



**MATAWA FIRST NATIONS**

**COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**



**FIREDOG**  
COMMUNICATIONS



### **Disclaimer Notice**

This project was undertaken at the direction of Matawa First Nations. The purpose of the document is to present the findings of a communications survey and to make recommendations for the implementation of a revitalized strategic communication plan within Matawa First Nations. The opinions and findings expressed herein are those of the staff and members of Matawa First Nations, gathered during a consultation process and are not necessarily shared by the consultants. The conclusions and recommendations that have arisen as a result of the expressed opinion, are however those of the consultants.



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## 1.0 Executive Summary

### 1.1 Background

Matawa First Nations embarked upon a strategic communications planning process in the summer of 2006. Working with the organization's communications advisors at Firedog Communications, the purpose of the Communication Plan is to highlight priorities and strategies for the development of enhanced communication practices that will support the mission and vision of Matawa First Nations. It is a community-focused plan to deliver improved levels of communication across the organization and in a way that better compliments the needs of the organization's membership. The purpose of this report is to provide recommendations that will overcome existing communication weaknesses and help to facilitate education and information sharing across the organization and its First Nations. This report provides a description of the processes undertaken by the communications advisors, their findings, and makes subsequent recommendations for communication planning strategies.

The communication plan report focuses around four (4) main priority areas:

- Strategic internal communication (within the Matawa organization)
- Strategic external communication (between the organization and the member First Nations)
- The communication process as a strategic management/key decision making tool
- The communication process as a strategic information sharing tool

### 1.2 Objectives

The primary objective of this project was to consult with Matawa First Nations in order to make informed recommendations that will communicate the Matawa vision and meet the needs of its people. The consultation process involved all demographics; from Matawa Board of Directors, Management and Staff, to First Nations leadership, Elders and Youth. To this end, the communication plan report focuses around the four main priority areas described above.



As a result of this report, Matawa First Nations will gain insight into the current opinions of its staff and membership towards current levels of communications and will be given options for improvement and growth. The underlying goal is to engage people's interest and participation in the initiatives of Matawa First Nations through improved access to information and knowledge sharing.

### **1.3 Methodology**

In order to facilitate a communications planning process that will lead to the development of strategies that are effective and relevant to First Nation needs, both Matawa staff and community members were consulted. This consultation process involved a communication survey with the purpose of measuring current communication successes and identifying areas of weakness. Analysis of the survey results clearly highlight that more attention must be given to the specific channels of information delivery in order to engage wider audiences at the First Nation level. Further analysis of the report shows that while the internal communications strategies of Matawa First Nations require some attention and direction in order to become more efficient; the external communication strategies directed at the member communities and other external audiences are perceived to be lacking and require the most improvement.

### **1.4 Consultation Process**

Beginning in July of 2006, a communication research survey was formulated, drafted, and delivered to the Matawa First Nations organization and its 10 (ten) member communities.

The general focus of the surveys was:

- An analysis of the communication strategies and their role in directing the operations within Matawa
- An analysis of the perceived effectiveness of the current communication strategies
- An analysis of the preferred communication channels in disseminating and receiving information



- An analysis of the current state of strategic communications and how they affect the success of information sharing activities.

The Matawa First Nations communication plan was developed using information obtained after a close analysis of the survey results. The communication plan and survey were designed to collect specific, quantitative, measurable data about the role of communication practices within Matawa First Nations. The intent behind collecting and analyzing this data was to understand and interpret the findings, in order to create accurate, logical and justifiable recommendations for improving the role of strategic communications.

### **1.5 Issues Arising**

The report finds that a favourable climate exists among staff and community members towards future developments in communications, and that many opportunities to improve community engagement exist by developing and refining the communication practices of Matawa First Nations.

Based upon the analysis of the survey data, which produced several reoccurring themes about the communication practices at Matawa First Nations, key recommendations for improving the effectiveness of strategic communication practices have been formulated.

