

Worksession

MEMORANDUM

May 2, 2022

TO: Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee

FROM: Marlene Michaelson, Executive Director

SUBJECT: FY23 Operating Budget: **Legislative Branch Communications Outreach NDA**

Those expected for this worksession:

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

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH COMMUNICATIONS NDA			
	FY22 Approved	FY23 CE Recommended	Change from FY22 Approved
Total Costs	\$ 1,435,295	\$ 2,142,152	49.2%
FTEs	9	13	44.4%

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

- 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
- A Legislative Information Management System (LIMS) to offer public records on-line, including legislation, resolutions, zoning text amendments, and subdivision regulation amendments.

The FY23 amount recommended by the County Executive for the NDA is \$2,142,152, an increase of \$706,857 or 49.2% over the FY22 budget, attached at ©1. In addition to the normal increases associated with compensation and the full year costs of positions added in FY22, the FY23 budget allocates \$250,000 for a new customer relationship management (CRM) system, 3 new positions, and 1 new position created in FY22. The CRM system serves both the County Council and the County Executive and enables them to organize incoming correspondence and track responses. The need to upgrade this system was previously approved by the Council and Council staff are in the final stages of negotiating a contract with the selected bidder.

Two of these positions are conversions from contractual support to full-time staff. The Council hired a contractor to manage remote Council and Committee meetings. The decision to allow hybrid meetings going forward and to have some individuals to be in person while others are remote (such as speakers at Council public hearings) means this is no longer a temporary need, and the staff should become permanent rather than contractual. Similarly, the Council has had contractual support for information technology (IT) Help Desk services on a part time basis over the past two years, which has not been sufficient to meet the Council’s needs, particularly as the use of different technology has become more pervasive and complex. Moving this to a full-time staff member will better address current needs for IT support.

The budget includes funding for one new position in IT, to serve the needs of 2 new Councilmembers and their staff. Positions to serve new the new Councilmember offices have been lapsed to reflect that they will not start until December 2023.

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☀ 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.

Non-Departmental Accounts

Other County Government Functions 72-17

FY23 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	FTEs
FY22 Approved	1,435,295	9.00
Increase Cost: Operating Expenses	250,370	0.00
Add: Funding for Two Public Information Officers	192,863	2.00
Add: Funding for Two Information Technology Positions	172,044	2.00
Increase Cost: FY23 Compensation Adjustment	13,871	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.	77,709	0.00
FY23 Recommended	2,142,152	13.00



Summary of Communications Activities and Legislative History of the Communications NDA

The activities of the Council's Communications Office have grown significantly over the last two years. During that same time period, the office has experienced a 50 percent staffing turnover. While we had some growing pains during the start of the pandemic response, the team stepped up to meet multiple competing priorities and support outside department and county residents.

In the early days of the public health crisis, GO Committee Chair Navarro and Council President Albornoz initiated the multicultural communications response. We stood up 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. We 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, we didn't miss a beat with the coverage for Council and committee meetings throughout the pandemic, as the Council swiftly moved to a virtual meeting model to continue operations and provide multiple participation options for residents throughout the public health crisis. We carried more than 500 hours of live and streamed Council meetings each year and streamed various advisory group meetings and generated the majority of County Cable Montgomery's original programming. Moreover, we worked with IT staff to develop an online system for accepting public hearing testimony and kept residents informed about Council decisions.

For calendar year 2021, press releases were up six percent from 2020 with a total of 457 issued. This is a 50 percent increase from calendar year 2018. So far for 2022, the communications team has issued 168 releases with a high of 49 in March. We also continue to produce the weekly media briefings with the Council President's Office, the Council President's electronic newsletter as well as Council commemorations, town halls and media events.

Our social media platforms have also grown significantly over the last two years, as residents sought information about the pandemic and Montgomery County's response and recovery efforts. By using targeted public health information and streaming all meetings, YouTube watch times more than tripled from 2019, and in 2021 we logged 42,800 hours. YouTube views have doubled since 2019 with 390,400 views in 2021, which is up 25 percent from 2020. In addition to pandemic related topics, human interest stories and the Council's efforts, spearheaded by Chair Navarro, to promote racial equity and social justice have performed the best over the last two years.

The Council's Twitter account has grown to more than 17,000 followers, which is up 15 percent from 2020 and has increased 64 percent from 2019. This social media platform generated 7.2 million impressions last year. The posts that generated the most interest focused on the Council's Board of Health decisions and ghost guns.

