

MEMORANDUM

May 2, 2022

TO: Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee

FROM: Marlene Michaelson, Executive Director
Sonya Healy, Legislative Information Officer

SUBJECT: **FY24 Operating Budget: Legislative Branch Communications Outreach NDA**

Those expected for this worksession:

Sonya Healy, Legislative Information Officer, County Council
Bertha Cerzosimo, Multicultural Communications & Outreach Manager, County Council
Sandra Marin, Administrative Services Manager, County Council Office
Grace Pederson, Office of Management and Budget

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH COMMUNICATIONS NDA			
	FY23 Approved	FY24 CE Recommended	Change from FY23 Approved
Total Costs	\$2,142,152	\$2,504,757	16.9%
FTEs	13	14	7.7%

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 about issues that directly affect them and to ensure that these communities’ concerns are considered. Significant information technology needs have also been provided through this non-departmental account. Among its many purposes, the NDA has supported the following:

- Informing the public about the work of the Council and conducting public outreach.

- Media relations on behalf of the legislative body with annual priorities developed with the Council president's office.
- Crisis communications.
- Multicultural communications through a Racial Equity and Social Justice lens.
- Broadcasting and streaming all Council and committee meetings.
- Producing half of the programming for County Cable Montgomery.
- Conducting five Council commemorations each year and providing Council proclamations.
- Working with individual Councilmember offices to promote public policy issues.
- Serving as a liaison among public information staff in county government departments and outside agencies.
- Funding the Correspondence Relationship Management System (CRM), a part-time conferencing moderator for the Board of Appeals and Zoning and Hearing Administration, information technology hardware, on-going software subscriptions such as M365, Adobe and Zoom and the task order for the Legislative Information Management System (LIMS) contractor.

The Executive-recommended FY24 budget for the Legislative Branch Communications Outreach NDA is attached at © 1. Additional information on this NDA and its history is attached at © 2.

The FY24 amount recommended by the County Executive for the NDA is \$2,504,767, an increase of \$362,605 or 16.9% over the FY23 budget. In addition to the normal increases associated with compensation and the full year costs of positions added in FY23, the FY24 budget adds funding for a new position to serve as a liaison to the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community (\$82,703), increased funding for translation services (\$30,000) and \$10,000 for culturally competent advertising.

The Executive's Recommended FY24 Operating Budget includes the Council's request to add a new community outreach position to serve as a liaison to the Asian American and Pacific Islander community. In addition to serving as a community liaison, we are hoping to hire someone who would be responsible for serving as an interpreter and translator for Traditional Chinese. Currently materials requested in Chinese must be sent out to independent contractors, and we have no timely way to verify the quality of the work being provided. Adding this additional position would also allow the Council to expand community outreach work and adapt the existing civics curriculum for the needs of the Chinese community.

The request for additional translations and interpretation services (\$30,000) is based on the high demand for such services to enhance our efforts to reach the broadest range of residents on critical issues. The funding allocated in FY23 for this purpose (\$23,000) was clearly insufficient to meet the needs of the Council. We have begun providing simultaneously translation for Spanish speakers at Council hearings when we believe there will be high demand and are translating more Council documents than ever before, including using translation services for languages other than Spanish (where we now have in house capabilities). **We believe it is critical to continue and expand our success in having a more diverse audience able to read Council materials and attend hearings.**

The Recommended FY24 budget also includes \$10,000 in resources to begin paid outreach in ethnic media not typical used by the Council and for boosting critical public health and safety messages and important public policy issues on social media. Councilmembers Fani-González and Alborno support this communications expansion but believe that far more funding is necessary to make the effort impactful for Montgomery County’s multicultural community.

