City of Walhalla

Strategic Communication Plan

February 2024

Summary

City Objectives: The City envisions and strives to create a future marked by increased citizen awareness, community engagement, and transparency. With objectives ranging from promoting the local economy to enhancing emergency preparedness, the City of Walhalla's Communication Plan is a comprehensive strategy designed to enrich and inform its residents.

Targeted Audience: Recognizing the City's diverse demographics, this plan focuses on key segments, including adult residents, seniors, middle-aged residents, youth and families. Tailored communication efforts aim to address the unique needs and interests of each group, ensuring inclusivity.

Communication Channels: From a user-friendly city website to vibrant engagement on social media platforms, the plan leverages diverse channels. Whether through email newsletters, events, or community partnerships, the goal is to reach residents through channels that resonate with them.

Risk Management: Anticipating potential challenges, the plan adopts a proactive risk management approach, addressing issues like misinformation, social media backlash, and unforeseen external events. By implementing mitigation strategies, the city aims to build and maintain public trust.

Reporting and Documentation: Regular reporting mechanisms, including monthly or quarterly reports and an online portal, ensure accountability. The plan prioritizes feedback sessions, surveys, and social media listening to continually adapt and refine communication strategies.

In essence, the City of Walhalla's Communication Plan is a dynamic framework poised to elevate community connection, foster inclusivity, and create an informed, resilient and engaged population. Through these efforts, Walhalla aspires to not only be a city with a rich history, but a thriving and forward-looking community poised for a vibrant future.

Introduction:

- The City of Walhalla, founded in 1850 and situated in Upstate South Carolina, boasts a rich heritage as the county seat of Oconee County. It serves as the hub for various county and school administrative offices and is surrounded by the picturesque Blue Ridge Mountains and the refreshing Chattooga River. Walhalla is set to become the endpoint for South Carolina's longest pedestrian and bicycle trail, The Palmetto Trail, and features the newly constructed Stumphouse Mountain Bike Park with world-class mountain biking trails. Positioned in the Northwest corner of the state, Walhalla serves as a gateway to mountain adventures, offering access to local hiking trails, spectacular waterfalls, Lake Jocassee and numerous smaller mountain lakes and Western North Carolina cities, such as Highlands and Cashiers. With its quintessential southern charm and rich heritage, Walhalla proudly stands as the "Garden of the gods" on the "Main Street to the Mountains."

- The City of Walhalla comprises a population of 4,076 individuals, characterized by a median age of 40.6 years. The demographic distribution reveals a majority of 56.2% female and 43.8% male residents. The local labor force encompasses 1,724 individuals, contributing to an unemployment rate of 13.7%. Notably, 77.7% of the populace has attained a high school diploma, GED, or higher educational qualifications. Analyzing the age distribution, 36% fall within the 18-44 age bracket, while 24% are aged 60 and above. Additionally, 20% of the population falls within the 45-59 age range, and an equivalent percentage consists of individuals under the age of 18. (*Source: US Census Bureau, 2020; American Community Survey, 2022*)

Objectives:

1. **Public Awareness:**

   - Increase public awareness of city services, initiatives, and events.

   - Inform public of ways to report water and sanitation issues

2. **Community Engagement:**

   - Foster community engagement and participation in local governance and decision-making processes.

3. **Transparency and Accountability:**

   - Enhance transparency by providing clear and timely information about government activities and decisions.

   - Promote accountability by keeping residents informed about the use of public resources.

4. **Emergency Preparedness:**

   - Develop effective communication strategies for emergencies, ensuring that residents are well-informed and can take appropriate actions.

5. **Promotion of Local Economy:**

   - Showcase the City as a desirable place to live, work, and do business to attract investment and stimulate economic growth.

   - Highlight the benefits economic development has for all.

6. **Tourism Promotion:**

   - Promote the City's attractions, cultural events, and tourism opportunities to attract visitors and boost the local economy.

   - Increase public awareness of the benefit of tourism to the overall well-being of the City and how it benefits its citizens.

7. **Infrastructure and Development Updates:**

   - Communicate information about ongoing infrastructure projects, urban development plans, and improvements to services and programs to enhance the quality of life for residents.

8. **Education and Services Awareness:**

   - