Step 2: PIO decides who to assign responsibility for tasks associated with the issue

Step 3: CIMS distributes messages to identified parties both within the PIO and to participating departments

Step 4: CIMS monitors and tracks progress associated with the tasks as entered by users

Step 5: PIO completes all tasks associated with issue and closes out the event

Step 6: PIO uses information from CIMS to report performance and perform post-event analysis

Overview of County Issues Management System (CIMS)

Overview of County Issues Management System (CIMS)

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CIMS Core Benefits

- The CIMS application will provide a convenient, stable, secure, reliable, and fast web-based solution that will enable the PIO to more effectively assign, manage, maintain, and respond to issues and correspondences.

- CIMS will enable designated staff to login, using their assigned County computer password, to add and assign, edit/update, search, and display issues as required.
  - This will create a system of better accountability and improve record keeping

- CIMS will enable users to generate issue reports by status, by department, by date submitted or assigned, by topic (if necessary), or by location.
  - This will allow for greater interagency collaboration and generate stronger unity in messaging

> CIMS integration into PIO operations will allow for greater tracking and verification of messaging without an increased user burden

Process for Integrating CIMS into PIO Operations

- **Await completion of CIMS Pilot Prototype (Version 2)**
  - Current pilot users are County Council, DHCA, DTS, DOT, CEX, CountyStat

- **DTS will meet with PIO leadership to determine if any alterations need to be made to the system**

- **DTS will conduct CIMS overview and training to PIO users**

- **PIO begins to track issues through the use of CIMS**

> CIMS integration into PIO operations will allow for greater accountability and create a more robust dataset from which performance can be assessed

Wrap-Up and Follow-Up Items