

Strategic Marketing & Communications

Led by: Director of Customer Service & Communications

Service Description

Strategic Marketing & Communications (SMC) provides marketing and communications consulting, strategy and tactics that align with The City's brand. It strengthens The City's reputation and supports business objectives by providing communications, marketing, media planning, social media, corporate communications, creative services and media relations. This service informs, influences and motivates Calgarians, customers and employees. It is focused on building public trust and confidence, achieving business outcomes, and demonstrating the value of City services in making life better every day in Calgary.

Service Updates

Key Service Results

Awards

- Gold Quill Award of Merit
- 2023 Gold Stevie: Marketing Campaign of the Year - Government / Institutional / Recruitment

1. The service has increased its focus on delivering coordinated communications about priority issues to Calgarians through a new program to identify and elevate reputational risks and issues. This ensures the right people are working together to share more cohesive, accurate, and timely messages about the topics that matter to Calgarians and contributes to increasing the public's trust in The City.
2. In response to high volumes of social media activity and ongoing challenges in the social media environment, the service has implemented improved social media monitoring and reporting. Through this work, The City will be able to glean more actionable insights, save time, and refocus staff on providing Calgarians with accurate information and safe social media spaces for two-way communication.
3. Calgary.ca has moved from department-focused navigation to a more user-centric, topic-based approach. Using information provided by Calgarians about how they interact with the site, the service has reorganized web content to make it easier for the public to find relevant information and conduct business with The City.

Service Challenges

Due to an unprecedented wildfire season and multiple elevated risk events, Strategic Marketing & Communications saw increased demand for crisis communications and Emergency Operations Centre support in 2023. While appropriate resources were found to address these events, it required key personnel to be re-deployed, creating significant strain and challenges in supporting City departments with regular communications to Calgarians. As the volume and duration of these events increase, existing practices are growing unsustainable and could impact satisfaction with City communications and the delivery of quality, timely information to ensure public safety.

To address these challenges, the service has conducted a review of its crisis communications program and will be focusing on training new team members, working with City services on communication prioritization, and increasing efficiency by updating support materials to reflect the changing nature of emergency activations.

Trends & Potential Uncertainties

Advancements in artificial intelligence, along with upward trends in public polarization and online incivility, may lead to more sophisticated attempts at disseminating misinformation about The City. Failure to address the use of artificial intelligence for such activity could impact measures related to trust and the effectiveness of City communications. Advances in artificial intelligence also present an opportunity for the service to leverage technology to filter hateful and threatening social media comments, which would increase efficiency and protect employees and Calgarians from exposure to hate and incivility on City accounts. A tool is being assessed to ensure these benefits can be effectively delivered while continuing to respect the need for open and honest public discourse.



