

AOC Internal Communications (IC) Plan

This document outlines a proposal for the development and implementation of an internal communications (IC) program at the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). The development of a coordinated IC program was a major recommendation made by Sinickas Communications, a consultant retained in 2005 to survey AOC staff and make recommendations on improving internal communications. The proposal identifies the mission, challenges, proposed solutions, and potential benefits of an IC program for the AOC.

MISSION STATEMENT/PROGRAM GOALS

The IC program provides AOC staff with access to information and tools necessary to do their jobs effectively. This access improves the communication, collaboration, climate, and productivity within the agency so it can better serve the courts and improve the administration of justice in California.

Specifically, the IC program should ensure that AOC staff:

- know the AOC and the Judicial Council's major goals and objectives;
- know what's going on at the AOC (within its divisions and offices), in the courts, and in the judicial branch, and why;
- know the recent history of the AOC, the California courts, and branch and be aware of the vision for the future;
- have adequate feedback channels to share views with agency management and colleagues;
- receive information, feedback, and direction from AOC leaders
- become familiar, to the extent possible, with fellow employees at headquarters and the other AOC offices and how their work contributes to the overall goals of the agency and the judicial branch—build a sense of community;
- feel a greater level of commitment to and connection with the agency

Innovative and engaged employees understand the big picture, know their role in helping to achieve it, and feel empowered to do so.

CHALLENGES

Major internal communications challenges/issues for the AOC identified from previous staff surveys and comments:

- ensure agencywide communications contain the necessary information and are understandable, consistent, and in line with overall business goals
- improve communication between and within AOC divisions and offices
- staff want to know more about activities of the AOC, the courts, and the judicial branch

- too many individual e-mails distributed to all AOC staff
- managers not passing on information to staff
- desire of many AOC staff to get information from Intranet rather than from other communication channels; used to be that only half of AOC staff visit AOC Intranet regularly, with half only visiting when they need something; more staff (80%) now visiting Intranet on a daily basis
- staff want more information from senior executives
- staff need more feedback opportunities
- staff don't know their colleagues or what they do at the AOC

IC ADVISORY GROUP

The AOC Internal Communications (IC) Advisory Group is an inter-divisional strategic group that will advise on the design, development, and implementation of the IC function. Advisory group members will be asked to review:

- previous initiatives and research conducted on the IC function;
- current division-based best practices—current agency internal communications tools;
- best practices and model programs in internal communications from other companies and agencies; and
- new internal communications initiatives

Ultimately, the IC advisory group will advise the Office of Communications on recommendations for consideration by the AOC Executive and Management Teams.

PROPOSED IC PROJECTS/POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS (Short- and Long-term)

1. All-Staff Meeting – IC staff should take a larger role in the planning and execution of the AOC All-Staff Meetings, including serving on the planning committee.

Benefits/Project Details

- provide an agencywide perspective and consistency in the look and feel of the meeting
- provide input on the agenda
- advise on the panel discussion, videos, guest speaker, and program/guide
- serve as Emcee for meeting, if appropriate
- help coordinate internal “yearbook/annual report” to distribute to staff at the meeting
- provide follow through on key meeting messages/themes/issues throughout the year

Challenges/Moving Forward

- answer all staff questions submitted to in response to the All-Staff Meeting survey that we didn't have time to answer during the panel discussion
- increasing number of AOC staff = higher cost for event
- consider less expensive formats for future all-staff meetings
- consider changes to agenda in light of new IC program—the annual meeting will no longer be the only chance for AOC staff to hear from and ask questions of the Executive Office or get highlights from divisions

2. Intranet Content Management – IC staff should be content manager/owner of the AOC Intranet; the AOC Intranet should improve staff productivity and collaboration

