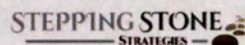


# Communications & Branding Report

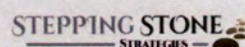
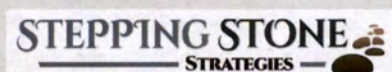
to Somerset County  
by Stepping Stone Strategies

March 31, 2022  
FINAL



## Background

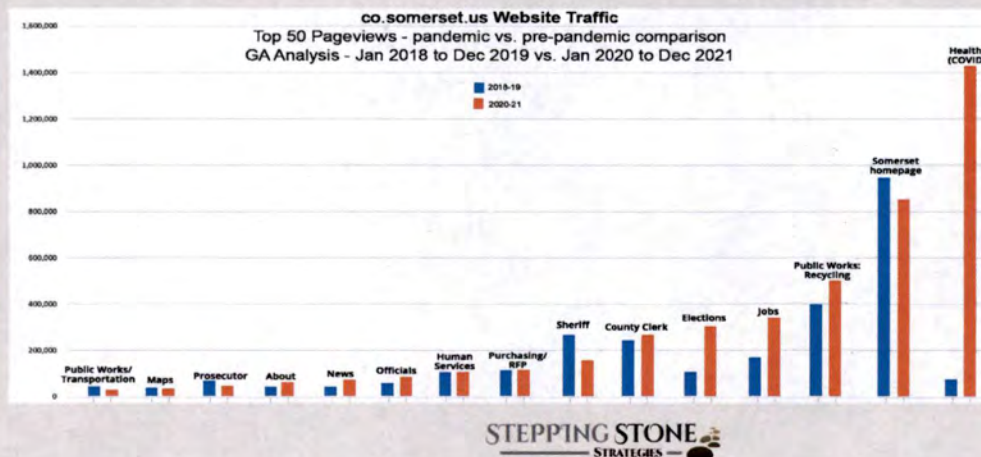
- Somerset County is evaluating strategies and tactics for communicating and marketing the county, its assets, and services to residents, as well as to businesses and visitors
  - The timing is crucial since the county is preparing an economic rebound following the global pandemic and intends to attract tourists and film-making to replace expected losses in traditional business travel.
  - The pandemic and Hurricane Ida further drove home the life-saving potential of effective communications, particularly among disadvantaged communities.
- The county selected Stepping Stone Strategies to undertake an independent analysis of the county's public information, marketing communications, branding, and customer service, including recommendations and an implementation strategy.



# Effective Communication Saves Lives

- During the COVID-19 pandemic demand for public health information from the county has exploded, becoming the number-one topic sought out on the county website, vs. 10<sup>th</sup> pre-pandemic.
- Nationally, effective leadership and public health communications have been shown to be lifesavers at a time of increasing disinformation about public health measures.

➤ Brookings Institution, April 29, 2020.



"Health" received 1.4 million pageviews on county website in 2020-21, up 1777% vs. 2 prior years

Page 3

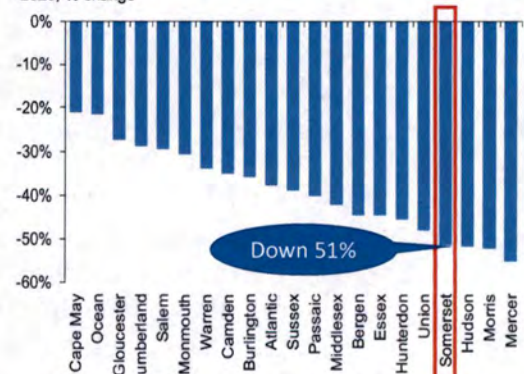
## The Branding Imperative

- Since the pandemic, Somerset County has lost \$644 million in economic activity from the travel industry, a 51% decline.
  - The drop in lodging revenues among the county's ~45 hotels and 4.8k rooms has been steeper (-66%).
- A significant portion of this travel revenue may be gone forever.
  - Nationally, two-thirds of all travel is for business, and this is likely higher in Somerset due to the concentration of corporate offices.
  - Morgan Stanley estimates virtual meetings will replace 27% of corporate travel.
  - Bloomberg survey finds 84% of global companies will spend less on corporate travel, post-pandemic.
- Thus, Somerset County needs to create an identity as a destination for leisure travel
  - The county "brand" has never been more vital to economic success.

### VISITOR SPENDING GROWTH BY COUNTY

#### Growth in Tourism Industry Sales

2020, % change



# A Vision for County Communication

- Dozens of interviews with Somerset County leaders and employees suggest the county in 2022 needs to update its brand and upgrade its communications capabilities to adapt to:
  - Changes in communications technology
  - The rise of disinformation
  - Diversifying communities within the county
  - Increasingly public health and weather emergencies
  - The need for an economic transformation after a global pandemic that has lasted two years
- This report provides a roadmap for a transformation for Somerset County's brand and communications



## Our Meetings

- County Commissioners (5)
  - Clerk of the Board (1)
- Constitutional Officers (3)
  - Deputies (2)
- Executive Leadership (7)
  - Administrator & Asst.
  - County Counsel
  - Finance
  - Human Resources
  - Human Services
  - Planning/Policy/Econ Dev
  - Public Works
- Public Information Office (5)
- Graphics/Print shop (4)
- Cultural & Heritage (3)
- Film Commission (1)
- Human Services (6)
- Health Dept (4)
- IT (1)
- Leadership Director (1)
- Library Commission (2)
- Public Safety (5)
- Park Commission (1)
- Richard Hall (5)
- SC Business Partnership (1)
- Workforce Development (3)

Talked with  
60 leaders  
& staff

# How this Report is Organized

- Executive Summary of Major Recommendations
- The report is organized in sections that largely match up to the county's original Request for Proposal.
  - 1) Review previously commissioned reports and budgets
  - 2) Provide an assessment of the county's current communication capabilities, structure and priorities
  - 3) Provide a SWOT analysis to assess county's competitive advantages/challenges for attracting and retaining, businesses and visitors
  - 4) Review current budget and expenditures
  - 5) Review current organization charts for public communications and marketing
  - 6) Recommend best practices for staffing/management allocation and scheduling
  - 7) Review IT hardware and software, digital assets
  - 8) Offer benchmarking to compare against other New Jersey County's plans/information offices
  - 9) Improving outreach to diverse communities
  - 10) Implementation Strategy
- An appendix follows with additional background information.



## Executive Summary of Recommendations

### Recommendation:

## 1. Upgrade the Public Information Office

The Public Information Office is under-resourced given the increasing importance of branding, tourism, changing technology and media, emergency communications, and the need to reach under-served communities. County services have never been more important. We recommend:

**1. Hire a Chief Communications Officer to oversee PIO + brand/marketing**

- “Trusted advisor” to the Administrator who contributes to policy
- Steward and advocate of the county brand
- Teaches and inspires countywide, beyond direct reports
- This recommendation is structurally similar to a 2019 proposal\*

**2. Fill skill gaps when filling open PIO positions**

- Bilingual and bi-cultural communications personnel
- More focus on photography, video, social media in all hires

**3. Train/develop existing staff to fill other gaps**

- Greater focus on storytelling and information “campaigns”
- More photography, video, and social media for all staff

**4. Modify organizational structure**

- Expand on a “beat” system for assignments/workflow
- Encourage mentorship with revised reporting lines



\*2019 proposal for a “Creative Marketing Manager” to oversee PIO and marketing.

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### Recommendation:

## 2. Market Somerset County as a Brand

The Somerset County’s brand was developed when marketing the brand was less vital. Stewardship of the brand is split among many organizations. We recommend:

**1. Harmonize brand identity** between the County and our partners,

- such as Tourism/Business Partnership, Parks, Library
- Make sure that future tourism advertising and marketing benefits all parts of a unified county brand
- Emphasize key assets such as beautiful landscapes, parks, outdoor recreation, history, diversity, etc
- Attract leisure tourism to replace lost business travel

**2. Use the county website to create a “sense of place”** for residents and visitors alike

- Use beautiful photographs of noteworthy county locations
- Create seamless connection to tourism website

**3. Act quickly to support an economic turnaround** while leveraging American Recovery Money available for tourism



Page 10

Recommendation:

### 3. Expand Outreach to Diverse Communities

The county needs to dramatically improve its ability to connect with non-English speakers given that **31%** of households speak languages other than English and **25%** of residents are foreign born. The county also needs to focus on reaching the **45%** who are non-white. We recommend:

1. **Form a Multi-Cultural Taskforce** to improve outreach to diverse communities and increase hiring diversity
2. **Use mobile outreach vehicles** to deploy the county's Constitutional Officers for outreach work in under-served neighborhoods, to meet diverse communities where they live, and to educate residents on available resources
  - The County Clerk's Office has extensive non-English language capabilities and offers a wide variety of needed services
  - The Sheriff Office has diversified its workforce and created outreach programs with houses of worship
  - The Surrogate employs a diverse workforce with services required by all
3. **Re-vamp printed collateral material** intended for diverse communities



Recommendation:

### 4. Promote Health & Safety through Communication

Public health and weather emergencies are likely to become frequent occurrences, creating a new imperative to quickly disseminate information and respond to urgent needs and questions

1. **Increase the capacity for Somerset County** and its municipalities to respond to emergencies by organizing marketing campaigns to recruit and train volunteers for Fire, EMS, CERT, etc.
2. **Create a standing "Emergency Hotline Corps"** under the Office of Emergency Management but staffed by willing staff from across the county, including bilingual staff
3. **Create an "Emergency Messaging Task Force"** co-chaired by OEM and PIO that draws from relevant departments and holds standing conference calls to plan and coordinate communications under emergency conditions



Recommendation:

## 5. Improve Digital Capabilities and Tools

The county website and email systems are inadequate and insufficiently visual for promoting the county brand and for efficiently reaching large audiences with priority content, including video and photography. Social media and constituent service communications are also underleveraged.