Measuring Our Performance

Legend

— Actuals

■ Expected Future Performance

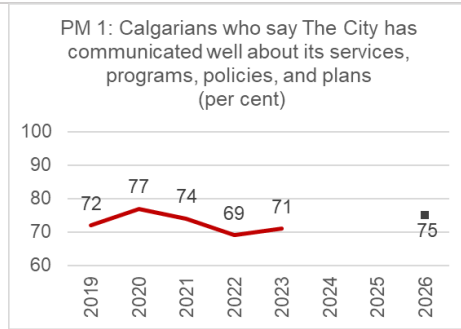
➔ Progressing as planned

⊖ Not progressing as planned

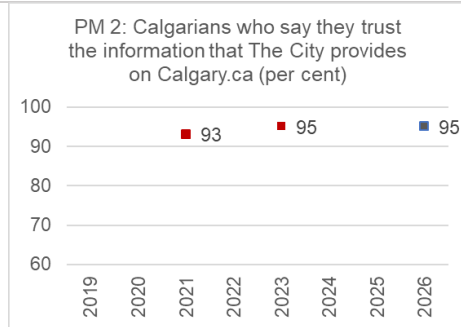
Performance Measures

Story behind the numbers

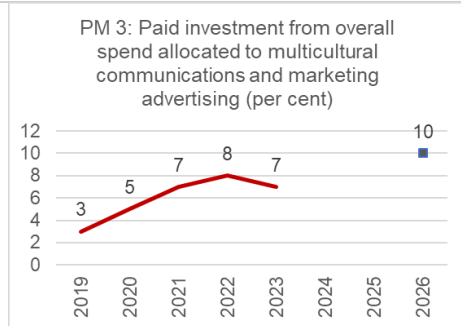
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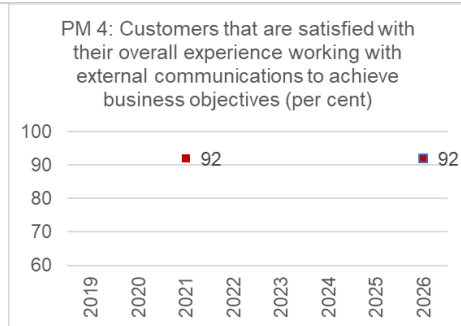
Due to changes with the Fall Survey of Calgarians, year-end data is unavailable. However, spring 2023 data shows a small increase in how Calgarians rated the quality of communications. Despite this rise, the score is six points below the five-year high seen in 2020. This is due to the shift from COVID communications, which were highly effective and valued by Calgarians, as well as increased public polarization and lower trust in government. With a new team focused on providing Calgarians with more cohesive and coordinated communications on key issues, the service is on track to reach its 2026 anticipated performance level of 75 per cent.



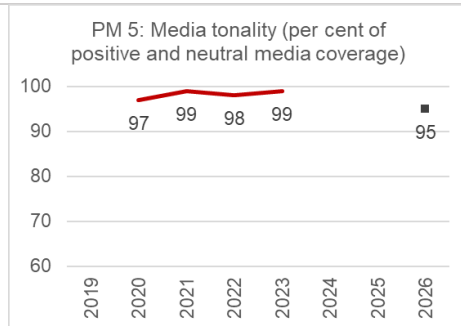
Calgary.ca remains one of Calgarians' most trusted sources of City information, with its trust rating increasing from 93 per cent in 2021 to 95 per cent in fall 2023. This is likely the result of ongoing efforts to prioritize accurate, up-to-date content and user-centric design – two key factors known to influence website trust. With continued high demand for content-related work on the website (9,700 requests in 2023), and content enhancement projects planned for key areas of the site in 2024, trust in Calgary.ca is expected to remain strong and meet 2026 anticipated performance levels.



The percentage of overall spend on multicultural advertising, which demonstrates The City's ongoing commitment to reach diverse groups of Calgarians with its marketing and communications, dropped by one point in 2023. This is due in part to several multicultural print publications ceasing operations, which led to the removal of this tactic from multiple plans. Given the growth of this measure since 2019 and the number of years remaining in the business cycle, the service still anticipates meeting the 2026 expected future performance.



Client satisfaction with external communications provides the service with an indication of how well it is meeting expectations around service delivery and communications with the public, businesses, industry, and other orders of government. While an updated measure will not be available until the spring of 2024, the service expects to meet the 2026 anticipated performance level of 92 per cent previously achieved in 2021. To support ongoing satisfaction with external communications, the service has introduced processes to better respond to reputational issues and continues to evolve its use of data and analytics to reach desired audiences.



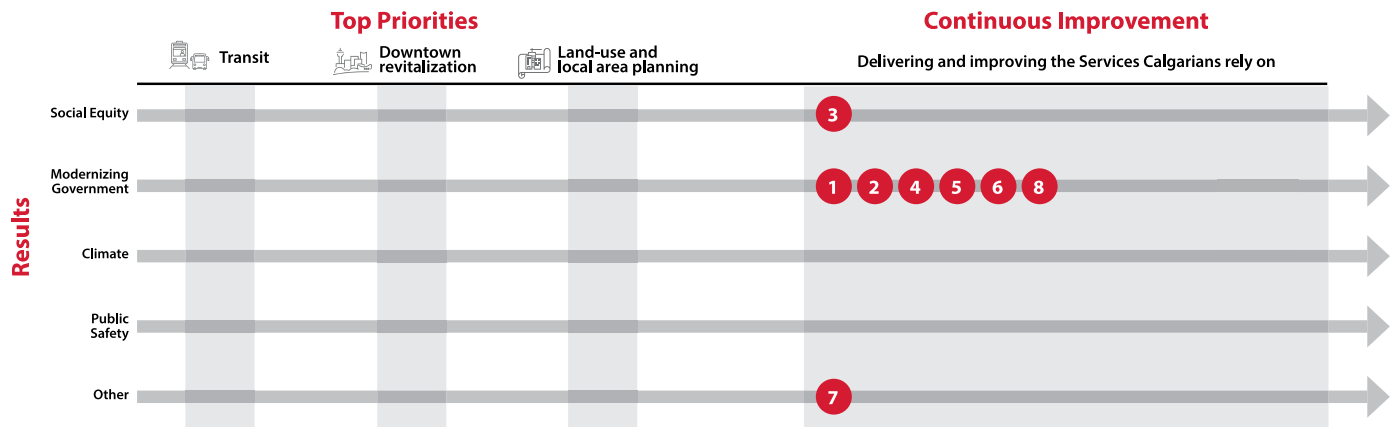
The media tonality measure looks at the percentage of news coverage classified as positive or neutral in tone and provides insight into the effectiveness of City media relations. Despite multiple polarizing issues facing The City, the tonality score has increased by one point since mid-year. As in past years, coverage has been mainly informational in nature and neutral in tone (83 per cent). Approximately 16 per cent has been positive and tied to popular projects (i.e. completed roads, park openings). Given past performance, increased media training, and new reputation risk processes, the measure is expected to stay in the high nineties.