We have also doubled our Facebook followers since 2019, but the English and Spanish pages continue to lag well behind Twitter. Each page reaches approximately 9,500 residents, with the Spanish page having 7,645 followers and the English page having 6,679 followers.

Instagram followers increased by 26 percent in 2021, after an increase of 189 percent in 2020. The video content provides the highest engagement with small business features and commemoration videos attracting the most engagement.

The Council's multicultural communications team is currently led by Marcela Rodriguez and Carolyn Chen in collaboration with Ken Hartman and Diane Vu and is supported by staff in Councilmember offices and other members of the communications team. During the pandemic, 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).

We continue to work on two other key initiatives started, developed and expanded by Chair 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 I schools.

At the direction of Chair Navarro, the Council communications team established a crisis communication plan, which was reviewed by the Council during their January retreat to have uniform protocols in place to deal with emergency situations.

On the personnel side, the Communications Office has stabilized staffing related to employee turnover by filling all but two vacant positions in the current personnel complement. The Communications Office has filled the interpreter/community outreach position, and the new employee will begin on May 9, 2022.

We are currently recruiting for a manager of multicultural communications and community outreach. This new position will formalize culturally competent multicultural communications across the Council in consultation with the Council's racial equity and social justice manager and the legislative information officer and conduct outreach to underserved communities across Montgomery County, sharing Council information in a culturally competent way. This position will:

- 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 will be used across all Council communications;
- manage the daily operations associated with multicultural communications;
- 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.

We have also selected a vendor for media monitoring and analysis and are working the contract through the Office of Procurement. We anticipate having individual accounts for each Councilmember's office and training sessions scheduled in June.

History of the Legislative Branch Communications Outreach NDA established by Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee Chair Nancy Navarro

In 2012 Committee Chair Nancy Navarro established the Legislative Branch Communications Outreach NDA. At that point in time, the GO Committee and Council established following five goals that were achieved over the next few fiscal years:

1. A Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, which was procured and implemented to strengthen the Council's electronic communications.
2. Televising Committee meetings was expanded from one-third of the meetings to all meetings. The meetings were broadcast either live or (for simultaneous meetings) at a later time and were made available on demand within 24 hours on the Council's website. Televising meetings was expanded in FY14 to include Council meetings on state legislation and interviews conducted by the Council.
3. A legislative branch webmaster position was created and filled.
4. An IT support position to help our Senior IT Specialist meet the expanded IT needs of legislative branch offices was created and filled.
5. The Spanish-language communications specialist position was expanded from half-time in FY12 to two-thirds time in FY13. It became full-time starting in FY14. In FY14 and FY15, the NDA was also used to develop an app to enable the community to use the Interactive Fiscal Plan tool created by OLO and fund a weekly Council program on Radio America, which Councilmember Navarro first proposed in 2011. It was also used to hire three part-time contractors to strengthen communications outreach with a video editor, a videographer, and a second multi-lingual specialist to expand outreach to Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese communities.

In FY16 the NDA was expanded to include extending the weekly shows on Radio America from a half hour to an hour and to add support for Linea Directa, which produces shows in Spanish for Telemundo and County Cable Montgomery that are directly related to Montgomery County issues. In addition, support was added for a web design contractor to help our IT staff upgrade the Council's website, build interactive district/county maps, and develop a legislative information management system (LIMS) to offer public records online.

Funds were also allocated to provide contract support for translation and interpretation services needed for the Council's public hearings and other events. All these services continue to be supported in the NDA.

At the end of FY19, Chair Navarro initiated the expansion of the Latino Civic Project beyond District 4 to a countywide initiative to promote and strengthen the civic participation of the Latino and immigrant communities. This is done through a culturally and linguistically appropriate curriculum shared in a series of workshops with the purpose of building a knowledge base and encouraging active community participation in the decision-making process. This work is also supported by the NDA. A full-time civic engagement coordinator was transferred to the Council's Communications office in FY20 to focus on this work.

Additionally, in FY21, the GO Committee recommended transferring funding for a PIOII position from the Public Information Office to the Council. The NDA supports some of the funding needed for this position.

In FY22 Chair Navarro recommended, and the GO Committee agreed, to continue building capacity for multicultural outreach to all residents and expand capacity to respond to crisis situations by creating a manager of multicultural communications and an interpreter/community outreach position.

Each of these investments have built an essential and strong foundation for the Council's communications efforts moving forward into FY23 and beyond to serve all residents of Montgomery County.