M E M O

TO: County Commissioners

FROM: Catlin Solum

DATE: September 13, 2023

SUBJECT: Cass County Communication Plan

Cass County Administration has been working on updating Commission Policies, as a result several policies regarding communication or branding have been adjusted or removed. Cass County's public information coordinator has also developed the communication plan found in your packets. This document is routinely reviewed and updated as needed.

Cass County Administration is proposing to adopt the communication plan as an evolving document to direct Cass County communication efforts. By adopting this plan, we provide guidance and clarity regarding our overall approach to external and internal communications. It also provides flexibility in our overall procedures if communication needs or demands change in the future.

SUGGESTED MOTION: To adopt the communication plan as developed by Cass County's public information coordinator as a guiding document for future communication and branding policies and procedures.

CASS COUNTY COMMUNICATION PLAN

FALL 2023

CONTENTS

PURPOSE OF COMMUNICATION PLAN

This plan will serve as a foundation for public outreach efforts, a guideline for internal communication within Cass County Government, and a reference manual for public information moving forward.

The document will be reviewed and amended throughout the design and construction process. Generally, this plan is intended to evolve and change as Cass County Government operations are updated or new policies and procedures are introduced.

HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

This plan is meant to be a guide for daily outreach work. Every outreach and communication action taken should have an expressed goal, target audience and end objective in mind.

This plan helps identify those goals and guide all communication efforts to work together. Various entities and individuals will be working on communicating Cass County updates, so it is important this document has information that can be used on a regular basis for a variety of situations.

PURPOSE 1
DETERMINE WHAT COMMUNICATION NEEDS EXIST

PURPOSE 2
DETERMINING THE METHODS FOR COMMUNICATION

Common needs in the past have included:
- General awareness of Cass County operations and accomplishments
- Need for transparency

Continuing needs:
- General awareness of operations
- Need for transparency
- Education and outreach on different programs and services available to residents
- Rural Cass County outreach
- Highlight Cass County departments and on-going accomplishments

Previous & continuing methods used:
Public meetings
Press releases
Website
Radio
News conference
Direct presentation
Social media
Digital ads
Newsletter
Direct mail

PURPOSE 3
OUTLINING TARGET AUDIENCE AND GOALS

Without a target audience identified, it is very difficult to communicate specific messages. This is an important step to achieving communication goals.

CHOOSE THE PRIORITY

SET GOALS FOR MEETING THE PRIORITY NEED

CREATE A WORK PLAN AND REVIEW TARGET AUDIENCES

ENACT THE WORK PLAN
Work plan outlines the specific message, audience, method of delivery and schedule for implementation.

PLAN SUMMARY AND GOALS

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION GOALS

The internal communication goals for Cass County mainly focus on keeping all internal stakeholders in communication and informed about the procedures, policies, accomplishments and services offered by county employees.

Internal communication focuses on internal partners. These goals strive to achieve open channels of communication through regular working group meetings, protocols that allow for easy access to each other and transparency and openness with others on the team.

Some standard operating guidelines to follow to reach these goals include:

- Communicate early and openly about scheduled meetings. Ensure agendas are distributed in a timely fashion.
- Ensure committee members attend meetings.
- Follow the established protocols for communication. If a situation not covered by the protocols arises, work as a team to develop a plan of action.
- Work as a team to reach communication goals. Use the abilities of all team members to their fullest extent to achieve goals.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION GOALS

The external communication goals for Cass County focus on keeping all external stakeholders, especially the county residents, in communication and informed about the procedures, policies, accomplishments and services offered by county employees.

Some standard operating guidelines to meeting these external communication goals include:

- Provide clear, accessible and timely information to audiences that meets their need and expands knowledge.

- Develop and maintain support, trust, and credibilty for Cass County Government by demonstrating comptence and understanding of the issues, goals and suggestions of county residents.

- Celebrate milestones and successes when appropriate.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION GOALS

1 All internal partners communicate with each other easily & efficiently

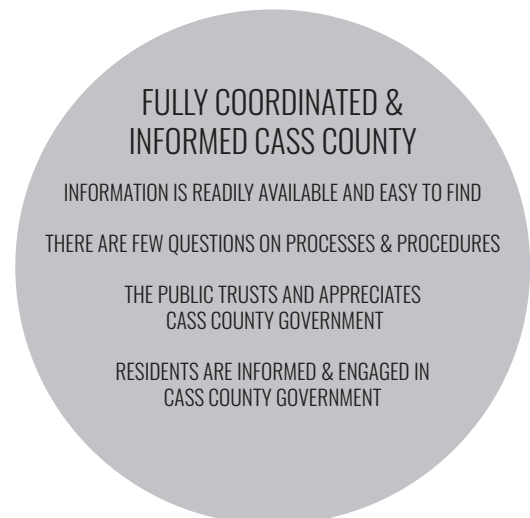**2** All internal partners know how to communicate externally with ease and efficiency

3 All internal partners understand key issues and concerns from appropriate stakeholders

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION GOALS

1 External statekholders know how and where to find information they need

2 External stakeholders recognize importance of Cass County Government and our accomplishments

3 Stakeholders increase engagement with Cass County Government procedures and processess

FULLY COORDINATED & INFORMED CASS COUNTY

INFORMATION IS READILY AVAILABLE AND EASY TO FIND

THERE ARE FEW QUESTIONS ON PROCESSES & PROCEDURES

THE PUBLIC TRUSTS AND APPRECIATES CASS COUNTY GOVERNMENT

RESIDENTS ARE INFORMED & ENGAGED IN CASS COUNTY GOVERNMENT

PARTNERS, STAKEHOLDERS AND TARGET AUDIENCES

INTERNAL PARTNERS

Internal partners include individuals or organizations that work with Cass County Government in some manner or form. All partners have a purpose for working with the County and are therefore, also stakeholders. Cass County Government is made up of several different departments, each with a Department Head and their own organizational workflows. There are numerous partners such as advisory boards, committees, and working groups that continually support and assist each department. Members of each advisory board, committee or working group consist of various government officials, staff, program consultants, or members of the public. Cass County Government committees and staff working groups all meet on a regular basis to conduct the work required to meet the needs of Cass County residents.

Internal Partners:
Cass County Departments/Advisory Boards
Rural Cities & Townships
FM Diversion Authority
Fargo Cass Public Health
ND Association of Counties

EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

The external stakeholders are all people, businesses, and organizations that will benefit or are impacted by the Cass County Government programs, services, operations and information. Engaging external stakeholders is a key component of this Communication Plan.

Some key methods of engagement that have worked well to connect with external stakeholders include:

Social media. Using Facebook, X or Youtube to provide updates and regular information is a great way to make "Daily Deposits into the Community Bank of Trust". The more information you can provide in easy-to-find places like social media, the more trust you can develop with Cass County residents and the more comfortable they will feel when it comes time for them to reach out if they need something from Cass County Government or need to find information on a certain subject. Social media posts should be regular, but not overbearing with too much information - this leads to people ignoring posts. The goal would be to have 1 or 2 posts per day with pertinent information for our residents.

Website material. The website sees steady traffic volumes and many people reference it for materials and specific documents. Having a regularly updated website where all things are available for the public is a good method and helps when dealing with the public or media as a good place to direct them.

Meeting with individuals or organizations directly. Presenting information and being available to answer individual questions directly is very effective when working on projects with multiple moving parts and several different stakeholders involved.

Media tracking. Daily media tracking helps internal partners remain aware of what is being reported by external media. This also helps improve response time and coordination to media reports.

Videos. Having easy-access to meeting recordings and educational videos has been effective on various platforms including Facebook, X and YouTube.

External Stakeholders:
County Residents
Local & Statewide Agencies
Local & Statewide Government Officials
Local & Statewide Businesses & Organizations
Local & Regional Media

TARGET AUDIENCE

Target audiences are groups of stakeholders that have a particular common factor or desire. These groups consist of people, businesses, or organizations that have some sort of benefit, impact, representation or oversight of the actions by the county. Tailoring information and materials for target audiences is crucial. Without this tailoring, messaging can be lost and ineffective.

Common Target Audiences:
Local Media
Private Citizens
Public Representatives
Businesses & Organizations

COMMUNICATION MEDIUMS

PUBLIC MEETINGS
Throughout the year, the public must have ample ability to attend or view the public meetings, whether it be a Commission meeting or any specific advisory board or committee meeting. Information on these meetings and how to attend or view is distributed through our website, social media platforms and a press release to the media.

PRESS RELEASES
Many of the press releases issued have been effective in the past, meaning traditional news media have utilized information contained in the release. Releases have been developed for specific events, and not based on a mandated schedule. Press releases should be concise and deliver information in an efficient manner.

FACEBOOK, X, YOUTUBE
Releasing information and photos on Facebook, X and video on YouTube has been effective. Social media following has increased since March 2020 (date of PIO hire) in each of these areas. Specific stats are available upon request.

DIGITAL ADS
Utilizing the Forum Communication services to geotarget audiences with specific demographics or in a specific area of Cass County has been successful. Facebook ads have been very effective for election and tax statement campaigns for the Finance Department.

WEBSITE
Utilizing www.CassCountyND.gov as the primary location for public-facing information, educational documents, reference materials and notices has been effective. There are over 6,000 web items to manage on the public site, constant attention is necessary for a presentable and effective public site.

Cass County also utilizes an internal SharePoint website and Intranet site. This is used to share internal communications such as department updates, upcoming employee events or the cafeteria menu. Each department will have its own SharePoint site that will house information on each department like organizational charts, office locations, and overall responsibilities and duties. The goal is that any new employees should be able to easily find who to contact from each department and where to find those employees if needed.

NEWS CONFERENCES
News conferences have been used sparingly in the past and that has resulted in their success. Calling media together for a conference has been rare, and therefore, when used, well-attended. The most successful news conferences have been tied to large news-making activities or updates - e.g. Flood updates, Sheriff's Office incident.

PRESENTATIONS
Presentations are a part of disseminating information or updates about Cass County. Presentations are used for general county news or updates to the public. Internal presentations are used to inform employees of any major changes to policies or procedures.

