



## **BOARD MEETING AGENDA SUBMITTAL**

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**TO:** GCSB Board of Directors

**FROM:** Jennifer Donabedian, Administrative Services Manager

**DATE:** November 14, 2023

**SUBJECT: Agenda Item 4C: Adoption of a Resolution Approving and Implementing the Revised District Communication Plan**

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**RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

Staff recommends the following action:

*I move to adopt Resolution 50-2023 approving and implementing the revised District Communication Plan.*

**BACKGROUND:**

In 2018 the Board approved the District's Communication Plan. Since this time, the District has made some drastic changes in the way staff and management communicates important information to District constituents. This plan is a tool used by staff and the District's Social Media and Public Relations consultant to guide communication efforts.

The plan before the Board today has been updated to include these changes to better encompass the District's communication goals and objectives and means of delivery.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Draft Communication Plan
2. Resolution 50-2023



# COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Groveland Community Services District

## ABSTRACT

The District collects millions of dollars annually from ratepayers in the community. Where is this rate money spent? Who keeps the water flowing in my tap 24x7? Is my water safe and do we have enough for me to water my garden? Who is my wastewater provider and who controls them? The Groveland CSD (GCSD) has determined that public awareness and information of the critical public services it provides is essential. This Communication Plan describes the means to accomplish the goal of the District Board of Directors to increase public awareness of the District and improve its public image.

# GCSD COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Groveland Community Services District's communications typically can be categorized in the following key issues areas: Personnel/Organization, Financials/Accounting, Board, and Infrastructure/Capital Improvement. Staff has developed a Communications Plan covering all of these critical areas to maximize the District's budget and efficiency.

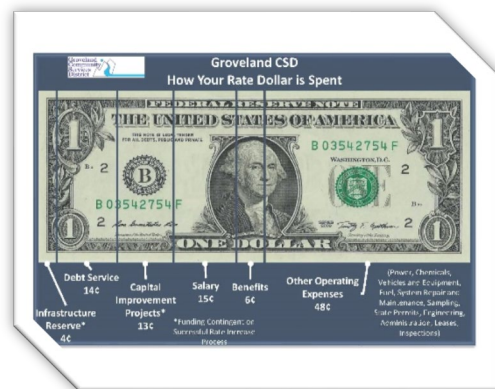
## GOALS

This Communications Plan has two major goals:

- To provide GCSD customers with a clear understanding of the District's operation, management and finances.
- To ensure that GCSD customers are aware of the high level of customer service and high quality of water, sewer, fire and park services provided by the District.

## TARGET AUDIENCES

- GCSD Customers
  - Active metered water and wastewater customers
  - Customers with second homes in the service area
  - Vacant land owners
  - Customers utilizing the District park facilities
  - Property owners who benefit from the fire services provided by the CSD
- Internal Communications
  - Customer service
  - Field operations
  - Training and advancement
- Media Relations
  - Local print/radio
  - Regional print/radio/broadcast/cable
  - Legislative Outreach
  - Local elected/appointed officials
  - Regional associations
- Public Agency Outreach
  - County/communities
  - Surrounding special districts and service providers
  - Service clubs and civic organizations



# GCSD COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

## RESEARCH

### DOCUMENT REVIEW

Staff reviewed the following documents and/or programs to prepare this Communications Plan:

- Groveland Community Services District Approved Management Objectives
- Website content at [www.GCSD.org](http://www.GCSD.org)
- Facebook and Instagram postings on a District specific site and on frequently visited sites such as NextDoor
- GCSD Board meetings/agendas/minutes
- Groveland Community Services Customer Service Requests

## OPPORTUNITIES

- To increase positive customer perception of GCSD customer service and quality of the delivery of water, sewer, park/recreation, emergency response and fire protection service over their cost.
- Knowledgeable and dedicated staff willing to support communications initiatives.
- New and expanding grant programs specifically for communication/education programs for sustainable customer communications.
- Inform of the fact that GCSD consistently provides high-quality services to its customers.
- Education and transparency for residents and property owners within GCSD of the intricacies and cost associated with providing critical public services.
- Secure feedback regarding community needs and interest in funding specific service levels.

## STRATEGIES

1. Engage GCSD staff to support communications efforts.
2. Focus branding and outreach efforts on programs that connect GCSD staff *directly* with high-quality service and programs.
3. Incorporate fact-based outreach for all major GCSD programs, plans and initiatives to help educate rate payers.
4. Improve Web-based outreach, including social media.
5. Secure consulting assistance with photography, information piece development, social media and program implementation.

## TACTICS

Tactics are the specific efforts and actions used to implement the Communications Plan. Each strategy has a unique set of tactics to be carried out by either GCSD or outside consultants as noted. Not all tactics will be feasible for implementation based on funding and/or staff availability; however, they should be considered when appropriate.

