

COMMUNICATION, OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

A framework for inclusive citywide communications and engagement.



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PURPOSE

Communication is an Essential Service

Community outreach and engagement are essential services provided by the City of Salinas. The Communication, Outreach & Engagement Strategy (Communication Strategy) is designed to establish standards and best practices in communication and is tailored to equip staff with the knowledge, tools, and strategies required to facilitate inclusive outreach and engagement with the community.

The purpose of the Communication Strategy is to make citywide communications and engagement consistent, unifying, and centralized in a way that fosters cooperation within the organization and with residents. The City's approach to inclusive communication and engagement hinges on an understanding of the unique challenges, needs, and priorities within the Salinas community. It is about actively listening, acknowledging historical contexts, and partnering collaboratively with our community to help us achieve that goal.

Communication is an essential service to the community and central to the effective operation of the City. The Communication Strategy aims to support and enhance operations through ethical and equitable outreach by increasing transparency, expanding community reach, breaking down information silos, and providing staff with tools to effectively inform and engage the community.

The Community Relations Manager will update the Communication Strategy as needed, but at a minimum, every two years, to support and enhance effective operations through ethical and equitable outreach and engagement while keeping up with best practices in communications, outreach and engagement.

Overarching Goals



The overarching goals of the Communication Strategy are to:

- Inform the public as an essential service to the community
- 2 Encourage civic engagement
- Support and advance equity through outreach and engagement
- Ensure consistent and strategic branding and messaging
- Define leadership and staff roles and responsibilities in communication, outreach, and engagement efforts

INFORM THE PUBLIC AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

Clear, consistent, and accessible communication is a fundamental responsibility of the City. Ensuring that residents are informed about City operations, services, and initiatives is not only an essential service, but a key factor in fostering civic engagement and trust. Whether communicating routine updates, sharing information on community meetings/events or disseminating information on urgent matters, the City must prioritize transparency and clarity (sharing information in common language) to ensure information reaches all segments of the community effectively.

Strategy 1.1: Proactive Dissemination of Information

Effective communication goes beyond responding to inquiries and requires a forward-thinking approach to ensure that information reaches residents before they have to seek it out. Proactive dissemination is a strategy that delivers timely, relevant information and updates in a clear, accessible manner, which means utilizing a multi-channel approach that meets residents where they are, whether through digital platforms, printed materials, in-person outreach, or partnerships with trusted community organizations.

Proactive dissemination also means anticipating information needs. Rather than waiting for questions or concerns to arise, the City should regularly assess what residents need to know and strategically distribute information accordingly. This is especially important for topics such as City budgeting, infrastructure projects, and emergency communications, where early engagement can improve community understanding and effective participation. Additionally, ensuring that information is presented in plain, common language—free from jargon and unnecessary complexity—will make City communications more approachable and inclusive.



By embracing this proactive approach, the City can strengthen transparency, build trust, and empower residents with the knowledge they need to engage with the City effectively.

Strategy 1.2: Using Multiple Methods of Sharing Information

Informing the public is not simply a task of disseminating information (the traditional "checking the box"); it is a commitment to proactive outreach engagement, inclusivity, and accessibility. The City's communication efforts must reflect the diversity of Salinas, ensuring that residents receive relevant updates in formats and languages that meet their needs. The approach must be adaptable, acknowledging that no single communication method will serve all audiences or situations.

Strategy 1.3: Providing Access to Public Information

Public access to information is a legal and ethical obligation under the California Public Records Act (PRA). As a guiding principle of government transparency, the PRA ensures that residents can request and review public records related to City business. The City upholds this responsibility by maintaining public records under the PRA and offering access for public inquiries to foster a culture of transparency and trust.

GOAL 2

ENCOURAGE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



Effective communication helps residents and stakeholders connect and work productively with their City. Civic engagement is more than participation; it requires fostering ongoing relationships with the community built on trust, accessibility, and meaningful dialogue. By ensuring that communication is service-oriented, responsive, and inclusive, the City can empower residents to engage in the governance process in a way that is informed and impactful.

This approach also recognizes that engagement is not one-sided. Collaboration, shared investment, and sustained partnerships are foundational to effective outreach and engagement. By removing barriers to participation, addressing community concerns transparently, and proactively supporting engagement efforts, the City can strengthen civic involvement and build a governance model that reflects the needs and priorities of Salinas residents and stakeholders.

