



SOCIAL MEDIA AND CITIZEN'S ENGAGEMENT ASSESSMENT

FOR THE TOWN OF CANTON

Presented by

O'Neill and Associates

December 14, 2018

Finalized – April 25, 2019

Thirty-One New Chardon Street Boston, Massachusetts 02114 (617) 646-1000 (617) 646-1290

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	Section I
Executive Summary	
Process and Objectives	
Audit Findings and Recommendations	Section II
General Findings	
Recommendations	
Implementation	Section III
Social Media Protocol	
Social Media Checklist	
Templates	
Appendix	Section IV
List Interviews Conducted and Materials Reviewed	



I. INTRODUCTION – SOCIAL MEDIA ASSESSMENT

Executive Summary:

This report outlines the findings of the social media and community engagement assessment conducted by O'Neill and Associates (OA) for the Town of Canton. The report was developed through a comprehensive process involving in-person and phone interviews, examining social content and protocols, and additional research by OA.

Throughout the engagement, Town of Canton personnel indicated their challenges with social media centered on capacity, protocols and managing public feedback. The goals of this engagement:

- Identify ways to increase engagement with the Canton community through the website and social media platforms;
- Develop a strategy to help the town improve its interactions with residents through the transactions they make with the town; and
- Help Canton build a community climate where residents are "heavily and regularly engaged" in the town's governance.

OA held a kickoff phone call with Louis Jutras of the Town of Canton on August 1, 2018, to align on goals and objectives. This was followed by meetings with Town departments on September 6, the Library on October 5, and the Select Board Chair on November 8. Each of these meetings focused on social media usage, discussion on protocols, and specific examples of social posting and/or resident response. OA spent most of November assessing meeting notes and preparing this analysis and recommendations.

Throughout the process, we were informed and dutifully guided by Louis Jutras. His management of this project has been central to the successful completion of our work.

OA is honored to present the Town of Canton with this social media assessment and plan.



Process and Objectives:

Following a May 2018 agency presentation and interview with the Town of Canton, O'Neill and Associates was selected to conduct an assessment of the Town's social communications with an objective to enhance citizen engagement. O'Neill and Associates examined the Town's social media processes, content types, and resource capabilities and limitations.

Our two-phased approach is detailed below.





IN OUR AUDIT, WE LOOKED AT THE FOLLOWING:	fy
Town of Canton	✓
Police Department	✓
Fire Department	✓
Building Department	✓
Parks and Recreation	✓ ✓
Council on Aging	✓
Library	
Board and Committees	fy
Planning Board	 ✓ ✓
Substance Abuse Committee	
Emergency Management	✓



II. AUDIT FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

#1: Overall Positives and Areas of Improvement

The Positives:

• By engaging in this process, Town of Canton is demonstrating how seriously it takes citizen engagement

The Town of Canton is to be applauded for engaging in this review and analysis process of its citizen engagement. In doing so, Town leadership is demonstrating that it takes seriously the need to communicate with residents and to further strengthen its ability to receive feedback. Furthermore, this process will allow the Town to create a stronger infrastructure for engagement and communications, especially through its digital and social media tools.

It is worth noting that while social media platforms are important tools for communicating with citizens, they aren't the only way to promote two-way communication. The Town should continue to use meetings, traditional media, and other forms of engagement, as well.

• Canton's most public-facing departments understand the importance of social media and utilize digital platforms well.

Some of the Town's most public-facing departments – including police, fire, and the library – are aware of the importance of social media and have put social media strategies into place that foster communications with citizens. This is important because it means that residents are interacting with Town departments already, which gives the Town a foundation upon which it can build. Those strategies take into consideration potential pitfalls as well as opportunities, which demonstrates an important level of sophistication that can provide other departments with a good model to follow.

• The Town recognizes that it needs to utilize digital and social media platforms as a way of filling an information vacuum.

The Town expressed a concern that residents are receiving information from non-official entities online and recognizes that one way to fill an information vacuum is by engaging more directly through social media platforms. We will address ways to manage interaction with those non-official groups later in this document, but the acknowledgment by Town officials that they can better address the needs of constituents utilizing their own platforms is positive and should be encouraged.



Areas of Improvement:

• Town departments need better, more streamlined coordination for pushing information out through social media platforms.

