

**Worksession**

**MEMORANDUM**

May 4, 2021

TO: Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee  
FROM: Marlene Michaelson, Executive Director  
SUBJECT: FY22 Operating Budget: **Legislative Branch Communications Outreach NDA**  
PURPOSE: Review and make recommendations on FY22 Operating Budgets

*Those expected for this worksession:*

Sonya Healy, Legislative Information Officer, County Council  
Sandra Marin, Administrative Services Manager, County Council  
Office of Management and Budget Staff

<b>Legislative Branch Communications NDA</b>	<b>FY21 Approved</b>	<b>FY22 CE Recommended</b>	<b>Change from FY21 Approved</b>
<b>General Fund</b>	<b>\$1,060,250</b>	<b>\$1,180,342</b>	<b>11.3%</b>
Personnel Costs	\$720,510 7.0 FTEs	\$800,702 7.0 FTEs	11.1% 0 FTEs
Operating Costs	\$339,740	\$379,640	11.7%
<b>Total Expenditures (All Funds)</b>	<b>\$1,060,250</b> <b>7.0 FTEs</b>	<b>\$1,180,342</b> <b>7.0 FTEs</b>	<b>11.3%</b> <b>0%</b>

In 2012, at the Committee's initiative, the Council established this non-departmental account (NDA) to strengthen the capacity of the five Legislative Branch offices (the Council office, the Office of Legislative Oversight, the Board of Appeals, the Office of Zoning and Administrative Hearings, and the Office of the Inspector General) to inform constituent communities of issues that directly affect them and to ensure that these communities' concerns are considered. Among its many purposes, the NDA has supported the following efforts:

- A Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system
- Ongoing development of Legislative Branch websites

- Equipment, software, and maintenance needed for communications outreach efforts
- Expanded use of social media and video coverage for Council events
- A weekly Council program on Radio America, started by Councilmember Navarro, and a Latinx communications specialist to coordinate that and other efforts to inform County residents who speak Spanish
- Translation and interpretation services
- Development of a Legislative Information Management System (LIMS) to offer public records on-line, including legislation, resolutions, zoning text amendments, and subdivision regulation amendments.

The FY22 amount recommended by the County Executive for the NDA is \$1,180,342, an increase of \$120,092 or 11.3% over the FY21 budget. The increases include IT software, compensations, and miscellaneous adjustments. FTEs are unchanged from FY21 to FY22. The Executive’s recommendations are attached at © 1. Attached on © 2 is a summary of the activities of the Communications team in 2020.

### Potential Additions to NDA

Over the last few years, the Council has discussed the increased workload for the Communications Office and the need to provide additional resources to ensure its success, particularly for multicultural communications and crisis management. The expanding need to effectively communicate with diverse communities was also identified in the Legislative Branch Operations Assessment, which was spearheaded by Councilmember Navarro and conducted by the National Academy of Public Administration.

Staff has presented several options summarized in the following chart with details below. Ideally, the Council would fund all of these additions as soon as possible (Category 3), but the Committee may want to consider placing those considered less critical in Category 2, to be reconsidered once the revenue picture is clearer. While each of the following additions are important, Staff believes that the Multicultural Communications and Community Outreach Manager could significantly help bring a more strategic approach to our existing efforts, and a full-time translator would ensure consistent quality without having to rely on bilingual staff in Councilmember offices for assistance. Staff further notes that a crisis management consulting firm could be considered on a temporary basis for ARPA funding over the next year.

Multicultural Communications and Community Outreach Manager	\$130,000
Bilingual videographer contractor	\$50,000
Software solutions and equipment for broadcasting in multiple languages	\$30,000 (Placeholder amount)
Full-time translator and interpreter for meetings, materials, and events in Spanish	\$85,000
Crisis management consulting firm	\$60,000-\$100,000

## **Multicultural Communications and Outreach**

In the past year, Council staff created a Multicultural Communications and Community Outreach team, but it uses existing staff with other responsibilities, providing limited capacity. Staff believes the team could be far more effective with full-time staff. This team would be charged with consistently reaching out to underserved communities across Montgomery County, sharing Council information in a culturally-competent way, promoting community engagement in government, and generating more public input about public policy issues before the Council. This team would consist of existing and new staff.