# GCS D COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

## 1. ENGAGE GCS D STAFF IN MULTIPLE DEPARTMENTS TO SUPPORT COMMUNICATIONS EFFORTS.

Currently communications efforts are planned, managed and implemented by GCS D administrative staff. Communications efforts have increased significantly over the last several years since the implementation of this communications plan. It is critical to engage a wider cross section of staff to develop materials, information and content for communications efforts. This will be successful and cost effective to implement by using an outside consultant to augment in important areas such as photography, social media site/content management, and advising program contact/focus based on community needs.

### Develop Internal Pool of Writers (GCS D Staff and/or consultants)

GCS D has identified the following positions to serve as conduits for information regarding their particular job/consulting function:

Staff Member	Expertise
General Manager	Leadership, Management and Legislation
C&D Operations Manager	Operations, Construction & Maintenance
Administrative Services Manager	Administration, Customer Service, Record Keeping, Finances, Web Presence and Reporting
Chief Plant Operator	Water and wastewater treatment
Consultant	Social media management, Staff Interviews and Expose Preparation, Photography and Information Piece Quality Review

It is anticipated the majority of these positions will commit to at least one to two hours per month to support this effort.

These staff members and/or consultants will:

- Prepare brief summaries of activities, news, programs and initiatives within their areas of expertise on a monthly basis, or as needed.
- Prepare brief stories and exposés that focus on staff members and/or service-driven actions as appropriate.
- Provide updates regarding progress/milestones achieved within their departments.
- Provide information on service needs and solutions identified or implemented, emergency responses, etc.
- Participation at community events such as the annual 49er Festival and Trunk or Treat.
- Participation at community organization meetings such as the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, and Pine Mountain Lake.

This information will be used to populate newsletters, the GCS D website, social media, news releases and advertising efforts described in this Plan. We anticipate that overall management of these activities will be supervised by the General Manager and/or their designee; with implementation assistance from a third-party consultant.



# GCS D COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

## Develop Media Library (Photographs, video)

The District will develop a library containing a variety of photographs of all aspects of service delivery, including:

- Water and sewer utility maintenance, repair and emergency response
- Utility projects such as water or sewer line construction
- District equipment, vehicles and infrastructure
- Park facilities, their public use/community benefits and improvements
- Fire suppression, emergency response and related community services
- Governance and Administrative activities such as Board and/or meetings, customer service, public commendations and appreciations

The library will contain both high quality (high resolution/professional) photos and video, to show the level of detail necessary for ease in internal/customer understanding of the nature, subject and purpose of the photo and communication piece.

## Develop Internal GCS D Briefing (GCS D Staff and Board of Directors)

GCS D's employees and directors are not only the District's greatest asset for governance, administration, operations and maintenance; they can also serve a critical role in communications efforts. The vast majority are in fact customers of the agency they serve. They are the family, friends and neighbors of GCS D customers. Their ability to speak knowledgeably about basic programs and services is critical to the overall positive perception of GCS D's governance and management. Uninformed employees and directors can inadvertently contribute to misconceptions about operations, resulting in negative perceptions of the District.

A simple, straightforward summary of key projects, programs, milestones and initiatives will be shared with staff and the Board on a monthly basis via email, Board and staff meetings. This will be a simple standard email compiled by Staff based on items received from the internal writer pool.

## 2. FOCUS BRANDING AND OUTREACH EFFORTS ON PROGRAMS THAT CONNECT GCS D STAFF *DIRECTLY* WITH HIGH-QUALITY SERVICE AND PROGRAMS.

One of GCS D's largest operating expenses is its personnel. It is important for the District to demonstrate that the number and qualifications of employees is appropriate to deliver the level of service expected by GCS D customers; as well as to meet the requirements of state laws, permits and other mandates. Consistent reinforcement of this message is extremely important.

## Revise Advertising Strategy to Focus on Employees (GCS D)

All forms of advertising and education programs should use images and material that link GCS D employees with specific services, projects/programs and/or initiatives.

Staff members who appear in advertising or collateral materials should be asked in advance to give GCS D permission to use their images for educational purposes.

## Promote Both Department and Individual Achievement

When possible, GCS D should promote individual and/or department accomplishments or services. This reinforces the concept that staff members are ready to meet any challenge whether it's responding to a malfunctioning pump, a broken water main, a flood or a sewer spill. Real stories about real experiences

# GCSD COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

with real customers are a great way to connect the public with GCSD operations. These events should be photographed and cataloged as detailed above, with stories generated as part of the monthly reports prepared by the writing pool. Appropriate stories will be chosen for inclusion in the eNewsletters and/or considered for news releases as appropriate.

