



Town of Medfield, MA

Community Compact Best Practice Program

Citizen Engagement and Transparency

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Image: Peak House Historical Site¹

Introduction

The Town of Medfield, Massachusetts, has a population of roughly 12,000 residents². Located in Norfolk County, Medfield is home to popular and historical sites like Hinkley Pond, the Dwight-Derby House and the Peak House. Like many New England cities and towns, the Town of Medfield does their best to increase opportunities for transparency and two-way communication with constituents while simultaneously striving to maximize cost savings within the community. In February 2016, the Town of Medfield entered into a Community Compact agreement with the Baker-Polito administration where they pledged to implement best practices to enhance their current processes and procedures. Through the Compact Program, Medfield selected two technology-focused best practices for Citizen Engagement and Financial Transparency. In the summer of 2016, the Office of Municipal and School Technology (OMST) at EOTSS, and Town leadership, discussed the goals of the Compact and identified IT projects that could significantly transform current operations within the Town.

¹John Phelan. "Peak House, Medfield Massachusetts." *Wikimedia Commons*. [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peak_House,_Medfield_MA.jpg). Accessed on December 28, 2017.

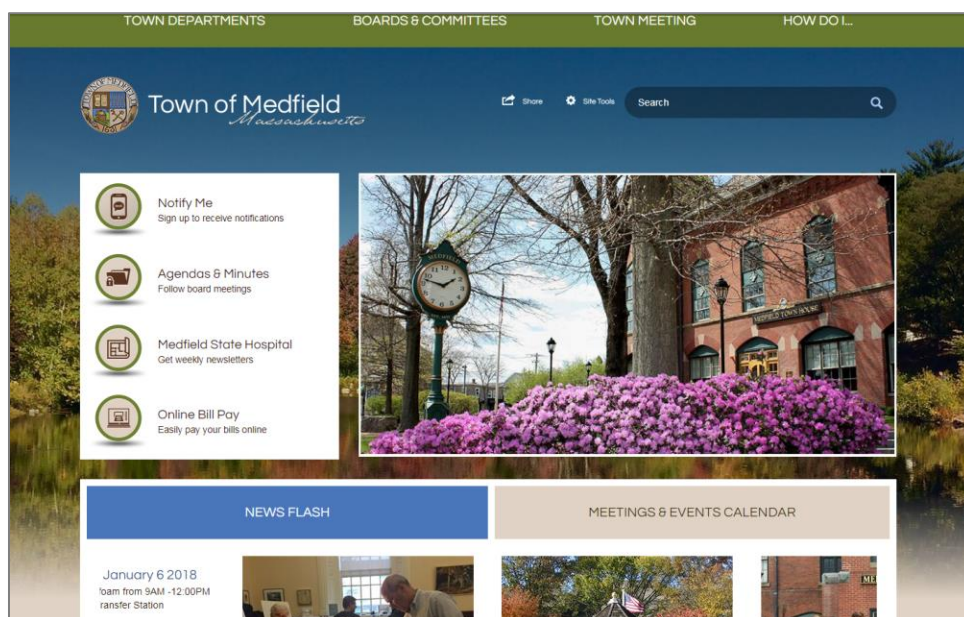
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peak_House,_Medfield_MA.jpg

² 2010 Census. "Community Facts." *United States Census Bureau. American FactFinder*. Accessed on December 28, 2017. https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml#

Medfield's IT Enhancements

WEBSITE

To become more transparent and interactive with citizens, the Town of Medfield opted to enhance their online presence, starting with their municipal website (www.town.medfield.net). With their existing web hosting contract expiring in 2017, Town leadership saw an opportunity to explore other vendor options, modernize the website and make it more user-friendly. In Spring 2017, Medfield hired CivicPlus to design a new website and migrate all preexisting web content to the new platform. The Town launched their new website in the Fall of 2017.



Screenshot: The new official “Town of Medfield, MA” website³

Medfield recognizes the importance of refining their digital communication methods. As residents of all ages and backgrounds become increasingly more technologically sophisticated, they expect the same caliber of online resources from the public sector as they do with the private sector. For many towns, the municipal website is the only source of online interaction with citizens. However, other communication vehicles like social media and email can also be very effective for disseminating information to the public.

