



## MANAGEMENT LETTER of AUDIT OBSERVATIONS

May 1, 2023

Anita Skipper, Chief Public Information Officer

An audit of the Public Information Office (PIO) was completed on May 5, 2023. The issuance of an official Audit Report is pending Management Responses. Internal audits can be carried out in all areas of County operations, with an audit focus upon improving operations by providing management with a reasonable assurance of whether or not internal controls exist and are effective, in their areas of operation. When internal control deficiencies are identified, they are brought to management's attention, along with recommendations for improvement, within the Audit Report. As a result of this Audit, the Internal Audit Function will schedule a 90-120 Day follow-up with the Public Information Office concerning progress made on addressing Moderate-level risks/findings indicated in the official Audit Report.

The internal audit process consists of a thorough review and understanding of applicable SOPs and policies governing operations and staff actions. Interviews with knowledgeable staff, direct observation of department activities, as well as the testing/reviewing of documentation that supports activities are conducted. This Audit focused on the period of October 1, 2022 – March 31, 2023.

The following comments, which have been or will be discussed with you, are intended to improve the Public Information Office's internal control structure. Comments are presented here and not within the official Audit Report, as these items are viewed as beyond the immediate scope of the Audit. As with all Management Letters, an official response in writing is not required; however, at minimum verbal feedback to the internal auditor is encouraged. A few auxiliary items that were revealed, of which the Public Information Office leadership may want to stay abreast and address, are below (*Management Input is italicized*).

## **Audit Observations: Public Information Office**

### **1. Staff Training –**

Inquiries by the internal auditor indicated a desire by staff to receive training that could enhance their current skill levels. While advanced training with Adobe Suites and Content Marketing were among the desired courses for staff, the Audit recognizes that most staff in this department have experienced multiple changes in management over a few short years. Thus in addition to considering annual training protocols for staff, the Chief Public Information Officer is encouraged to also consider employing team-building measures/options that would elevate department cohesion, morale, and establish a strong sense of stability.

**Management's Response:** *I accept this recommendation and will encourage skills training, starting with this year's annual review and seek out team-building options that will integrate with our work schedules by the end of the first quarter of FY 23-24.*

### **2. Crisis Communications Protocol –**

An implied audit objective was to ensure that the PIO has some protocol in place to address and manage crises. Whether it is responding to the spread of misinformation or communicating during emergencies, prudence dictates the establishment of guidance that can be followed during or to avert a crisis. The Chief Public Information Officer shared with the internal auditor a draft of the *Strategic and Crisis Communications Plan* that thoroughly addresses this objective. The Audit recommends that management take the necessary steps to update and establish this draft as department protocol, sharing it with department staff upon completion. As applicable, some portions of the plan may benefit from a review by Human Resources, the Emergency Manager, and/or the Legal department.

**Management's Response:** *I accept this recommendation. I will finalize the draft and share it with my direct supervisor, ACM of Administration. From there, I will follow her guidance on how to move it forward.*

NOTE: ACM – Assistant County Manager

### **3. Lack of Consistent Countywide Branding -**

Interviews with staff, as well as a review of varying county logos revealed the lack of a consistent county brand. Herein, each department may display different fonts or colors on the county logo, which appears on signs, documentation, apparel, and business cards. Standardization of the county logo can be an important step in establishing a consistent county brand that is recognized by all.

While the benefits of brand standardization are many, management should consider the costs of implementing such changes on a countywide basis. The PIO appears to be in the best position to coordinate and establish branding standards, and the Audit recommends taking the necessary steps to do so. In the event that the County desires to have more control over its (updated) brand, then considerations should be given to acquiring a trademark or another

applicable form of intellectual property right. As a part of establishing an immediately recognized and uniformed brand, the Audit also recommends consideration for updating current logo image(s), making them more representative of Doña Ana County.