Attached on © 3 are the highlights of their proposal to enhance the County’s ability to communicate and facilitate the flow of critical information to residents focused on our Black, Indigenous and People of Color communities. They have proposed an initial investment of \$315,000 in FY24 to be allocated in the Council’s Legislative Branch Communications Outreach NDA. This funding would allow messaging to be tailored to each racial/ethnic/multicultural community and use ethnic media that is diverse owned/founded so that this information reaches the Council’s intended audiences. Their requested amount was based on their internal and external meetings with Council and Executive Public Information Office staff, media outlets, as well as information gathered from partner agencies regarding the way they strategically invest in media purchases.

The Council communications team would implement this initiative and would be tasked with tracking engagement and measuring the effectiveness of each ad campaign through post-campaign analysis of reach, performance, relevance, surveys, and other available metrics, that will help track, whenever possible, the success and return on investment of this effort. Should the Council prioritize and approve this funding as part of the FY24 budget, a more robust and detailed plan will be developed as part of a new multicultural workplan.

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

Vacancies

There is only one existing vacancy on the Communications Team and an offer has been made to a candidate to fill the vacancy.

Reconciliation List

Based on the Council’s protocol for reviewing the FY24 budget, all additions to the FY23 budget other than compensation and required adjustments need to be placed on the reconciliation list. Staff recommends that the **new position to serve as a liaison to the AAPI community and the additional operating funds for translation and community engagement** be placed on the reconciliation list as high priorities. The **funding requested by Councilmembers Fani-González and Alborno** is not in the Recommended FY24 Operating Budget and would also have to be added to the reconciliation list. Staff recommends that it be designated a high priority.

This packet contains:

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employees in the Municipal and County Government Employees Organization (MCGEO) union. The committee attempts to resolve matters that affect bargaining unit employees, both County-wide and department-specific. This NDA provides funds to implement the recommendations of the LMRC.

FY24 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	FTEs
FY23 Approved	100,000	0.00
Decrease Cost: Funding Adjustment Due to Sufficient Rollover of Funds from FY23	(100,000)	0.00
FY24 Recommended	0	0.00

Leases

This NDA provides the funds necessary to lease privately owned real estate to accommodate County programs. Real property leased by the County includes office, warehouse, and retail space; childcare space in schools; parking spaces; and space for communication antennas. Leasing property allows the County the flexibility to locate programs in the communities they serve and provides space for programs to operate when there is no County-owned space available. Further, it is an economical way to procure highly specialized, location-sensitive, and/or temporary space. For FY24, approximately 73 leased facilities are budgeted. The inventory of leases is constantly shifting as new leases are added and existing leases are terminated.

FY24 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	FTEs
FY23 Approved	15,671,334	0.00
Increase Cost: Net Chargebacks of Facility Leases	1,195,569	0.00
Increase Cost: Net Change in Lease Costs	1,081,583	0.00
Increase Cost: New Leases	108,120	0.00
FY24 Recommended	18,056,606	0.00

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.

FY24 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	FTEs
FY23 Approved	2,142,152	13.00
Add: New Position to Serve as Liaison to the Asian American and Pacific Islander Community	82,703	1.00
Increase Cost: FY24 Compensation Adjustment	45,862	0.00
Enhance: Translation Services and Culturally Competent Advertising	40,000	0.00
Increase Cost: Annualization of FY23 Compensation Increases	12	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.	194,028	0.00
FY24 Recommended	2,504,757	14.00

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 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.

FY24 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	FTEs
FY23 Approved	1,684,519	0.00
Increase Cost: Increase Membership Dues	273,014	0.00



Summary of Communications Activities 2022 and Legislative History of the Communications NDA

The Council's communications team is responsible for the following activities:

- Informing the public about the work of the Council and conducting public outreach.
- Media relations on behalf of the legislative body with annual priorities developed with the Council president's office.
- Crisis communications.
- Multicultural communications through a racial equity and social justice lens.
- Broadcasting and streaming all Council and committee meetings.
- Producing half of the programming for County Cable Montgomery.
- Conducting five Council commemorations each year and providing Council proclamations.
- Working with individual Councilmember offices to promote public policy issues.
- Serving as a liaison among public information staff in county government departments and outside agencies.