These recommendations include:

- Producing visible, tangible, and informative material for all regarding best practices, protocols and procedures for information sharing,
- Promoting participation in educational workshops and training to build collective communications capacity,
- Expanding the resources, reach and impact of Matawa's internal and external communication channels.



## **2.0 Communication Plan Mission and Vision**

### **2.1 Communication Plan Mission**

The mission of the communication plan is to develop a comprehensive environmental analysis of the Matawa First Nations communication practices and to provide recommendations for the development and implementation of a strategic communication framework that will deliver valuable information directly to the membership of all 10 (ten) Matawa First Nations. Through planning, programs, and ongoing communication development, the communication plan will assist in fulfilling the vision of Matawa First Nations.

### **2.2 Communication Plan Vision**

The vision of the communication plan is to provide accurate information and communication resources to the Matawa First Nations, thereby empowering strong, knowledgeable and self-sufficient people within communities.

### **2.3 About the Communication Process**

Excellent communication involves two-way communication. Communication practiced according to a two-way symmetrical model will enable Matawa First Nations to build and maintain better relationships internally and with its communities and various stakeholders. Two-way symmetrical communication means communication that is balanced. It means listening to others as well as disseminating messages of information. Effective two-way communication seeks to manage conflict and promote mutual understanding with target audiences and publics through negotiation with key groups. The goal is to find “win-win” communication solutions that meet the needs of all involved.

In nearly all organizations, staff name their manager as the preferred source of information on a day to day basis. Accordingly, managers should be accountable for communication, along with other important elements of their job, at performance appraisal time. Managers must understand that they must listen to employees’ concerns and questions as well as give



directives. They must find answers to these concerns and questions and pass them on to the organization's leaders so that they will be better informed. It is imperative that employees have enough information to perform their jobs productively. Employees at every level should be included in the development of the organization's communication mission, goals, and objectives, if they are expected to support them.

All external publics view any Matawa First Nation member or employee they talk to as a representative of the Matawa First Nations. Every Matawa member should understand that he/she must pay attention to community concerns and be responsive and supportive at all times. Employees and community members will have major roles in implementing the tactics it will take to accomplish the communication goals and strategies; therefore they must be empowered through a participatory organizational culture.

This communication plan provides an implementation plan that addresses the above-referenced needs.



### 3.0 Communication Audit

#### 3.1 Current Situation

Matawa First Nations and its 10 (ten) member communities consist of Aroland First Nation, Constance Lake First Nation, Eabametoong First Nation, Ginoogaming First Nation, Hornepayne First Nation, Long Lake #58 First Nation, Marten Falls First Nation, Neskantanga First Nation, Nibinamik First Nation, and Webequie First Nation. These remote and non-remote First Nations are provided with advisory services and support programs by the Matawa organization in the areas of governance, finance, health, economic development, education, and technical services. Although these are Matawa's main areas of focus, other demands are often placed on the organization in times of crisis or when new programs are introduced.

Matawa First Nation communities rely on their individual community leadership who make up the Matawa Chiefs Council to provide them with the necessary guidance, support and advocacy in their quests to build self sufficient communities. This involves implementation and representation on policy development, advocacy, information distribution, and all encompassing communication on behalf of and as directed by the Matawa Chiefs and Chiefs Council.

The priority factors affecting Matawa First Nations today are social, environmental and political. The people within Matawa First Nations are challenged everyday by unemployment, inadequate housing, rights over land/natural resources, representation in political decision-making processes and other related issues. The external messaging for Matawa First Nations has begun to lay a foundation in addressing some of these key issues, however there is much work to be done if Matawa First Nations are to raise awareness of their challenges, grow a stronger voice and see positive improvements for the future. Indeed, a solid internal communication framework must be developed and implemented in order to improve effectiveness and efficiency in external communication efforts.