NEWSLETTER
This is another internal communication platform opportunity that departments can take advantage of. The newsletter has been an effective method of expanding readership of internal Cass County Government stories. These stories are usually accomplishments or projects that various departments have done or are currently working on.

RADIO TALK SHOWS
Talk radio hosts have conducted interviews with Department Heads on specific updates in Cass County (e.g., reaching out Finance Director for election information, reaching out to Director of Emergency Management for flood updates).

DIRECT MAIL
Mass hard-copy mailing has been used to provide information to specific audiences - these audiences are usually older in age and live in rural Cass County.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

STRUCTURE AND FLOW OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

The following outlines can be used for routine internal communications between the public information coordinator and Cass County employees. When sending internal communications related to a specific topic, please reference who should be notified as a primary person of contact and what call to action is requested.

1 All internal partners communicate with each other easily & efficiently

PRIMARY POINT OF CONTACT FOR CASS COUNTY DEPARTMENTS

ADMINISTRATION Robert Wilson	CORRECTIONS Andrew Frobig	FINANCE Brandy Madrigga	HUMAN SERVICES Gail Bollinger	RECORDER Deb Moeller	VECTOR Ben Prather
ASSESSOR Paul Fracassi	COURTS Mike Kasprick	IT/SERVICEDESK Bob Henderson	NDSU EXTENSION Rita Ussatis	SHERIFF Jesse Jahner	VETERANS Chris Deery
CORONER Kriste Ross	EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT Jim Prochniak	HIGHWAY Jason Benson	PLANNING Cole Hansen	STATE'S ATTORNEY Kim Hegvik	WEED CONTROL Stan Wolf

KEEPING INTERNAL PARTNERS AWARE OF COUNTY UPDATES

Ensuring all partners have access to information necessary to represent Cass County Government and discuss important county-related subjects is very important. Focusing on distributing information in a clear and repetitive nature can help ensure that all county partners are aware of any important updates. This is especially important for partners who are in publicly-elected positions. It is also important to engage employees and associates of partners who may not have daily interaction with Cass County Governement happenings. Without a regular flow of communication to employees and associates, it may be difficult for the employee or associates to explain current policies, procedures or activities.

2 All internal partners know how to communicate externally with ease and efficiency

It is recommended that each department work directly with the public information coordinator to develop press releases or news stories that will be distributed internally and externally. Updates are regulary requested from each department every month to include information in the Cass County monthly newsletter distributed to each employee. These updates are also shared with mayors from the county and township officers to keep our rural partners involved with regular updates. At times, these internal updates are also shared externally to our media partners.

3 All internal partners understand key issues and concerns from appropriate stakeholders

With regular updates and internal communication efforts between Cass County Departments and the public information coordinator, the goal is to make sure everyone that will be working with external partners has the appropriate level of understanding and information to address any questions, issues or concerns.

A FAQs document can be developed if certain departments find themselves addressing the same issues regularly. This document would need to be updated quarterly and should be overseen by the public information coordinator so the information can be distributed appropriately.

Internal Efforts

Short-Term	**Mid-Term**	**Long-Term**
Intranet Updates	County Update Emails	Internal Document Formatting
Social Media	Palavering Newsletter	Website Redesign
Public Inquiry Response	Internal Document Updates	SharePoint Updates
Public Meeting Coordination	Social Media	County Video Project
Website Updates	Website Updates	Overall Communication Plan

EXTERNAL OUTREACH COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

STRUCTURE AND FLOW OF EXTERNAL OUTREACH COMMUNICATIONS

Communication action must start with a goal in mind. Without this step, communications may lack the purpose and ability to determine if they were effective. Often, goals seem self-explanatory, but outlining a purpose will keep a message on target and give us the ability to measure whether or not communications were effective. The basic structure of crafting outreach materials begins with a goal, followed by message development through the development process to delivery. The final step is assessing the effort to see if the goal was reached.

1
External statekholders know how and where to find information they need

2
External stakeholders recognize importance of Cass County Government and our accomplishments

GOAL IS IDENTIFIED	MESSAGE IS DEVELOPED	TARGET AUDIENCE IDENTIFIED	DELIVERY METHOD CHOSEN	MESSAGE DELIVERED
goals can change with what messages are being developed.	*message crafted with info & input from all necessary partners*	*based on message & overall goal of the communication*	*social media, press release, website post, eNotification, livestreaming*	*Executed by the public information coordinator*

ALWAYS MONITOR TO SEE IF GOAL WAS REACHED

KEEPING EXTERNAL PARTNERS AWARE OF COUNTY UPDATES

Ensuring all partners have easy access to information necessary to represent Cass County Government and discuss important county-related subjects is very important. Building trust with our external partners is paramount and the ability for external partners to easily find the information that they are looking for should be a priority for the external outreach communication plan. Focusing on distributing information in a clear and repetitive nature can help ensure that all county partners are aware of any important updates. Without a regular flow of communication to external partners, it may be difficult for residents or media associates to find information on current policies and to explain those procedures or activities in an accurate way.

3
Stakeholders increase engagement with Cass County Government procedures and processess

It is recommended that each department work directly with the public information coordinator to develop press releases or news stories that will be distributed externally.

External Efforts

Short-Term
Press Releases
Website Updates
Social Media
Public Inquiry Response
Pulbic Meeting Coordination

Mid-Term
Anniversary Content
Photo Cache
Website Updates
Social Media

Long-Term
Live Streaming/Meeting Viewing/TV Fargo
Website Rebrand
Overall Communication Plan
County Video Project

TELEVISION ENTITIES
• WDAY/WDAZ
• KVLY
• KVRR

RADIO ENTITIES
• WDAY 970AM
• KFGO 790AM
• LIFE 97.9
• WZFG THE FLAG
• 103.9 THE TRUCK

NEWSPAPER ENTITIES
• Fargo Forum
• West Fargo Pioneer
• Cass County Reporter
• High Plains Reader

COMMUNICATION METHODS

This section will outline a series of protocols for responding to media requests from traditional media entities and selecting appropriate spokespersons. This structure should be used on a regular basis, and not necessarily during a crisis or situation that requires immediate response.

RESPONDING TO THE MEDIA

Media entities will often request certain pieces of information for stories or interviews they are preparing. Working with reporters is important. The more accurate and complete information you can provide, often the more accurate and complete story they can report.

Remember, the media has a job to do and a deadline to meet. You can achieve a great deal by assisting journalists in getting information, interviews and data before deadline. Most deadlines are middle to late afternoon.

Beyond meeting needs before deadline, here are some helpful tips in working with journalists.

- Tell them how long it will take you to get a complete response. This will help them plan for their news deadline.
- Help them understand the real issue. Answer the question, but don't forget to explain things thoroughly. The greater their level of understanding, the more accurate a story can be.
- Give them materials they can use. Provide numbers, data and contact information that can make a story stronger.
- Ask if they have everything they need. Would they like photos of historical events related to the topic? What items could they use, but may not have access to currently. The public information coordinator can assist in the area of finding/delivering additional photos, stats, etc..

ENGAGING TRADITIONAL MEDIA

The media will cover news, but sometimes a story or information deserves more time in the media than originally given. In this situation, the public information coordinator will decide that an effort should be made to bring the topic back into the media sphere in a targeted manner.

This requires working with media to help them see an additional aspect of the story that was not covered before. The following steps help outline choosing a story to propose for extended news coverage.

- What is the news that deserves additional coverage?
- What type of media would cover this type of news the best?
- How can you pitch the story to be interesting, have an impact and be news?

Remember, each media type has different needs. Choose to approach the media outlet that best suits the needs of the story. If the story has an active component happening, consider video. If compelling photos are a key part of the information, approach print media.

ENGAGING TRADITIONAL MEDIA

NEWSPAPERS
- Needs detailed information.
- Must be news.
- Graphics and photographs can be helpful.
- May require subject matter experts.

TELEVISION
- Needs video, preferably active.
- Best with an engaging spokesperson who can give interviews full of sound bites and quotes.
- Message must be precise.

RADIO NEWS
- Information should be to the point.
- Best with an engaging spokesperson who can speak clearly and with inflection.

RADIO TALK SHOWS
- Must be prepared to answer questions about many topics.
- Best with an engaging and trusted spokesperson.
- Must reinforce key talking points.

DIRECT MAIL
- Expensive but can be effective at reaching remote audiences.

WORKING WITH OPINION PIECES IN TRADITIONAL MEDIA

This section will outline a series of protocols for responding to situations that involve things outside the traditional media news cycle. Once again, these guidelines should be used on a regular basis, and not necessarily during a crisis or situation that requires immediate response.

RESPONDING TO OPINION PIECES

Opinion pieces are distributed in many formats including the traditional newspaper editorial, guest columnists in newspapers or magazines, blog sites and social media posts.

In general, response to opinion pieces should be determined on a case-by-case basis. Some of the factors taken into consideration include:

How many people consumed the opinion piece? If the opinion piece is in a larger, traditional paper format, it may require a response due to the high number of people who saw it.

Does the piece include misinformation? Correcting misinformation is an important task, but only done with a purpose and goal in mind.

What is the best avenue to present a counterpoint if needed?

Who is the spokesperson stating the opinion? Are they a regular contributor or a public official? The background of the individual writing the opinion piece can often make a difference on the impact the piece has. Some general guidelines to follow in this area include:

- If there is no name associated with the opinion, a response may be futile.
- Determine if the issue is even relevant. If not, no response may be required. If it is very relevant, responding may be a good avenue of expanding education about the topic.
- Contacting individuals in person may, at times, be the best method of discussion and communication.
- If a response is required, think critically about the individual who will make the response. Reputation and background are critical in this arena.

WORKING THROUGH NEW MEDIA PLATFORMS

Traditional media sources include entities that utilize historical media platforms including printed newspapers, print magazines, broadcast radio stations and non-cable television news. Typically, these entities have editorial boards and some manner of oversight.

In general, non-traditional media consists of communication platforms that exist online and generally lack the oversight of a traditional editorial board or structure that guides traditional media.

New media has opened the floodgates of information flow, but can make reaching target audiences more fragmented than in the past. These platforms allow for a different level of information engagement and should be approached with a goal in mind.

