Mission

To lead coordinated communications, customer service, language access and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests from a countywide perspective that connects County residents with information about their government's services, operations, and policies. To increase public awareness of hazards and to communicate appropriate actions to take before, during and after emergencies. To ensure clear, open, and timely communications to and from employees to maintain an informed and motivated workforce.

Connection to the Countywide Strategic Plan

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors adopted the first-ever Countywide Strategic Plan on October 5, 2021. The Countywide Strategic Plan serves as a road map to help guide future work, focusing on the 10 Community Outcome Areas that represent the issues of greatest importance to the community. In February of 2023, the first Annual Report on the work of the strategic plan was released to the public. The report contains point-in-time progress highlights for each of the proposed plan strategies, plus a sample data dashboard and data story that is being replicated across all of the outcome areas, and a number of additional initiatives to embed the elements of the plan within department-level work. The report also includes a Year Two Implementation Model, which focuses on identifying the specific strategies that will move forward to implementation under the guidance of the Board of Supervisors. For more information on the Countywide Strategic Plan, please visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/strategicplan. The Office of Public Affairs primarily supports the following Community Outcome Area:

Countywide Strategic Plan Community Outcome Areas

Community Outcome Area	Vision Statement
Effective and Efficient Government	*All people trust that their government responsibly manages resources, is responsible to their needs, provides exceptional services and equitably represents them.*

Focus

The Office of Public Affairs (OPA) is the central communications office for the County and, as such, provides essential information to the public, elected and appointed officials, County agencies, and the media concerning County programs and services. The Director serves as the County media spokesperson and as a liaison with the County Executive and the Board of Supervisors. OPA also manages countywide editorial planning, social media, website content, compliance with the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, language access, and countywide customer service.

OPA coordinates a comprehensive, centralized public affairs program for the County while also providing communications consulting to County agencies. Employee internal communications, countywide web content management, social media, customer service and emergency communications are part of the agency's critical functions.

OPA focuses on three main areas of communication: external, employee and emergency. This structure facilitates the best use of OPA staffing to address the following strategic issues: enhancing access to information both internally and externally; improving crisis and emergency communications; publishing content through numerous tools and engaging the public; providing

information proactively to the media; supporting agencies that do not have their own public information staff; and coordinating with agencies which do have embedded communications staff. Strategies to address these critical issues include increasing collaboration with agencies, enhancing information on the County's intranet and internet websites, and continuing to explore tools for reaching diverse audiences.

OPA remains proactive in anticipating the needs of the public and media by providing timely information. In addition to managing the content on the County's website at www.fairfaxcounty.gov, OPA oversees the use of several social media sites, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Nextdoor. These websites are all utilized to provide direct communication on important County matters to the public. The public reach of these tools has grown exponentially over the past few years enabling the amplification of a common message through multiple channels.

OPA is also responsible for coordinating countywide compliance with the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (VFOIA). OPA monitors incoming VFOIA requests and is committed to continually improving the efficiency of the VFOIA response process to maintain the County's commitment to public transparency. Strategies to implement this commitment include: ensuring agency compliance with countywide Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) policies, VFOIA laws and policies, and state and federal records laws; providing quarterly training on these laws and policies to County employees; ensuring open and collaborative communication with designated agency points of contact and; administering a centralized system to track all FOIA requests.

External Communications
OPA provides critical leadership in communicating with many external audiences about important issues, deadlines, and events, including COVID-19. This includes serving County residents, the business community, nonprofits, faith communities, media, and many other key groups by sharing relevant, timely and actionable information through the following tools:

- www.fairfaxcounty.gov
- NewsCenter
- NewsWire
- Facebook (English and Spanish)
- Twitter (English and Spanish)
- Instagram
- Nextdoor
- YouTube
- Flickr
- SlideShare
- Surveys
- Media
- 703-FAIRFAX Phone and Email Customer Service
- Mobile App
- Podcasts, Internet Radio, and SoundCloud
- Email Newsletters
- Printed Materials

NewsCenter
The NewsCenter (www.fairfaxcounty.gov/news) serves as the central focal point for publishing news for residents. OPA's vision for the NewsCenter is simple: to selectively package, promote and publish relevant, timely and actionable audience-focused information for the community. Most of the

content focuses on the needs of residents and what is practical in their daily lives. The NewsCenter has been recognized with several awards, including the Governor's Technology Award and the National Association of Counties Achievement Award.