1. **Move to a commercial-grade email platform** as the most effective means for distributing e-newsletter (35x/year).
  - The system included with the Granicus website platform is outdated, visually limited, and performs poorly on mobile devices
2. **Redo the county website** for branding and visual appeal
  - Website needs to be more visual, video-friendly, and easier to use, given the beauty of Somerset County
  - Visually emphasize “sense of place and pride” for residents, visitors,
  - Use of ARP funds may be justified based on the website’s central role in promoting public health and potential to support tourism
  - Invest more resources in photography and photo filing/storage



## Main Report

# 1. Review previously commissioned reports and budgets

## An Evolving Strategy for Somerset County

- Prior to COVID-19, Somerset County's economic strategy was evolving
  - In 2014 the Somerset County Business Partnership published a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy that focused on reducing regulatory burdens and re-use of "significant properties," while classifying tourism and agriculture development as priorities, but low ones
  - Since 2018, Somerset County has been working on a Preservation Plan for history, open space, and farmland that sees these assets as economic drivers, to attract visitors, residents, and businesses
  - In 2019, the county completed a "Walk, Bike, Hike" report that put forth an approach to improving mobility for residents, workers, and visitors while taking advantage of local trails, greenways, and open spaces.
  - A 2020 commissioned Rutgers report recommends the county centralize and improve the effectiveness of county communications and marketing, to increase awareness of the county's services and connect with increasingly diverse communities. Another 2020 plan by the county called for the hiring of a Creative Marketing Director.
- As the county has begun to prepare for post-pandemic recovery, it convened roundtables of businesspeople and nonprofits for input
  - Participants identified tourism promotion as vital to the recovery of downtown businesses and the hospitality sector
  - Businesses recommend larger investments in marketing the county with monies available through the American Relief Plan



## 2. Provide an assessment of the county's current communication capabilities, structure and priorities

## Scope of Somerset County Communications

Many parts of the county are engaged in communications/brand activities

| Organization                 | Roles                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| SC Public Information Office | Media relations, press releases, commissioner speeches, website content creation & management, e-blasts, county social media, video, event promotion, emergency communications, departmental support, etc. |
| SC Business Partnership      | Tourism marketing, business relations, website content creation and management, and email marketing                                                                                                        |
| SC Library Commission        | Program & Event promotion, email marketing, social media                                                                                                                                                   |
| SC Park Commission           | Program & Event promotion, email marketing, social media                                                                                                                                                   |
| Constitutional Officers      | The Clerk, Sheriff, and Surrogate communicate with social media and have additional needs                                                                                                                  |
| Every department/division    | Identifies programs/events in need of promotion, and partners with PIO and/or tourism marketing                                                                                                            |

# Communications Strengths



- Great stories to attract positive media attention
  - Comprehensive government services that provide high value
  - Highly successful response to COVID-19
  - Diversity of county and county leadership
  - Compelling stories of county history, particularly during Revolutionary War
  - Outstanding parks, farms, and wilderness areas
  - High concentration of business and innovation
  - Unique local events: Tour of Somerville, Far Hills Race, etc.
- Highly experienced public information staff
  - Many years of communications experience in and outside of Somerset County
- Strong communicators in leadership
  - Many strong communicators among elected officials and executive leadership

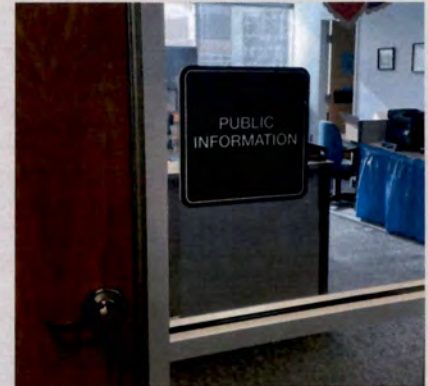
# Communications Weaknesses

- Lack of strong brand identity & strategy
  - Brand management divided among many parts of the county
  - Communications leadership lacks authority to drive strategy
  - Lack of communications planning process, leading to uneven flow of stories and media attention
- Skill deficits
  - Strategic marketing, advertising, and planning
  - Photography, video & social media
  - Storytelling
  - Fluency with diverse cultures/languages
- Infrastructure issues
  - Website and e-newsletter platforms fall short of current design standards
  - Lack of sufficient internal photo, video, and drone capabilities
  - Lack of a scheduling system to organize major events countywide



# Communications Performance

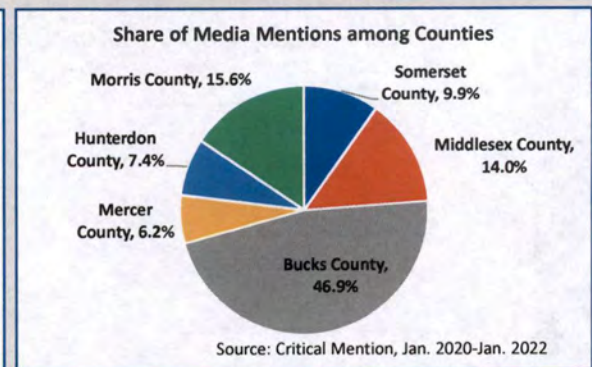
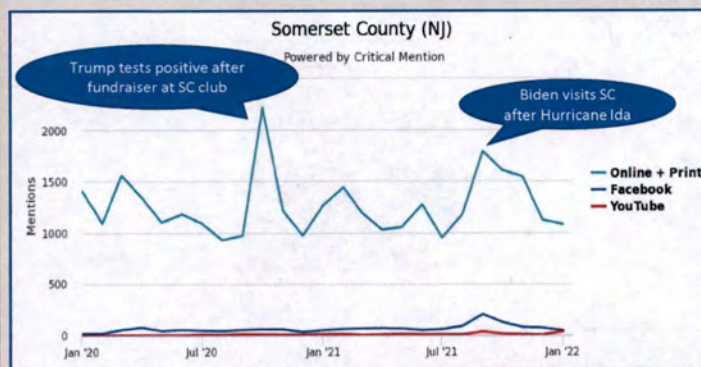
- The Public Information Office produces a lot of each year\*
  - ~700 Facebook posts
  - ~550 emails
  - ~150 press releases
  - ~90 videos
  - ~40 e-newsletters
  - ~30 livestreams
  - ~5 special events
  - 2 direct mail pieces to all residents
- However, the impact could be much greater
  - Media coverage limited to a few channels with modest audiences.
  - The typical (median) video gets just 35 views on YouTube.
- Measurement and Media Monitoring could increase focus on results rather than output



\*Most estimates based on projections of Nov/Dec 2021.

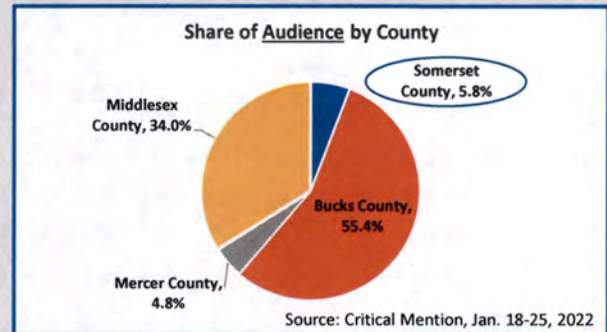
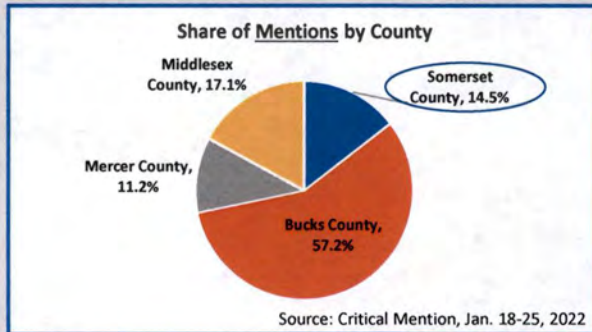
# Somerset County's "Earned Media" Performance

- Over the last two years, Somerset County usually gets 1,000-1,500 media mentions per month
  - Largest peaks produced by presidential news in the county
  - The data below come from Critical Mention, one of several commercially available media monitoring tools
- Bucks County is the clear leader for press, reflecting the county's success at branding itself
  - This "competitive set" of counties includes all bordering counties, plus nearby Bucks County which has created a true "county brand"



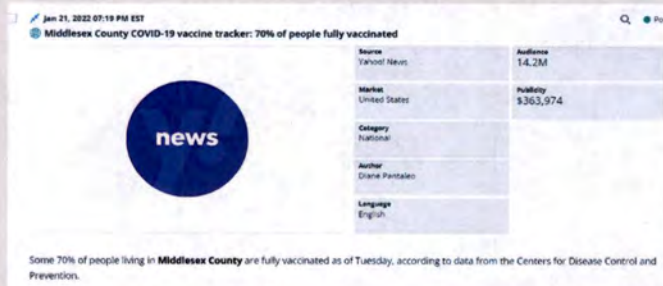
# A Key Goal Should Be Maximizing Audience

- Somerset County is relatively effective at getting press mentions, but reaches a modest audience size
  - Media monitoring tools multiply mentions by the size of audiences reached, as a rough approximation of the potential audience for press mentions
- During a recent period, Somerset County earned 14.5% of media mentions among a group of “competitive” counties, but only 5.8% of the total audience reached by those counties
  - The implication is that Somerset is getting picked up by relatively small media outlets, whereas Middlesex County gets much bigger audiences with almost the same level of media mentions



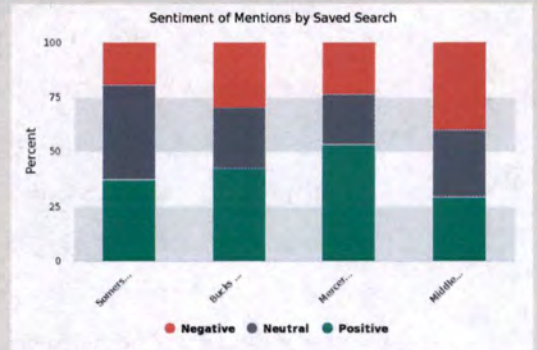
# Bigger Media Outlets Create Bigger Audiences

- Middlesex County gets coverage more consistently in major press such as
  - The *New York Times* for a story about Dunellen as a place to live
  - *Fox News* and many other outlets for a story about a local toddler who accidentally bought furniture online
  - *Yahoo News* for a COVID-19 vaccination update



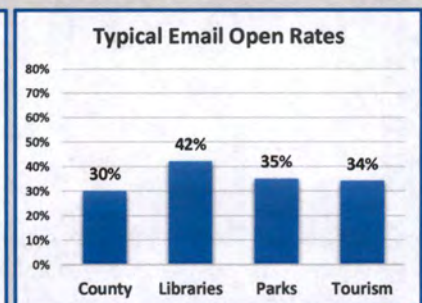
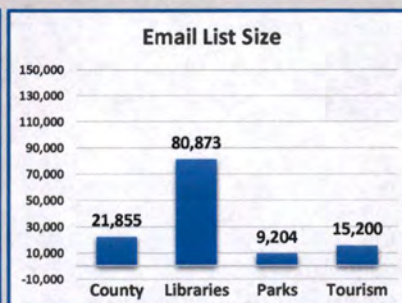
# Bucks County Benefits from Arts & Culture

- Media monitoring also estimates of the percent of coverage that is positive versus negative or neutral.
- Bucks County gets a lot of positive coverage for its arts & culture scene
  - Filming location for a new HBO drama
  - Financial performance of a casino
  - A production at a theater that bears the county name
- A lot of Somerset's coverage in January 2022 was "neutral"



# Performance of "Owned" Media Channels

- The county's website reaches a large audience every month, due to demand for pandemic related information
  - This could be leveraged to increase email list sizes for the county, parks, libraries, tourism
  - The Parks Commission doesn't have data on its website visitors, and plans to upgrade the site soon
- Library Commission reaches a huge audience
  - Uses a commercial grade email platform and best practices for email and borrowers use website to access individual accounts
  - Opportunity for cross marketing with the county, parks, and tourism
- Strong email open rates generally typical for government
  - County's open rate would be better with a commercial platform optimized for mobile, and best email design and timing practices



\*Library stats estimated from pageviews. Parks stats unavailable.

# Opportunities for Improvement

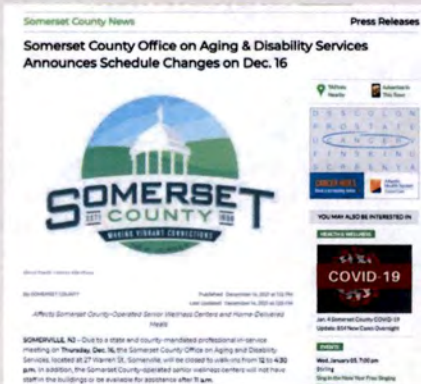
- Establish communications/marketing objectives annually
- Reduce volume while increasing quality and impact
- More “storytelling” through all channels of communications
- Aim higher for statewide and regional media
- Create and execute campaigns to roll-out priority stories
- Improve visuals through photography and video
- Use paid boosts for priority social media posts
- Expand use of eblasts, with a focus on increasing size of list
- Measure impact in a monthly report distributed to leadership



*Examples on following pages*

## Improvement Opportunities: Examples

Less of this...