## 3. INCORPORATE FACT-BASED OUTREACH FOR ALL MAJOR GCSD PROGRAMS, PLANS AND INITIATIVES TO HELP EDUCATE RATE PAYERS.

GCSD will always have major projects, programs and plans to develop and implement.

Each of these efforts needs to have an education/visual component that clearly explains:

- The nature of the project;
- Why it is necessary;
- How much it will cost;
- Where that funding will come from;
- How it contributes specifically to GCSD's ability to provide high-quality service to its customers; and
- How it directly impacts the daily life of customers

GCSD will incorporate tasks specific to public outreach in Requests for Proposals and/or Qualifications as appropriate when seeking consultants for work on major projects, such as Master Plans. The costs for project-specific education and outreach will be assigned to those projects and not to the District's overall communications budget.

## 4. BETTER UTILIZE WEB-BASED OUTREACH.

### Revamp Website (GCSD Staff and Consultant)

It has become clear that the residents of GCSD are interested in more information to be accessible at the click of a mouse. Over the past few years, the District changed its outdated website platform and replaced it with a more user friendly one. The goal of this site is to make it a data base for customers to easily access public information that they would normally have to submit a Public Records Request for and make District information as transparent as possible.

### Consistently Update Site (GCSD Staff)

The GCSD site can and should serve as a primary source for up-to-date information regarding GCSD operations. It is important to update the site at least weekly with new information to keep website traffic coming back.

Staff members at all levels should be reminded of the importance and usefulness of the website and encouraged to promote the site to customers. This is especially important for Customer Service representatives. GCSD should ensure that all letterhead, materials, bills and emails include the proper web address. In addition, the District will work with the website designer and customers to include a form for site visitors to use to sign up for information, e-newsletters and notifications. Email addresses for customers interested in receiving newsletters and information will be gathered and entered into mass email programs by customer service staff.

# GCSD COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

## Baseline and As-Needed Customer Surveys (GCSD via SurveyMonkey)

GCSD has a very active community of customers who are willing to provide feedback to the District. Staff will actively collect emails to create a data base with which to send email blasts to our customers, leading them to a web-based survey intended to gather input on customer understanding of important baseline, the accuracy and understanding of which can be measured over time, such as where the district receives its water supply, where treated wastewater is disposed, number of District office staff, why employees must be state certified, how fire and park services are funded, etc. An increase in the level of customer understanding of the same indicator shows a positive impact of the communication plan.



## E-Newsletters for Customers (GCSD)

Postage and printing is expensive — e-mail is not. District customer service staff will use a variety of means to maximize the current email addresses on file for its customers, and seek their input on the types of communications they would like to receive.

E-newsletters will be graphic or photo prominent summary documents, with links to additional information, which can also be distributed to GCSD partners, elected officials, other agencies and service clubs.

## EVALUATION

It is important to measure the impact of any public education program in a meaningful way. The success of this program should be measured as follows:

- Increase in traffic to the District's website and social media platforms
- Increased public engagement
- Increase in rate payer knowledge regarding key District programs and projects. This should be tested via survey as described above. Additional indicators include increase in public comments and active participation in Board meetings.
- Increase in the percentage of rate payers who know where their water comes from, or how their treated wastewater is disposed, numbers of employees, why certifications are required, etc.



**RESOLUTION 50-2023**

**A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE GROVELAND COMMUNITY SERVICES DISTRICT APPROVING AND IMPLEMENTING THE REVISED DISTRICT COMMUNICATION PLAN**

**WHEREAS**, the Groveland Community Services District (herein referred to as District) is a local government agency formed and operating in accordance with Section §61000 et seq. of the California Government Code; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board adopted a Communications Plan in 2018 outlining the goals and objectives of District Communications with the public and constituents; and

**WHEREAS**, the way the District communicates with the public and constituents has greatly evolved since this plan was adopted; and

**WHEREAS**, staff has updated the District’s Communication Plan to reflect these changes.

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE GROVELAND COMMUNITY SERVICES DISTRICT DOES** hereby approve Resolution 50-2023 Implementing the revised District Communication Plan.

**WHEREFORE**, this Resolution is passed and adopted by the Board of Directors of the Groveland Community Services District on November 14, 2023, by the following vote:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSTAIN:

ABSENT

APPROVE:

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Nancy Mora, Board President

ATTEST:

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Rachel Pearlman, Board Secretary

**CERTIFICATE OF SECRETARY**

I, Rachel Pearlman, the duly appointed and acting Secretary of the Board of Directors of the Groveland Community Services District, do hereby declare that the foregoing Resolution was duly passed and adopted at a Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Groveland Community Services District, duly called and held on November 14, 2023.

DATED: \_\_\_\_\_