Social Media

OPA continues its social media publishing role leading daily information dissemination on multiple County platforms reaching the community. OPA also leads the entire County social media program including oversight, approving new accounts, analyzing metrics from all County accounts, setting standards, and working in partnership with more than 80 social media publishers across the County. This role is essential as social media tools constantly evolve and change. A continued area of focus is addressing legal issues related to official social media accounts. The law is generally years behind where society is, so courts are issuing rulings that impact the County in many ways. OPA has worked closely with the Office of the County Attorney and the Board of Supervisors to address new legal requirements for official social media accounts.

County Website

OPA continues its work to support the County website including managing key pages, setting content policy, metrics tracking, accessibility support, usability testing, consultation with agencies, and working with the Department of Information Technology (DIT) to plan the next phases and features of fairfaxcounty.gov.

Community Engagement

OPA has taken on a leadership role for Inclusive Community Engagement in partnership with One Fairfax and the Department of Neighborhood and Community Services (NCS). This work will lead to process improvements, standards, coordination and ensuring a more equitable way for the County to engage the community. OPA oversees the County's new online public engagement platform that continues to roll out to other departments.

Digital Team

Within external communications, OPA's digital team continues its focus on the following areas:

- Developing policies and governance for the website and social media
- Providing strategic and tactical counsel
- Training web and social media publishers
- Maintaining a suite of metrics
- Enhancing capabilities during emergencies and public health crises

Customer Service

OPA's customer service team strives to exceed expectations in serving County residents. The team often serves as a bridge, linking residents to the appropriate agency to assist them with their needs. The customer service team takes ownership of residents' unique situations and works on their behalf to connect them with the services and programs they need. This includes speaking with numerous agencies to find the correct entity to address the resident's questions or concerns.

The customer service team assists the public through the following channels:
- 703-Fairfax (324-7329) Telephone Line
- 703-Fairfax (324-7329) Voice Mailbox
- 703-Fairfax Email Inbox
- Customer Service Center located inside the Government Center Building

Additional functions handled by the customer service team include:

- **Homeowners Association List** – OPA maintains a list of more than 2,400 Community and Homeowners Associations, which is used by County agencies to communicate with residents. OPA also receives telephone calls and emails from the public requesting this contact information.
- **Public Meetings Calendar** – Staff maintains and serves as approver for the Public Meetings Calendar on the County website, which lists all public meetings. This meets requirements of the VFOIA to post public meetings.
- **Customer Relationship Management (CRM)** – The customer service staff updates and maintains the CRM, which is the primary system that the customer service team uses to look up contact information for County agencies, as well as other state and local agencies to connect the public with the appropriate organization to assist them.
- **Equipment Loan Program** – OPA maintains an equipment loan program, which provides podiums, sound systems, cameras, and accessories to agencies for various events like groundbreakings and ribbon-cuttings.
- **Telework Space** – The customer service team created a small workspace behind the Information Desk and monitors and maintains this space for County employee use. The space was established in response to numerous requests from County employees who do not work at the Government Center but may need access to a small workspace.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the customer service team partnered with DIT to create an all-virtual contact center, which enables residents to remain connected with their government through a global pandemic and allows staff to work safely from home. Today, the 703-Fairfax Customer Service Center is a hybrid workplace with one/two customer service representatives onsite to serve walk-ins and one/two customer service representatives answering calls remotely.

In FY 2022, the number of calls decreased by 16 percent. This decrease in calls shows that residents are using other channels to find information, such as social media, the County's website and blog posts. In addition to receiving information through other channels, the need for COVID-19 information and resources slowed down towards the end of FY 2021 resulting in fewer calls. In addition, voicemails decreased by 35 percent due to being fully staffed in the customer service team and fewer incoming calls.

	FY 2021	FY 2022	% Difference
703-Fairfax Calls	37,510	31,485	16 percent decrease
703-Fairfax Voicemails	7,859	5,099	35 percent decrease
Information Desk Walk-ups	8,248	7,960	3 percent decrease
703-Fairfax Emails	4,340	3,817	12 percent decrease
Public Meeting Posts	1,495	1,250	16 percent decrease

Employee Communications

OPA provides the central point of coordination for countywide internal communications, supporting individual agency communication needs, providing strategic consultation and managing executive communications to employees. The agency plays a key role in helping agencies develop and amplify important information for the workforce. OPA also coordinates and implements communications plans and strategies for major County priorities.

COVID-19 communications continued to be a major focus internally in FY 2022. The Commonwealth of Virginia's decision in March 2022 to revoke the COVID-19 workplace safety standards resulted in

a number of important changes for County employees. This significant change required extensive communications to employees and updates to reference materials along with direct messaging to employees.