Routine press releases that gain few readers via local online-only media. Some may be necessary, but return on investment is low.

More of this....



Front-page worthy stories personally pitched to local editors, in support of larger communications objectives of the county.

# Improvement Opportunities: Examples

## Less of this...



"Talking head" Independence Day video messages from all five commissioners, all under 1 minute, gained just 19 YouTube views, on average.

## More of this....



On-site video announcement of 2.5 minutes, supplemented by drone video, map, music. Pushed out on multiple county homepages, eblasts, social media. Received over 650 YouTube views.

# Improvement Opportunities: Examples

## Less of this...



Somerset's directly mailed newsletter is popular based on survey results, but lacks storytelling and visual appeal.

## More of this....



Middlesex County uses a combination of photography and storytelling to inform residents how the county supports its residents.

### 3. Provide a SWOT analysis to assess county's competitive advantages & challenges for attracting and retaining, businesses and visitors

## County's Strengths

- **Agritourism** opportunities with farms & craft beverages
- **Diversity** of people, including recent immigrants, brings energy and cultural influences.
- **Emerging Downtowns** with cafes, shops, restaurants, and events
- **Family friendly** towns with strong schools
- **Great History**, with sites related to Revolutionary War, canal era, manor homes, etc.
- **Highly Educated** workforce
- **Location** close to major population centers, within 90 minutes of New York, Philadelphia, North Jersey.
- **Outdoor activities** such as canoeing, golf, biking, hiking, birdwatching, farm & garden visits
- **Physical beauty** of preserved open space, parks, farms, gardens, historic sites, etc.
- **Quality of life** with access to clean air, water, parks, etc.



# County's Weaknesses

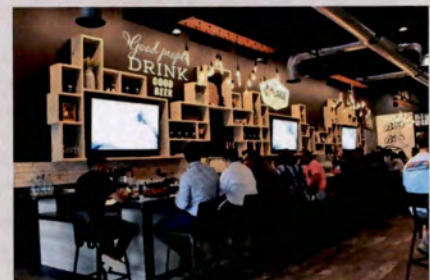
Figure 2-5: Existing Public Transit



- **Business travel decline** in post-pandemic economy
- **Expensive real estate** a challenge for supporting middle- and low-wage workers
- **Limited Public Transit**, with few connections to tourist sites and workplaces
- **No urban center** to attract young adults
- **Performing arts** limited in the county
- **Scattered Destinations** throughout county and no site of national prominence
- **Underserved communities** of color and low income in need of resources
- **Visitor readiness** is a challenge in that many tourist sites are rarely open; programming and coordination is lacking.
- **Vocational Education** focus historically insufficient to support economic and community needs
- **Weak Branding** of county, with loosely connected communities lacking strong regional identity

# County's Opportunities

- **Foodie entrepreneurs** leverage a rich local agriculture, creative and ethnic cuisines, and craft beverage makers
- **Greening economy**, as the first US county to adopt a clean energy commitment
- **Home office** workers may be attracted to the county's quality of life as commuting distances become less relevant
- **Inclusive storytelling** could make the county's history and culture relevant to more diverse residents and visitors.
- **Open Space Available** for development of new recreation, culture, and agriculture destinations
- **Outreach to communities** in need of economic support
- **Tourism** offers an opportunity to replace lost business travel to support hotels, restaurant, retail, etc.



# County's Threats



- **Aging population** if young adults are not attracted/retained
- **Bedroom community** where residents lack connection to local attractions and downtowns
- **Business travel revenues** at risk due to post-pandemic shift to virtual meetings
- **Corporate Offices** at risk due to post-pandemic changes in workplaces
- **Flooding** in low lying areas due to climate change
- **Hotel surplus** creates risk due to lack of post-pandemic business travel.
- **Income inequality** is high between upland suburbs and low-lying boroughs
- **Legacy Industrial zones** pose environmental risks
- **Suburban sprawl** threatens rural beauty

# MarComs Can Promote Strengths, Opportunities

- Marketing/communications can promote all the county's **strengths** to residents, visitors, businesses
  - Emphasize outdoors, physical beauty, history, diversity, downtowns, location
  - Persuade residents and businesses to stay and spend money locally, while attracting visitors from nearby cities
- Communications can capitalize on **opportunities**
  - Advertising/marketing can be highly effective for promoting tourism
  - Identifying and telling inclusive stories related to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual preference can engage more people
  - Outreach to communities to deliver federal economic assistance

Underlined items are those that can be meaningfully addressed with marketing and communications



# Marketing & Communication Implications

- Improved marketing and communications represent valuable tools for capitalizing on strengths and opportunities of Somerset County
  - Somerset County has spent about \$300 million to preserve open space, parks, and farms—a major investment that can be leveraged with a modest additional investment in marketing to attract visitors who will spend locally on lodging, meals, shopping, and recreation
  - Another advantage of marketing is that it can bring attention to existing assets quickly, whereas investments in tourism amenities and infrastructure require time to plan/build
  - Marketing can be vital for converting opportunities to strengths, such as realizing the potential of tourism to replace lost business travel
- The county's currently weak branding is a challenge, but the American Relief Plan provides a unique opportunity to fund advertising and marketing to address negative economic impacts from the pandemic
  - Consider a strategy that emphasizes the county's beautiful landscapes, outdoor activities, and proximity to major cities
  - This approach can be bolstered by targeting state and local investments to address visitor readiness challenges



# Brand Positioning Opportunities

- The county's draft Preservation Plan and Walk Bike Hike Study repeatedly raise the potential to promote the county to visitors based on agritourism, heritage tourism, and eco-tourism
    - Each of these could inspire an impactful branding and marketing strategy
    - A potential theme that effectively combines all three concepts is simply "Get Outside," encompassing nearly all the county's major tourism assets and attuned to the post pandemic era:
- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Ecotourism/Recreation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>140 miles of trails to walk, bike, hike</li> <li>Paddling in D&amp;R Canal, Raritan River</li> <li>Golf &amp; Golf Museum</li> <li>Garden tours at Duke Farms, Colonial Park, Leonard J. Buck Gardens,</li> <li>Birdwatching in Sourlands, at Env. Education Center</li> <li>Sports and picnicking in parks</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>Agritourism</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Farmer's Markets</li> <li>Harvest festivals</li> <li>Farm Tours</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Heritage Tourism</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>D&amp;R Canal State Park</li> <li>Tour of 5 Generals Houses</li> <li>Millstone Valley Scenic Byway</li> <li>Division Street and downtown Somerville</li> <li>Natirar Cooking School</li> <li>Rockingham Historic Site</li> <li>Dozens of historic villages</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>Events</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Somerset Patriots baseball</li> <li>Far Hills Race</li> <li>Tour of Somerville bike race</li> <li>Duke Island Park concerts</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|



# A Focus on Newsworthy Stories

- Effective marketing requires good stories to tell
- Somerset County has many “best kept secret” stories now
  - Parks, wilderness areas, outdoor recreation
  - Scenic Byway, National Historic Trail, East Coast Greenway
  - Bicycling Mecca with oldest bicycle race
  - Vibrant downtowns reachable by train
  - Yankee affiliate baseball
  - Somerset County’s LGBTQ Revolutionary War General
- At the same time, potential initiatives\* can be considered through a marketing lens
  - Bikeshare Program for Somerset County’s Main St.
  - Somerset Revolutionary War Sites to Open Every Weekend
  - Somerset County Announces New Tomato Festival
  - Governor Puts Central Jersey on Tourism Map
  - Somerset County Inspires Central Jersey Beer Trail
  - Hotel District Now Connected to 350 Miles of Offroad Trails
  - Canal Boats Return to D&R Canal for Recreation

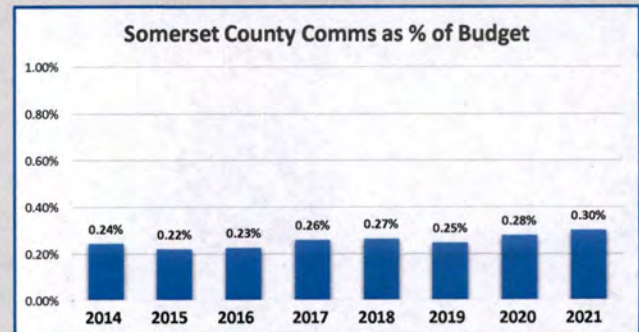
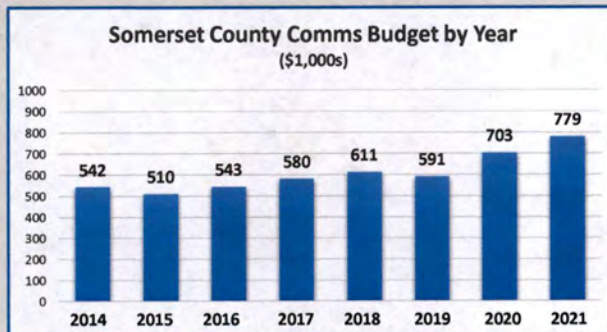
\*Hypothetical initiatives, as they might appear in print



## 4. Review current budget and expenditures

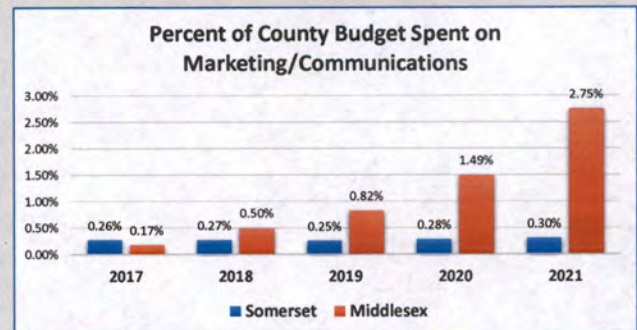
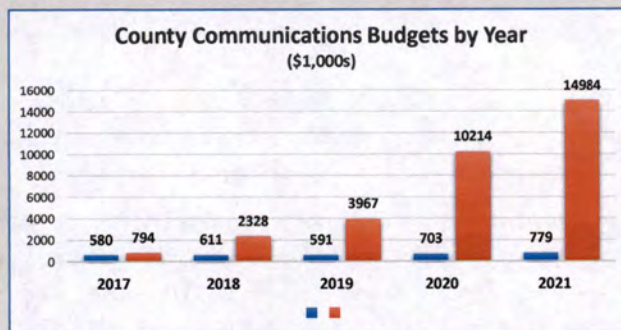
# Budget Trend for Somerset Communications

- In 2021 Somerset County spent \$779,000 on its Public Information Office, representing a modest rise over time. This figure includes the Print Office, which offsets some costs via shared service revenue
- As a percent of total county spending, the amount remains low, less than one-third of 1%
- What's the right amount? According to Deloitte, companies spend an average of 11% of revenue on advertising/marketing. Government agencies spend far less, although figures are hard to come by



# Comparison to Middlesex County

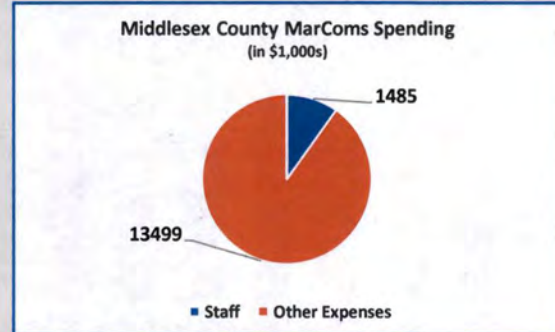
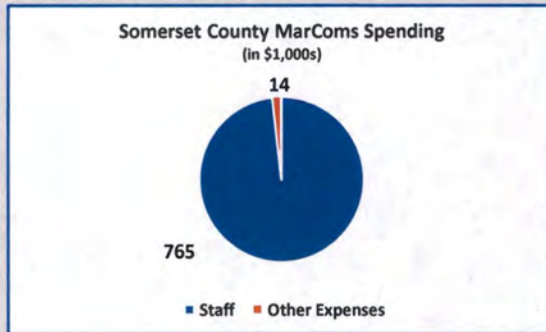
- Neighboring Middlesex County has launched a major effort to promote itself, with new staff, outside consulting, and substantial spending on paid media
- By 2021, Middlesex County\* was spending 19 times the amount of Somerset in raw dollars, and 9 times as much as a percent of total county spending
- Both counties also have independently funded tourism bureaus not included in these figures



\*Middlesex budget includes "Office of Communication" plus a new "Office of Marketing, Outreach, and Education" starting in 2018 and "Print Team" starting in 2019.