Benefits/Project Details

- maintain and update the home page news sections on the home page with fresh content; develop search function for archived news items
- organize regular content contributors to the AOC Intranet into a network of staff that helps prepare and review content for news items
- ownership of site will enable IC staff to be aware of content updates made by other AOC staff, troubleshoot posting issues, and develop guidelines for posting
- consider breaking up large sections (ex – Reference/AOC Agencywide) to improve searchability
- consider adding or merging existing content to Intranet (ex - Outlook Bulletin Boards, People & Programs/Divisions & Offices sections of Intranet)
- add new sections and features, such as online forums/message boards, profiles, or videocasts (*many new ideas for these new Intranet features are discussed below as individual Proposed IC Projects/Potential Solutions*)
- Conduct a Content Audit and Information Architecture Review to ensure that the news/knowledge/information staff need is being presented and is easily accessible; develop list of content reviewers from IntranetNetwork, Big Sweep I, and divisional contacts who update People and Programs; stay with familiar design/architecture unless existing site is convoluted and full of bolted-on features; site can be ugly, as long as it's useful and easy to navigate; Gerry McGovern says only use audience-based navigation when audiences' tasks are totally different; if use audience-based navigation, say "For Supervisor" rather than just "Supervisor" so users know it's info/resources for this group and not about them
- Make the Intranet accessible remotely; a new content management system that will host the site at CCTC could make that possible; also add a link to shared drives from the Intranet; think about mobile users/create mobile-friendly site?
- Develop a strategic site mission and objectives for the Intranet that will guide future content and development
- **update to AOC Intranet as of April 2013:** Feedback button welcoming staff questions/comments for Executive Office is posted in upper-right corner of the Intranet home page; button also permanently posted with each edition of *AOC Headlines* as a button at the top of each edition, on the upper-right corner of the *AOC Headlines* section of the Intranet; questions and comments submitted are

archived on Intranet; Executive Office staff receive an e-mail notification of submissions so they can see comments and answer inquiries that request a response; responses can provide content for the “From the Executive Office” feature

Challenges/Moving Forward

- *proposed editorial policy for news items* = a preferred channel for AOC-to-AOC communication—direct communication (individual e-mails to AOC-Users All list) should be used only for urgent or deadline-sensitive messages, notices of major policy or personnel changes, budget requests, operational or business notices in which action must be taken, or other information that is required to be communicated to AOC staff, such as changes to the Judicial Branch Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual or health benefits. In these instances, the What’s New section may be used as a helpful summary or deadline reminder
- request that AOC Executive Office direct division directors and their staff to adhere to editorial policy
- minor layout changes to site to increase usability
- redesign of Intranet should wait for implementation of a new Web Content Management System and redesign of Courtinfo and Serranus, as we can mirror those sites and learn lessons

3. AOC Headlines E-mail Briefing – a weekly e-mail briefing with news and information for AOC staff only, similar to the weekly e-mail for the courts (Court News Update - CNU)

Benefits/Project Details

- reduce amount of e-mails by encouraging staff to use the weekly e-mail update instead of sending individual e-mails
- send weekly briefing every Friday morning
- conduct a contest to come up with the name for the weekly e-mail
- include news items for AOC staff about statewide news and events, AOC job openings, new policies and procedures, computer trainings, etc.
- links to more information drive traffic to AOC Intranet or other online sources
- news included in the e-mail update could mirror What’s New items from the Intranet home page
- searchable, archived editions on Intranet
- **update to AOC Headlines as of April 2013:** added “From the Executive Office” feature runs at the top of *AOC Headlines* once a month (usually the last Friday of the month); feature is set apart from rest of edition via shading and a text box; content includes updates and insights from Executive Team and AOC office leads; AOC Executive Office to help coordinate and mandate content gathering and creation; rotate the content among the 4 executives in the Executive Office (3 features per year for each); features can be executives providing their own insights or updates spotlighting offices within their divisions; features can also be in response to comments/questions from staff; features in response to staff

questions could be titled “From the Executive Office: Glad You Asked”; could branch out and have “From the Council” features that are messages from council members directly to AOC staff; features are posted the following Monday to the AOC Insider section on the Intranet home page and archived

- **update to AOC Headlines as of April 2013:** Feedback button welcoming staff questions/comments for Executive Office runs with each “From the Executive Office” feature; button also permanently posted at top of *AOC Headlines*, on the upper-right corner of the *AOC Headlines* section of the Intranet, and on the right navigation of the Intranet home page; questions and comments submitted are archived on Intranet; Executive Office staff receive an e-mail notification of submissions so they can see comments and answer inquiries that request a response; responses can provide content for the “From the Executive Office” feature