### 3.2 Current Communication Channels

Internal communication channels within an organization are built to support a reliable means of relaying messages among staff, management and other key players in the day to day operations of the organization. A consistent flow of communication should thread throughout the organizational structure upward, downward, and laterally. In looking to enhance communication practices, we must first take stock of current ones. The following are currently used to communicate internally within the Matawa First Nations:

- Monthly Meetings: Matawa staff and management,
- Quarterly Meetings: Chiefs Council and Board of Directors
- Annual General Meetings: Community leadership, community members, Matawa management and staff and invited guests
- Matawa Messenger: Quarterly newsletter to Matawa communities
- Monday Messenger: Weekly email-notice to Matawa communities
- Bulletin Boards
- Email/Fax/Telephone
- Matawa Website
- Brochures
- Media Releases
- Advertising
- Community visits



### 3.3 Critical Issues

The analysis of issues facing the Matawa First Nations is the heart of this strategic communication plan. The following provides an overview of the critical issues that arose as a result of the survey findings with both staff and community members. A complete report of both survey findings can be found in **Appendix A and B**.

#### Staff:

- A large percentage of staff believe that internal communications are average or less than average
- A large number of staff feel that they do not receive sufficient information from both management and the Board of Directors
- A large number of staff feel that their information is not getting to community members
- A large number of staff are not using current communication tools
- A large number of staff would like to communication tools upgraded

#### Community Members:

- The majority of community members surveyed were NOT aware of the vision and mission of Matawa First Nations
- The majority are unaware of the services and programs offered by Matawa First Nations organization and feel that they do not receive enough information from the organization
- The majority of community members are not using the communication resources available to them such as the website
- The majority were unaware that the Matawa communication materials were available to them
- The majority rated the level of communication between the Matawa organizations and their community as average or below



### 3.4 SWOT Analysis

It is important to evaluate environmental opportunities in relation to the strengths and weaknesses of the organization's resources, and in this specific communication plan, the organizational culture. Real opportunities exist when there is a close fit between environment, values and resources. An evaluation of an organization's strengths and weaknesses in relation to environmental opportunities and threats is generally referred to as a SWOT analysis.

#### STRENGTH

- Strong/new brand
- Existing framework of internal communication resources
- Annual General Meeting
- Communications staff
- New Staff (some younger)
- Experienced Staff
- Variety of programs and services
- Board composition-experienced, new, active, involved
- Knowledgeable & committed staff with complementary skills
- Easy community member access to Band Office
- Internal support for improved communications

#### WEAKNESS

- Portion of the targeted audience is unaware of the organizations role
- Community members unaware of the Matawa vision and mission
- Language barriers
- Lack of personal contact with community and partners, due to geography;
- Lack of resources to conduct direct communications/adequate community visits
- Cost of travel and service to cover geographic area
- Dependence on government assistance and impact on long-term planning
- Under-utilization of communication tools



## **OPPORTUNITY**

- Increase moral
- Increase awareness
- Increase support for Matawa First Nations
- Capitalize on internal buy-in
- Matawa Messenger
- Monday Messenger
- Matawa website

## **THREAT**

- Adapting to new technologies
- Language of publications
- Communications barriers due to geographic area
- Government funding
- Geographic location

## **4.0. Communication Strategy**



All communication activity must be designed to help Matawa First Nations achieve its vision and to overcome the identified critical issues. To this end, Matawa First Nations face two major challenges from a communications perspective; the first is *establishing a strong and consistent network of user-friendly communications resources*, and the second, is *increasing usage of the resources made available*. The two go hand-in-hand. Establishing a solid foundation of effective communication resources will encourage uptake. There is also an identified need for educational and awareness building in order to promote the regular use of the communication tools available. This communication planning process will require an integrated strategy that focuses on upgrading current communication tools, increasing usage and raising awareness of resources through promotion, education and training. As a result of the consultation process, the following strategic areas of focus have arisen for the communication plan.

- To develop and implement a framework of communication tools that will improve two-way communications within the Matawa First Nations.
- To increase usage of the available communications resources within Matawa First Nations.
- To improve the communication skills of staff, management, Board of Directors, Chiefs Council and others involved with Matawa First Nations.
- To build a stronger awareness of Matawa First Nation initiatives within the Matawa First Nations and externally among the community, industry and media.