OPA continued to maintain the Coronavirus Information for Employees site as the central hub of internal COVID-19 communications in FY 2022. The site has been visited more than half a million times since its development and continues to receive an average of more than a thousand unique visitors every month.

NewsLink, the daily email newsletter, is distributed to more than 12,000 employees each workday, providing easy access to information on everything from training to Open Enrollment. OPA also maintains a countywide calendar of key dates and events for employees through FairfaxNet. With almost all trainings and events transitioning to a virtual environment, the countywide calendar provides easy access to these online offerings.

Major internal projects in the past year have included the development of a Labor Relations Administrator intranet site providing information to employees on the Collective Bargaining process.

Additionally, OPA offers guidance and training on internal communications, including eliminating internal print communications tools and maximizing use of the County intranet. Blogs remain a popular tool, improving efficiency and reach of agency communications.

OPA will continue to implement and coordinate additional products and tools for internal communications, reflecting the attributes of a high-performance 21st century workforce.

Emergency Communications
As required by the Fairfax County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP), OPA coordinates and disseminates all emergency information related to major incidents affecting more than two County agencies. Accordingly, OPA continues to recognize emergency communications as one of its major lines of business and the need for continued emphasis on emergency communications and dissemination of emergency information to the public, Board of Supervisors, County employees, the media, and other partner agencies and stakeholders.

During activations of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), OPA staff are key players in the incident command organizational structure, serving as the EOC Command and General Staff Public Information Officer (PIO), while the Director of OPA serves on the Senior Policy Group of key County leadership. Additional OPA staff serve in the Joint Information Center (JIC) as assistant PIOs, creating and disseminating all emergency-related content during an EOC activation. OPA opens the County's JIC, which serves as the central clearinghouse for emergency information, whenever the EOC is activated above a monitoring level.

The increased use of communication tools and the changing way residents receive information means that OPA must continue to recognize and adapt to be able to effectively distribute emergency news and information to various audiences and stakeholders. As such, OPA uses multiple communication tools and channels. These tools include the emergency blog, (www.fairfaxcounty.gov/emergency/blog); County website; Facebook; Twitter (both County and agency-specific accounts); YouTube; Instagram; Nextdoor; Flickr; SoundCloud; emails, text and pager messages from Fairfax Alerts and the Employee Alert Network (EAN); Fairfax County Government Radio online (www.fairfaxcounty.gov/radio); podcasts; the emergency information hotline and internal hotline numbers for County employees; video (OPA utilizes video online and on Channel 16); media interviews; and the County mobile app.

While emergency blog views/visitors increased significantly in calendar year 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, views/visitors in calendar year 2022 have not maintained that pace, as emergency blog views are historically driven by emergency events. While this drop in emergency blog views is significantly less than the previous two years, the number of views continue to represent a growth pattern for the emergency blog, without the spike caused by COVID-19.

In addition to the actual number of blog post views, each time an article is published, more than 7,700 e-mail subscribers and more than 540 blog followers using WordPress receive the article. There is no way to quantify how many of these recipients then share OPA's information with their followers.

OPA continues its involvement on the County's Exercise Planning Team in planning County tabletop and functional exercises to ensure smooth operations during emergencies. OPA staff also participate in countywide exercises, as well as participating in the exercise simulation cell (Sim Cell) and Emergency Operations Center for larger, multi-agency and department-specific events.

Virginia Freedom of Information Act
OPA enhances public access to Fairfax County information and public records through the countywide FOIA program. The countywide FOIA Officer serves as Fairfax County's main point of contact for FOIA requests, coordinates the County's compliance with VFOIA, and provides strategy and direction to agencies on how to efficiently respond to the growing volume and complexity of FOIA requests.

The goals of the countywide FOIA program are to: 1) coordinate compliance with VFOIA; 2) promote the County's commitment to transparency; 3) improve the efficiency of the FOIA response process; and 4) enhance monitoring and accountability of FOIA requests. In order to achieve these goals, the countywide FOIA program team conducts VFOIA compliance training on public records and public meetings, ensures frequent and meaningful collaboration among all County agencies on improving the FOIA response process, administers the countywide FOIA tracking application and generates annual FOIA reports to measure the impact of FOIA countywide, and provides subject matter expertise to all Fairfax County agencies, Board, Authorities, and Commissions, and Board of Supervisors' offices.

COVID-19 brought new challenges to OPA and other County agencies in responding to FOIA requests and conducting public meetings. To ensure the public's access to public information and public meetings were not negatively impacted, the FOIA program provided strategic oversight of new and improved methods by which certain public meetings were conducted, implemented a FOIA fee portal to allow for electronic payment of FOIA fees, maintained average response times, and provided timely guidance on complying with newly adopted changes to VFOIA.