# Internal vs. External Spending

- Middlesex County spends about twice what Somerset does on staff for marketing and communications (marcoms)
- The major difference is Middlesex spending on external consulting and media
  - As part of the Rutgers POET study, Middlesex County indicated it “relies heavily on the expertise and contributions” of an external consultant



# Tourism Marketing Locally & Statewide

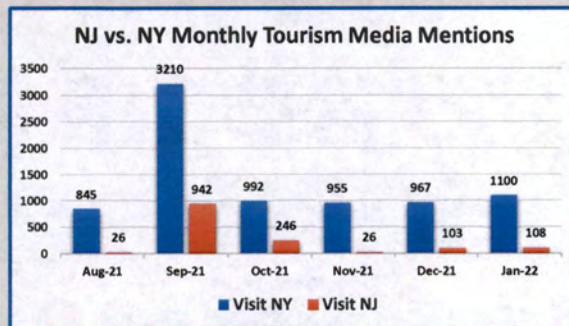


- New Jersey is 11<sup>th</sup> among states for population but 32<sup>nd</sup> for Tourism spending
  - Much of NJ's Tourism \$9M budget is focused on promoting the shore, Atlantic City, and the Meadowlands
  - At present, only 5% of hotel tax receipts are reinvested in tourism, a major disadvantage
  - Governor Murphy has proposed \$25M in new tourism spending in 2023 as part of his American Relief Plan
- New Jersey annually distributes grants of \$1.8 million to 14 Destination Marketing Organizations to promote tourism
  - Somerset County received \$128,000 in 2020, a typical amount for county DMOs
  - By dividing up revenue, limited funds are diluted and efforts uncoordinated
  - Only South Jersey can promote itself to New York City based on a 50-mile rule
- Somerset is part of the northwestern “Skylands” tourism region (map)
  - The county is in an unhelpful “North Jersey” section of state’s tourism website, magazine
  - There is an opportunity to petition the state to carve out a “Central Jersey” region

\*Main source for this section is NJ Tourism Association [as published by](#) Stockton University's Light's On (Summer 2021).

# New Jersey Tourism Struggles for Attention

- Lacking funds and a strong strategy, New Jersey Tourism under-performs New York Tourism in generating media coverage
  - With twice the population, New York Tourism gets five times as many media mentions and twelve times the audience



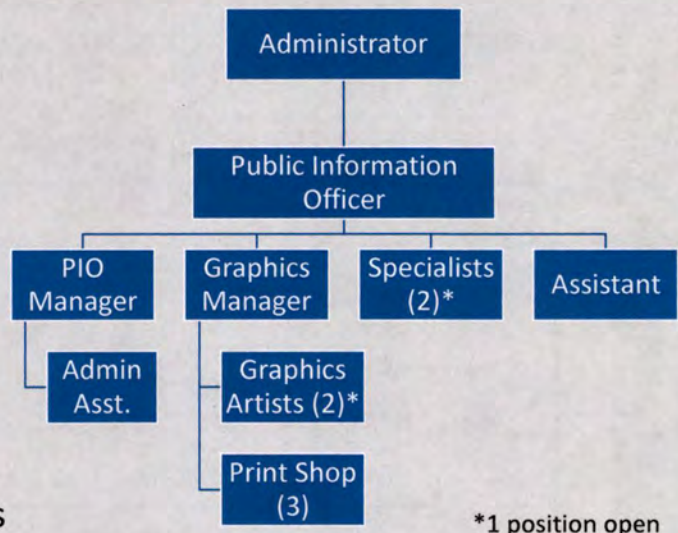
Source: Critical Mention, August 2021 - Jan. 2022

NY query: "Visit New York" or "Visit NY" or "Visit NYC" or "VisitNYC"; NJ query: "Visit New Jersey" or "Visit NJ" or "VisitNJ."

## 5. Review current organization charts for public communications and marketing

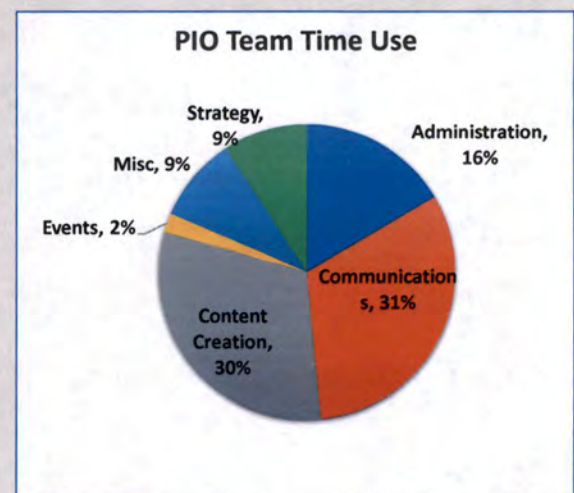
# Current Organization Chart for Communications and Marketing

- The Public Information Office currently has a headcount of 12
  - 6 are dedicated to the graphics and print shop functions
  - 6 are professional communicators
  - 2 positions are currently open
- PIO Leader reports to the Administrator
  - However, he is not a member of the senior leadership team
  - The role does not help shape policy
- The PIO directly supervises all county communication professionals



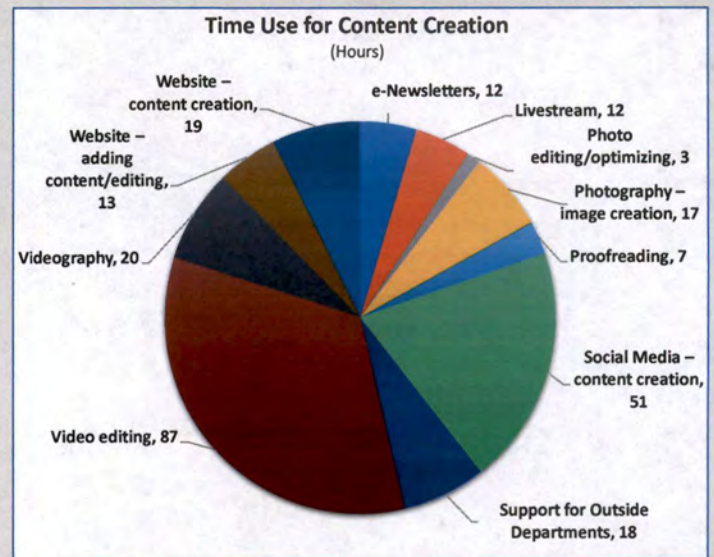
# How Time Is Spent by Communications Team

- The communications team is focused on core mission
  - 61% of time is spent on communications (mostly press releases) and content creation (mostly video & social media)
  - Only 16% is spent on administrative tasks
- Time devoted to strategy is modest
  - Only 9% of team time is spent on strategy planning, and mainly by the PIO leader
  - Ideally, the team would spend more time developing strategies prioritizing most important messages and developing campaign tactics for wider audiences
- Miscellaneous projects tend to involve special events
  - Reorganization meeting, Juneteenth, Diversity Festival, etc.
  - The County Directory is another major miscellaneous project



# Hours Spent on Content Creation

- A lot of time is devoted to video shooting and editing
  - 107 hours per month
- Social media creation is another major focus of effort
  - 51 hours per month
- Noticeably little time is spent on still photography
  - Just 17 hours per month
  - Given trends in social media and the beauty of Somerset County, much more time should be devoted to photography



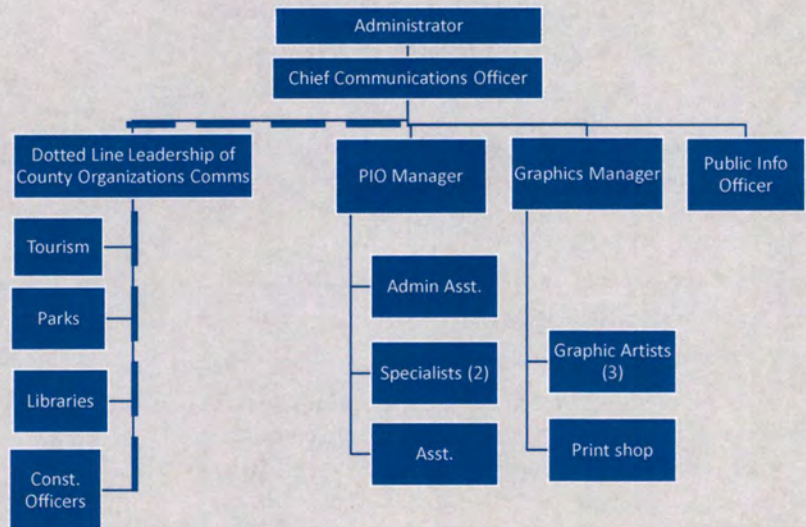
# Raising Staff Performance

- Future hiring should focus on skill deficit areas
  - Cultural diversity and non-English language skills to improve communications outreach to diverse communities
  - Photography, video, and social media skills
- Training of existing staff
  - We should work toward having more “utility players” who can do almost everything at a minimum level of competency
  - Training on photography, video, social media
- Reporting lines and assignments
  - Most junior staff should report to mid-level mentors
  - Assignments should be made more consistently along “news beats” to develop expertise and internal client relationships



# Recommended Comms Structure

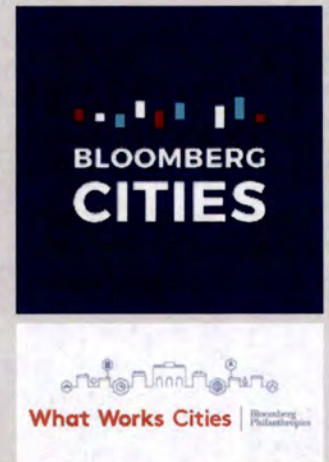
- Proposed structure for new CCO envisions a significant dotted-line leadership role with arms-length county organizations to steward the county brand, share best practices, and coordinate strategies and scheduling
- Within the PIO office, the recommendation also envisions the PIO Manager having more day-to-day supervision of the team