RESPONDING TO INFORMATION THROUGH NEW MEDIA PLATFORMS

The most common forms of content to respond to through new media platforms are written and video.

As with responding to opinion pieces, caution and promptness are crucial in responding to information posted through new media.

Be cautious. Posting too much, or too little can be damaging. Members that communicate responses can follow the same general steps for responding to media if trying to determine if a response to something on new media is required.

Be prompt. The life cycle in new media is very short. Responding to something with relevant information after it becomes irrelevant is not the best use of time.

YOUTUBE
• A video sharing site that can allow or not allow comments on videos and is useful for sharing video content across other platforms or storing video recordings.

FACEBOOK
• A social networking site based off individual and organizational pages. The official page for Cass County Government is @CassCountyGovND.

X
• A social micro-blogging site. Used to post story links to website, meeting updates and engage with other social groups about Cass County. The official X page for Cass County is @CassCountyGovND.

WEBSITES
• Content posted and maintained by the organization. The official location for all information related to Cass County Government. Website includes important items like news items, reference documents, frequently asked questions, a space for questions to be submitted and the ability to sign up for eNotifications and the community emergency alert system.

MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS

CURRENT MONITORING METHODS

It is important to monitor and measure the outcomes of outreach efforts. A large number of sources and factors will need to be monitored, including the following:

- Content and tone of local news coverage.
- Messages and tone of county residents, including posts on social media, website inquiries and opinion articles.
- General public conversations

The reactions to outreach efforts should be routinely discussed during meetings of the various committees and subcommittees. The public information coordinator will follow media coverage on the county to track and analyze news websites, broadcasts, and social networks to help gauge public opinion about current projects or services. The text of newspaper articles and opinion letters, as well as television, radio, and blog coverage, will be included in the media-tracking process.

OPTIONAL MONITORING METHODS AVAILABLE

Some additional monitoring options include

- Focus groups
- Survey groups
- Setting website visit or traffic goals
- Set goals for engagement and subscribers for eNotifications
- Set goals and monitor communications on social media sites.

WHAT WAS THE GOAL?

Policy goals include awareness, finding/empowering champions, building constituency, building public trust or changing policy. Behavioral goals include awareness, belief the message is important, change of attitude, change of the social norm or discussion, behavior change.

CREATE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

How is the target audience responding? Is there any evidence messages are being absorbed by audiences? Do we need to alter or further specify target audiences? Should we be using other message delivery methods?

EVALUATE AND ADJUST

Monitoring efforts are designed to help a campaign adjust message and become more efficient. Pay attention to data from monitoring and adjust work accordingly.

TIPS FOR SPOKESPERSONS

• Never say, "NO COMMENT." That phrase sounds evasive. It is better to say, "We are gathering more information about the situation right now. May I get back to you with more information once it becomes available?" If you promise to follow up, it is important to do so or you risk looking like you are trying to hide something.

• Remain calm. If you are not ready to speak to a reporter, ask for a few minutes to prepare. It is also acceptable to pause briefly after each question to collect your thoughts before responding.

• Stay within your area of responsibility. Only answer questions pertaining to what you know. For instance, if you are an expert on the technical side of a project but a reporter is asking an administrative or outreach question, you should refer the reporter to someone on the team who knows more about those topics.

• Do not speculate. If you do not know an answer, it is fine to admit it. If it is something you feel comfortable answering after doing some research, tell the reporter that you will get back to him/her when you have the answer. The reporter may try to coerce you into speculating or giving specifics about what could have caused something to happen, or what could happen in the future. You may say, "I can't speculate on that. What I do know is _____." Fill in the blank by stating an approved outreach message.

• Do not discuss cause or fault. The most difficult questions to answer are "why" and "how." Many people have opinions about why or how something happened, but a spokespersons role is not to offer personal opinions. Stick to confirmed information and approved messages when speaking to a reporter.

• Do not discuss liability. This is particularly important in situations where an accident or injury has occurred. In many cases, an investigation determines that the cause of an incident is different from what was initially suspected. Stick to the known facts and do not discuss who or what caused the incident.

• Never make comments "off the record." Assume everything you say from the time the reporter arrives until the time that person leaves is "on the record," even if the camera or recording device appears to be turned off. A good reporter's ears are always listening for a "juicy tidbit" to add to their story.

• Do not blame. Offer positive solutions. Never make any statements that place blame on someone or an organization or cast something in a poor light. Instead, try to turn a negative question into a positive response. For example, if something has cost the taxpayers a lot of money, focus on the fact that they will realize the project's value in the long run.

• Do not be afraid to ask the reporter questions to clarify a question. A reporter may attempt to bombard you with rapid-fire questions. Feel free to respond with your own questions if you want to better understand where the interview is headed. Ask questions such as, "What have you heard?" "Can I confirm this information?" "What is this story about?" "Who else have you contacted?" "Tell me what you know about this story." This helps tell you what information gaps you need to fill in for the reporter.

• Correct misinformation. If a reporter puts you on the defensive, remain calm. Correct the misinformation and stay focused on a key message.

• Stay calm. Refrain from giving angry or defensive responses. Remember, reporters always have the final word in the editing room. Do not give them the ability to make you or the county look bad.

• Never walk away. Never walk away from a reporter before the interview is finished. If you do, it is very likely your decision to walk away will be mentioned or shown in print or on the air.

WRITING STANDARDS

In general, it is best practice to follow the Associated Press (AP) writing style for any journalism or news writing. Some common rules of the AP style can be found below:

- Capitalization: Proper nouns (specific people, places and organizations) are capitalized. Titles before, but not after, names are capitalized. Directions that are names are capitalized (North, South, West).

- Required abbreviations for names include Dr., Gov., Lt. Gov., Rep,, and Sen.. Public representatives should be written as Sen. John Doe, (R) North Dakota.

- Time, date, place

- a.m. and p.m. never A.M. or P.M.

- Spell out numbers one through nine and use numerals for the rest.

- Months to abbreviate: Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec. Spell the rest out.

- Titles before names do not have a comma before the name. Titles after names do require a comma. Titles before names are capitalized but titles after names are lower case.

- Days of the week are never abbreviated.

OPEN RECORDS REQUEST

Anyone has the right to access and obtain copies of a public entity's records, regardless of where they live.

A request must reasonably identify specific records. The request can be made by any available medium - such as phone, email, mail - or in person, and does not have to be in writing.

A request for information is not a request for a record.

When a public entity receives a request for records, it must respond within a reasonable time, either by providing the records or by citing the legal authority for denying the request.

What is "reasonable" depends on many factors, including the amount and type of records you requested. If asked, the entity must put a denial in writing. A public entity can charge for providing records, and may require payment of any estimated charges before fulfilling an open record request.

A public entity has no obligation to respond to requests for information or to questions about its duties and functions, to explain the content of any of its records, to create or compile records, or to convert existing records to another format.

The courts are not subject to the open records laws. Certain records of the state's legislature are not subject to disclosure.

If your office receives an Open Records Request, please work with the State's Attorney Office and the Administration Office to meet that request.

WEBSITE POLICY

Disclaimer

The content of the Cass County Government website is provided for general informational purposes only. While we strive to be up to date, the information provided may not always be the most recent information available on that topic.

We attempt to ensure that all documents, PDFs and downloadable files are free from viruses, but cannot guarantee that all downloads are virus-free or have not been otherwise tampered with or damaged. We recommend that users run the latest virus software on all downloads. Neither this website, its host or its owner will be responsible for any damage done by viruses or other damaged files may be downloaded from this site.

All content on this site is presented as is, with no expressed or implied warranties.

The sites to which we are linked are recommended for informational purposes, but have no connection or affiliation with this site, its host or its owner unless otherwise stated. We are not responsible for the content on sites to which we are linked.

Privacy Policy

Simply stated, our policy is to collect no personal information when visiting the www.casscountynd.gov website, unless you affirmatively choose to make such information available to us.

When you visit the www.casscountynd.gov portal, the Web server automatically recognizes only the Internet domain and IP address from which you accessed the site, as well as your general location based on your IP address. This information does not result in the identification of your personal e-mail address or other personal information.

In addition, information is only gathered regarding (a) the volume and timing of access to the site by collecting information on the date, time and pages you visited while at the site, and (b) your interactions with our advertisements. This is done so that the content of the site can be improved, and we can monitor how effective our advertisements are at inspiring you to utilize services offered in Cass County. Your personal information is not identified.

Request for Information or Response

If you choose to share personal information, such as by sending a message or filling out an electronic form with personal information, the information will be saved for a designated period of time in order to comply with the state of North Dakota's archiving policies. However, information will not be disclosed to third parties or other government agencies, unless required by state or federal law. Please note that North Dakota's public records law requires that all information received in connection with state business be made available to anyone upon request, unless the information is subject to a specific statutory exemption.

We use cookies on the www.casscountynd.gov website. "Cookies" are small pieces of information stored by your browser on your device (such as a computer or mobile phone). Cookies can make our website or our advertisements more useful by allowing us to personalize information for visitors and by storing information about customer preferences on our site as well as your location. Cookies do not collect your personal information. Most web browsers automatically accept cookies but you can change your browser preference settings to prevent that.

SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

With the amount of information available on the internet today and the incredible speed at which it travels, social media can be an effective tool to deliver messages to an audience in a quick and efficient way. It is becoming apparent that a large population of people rely on socia media platforms to inform themselves about things going on, and Cass County Government sees this as an opportunity to inform our residents on regular updates and services readily available. The goal of the Cass County Government social media platforms is to build trust with and to inform the residents of Cass County. It is also an opportunity to shed some light on the accomplishments of our employees and highlight their unique skills and talents.

Regular posts to Facebook and X act as "Daily Deposits in the Community Bank of Trust". These deposits can be small and simple, but each deposit plays a role in building the overall trust we are striving for with our residents. Creating reoccuring posts that give daily, weekly or monthly updates on the same subject are effective and can give Cass County residents a reason to regularly check in our Cass County Government social media sites. Using Facebook and X to deliver information on policy updates or events, such as public meetings, can also be an effective use of our social media platforms. The idea is to create a source of information for our residents to be able to reference at their leisure to find the information that they may be searching for.

