



MEMBERS OF MINNESOTA STATE

# Strategic Communications Plan

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Prepared by:



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## Introduction

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The marketing department for Dakota County Technical College (DCTC) and Inver Hills Community College (Inver Hills) worked with Goff Public to develop this strategic communications plan with the primary objective of raising awareness and enhancing the reputations of both institutions.

To inform this plan, Goff Public first performed an audit to understand the current extent of communications at these institutions and to learn about what is going well and where opportunities for improvement exist. The audit consisted of interviewing DCTC and Inver Hills employees across multiple departments to solicit feedback on communications strengths and potential areas of improvement. Goff Public also reviewed existing communications materials and channels and prepared a competitor analysis comparing DCTC and Inver Hills' communications to local competitors.

We found that internal stakeholders believe that DCTC and Inver Hills have favorable reputations, and that there is a strong sense of pride at both institutions. The employees we interviewed also feel that the content and stories shared in the e-newsletter and on social media are strong and noted their respect for the marketing department's efforts to manage a broad range of communications tasks for both schools.

In terms of what could be communicated better, many employees expressed frustration with the lack of internal communications processes, particularly around the alignment of DCTC and Inver Hills. They said that many employees are misinformed – and even uninformed – about the alignment. We also found that there is a strong desire for more frequent and consistent internal communications, particularly from the top down. Employees shared that they feel like they most often see DCTC or Inver Hills in the news for negative reasons and that each institution could benefit from more positive media coverage.

Based on these audit findings, Goff Public prepared recommendations for the following forms of communications:

- Internal communications
- E-newsletter and social media
- Media relations and news coverage
- External communications
- Crisis communications

This strategic communications plan contains tangible strategies and tactics that are implementable in the next fiscal year.

## **Goals and objectives**

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### **Primary objective**

Create and implement an impactful strategic communications plan that raises awareness of Dakota County Technical College and Inver Hills Community College and protects and builds their reputations.

### **Communications goals**

- Develop and implement messaging that is succinct, engaging and effective.
- Enhance media relations efforts to increase positive news coverage of both institutions.
- Improve internal communications processes and methods.

## Audiences

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### Primary

- Current students
- Faculty and staff
- Prospective students
- Parents
- Business and community partners
  - Ziegler CAT
  - UTC Aerospace
  - Dakota Electric
  - Walser Group
  - Luther Auto Group
- Foundation boards
- Current corporate donors
  - DCTC
    - Ziegler CAT
    - Ames Construction
  - Inver Hills
    - UTC Aerospace
    - Bremer
    - CHS
  - Both DCTC and Inver Hills
    - Dakota Electric Association
    - Xcel Energy
    - Kopp Family Foundation
- Prospective donors
- Alumni

### Secondary

- General public
- Neighbors
- Media
  - Local/Dakota County
    - Sun Thisweek
    - Rosemount/Farmington Town Pages
    - Cannon Falls Beacon
    - New Prague Times
    - Hastings Star Gazette
    - South-West Review
    - KDWA-AM
  - Twin Cities metro
    - Star Tribune

- Pioneer Press
  - MinnPost
  - Minneapolis/St.Paul Business Journal
  - News radio stations (MPR, WCCO-AM)
  - TV stations (KSTP, KARE 11, FOX 9, and WCCO)
- Education publications
  - The Chronicle of Higher Education
  - Inside Higher Ed
  - Teaching Today Minnesota
- Elected officials who represent campuses (*\*seats up for election in November 2018*)
  - U.S. Representative for District 2: Jason Lewis\*
  - U.S. Senators for Minnesota: Amy Klobuchar\*, Tina Smith\*
  - Elected officials who represent DCTC
    - State Senator for District 57: Gregory Clausen
    - State Representative for District 57B: Anna Wills\*
    - Mayor of Rosemount: Bill Droste\*
    - Rosemount City Council Members: Mark DeBettignies\*, Heidi Freske, Shaun Nelson\*, Jeff Weisensel
  - Elected officials who represent Inver Hills
    - State Senator for District 52: Matt Klein
    - State Representative for District 52B: Regina Barr\*
    - Mayor of Inver Grove Heights: George Tourville\*
    - Inver Grove Heights City Council Members: Tom Bartholomew, Rosemary Piekarski Krech\*, Kara Perry, Paul Hark\*
- K-12 partners
  - DCTC’s top feeder schools
    - Cannon Falls High School & Middle School
    - New Prague High School
    - Farmington Area High School
    - Lakeville North High School
    - Hastings High School
  - Inver Hills’ top feeder schools
    - Rosemount High School
    - Park High School
    - Eagan High School
    - Farmington Area High School
    - Eastview High School
    - Henry Sibley High School
  - New partners
    - Northfield High School
    - St. Croix Lutheran High School
    - Cretin-Derham Hall High School
    - Cannon Falls High School & Middle School
    - South Washington Alternative High School

## **Key messages**

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This plan identifies overarching key messages that complement DCTC's and Inver Hills' values and should be used to guide all communications. Each department's communications with key audiences should include these messages in some way.