## 6. Recommend best practices for staffing/management allocation and scheduling

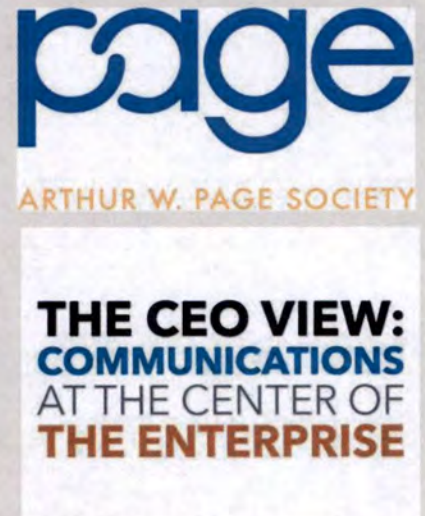
# The Future of Local Government Communication

- Local governments are rapidly changing how they communicate due to the decline of independent local media and the rise of digital, as described at a Bloomberg Cities workshop in 2018
  - Detroit hired a former journalist as its “chief storyteller.” “With a team of two writers, two videographers, and a photographer” the team set out to “uplift and amplify the stories of Detroiters who are doing good things.... Most people only hear one of two stories about Detroit: one that focuses on crime and poverty and the other that’s centered on downtown revitalization... We desperately need a platform where people can be seen and feel a part of the Detroit story.”
  - Gilbert, AZ has a “chief digital officer who sits at the nexus of communications and digital government services... She took over 311, in part because they recognized that handling customer complaints is as much about closing communications feedback loops with citizens as it is about fixing potholes...A lot of open-data portals end up in the IT department, but nobody uses them because they’re not marketed....we need the technologists to get the data ready for us on the back end, but they’re not the right ones to be running the front end.”
- With the decline of local media, local governments are following the lead of businesses in taking on more of the storytelling responsibility



# Professional Communications in 21<sup>st</sup> Century

- The private sector increasingly identifies communications as central to success
- The Arthur W. Page Society is the world's leading professional association for senior public relations and communications executives and educators
- Recently, the organization is undertaken studies that show the degree to which communicators have become central players in private enterprise—with implications for government, as well



# The Chief Communications Officer

In a recent report, the Page Society defined the expanding role of Chief Communications Officers:

- A strategic business leader and counselor who is an “informed, vocal, compelling and trusted counselor” to leadership.
- The steward of reputation and a “conscience counselor” who ensures actions match rhetoric, that values are practiced and not merely preached.
- An effective communicator, capable at using the proliferation of digital channels and the more indirect influence that enterprises have in shaping perceptions and communicating effectively.
- An integrator who can drive cross-functional collaboration around strategic priorities.
- A builder of engagement systems that use sophisticated platforms to map stakeholders, understand them (usually through data), and systematize the process of engaging with them, not merely as segments but as individuals.

**THE NEW CCO:  
TRANSFORMING  
ENTERPRISES IN A  
CHANGING WORLD**

MARCH 2016

*Arthur W. Page*

ARTHUR W. PAGE SOCIETY

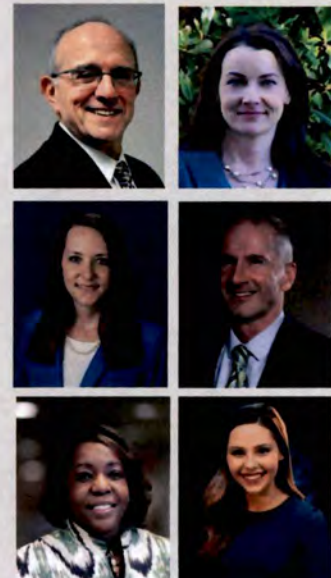
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## The CCO in County Government

Counties increasingly employ Chief Communications Officers

- DeKalb County, GA
  - Eagle County, CO
  - Kern County, CA
  - New Hanover County, NC
  - San Mateo County, CA
  - San Bernadino County, CA
  - St. Louis County, MO
  - Palm Beach County, FL
- Job descriptions illustrate wide-ranging responsibilities
    - The DeKalb County Communications Department is responsible for ensuring transparency and building trust between the county and all constituents, including residents and employees, through the dissemination of timely, accurate and dependable information. The department manages all internal and external communications, including message development, issues management, style standards, news releases, advertising, editorials, publications, social and digital media, website content, photography and ceremonial documents. The department operates the county's award-winning television station, DCTV 23.
    - The San Mateo Chief Communications Officer leads the County's media relations, public affairs and crisis communications. She is responsible for strategic messaging on a wide variety of projects and initiatives and oversees a team charged with telling the County's story using a variety of platforms. She co-chairs the Bay Area Joint Information System (JIS), a nine-county collection of communicators who collaborate on best practices and regional messaging. During times of emergency, she also heads the County's JIS.



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# A Reimagined Communications Function

- Oversees a PIO team with expanded skills
- Steward of county brand, guiding marketing for tourism and economic development
- Coordinates with, advises, and inspires other centers of communication
  - Public Safety, Health, and Emergency Management
  - Constitutional Officers
  - Parks Commission
  - Library Commission
- Advises Administrator on policy from a communication perspective
- Measures and reports communications performance



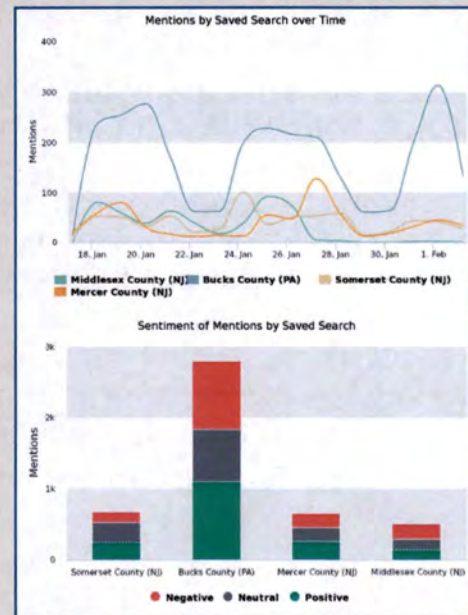
# Planning & Scheduling

- Currently, there is a lack of communication planning, such as:
  - Setting objectives and goals for the year ahead
  - Choosing key themes to be communicated
  - Identification and coordination of priority events
  - Strategic thinking about timing and prioritization of press releases, eblasts, etc.
  - Coordinating the schedules of Commissioners for photo ops
- There should be an annual plan that is developed in consultation with the Administrator, department heads, and other county organizations (Library, Parks, Tourism)
- A calendar platform should be used to help give all employees advance notice of coming events, and allow the communications team to prepare
  - Somerset County Library System is willing to extend its calendar platform countywide, Communico



# Performance Measurement

- Professional communicators today measure outcomes rather than outputs
  - Number of media mentions
  - Size of audience reached
  - Positivity of coverage
  - Intended outcomes achieved such as website visits, traffic generated, sales achieved
- Somerset County should license a monitoring system that allows it to track over time and benchmark against other counties and tourism destinations



# Leadership through Shared Services

- The print shop within PIO offers printing services to other county entities, municipalities, and school districts via "shared services"
  - Produces ~\$82,000 in annual revenues to offset operating costs
  - Pricing is 40%+ below commercial market rates
- Opportunity to expand offering
  - Could include graphics services and possibly PR
  - Somerset County Library System is willing to be intermediary for county non-profits who might seek affordable county printing
  - The county's expanding "shared service marketplace" represents an opportunity to increase these revenues
- Recommendations
  - We recommend finance department assess whether pricing fully recaptures overheads on printing, and helps establish pricing for graphics
  - If the county increases PIO shared services, leverage that role to increase communications leadership among municipalities and school districts
  - Continue to insist that shared service work focuses on low-urgency projects that won't preempt county work.



| Year | Make | Additional Description     |
|------|------|----------------------------|
| 2017 | RAM  | 2017 RAM 1500 4x4 Crew Cab |
| 2017 | RAM  | 2017 RAM 1500 4x4 Crew Cab |
| 2017 | RAM  | 2017 RAM 1500 4x4 Crew Cab |
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| 2017 | RAM  | 2017 RAM 1500 4x4 Crew Cab |
| 2017 | RAM  | 2017 RAM 1500 4x4 Crew Cab |

## 7. Review IT hardware and software, digital assets

## Digital Communications Overview

Somerset County digital platforms should provide quick and easy access to a wealth of information and services while promoting pride, uniqueness, and a sense of community

County digital communications encompasses three core channels:

1. Email platforms
2. County website
3. Social media

### Areas needing greatest improvement:

- Need for greater visual depth to promote county beauty, heritage, and vitality across all channels
- Need for trackable, mobile-friendly email campaigns, and a constituent email management system
- Upgrade to a more visually oriented website that is easy to update, and easy to navigate, across a complex array of county functions and services
- Measurable goals and benchmarks for results across all platforms



# Email Communications Are Important

Email remains the primary vehicle for communications outreach, especially for government, with mobile playing an increasingly important role. It plays a key role in driving people to priority content.

- Email messaging cited by 74% of County residents as the most desired form of communication from the county  
➤ Rutgers Communications/Outreach Survey
- Government-related emails are the most commonly opened, with an average open rate of 28%  
➤ Mail Chimp
- Poorly formatted mobile emails are deleted by 70% of users in under three seconds  
➤ "Email Monday"



# Email Has Growth Potential

- Significant opportunities for reaching more residents exist through expanding lists and simplifying subscription
  - Current list size for County email outreach is 21,855 active subscribers, representing only 8.5% of adult residents
  - Open rates average 30%, roughly on par with national benchmarks for government emails. A commercial email platform for major mailings will reveal open rate and click rates on key calls-to-action, enabling emails to improve reach by building on past success.
  - Email subscribers are faced with a daunting number of subjects to choose from, especially in the News category with over 50 topics, and no single category is sent to the entire list
- A campaign is needed to increase the size of list
  - Cross-market with other county organizations
  - Use a pop-up invitation on the county homepage
  - Use social media accounts to extend invitations
  - Occasional invitations via Nixle
  - Encourage forwarding of ebulletins
  - Offer sign-ups at county sponsored events



# How to Improve Email Newsletters

With the importance and volume of email communications generated by the county, we recommend establishing a multi-level email strategy, leveraging existing capabilities

## Commercial-grade email marketing platform

For email newsletters, high priority messages, messages with important calls to action, and other high-visibility messaging that should be measured and tracked

### Benefits of the commercial-grade email platform:

- Visually oriented emails that are easy to create and duplicate using templates
- Mobile responsive mobile emails are increasingly the majority of views
- Detailed reports showing opens, clicks, mobile vs. desktop viewing
- Ability to test and track subject headings, automatically resend emails to non-openers
- High quality list management that reduces the chances of undelivered emails or spam complaints, can link into existing list data dynamically

Current newsletter mobile view  
very hard to read without pinch and zoom



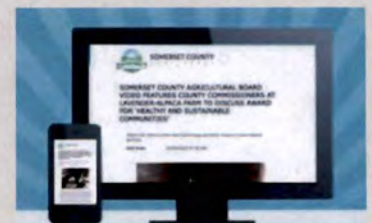
# Email Communications for Routine Business

## Granicus/internal CMS email platform

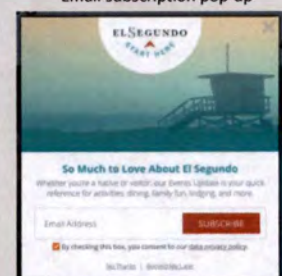
The internal CMS platform offers a powerful way to send out email on a wide range of topics to segmented audiences from a wider group of senders related to the daily business of county operations