In furthering OPA's strategic goals, the following training and FOIA performance metrics demonstrate the County's continued commitment to improving FOIA compliance and the FOIA response process:

FOIA Trainings Offered
- 24 training events
- 315 attendees

FOIA Requests
- Total FOIA requests: 16,160
- FOIA requests managed by OPA: 624
- Total FOIA fees assessed: $119,565
- Total FOIA fee waivers: 10,722

Additional performance metrics and data are published annually in the FOIA Annual Report, which is provided to the County Executive and proactively made available to the public and media on the County's website.

Fairfax County Language Access Strategy
Fairfax County's Language Access Program (LAP) was reestablished in 2020 to ensure that the County embodies social equity, race, immigrant integration, and social justice into policies, practices, programs, and budget decisions to create equitable outcomes. This program is key to ensuring the equitable distribution of communication of benefits, services, and resources to all County residents, regardless of their English proficiency. It also aims to serve the 31 percent of County residents with limited English proficiency (LEP) who identify themselves as speaking English "less than very well."

LAP is centered around the three goals of promoting cultural competency, enhancing the efficiency of the County's translation process, and strengthening partnerships to meet the needs of the County's multilingual and cultural communities.

In order to achieve these goals, the County's Language Access Program Director will engage more than 20 County agencies to update the County's language access policy. The program Director will act as the County's central point of contact and will assist all agencies in identifying a Language Access Coordinator. In addition, OPA has led the innovation of technology and support solutions to staff to provide information in the seven predominant languages in the County during the response to COVID-19. In partnership with NCS and the Park Authority, OPA established a Multilingual Pilot Program and has trained, tested, and validated 10 County staff to translate key information in the seven predominant non-English languages spoken in the County: Spanish, Arabic, Farsi, Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Urdu. This approach has enabled the communication of information to be delivered to the diverse multilingual communities throughout the County.
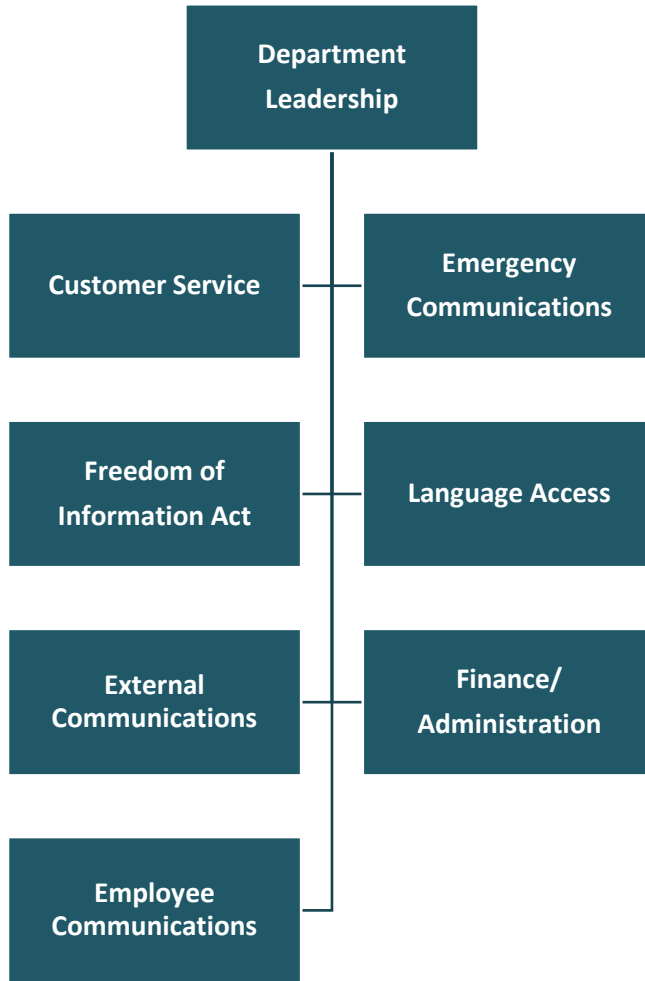
<u>**Multilingual Communications**</u>
Social media
OPA created the County's first Spanish language Facebook and Twitter pages in 2020. These pages have quickly become a vital resource for agencies to communicate with the County's growing Spanish-speaking community. During the height of the COVID-19 response, OPA created a weekly Facebook live segment.

In-Language Media
The Spanish-language media strategy was established in 2020. Continued coverage by Spanish-language networks such as Univision, Telemundo, and other such media outlets have become a priority for the County.