The urgency of providing information during the public health crisis did not provide the space or time to develop a comprehensive, strategic approach to multicultural communications and outreach or to fully appreciate the impact that these added responsibilities would have on existing staff. Councilmember's staff are often called upon for quality control over the messaging and work products. In addition, a large amount of time in 2020 was also spent focused on pushing out information from outside departments.

If the Council is interested in expanding its efforts in this area, the first step should be to hire a manager for multicultural communications and community outreach, who would help develop a strategic plan for Council future efforts in this area and the need for additional resources. As soon as the plan is developed, we will return to the Council to present the plan and the resource implications.

### **Potential Position: Manager of Multicultural Communications & Community Outreach**

Estimated salary and benefits: \$130,000

A Multicultural Communications and Community Outreach Manager with bilingual capacity in Spanish would do the following:

- develop a strategic approach to multicultural communications and outreach based on the needs of underserved community groups;
- develop culturally-competent protocols in concert with the Council's Racial Equity and Social Justice Manager, the Legislative Information Officer, the Bilingual Communications Specialist, and the Latino Civic Project Coordinator that would be used across all Council and Councilmember communications;
- manage the daily operations associated with multicultural communications;
- ensure that all information being shared is culturally appropriate;
- serve as the liaison with the Community Engagement Cluster and community groups across the County on behalf of the Council; and
- assist with policy development, crisis management, and succession planning.

### **Potential Contractual Assistance: Bilingual Audiovisual Information Services**

(Estimated \$50,000)

The Council's Bilingual Communications Specialist has identified video content, radio, and social media as the best ways for the Council to continue to expand its outreach efforts to the Latino community. Adding contractual support from an additional audiovisual information specialist who is fluent in Spanish would help her push out additional information and connect with more residents.

**Potential Position: Full-time translator and interpreter for meetings, materials, and events in Spanish**

(Estimated salary and benefits \$85,000)

Currently the Council relies on contract services for consecutive and simultaneous interpretation. The service quality is inconsistent, based on the availability of the individual assigned. As we move to provide more coverage in Spanish, this position would provide more timely and effective service, and we would be able to control the quality of the work. For other languages we would continue to rely on contract services and the new translation unit being set up in the Community Engagement Cluster.

**Software solutions and equipment for broadcasting in multiple languages**

(Placeholder amount \$30,000)

The Communications team needs to work with the Cable Office to determine the best way to provide quality interpretation services to broadcast Council and Committee meetings in multiple languages and to continue to provide remote opportunities for meetings. We will begin this work once the budget work has concluded and will report back in August.

**Other Item**

**Crisis Management RFP**

(\$60,000-\$100,000, depending on the size of the firm & services provided)

For the Council to more effectively meet the 24-hour, seven day per week news cycle, and to be prepared for the next crisis, the Council may want to hire a crisis communications firm to develop a culturally-competent, multi-platform and multilingual crisis communications strategy. The aim would be to develop a comprehensive, sustainable plan for the Council to manage Countywide crises and Council crises. The firm would also be available on-call in the midst of the emergency to provide real time support to Councilmembers and the Council Communications staff.

The contractor would develop a comprehensive and strategic plan for use by the entire Council. This would include creating a crisis management toolbox that will use all forms of media. The expectation is to use a set of standard protocols that the Council would agree upon to determine the occasions and contexts for the plan's activation and case escalation.

Potential deliverables could include:

- Develop and implement a crisis communications plan to include a toolkit for Council use;
- Develop a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis for current crisis communications strategies;
- Provide media training support for crisis situations to individuals as designated by the Council and LIO team;
- Provide ongoing call-in support via a designated representative or a team;
- Upon request, provide emergency support;
- Components of strategic plan and toolkit;
- Research that includes analysis of existing responses and processes;

- Toolkit with approved messaging proven to resonate with residents (for web, social media, traditional media); and
- Metrics, reporting and evaluation.