### Recommended improvements to existing Granicus email settings:

- Simplify subscription web page. Organize topics by category in the News section. If possible, consolidate to fewer topics
- Increase font size on email body text to 12 point minimum
- Set email background to white to ensure readability on mobile devices in dark mode
- Clarify/simplify email subscription process, including creation of a simple sign up on the website for general messaging

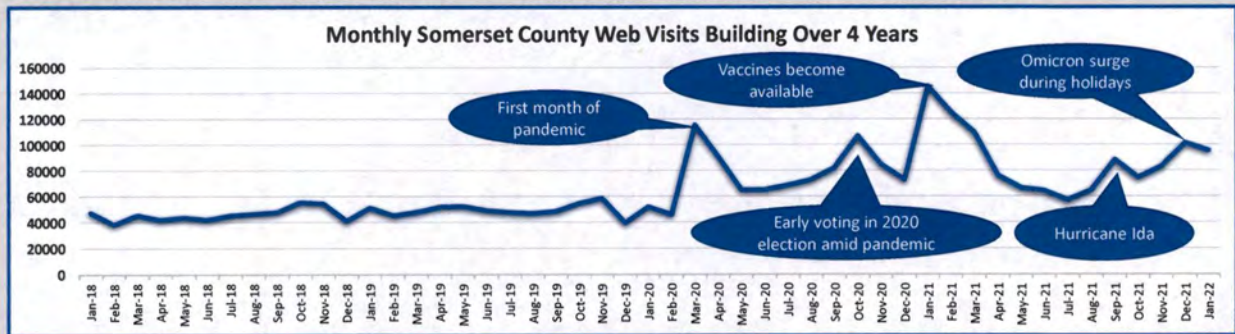


Email subscription pop-up



# County Website Steadily Gaining Traffic

- The County website has been steadily gaining traffic, from roughly 40,000 users per month in 2018 to 100,000
- The pandemic produced the two biggest peaks
  - 145,000 in January 2021 when vaccines became available
  - 115,000 in March 2020 when the pandemic began
- Politics and weather emergencies also have produced peaks
- Even between emergencies, traffic is running at least 50% above prior levels



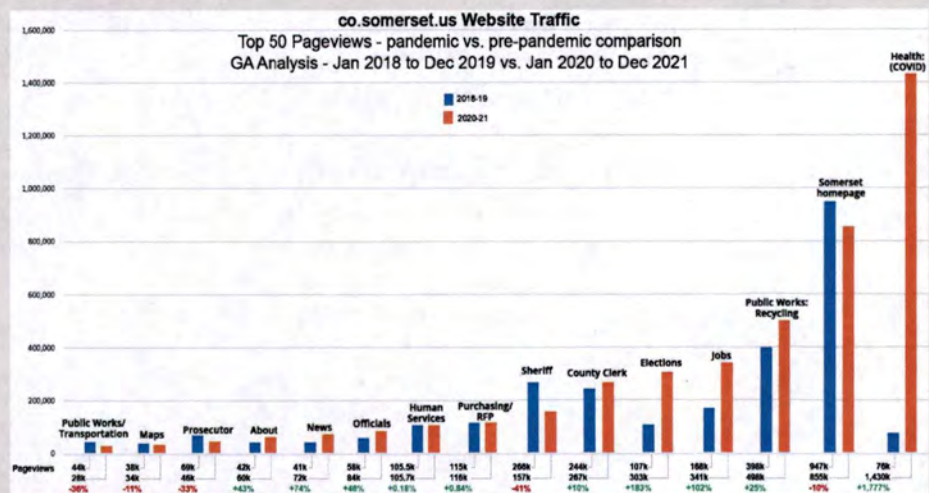
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# Website Demand Rising for Health, Jobs, Elections

- Enormous increases in website usage during the pandemic reflected increased interest in health, jobs, and elections

Featured navigation should be informed (but not controlled by) user patterns. Current featured navigation does a good job of balancing high traffic areas with important county priorities.



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# County Website: Improving the Platform

## Website Recommendations

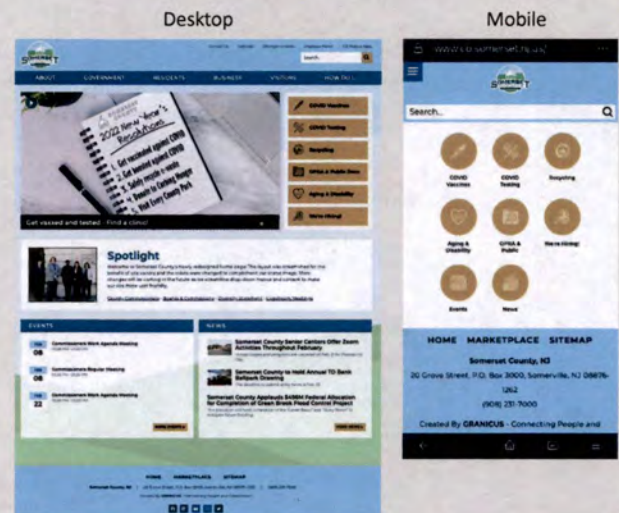
While the recent upgrade provide some necessary improvements, the county website needs a design and structure upgrade to be determined by a formal bidding process to select the next generation county website platform, a powerful information system tailored to city and county government. Currently, best-practices of a user-friendly, branded site are not fully met.

**The current website relies heavily on text and text-based graphics, while under-leveraging photography and video**

Our goal is to ensure the web platform to be improved to meet current and future challenges, including a visually compelling and robust sense of place and pride, while benefiting from the increased awareness and interaction between County and residents

**Desktop and mobile should be visually consistent and reflect the same featured content**

The mobile version (far right) falls especially far short of current standards, offering no photos or graphics



# County Website: Improving the Homepage

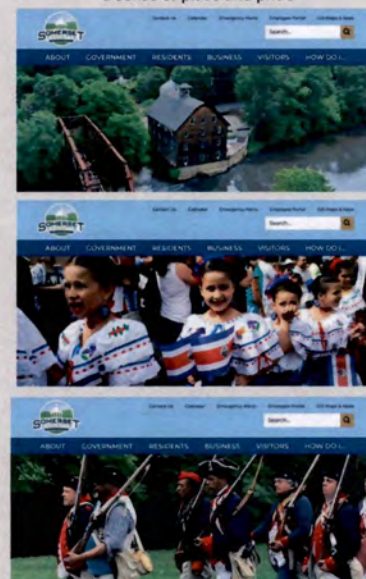
## Website Recommendations (cont.)

### • Homepage Image slider

The home slideshow should ideally be full width to maximize visual impact and scale down for tablet and mobile. Use it as an image showcase of the visual beauty and history of the county. Text-based messages should be included, but only selective, high impact messages.



Example: use photographic slides to express a sense of place and pride



# County Website: Improving Design Elements

## Website Recommendations (cont.)

- **County logo image** needs optimization so that image is crisp and all text is readable. Currently, the years and motto are not readable at standard resolution on most desktop browsers and not at all readable on mobile devices. *A solution would be a modified version of the logo optimized for website usage.*



- **Translation feature** (removed in current update) has value in utility and is a sign of inclusiveness. It should be limited to widely spoken languages within the community, with Spanish being the largest group. Menu selection should be written in the chosen language, if technically feasible.



# County Website: Improving Design Elements

## Website Recommendations (cont.)

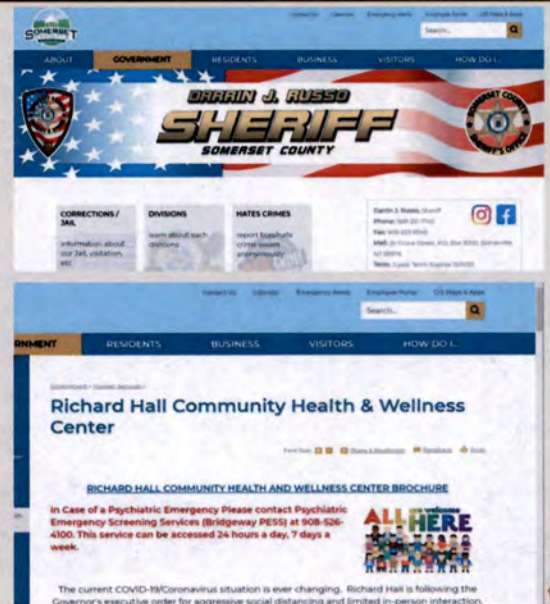
- **Mega Menus**
  - Some sections are too large and need subcategories—government and resident mega menus are so tall, they scroll on many desktop screens, this is not expected by users.
  - Menu items refer to events/initiatives in the past
  - Some menu items link directly to PDF documents that are old and not formatted for web/mobile viewing
- **Visitor section**
  - This entire section needs more life, photography, video, sense of place and pride.
  - Build integration recognizing that many “visitors” are county residents
  - Needs much tighter and seamless integration with the tourism site
  - Remove timed exit page to Somerset County Tourism (see illustration)
  - Consider removing “visitor” designation altogether in favor of “discover Somerset”
- **Emergency Communications**
  - Multiple tiers of emergency messaging should be predefined with clear roles and guidelines
  - Consider alternate emergency homepage for catastrophic events
- **Global footer**
  - Expand footer to include a wider set of key links to top menu sections along with most-used sub-pages. Contact information should also be present.



Limit exit pages to only third-party non-affiliated websites. For example, Tourism, Library, and links to SC social platforms should not have exit pages.

# County “Sub-Brands” on the Website

- The county has “sub-brands” that come across awkwardly on the website
  - The Sheriff’s page has a wholly different look, and is insensitive to how “law and order” imagery can come across to diverse communities
  - The Richard Hall Center offers poor navigation to populations who may be under duress
  - Other “sub-brand” pages include the Surrogate, County Clerk, Greater Raritan One Stop Career Center
- Sub-brand site design standards should be developed and implemented
  - Agree on a standard format for sub-brand pages with an emphasis on navigation ease
  - Ensure branding compatibility with colors and design
  - Recommend prominent and welcoming photo for each sub-brand page (and all pages)



# Social Media: Engage and Grow

- Significant resources are devoted to maintaining a vibrant social media presence for the County on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. The same improvement to content required for the website and email are even more important on social media.
  - Strategy and goals are needed to set objectives for social platforms, with benchmarks established to measure progress
  - Increase paid social: Advertising is a key component to successful social media strategy
  - Follow the 80/20 rule: 80% of content on social platforms should entertain and promote pride and participation while 20% should convey critical agendas and messaging.
  - Maintain vigilant monitoring and listening: Social media is a critical barometer of sentiment and feedback, requiring Adequate resources for listening and responding
  - Leverage video: Quality video consistently receives views and engagement, but deployment and promotion drive visibility
  - Create more high-quality photography to promote a sense of place and pride, especially on Instagram



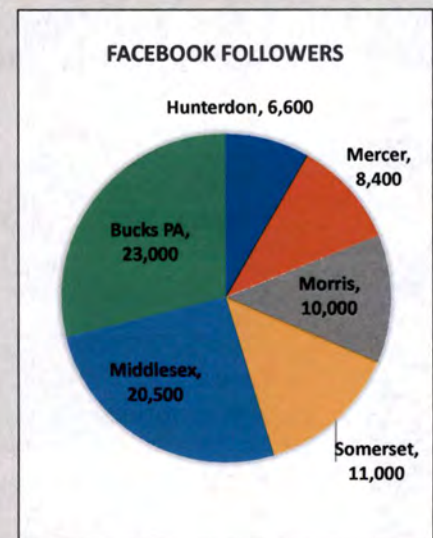
# Social Media: Facebook



- Facebook remains the dominant social platform and has been a major focus of Somerset County social content creation
  - Total number FB followers is proportional to population and has plenty of room to grow
  - The number of people reached in 2021 more than doubled over 2020, from 194,000 to 524,000
  - Consistent with website traffic, top posts with high engagement are pandemic-related
- Facebook presents challenges for audiences and reach
  - Facebook followers are 75% female.
  - Followers unevenly distributed across the county
  - Followers trend older and peak in the 35-55 range



