

CURVE LAKE FIRST NATION

# Communications Snapshot & Strategy

Reconnecting with the People

2011

CURVE LAKE FIRST NATION

**Contents**

- Section #1.0 Introduction..... 1
  - 1.1 *Importance and Relevance of Communication* ..... 1
  - 1.2 *Communication – A Snapshot* ..... 1
- Section #2.0 Communication Planning..... 4
  - 2.1 *Risks of Poor Communication*..... 4
  - 2.2 *Communication Protocol* ..... 4
  - 2.3 *Communication Goals and Objectives* ..... 4
  - 2.4 *Upcoming Issues and Events* ..... 5
  - 2.5 *Using Technology* ..... 5
- Section #3.0 Recommendations ..... 6
  - 3.1 *Recommendations*..... 6

## 1.1 *Importance and Relevance of Communication*

In our family life, our community, our government, the business world, the world stage and practically every facet of our life we rely on effective communication to be successful and prosperous. More notably, our traditional way of life and culture was entirely dependent upon oral communication. We have it in us to be respectful and effective communicators to one another. Simply put, communication is a powerful tool.

Done right, it can allow leadership to be prepared for any situation facing the community.

Today, in governing the Curve Lake First Nation, there are several factors that make communication a high priority. To name a few, there are: Governance; Committee; Departmental; and Community activities that require the Organization to report back to the people and on a frequent level.

Done wrong, it can send leadership into a state of constant crises management.

Without effective communications, there is a disconnection with our People and as a result, we cannot govern our First Nation to its fullest potential. Without goals and objectives and a strategic plan to reconnect with the People the rumor mill will prevail. Myths need to be replaced by facts. The integrity and legitimacy of our leadership, staff, and entire organization as we know it will be non-existent, inaccurate or skewed in some manner.

Communicating effectively costs money and requires long term commitment.

## 1.2 *Communication – A Snapshot*

### ***Our Audience – Our Responsibility***

Curve Lake First Nation is responsible for communicating with the following groups and audiences:

- I. CLFN Members On – Reserve
- II. CLFN Members Off – Reserve
- III. CLFN Staff
- IV. Private Enterprise On – Reserve
- V. CLFN Funders
- VI. Land Owners, Leaseholders and Lockatees
- VII. Neighboring Communities
- VIII. General Public (non-Native)
- IX. Government Affiliates
- X. Local, regional, provincial and federal governments and organizations

Our first priority is and will remain our people before all others.

## ***Our Present Communication Mediums***

There are three key communication categories used by Curve Lake First Nation, they are:

### Paper Methods

- I. Bi-weekly newsletter – delivered to all households in community (frequent)
- II. Special flyers (as needed)
- III. Mail outs to on and off reserve members (as needed and for elections)

### Paperless Methods

- IV. Web-site at [www.curvelakefn.ca](http://www.curvelakefn.ca) - (unsolicited and unsure of user activity)
- V. E-mail – (Internal only)
- VI. Digital Sign – (Limited capabilities and needs repairing)

### In-Person and Oral

- VII. Telephone – (solicited and unsolicited)
- VIII. Community and Special Meetings – (as needed)
- IX. By Appointment – (as needed)
- X. Committee – (monthly)
- XI. Council – (bi-weekly)

Annually, it costs CLFN thousands of dollars and an abundance of in-kind contributions to implement the aforementioned communication activities.

## ***Our Overall Responsibility – But who's Responsible for Communication?***

Presently, a large portion of the responsibility of communication is shared between the General Manager, Executive Secretary and Admin Staff. The remaining portion falls upon each separate department, the staff, Council, Committees and the community itself.

From an administrative standpoint, managers and executive staff don't necessarily have the time to develop correspondence for distribution to the community. In most cases, this adds work to already busy staff and although important – becomes burdensome.

In terms of transcribing and minute taking, Council relies solely on the Executive Secretary. Although this may seem like a normal procedure within a First Nation, it is not ideal for CLFN given the volume of responsibilities the Executive Secretary is presently responsible for. From a committee standpoint, staffers, committee members, program administrators, and community members share in minute taking. With the exception of Council minutes which are always uniform and precise, committee minutes differ from committee to committee. Differences include layout, detail, and overall quality.

## ***Options for Shifting Responsibility***

A possible solution may be to delegate the duty of communication to certain personnel within the organization. This may require added training or new personnel altogether. Another option may be to

implement a routine and specific communication protocols that each department is to follow including Council and Committees. The last and least favorable option would be to outsource all communications.

A sensible solution to minute taking may be to hire a firm or qualified individuals so that all information is collected in a professional, accurate and uniform way.

### ***How Are We Doing Presently?***

Curve Lake First Nation and the ways in which it communicates could be described as mediocre to good. Sometimes we're great and sometimes we're bad. What is worrisome is our community will always remember when communication is poor. This makes the risk high which in return emphasizes the importance of effective communication.

Let's pose some questions that address communication in our community.

- How are Council's priorities reported to the staff and membership?
- How does our community know which portfolio each Councilor is responsible for?
- Do we as an organization regularly report to our members on the administrative, operational, departmental and fiscal performance of Curve Lake First Nation?
- How are successes and failures reported to our staff and community?
- How is progress reported to our community?
- How do our people know when and what leadership is doing from week to week, month to month and year to year?
- How many times does the organization find itself reactively communicating with the People?
- How frequently does Council publically address the People? Of these times, how many are for simply conveying general information and for general discussion?
- Do we provide status updates on certain issues such as the residency by-law, cabin by-law, hunting and fishing rights etc.?