Progress on Service Delivery

Alignment with Council Refined Priorities and Result Areas



- Legend**
- Completed
 - Progressing as planned
 - Not progressing as planned
 - Not started
 - Initiative number

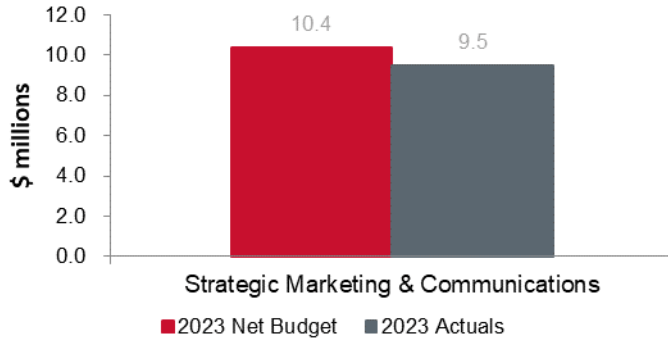
Initiative	Initiative Update	Status
1 Maintain The City's relationship and reputation with the public and media by focusing on the effectiveness and responsiveness of The City's social media and media relations efforts. This requires the service to manage of increased demand for timely, two-way communication within the existing budget, while also ensuring The City is able to adapt to the changing media and social media preferences of Calgarians.	Social media humanizes The City's brand, allowing it to address misinformation and manage risks. Two positive examples of effective response in 2023 were: 1. During Lobbyfest, concerns arose about the use of single-use plastics in displays. By clarifying that these would be repurposed into vinyl flooring, The City positively shifted the conversation. 2. Criticism about the expenditure on the Big Cheeto public art prompted The City's social media team to clarify that it was privately funded. This action altered the narrative and resulted in the most engaged post in 2023, reaching over 100,000.	
2 Support economic recovery and resilience priorities such as the Downtown Strategy, investment in Calgary and revenue generation for City services through the development and implementation of marketing and communication strategies. This includes leveraging data and analytics to better target audiences and partnering with Citizen & Information Services to implement e-commerce solutions to make doing business with The City faster and easier.	Strategic Marketing & Communications has implemented advanced analytics software on multiple applications (i.e. Live and Play, Assessment search, Engage Portal, myID) to better target audiences, and improve Calgarians' ability to find relevant information and do business with The City. The service line also completed a search engine optimization project for recreation programs, increasing leads generated to program registration pages by 117 per cent. In 2024, new metadata will be implemented to enable easier organization and cross promotion of City services.	
3 Advance social equity through communications and marketing support to City services. This includes continuing to champion inclusive and accessible City communications through the Multicultural Communications & Engagement Strategy and Equitable Standards for Communications.	By managing vendor and language service requests on behalf of The City and incorporating multicultural recommendations into all marketing plans and strategies, the service continues to further social equity by removing language barriers for Calgarians. Work to update multicultural insights and tools with the latest census data is on track, with the service planning to use revised Ward and Community Profiles to complete updates to the Calgary Language Map in early 2024.	