Top post of the past 90 days



# Social Media: Instagram



- Instagram remains an essential part of social media communications, as the image- and video-driven platform skews younger and often generates more engagement than Facebook
  - The Somerset Instagram account illustrates the need for more posting overall, more photography, more visually compelling video content, more adherence to 80/20 rule
  - Top video Reelz was about recycling. Top posts in 2021 were related to Hurricane Ida
  - In 2021, Reelz averaged 1,500 views, videos averaged 200 views, posts averaged 62 likes

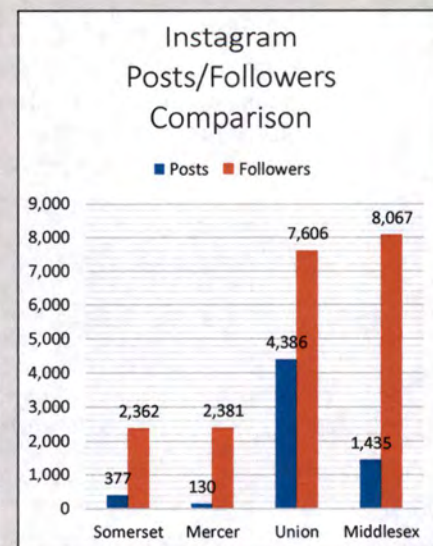
Top reel video: 2,765 views



Most liked post: 143



Most viewed post: 749



# Social Media: YouTube



- YouTube is often overlooked as a social platform and treated more as a video repository, but this is a mistake:
  - According to a 2021 Pew Internet Research report, YouTube is the largest and fastest growing social platform
  - YouTube skews more male than other platforms and is a way to offset demographic imbalances from other platforms
  - YouTube is the least politically polarized social platform

➤ 2021 Pew Internet Research Study
- The Somerset YouTube channel delivers important content, but engagement varies widely and many video views are in the single digits
  - Channel lacks a branded URL, uses the default long string of characters
  - Channel lacks folders so visitors to channel home see only recent uploads
  - A wider variety of subjects is needed, especially featuring county beauty, recreation, arts, diversity, and lighter interest to be mixed in with important initiatives and county business
    - Visit Somerset Channel has only 8 subscribers and 6 videos.
  - Middlesex County, with 1k subscribers and highly branded balanced content is a good reference point

Top videos 2021



# Social Media: Looking Forward

- Somerset County may wish to consider additional social platforms, although each should be evaluated in terms of relevant audiences and objectives achieved
  - NextDoor may be helpful for localized emergency communications
  - TikTok reaches a younger audience and may be helpful with public health and mental health
  - Private messaging apps such as WhatsApp tend to do well with immigrant communities
- These do not need to be addressed urgently



# A Systematic Approach to Photos & Video

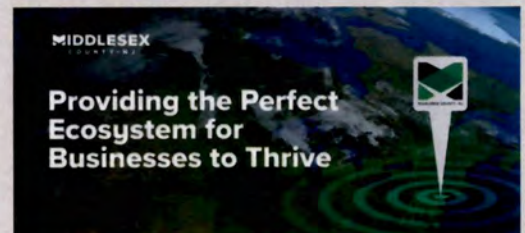
- All digital and media channels today require high-quality visuals
  - Both photography and video
- The County is fortunate to have a rich and diverse visual landscape that can be promoted
  - However, the county lacks a comprehensive visual database
- The PIO Team needs a sophisticated, shared, and searchable photo and video archive system
  - There should be a systematic investment made in collecting such images and video
  - An archive database should be shareable with Tourism, Parks Commission, and Library System



## 8. Offer benchmarking to compare against other County's plans/ information offices

# How Other Counties Manage Communications

- As of now, most counties are managing communications similarly to Somerset County
  - Public Information Officer plus several staff, depending on county size
  - "Marketing" is usually left to a Destination Marketing Organization
- A few counties stand out
  - Middlesex County, NJ stands out for its large marketing investment managed by consultants
  - Bucks County, PA stands out for building a county brand via a DMO
  - We identified several counties that have hired Chief Communications Officers as champions for both communications and marketing
- Somerset County has good reasons to innovate in communications
  - Large dependence on business travel that needs to be placed by leisure travel via destination marketing
  - Lots of great assets and stories to draw upon
  - Lack of strong local press creates need for internal capability



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## Middlesex County Invests in Marketing

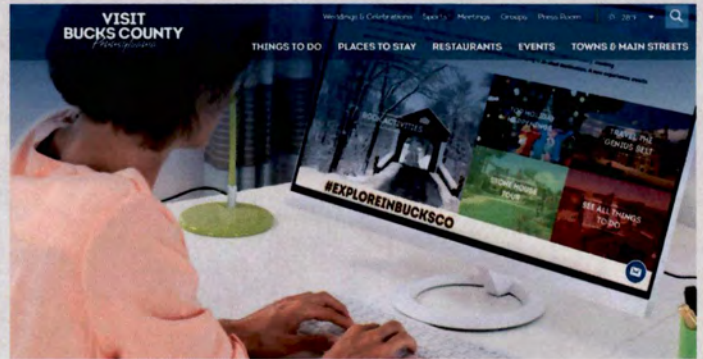
- Middlesex County is making a major investment in marketing, increasing its communications budget by 1800%
  - Messaging focused on innovation, opportunity, leadership, and health care with an economic development objective
  - Campaign is managed by external consultants reporting to county government
  - The campaign is not designed to support tourism, which continues to be managed by an independent DMO



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STRATEGIES

# Bucks County, PA is a Worthy Model

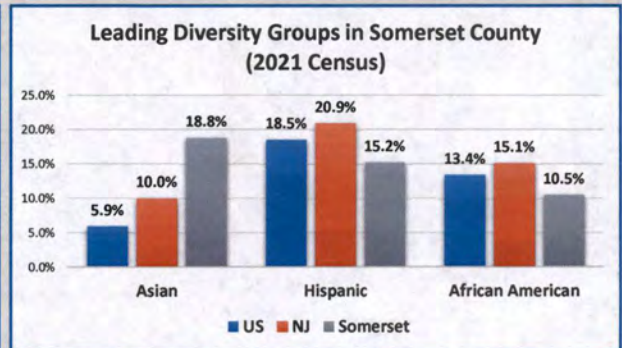
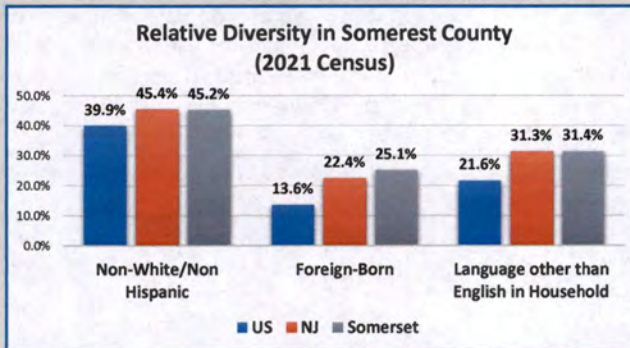
- Bucks County has succeeded in creating a brand with a county name
  - The effort goes way back to the 1960s when the visitor bureau's predecessor was known as the "Bucks County Historic Tourist Commission"
  - A substantial investment of 10 employees at Tourism Bureau
  - Bucks has 90% more residents than Somerset, but earns 500% more media mentions and 900% larger media audiences
  - The county and Tourism websites have a similar look and support each other



## 9. Improving outreach to diverse communities

# Somerset County Is Highly Diverse

- Somerset County is more diverse than the nation as a whole
  - 45% are non-white/non-Hispanic and 25% are foreign born
  - Since 2010, the Asian population has grown from 14.1% to 18.8%; Hispanic from 13.0% to 15.2%
- The four municipalities in the county that are “minority majority” also have above-average poverty
  - Over half are non-white in North Plainfield (73.2%), Franklin (66.2%), Bound Brook (63%), South Bound Brook (58.4%)
  - More than half of the county’s 16,577 persons in poverty live in these same municipalities per 2020 Census



# Communicating with Diverse Communities

- In many cases, these communities have above-average need for social services, public health support, and economic aid, particularly since the COVID-19 crisis began in early 2020
- Yet, many of our communication strategies are not suitable to these under-served communities
  - To some communities, services and events seem the domain of the white and middle class and can seem unobtainable or irrelevant them
  - Campaigns should be designed for people of color and immigrant communities based on their language, visuals, and cultural context
- Often, the best way to appeal to people in these communities is to go into neighborhoods and participate in everyday activities
  - Building outreach specific to communities is an efficient way to bring about social progress and achieving equity and inclusion across the different communities
  - Cultural competency is crucial to providing quality care and service while achieving excellence goals and program longevity.



# Customizing Marketing Collateral



- There are misconceptions about mental health and other preventive health services (such as vaccines) within communities of color
  - Effective marketing is an opportunity to dispel those myths and spread the word about what is and is not true, while driving positive behaviors
- Revise existing collateral or create new materials
  - Collaborate with communications team and be sure that all public relations and marketing materials – brochures, newsletters, annual reports, and training manuals – anything that the public will see – offer an accurate representation of the demographics and a thorough understanding of the population we seek to serve
  - Use images showing the intended community accurately and positively
  - It is important to have members of that community review collateral ensure the community is portrayed appropriately, and language used correctly, to maximize effectiveness and minimize the chance of offending

# Current Collateral Needs Improvement

- Somerset County is making an important effort to engage in outreach to communities with brochures and flyers in libraries and other locations
  - The success of this will depend significantly on the quality of the collateral available
  - This effort can be enhanced by a committee or task force supporting design teams
- In a review of collateral material, we observed several issues
  - The design of collateral often is “stuffy,” with too much detail and insufficiently compelling photos and headlines (far right)
  - Adaptation to diverse communities often is limited to a Spanish translation (far right) and in this example the word “career” is not translated leaving folks unaware of the organization’s purpose
  - Collateral messaging and design can be severely off-putting, to the target audience, as in the example of a depressing Juvenile Institutional Services brochure presumably designed for parents of at-risk kids
- We recommend
  - Less detail and sharper headlines, such as “Looking for a Job?” rather than “Services for our Customers”
  - Greater sensitivity and customization of visual images to connect with specific communities—not all jobs are white collar, or for middle-aged
  - Use of more languages, even on the same version to drive inquiries by phone or website