Regular reoccuring posts should include information that can be shared and posted multiple times throughout each week or month while still delivering relevant and timely information. Some examples of this would be the daily COVID-19 reports from the North Dakota Department of Health, weekly Vector Department updates on mosquito spraying, or general updates from various departments on the services or programs they offer (e.g., Human Services financial assistance, GIS Geo Hub and application information, Veterans Services resources). Some examples of reoccuring and regularly used social media posts can be found below.

Due to the variety of information posted and the speed that it gets shared throughout social media networks, posting on any given day should remain flexible. The goal is to eventually utilize a social media calendar application that can schedule these posts on multiple platforms, but audience building and informing residents remain the focus at this point.

Flexibility should always remain in case an event or incident occurs randomly - it is important to be able to report and post about something promptly and without it being scheduled.

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Social Media Usage Policies

Cass County Government welcomes public comments, questions and thoughts on all of our social media networks. Cass County reserves the right to remove any post that is inaccurate, offensive, advertises commercial products, or is otherwise objectionable. We also reserve the right to ban individuals who violate any other guidelines found in the policies on pages 27, 28, and 29.
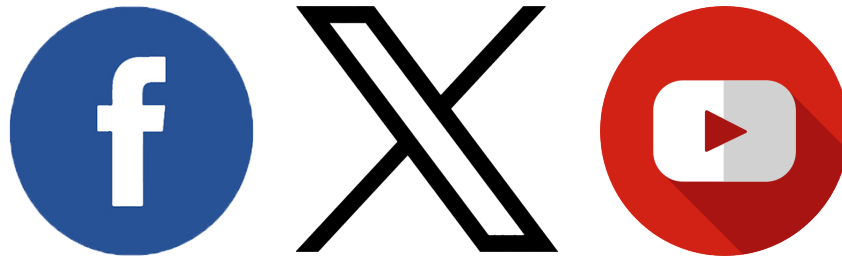
Social Media Response Policy

The first step in responding is to evaluate the comment within the social media channel. Does the comment fall within one of these categories? This allows us to respond in a logical manner based on the type of comment.

Here is a guideline for the proper response procedure:

Is the comment appropriate and positive?

If the comment is appropriate and positive in nature, we can respond in the following manner:

- Concur with the post.
- Let the post stand as is based on its own merit.
- Provide additional information to reinforce the comment.
- Provide a positive review and show appreciation.

Is the comment appropriate and negative?

If the comment is appropriate and negative in nature, we can respond in the following manner:

- Respond to the original post, inactivity will appear as though we are ignoring the issue.
- Be patient and let them know you understand the issue.
- Urge the user to take the conversation offline by offering alternative ways to contact you.
- If the concerned user is unreceptive or blatantly hostile, remove the post and ban the user from participating in any further discussion.

SOCIAL MEDIA RESPONSE POLICY

Is the comment inaccurate?

If the comment is inaccurate, we can respond in the following manner:

- Offer information that is correct in response to post.
- Show appreciation for participating and correct the information contained within the post.

Is the post a low-risk inappropriate comment?

If the comment is a low-risk inappropriate comment, we can respond in the following manner:

- If the post contains inflammatory comments, we can let them know that the post was inappropriate and inform the user why.
- Delete the comment and let the community know what behavior is appropriate.

Is the post a high-risk inappropriate comment?

If the comment is a high-risk inappropriate comment, we can respond in the following manners:

- If the comment is violent, vulgar, derogatory or inflammatory, it should be deleted and the community should be informed of the reasons why it was removed.
- The user who posted the comment should be considered warned.
- If it continues and the social media channel allows, they should be reported and banned from participation.

Is the post a question?

If the comment is a question, we can respond in the following manners:

- If the post is a legitimate question, evaluate the best answer and respond accordingly.
- If the post is a legitimate question but would be better answered by another entity, thank the user for their question and let them know who would be better equipped to help them.
- If the post is not a legitimate question, you can choose to ignore it or delete it.
- If the post is not a legitimate question and inflammatory, you can consider it an inappropriate comment and respond accordingly.

These categories allow us to respond with confidence because it allows for a logical response based on the content of the post. It allows us to be consistent and tactical with our responses based on the category in which the content of the post lies. It is also a sustainable system that allows us the flexibility to respond quickly and accordingly.

FACEBOOK POLICY

By engaging with the Cass County Government Facebook Page, the public is agreeing to the following:
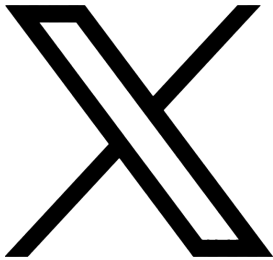
All comments left on the Cass County Government Facebook Page are the responsibility of the commenter. By submitting a comment on our page you agree that the comment content is your own, and Cass County Government is harmless from any and all repercussions, damages or liability.

Cass County Government reserves the right to remove any post that is inaccurate, offensive, advertises commercial products, or is otherwise objectionable. We also reserve the right to ban individuals who violate any of the guidelines listed below or Facebook's terms of service.

- While this is an open forum, it's also a family friendly one, so please keep your comments, photos, videos, and wall posts clean. In addition to keeping it family friendly, we ask that you follow our posting guidelines here. If you don't comply, your message will be removed.

- We will not allow personal attacks or vulgar, abusive, offensive, threatening or harassing language. This includes creative spellings of swear words using asterisks or spaces between words.

- We will not allow comments that promote, foster or perpetuate discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation.

- We will not allow comments that contain sexual content or links to sexual content.

- We will not allow comments that promote or advertise a person or a business or commercial transaction that is unrelated to Cass County Government.

- We will not allow spamming, nor the same content to be posted multiple times. Any subsequent posting of identical information will be deleted.

- We will not allow comments that promote or oppose any person campaigning for election to a political office or that promote or oppose any ballot measure or politically sensitive issue.

- We will not allow comments or posts that disclose information which the agency and its employees are required to keep confidential by law or administrative rule.

- You participate at your own risk, taking personal responsibility for your comments, your username and any information provided.

Opinions expressed in public comments do not necessarily reflect official positions of Cass County Government. Any information posted here is considered public information and may be subject to monitoring, moderation or disclosure to third parties.

X POLICY

By engaging with @CassCountyGovND on X you are agreeing to the following:

All X conversations with the Cass County Government X Page are the responsibility of the commenter. By Tweeting with us, you agree that the content is your own and @CassCountyGovND is harmless from any and all repercussions, damages or liability.

@CassCountyGovND reserves the right to report any Tweet that is inaccurate, offensive, advertises commercial products or is otherwise objectionable. We also reserve the right to ban individuals who violate any of the guidelines listed below or X's terms of service.

- While this is an open forum, it's also a family friendly one, so please keep your Posts, comments, photos, videos, and wall posts clean. In addition to keeping it family friendly, we ask that you follow our posting guidelines. If you don't comply, your Tweet will be reported.

- We will not allow personal attacks or vulgar, abusive, offensive, threatening or harassing language. This includes creative spellings of profanity using asterisks or spaces between words.

- We will not allow comments that promote, foster or perpetuate discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation.

- We will not allow comments that contain sexual content or links to sexual content.

- We will not allow comments that promote or advertise a person or a business or commercial transaction that is unrelated to Cass County Government.

- We will not allow spamming, nor the same content to be posted multiple times. Any subsequent posting of identical information will be deleted.

- We will not allow comments that promote or oppose any person campaigning for election to a political office or that promote or oppose any ballot measure or politically sensitive issue.

- We will not allow comments or posts that disclose information which the agency and its employees are required to keep confidential by law or administrative rule.

- You participate at your own risk, taking personal responsibility for your Posts, your username and any information provided.

Opinions expressed in public comments do not necessarily reflect official positions of Cass County Government. Any information posted here is considered public information and may be subject to monitoring, moderation or disclosure to third parties.

YOUTUBE POLICY

By engaging with a video on the Cass County Government channel, you are agreeing to the following:

All conversations with the Cass County Government YouTube account are the responsibility of the viewer and commenter. By commenting, you agree that the content is your own, and Cass County Government is harmless from all repercussions, damages or liability.

Cass County Government reserves the right to report any comment that is inaccurate, offensive, advertises commercial products, or is otherwise objectionable. We also reserve the right to ban individuals who violate any of the guidelines listed below or YouTube's terms of service.

- While this is an open forum, it's also a family friendly one, so please keep your comments, photos, videos, and wall posts clean. In addition to keeping it family friendly, we ask that you follow our posting guidelines. If you don't comply, your comments will be reported and deleted.

- We will not allow personal attacks or vulgar, abusive, offensive, threatening or harassing language. This includes creative spellings of profanity using asterisks or spaces between words.

- We will not allow comments that promote, foster or perpetuate discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation.

- We will not allow comments that contain sexual content or links to sexual content.

- We will not allow comments that promote or advertise a person or a business or commercial transaction that is unrelated to Cass County Government.

- We will not allow spamming, nor the same content to be posted multiple times. Any subsequent posting of identical information will be deleted.

- We will not allow comments that promote or oppose any person campaigning for election to a political office or that promote or oppose any ballot measure or politically sensitive issue.

- We will not allow comments or posts that disclose information which the agency and its employees are required to keep confidential by law or administrative rule.

- You participate at your own risk, taking personal responsibility for your comments, your username and any information provided.

Opinions expressed in public comments do not necessarily reflect official positions of Cass County Government. Any information posted here is considered public information and may be subject to monitoring, moderation or disclosure to third parties.

WEATHER-RELATED CLOSURE ANNOUNCEMENT

In the event that severe weather in the area causes the Cass County Government offices to close, the public information coordinator will be responsible for sending out a closure notification to local media, on Cass County social media platforms, on the internal Intranet website and the public Cass County Government website. A notice will also be sent to county employees through the Alertus App and the storm phone line. This must be done before 6:30 a.m.

The decision to close will be made in agreement by the County Administrator, Sheriff, and Commission Chair. Communication will be handled by the County Administrator to notify the public information coordinator to send out the closure announcement as described in the prior paragraph. Internal communications to County and state employees working in county buildings will be handled by the Administrator.