Challenges/Moving Forward

- *proposed editorial policy for AOC Headlines E-mail Briefing* = a preferred channel for AOC-to-AOC communication—direct communication (individual e-mails to AOC-Users All list) should only be used for urgent or deadline-sensitive messages, notices of major policy or personnel changes, budget requests, operational or business notices in which action must be taken, or other information that is required to be communicated to AOC staff, such as changes to the Judicial Branch Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual or health benefits. In these instances, the AOC Update/Action/Headlines e-mail briefing may be used as a helpful summary or deadline reminder
- request that AOC Executive Office direct division directors and their staff to adhere to editorial policy
- organize regular content contributors into a network of staff that helps draft content and review the e-mail update for accuracy
- ensuring an agencywide e-mail list of all AOC employees is accurate and up-to-date (AOC-Users All Outlook list, CAPS database)

4. AOC Online Discussion Forums – online (Intranet-based, not e-mail-based)

discussion forum/message boards that offers AOC staff an opportunity to offer a comment or request feedback/answers to their questions from other AOC staff; improves the communication, collaboration, climate, and productivity within the agency so it can better serve the courts and improve the administration of justice in California.

Benefits/Project Details

- foster innovation and productivity via collaboration
- adapt our existing culture of collaboration and communication for an increasingly geographically dispersed workforce
- increase feedback, inquiry, and networking opportunities for staff; begin to build knowledge in staff of which staff do what at the AOC or who have which expertise/knowledge (passive mental staff directory)
- staff talking about AOC projects they work on lends credibility to the project

- could have blog for each AOC division so they could give others updates on their projects
- retain talented staff by giving them tools they are used to for communicating with colleagues; improve new staff's assimilation into the agency
- could provide offshoot forums from the main all-inclusive forum that are tailored to managers/supervisors or other niche groups within the AOC
- button located on the home page of Intranet and/or in the *AOC Headlines* e-mail; could post starts of actual comments from posters on that home page space to get people to click through to the forum
- could suggest topics for discussion; good for "how to get things done" items
- post answers to recurring questions/topics of interest to Intranet and link to answers from Intranet home page and/or *AOC Headlines*
- once a month AOC Executive Office/directors answer a few recurring questions via an Intranet posting or videocast; directors could address questions at their respective quarterly divisional meetings
- could use online forum to post "activity streams" that would enable units/staff to post updates on their projects
- could use online forums to post work-related needs/services; for example, if unit needed an AOC staff member to help out taking photos at an event or doing a voiceover for a video
- forum could be venue to post info on resources available outside of work (classifieds, restaurants in area, volunteering, personal announcements—babies, retirements, etc.)—receiving encouraging/positive news from/about co-workers increases staff satisfaction with their jobs and leads to benefit to organization
- could call the online forum "The Bridge", the name of the AOC's old community-building-style internal newsletter
- archive answers/videocasts addressing topics that came up on online forum on the Intranet
- create IET course on how to use the online forum—include success stories; samples of good posts
- create buzz/awareness via Intranet home page, flyers, buttons, etc.

Challenges/Moving Forward

- create an editorial policy on posting comments/questions—do *not* make posting anonymous, so people are accountable and can get help on projects and get questions answered; perhaps enable AOC staff contribute ideas for editorial policy; provide examples of good posts
- ensuring that it is a useful tool by driving enough traffic to it; moderator could suggest topics for discussion;
- perhaps start by instituting Ask the Expert/Q&A format and then broadening it to an online discussion forum;
- develop editorial policy on which comments will be addressed and 2.0 tool usage; initially deliver via an Intranet posting or videocast by the AOC Executive Office/directors (include in the policy the "why" we were using 2.0 tools)

- ensuring that AOC Executive Office/directors make time to address recurring comments/questions
- finding a suitable technological solution to host the forum; look at outside vendors as well as in-house solutions; should be accessible from home/remote computers so employees can communicate away from the office; current plan will be to use the Open Text solution that comes with our content management system

5. Divisional Meeting Presentations/Forums – IC staff should help coordinate, promote, and help improve in-person, informational meetings; increase the use of presentations and/or Q&A forums at AOC quarterly divisional meetings

Benefits/Project Details

- enable staff to learn first-hand about new initiatives and work of other AOC staff and to provide input and feedback to other AOC units/divisions
- potential Q&A forum for Executive Office/AOC directors to address another division's staff about a certain topic or answer questions
- Education Division has developed a template for these presentations
- Develop a Toolkit to promote/implement this program and improve divisional meetings as a whole; toolkit has been created and posted on Intranet
- Coordinate a master calendar to ensure that all AOC divisions contribute and participate, including regional offices