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Strategy 2.1: Encouraging Engagement

Service-Oriented, Responsive

Take a service-oriented approach to communication by engaging with the community proactively, responding to questions/comments, and providing accessible information that encourages informed civic participation. Clear and supportive communication fosters trust and engagement, even in difficult conversations.

- Clear and concise written and verbal communication Refrain from technical terms and jargon. In order for residents to effectively participate, they need to understand the information being shared.
- Accessible and inclusive communication Consider diverse language, cultural, and accessibility needs when sharing information. Use multiple formats and outreach methods to ensure all residents have equitable access to City communications, including those with accessibility needs or limited digital access.
- Active listening and adaptive messaging Approach community interactions with a listening-first mindset, ensuring responses are not just informative but also tailored to the concerns and perspectives of the community. Adapt messaging based on community feedback to keep outreach efforts relevant and effective.
- *Timely and transparent responses to inquiries* Acknowledge and address community questions and concerns in a timely manner to demonstrate accountability and encourage ongoing engagement. Consistent and responsive communication builds trust and reassures residents that their voices are valued.

Strategy 2.2: Building Relationships to Strengthen Trust and Engagement

Cultivate strong, reciprocal relationships with local organizations, schools, and businesses to expand communication efforts. True engagement (connection and participation) goes beyond outreach (dissemination of information). Effective engagement requires ongoing support, collaboration, and a shared commitment to community well-being. Strengthening the relationships with our community partners ensures that engagement is not just a one-way request for their support but a genuine partnership.

Strategy 2.3: Strategic Design of Outreach and Engagement Plans

Engagement must be approached with cultural awareness and sensitivity, prioritizing sustained relationships that recognize the leadership and insights of local voices. Use the Spectrum of Community Engagement (page 43 of the Alisal Vibrancy Plan) and other tools to assess the appropriate level of outreach for programs, projects, and services, ensuring community engagement goes beyond minimum legal requirements to maximize impact.

Spectrum of Community Engagement

Stance towards community	0 IGNORE	1 INFORM	2 CONSULT	3 INVOLVE	4 COLLABORATE	5 EMPOWER for IMPACT
Impact	Marginalization	Placation	Tokenization	Voice	Delegated Power	Community Control
Community Engagement Goals	Deny access to decision-making processes	Provide the community with relevant information	Gather input from the community	Ensure community assets, needs & concerns are integrated into process & inform planning	Ensure community capacity to play a leadership role in implementation of decisions	Foster democratic participation and equity by placing full decision- making in the hands of the community
Message to the community	"Your voice, needs and interests do not matter"	"We will keep you informed"	"We care what you think"	"We can't do this well without you"	"Your leadership and expertise are critical"	"We want this to work so we support democratic and equitable processes led by community"
Examples of tools	Closed door meetings	Fact sheets Open Houses Presentations Billboards Videos	Public comment Focus Groups Community Forums Surveys	Interactive Workshops Polling House Meetings Community forums	MOU's with Community- Based Organizations Consensus building Citizen Advisory Committees Participatory Action Research	Community-Driven Planning Community Organizing Open Planning Forums with Citizen Polling Participatory Budgeting Participatory Action Research
Resource allocation ratios	100% systems admin	70-90% to systems admin 10-30% to promotions and publicity	60-80% to systems admin 20-40% to consultation activities	50-60% to systems admin 40-50% to community involvement	20-50% to systems admin 50-70% to community partners	0-20% to systems admin 80-100% to community partners and community- driven processes

- Outreach vs. Engagement: Outreach focuses on sharing and disseminating information through multiple platforms to inform stakeholders about key issues, decisions, and opportunities. Engagement, on the other hand, is a collaborative process that meets people where they are, fostering meaningful participation and strengthening relationships between the organization, residents, and stakeholders.
- Informing vs. Achieving Consensus or Consent: Outreach can be designed either to inform, gain consensus or gain consent, each serving a distinct purpose. The decision on which approach is most appropriate should be strategically applied based on engagement goals.
 - *Inform* sharing information transparently
 - **Consensus** working toward agreement
 - Consent acceptance through informing with dialogue
- Equality (Sameness) vs. Equity (Fairness) in Outreach & Engagement: Equality provides the same level of resources to all, while equity acknowledges different circumstances and allocates resources based on needs to ensure fair participation. Truly inclusive outreach recognizes disparities and adjusts engagement efforts accordingly to create opportunities for all voices to be heard.
- Inclusion as an Outcome: Engagement efforts must be intentional
 in reaching diverse populations equitably, ensuring that all
 communities, especially historically underrepresented groups, are
 meaningfully included. Inclusion is not just about participation
 numbers but about fostering a sense of belonging in decisionmaking.
- Collaboration as a Foundation for Trust: Successful engagement is built on authentic partnerships with community partners, organizations, and residents. Active participation should not just seek input but to foster co-creation of solutions that reflect the priorities of the community. A relationship-driven approach ensures that engagement is rooted in trust and not transactional.
- Partnering with Community Messengers: Recognize the role of community partners in facilitating engagement, especially where there may be engagement hesitancy or limited trust with the City as an organization. Collaborating with leaders and partners in the community can strengthen outreach efforts by ensuring communication is culturally relevant, relationship-driven, and accessible to all segments of the community.