**FY22 Recommended**

**☀ Legislative Branch Communications Outreach**

This NDA provides funds to strengthen the capacity of five Legislative Branch offices (the Council Office, the Office of Legislative Oversight, the Board of Appeals, the Office of Zoning and Administrative Hearings, and the Office of the Inspector General) to inform constituent communities of issues that directly affect them and to ensure that these communities' concerns are effectively taken into account. Communications efforts supported by this NDA include expanded outreach in Spanish and other languages, greater use of web and social media resources, Open Government initiatives, and improved management of constituent requests.

FY22 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	FTEs
<b>FY21 Approved</b>	<b>1,060,250</b>	<b>7.00</b>
Increase Cost: Operating Expenses (IT Software)	39,900	0.00
Increase Cost: FY21 Mid-Year Salary Adjustments	20,955	0.00
Increase Cost: FY22 Compensation Adjustment	5,281	0.00
Multi-program adjustments, including negotiated compensation changes, employee benefit changes, changes due to staff turnover, reorganizations, and other budget changes affecting multiple programs.	53,956	0.00
<b>FY22 Recommended</b>	<b>1,180,342</b>	<b>7.00</b>

**☀ Metro Washington Council of Governments**

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) is a voluntary association of major local governments in the Washington Metropolitan Area. COG seeks to provide regional answers to, and coordination of, area-wide issues such as air and water pollution, day care, housing, crime, water supply, land use, and transportation.

This NDA reflects Montgomery County's share of the organization's operation plus special COG initiatives. Additionally, the contribution supports the Cooperative Purchasing Program; the Anacostia Restoration Fund; and the Regional Environmental Fund.

As in previous years, the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission will provide Montgomery County's contribution to support the Water Resources Management Planning Program and the Blue Plains Users Program.

FY22 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	FTEs
<b>FY21 Approved</b>	<b>1,684,519</b>	<b>0.00</b>

## Summary of Communications Activities in 2020

The activities of the Council's Communications Office have grown significantly, particularly over the last 16 months. While it had some growing pains during the pandemic response, the team stepped up to meet multiple competing priorities and to support outside departments and County residents.

In the early days of the public health crisis, Councilmembers Navarro and Albornoz initiated the multicultural communications response. We created a Multicultural Communications team, utilizing the language and video production skills of the Communications staff as well as expertise from Councilmember offices to assist with interpretation, translation, community outreach, and messaging. They also worked in partnership with Montgomery College to develop and provide current, and consistently changing content, for CoronaMontgomery, which is a one-stop information portal and local information station on Channel 10.

In addition, the Office did not miss a beat with the coverage for Council and Committee meetings. They broadcast more than 225 Council, Committee, and town hall meetings totaling 520 hours, streamed various advisory group meetings, and generated the majority of County Cable Montgomery's original programming. Moreover, they worked with IT staff to develop an online system for accepting public hearing testimony and kept residents informed about Council decisions.

For calendar year 2020, press releases were up 25 percent from 2019, with a total of 430 issued. This is a 48 percent increase from calendar year 2018. So far for 2021, the Communications Office has issued 170 releases, with a high of 55 in March.

Our social media platform also grew significantly in 2020. By using targeted public health information and streaming all meetings, YouTube subscribers grew by 73 percent in 2020, with watch times growing 234 percent to 43,000 hours. Twitter followers grew by 43 percent and our posts were up 62 percent. We also increased our Facebook followers by 103 percent, with a 70 percent increase in page likes. Facebook followers on Concejo del Condado de Montgomery grew by 228 percent, with likes also growing by 227 percent. Instagram followers grew by 189 percent and total posts grew 74 percent.

The Council's Multicultural Communications team is led by Lilian Mass and Carolyn Chen in partnership with Ken Hartman and Diane Vu and is supported by staff in Councilmember offices and other members of the Communications team. In 2020, the group made one-on-one connections with 160 nonprofits and participated in outreach efforts to community groups and small businesses. The group produced short, culturally-competent informational segments on social media and PSAs in multiple languages (Spanish, French, and Amharic with current staff members and in Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese with community partners).

The Communications team continues to work on two other key initiatives started, developed, and expanded by Councilmember Navarro—En Sintonia con el Concejo (In Tune with the Montgomery County Council), which is the weekly radio show on Radio America, and the Latino Civic Project that provides civics curriculum taught by Mayra Cruz-Solis with Linkages to Learning in Title 1 schools.