# Pop Culture Provides Outreach Opportunities

- Major pop culture stories can provide opportunities to open important conversations, as in the case of Chadwick Boseman and the Black/African American community
  - Cultural icons, historically significant persons or community faith leaders influence acceptance of reality — especially illness, mental illness, death and grief
  - Chadwick Boseman case story is an example of that can open a conversation about colon cancer to a younger African American Community, and provides significant insights about cultural values
  - According to the American Cancer Society, colorectal cancer disproportionately affects Black/African-Americans as the group is 20%. Roughly 40% of Black/African-Americans with colorectal cancer are expected to die more than other groups as well
  - As with most health disparities, access to care, cultural risk factors and socioeconomic barriers contribute to colorectal cancer prevalence, timeliness of care
  - During a time of communal mourning, related health outreach and education efforts can be a venue for solid relationship building.
  - Particularly in the Black/African-American community, the declining health is considered a private, personal journey making public health conversations difficult
- Communicators must be intentional about reaching out to diverse communities
  - In supporting each community, it is essential that you do so with a genuine intent and positive approach to building the community up
  - The opportunity is to grow a long-lasting relationship with the community we seek to better serve
  - When educating, ask questions about a person's understanding of the service and assist with processing "the big picture" with culturally competent information when needed



# African Americans & Faith Communities

- Within Black/African-American communities, faith can carry more weight than medicine. Many Black/African-Americans are deeply connected to their faith community and will turn there for support before seeking help from other agencies. The church serves as the bedrock of spiritual activity, a center of social engagement, an indispensable source of information on all topics and a critical foundation of support in times of crisis.
- Faith is "It." Studies suggest that Black/African-Americans are willing to participate in health education programs such as smoking cessation, blood pressure and cancer screenings when they are held at their churches, mosques, and synagogues. And since the place of worship is often the primary source of information on a wide range of subjects, it offers one of the best ways to reach the widest audience in a safe, trusted environment.
- Find your "In." Identify the person who handles community-related issues. This might be a lay leader, member of the Diaconate (deacon or deaconess), parish nurse, the head of the congregational care ministry or a social worker who serves as a community care coordinator.
- The Pastor's role is a critical one. Generally, pastors emphasize the duality of spirituality and proper self and community care. It is important that he/she understands the wide range of available services, and how they can support his/her congregants. Be aware that some families see the pastor's job as praying for healing, first and foremost.



# Partner with Community Groups



- An important outreach strategy is to partner with organizations that already exist in the communities the county wishes to reach
  - This approach gives physical access through email lists, events, and community centers
  - Just as importantly, the endorsement of community group leaders helps gain credibility and acceptance
- Examples of organizations working locally, regionally, or statewide include:
  - Arab Americans
    - Wafa House has a mission to "Strengthen Family Through Intervention and Education" (Clifton, NJ): <https://www.wafahouse.org/>
    - Palestinian American Community Center (Clifton, NJ): <https://www.paccusa.org/>
  - Korean American
    - Praise Korean Cultural Community Center (Somerset, NJ)
  - Caribbean & Central American
    - El Centro Hispanoamericano (Plainfield, NJ): <https://elcentroni.org/>
    - Puerto Rican Action Board (New Brunswick, NJ): <https://prab.org/>
  - African American
    - AACT-NOW (African American Community Together NOW) is an initiative of the National Alliance on Mental illness (NAMI) in New Jersey to connect with NJ's African-American families to provide culturally competent education, support and advocacy <https://www.namini.org/programs/multicultural/aactnow/>
    - The many churches serving the African American community, such as the First Baptist Church Lincoln Gardens
  - South Asian
    - AICC – Asian Indian Chamber of Commerce: <http://aicc.net/>
  - North Asian
    - New Jersey Chinese Community Center: <https://www.chinese-community-center.org/>

# Reaching Communities Where They Live, Work

- Reaching under-served communities in Somerset County involve multiple challenges, including cultural and language barriers, as well as the scarcity of affordable public transportation
- One rapidly growing strategy is to go to communities where they are via a Mobile Outreach Vehicle (MOV), as described below by the Legislative Analysis and Public Policy Association in 2021
  - "One popular method of community outreach is through mobile outreach vehicles (MOVs) which usually consist of large vans, trailers, or campers that are customized to provide health care and harm reduction services in targeted communities. A large benefit over brick-and-mortar clinics is the fact that MOVs are ambulatory and can travel to those who most need services. Additionally, one MOV can service multiple neighborhoods and can travel to targeted areas in the community as drug use patterns emerge. By becoming a recognizable presence in a community, MOVs become familiar to, and gain credibility with, the community in high-risk neighborhoods.: Paper [available online](#).
- Communities that have launched these programs include
  - New York City, NY and Caroline County, MD (shown in photos)
  - Denver, CO; Lower Fairfield County, CT; Baltimore, MD; San Francisco, CA; Greater Chicago, IL; Philadelphia, PA



# Benefits of Mobile Outreach Vehicles

- The mobile units highlight our community level approach to build trust and deliver services in innovative and engaging ways.
- The extension of health and social resources to people experiencing economic and social difficulties via street canvass teams can bring vital services to people where they are. These efforts will have a lasting impact well after the pandemic.
- These vans will connect and complement the county's vast outreach efforts by directly delivering vaccinations, physical health, mental health, and harm reduction services to those in need and to meet people historically disconnected from a continuum of care where they are, engage them, and invite them in for care without appointments or other barriers.



# Constitutional Officers Embrace Diversity

- Diversity has increased in Sheriff's Department since 2019
  - Of 21 current new hires, 10 bring diverse backgrounds
    - Hires are Hispanic (4), Asian (2), African American (3), Muslim (1)
    - Hires include females (4) are females and LGBTQ (1)
  - Among promotions to Sergeant
    - 1 African American and 1 Hispanic
    - 3 females and 1 LGBTQ
  - The Sheriff has formed a "chaplaincy" outreach program
    - 7 faith leaders from the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish traditions
- Diversity in Surrogate's Office
  - The County Surrogate is African American, and the department employs other non-white persons
- The County Clerk's staff can speak 10 languages
  - Five staff members speak 2+ languages, including Spanish (4), Portuguese, Gujarati, Hindi, Tagalog, Japanese
  - County Clerk is a linguist who adds German, Russian, Swedish



## Strategy Opportunity:

Deploy Constitutional Officers as outreach teams into under-served neighborhoods.  
Provide **mobile outreach vehicles** and literature in multiple languages, organize and attend events, etc.

# Outreach Via Somerset County Library System

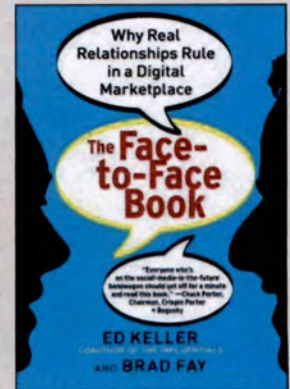
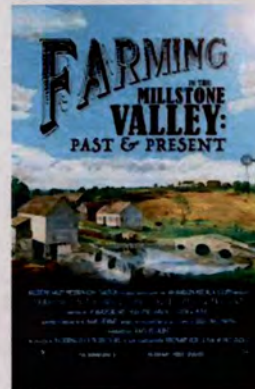
- The Somerset County Library System represents a key avenue for outreach to diverse communities
  - A dozen locations, including in several under-served communities such as Bound Brook/South Bound Brook; Manville; North Plainfield
  - 24 staff members wear nametags indicating non-English languages spoken, including American Sign Language, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Gujarati, Punjabi, Hungarian, Tamil, Hindi, Konkani, Marathi, Chinese, Russian, Japanese, Malayalam
  - Programs designed for diverse communities
  - Free internet connections for those lacking it at home
- The SCLS is eager to offer literature on county services, and welcomes county representatives
  - It is crucial the collateral is well designed for intended communities



## Appendix

# Stepping Stone Strategies

- A communications, marketing, and consulting firm based in Somerset County
  - Principal is marketing expert Brad Fay, author of an award-winning marketing book and former chairman of a major marketing trade group.
  - The firm provides communications and marketing advice to local governments, and non-profits.
  - The firm owns [Discover Central NJ](#), a regional marketing platform.



- Team members
  - Yuri Marder for evaluating digital and IT assets, equipment, and processes.
  - Donnetta B. Johnson for evaluating county strategies and tactics for connecting with diverse audiences.

## Key Personnel Information: Brad Fay

A nationally-known marketing expert, W. Bradford "Brad" Fay is the Founder and President of Stepping Stone Strategies. He brings a wealth of experience as a leader and strategist in business, government, and non-profits.

Brad is co-author of *The Face-to-Face Book: Why Real Relationships Rule in a Digital Marketplace* (Free Press), winner of the American Marketing Association's "best book in marketing" award in 2012. He also shares screenwriting credit on a 2018 documentary film, *Farming in the Millstone Valley: Past & Present*, selected for the Garden State Film Festival. He has been quoted as an expert in social marketing and influence in the *New York Times* and in Hillary Clinton's *What Happened*.

Brad was co-founder of the Keller Fay Group, a data and analytics company in New Brunswick, NJ focused on social media and consumer influence, acquired in 2015 by Engagement Labs, a Canadian company. As Chief Operating Officer and Chief Commercial Officer, Brad led development of the firm's TalkTrack® and TotalSocial® products, winning the Grand Innovation Award of the Advertising Research Foundation. TotalSocial combines social media data with survey research data about offline conversations and brand recommendations.

Brad is Board President of the Millstone Valley Preservation Coalition, the sponsor of the Millstone Valley National Scenic Byway in Somerset. He served as Board Chair of the Word-of-Mouth Marketing Association, now part of the Association of National Advertisers, and he is a past President of the Market Research Council of New York, NY. Brad was elected to the Montgomery, NJ Township Committee, serving four years, including one as deputy mayor.

Brad holds political science degrees from Colby College (BA) and the University of Connecticut (MA).



## Subcontractors: Yuri Marder

Yuri Marder is a senior digital marketing manager, web developer, and social media manager with over twenty years of experience in digital media development, management, strategy, and brand promotion.

A resident of Hillsborough, Yuri is the director of web and social media marketing at William Paterson University in Wayne, NJ. He has also worked as a web designer and digital marketing strategist for clients in financial services, retail, pharma, and a variety of non-profit and community organizations.

Yuri has hands-on experience in social media strategy, development, campaign creation, and day-to-day operations. He has in-depth experience in all areas of digital/web communications, from online advertising campaign management to HTML/CSS/Javascript coding to graphic design, layout and production, along with extensive experience with the tools and techniques of video and still content creation.

In his capacity at William Paterson, Yuri has built a collaborative and effective marketing team from the ground up in a complex institutional environment. He created a structure to leverage a culturally diverse group of trainees, entry-level staff, editors, designers, strategists who work with executives to create an inclusive, effective, and award-winning digital marketing program.

Yuri holds a BA from Columbia University in Latin American History.



## Subcontractors: Donnetta Bishop Johnson

Donnetta Bishop-Johnson is a prominent community leader and Hillsborough business owner. She began her career as a programmer and senior project manager at AT&T where she managed several projects of major renown in the telecommunications industry. Donnetta then left her corporate career to pursue her passion as an entrepreneur as the founder of the Allegra School of Music and Arts which has been in operation since 1999. Donnetta is also the founder of the Hillsborough Music Festival which promotes local business in partnership with government and the arts in support of youth mental health and suicide prevention.

In 2021, Donnetta became the Executive Director of the Stoutsburg Sourland African American Museum in Montgomery Township, Somerset County.

Throughout her career, Donnetta has worked as a powerful advocate for diversity and inclusion. She began as a pioneering Black woman in technology, rising through the ranks to become a successful manager. As an advocate for building successful communities where talent and initiative are recognized and diverse people, lifestyles, and cultures are celebrated, Donnetta has worked tirelessly for nearly three decades to synergize the strengths of communities and has generously mentored legions of young students and emerging professionals with an emphasis on the powerful voices of young women.

Donnetta holds a BS from Pace University in Math and Computer Science.