Initiative	Initiative Update	Status
<p>4 Improve the effectiveness and level of trust in City communications by addressing the growth of misinformation about The City. This includes providing staff with tools and training to identify, monitor, and correct misinformation when responding to Calgarian and media inquiries, and address increased demand within existing budget.</p>	<p>Strategic Marketing & Communications continues to correct all misinformation where The City has been mentioned or tagged on social media and reaches out to any media outlet that publishes inaccurate information to ask for a correction.</p> <p>With the aim of enhancing trust in City communications, the service rolled out a new process in 2023 to internally elevate reputational risks associated with programs and projects where mitigation strategies can be applied to reduce the risk. A robust strategy to address and combat misinformation will be rolled out in 2024.</p>	
<p>5 Protect and enhance The City's visual identity and brand by educating staff on the related policy and conducting regular reviews of City communication and marketing materials for brand compliance.</p>	<p>Oversight and provision of creative services continues on City campaigns to ensure alignment with the Corporate Brand Identity Policy. The service also continues to work on ensuring all City marketing and communication activities are aligned with The City's brand strategy. The focus in 2023 was on educating contractors about The City's brand and visual identity guidelines. Additional educational opportunities and advocacy to encourage brand compliance within the organization and with external vendors are planned for 2024, along with policy updates.</p>	
<p>6 Ensure staff are connected, informed, equipped and engaged as ambassadors of The City by providing coordinated messaging to employees in support of The City's goals to modernize government and improve organizational culture. This includes maintaining core employee communications activities and channels, while also providing communication strategy and tactics for large corporate initiatives such as the Rethink to Thrive Strategy within the existing budget.</p>	<p>On top of regular ongoing tactics, the service reintroduced video as part of its employee communication efforts. In particular, the 'News Flash in a Dash' video series has proven to be highly effective at building connection and rapport between staff, providing new opportunities for collaboration between City communicators. In 2023, seven episodes aired with an average of 569 views and eight comments each - adding a boost to internal campaign messaging and personalization to external campaign messaging. Additional video features will be explored in 2024.</p>	
<p>7 Uphold public trust and confidence in The City by delivering ongoing communications and campaigns to raise Calgarians' awareness and understanding of The City's services, financial position, and the value Calgarians receive for their taxes and fees.</p>	<p>With an earlier preview of potential investments and Calgarians facing significant economic and social pressures, the service was tasked with communicating about key elements of The City's finances and opportunities to access information about the budget and adjustment process. The campaign used numerous tactics to detail the 2023 investment options, encourage public input, and break down complex financial information. This work led to six million impressions on City social media channels, with 7,000 clicks to information on Calgary.ca. and resulted in 26,000 views on the associated webpages.</p>	
<p>8 Improve the accessibility of Calgary.ca by making the content and services provided online easier to find and understand. This will help streamline the process of communicating with The City and help to manage high demand for in-person and telephone support.</p>	<p>In 2023, the service completed improvements to the way content is presented and organized on Calgary.ca. One key update involved transitioning the previous department and business unit format to a new user-tested topic structure, making it easier to find information on the site.</p> <p>Research conducted in 2023 support these improvements, with 96 per cent of users finding information easy to access compared to 85 per cent in 2021. While information is becoming easier to find, evolving expectations and complexity are impacting user's perceptions around how easy it is to complete a task on Calgary.ca.</p>	



Service Updates on Financial Performance

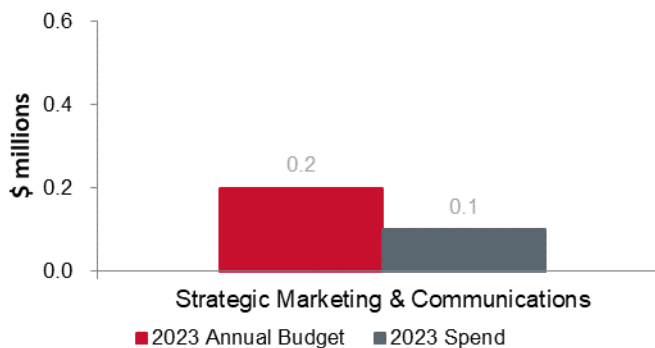
Net Operating Budget and Actuals as of December 31, 2023



Operating Budget Updates - 2023 net operating budget vs actuals:

Strategic Marketing & Communications has a favourable year-end operating variance of \$0.9 million. This is primarily due to savings in salary and wages resulting from sickness and accident absences, attrition, and hiring challenges causing short-term vacancies. These vacancies are being factored into recruiting strategies for 2024.

Capital Budget and Spend as of December 31, 2023



Capital Budget Updates - 2023 total capital budget vs 2023 spend:

Strategic Marketing & Communications has spent 41.5 per cent of the 2023 approved capital budget.

This Service Line has a minimal capital budget. Funds have been invested in the replacement of aged audio/visual equipment used to support The City's brand and visual identity, and in a new email marketing tool to deliver timely and targeted communications to Calgarians. There was delay in equipment procurement resulting in the underspend. It is expected that the remaining funds will be fully utilized in 2024.