³ The Town of Medfield. Accessed on December 28, 2017. <http://www.town.medfield.net/>

SOCIAL MEDIA & EMAIL

In addition to the new website, the Town of Medfield took additional steps to ensure residents could access government information from multiple online sources. In October of 2011, Town leadership established their social media presence by creating an official Twitter account (@TownofMedfield)⁴. Although the account was established several years ago, the Town's following has grown significantly over the past two years. Since they became a Community Compact community back in 2015, Medfield's Twitter following has increased from 900 to approximately 1,560 users as of this writing. The page currently holds 889 tweets, or posts. The snapshot below shows one of Medfield's latest tweets regarding new website training for town employees. This post received 8 likes and 1 retweet!



Email notifications is another feature that Medfield intended to incorporate into the website redesign process. Fortunately, the Town's CivicPlus package includes the option to push information to constituents via email and text. By subscribing to the "Notify Me" tool on the Town's website homepage, residents can now receive updates about emergencies, news, calendar events, and the town agenda.

⁴ Official Twitter Account for the Town of Medfield. <https://twitter.com/TownofMedfield>

Conclusion

Medfield has taken significant steps to improve their online presence and become more transparent with citizens. More developments are underway, including the deployment of an open checkbook/budget solution to ensure the Town's financial data is accessible by the public in a user-friendly format. This tool has been under consideration for some time and is of specific interest to the community. Town leadership is very invested in making sure residents can easily understand where their tax dollars are being allocated. Medfield is also looking into technology options that could potentially streamline the Department of Public Works workflow. At this time, plans to implement a semi-automated citizen request system are also under consideration. With the new website redesign complete, and several more online interactive tools in the works, the Town of Medfield is well on their way to becoming a more transparent and civically engaged government.

Additional Considerations

SOCIAL MEDIA

Consider Twitter Analytics. Leverage the social network's built-in analytics feature to track tweet activity, followers, and Twitter Cards. Use the data to refine your social media strategy. By clicking into a tweet, page admins can access details about the post including the number times it showed up in people's feeds. It can also highlight which part of the tweet received the most engagement (likes, retweets, etc.). To access the analytics dashboard for your page, simply *log in* to analytics.twitter.com with your **username** and **password**; and *select Tweets*.

General Best Practices for Building Your Twitter Following. Twitter offers the following strategy for organizations that want to build their following around engagement and effective communication:

1. Keep it Short – Each tweet should be concise, focusing on a single topic. Include a link to more information if necessary.
2. Use Visuals – Twitter claims that incorporating visual media in posts increases engagement. Users are three times more likely to interact with a tweet that has a video or image associated with the message.

3. Incorporate Relevant Hashtags – Adding hashtags at the end of a tweet could potentially boost engagement and increase your following. Doing so pulls in other members of the Twitter community who may be interested your content. Twitter recommends using no more than two hashtags per post, to effectively leverage the 140-character limitation.
4. Ask Questions and Run Polls – Twitter Polls is a built-in surveying tool that enables users vote on a particular topic. It displays the results of the poll in real time on your Twitter feed.
5. Connect with Retweets and Replies – Be kind, responsive, and diligent when responding to followers. Good, quick customer service is a main ingredient when maintaining a strong Twitter presence. Each interaction is an opportunity to demonstrate your organization’s mission and principles. For longer or more difficult exchanges, continue the conversation privately over direct message.

DEPLOYING A CITIZEN REQUEST TOOL

Tactfully Introduce New Technology to the Community. Before unleashing a new public facing technology, consider creating a small outreach campaign to get residents excited about the new amenities they’ll have access to. Leverage existing communication platforms, like the municipal website and Twitter, to share interesting details about the new tool. Users enjoy having access to “behind the scenes” content! Incorporate visual aids into the campaign to make it dynamic and interesting. The new website is a great accomplishment and can be an opportunity to highlight new tools that have become available or tools that existed previously but were perhaps underutilized.