# Section #2.0

# Communication Planning

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## 2.1 *Risks of Poor Communication*

There are several detrimental risks to ineffective communications. Namely:

- Confusion
- Mistrust
- Mixed Messages
- Feelings of Hiding Information
- A Community that is Impartial to Leadership
- Myths Replace Facts
- Simply Not Being Informed about various community issues, projects etc.

## 2.2 *Communication Protocol*

1. To clearly outline, schedule and delegate the responsibility of specific communication activities within the organization.
2. To advertise contact data for each Council member.
3. To develop databases of key target audiences (digital and non-digital).
4. To develop communication checklists for various events.
5. To develop consistent messages to be delivered to the community.
6. That Council uses community email addresses when conducting community business. This is a standard and uniform approach and allows the webmaster to control and have critical files about what information is being sent.
7. Other ideas.

## 2.3 *Communication Goals and Objectives*

Some communication goals and objectives could be as follows:

- a) Establish a communications committee to develop a communications policy. Example: letter to editor by Jeffrey Jacobs. As a member of Council, is communication such as this okay or not? There are definite risks, especially without the permission of Council.
- b) To reaffirm that CLFN is the primary source of information to the community on all issues.
- c) To develop and implement a primary communicating schedule. Especially in regards to the performance of the First Nation (quarterly and annually).
- d) To change the culture of “he said” into “knowing the facts”.
- e) To increase the frequency and level of sophistication of financial reporting to our community.

- f) To invite the community to access information on various issues. Develop a digital database of all information and ensure limited number of hard copies is available too. Feasibility studies, by-laws, etc.
- g) To move toward paperless communication.
- h) To allow technology to do the work for us.
- i) To cater communication to elders and youth so that messages are being communicated accurately to these groups. This could be as easy as appointing certain community members to communicate with the aforementioned groups.
- j) To explore the benefits of using social networks such as twitter and Facebook.
- k) To allow our youth studying public relations and other communication programs an opportunity to practice communicating. Example: Devon Jacobs.
- l) To encourage and provide a mechanism for our membership to communicate with us on a regularly scheduled basis.

## 2.4 *Upcoming Issues and Events*

Within the organization and community presently there are several key issues that will require the development and distribution of sophisticated communication to our community.

1. Hiring of new General Manager
2. Relocation of Cultural Centre
3. Ice Fishing and Relationship with Ministry and Non-Native anglers
4. Organizational Review & Succession Planning
5. Land Claims
6. Committee and Council Reporting
7. Conveying Council's priorities
8. Gaming Revenue Activities

## 2.5 *Using Technology*

There is an opportunity to build upon what is already in place with respect to communication.

For instance, our community's digital sign is old and outdated and in need of repairs or replacement. This is an opportunity for our community to purchase and install a new one. CLFN and our members have become somewhat reliant on the sign for certain announcements. A new one would need to have better features especially for displaying text.

Another is the use of smart phones. There are certain positions within the organization that may require the use of these devices. Namely the General Manager, Executive Secretary and appointed Council member.

Other ideas: SmartBoard in Council Chambers, Ceiling Projector in Community Centre, certain software, Phone System with the number of all residents in it to automatically use telephone messages.

## Section #3.0

## Recommendations

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### 3.1 Recommendations

All in all, the good news is that communications can be improved. Based on the findings of this report, there are a few key recommendations that make sense to put forth. They are as follows:

#### Development:

1. Entertain the development of a BCR or commitment statement announcing that CLFN will do better with communicating to the community.
2. Form a communications committee or working group. This committee or group could put forth a funding application to Gaming Revenue Fund and Kagita Mikam to finance development, HR, capital, and marketing costs.
3. Appoint an internal contact to administer and manage logistics. Could be Gaming Revenue Administrator. Someone like Melanie would be a perfect fit. Would require approximately 10 to 20 hours weekly.

#### Evaluation and Costing:

4. Commission the assessment and evaluation of existing web-site. Likely to be undertaken by the Economic Development Committee. Make improvements if necessary and begin to heavily promote the use of it.
5. Commission the assessment and evaluation of the overall cost and level of service provided by existing providers of communication services. For instance: Let's Get Digital. If not satisfied, put out to tender. Additionally, perform a cost analysis between hiring a company to provide services or a dedicated individual within the Organization. Likely to be undertaken by Economic Development or Finance Committee.
6. Assess the feasibility and logistics of outsourcing Council, Committee and special meeting minute taking and development.
7. Contact CLFN student to help with the development and actual writing of communications. This could be Devon Jacobs.
8. Price the cost of a new "digital sign" and compare to repairing existing one. Weigh the benefits of either replacing or repairing at this time and decide on which way to proceed.

#### Develop Protocols and Follow Standards:

9. Within CLFN there has been some ongoing branding with our Community signage. We must remain consistent with the branding of Curve Lake First Nation when developing new community signs.

#### Deliverables:

10. A standardized communicating protocol with semi-dedicated personnel and a centralized point of contact for all audiences.
11. Exceeding expectations of community. Replacing hearsay with facts.
12. Development and distribution of community profile about CLFN.
13. Purchase and installation of new digital community sign.
14. Development of databases.
15. Improvement of existing tools.

In order for the strategy to work, we first must put the necessary resources in place to make it happen. A likely annual budget for a strategy of this nature could be in the neighborhood of \$30 - \$50k annually. Considerations include:

- Added financial resources for Communications committee.
- Added human resources \$10,000 to \$20,000 (could be less expense if left at a committee level, but then communications would be less effective and timely).
- New sign \$18,000 - \$23,000.
- Revamp web-site.
- Other ideas?

The cost benefit is that our community members will be informed in a timely proactive manner on issues that matter to them.