Social media can feel overwhelming for those not used to dealing with it, and for Town entities, it can often feel as if you are just fielding negative comments without any positive feedback. The paradox of social media is that the more a department posts, the less likely they are to experience overwhelming negativity since citizens will feel as if they are getting useful information from official town entities.

It's clear from our discussions that creating a structure for coordination and developing a protocol for sharing information across departments will benefit all of the Town divisions. It will address some of the capacity concerns by helping departments generate content and it will give the department heads a better understanding of what is and is not appropriate for social media. In general, a more coordinated process will benefit ALL departments, including those like the public safety departments and the library who are already using their digital assets in an appropriate way.

Finally, due to overarching issues with capacity that will be discussed later in this report, Town Departments should make sure that they are active on *at least* Facebook and/or Twitter as their primary social platforms, and deputize one person within their department as the "manager" of those pages. They may not be the only person contributing content, but it is important that social media responsibilities be part of someone's job description. If a department with a social media page cannot support this, they should reach out to an information systems manager or public information officer to discuss consolidation of content.

• More support is needed for departments who are not robust users of social media.

Certain departments are understandably concerned about both their capacity to use social media and the ways to appropriately address negative comments they receive on Twitter and Facebook. Providing some additional support for those departments, particularly as they become more adept at using social media, make sense so that they can feel comfortable in engaging with residents. That support can come in the form of social media training for department leads, development of content so that they don't feel overwhelmed by content creation, and the creation of a process to deal with significant negative push back.

Certain departments may always experience some kind of negative response to social media because of their roles within the Town. But if those departments have the support they need to address their concerns, they will feel more comfortable using those platforms. And the more they have a presence, the easier using those platforms will be.



7

• The Town should consider hiring a public information officer, especially one with social media experience.

The Town of Canton is currently without a public information officer and should consider creating that role. Because citizen engagement is increasingly taking place in digital spaces, that individual should have experience in digital and social media as well as traditional media.

The public information officer can and should act as the point person for distributing information across departmental platforms as well as be a resource for department heads managing social media accounts.

• The Town must institute a community management process for dealing with non-official social media groups.

The current "official" policy of the Town in dealing with non-official social media groups is for the Town to just ignore what is posted in those groups. We do not feel that is the best policy to rectify any misinformation that may be distributed on those groups and likely leads to information void.

We recommend that the Town update its policy to address those groups so that it includes some constructive engagement within the groups. That does not mean that the Town is required to answer every question on a Facebook group in a detailed way. But if incorrect information is posted on a non-official Facebook group, it is not inappropriate for a town official to post something that corrects the information and then instructs visitors to visit the Town's officials Facebook account or website. Furthermore, departments should be able to utilize such groups to post information about an upcoming event or program, if they wish. Developing a protocol to address these questions will help provide departments with guidance while ensuring that correct information is being distributed.

#2: Printed Collateral and Physical Promotion of Social Media

In order for the Town's social media platforms to be effective, residents need to be aware that they exist and should be encouraged to follow them. A good tactic to encourage usage is making sure that you leverage public signage to inform Canton residents that they can follow your pages on social media. Notices, official flyers for town events, reminders, and even official mail from the Town should include a reminder of all of the ways that the average citizen can connect with you (even if it just includes the Twitter or Facebook icon with the link). Almost anywhere that you feel the need to include a phone number or an email, you should include social media and website information. This same approach should be used for Town of Canton promotions in *The Canton Journal.*



#3: Amending the Human Resources Policy #V-62

As part of our audit, we also reviewed the recently passed Human Resources Policy (Policy Number: V-62). There is one area that struck us as unnecessarily restrictive and we feel could be tweaked: the use of images of children under the age of 18. The town, through departments like the Public Library, and Parks and Recreation, frequently host family-friendly or even child-centric events. This restriction as it is currently written, with no provision for asking parents for permission, puts a serious strain on the Town's ability to inform residents with children about this event because it restricts your ability to have images of the event that are targeted to a key audience - families.

Rather than an outright ban on such images, we would recommend that you explore the possibility of allowing parents to consent to have their *families* featured in posts about fairs, events at the library, etc. This makes the policy consistent with your other restrictions on the use of the image or likeness of individuals in your social media posting. One middle ground compromise to explore would be to use images from behind (no faces).