Please note - late openings and early closures of County facilities (or any other reason that represents a safety-related concern) can be made at the sole discretion of the Sheriff.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE
(excerpt taken from overall Emergency Management Operations Plan)

Lead Departments: Public Information/County Administrator

Support Departments: Individual Department Level Information Officers

Cass County Government Public Information Coordinator will act as the main point of contact for the county. Department level communication coordinators may be utilized to relay department level information coordinated through the Public Information Coordinator.

During a disaster, the following protocol will be used:
Responsibilities
- Serve as the coordination point for all media releases for Cass County Government. Represent the EOC as the Public Information Officer (PIO).

- Ensure that the public within the affected area receives complete, accurate, and consistent information about life safety procedures, public health advisories, relief and assistance programs and other vital information.

- Coordinate media releases with Public Information Officers representing other affected emergency response agencies within the area as required.

- Develop the format for press conferences, in conjunction with the Incident Commander.

- Maintain a positive working relationship with the media representatives.

- Publish press releases to Cass County website, Gov Delivery system, and other network sites such as X or Facebook (when possible).

- Supervise Public Information staff, assigned by the County Administrator. Staff could include commission assistant and personnel staff.

Activation Phase
- Determine staffing and equipment requirements and make required personnel assignments for the Public Information functions as necessary. Consider options, such as establishing a joint information center with representatives from city, state and federal personnel.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Operational Phase

- Obtain policy guidance from the Incident Commander with regard to media releases.

- Keep the Incident Commander advised of all unusual requests for information and of all major critical or unfavorable media comments. Recommend procedures or measures to improve media relations.

- Coordinate with the Functional Coordinators and identify method for obtaining and verifying significant information as it is developed.

- Develop and publish a media-briefing schedule, to include location, format, and preparation and distribution of handout materials.

- Implement and maintain an overall information release program.

- Establish a joint information center as needed.

- Maintain up-to-date status boards and other references at the media information center.

- Provide adequate staff to answer questions from members of the media.

- Interact with other jurisdiction PIO's and obtain information relative to public information operations.

- As needed, develop content for Emergency Alert System (EAS) messages.

- In coordination with other Functional Coordinators, and as approved by the Incident Commander, issue timely and consistent advisories and instructions for life safety, health, and assistance for the public.

- At the request of the Incident Commander, prepare media briefings for members of the County Commission, and provide other assistance as necessary to facilitate their participation in media briefings and press conferences.

- Ensure that a rumor control function is established to correct false or erroneous information.

- Ensure that adequate staff is available at incident sites to coordinate and conduct tours of the disaster areas.

- Provide appropriate staffing and telephones to efficiently handle incoming media and public calls.

- Prepare, update, and distribute public information that provides locations to obtain food, shelter, supplies, health services, etc.

- Consider announcements, emergency information and materials that need to be translated and prepared for special populations (non-English speaking, hearing impaired, etc.)

- Monitor broadcast media, using information to develop follow-up news releases and rumor control.

- Ensure that file copies are maintained of all information released.

- Provide copies of all media releases to the Incident Commander.

- Recommend Functional Coordinators conduct shift change briefings in detail, ensuring that in-progress activities are identified and follow-up requirements are known.

- Prepare final news releases and advise media representatives of points-of-contact for follow-up stories.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Concept Phase

A disaster organization must effectively disseminate information in order to facilitate an effective, community-wide response. As the Incident Management System forms and activates the Emergency Operations Center, it is imperative that procedures provide complete and accurate information before, during, and after an emergency. The timely and effective distribution of public information can enhance respect and understanding of local government, galvanize public support, and aid in response to emergencies.

Major incidents often result in intense media attention from both local and national news agencies. Quick and effective dissemination of relevant information to the community and to news agencies may expedite government response to emergency situations.

This public information plan should be implemented whenever the Incident Management Team is activated, or when local officials determine that the best interests of the county and the public are served by its implementation.

Release of Information Guidelines

In emergencies, the Public Information Officer may use the following guidelines in evaluating and releasing information concerning the incident:

- Accurate information will be provided to the media. Those facts that can be confirmed should be released within twenty minutes of confirmation. If little information is available, the following statement should be issued:

"We are aware that an (accident-incident) involving (type of incident) occurred at approximately (time), in the vicinity of (general location). Emergency crews are responding, and we will have additional information as we are able to confirm it. We will hold a briefing at (location), and will notify the press at least one-half hour prior to the briefing. At this time, this briefing is the only place where officials authorized to speak about the incident and confirmed information will be available. Thank you for your assistance."

- Emergency information dissemination should be restricted to approved, specific, and verified information concerning the event, and should include:

Emergency Operations Center Staff
(Includes Public Information Officer and Incident Commander for approval)

Information from on-scene sources
(Includes on-scene Public Information Staff)

- o Nature and extent of emergency occurrence.
- o Impacted or potentially affected areas of the county.
- o Advice on emergency safety procedures, if any.
- o Mitigation activities being conducted by responders.
- o Procedures for reporting emergency conditions to the EOC.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

- Information concerning the event should be consistent for all members of the media.

- Information should be presented in an objective manner.

- Rumor control is vital. Sensitive or critical information must be verified and authorized by the Incident Commander before release. Inaccurate information published by the media should be corrected. Unconfirmed rumors or information from unauthorized or unnamed sources may be addressed in the following manner:

"We will not confirm that until we have been able to check out the information through authorized sources. Once we have confirmed information, we will release it to all members of the media at the same time."

- Information that media representatives often request includes:

  o   Disaster (What is it?)
  o   Location (Where is it?)
  o   Time (When did it occur? How long will it last?)
  o   Deaths (Are there any? How many?)
  o   Injuries (Are there any? How many? What is the nature of the injuries? Where are the injured being treated?)
  o   Involved Agencies (What other agencies responded? How many? What level of involvement do they have?)

- Do not release information that might hinder emergency response, prejudice the outcome of an investigation, or pose a further threat to public safety. Examples include:

  o   Personal conjecture about the course of the emergency, or the conduct of the response.
  o   Opinions about evidence, or a suspect or a defendant's character, guilt or innocence.
  o   Contents of statements used in alibis, admissions, or confessions.
  o   References to the results of various tests and examinations.
  o   Statements that might jeopardize the testimony of credible witnesses.
  o   Extraneous or demeaning information—statements which have no bearing on the incident.
  o   Information that might be otherwise compromising to an individual or to the response.

- In an incident involving fatalities, the names of the victims or the cause of death shall not be released without authorization from the medical examiner's office or notification of the next of kin.

- Confidential information is not to be released. This includes the home phone numbers and addresses of county department or agency personnel and volunteer emergency workers.

- The Public Information Officer will not allow media access to the EOC except under limited, controlled circumstances, and only with the prior approval of the Incident Commander. Before being admitted to the EOC, media representatives shall display appropriate identification, and shall be escorted by a member of the public information staff.

- Public information briefings, releases, interviews, and warnings shall be logged and, if possible, recorded. Copies shall become part of the final incident package.

- Whenever possible and appropriate, media briefings shall be scheduled in cooperation with media deadlines. For national media representatives, these times are generally 1100 and 1500 EST. Do not commit to firm briefing times unless it is certain that these times can be kept. It may be more efficient to notify the media one-half hour in advance of a briefing.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Media Briefing Facilities
The following areas may be available for media briefings during emergencies:

- County Commission Room
- County Jail
- Public Safety Building

Media Access to the Scene
In cooperation with on-scene personnel, media representatives may be allowed restricted access to the scene, depending on the nature and location of the incident. This should be done only after considering the safety of media personnel, the impact on response, and the wishes and concerns of the victims. A release of liability should be signed by all media representatives before they visit the scene.

If it is not safe or practical to admit all media representatives to the scene, a media "pool" may be created, where media representatives select one camera crew to take footage for all.

Protect response personnel from unwanted media intrusion. Off-shift personnel should be provided uninterrupted rest in an area free from media access.

Victims and families should have access to public officials without having to face the media. Try to provide a secure entrance to briefing areas, or arrange a meeting/interview room away from the press.

Rumor Control and Public Assistance
The Public Information Officer may establish a separate division to deal with providing emergency information to the public through the EAS (emergency alert system) and public information/rumor control lines. Public information numbers may be published via the media. Release will result in fewer non-emergency calls to 911 and the EOC General Staff, will aid in information gathering, and will offer the public a means of getting valid information about the incident, rather than potentially harmful rumors.

Requests for non-emergency assistance received by the public information staff should be routed to the appropriate EOC staff.

Intra-Agency Communications
Agency staff not directly involved in the emergency response, especially telephone response teams, must receive updated and accurate information about the incident. This information should include the phone numbers for public information/rumor control lines, in case the public attempts to contact the county agencies/departments directly seeking information on the incident.