## 5.0 Target Audiences

Before any communications plan can be developed, it is vital to clearly identify target audiences. That is to say, who are the stakeholders and publics with which the organization must communicate. The primary target audiences for Matawa First Nations can be defined as follows:



**Internal Audiences:**

- **Youth:** Matawa First Nations youth are on the forefront of becoming the new leaders and representatives of Matawa First Nations. Strong communications strategies with the youth will provide them with the information, guidance and teachings to make informed decisions for their generation. Clear and concise information and knowledge will empower Matawa youth to embrace their futures and increase their personal potential to affect change within their families and communities.
- **Elders:** Matawa Elders walk with one foot in the past and one foot in the present. The young walk with one foot in present and one foot in the future. Those in the middle act as a bridge between the two. This path carries the traditional ways into the reality of modern practice. The Matawa Elders are a great source of historical, cultural, and social information that must be shared and used for guidance in daily decision-making processes. The communications plan must provide effective methods for information to be provided to Elders for their advice and for them to provide feedback and recommendations.
- **Communities:** Matawa First Nation communities are the central focus of Matawa's mission and vision and therefore the communications plan must focus on community-first. Matawa communications must allow for easy and effective information in and out of Matawa communities and between them.
- **Matawa First Nations Staff:** Matawa First Nation staff has the specialized training and education necessary to help the First Nation communities to realize their goals. Staff must be the focus of a stronger communications effort that allows them to build stronger relationships with the First Nations and to be more effective within the workplace.



- **Matawa First Nations Chiefs and Councils:** Matawa First Nations Chiefs and Council are the elected leaders and decision-makers for their communities. The amount and level of information they receive plays an influential role in the future directions of their respective communities. At the same time, the Chiefs and Councils are also the primary advocates and lobbyists for their community needs and successes. A strong and well focused system of communications for the leadership to send and receive information is vital.

### External Audiences:

- **Government:** Strategies to improve communications to the Federal Government are essential to improve consultation with First Nations, active participation in decision-making processes, effective lobbying and awareness and education of government officials of First Nation needs. With Matawa First Nations dependent on government financing, improved two-way communication will play a major role in overcoming current relations.
- **Industry:** With new and emerging opportunities for First Nation/private sector partnerships in areas of economic development, the communications plan must incorporate strategies for building stronger relationships with industry. Key areas of focus need to communicate the opportunities with First Nations, their work ethic, incentives and opportunities for growth.
- **Public:** Improved communication with the general public is required to build understanding between the general public and the Matawa First Nations. Oftentimes, Matawa First Nations are overlooked for participation and inclusion in public initiatives that could be positive for all parties. Matawa First Nations need to better communicate their current and future commitment to get involved in broader regional developments that will bring prosperity for all.



## 6.0 Communication Strategies and Tactics

**Strategy 1#:** To develop and implement a framework of communication tools that will improve two-way communications within the Matawa First Nations.

### Proposed Tactics:

1. To develop and implement an overall communications feedback system
2. To appoint a Communications Liaison within each First Nation and develop an organizational system that involves meetings and collaboration on regional communication issues/needs
3. Develop quarterly pre-recorded radio shows for distribution via local First Nation radio to provide updates and news on Matawa initiatives
4. To engage a youth representative from the Matawa First Nations to receive feedback from Matawa youth and provide input and information on youth issues for communication.
5. To host a youth forum with 5 representatives from each First Nation to discuss opportunities, visions and action items for the future.
6. To re-develop the Matawa corporate website to become more of a 'regional portal' that will act as a gateway to:
  - First Nation sites/pages
  - First Nation business listings
  - E-commerce store for First Nations to sell products
  - Health information
  - Employment/Training opportunities
  - Education
  - Matawa Corporate pages
  - Youth area
  - Media Room
  - Private members only area to upload documents for Chief and council viewing