### **Dakota County Technical College**

#### **About Dakota County Technical College**

Dakota County Technical College (DCTC) provides highly skilled and technical training for today's most in-demand jobs. The DCTC community includes more than 2,200 full- and part-time students training in 55 different programs to boost their earning potential and launch or change their careers. DCTC was founded in 1970 and is located less than 20 miles south of Saint Paul in Rosemount, Minnesota.

#### **DCTC provides highly skilled and technical training for today's most in-demand jobs**

- Real-world instruction and hands-on training for high-demand jobs
- Immersive experiences prepare students to enter a career ready to contribute on day one
- 55 degree programs and more than 90 certificate and diploma programs in areas ranging from construction and manufacturing to healthcare to visual arts to business and more
- Each program has an advisory board of industry professionals anticipating workforce needs and shortages to ensure the program complements industry trends and demands

#### **Students are boosting their earning potential and launching or changing their careers**

- 91 percent of graduates are employed in a field related to their degree
- Employers seek out DCTC graduates. In fact, 97 percent of employers would hire a DCTC graduate again.
- Graduates from STEM programs earn up to approximately \$70,000 annually and construction management graduates earn \$85,000 to \$145,000 or more
- More than 2,200 full- and part-time students with an average age of 29

#### **The DCTC experience is affordable, flexible, hands-on, and inclusive**

- Average annual tuition is only \$5,700; among the lowest in the nation and less than half the cost of the same credits at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities
- DCTC ranks in the Top 25 nationwide on *Forbes* list of "Best Technical Colleges"
- Expert instructors provide hands-on training across multiple industries
- Classroom instruction mimics real-world work environments
- DCTC offers daytime, evening, weekend, and online courses; short-term programs can be completed in as little as six weeks
- DCTC's college community is a positive, engaging environment that welcomes opinions and ideas from people from all nations, backgrounds and cultures

## **DCTC has trained thousands of people living in, working in, and contributing to Minnesota’s economy**

- More than 18,000 students have graduated from DCTC since its founding in 1970
- Graduates are employed as accountants, civil engineering technicians, medical assistants, automotive technicians, software developers, graphic designers, digital marketing specialists, and more
- DCTC graduates are employed by top Minnesota companies such as Fairview, Allina, Ziegler CAT, Augustana Health Care Center, Union Pacific Railroad, and Trinity Care Center

## **Inver Hills Community College**

### **About Inver Hills Community College**

Inver Hills Community College (Inver Hills) is a place where students can get an affordable, high-quality education to launch their college degree in a supportive environment. With an enrollment of more than 5,000 full- and part-time students, the Inver Hills experience is defined by small class sizes and an engaged and active community that prepares students to succeed at a four-year college or to enter the workforce. Founded in 1970, the campus is located in Inver Grove Heights, less than 10 miles from Saint Paul, Minnesota.

### **Inver Hills is a supportive and affordable place for students to launch their college degree**

- Students can begin a degree at Inver Hills and transfer to a four-year college with less debt
- Small campus with a faculty to student ratio of 18 to 1
- Students receive personalized support through tutoring, advising, financial aid, application assistance, and more
- Inver Hills’ college community is inclusive of all individuals, and supports students and their families in achieving social mobility through advanced education

### **Inver Hills prepares students to succeed at a four-year college or to enter the workforce**

- More than 5,000 full- and part-time students
- 57 percent of graduates pursue continuing education and 43 percent enter the workforce
- Average age of students is 26

### **Inver Hills graduates are business, industry and community leaders**

- Students build personal and professional relationships that last a lifetime
- More than 24,000 students have graduated from Inver Hills since its founding in 1970
- Graduates are employed in fields ranging from nursing to aeronautics to social work and more
- Alumni have gone on to pursue advanced degrees, start their own companies, found law firms, open wellness centers, and more



# **Communications strategies and tactics**

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## **1. Internal communications**

*Strategy: Streamline and define internal communications processes to improve the flow of communication and ensure consistent messaging.*

*Tactics:*

- Streamline aligned employees: Streamline the email addresses, phone numbers, calendars, and other related accounts for the approximately 60 aligned employees. Office 365 may be the best service for implementing this tactic.
- Define and communicate the role of the marketing department so that faculty and staff know how they can and should utilize the department.
- Filter all external communications materials: Develop a process to filter communications content/materials created by other faculty/staff through the marketing department to ensure consistency in messaging and branding and reduce the need for staff to design and print their own materials.
- Develop a communications toolkit for faculty and staff that includes a standard email signature template, letterhead, logos, and other template materials as appropriate for all faculty and staff to use consistently. This should include a communications checklist (see Appendix A) for departments to use when creating their own materials.
- Develop a story-sharing protocol: Create a process for faculty and staff to submit potential content to the marketing department, including story ideas, events, and photo opportunities.
- Add to your team: Consider hiring an internal communications staff member so that marketing can focus on external communications goals and channels.