Joint Information Centers
In a very large incident involving all levels of government, the Public Information Officer may become a member of, or feed information to, a joint information center. This may be set up in a central location, and is designed to allow Public Information Officers from involved response and recovery agencies to coordinate information released to the media and the public.
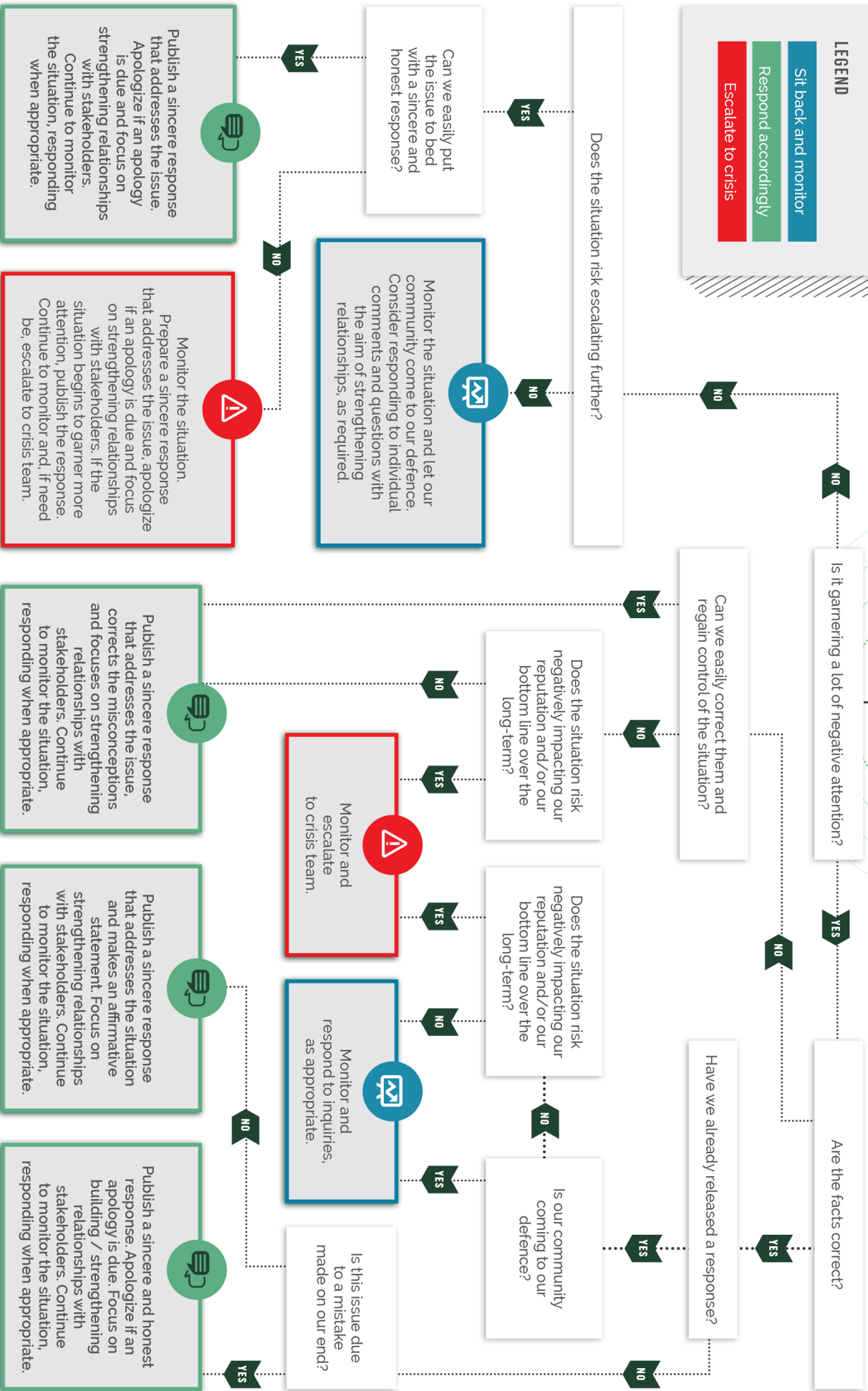
Demobilization Phase
Close down work area and deliver documents to Emergency Manager.

CRISIS READY™
FLOWCHART

LEGEND

- Sit back and monitor
- Respond accordingly
- Escalate to crisis

A NEGATIVE ISSUE HAS OCCURRED

Is it garnering a lot of negative attention?

YES → Are the facts correct?

- **YES** → Have we already released a response?
  - **YES** → Is our community coming to our defence?
  - **NO** → Is this issue due to a mistake made on our end?
    - **YES** → Publish a sincere and honest response. Apologize if an apology is due. Focus on building / strengthening relationships with stakeholders. Continue to monitor the situation, responding when appropriate.
    - **NO** → Does the situation risk negatively impacting our reputation and/or our bottom line over the long-term?
      - **YES** → Monitor and respond to inquiries, as appropriate.
      - **NO** → Publish a sincere response that addresses the situation and makes an affirmative statement. Focus on strengthening relationships with stakeholders. Continue to monitor the situation, responding when appropriate.

- **NO** → Can we easily correct them and regain control of the situation?
  - **YES** → Publish a sincere response that addresses the issue, corrects the misconceptions and focuses on strengthening relationships with stakeholders. Continue to monitor the situation, responding when appropriate.
  - **NO** → Does the situation risk negatively impacting our reputation and/or our bottom line over the long-term?
    - **YES** → Monitor and escalate to crisis team.
    - **NO** → Publish a sincere response that addresses the issue, corrects the misconceptions and focuses on strengthening relationships with stakeholders. Continue to monitor the situation, responding when appropriate.

NO → Does the situation risk escalating further?

- **YES** → Can we easily put the issue to bed with a sincere and honest response?
  - **YES** → Publish a sincere response that addresses the issue. Apologize if an apology is due and focus on strengthening relationships with stakeholders. Continue to monitor the situation, responding when appropriate.
  - **NO** → Monitor the situation. Prepare a sincere response that addresses the issue, apologize if an apology is due and focus on strengthening relationships with stakeholders. If the situation begins to garner more attention, publish the response. Continue to monitor and, if need be, escalate to crisis team.

- **NO** → Monitor the situation and let our community come to our defence. Consider responding to individual comments and questions with the aim of strengthening relationships, as required.

THE **CRISIS READY**™ FORMULA
FOR MANAGING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Controversies are amongst the most difficult types of negative events to manage effectively. Why? Because they are **emotionally charged situations that automatically segregate your audience**. Not to mention that, due to their emotional relatability, they present a high-risk for fast escalation and virality.

Furthermore, with our current societal climate—with everything from the *Me Too* and *Time's Up* movements, to society's collective stance against racial discrimination, and more—**controversial issues are an increasing high-risk scenario for many organizations**.

Fortunately, there is a **4-step Crisis Ready formula for effectively managing the majority of controversial issues**. Share this formula with your team prior to experiencing a controversy, and be ready to get ahead of this type of incident that threatens both high-velocity of reach, and long-term impact on your brand's reputation.

STEP **4**

STEP **3**

STEP **2**

STEP **1**

BE QUIET AND MONITOR Once steps 1 through 3 have been taken, there is nothing left to say. Let the conversation take place, continue to monitor, and establish a threshold that, if surpassed, requires notification and escalation to leadership.

BE CLEAR Release a strong statement that clearly and concisely explains your position, decision, and reasoning. Do not be ambiguous or leave room for misinterpretation or misconception.

BE DECISIVE Take a decisive stance in alignment with the organization's values. Know that you will not appeal to or please everyone as controversy segregates, which means that being decisive is important. Don't make a decision you will go back on and ensure your team understands that some stakeholders will most likely not be happy.

BE THOUGHTFUL Think through the situation in alignment with the organization's core values; seek to understand all sides of the controversy and its emotional relatability; and assess all potential risk on the organization's reputation and its connection with its stakeholders.

THIS FORMULA SHOULD BE USED

- When preparing for an inevitable or self-imposed controversy
- When managing an escalating controversial issue

Being crisis ready is a powerful initiative that builds brand invincibility.

CRISIS READY™
INTERNAL ESCALATION PROTOCOL FLOWCHART

INCIDENT DETECTED, APPROPRIATE TEAM NOTIFIED.

Approximate / ideal timeline

INITIAL ANALYSIS
by appropriate team.
Does incident risk presenting
long-term material impact?

- Yes
- Probable / Unsure
- No

Approximate / ideal timeline

BUSINESS AS USUAL
Appropriate department(s) to perform
their responsibilities as usual.

STANDBY
Assessment group to convene and assess
potential scope of the situation.
Does incident risk presenting
long-term material impact?

- No

LEADERSHIP TEAM TO ASSESS SITUATION
Does incident present a crisis
to the organization?

- Yes
- Yes
- No

RESPOND AS APPROPRIATE
Monitor situation
and be ready for
potential escalation.

ACTIVATION
Crisis Ready team
and program
activated.

LEGEND

- Appropriate department procedures
- Assessment Group procedures
- Leadership Team procedures

Crisis Ready Rules

If you don't **own the crisis**, the crisis will own you.

If you ask a question, be prepared for answers you don't like. If the question is important, **ask it anyway**.

Never launch a new product, campaign or communication without **assessing the potential risk**.

Greater trust instilled with stakeholders gives you the merited **benefit of the doubt** at the onset of a crisis.

You can't outrun the Internet. You have to **outsmart it.**

Always assume **there's video**.

Emotion always overpowers reason.

When in doubt, **focus on** (re)building and strengthening **relationships**.

You never know where you will be when crisis strikes. Ensure multiple **remotely accessible copies** of your program are **safely stored**.

A mistake can be forgiven. The appearance of a cover-up will not be.

A **legal strategy** is vital to dealing with a crisis, but it is **NOT the public face** of your response.

Social media is the gasoline, **not the fire**. (It can also be the smoke and **the rainbow**.)

GRAPHIC STANDARDS

Why are graphic standards important?

This manual provides guidelines to help ensure consistent application of the Cass County Government identity. Projecting a unified visual identity involves more than simply creating and implementing a logo. Graphic standards provide a sound, flexible structure for using logos, color, and typography — a graphic "vocabulary" unique to Cass County. By consistently following these graphic standards, Cass County's visual identity will become established and recognized. Failure to properly use these elements reduces our ability to communicate with the County's many audiences, and diminishes the identity's value.

AT LEAST 1 INCH OR 200 PIXELS

The Logo

The logo is Cass County Government's official identifying mark. It is the basic element in the application of a universal visual identity.

Cass County's logo consists of two parts: the profile of the Cass County Courthouse and the wordmark. The two parts should never be arranged differently than the examples shown in this manual, or combined with other design elements.

The logo is uniquely rendered. It cannot be redrawn, duplicated, or modified outside of the variations in this guide in any way.

Please note: Cass County has used this logo since 1991.

Minimum logo size

The Cass County Government logo has been designed for use in a wide variety of sizes. However, it should never be reproduced so small that it becomes illegible or unnoticeable.

In print, the minimum logo size is one inch, measured as the width of the logo. Never print the logo smaller than this.