Organizational Chart

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              Department
              Leadership
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    Customer Service    Emergency
                        Communications

    Freedom of          Language Access
    Information Act

    External            Finance/
    Communications      Administration

    Employee
    Communications
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Budget and Staff Resources

Category	FY 2022 Actual	FY 2023 Adopted	FY 2023 Revised	FY 2024 Advertised	FY 2024 Adopted
FUNDING					
Expenditures:					
Personnel Services	$1,850,145	$2,541,273	$2,541,273	$2,802,520	$2,889,897
Operating Expenses	133,653	357,386	375,133	264,062	254,169
Subtotal	**$1,983,798**	**$2,898,659**	**$2,916,406**	**$3,066,582**	**$3,144,066**
Less:					
Recovered Costs	($260,302)	($239,882)	($239,882)	($239,882)	($239,882)
Total Expenditures	**$1,723,496**	**$2,658,777**	**$2,676,524**	**$2,826,700**	**$2,904,184**
AUTHORIZED POSITIONS/FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT (FTE)					
Regular	23 / 23	26 / 26	26 / 26	26 / 26	26 / 26

FY 2024 Funding Adjustments

The following funding adjustments from the <u>FY 2023 Adopted Budget Plan</u> are necessary to support the FY 2024 program. Included are all adjustments recommended by the County Executive that were approved by the Board of Supervisors, as well as any additional Board of Supervisors' actions, as approved in the adoption of the Budget on May 9, 2023.

Employee Compensation   **$255,300**
An increase of $255,300 in Personnel Services includes $138,178 for a 5.44 percent market rate adjustment (MRA) for all employees and $40,924 for performance-based and longevity increases for non-uniformed merit employees, both effective July 2023. The remaining increase of $76,198 is included to support employee retention and recruitment efforts that will reduce pay compression and align the County's pay structures with the market based on benchmark data.

Targeted Vacancy Savings   **($9,893)**
A decrease of $9,893 is included to recognize targeted vacancy savings. Although the County has taken actions to reduce the vacancy rate, it is anticipated that vacancies will remain high for the foreseeable future, generating flexibility in agency budgets.

Changes to FY 2023 Adopted Budget Plan

The following funding adjustments reflect all approved changes in the FY 2023 Revised Budget Plan since passage of the <u>FY 2023 Adopted Budget Plan</u>. Included are all adjustments made as part of the FY 2022 Carryover Review, FY 2023 Third Quarter Review, and all other approved changes through April 30, 2023.

Carryover Adjustments   **$17,747**
As part of the *FY 2022 Carryover Review*, the Board of Supervisors approved funding of $17,747 in encumbered carryover to provide workspace for staff in the Language Access Program.

Position Detail

The <u>FY 2024 Adopted Budget Plan</u> includes the following positions:

OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS – 26 Positions			
1	Director	5	Information Officers III
1	Deputy Director	2	Information Officers II
2	Management Analysts IV	2	Information Officers I
3	Management Analysts II	1	Administrative Associate
1	Communications Specialist IV	1	Administrative Assistant V
1	Communications Specialist I	2	Administrative Assistants IV
2	Information Officers IV	1	Administrative Assistant III
1	Public Safety Information Officer IV		

Performance Measurement Results by Community Outcome Area

Effective and Efficient Government

OPA's platforms continue to deliver information to meet the public's changing expectations. From NewsCenter, a countywide news and engagement website, to social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Nextdoor, Flickr and SlideShare, OPA strives to provide a variety of means for the public and the media to receive County-related information and engage with their local government.

The County's main Facebook account is currently used as a performance measurement indicator to track the growth in use of that predominant social media tool for customers, both the public and the media, to obtain important information about Fairfax County. However, ongoing changes to Facebook's algorithm and delivery of content in news feeds continue to pose a challenge in achieving growing organic reach year over year.

Facebook remains a critical platform for the County's 20+ accounts to share information and OPA will continue publishing content to the main account and provide oversight to all accounts.

The efficiency of Facebook reach per dedicated FTE has changed as OPA redirected resources from Facebook in order to staff other essential communication tools such as Nextdoor, Instagram and the County website and short staffing.

Community Outcome Area	FY 2020 Actual	FY 2021 Actual	FY 2022 Estimate	FY 2022 Actual	FY 2023 Estimate	FY 2024 Estimate
Effective and Efficient Government						
Effective Technology and Quality Facilities						
Percent change in Facebook reach (main account)	98.1%	(0.3%)	5.3%	25.7%	(8.1%)	20.0%

A complete list of performance measures can be viewed at
https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/budget/fy-2024-adopted-performance-measures-pm