Challenges/Moving Forward

- ensure that each AOC division holds quarterly meetings; inventory each division to see what kinds of meetings they are conducting each quarter
- encourage divisions to make space on their meeting agendas for these presentations
- identifying topics and securing speakers for presentations

6. AOC/Court Staff/Unit Profiles – post brief profiles of AOC/Court staff/units on the Intranet to introduce them and their work to the rest of the agency

Benefits/Project Details

- become familiar with fellow employees or employees of the courts and how their work contributes to the overall goals of the agency, the courts, and the judicial branch
- profile subjects answer same questions, which are primarily focused on business-related topics (like in SF Business Times); modify for court staff profiles
- can draw subjects from AOC People and Programs; could borrow content as well
- could post profile on Intranet home page as a “mystery AOC staff/unit” and not reveal their photo or name until you get to know them even better by clicking on videocast link where you then see and hear them speak; make videos searchable by headings so visitors don't have to wade through entire video

- “Who am I?” teaser on Intranet home page (AOC Insider) with a “question mark” as the graphic; description of staff member with no photo – reveal their identity and photo when you click to Main Content page (could link to a Word doc when you click on AOC Insider headline so you could include a photo of staff member—because you have to have same photo of Intranet home page and Main Content page—or could reveal identity the following week
- archive profiles on Intranet
- promote headphones available from our IS Division for staff concerned about the noise from videocasts bothering their neighbors

Challenges/Moving Forward

- identifying subjects to profile—staff could be chosen from AOC Award Program recipients to ensure impartiality in the profile selection process (**update as of April 2013: AOC Awards Program suspended due to limited staff resources**)
- keeping the posted profiles fresh and getting to as many staff as possible—recruit AOC staff to volunteer to draft/video profiles
- ensuring that profiles remain primarily business-focused
- finding a suitable technological solution to host the videocast
- finding the time and resources to develop these features

7. Judicial Branch/AOC Project Profiles – post brief profiles of judicial branch/AOC initiatives to introduce them to AOC staff

Benefits/Project Details

- share reasons for and potential benefits of individual projects and programs
- build awareness and support of individual programs/projects
- interview AOC/court staff overseeing project to explain how it will work and why we are doing it
- make videos searchable by headings so visitors don’t have to wade through entire video
- archive profiles on Intranet
- promote headphones available from our ITSO for staff concerned about the noise from videocasts bothering their neighbors

Challenges/Moving Forward

- identifying initiatives/projects to profile—could choose from projects highlighted in the Administrative Director’s report presented at each Judicial Council meeting
- keeping the posted profiles fresh and getting to as many projects as possible—recruit AOC staff to volunteer to create project profiles
- finding a suitable technological solution to host the videocast
- finding the time and resources to develop these features

8. Communications Consulting – serve as an advisor and collaborator on high-profile and major changes/initiatives at the AOC

Benefits/Project Details

- Attend meetings and provide communications consulting for both internal and external audiences
- Help to develop resources such as tips sheets, fact sheets, and Web content
- Draft and edit messages and news items for AOC staff, the courts, and other project stakeholders

Projects we've consulted on include: H1N1 Flu Virus; 455 Golden Gate Building Power Outage; OERS situations such as unexpected building closures and commute-related restrictions; AOC Green Team; AOC Awards Program; AOC 50th Anniversary; AOC Personnel Policies and Procedures Group (PEPRO); AOC Injury and Illness Prevention Plan; HREMS upgrades; Creative Connections; Injury Illness & Prevention Program (IIPP); AOC restructuring

Challenges/Moving Forward

- Identifying appropriate initiatives/projects to consult on due to limited time and resources
- Ensuring that AOC internal communications staff is consulted early on in the project/initiative

ADDITIONAL POTENTIAL IC PROJECTS/SOLUTIONS

AOC Mission, Vision, and Values – publish and promote the mission, vision, and values of the AOC through the Intranet and print vehicles in reception areas and breakrooms; develop a clear, concise statement (aside from the mission statement) that further describes what the AOC is and what we do--AOC staff could use this description to better describe to friends and family their work and the agency they work for; when we roll out new mission, vision and values, create an exercise/survey that asks all staff to fill in this blank, “I _____ to advance excellence in state court administration for the benefit of all Californians” so they think about how their job supports our mission.