For on-screen uses, the minimum logo size is 200 pixels, measured as the width of the logo. Never display the logo smaller than this.
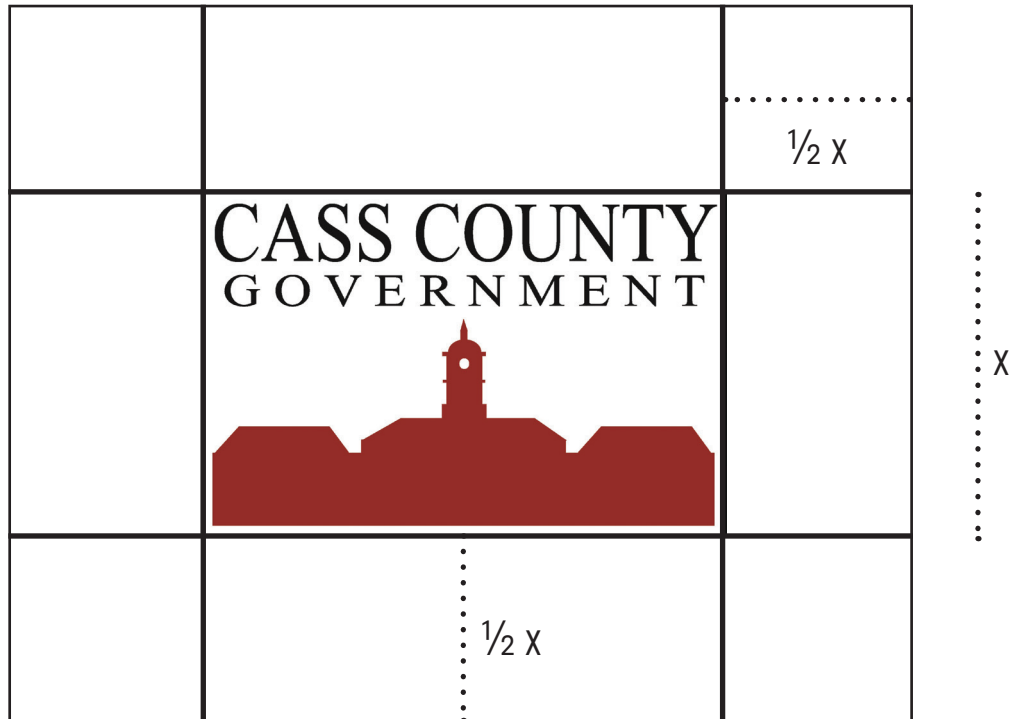
Logo clearspace

The logo should always be surrounded by a buffer area of clear space to separate it from text and other graphic elements, as well as the edge of the page. No other elements should infringe upon this space.

The minimum clearspace needed is specified relative to the height of the logo.

For example:
If the logo height is 1", the required clearspace surrounding the logo is ½". If the logo height is ½", the required clearspace surrounding the logo is ¼".

Acceptable Logo Variations

PREFERRED

ACCEPTABLE

ACCEPTABLE

Note: The logo should never be placed in a shape that implies it is part of the logo. The black background shown above is meant to suggest a large field of color, not an acceptable shape around the logo.

Logo color configurations

Whenever possible, print the logo in color. However, when this isn't possible, it is acceptable to print the logo as solid black or pure white.

The logo should be reproduced so that it is easily seen and recognized. Always place the logo on a solid, contrasting background. Do not place the logo on a busy or complicated background.

Use only the color configurations illustrated above. No other colors or configurations are acceptable for the logo. Digital files of all three logo color configurations are available; please contact the public information coordinator to request them.

AT LEAST 1 INCH OR 200 PIXELS

The Seal

The Cass County Government Seal can be used as a secondary logo - but usage is restricted to social media posts or when the usage of the Primary Logo is not possible. The primary color of the seal will be limited to either black or white. Any other versions of the seal will need to be approved by the public information coordinator of county administrator.

The seal is uniquely rendered. It cannot be redrawn, duplicated, or modified in any way.

Minimum logo size

The Cass County Government seal has been designed for use in a wide variety of sizes. However, it should never be reproduced so small that it becomes illegible or unnoticeable.

In print, the minimum logo size is one inch, measured as the width of the logo. Never print the logo smaller than this.

For on-screen uses, the minimum logo size is 200 pixels, measured as the width of the logo. Never display the logo smaller than this.

SIGNATURE COLORS
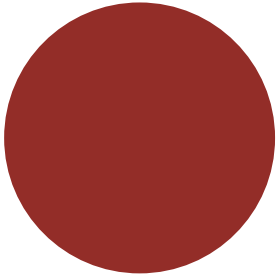
CASS COUNTY MAROON

Pantone   7623 C

CMYK   27– 92 – 89 – 26

RGB   147 – 45 – 47
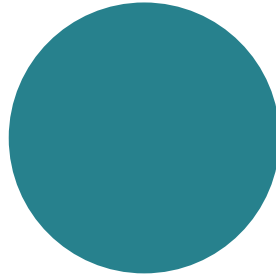
CASS COUNTY TEAL

Pantone   5483 C

CMYK   82– 34 – 40 – 5

RGB   39 – 129 – 141

SECONDARY COLORS
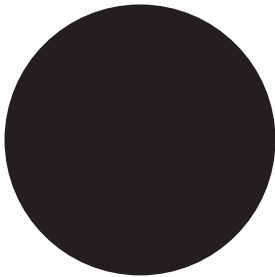
BLACK

Pantone   black

CMYK   0– 0 – 0 – 100

RGB   0 – 0 – 0
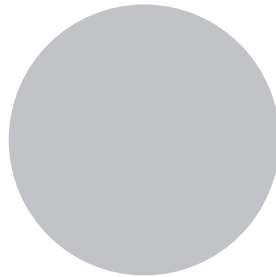
GRAY

Pantone   428 C

CMYK   58– 51 – 51 – 19

RGB   107 – 105 – 104

Color palette

Color plays an important role in keeping all materials consistently recognizable. The two signature colors that comprise Cass County's identity are maroon and teal.

Additionally, a secondary palette has been established. These colors work well in combination with any of the three signature colors.

SOURCE SERIF PRO REGULAR: *primarily used for body copy*

ABCDEFghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz12345678

SOURCE SERIF PRO ITALIC: use for emphasis

ABCDEFghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz12345678

OSWALD BOLD: use for headlines or subheads

ABCDEFghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 12345678

OSWALD LIGHT: use for subheads or body copy

ABCDEFghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 12345678

Recommended typography

Typography, used consistently, is one of the most important design elements in establishing a recognizable graphic identity. From hundreds of typefaces available, the Source Serif Pro and Oswald font families have been selected for use in Cass County Government materials. These typefaces are attractive, functional, and versatile enough for use in a wide variety of applications.

The sample styles displayed demonstrate the versatility of the chosen font families. This is not a comprehensive list of acceptable styles, but a guide to encourage the use of our recommended font families. Variations on these samples are expected as they suit the project.

The Source Serif Pro and Oswald fonts are available for purchase from Adobe Systems: font.adobe.com.

Questions about logo, fonts, colors etc. should be addressed to the public information coordinator to ensure consistency.

TIMES NEW ROMAN: *primarily used for body copy*

ABCDEFghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz12345678

TIMES NEW ROMAN ITALIC: use for emphasis

ABCDEFghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz12345678

Arial BOLD: use for headlines or subheads

ABCDEFghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 12345678

Arial REGULAR: use for subheads or body copy

ABCDEFghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 12345678

Arial ITALIC: use for emphasis

ABCDEFghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 12345678

Acceptable typography

It is understood that not everyone will have the recommended font families. If Source Serif Pro and Oswald are available, use them as described in this manual. If they are unavailable, substitute the font families shown above.

Substitute Times New Roman for Source Serif Pro, and Arial for Oswald. These fonts are readily available on both PC and Macintosh computers.

PRESS RELEASE EXAMPLE & TEMPLATE

LOGOS
Releases typically come from the public information coordinator and the Administration Office, so they need to have the official Cass County Government logo included. Some releases may come from the Sheriff's Office or the Emergency Management Department, these releases may include their specific department or office logos.

HEADLINE
Press release headlines should be in Arial, bold, and typically around 16 font size. They should also be brief, clear and to the point. First word of the headline and all proper nouns should be capitalized. There is no need to capitalize every word.

BODY
Press releases should be written in Arial size12 font. The body of a press release should be factual and newsworthy. It should be written in the AP style and avoid using long sentences and paragraphs. Avoid repetition and fancy language. A press release should start with a sentence or two stating the most important facts. The second paragraph should lay out the most important details. Typically the third paragraph is reserved for a quote from a subject matter expert or an official connected to the information if it is available. The last portion of the release should include any missing details. Finally, Be sure to include an "end of content" marker - such as three pound signs (###).

CASS COUNTY GOVERNMENT

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 13, 2020
CONTACT: Catlin Solum, solumc@casscountynd.gov, 701-241-5794

Public Access to Upcoming Cass County Meetings
Those wishing to participate in meetings remotely will need to be invited

CASS COUNTY, N.D. – A Cass County Human Services Zone Board meeting, Group A Rotational meeting and the Commission meeting have been scheduled for Tuesday, January 19. The Human Services meeting starts at 1:00 p.m., the Rotational meeting begins at 2:00 p.m. and the Commission meeting starts at 3:30 p.m.

This notice is being sent in accordance with North Dakota open meeting laws. The meetings will be streamed live on the Cass County Government social media platforms and recordings of the meetings will be available.

For anyone that plans to participate in the meetings remotely, they will need to send an email to pio@casscountynd.gov to receive a private invitation to the meeting and to organize their participation.

###

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE RELEASES

KEEP YOUR GOAL IN MIND
The purpose of a release is to drive news coverage. Write the release with the intent of getting the information into the news cycle.

KNOW WHAT KIND OF RELEASE IT IS
Is the release to get the media to attend an event? Make sure that information is at the top. Is the release about something important that has happened? Make sure important details about the news are included close to the top.

INCLUDE QUOTES THAT ENTITIES CAN ACTUALLY USE
Quotes in a release are useless if they never get used. Make sure the quotes you include support the point of the release and sound like the individuals speaking.

BE DIRECT AND USEFUL
Releases should have important and useful information for reporters, not information that creates more questions.