Strategy 2.4: Data - Driven Engagement

Regularly evaluate and refine communication strategies using surveys, feedback channels, and engagement metrics. Leverage data analytics to identify community needs, measure outreach effectiveness, and guide future improvements. Track engagement levels across platforms and use post-event surveys to assess whether community members felt engaged, gathering insights to shape more impactful communication efforts.

Strategy 2.5: Identify Barriers to Participation

Effective communication between the City of Salinas and its diverse communities is essential for fostering trust, civic engagement, and equitable access to resources. However, several persistent barriers complicate meaningful outreach and participation, including the need to build trust-based relationships, language access, and intimidating bureaucratic processes. These challenges demand more than a standardized approach; overcoming them requires intentional, adaptive strategies that acknowledge the nuances of each barrier and the diverse needs of Salinas residents.

By recognizing that communication is not a one-size-fits-all effort, the City can create a more inclusive and responsive system that ensures every resident has access to the information, services, and opportunities they need to engage fully in local governance.

A. Trust

Any effective relationship is built on trust, and communication with the community is no different. The reasons we need to build trust can vary. It could be based in experience where residents felt there was a lack of communication and engagement with past initiatives. It could also stem from limited awareness or knowledge of laws or regulatory requirements/processes. Little to no past engagement with the City could be another reason that trust needs to be established. When trust has not been established, the desire to participate can be seen with lack of value, suspicion and scrutiny, possibly discouraging participation, compromising trust and hindering effective collaboration and progress.

To build trust, Salinas must prioritize transparency, consistency, and relationship-building through genuine, sustained outreach rather than transactional communication.

B. Language Access

Salinas is home to a large Spanish-speaking population, as well as Indigenous language speakers and other linguistic minorities. Without consideration for language access, information fails to reach our diverse community, including critical city updates, emergency alerts, and community resources and programs. The City must ensure that messaging is not just translated but adapted for clarity, cultural relevance, and accessibility.

C. Digital Divide

While online platforms have become essential outreach tools, reliance on digital communication alone risks exclusion of residents with limited internet access or digital literacy skills. Aging community members, linguistically diverse communities and lower-income households face disproportionate barriers in engaging with online City resources. A successful strategy must incorporate consideration of the need for multilingual printed materials, in-person meetings, and partnerships with trusted community groups to bridge this gap, particularly as it relates to information or initiatives that impact community members with a limited to no digital access or digital literacy skills.









D. Intimidating Bureaucratic Processes and Complex Regulations

Even for the most seasoned community participant, navigating City processes can be daunting. Complex government procedures, such as permitting, public comment forums and means for participation, and grant applications, can feel overwhelming to many, thereby discouraging participation; this includes understanding when and how to participate and why participation is important.

Simplifying these processes through clear, step-by-step guidance, accessible formats, and community partners can help ensure more residents can confidently engage with City services. Communicating these regulations and processes in plain language, with community-led educational sessions, can make engaging with the City more approachable.

E. Engagement Hesitancy

Some residents may hesitate to engage with local government due to past negative experiences or uncertainty about how their voice will be valued. Traditional outreach methods that feel performative or rigid often fail to inspire meaningful participation. The City must foster dialogue that empowers residents and communicate how the feedback has led to actionable outcomes.

While a staple of municipal governance is to deliberate forums like town halls and public hearings, it often is not suited to meaningful dialogue with the community. The type of forum for participation should be determined based on the needs of the segment(s) of the community the City is informing or engaging. The needed level of community engagement can be determined based on the type and impact of project/initiative, and the Spectrum of Community Engagement (pg. 9), a tested and effective tool to define those needs.