Agencywide Awards/Recognition – The AOC Human Resources Services Office has developed a new and improved agencywide award/recognition program; our Office of Communications will help communicate the new program and publicize award recipients agencywide on an ongoing basis (**update as of April 2013: AOC Awards Program suspended due to limited staff resources**)

Weekly Supervisor/Manager E-mail Briefings – help Executive Office/Team deliver brief, weekly summaries of major activities/strategies/key points via e-mail or Intranet so that supervisors/managers can deliver them to their staff at weekly staff meetings;

supervisors/managers can also share key messages at other meetings with staff, justice partners, or clients; or could develop weekly (Monday) voicemail or teleconference from Administrative Director for all staff to update them on his week and current activities

Quarterly/Biannual Town Halls With AOC Leadership - hold in JCCC auditorium and video-conferenced to regional offices--get Q's from staff in advance but also take live Q's; video and archive the town halls so staff who couldn't attend can see them later; follow the town halls up with action or communication about the issues/ideas raised

Online Phone Directory of AOC Staff – update the existing online directory on the AOC Intranet with not only the phone number for that staff person, but also a photo and brief bio, direct reports, supervisor, job title/description

AOC/Branch Fast Facts or Historical Facts/Dates – post to the Intranet current high-level statistics, facts, historical dates about the AOC and the judicial branch that would be of general interest – could borrow text from the Judicial Branch Daily Calendar

AOC/Branch Trivia – branch/AOC trivia Powerpoint/test on Intranet for AOC staff to learn more about the branch/AOC – tie it to continuing education credit

Contests/Surveys – contest for AOC staff to rename the Intranet—survey AOC staff on a topical issue—post results on Intranet

Signage – create better signage for AOC buildings and conference rooms; we have posted a chart of AOC offices to Intranet

Twitter - could use an internal Twitter account to replace Outlook bulletin board, or supplement it to drive people to it; could also use the internal Twitter feed to drive traffic to websites/forums

MEASUREMENT

Communications/Climate Survey

Conduct a survey of AOC staff once a year to gauge opinions on the agency and awareness of its mission, goals, and initiatives. Survey will also elicit suggestions from staff on communication vehicles and feedback opportunities.

Web Metrics

Conduct monthly analysis of Web hits and visits to the AOC Intranet to gauge interests of AOC staff and effectiveness of individual features and communication vehicles.

Focus Groups

Conduct focus groups of AOC employees on general communications practices or a particular issue or question related to internal communications. For example, we created a

voluntary, internal virtual focus group of AOC staff made up various levels of employee classifications and supervisory and non-supervisory employees; we can query this group via e-mail to gain valuable and AOC-wide input on specific questions or topics.

Stakeholder Meetings

Meet with key Intranet stakeholders at the AOC. This includes representatives from AOC divisions/units that provide, or will provide, a substantial amount of content for the site or who need to reach particular audience groups within the agency.

Counting E-mails to All AOC Staff

Conduct an analysis of the number of e-mail messages sent to AOC Users-All before the start of IC programs, especially *AOC Headlines*.

Employee Retention Rate

Conduct yearly analysis of the retention rates for AOC employees. The AOC Human Resources Services Office has agreed to track this information.

Exit Interviews

Review reasons why staff left the AOC—focus on communications issues

LONG-TERM GOAL—CULTURE CHANGE

The best way to increase discretionary effort and engagement is not through top-down accountability alone. Satisfying a supervisor's or manager's assignment will yield compliance. But compliance is not excellence. Shoulder-to-shoulder (pier to pier and/or pier to client) accountability will we yield greater effort and engagement from our staff.

If successful, the AOC Internal Communications program will ultimately improve the culture at the AOC and increase opportunities for all employees to connect and communicate with one another. This phenomenon will be evidenced by more informed employees, an increase in discretionary effort, and the ability of employees to draw a line from their day-to-day work and the overall strategy and goals of the agency.

This improved climate, collaboration, and productivity within the AOC will enable the agency to better serve the courts and improve the administration of justice in California.