

The **Communications Outreach Team (COT)**, established in 2022, was created to plan, coordinate, and implement the organization’s strategic communications plan and program. Since its inception, the beta group has undergone several changes and improvements to strengthen its effectiveness. Initially led by a single career employee serving as the program’s coordinator, the structure has since evolved in 2026 to include two coordinators with clearly defined and targeted areas of responsibility. These enhancements will contribute to a more focused and efficient team.

The following is a SWOT analysis of the 2025 COT program.

Strengths

- Broad team representation—by platoon members from all platoons, one lead coordinator, administrative input from the Assistant Chief and District Secretary—all support diverse perspectives and strong department-wide coordination.
- Efforts to hold monthly meetings promote consistent planning, monitoring, and alignment with the Strategic Communications Plan.
- Ambitious community presence through events, station tours, field trips, and school-focused safety programs builds public trust and hands-on education.
- Targeted safety messaging (fireworks, wildfire preparedness, burn bans) aligns with seasonal and district priorities.
- Home safety initiatives (free smoke alarms and address markers) directly reduce community risk.
- Partnerships with DNR and participation in county-wide wildfire protection meetings expand regional alignment and expertise.
- Effective use of newsletters, social media, digital platforms, and internal messaging ensures timely and accurate information flow.

Weaknesses

- A small team carrying multiple responsibilities increases burnout risk and inconsistent output, especially during peak operational periods.
- Outreach demands routinely exceed staff capacity during summer, wildfire season, and holidays.
- Inconsistent follow-through on several 2025 commitments, including a missed school event, affected trust and reliability.
- 2025 goals exceeded available staffing and structure, resulting in incomplete initiatives.
- Lack of standardized workflows (templates, communication protocols, documentation) creates dependence on individuals rather than systems.
- Limited performance metrics—engagement, attendance, satisfaction, and program impact are not consistently tracked.
- Digital strategy lacked structure, including posting schedules and a coordinated communication plan.
- Internal communication relied primarily on email, which received less attention than public-facing messaging.
- Crews were expected to prepare for station visits without receiving key details (guest counts, curriculum, handouts, materials), creating confusion and inconsistent experiences.
- Limited cooperation and participation from on-duty crews and volunteers reduced event staffing and support.
- Insufficient communication to crews contributed to misunderstandings and reduced trust, weakening department-wide support for outreach.

Opportunities

- The improved 2026 organizational structure adds coordinators and administrative support, expanding capacity.
- Three new team members bring fresh ideas, new energy, and innovative approaches.
- Nextdoor and Microsoft Forms can support district-wide surveys, feedback, and two-way community engagement.
- Standardized processes—event briefings, templates, documentation, timelines, and follow-up reporting—can improve consistency and reduce person-dependence.
- Ability to expand resiliency programs (fall prevention, wildfire readiness, CPR awareness, storm preparedness, home fire safety).
- Stronger digital engagement across Facebook, Instagram, Nextdoor, the website, and a potential TikTok pilot.
- Improved data analytics can support evidence-based decision-making.
- Growing partnerships with schools, HOAs, community organizations, and agencies support recurring annual programs.
- Increased accessibility through translated materials, ADA-compliant content, and outreach to underserved groups.
- Grants and business partnerships may support safety initiatives, wildfire mitigation, and public education programs.
- Community Connect implementation may enhance resident engagement and preparedness.
- Improved communication with crews can strengthen trust and increase participation in future events.

Threats

- Challenges in reaching diverse demographic groups with current communication channels.
- Continued lack of crew engagement could further reduce support for outreach and education efforts.
- Operational demands and emergency responses limit staff availability for outreach activities.
- Budget constraints may restrict materials, tools, and program expansion.
- Inconsistent messaging could pose reputational and potential legal risks.
- Social media misinformation may undermine district credibility.
- Lack of a formal crisis communication plan may result in reactive or inconsistent messaging during major incidents.
- Increasing wildfire seasons and severe weather heighten demand for preparedness communication, stretching available resources.