The activities of the Council's communications team have grown significantly during the last three years, as the Council's work has expanded, and we have adopted best practices implemented during the pandemic to increase public participation. For example, the Council now provides multiple streaming options for each Council and committee meeting, has multiple ways for the public to provide testimony and has expanded content in languages other than English. With the return to in-person meetings, the Council has also reinstated community conversations across the county with opportunities for residents to participate remotely.

The Council's Communications Office has also experienced a substantial staffing turnover in successive years, with new staff members filling three vacancies in 2022 and five filling vacancies in 2021. The Council communications team is currently staffed with 14 individuals, including one M2 position and 13 positions with grades ranging from 18 to 28. An offer has been made to fill one vacant audio-visual position in the communications NDA. Staff responsibilities are divided into three main categories: audio visual engineering and production, public information, and multicultural communications and outreach.

In 2022, the communications team issued 418 press releases and media advisories. Fifty of the press releases were also done in Spanish. There was a high of 57 press releases published in March. The team also organized and created content for five Council commemorations and organized numerous media availabilities, press conferences, and community conversations. Moreover, staff provides content on a weekly basis to program County Cable Montgomery and keeps social media current. The video engineering team is responsible for more than 400 hours of live Council and committee meetings that are broadcast and streamed. The communications team is on track to continue this pace in calendar year 2023 with 150 press releases and media advisories issued so far this year, with 20 issued in Spanish and a high of 55 releases issued in March.

The Council's social media platforms have also grown significantly during the last three years. The 2023 Office of Legislative Oversight report, "How the County Communicates with Residents," found that the Council has

the most YouTube followers across all 24 departments; comes in third for Instagram followers among the 21 departments using the platform; and has the fourth largest Twitter account across 30 departments, coming in just behind the Fire and Rescue Service. These social media efforts have grown without any funding for boosting posts or purchasing digital ads.

The Council's Facebook followers are divided between the English and Spanish page, so the Council didn't make the top five for followers based on individual page totals; however, if the page followers were combined, we would have come in fourth immediately following Montgomery County Government's page.

Some trends across social media that we have seen since emerging from the pandemic are as follows:

- YouTube subscribers have increased by nearly 25 percent, while watch times have decreased slightly. Human interest stories continue to be the most popular videos.
- Twitter followers continue to grow, but not at the pace experienced in 2020, when residents were looking for daily updates on continuously evolving public health guidance and resources. Our growth rate year-over-year from 2021 to 2022 was 2,900 new subscribers, which is approximately 42 percent of the growth rate in 2020.
- The Spanish Facebook page follower base has grown by 62 percent in 2022 and views have tripled thanks to the constant curation and constituent response from Community Liaison Claudia Davis and Public Information Officer Marcela Rodriguez Villagrán. The Facebook page in English has seen a 16 percent growth rate in subscribers since 2021, as more video content and graphics have been added.
- Instagram has also grown by 25 percent with more content being posted from various sources, with top posts focused on small businesses and commemorations.

Building on the work done during the pandemic to reach diverse communities in multiple languages, a strategic multicultural communications and outreach plan is being developed to standardize operations and measure outcomes. We continue prioritizing language access availability at Council town halls and public hearings by offering simultaneous translation and interpretation services to Spanish-speaking residents (and other languages as requested) through our recently acquired interpretation system, which has streamlined this process.

Multicultural Communications and Outreach Manager Bertha Cerzosimo is leading this work and the multicultural communications team's work, which includes key initiatives like "En Sintonia con el Concejo/In Tune with the Montgomery County Council", the weekly radio show on Radio America hosted by Public Information Officer Marcela Rodriguez Villagrán; and the Latino Civic Project, which provides a civics curriculum embracing a cultural humility approach taught by Project Coordinator Mayra Cruz-Solis with Linkages to Learning (L2L) in Title I schools and senior centers. Since January 2021, there have been more than 300 participants who have graduated from the various 25, eight-week sessions that took place at different MCPS schools (and a senior center) with L2L sites. This work has been done in partnership with the organizations running those L2L sites, which are the YMCA, EveryMind and Sheppard Pratt.