In addition, we recommend that the Citizen's Engagement Committee review item #3 of the HR policy, which deals with posting to non-official social media sites on behalf of the town. This is important due to the way information is shared in online communities today, in Canton and many similar communities across the Commonwealth. Often, there are community pages set up for residents of a town or city to discuss local activities, share funny articles or images, and more. Those pages can often become a hot spot for misinformation. As such this policy should be better understood or adapted to ensure that Town employees are properly equipped with the ability to meet people where they are and provide them the most accurate information that they can.

#4: Brand Consistency

There is a need to make sure that every official account of the Town of Canton has a consistent look and feel. Not only does this approach lend credibility to your smaller pages, it also creates an easily recognizable identity for your online community. Most cities and towns feature some version of their town seal in the visual identity of their various departments, for example. There are plenty of simple ways to ensure that the average citizen knows that they are correctly looking at the Town of *Canton Massachusetts'* social pages, rather than any of the other Cantons in the United States.

#5: Compliance and Open Records Law

As mentioned in your Human Resources Policy, all officials who are authorized to use the official social media accounts of the town must keep in mind that they may constitute public records and should be treated accordingly. This is perhaps one of the easiest things for people to forget about the difference between official government social media accounts and those of private citizens and businesses. We strongly recommend that you regularly redistribute this content and make sure that all existing employees (and new employees) familiarize themselves with this.



We also recommend that the Citizens Engagement Committee consult with the Town's counsel to determine an appropriate checklist of requirements or reasonable measures in order to ensure ongoing compliance with Massachusetts' Open Records Law, particularly as it relates to archiving social media posts, where they need to be stored, and how to maintain those records. There are several archiving tools made specifically to help public institutions comply with Open Records Law.

#6: Post Scheduling and Planning

In order to address some of the capacity issues that we have found above, we recommend that you look into acquiring a social media scheduling service for your various social media accounts. There are a variety of capable products on the market such as Hootsuite and Sprout Social that cover multiple social media type services. Even Tweetdeck offers basic scheduling for Twitter. After deputizing a person (or people) as social media manager, you they should create an account with a scheduling service so that your pages can begin delivering regular content. This regular activity will grow your follower base and your engagement and, after some necessary preparation, will free up additional capacity to focus on taking your content to the next level.

We also looked at the Everbridge messaging service. We view this a distinct from social media and recommend that Everbridge remain separate from this social assessment as it is geared to the Town's emergency communications. Delivery of emergency communications through the Town's social media pages is important, however. But social media should follow or be closely coordinated with the timely alerts sent by Everbridge, and not the other way around.

#7: Department-Specific Recommendations

TOWN OF CANTON (MAIN)

The Town of Canton runs their own Facebook and Twitter page with a strong mid-size social media following, considering the size of the Canton community. With 654 likes on your Facebook page and 779 followers on Twitter, the Town of Canton pages stand at the lower-middle of social pages for similar communities. This is perhaps the primary area where the main page can improve. The Town of Canton pages should be viewed as a central hub for information, from which residents can get updates on everything happening in the town, and what all other departments are up to. While Police and Fire Department pages will usually have more followers due to the nature of the information that they share, the Town of Canton pages should be able to at least grow their follower base somewhere within the range of those pages.



Overall, while the information that is shared on this page is certainly important, there are a few easy things that can be done to make this content more accessible, and thus make your overall social media presence more engaging. One of the most prominent areas for improvement is the stark lack of visual content. Visual content is critical to the success of social media posts, as it is one of the primary attention-grabbing aspects. As you can see from chart 1, social and digital content featuring images range from 40% to a whopping 230% more effective in garnering engagement of almost every type.

Finally, as mentioned in the general recommendations, the Town of Canton should seek greater coordination in social content among departments. We feel the need to underscore this because most of the content that will be a part of this coordination will probably be sufficient to post or share to the Town of Canton main social media pages. As mentioned once before, the central accounts should be seen as a hub for everything that one would need to know about Canton.



