Future of #SocialGov

Trends | Challenges | Opportunities

Town of Amherst, MA
@TownofAmherst
#AmherstMA
Brianna Sunryd

Communications Manager
Community Participation Officer
Town of Amherst, MA

• IT & Communications in Local Gov for 10 years
• School of Public Policy Graduate Student
• ICMA x UMass Founding Chapter President
• ICMA Digital Strategies Advisory Board Member

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Community Snapshot

• Population: 37,819 (2010)
• 58% is aged 15-24, 15% is aged 55+
• Median age =21.6
• UMass, Amherst College & Hampshire College
• Recent Government Transition
A Government in Transition: Representative Town Meeting to Town Council-Manager

- Legislative: from Town Meeting (240 members) --> Town Council (13 members)
- Meetings: from 2x per year --> every other Monday
- Agenda: Could not set own --> Sets own
- OML/COI Laws: Not bound by --> Bound by
- CEO: Select Board --> Town Manager, added function to existing role
Context: Urgency for Transparency & Community Participation

• Creation of Community Participation Team from existing staff (new charter)
• A new, sharper focus on timely information sharing
• New lens: One-way communication not enough!
  ○ Meaningful opportunities to dialogue with community members
Platforms

• **Official Users/Account**
  • Town, Police, Fire, Senior Center and Rec. Department

• **Town Manager and Councilor**
  • TM Twitter account that is self-managed, several Councilors as well

• **Control**
  • All request to set up a new account have to be approved by Communications Manager and Town Manager

• **Staff**
  • Sign a technology use policy, that includes rules of engagement on social media

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Investment in Socials

As part of larger digital strategy

• Followers doubled after dedicating gatekeeper
• Turned off automated "1 size fits all" sharing
• Content & messages platform specific
• Can’t be an after thought

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Content

Leverage Existing for Convenience & Engagement

• User (Community Member) Generated Content
  ◦ Interaction opportunity

• Other Community Stakeholder Content
  ◦ Increase reach
  ◦ New audiences
Emergency Management

Critical Tool in a Crisis

- Automated integrations with Emergency Notification Tool (Civic Ready)
- Share updates & important information quickly

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Calls to Action

Using Socials to Bring People Together

• Rally around specific cause or day

• Make it fun!

• Recent: City Hall Selfie Day | Community Clean Up Day

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Video, video, video...

• Grabs more attention
• More time spent on your page
• More likely to be shared, 6x more likely!
• Tells a better, more complete story
• Low-tech hits the mark

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Tell Your Story

Personalizing Municipal Services

• Feature your team
• Behind the scenes
• Put a face to a name, service or process
• Share employee success/awards
• Recent: #SheLeadsAmherst, Volunteer Spotlight
• Huge bump in reach and engagement

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Addressing Criticism

Embrace & Manage

- Correct Misinformation
  - Quickly combat incorrect information and help to stop the spread by replacing with correct details. Help control the narrative.

- Respond or Not?
  - Is the comment a one-off? Is it a request for service or info?

- Problem Solving
  - Can you offer a solution to rectify or help the situation? Convert issues to reporting system and report back.

- Policy
  - Have a statement for appropriate use allowing you to take down offensive language/content if needed, be sure to document and archive your official social content.

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Keeping Up

What platforms to use?

• Poll your community!
• Line up resources before expanding
• Fit with your strategic plan?
• Sustainability over time

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Key Points

**STRATEGY**

• Does it fit in with your strategic plan and goals? Decide on key messages & tone.

**STORYTELLING & ENGAGEMENT MINDSET**

• Make this a priority from the top down. Everyone in org can contribute to success.

**HERE TO STAY**

• Embrace responsibly as part of bigger strategic plan to better serve our communities. Paired with other tools can enhance participation & build trust. Meet your community where they are.