In late March and through the first week of June, our team is conducting a two-month pilot initiative consisting of community outreach pop-up events once a week in recreation and senior centers around the County. The locations for this effort are in Equity Focus Areas (EFAs) and occur at least once in every Council district. The impetus is to meet residents where they are and expand opportunities to inform the community about the work of the Council and receive feedback on areas of importance to them. This type of engagement enhances our understanding of community needs, empowers residents to play an active role in decision-making, which may lead to better-informed policies, more responsive programs and initiatives, and a better quality of life for all.

Information collected through this effort will be used to inform the strategic multicultural communications and outreach plan, which will be presented to Councilmembers and chiefs of staff for feedback in June and will establish short-term and long-term goals for community engagement.

As proposed by Councilmembers Natali Fani-González and Gabe Albornoz, part of this multicultural communications and outreach plan would include funding (if approved by the Council in the FY24 Operating Budget) for multicultural media buys. The funding proposed would greatly expand outreach efforts through partnerships with multicultural media outlets in the Montgomery County market to help educate all residents about essential public health and safety information and available county resources in a culturally appropriate and humble way. The proposal is included in the Council staff report starting on circle page 6. Council staff will produce all content for this effort internally by collaborating with the appropriate lead agencies based on topics selected by the Council.

Another budget item for consideration is adding a new community outreach position serving Chinese community members. Adding this additional position would allow the Council to expand community outreach work and adapt the existing civics curriculum for the needs of the Chinese community. Also, there is currently no internal capability to provide interpretation and translation services in Chinese. All materials must be sent out to independent contractors, and we have no timely way to verify the quality of the work being provided. If this new position is funded, the job description would require the ability to interpret and translate information into Traditional Chinese.

History of the Legislative Branch Communications Outreach NDA

In 2012 former Government Operations and Fiscal Policy (GO) Committee Chair Nancy Navarro led the creation of the Legislative Branch Communications Outreach NDA. At that point in time, the GO Committee and Council established the following priorities that were achieved over several fiscal years:

- A Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, which was procured and implemented to strengthen the Council's electronic communications.
- 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.
- A legislative branch webmaster position was created and filled.
- An IT support position, to assist the Council's senior IT specialist meet the expanded needs of legislative branch offices, was created and filled.
- The Spanish-language communications specialist position was expanded from part-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 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 Asian American communities.

In FY16 the NDA was expanded to include extending the weekly shows on Radio America from 30 minutes 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 Council IT staff upgrade the 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. These services continue to be supported in the NDA.

At the end of FY19, the Latino Civic Project was extended 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 team 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 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. These positions have been annualized in the budget.

Each of these investments has built an essential and strong foundation for the Council's communications efforts moving forward into FY24 and beyond.

YOUR CREW

COMMUNICATIONS STAFF

- Sonya Healy, Council's legislative information officer
- Bertha Cerzosimo, multicultural communications & outreach manager*
- Mark Matarese, program manager & video engineer
- Marcela Rodriguez, program manager & public information officer
- Sky Brandt, public information officer & photographer
- Mayra Cruz-Solís, Latino Civic Project coordinator*
- Claudia Davis, interpreter & community liaison*
- Lucia Jimenez, public information officer
- Genevieve Kurtz, public information officer
- Jordan Lindsay, public information officer
- YQuynh Nguyen, virtual meeting host & production coordinator
- Mirchaye Sahlu, visual information specialist*
- Mike Springirth, audiovisual production specialist
- Joseph Thompson, audiovisual production specialist
- Montgomery Community Media staff support (contract basis)
Michael Cohen, audiovisual editor



* Indicates Multicultural Communications Team



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

MEMORANDUM

April 19, 2023

To: Kate Stewart, Chair, Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee

From: Natali Fani-González, Chair, Economic Development Committee
Gabriel Albornoz, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee

Handwritten signatures of Natali Fani-González and Gabriel Albornoz.