Content Recommendations

- Town Website
 - Present information clearer on the home page. If the content management system allows, we recommend that the use of bold type and colored font can help to draw attention to important information. For example, on <u>https://town.canton.ma.us/</u> the text link to the Reservoir Pond site could be bolded if that information is deemed important.
 - The link to the Town's Twitter handle is virtually unnoticeable. Repositioning, bold or color could address this.
 - Similarly, transaction tools might be colored similarly as a visual cue to users that these are transactional services
 - Online bill payments
 - Parking ticket appeals
 - Permitting
 - Service requests
 - Public records requests
- Social media



- Employee Recognition
 - Promotions
 - Hires
 - Citizen help/heroism of first responder
 - Remembrance
 - Law enforcement crime, etc.
- Training
 - As we note in the overall recommendations, OA believes that many of the Town's department leads will benefit from receiving training in social media use (from the basics of each platform to developing content and understanding reach). O'Neill and Associates can provide training that will empower departments and strengthen engagement between the Town and residents.

CANTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Canton Public Library already boasts a strong social media presence compared the size of its cohorts, the other department-level pages in the Canton social media ecosystem. The Canton Public Library's Facebook page currently has 964 likes and a decent engagement rate, bolstered by the promotion of a number of engaging events for families. However, there is a lack of a consistent visual brand that keeps the Canton Public Library from reaching the next level. In the below example different colors and fonts are used between two supporting graphics, for example.



In addition, surveys and other community research needs to be done to determine what content would be ideal to focus in on and build a brand around that content. Finally, the Public Library may want to consider coordinating with the Town of Canton to determine the feasibility of running low-cost boosted ads for big events, as there is some concern about increasing the impact of social media and digital communication on event attendance.

Content Recommendations



- Weekly reading recommendations
 - o Adult
 - o Children
 - Staff Picks
 - New to the Library
- Kids are already featured well, but the Library could do some kind of "Young Reader of the Week" or something for which ever young person reads the most books or submits a photo of themselves reading a library book in an unusual place.
 - Need to amend the HR policy on social media to allow for parental consent in taking photos of minors
- Article sharing—the library already does this, but we recommend doing more. Really interesting science/history/art/literature articles are a great way to drive engagement.

CANTON POLICE & FIRE DEPARTMENTS

The Canton Police and Fire social media accounts represent the largest social media following of any Canton account that we observed. The content posted and the size of both audiences reflect a comfort with social media not seen in other departments. This is a product of a lot of experience and targeted trainings specific to first responders. While there are general considerations like proper coordination with other department social media accounts (even outside of an emergency) that we could have touched upon, there is only one area that we feel really needs some guidance: the distribution of false information.

False information propagated online is a serious problem across almost every sector, and as such there are a variety of tips, tricks strategies, and tools with which you can deal with the problem. We recommend that the departments introduce a community management protocol that specifically addresses this. Designating a person who monitors and flags false information, identifying key people who can provide the necessary information to correct this false information, and a way to properly respond in a *timely* manner. While the logistics of this are being worked out, it would be good to work into the departments' regular postings, reminders of the deceptive nature of false information distributed through social media. To the extent that you can find photo evidence (ie. screenshots of posts with identifying information censored) of some examples, you should feel compelled to include that as well.

In addition, Fire and Police utilize the handles of the respective Chiefs. These allow the departments to bring additional voices into their social communications. We strongly applaud this tactic. It allows a department message to be reinforced, often with a personal touch.

CANTON PLANNING BOARD

The Canton Planning Board is very active on Facebook and regularly fosters two-way communication by responding to comments and engaging on an interpersonal level with citizens, whether they are on their page or in community groups online. This is a great approach



to social media, and the more that this style of engagement takes place (within reason) the more comfortable Canton citizens will feel reaching out. Particularly, as the Planning Board embarks on the development of a Master Plan, two-way communication is critical to minimizing and in some cases avoiding, conflict.

As this process unfolds it will be important to really work to explain the Master Plan in a variety of ways. Multimedia communication or the use of videos, pictures, social & informational graphics and more will be critical here. You may want to work closely with whoever becomes your Public Information Officer (or operates in a similar position), to develop this content as your organizational capacity will be stretched thin.