**Management's Response:** *This process has already started. We concluded a countywide logo contest on May 19, 2023. The logo submissions have been shared with the commissioners. A panel of judges consisting of one representative from each district and one staff member will select five submissions for the commission to choose from. The winners (first, second and third places) will be announced at the June 13, 2023 BOCC meeting.*

*Once a logo has been identified, we will update the already drafted Branding style guide to include the new logo. We will explore a multi-phased approach to implementing the new logo with communication templates and email signature lines being in the first phase.*

#### 4. **Social Media Training -**

The PIO has operated social media sites since 2014, and has developed SOPs and best practices for operating these sites. Thus as others desire to operate a county-owned social media site, the PIO would be well-positioned to administer policy awareness training and make administrators aware of state statutes. In addition, the Chief PIO has offered to administer such training as necessary. Thus the Audit recommends that the PIO go forth with actually developing a training program. As 'training' is normally considered a Human Resources (HR) duty, as a matter of professional courtesy the Chief PIO could make the Senior Human Resources Administrator aware of the training curriculum.

**Management's Response:** *I accept this recommendation. We will use Facebook tutorials for best practices in order to create a curriculum by the end of August 2023.*

### VERBAL DISCUSSION

**Continued Segregation of Duties** – If the current procurement and receiving arrangement is dissolved, the Audit recommends maintaining the departmental segregation of duties pertaining to ordering and receiving merchandise.

**NOTE:** Listing of verbal discussions informs the reader about matters discussed with the department/office manager; such items do not require written details as they result from standard due diligence, and their risks are assessed as very low.

#### **Audit Observations: Clerk's Office**

##### 1. **Lack of Social Media SOP -**

An interview with the Clerk's Communications Coordinator revealed a number of best practices currently employed within this office. The Clerk's establishment of a secondary in the event the primary social media person is unavailable, along with communicating with

DAC PIO personnel as necessary indicate sound social media operating conduct. However, the Audit noted areas that could be improved upon, which are listed below. Establishing a departmental SOP for social media operations could set the direction and standards for consistency in this Office.

A departmental SOP could

- a. Establish and stress the usage of archival software as a matter of sound recordkeeping as well as address future IPRA requests.
- b. Propose a means of addressing inappropriate postings on your sites. Herein, hiding versus deleting should be considered as necessary.
- c. Institute crisis management templates or guidance to respond to misinformation campaigns, or to inform the public of a lack of comment due to an ongoing investigation.
- d. Categorize circumstances that would prompt engagement with Human Resources or the Legal Department before rendering a response.
- e. Encourage annual or semi-annual professional education/training necessary for social media personnel to stay current on changing platforms and/or social media practices. This could be in conjunction with or in addition to the virtual training for government employees that are already offered to members of the Government Social Media Professional Association.

Standard Operating Procedures particular to a department and its job functions serve to preserve the knowledge of not only how to most effectively perform a function, but also set a standard by which such performance may be measured. Established SOPs 1) can serve as a defense against the effects of ‘brain drain’ when knowledgeable staff decides to leave the county, 2) chronicle best practices that also shorten the learning curve for oncoming staff/management, and 3) allow for uniformity in performance as well as in performance expectations.

The Audit recommends establishing a departmental social media SOP. As the PIO has already established several SOPs, the Communications Coordinator is encouraged to acquire, utilize, and/or modify said SOPs to suit the needs of the Clerk’s Office. As a means of transparency, the Audit further recommends that any established departmental social media SOPs be shared with the PIO Department.

**Management’s Response:** *Communications Coordinator will create a Social Media SOP to be implemented by the County Clerk, Chief Deputy Clerk, and Communications Coordinator for the Clerk’s Office Social Media Platforms.*

2. **Lack of Metrics -**

An interview with the Communications Coordinator revealed that metrics/statistics of the number of social media followers, number of interactions, a particular audience that is reached, etc. are currently not maintained.

While this information can be useful to track progress for each social media platform, it is not required. Social media statistics for the PIO Department include the platform name, purpose of using that platform, the number of postings, followers, and engagements. As this information can be used as a quick reference tool for tracking platform progress and for delineating the purpose for each platform utilized, the Audit recommends that the Communications Coordinator consider conducting a costs versus benefits analysis for implementing and maintaining such a tool.

**Management's Response:** *County Clerk's office appreciates the recommendations and will maintain the current procedures in place.*

Thank you for the attention given to the items cited above.



Ernest Harvin, CIA