*Strategy: Practice transparency and communicate from the top more often to increase trust.*

*Tactics:*

- Communicate from the top: Develop more frequent and broad communications to all faculty and staff from the president to share major and/or visionary updates (ex. where we are going, what's new).
- Practice transparency about the alignment in order to reduce confusion and fear and clarify what it means for faculty and staff.

## **2. E-newsletters and social media**

*Strategy: Use e-newsletters and social media channels to share positive stories and important campus information in clear, concise and meaningful ways.*

*Tactics:*

- Develop a consistent voice and tone for each institution on social media.
- Proofread all content for grammatical and spelling errors, as well as consistency in tone and messaging.
- Vary social media content: When scheduling multiple social media posts regarding the same topic, vary the content so it seems authentic rather than automated.
- Use more video content in addition to still photography.
- Create space for a presidential perspective: Develop an additional e-newsletter from the president or include a message from the president in each edition of the e-newsletters.
- Develop a content calendar for both social media and the e-newsletter to ensure that key messages are being incorporated consistently, and that different programs and events are highlighted strategically.

### 3. Media relations and news coverage

*Strategy: Proactively engage the media to garner more positive coverage for both institutions.*

*Tactics:*

- Convert select internal stories into media pitches: Develop a story inventory and repurpose some e-newsletter and social media content for media pitches (focus on programming, student and alumni successes).
- Update all media lists: This includes Dakota County, Twin Cities, and industry-specific outlets.
- Hold a media training session for leadership and key spokespeople from both schools.
- Create a reactive media protocol to be followed by administration, faculty and staff.
- Develop a process for sharing positive news coverage for both schools. This includes social media, e-newsletter, and emails to board members and other stakeholders.
- Add a newsroom section on each institution's website to host press releases, media contact information, and recent positive media coverage.

### 4. Website/external communications

*Strategy: Define who you are to prospective students and other outside audiences.*

*Tactics:*

- Develop a value proposition for each institution defining what makes them unique.
- Focus on the "why": Enhance or add a "why choose DCTC/Inver Hills" section to each website. Include why DCTC and Inver Hills offer more benefits or produce greater results than their competitors.
- Reorder homepage sections so the campus news sections are less prominently featured and the institutions' selling points are featured instead.
- Increase DCTC and Inver Hills' presence metro-wide to compete with schools farther north/in the metro area.

## 5. Crisis communications

*Strategy: Create a crisis-ready culture through effective crisis communications planning and training.*

*Tactics:*

- Develop a comprehensive crisis communications plan for DCTC and Inver Hills.
- Train key administrators on the crisis plan: This includes information on how to spot a potential crisis, and specific roles during a crisis.
- Create a crisis-ready culture: This is most important for administrators so that the marketing department is aware of emerging issues and can prepare to respond to them. This can be done through the creation of a plan and training.
- Improve the notification system so that faculty, staff and students have timely and correct information in the event of a crisis.

## Appendix A: Communications checklist

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To ensure consistency in all DCTC and Inver Hills external communications, the marketing department has developed the following checklist to be used when individual departments create external communications materials. This could include email blasts, newsletters, letters, website content, brochures, direct mail, or other marketing pieces. The marketing department is available to help write, edit, proofread and/or design materials for any department. We can also help select photos or provide stories to support your materials. Please contact [INSERT NAME, NUMBER] for assistance.

- Does the communication comply with DCTC's/Inver Hills' brand standards for logo use, colors and templates? [INCLUDE BRAND STANDARDS OR SUPPLY AS SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENT]
- Does the content include one or more of DCTC's or Inver Hills' key message themes?
  - DCTC:
    - Provides highly skilled and technical training for today's most in-demand jobs
    - Students are boosting their earning potential and launching or changing their careers
    - Experience is affordable, flexible, hands-on, and inclusive
  - Inver Hills:
    - Supportive and affordable place for students to launch their college degree
    - Prepares students to succeed at a four-year college or to enter the workforce
    - Graduates are business, industry and community leaders
- Does DCTC or Inver Hills have existing language/messages on the specific topic? (Ask the marketing department if you are not sure. We want to make sure messages on reoccurring topics are consistent.)
- Are you using recent photos to complement the message themes?
- Should any other departments be aware that you are sending this communication? Might other departments be planning to communicate to the same audience around the same time?
- Could the content create any public relations risks?
- If the communication piece will be widely distributed, has it been reviewed, edited and proofread by the marketing department? Are other approvals needed?