F. Location, Time and Services

Where and when community engagement opportunities occur Conducting community matters. during inconvenient engagement times. for example, during the workday or when it is difficult to arrange care for family members, can be limiting for many individuals. However, if the audience we are engaging is the business community or other agencies, before work hours during lunch mav more accommodating.

The location of an engagement event can also be a barrier. Considerations transportation limitations and access can be utilizing a space that is closer/centralized for the communities we need to engage and/or considering including an additional remote/virtual engagement opportunity. Additional services should also be considered like food and childcare.





SUPPORT AND ADVANCE EQUITY THROUGH OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

City communications must ensure that all residents have equal access to information, services, and civic engagement, acknowledging the diversity of the population across language, age, access, and background. Thoughtful, strategic outreach must proactively address these disparities, including awareness of implicit bias, to ensure equitable, inclusive engagement that reflects the needs and priorities of all community members.

Strategy 3.1: Equitable Access to Information and Participation

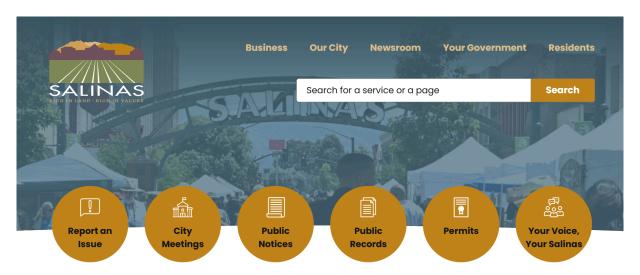
- Integrate accessibility and engagement into outreach planning Prioritize equitable access by allocating adequate time, budget, and resources to ensure outreach efforts reach residents effectively.
- Leverage the expertise of the Community Relations Team Consult with the Community Relations team for support in developing inclusive and responsive outreach and engagement strategies that address our diverse community needs.

Strategy 3.2: Language Access and Cultural Inclusion

- Bilingual communication materials Provide all public-facing content – social media posts, brochures, and flyers – in both English and Spanish, ensuring accessibility for the City's large Spanishspeaking population. Information in other languages should also be considered when thinking about the audience we are engaging and with accessibility in mind.
- Maintain bilingual forms and services Offer Spanish-language forms and translation services at City facilities and meetings.

Strategy 3.3: Digital and Accessibility Standards

- Ensure digital accessibility for residents Follow WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) to make digital content more inclusive and user-friendly.
 - w3.org/TR/WCAG22
- Train staff in accessible content creation Provide training and resources for staff to ensure City digital communications meet accessibility best practices and remain compliant with federal standards.









ENSURE CONSISTENT & STRATEGIC BRANDING & MESSAGING

The City's brand represents its identity, values, and commitment to the community. Consistency in public communications, including the appropriate use of the City's logo and seal, ensures clarity, professionalism, and trust in the City's messaging. All branding efforts must align with established guidelines to maintain a unified brand across departments and outreach initiatives.

Strategy 4.1: Represent the City's Brand with Consistency & Purpose

- Ensure branding consistency across public communications All consultant-led work involving public communication must include the Community Relations Manager team to ensure compliance with the Communication Strategy, review branding elements, and provide guidance on outreach and engagement strategy.
- Use approved templates for official documents Plans, documents, letterhead, email signatures, and other branding templates available on the City's Intranet must be used to maintain a unified identity.

Strategy 4.2: Proper Use of Logos and Visual Identity

- Maintain consistency in logo usage The City's official logo must be used across all City communications with the following exceptions:
 - City Council, Board, Commission, & Committee Agendas
 - Legal notices that <u>require</u> use of the City seal
 - Documents where use of the seal is required
- Departmental logo exceptions The Salinas Fire and Police Departments may use their official logos without the City logo, except in crisis communications, where alignment with citywide branding remains essential.

- Coordinate branding approval for public signage The Community Relations Manager must approve any replacement or addition of signage in public spaces, including building signs, doors, and the use of the City's logo or seal.
- Design of new logos The more logos that exist, the greater the
 potential to dilute the brand recognition of the City. This means
 that the more department or project specific logos that exist, the
 more challenging it can be for the community to know whether
 the logo is connected to the City. To that end, design of new logos
 is discouraged and requires pre-approval and final approval by the
 City Manager or designee.