Subject: Funding for Paid Media Campaign Targeting Multi-Cultural Communities

As the Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee considers the FY24 budget for the Legislative Branch Communications Outreach Non-Departmental Account (NDA), we write to request the Committee's support for adding \$315,000 to the reconciliation list to fund a new effort to engage more directly with our County's incredibly diverse constituents.

According to the 2020 Census, Maryland is now one of the most diverse states in the nation, surpassed only by Nevada, California, and Hawaii. Montgomery County is a majority Black and Brown jurisdiction and the most diverse County in the state. As presented by the Montgomery County Planning Board during their annual demographic trends update to the Council on January 24, 2023:

- Fifty-nine percent of the population identify as Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian and Pacific Islander, or other race; and
- Six out of seven Council districts are majority BIPOC; and
- A little over one-third of the total population is foreign born; and
- Spanish, Chinese, French, Korean, Vietnamese, and Amharic comprise the major languages spoken at home.

It is essential to our work to be able to communicate directly with these residents with culturally sensitive messaging and in publications/media they consume.

The Council's Communications Office is already well-equipped to produce multimedia content across different platforms that is both relevant and accessible to our diverse communities. What we now need is a robust effort to put this content where it will have the most reach and impact.

Accordingly, we propose a multi-year paid media campaign in multicultural media with the following components:

1. \$166,000 a year for TV media buys targeting multilingual communities
2. \$50,000 a year for traditional and digital multicultural media buys modeled after a multi-year phased out County-wide strategy for Thrive 2050 that targeted Equity Emphasis Areas.
3. \$83,000 a year for radio ads in ethnic radio and digital media targeting Black and Brown audiences, and Spanish, Chinese, French, Vietnamese, Amharic, and Korean-speaking communities.
4. \$16,000 a year for translation costs for tailoring messages in languages that we are not able to cover in-house

The total cost for FY24 of \$315,000 was informed by detailed conversations between Council communications staff and the multi-cultural media outlets themselves. We envision this to be beginning of an ongoing effort of the Council communications team.

While the Council has not yet embarked on a paid media campaign of this nature, it is a well-worn path for County departments that serve customers (i.e., Montgomery Recreation, Alcohol Beverage Services, the Department of Transportation, M-NCPPC etc.) who all have recurring funding for media buys. Meanwhile, other departments tap into grant funding to pay for media campaigns around critical issues, such as public health, census efforts, and Covid-19.

The County Council has a unique opportunity to create a first-of-its kind multicultural, multilingual paid media initiative in the Legislative Branch Communications Outreach Non-Departmental Account (NDA). The Council's Communications Office will oversee partnering with ethnic media that is diverse owned/founded to produce traditional and digital media ad campaigns that target the County's BIPOC community more authentically and effectively. The purpose of these multilingual ad campaigns is to raise awareness, change attitudes, opinions, or behaviors toward urgent community issues (i.e., fentanyl awareness, fire safety education, pedestrian safety, etc.). The goals and the topics of these advertising ads will be determined by the County Council as part of the Communications Office annual workplan set to be presented to Councilmembers in July 2023. The Communications Office will track engagement and measure the effectiveness of each ad campaign through post-campaign analysis of reach, performance, relevance, surveys, and other available metrics, that will help track, whenever possible, the success and return on investment of this effort.

To be clear, the entire effort will be done in-house, including content production and messaging, based on the Council's designated guidance and work plan for the upcoming year.

We understand that the demands on this year's budget are many, but we sincerely believe this investment will pay dividends over and over. We thank you for your time and attention to this matter, and we look forward to discussing it further with you.