7. To make the Matawa Messenger newsletter accessible online in a print-friendly PDF format
8. To hire a newsletter carrier within each First Nation to deliver the Matawa Messenger newsletter to each individual home.
9. To develop a poster series to promote Matawa advisory services within the First Nations
10. To schedule a monthly radio segment on Wawatay Radio whereby Program Managers are required to conduct phone-ins with community members on a rotating basis.
11. To develop a planned media buying schedule with Wawatay News

**Strategy 2#: To increase usage of the available communications resources within Matawa First Nations.**

**Proposed Tactics:**

1. A poster series to promote Matawa communication tools and increase participation
2. Distribute Monday Messenger to First Nations and encourage communities to submit their weekly news
3. To conduct a live phone-in on Wawatay and Community radio to inform First Nations of the way members can contribute and use Matawa communication resources
4. To conduct promotions/competitions to encourage members to submit stories for the Matawa Messenger newsletter.
5. To impose a minimum level of participation from Program departments in Matawa communications
6. To develop an electronic membership database of email addresses within the Matawa First Nations for distribution of e-newsletters and announcements
7. To distribute large decals with the Matawa website address and logo to First Nations for vehicles and boats.



**Strategy 3#: To improve the communication skills of staff, management, Board of Directors, Chiefs Council and others involved with Matawa First Nations.**

**Proposed Tactics:**

1. Communication workshops:
  - a. The benefits and need for improved communications
  - b. Training on how to use communication tools more effectively
  - c. Board and organizational leadership training to improve First Nation capacity, communication and progress measurement
  
2. Creation of a communications road map for staff and management of Matawa First Nations:
  - a. Development of a communications policy
  - b. Development of a communications best practices/procedures manual
  
3. Develop a crisis communication plan

**Strategy 4#: To build a stronger awareness of Matawa First Nation initiatives within the Matawa First Nations and externally among the community, industry and media.**

**Proposed Tactics:**

1. To develop a functional media room via the Matawa website
2. Develop information packages for each First Nation
3. To distribute the Matawa Messenger in-flight on NAC Airlines
4. To develop strategic partnerships with external organizations for new initiatives; i.e. Confederation College
5. To develop a presentation about the Matawa First Nations and develop a presentation schedule with key target external agencies – government & industry



6. To develop a marketing plan for Matawa First Nations economic development initiatives
7. To conduct a FAM tour to a remote First Nation with a key media representative to profile the economic challenges and initiatives in Matawa First Nations.
8. To host a Matawa First Nations conference and trade show to focus on the community development initiatives and business; and potential partnerships available with Matawa First Nations.
9. To exchange promotional web links between the Matawa website and other external agencies
10. Develop a speaker's group capitalizing on the strengths of internal staff as experts on First Nation issues. Submit abstracts for conferences and speaking opportunities.



## 7.0 Conclusion

Matawa First Nations is at a pivotal crossroads in its efforts to support the building of strong, healthy, and self sufficient communities. There is a recognized need to improve the overall communications processes currently in place, backed by an overwhelming desire among all audiences to support this initiative.

The general consensus is that strategic communications is an important part of Matawa First Nations long term success and growth. The staff and community members of Matawa First Nations are enthusiastic about the possibilities of communications, and express a desire to learn, and to play a larger and more proactive role in its success.

There are key areas of weakness within the communication process that have been identified by the communications survey. Within this report Matawa First Nations has been recognized as having the greatest potential for promoting the growth of communications best practices. The implementation of strategic communications tactics are in communications planning, formal communication training, the opportunity for increased information sharing, and the expansion of external communication practices. Matawa First Nations would be wise to address these key areas of its strategic communication practices. This would allow them to bridge the gaps in its communication process and to capitalize on the opportunities that exist for strategic communication.

It is recommended that the 2007 communication budget be used strategically and according to an approved communication work plan with measurable goals and objectives. The work plan will allow for the development of defined measurement tactics to efficiently monitor and evaluate the progress of communications and provide more effective reporting to the Matawa membership.