Strategy 4.3: Staff Training and Brand Stewardship

 Equip staff with branding and communication best practices – Regular training on content creation, marketing, and citywide communication standards ensures consistency and reinforces the principles of the Communication Strategy.







DEFINE LEADERSHIP & STAFF ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES IN COMMUNICATION, OUTREACH, & ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Community Relations is part of the Administration Department under the City Manager's Office. The Community Relations Manager serves as the Public Information Officer (PIO) for the City, and the Communications Specialist in Community Relations serves as the City's Assistant Public Information Officer (APIO). The Community Relations team oversees public communication and serves as the primary point of contact for media inquiries and management of the City's social media accounts and websites. While departments may manage department-level accounts and webpages, the Community Relations Manager will conduct regular reviews to ensure consistency with branding, messaging, and communication style, reinforcing a unified voice across all platforms that aligns with the City's values and strategic goals.

Public Information Officer Access to Information

A key function of the Community Relations team is to provide public news releases through the City's communications channels, including social media, the website, email, and text messages. To create this content and provide updates, there must be an open exchange of information. In most instances, the Community Relations team will reach out to staff to obtain information several weeks or more in advance. However, there will be occasions where information is needed on a more immediate basis.

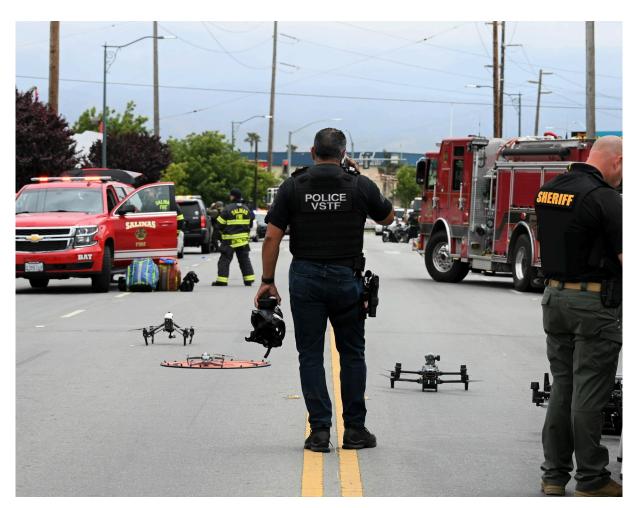
While not an exhaustive list, here are some examples of common instances where information may require a quick turnaround:

As soon as possible:

- Information for media inquiries
- Emergency situations
- High dollar value and key grants that have already been announced by the issuing agency when Community Relations Manager was not apprised in advance

Other examples:

- Information tied to items going to Council that may be highlighted before the Council Meeting or after the Council takes action
- Special projects like road closures, traffic impacts, or special updates that the Community Relations Division has been directed to release with a quicker turnaround time





Media Contact

Departments should coordinate media-related communications with the Community Relations Manager as far in advance as feasible to allow time to draft, prepare, and obtain necessary information. Examples of media-related items include:

- Media inquiries should be directed to the Community Relations Manager as the City's PIO or designee for information and interview coordination
 - Exception: Public safety personnel unless otherwise directed to work through the Community Relations Manager due to the emergent need to share information at all hours of the day
- Press Conferences and media coverage at events, including ribbon cuttings
- Press Releases (releasing information) and Media Advisories (requesting attendance) are sent by the Community Relations team
- Grant awards: The Community Relations Manager should be advised as soon as the Department is aware of an upcoming award, even if advised that the information is confidential, to allow adequate time for the release of information as soon as the State or Federal agency authorizes the release.

As a best practice, not every announcement should be a press release. If you're unsure if a press release (sent to the media directly) or a news release (widely shared) is appropriate, contact the Community Relations Division for guidance.

Social Media Management

The City's social media accounts are managed by the Community Relations Division. Although departments have direct oversight and primary content management access, it is the responsibility of the Community Relations Manager to ensure that staff are maintaining a public image of the City that aligns with the values and brand of the City and follows best practices for social media communication. This includes messaging, public communication, and branding.