CANTON PARKS & RECREATION

The Canton Parks and Recreation Facebook and Twitter (460 followers) pages both feature strong followings and post a great amount of compelling content. In addition, there is some consistency in the visuals and flyers used to promote events around town. This is great, and has the makings of a strong social media strategy, which is reflected in the community that has been built so far. There is obviously a strong natural interest in the Parks and Rec programming, so most of our review focuses on ways to enhance your content, and potentially reach more people.

A big hurdle, which we mention above, is the structural difficulty around posting pictures of events. Due to restrictions on featuring minors in social media posts, it is incredibly difficult to post pictures of your events in real time. We think that a slight change in your town policy regarding social media will open up a lot of visual opportunities for your page in particular. Overcoming your challenges with event photos would open up platform opportunities for the Parks and Recreation Department. Instagram, for example is a visuals-first platform, and currently enjoys one of the fastest growing active-user bases of any platform. It is especially popular with young adults which also adds to its promise for Parks and Recreation. This would be a great space to expand into, but settling town policy on visuals must come first.

Content Recommendations

- Use more pictures. Images of the open spaces in Canton, of people, pets, or wildlife enjoying those spaces.
- Post image galleries or image posts of events that take place in parks. Good current use of pictures to promote events, but post some follow up images from the event to show that a) it was a success, and b) everyone had fun.
- Featured a Park/Protected Area. e.g. Visit_____ Park, located in the heart of Canton today to enjoy biking, the skate park, or just lying on the grass!
- Green Living Tips:
 - Recycling reminders
 - o Anti-littering posts
 - o Ways to save energy/reduce your carbon footprint



CANTON COUNCIL ON AGING

The Canton Council on Aging has built a very structurally sound Facebook page, with a solid, mid-sized community to show for it. The Council on Aging features strong reviews prominently, has a great response rate to messages, and frequently posts and shares engaging video content. While we have a few content recommendations to further engage people through your page, this is a great model for your smaller social media communities to learn from.

Content Recommendations

- Articles pertaining to elderly living. These can serve both as a resource for seniors and as a way to drive engagement.
- Advisories on scams (coordinate with Police when practical)
- Good use of videos of events. Consider using Facebook Live to stream events—Facebook algorithms like when users use its live video platform and will show it to more people than normal. Additionally, once over, the video will automatically populate your timeline to be watched in perpetuity.



III. IMPLEMENTATION

Social Media Guidelines and Protocols -- Best Practices

- Well-designed, frequently updated municipal website
- Social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (where appropriate)
- Utilize direct email updates and mailing lists
- Press releases in local, regional, and community publications and websites
- Diverse, in-language community outreach of all community populations
- Collaborate on social distribution

General Content ideas

Overall we note three areas of content: Community Outreach, Relatable, and Informational. Each area should find its way into every social account's content calendar.

- Community Outreach
 - Any volunteer charity days (pictures/video)
 - School outreach
 - Any events coordinated by Police to benefit the public
- "Cute"/Relatable Content—this category easily defined as the wholesome filler content used to drive public engagement. Things like:
 - Cat in tree rescue
 - Kids with a First Responder
 - Seniors with young people
 - Unusual items
 - Historical images
 - Hidden talents of municipal worker being a cook on the side, etc.
- Informational or "Teaching" Posts—designed to impart important community or safety information by highlighting an issue or problem found in the community—e.g. "Yesterday Officer ______ responded to a report of an unpermitted backyard fire within city limits. We like responsibly enjoying family and friends a campfire around as much as anyone, but we know we need a permit. In case you've forgotten, here is what you need to do..."
 - A great example of this is the TSA's Instagram, where they share unusual items you can or can't fly with, in a tongue-in-cheek manner.



Here is a checklist to be printed and used as you see fit. This checklist is a handy guide that articulates what to keep in mind before posting from an official Town of Canton account:

Checklist for Social Media Engagement

- Fact check content to be shared (text and/or images)
 - Confirm all details/dates/times
- □ Ask yourself what is the desired outcome of the post?
 - Invitation/enrollment/registration
 - □ Survey/open response
 - □ Transaction fulfillment
 - **General** information
 - Promotion
 - Alert e.g. traffic, weather, safety
- □ Customize post for the social platform
 - □ Use clear and engaging language
 - □ Focus on the call to action/desired outcome, whatever that may be
 - Use approved images when possible
 - □ Consider opportunities for approved video
 - □ Spell check everything
 - **D** Enlist a coworker to review the post

