



Town of Concord

Citizen Engagement Strategy

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Image: [North Bridge, Historical Site in Concord, MA](#)¹

Introduction

The Town of Concord, Massachusetts, has a population of 17,700 residents². Located in Middlesex County, Concord is considered the birthplace of the nation as the American Revolutionary War began there. Concord is also home to Walden Pond, a historical literary center, where Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, some of the greatest literary and transcendental minds in America lived, worked, and wrote. Signs of their presence in the community are still preserved. Concord is a great historical and cultural destination for visitors and locals alike. Like many New England cities and towns, the Town of Concord does their best to handle community concerns and continues to seek new ways to establish two-way communication with constituents.

¹Source: Flickr.

² U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

The Community Compact Cabinet

In early 2016, the Town of Concord entered into a Community Compact agreement for Citizen Engagement as an Information Technology Best Practice. In the summer of 2016, the Office of Municipal and School Technology (OMST) contacted Town leadership, to discuss the goals of the Compact in detail and further refine the project for Citizen Engagement.

As part of the Citizen Engagement project the Town of Concord identified three primary goals:

- Redesign and re-launch the Town's website
- Establish best practices for and increase use of social media to better communicate with constituents
- Transform the Town Manager's Weekly Report to increase its effectiveness and reach

Through this process Town leadership successfully worked a digital communications plan that resulted in a new website, established social media policies and practices and reimagined the format and delivery of the Weekly Town Manager's Report.

Digital Communications, Strategy & Plans for Improvement

The Town of Concord launched a redesigned website on September 8, 2016. The new website addressed concerns around poor information architecture, inconsistent style and poor usability. Partnering with CivicPlus, a leader in municipal website solutions, the Town achieved many of the desired objectives.

- **Information Architecture.** A well-designed information architecture allows users to know where they are, what they are viewing and what's around them on the site. The Town worked to identify the site content and functionality most important to residents to ensure site visitors have a positive experience.
- **Improve Site Design and Optimize for Mobile.** A modern site design providing a consistent experience across devices that is clearly branded, visually appealing and intuitive. According to 2015 data from the Pew Research Center, approximately 84% of Americans use the Internet⁴. Other data suggests that the way people access the Internet has also shifted⁵. Globally, mobile internet usage has surpassed desktop and laptop usage by about 3%. However, in the United States, 42% of the population is using mobile devices to browse online content, while desktops account for 58% of internet usage. This shift in user experience means that mobile apps and responsive web design are a high priority for any technology initiative.

⁴ Perrin, A., & Duggan, M. (2015, June 26). Americans' Internet Access:2000-2015. Retrieved April 05, 2018, from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/06/26/americans-internet-access-2000-2015/>

⁵ Mobile and tablet internet usage exceeds desktop for first time worldwide. (n.d.). Retrieved April 05, 2018, from <http://gs.statcounter.com/press/mobile-and-tablet-internet-usage-exceeds-desktop-for-first-time-worldwide>

- **Establish Policy and Practices.** A policy and practice framework to ensure consistent and quality content. The Town worked to update or establish the necessary policies and practices for content publication and expiration, duration of postings and the workflows necessary to ensure that the Town website was a valuable communication resource. Over 50 employees have been trained and empowered to manage their own content and provide regular updates to constituents.
- **Website Personalization.** A website that provides a personalized experience for individual users. The new platform allows visitors to create accounts and personalize their user experience. Features include a Dashboard that allows residents to add widgets to view specific types of information such as a Calendar, Voting Information, Police and Fire Department News, Police Crime Alerts among other options. Users can also create custom widgets that allow them to view information about alerts, latest web content or community conversations.

With a more intuitive, modernized website the Town hopes to improve the user experience and increase the effectiveness and reach of communications. The Town will continually improve the website by working with residents to further develop and grow the site as a communications platform.

Social Media Strategy

According to Pew Research the use of social media by U.S. adults has grown steadily with 69% of U.S. adults using at least one social media site in 2016. Further 75% of Facebook users visit Facebook once per day. 63% of Instagram users – and 46% of Twitter users - visit the site daily⁶. The Town of Concord Twitter account, [@Concord_MA](https://twitter.com/Concord_MA), has itself experienced dramatic growth. Between April 2016 to March 2018 the Town has more than tripled the number of Twitter followers. Given the clear importance of social media to an overall communications strategy the Town updated or established the following policies and practices:

- Policies for Official Social Media Use⁷ - the Town drafted and adopted an official social media policy. The policy covers important items such as acceptable use terms, supported social media platforms and procedures for complaint resolution.
- Officially Supported Social Media Platforms⁸ - the Town maintains a list of official social media platforms and accounts. The practice helps constituents connect with the officially recognized Town accounts. Connecting constituents with official Town accounts helps ensure proper, clear and consistent communications.

⁶ Social Media Fact Sheet. (2018, February 05). Retrieved March 22, 2018, from <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media/>

⁷ [Http://concordma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/2108](http://concordma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/2108)(Rep.). (2012, July 27). doi:<http://concordma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/2108>

⁸ (n.d.). Retrieved April 12, 2018, from <http://concordma.gov/1914/Social-Media>

- Onboarding, Training and Support for Employee Social Media Use – the Town’s Public Information Officer (PIO) conducts on-boarding for departments adopting social media, hosts regular drop-in classes for staff to develop and deepen social media literacy and is the single point of contact for social media practices.
- Centralized Social Media - the PIO has created and updated internal policies and procedures to streamline social media presence. The Town has one set of centralized Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts to create consistency and continuity in communications.

By developing a social media strategy, the Town has taken the necessary actions to increase the effectiveness of constituent communications, allowing the Town to communicate more widely and effectively.

Transform the Weekly Town Manager’s Report

The Weekly Town Manager’s Report is used to increase awareness of Town business, initiatives and goals. Town leadership felt strongly that there was an opportunity to modernize and increase the effectiveness of this important communication tool.

To efficiently gather relevant updates across several departments the Town’s PIO attends weekly staff meetings. Information collected from departments is then communicated to constituents via the website and social media. Town leadership plans to continue developing the Town Manager’s Report to improve its reach and effectiveness.

Conclusion

The Town of Concord successfully redesigned their website, established sound policies and practices and improved their Town Manager’s Report. Additionally, the Town adopted many of the necessary support systems, such as user training and workflow improvements, to ensure long-term success. This project has positioned the Town to utilize improved and modern platforms to better communicate with residents and increase engagement.