The Community Relations Manager's social media role is to:

- Ensure that all content posted on the City's social media accounts adheres to the City's adopted Social Media Policy
- Conduct regular reviews of departmental social media accounts to ensure consistency with branding, messaging, and communication style
- Provide guidance and training to staff on best practices for social media communication, including effective use of visuals, tone of voice, and engagement strategies
- Maintain full administrative access to all social media accounts, including YouTube, NextDoor, LinkedIn and other less common and emerging social platforms
- Open or create a new social media accounts approved by the City Manager or the Community Relations Manager to maintain full administrative access rights
- Perform periodic audits to ensure social media accounts are not connected to individual, personal social media accounts
- Ensure all social media activities comply with relevant laws, regulations, and ethical standards
- Safeguard the City's social media accounts from security breaches and unauthorized access

Accounts that are not in compliance with the Communication Strategy or the City's social media policy within one month from being notified by the Community Relations Manager may be suspended or closed.

Any City social media account may be suspended/closed at any time at the direction of the City Manager, or department accounts may be suspended/closed at the direction of the Department Director.

Website

The Community Relations Manager plays a pivotal role in overseeing the City's website to ensure clear, consistent, and accessible communication. While individual departments may manage their respective webpages, the Community Relations Manager ensures alignment with branding, messaging, and strategic communication objectives. The Community Relations Manager serves as the webmaster for the City of Salinas and will regularly review the website for content and accessibility and provide direction, guidance, and recommendations to staff to ensure the website is an effective tool for residents to access information.

Crisis Communication

As the City's PIO, the Community Relations Manager serves as the lead PIO for the City during emergencies that lead or may lead to the activation of the City or County Emergency Operation Center. In this capacity, the Community Relations Manager will:

- Ensure centralized coordination of crisis communication The Community Relations Manager serves as the lead for emergency communication efforts, ensuring that messaging is timely, accurate, and aligned with the scale of the incident. Departments must keep the Community Relations Manager informed of emerging crises to maintain consistency and coordination in public communication.
- Adapt communication strategy based on incident scale Crisis response requires flexibility in timing, tone, and outreach approach. While some emergencies demand immediate public messaging, others require more measured communication to ensure clarity and prevent misinformation. Coordination across departments ensures that outreach is responsive, transparent, and appropriately scaled to the situation at hand.
- Develop and maintain an emergency communication plan The Community Relations Manager will create and maintain a Crisis Communication Plan that will guide communication processes in to ensure residents receive timely, accurate information during crises, with special consideration for language accessibility, digital inclusivity, and equity-focused outreach.

DEPARTMENTS

By fostering an open exchange of information and embracing communication best practices, departments play a vital role in strengthening community engagement and promoting transparency. Departments serve as the primary source of information on City initiatives, programs, and services and play a crucial role in effective communication by ensuring timely, accurate, and consistent communication and engagement, and building relationships within the community. Each department is responsible for identifying key updates, projects, and public-facing information that may require outreach and engagement. To maximize the effectiveness of communication efforts, departments are responsible for:

- Ownership of Departmental Communication: While the Community Relations team leads citywide communication efforts, departments are responsible for day-to-day communication from the department. Staff should leverage the Communication Strategy to enhance their communication, outreach and engagement efforts and rely on support from the Community Relations team to guide these efforts as needed. This includes managing departmental social media accounts, webpages, and other communications in alignment with established messaging guidelines.
- Proactive Information Sharing: Departments should proactively provide updates to the community, ensuring key project milestones, events, and initiatives are communicated early for strategic outreach.
- Collaboration on Messaging: Departments should work collaboratively with the Community Relations team if assistance is needed to refine messaging, ensuring consistency with branding and strategic goals.
- Timeliness in Response: When information is requested, whether for media inquiries, council-related updates, or urgent matters, departments should prioritize a timely response to facilitate effective communication.
- Accessibility and Inclusivity Considerations: Departments should ensure public communications consider accessibility, multilingual outreach, and culturally relevant messaging, reinforcing the City's commitment to inclusivity.



Social Media

All staff must adhere to the City's adopted Social Media Policy, which can be found on the City's website, and work collaboratively with the Community Relations team to ensure compliance with the Policy, the guidance in the Communication Strategy, and accessibility and other regulations.

Accounts that are not in compliance with the Communication Strategy or the City's social media policy within one month from being notified by the Community Relations Manager may be closed.





Website

Departments are responsible for maintaining accurate and timely information on their webpages. While the Community Relations Manager oversees website management ensures and alignment with branding and communication strategic objectives, departments should proactively update their content collaborate as needed. Regular coordination with the Community Relations Manager helps ensure accessibility, clarity, and consistency, making the website an effective resource for residents.