POWERPOINT EXAMPLE & TEMPLATE

When presenting slides, it is best practice to keep the information succinct and concise. Too much information or using too many words on a slide can defeat the purpose of using PowerPoint for the presentation. Below are some basic examples of PowerPoint templates that are available for anyone to use. In general, the Cass County logo should be placed in one of the corners of each slide, additional department logos should also be included if the information presented is associated directly with that department. If any department would like to use their own versions for PowerPoint templates, it is advised that they share that with the public information coordinator or county administrator for approval before using it publicly.
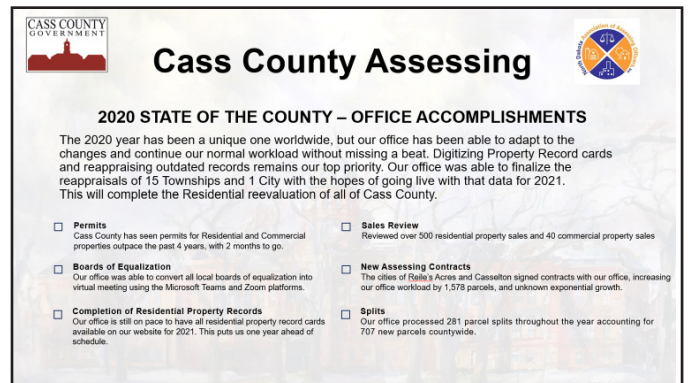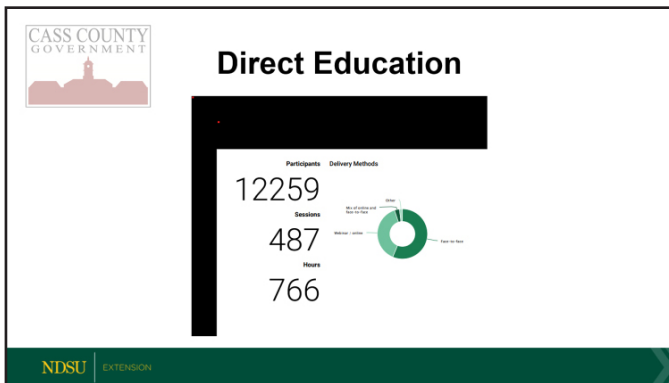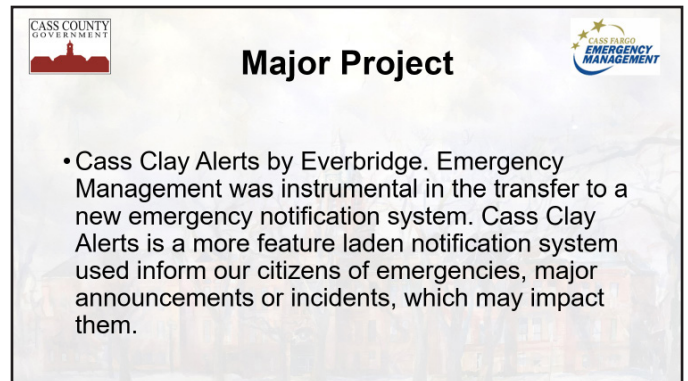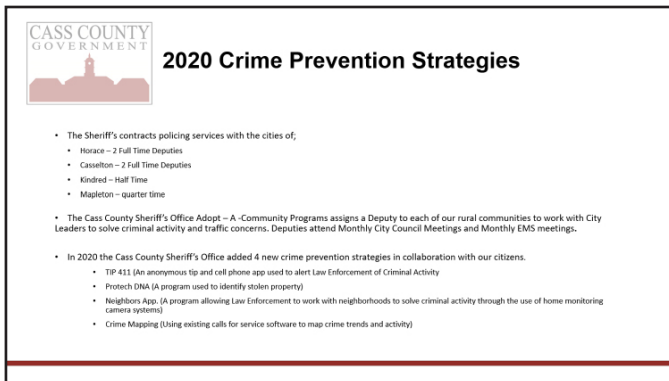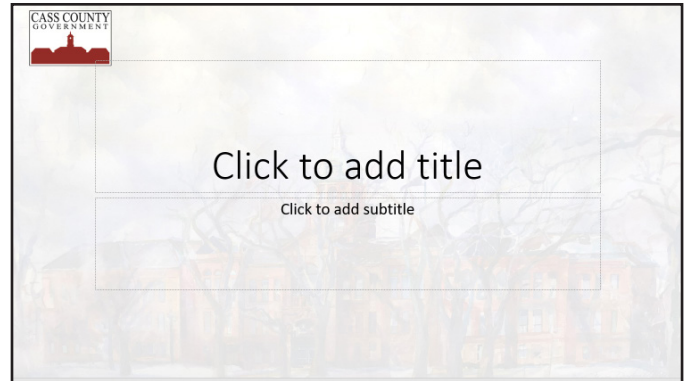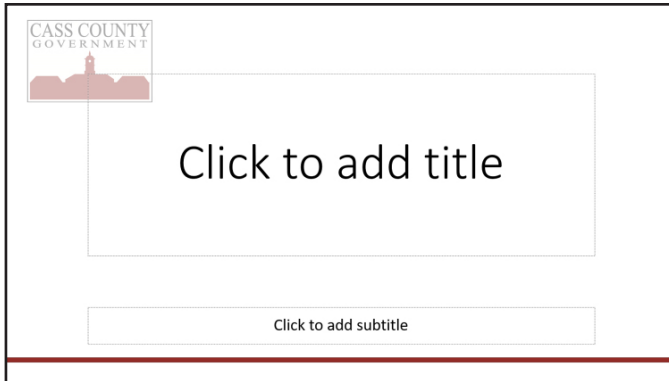
TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE POWERPOINT SLIDES

FOLLOW THE 5/5/5 RULE
To keep your audience from feeling overwhelmed, you should keep the text on each slide short and to the point. Some experts suggest using the 5/5/5 rule: no more than five words per line of text, five lines of text per slide, or five text-heavy slides in a row.

CHOOSE READABLE COLORS AND FONTS
Your text should be easy to read and pleasant to look at. Large, simple fonts and theme colors are always your best bet. The best fonts and colors can vary depending on your presentation setting. Presenting in a large room? Make your text larger than usual so people in the back can read it. Presenting with the lights on? Dark text on a light background is your best bet for visibility.

LETTERHEAD EXAMPLE & TEMPLATE

HEADER

The standard for the letterhead layout includes a header with the Cass County Government logo in the top left corner and the department contact information in the opposite top right corner. Each department may customize their contact information to suit their needs, but any changes to the header layout in official Cass County Government letterheads will need to be approved by the public information coordinator or the county administrator.

FOOTER

The standard for the letterhead layout includes a footer with the Cass County Courthouse mailing address and the Cass County Government public website address. Each department may customize this footer to suit their needs, but any changes to the footer layout in official Cass County Government letterheads will need to be approved by the public information coordinator or the county administrator.

This letterhead template is available for each department to use. Please contact the public information coordinator to receive a digital copy.

The body of your memo should be written in either Times New Roman or Source Serif Pro, size 12 font. If a header is necessary for clarity purposes, please follow the guidelines for the press release header found on page 35 of this document.

The information should be factual and should start with a sentence or two stating the most important facts or the purpose of the memo.

PALAVERING NEWSLETTER EXAMPLE
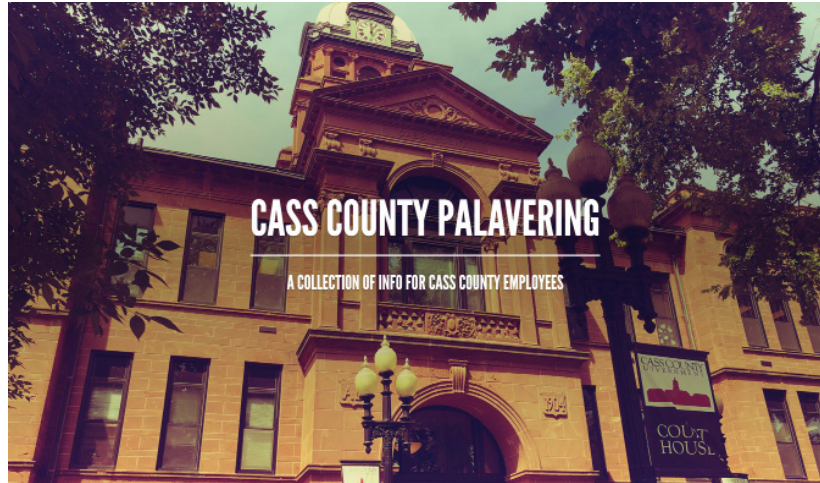
CASS COUNTY PALAVERING

A COLLECTION OF INFO FOR CASS COUNTY EMPLOYEES

PARENTING CLASSES OPEN FOR FALL ENROLLMENT

The NDSU Extension Parent & Family Resource Center is offering several online and in-person classes geared toward parents and families. The classes are aimed at enhancing the formative years of children through effective discipline skills and strategies needed to raise responsible children.

Active Parenting: First Five Years

HUMAN SERVICE ZONE UPDATE

Cass Human Service Zone Economic Assistance continues to make steps forward in the state-wide redesign of Economic Assistance service delivery. On 8/22/22, we transitioned our document management system to further streamline the flow of information to the team members. Full systematic redesign is slotted to be in effect February of 2023. The primary goal of the redesign efforts are to provider faster and more efficient service to the citizens of Cass County.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Cass County pays for 4 sessions per year for each Cass County Government employee and 4 sessions for each person living in your household which includes roommates and/or college students that rely on you financially.

The contact number for our local Village Family Service Center is 701-451-4900. Do not hesitate to use The Village, it is confidential.

SHAREPOINT DEPARTMENT SITE EXAMPLE

DEPARTMENT SITES

Each department will have its own SharePoint site that will house specific information such as an organizational chart, office location, and overall responsibilities and duties for that department. The idea is that any new employees should be able to easily find who to contact from each department and where to find those employees if needed. Each department site can be customized to suit the needs and preferences of the Department Head. These sites have the ability to house a variety of different widgets that can can do things like link to document storage, display a X feed, house an event calendar, or display news items. If there is interest in customizing a department site, please contact the public information coordinator to set that up.

EXAMPLES OF WIDGETS THAT CAN BE ADDED TO DEPARTMENT SITES