Before-posting

- Assess overall suitability of the post
- □ Be prepared to respond to feedback
- Plan ahead for follow-up posts (if necessary) e.g. will you use repost the same content or do you want to have modified versions as follow ups?
- Posting
 - □ Consider calendar and timing e.g. how far in advance? Tweets are short-lived so morning/noon/evening are better while Facebook is less frantic
 - Consider additional ways the content can be shared



IV. APPENDIX & USEFUL INFORMATION

Below are helpful visualizations of key facts about Facebook and Twitter, your most used platforms across all departments





Consider your target audiences and where best to connect with them:

% of U.S. adults who use each social media platform

	Facebook	Instagram	LinkedIn	Twitter
Total	68%	35%	25%	24%
Men	62%	30%	25%	23%
Women	74%	39%	25%	24%
Ages 18-29	81%	64%	29%	40%
30-49	78%	40%	33%	27%
50-64	65%	21%	24%	19%
65+	41%	10%	9%	8%
White	67%	32%	26%	24%
Black	70%	43%	28%	26%
Hispanic	73%	38%	13%	20%
High school or less	60%	29%	9%	18%
Some college	71%	36%	22%	25%
College graduate	77%	42%	50%	32%
Urban	75%	42%	30%	29%
Suburban	67%	34%	27%	23%
Rural	58%	25%	13%	17%

Source: Source: Survey conducted Jan. 3-10, 2018. Pew Research Center



A majority of Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram users visit these platforms on a daily basis

NET Several times a day About once a day Less often Daily 74% Facebook 23% 26% 14% 36% Snapchat 63 22% 39% Instagram 60 20% Twitter 53% 46 YouTube 17% 55% 45

Among U.S. adults who say they use ___, the % who use each site ...

Note: Respondents who did not give answer are not shown. "Less often" category includes users who visit these sites a few times a week, everyfew weeks or less often. Source: Survey conducted Jan. 3-10, 2018. "Social Media Use in 2018"

5561d1 mcd1d 63c m 2010

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



REGARDING: Social Media Training - Outline

Introduction

Social Media is an essential, everyday communications vehicle. While social media is a critical and effective communications channel, all forms of social media are not appropriate for all organizations, and every form of social media has its pros and cons. O'Neill and Associates helps clients navigate these challenges by creating comprehensive and thoughtful social media strategies that best reflect the goals of each organization. Because social media is intended to be user-friendly, O'Neill and Associates provides interactive small group tutorials to facilitate implementation of social media campaigns and the development of streamlined, efficient and responsible content.

Training Session Example Outline

1. Introduction

- a. Introduction to Social Media
- b. "Why Social Media"
 - i. Overview of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn
- c. Who is using Social Media?
 - i. Peers/Competitors
 - ii. Your Audience on the Major Platforms

2. Best Practices

- a. Facebook
 - i. Writing for Facebook
 - ii. Visuals
 - iii. When to Post
 - iv. Videos
 - v. Facebook Live
 - vi. Advertisements
 - vii. Messenger
 - viii. Instagram
- b. Twitter
 - i. Writing for Twitter
 - ii. Hashtags
 - iii. When to Post
 - iv. Videos
 - v. Periscope
 - vi. Advertisements



- c. Instagram
 - i. The ideal Instagram post
 - ii. When to post
 - iii. Hashtags
 - iv. Stories
- d. LinkedIn
 - i. Formatting a LinkedIn post
 - ii. Visuals
 - iii. When to Post
 - iv. Optimizing Your Profile

3. Demystifying Social Media

- a. Do's and Don'ts of Posting online
- **b.** Responsible posting (private and public sector)
- c. Checklist for Posting to Official Accounts

4. Creating a Social Media Strategy

- a. Identifying and growing your followers
- **b.** Writing engaging content
- c. Managing your Community
 - i. So You've Received a Negative Comment, What Now?
 - ii. Introduction to Trolls
 - iii. Crisis Prep
- d. Important Tools for Social Media Management
 - i. Scheduling
 - ii. Analytics
 - iii. Social Listening
- e. Promoting your Pages "Offline"

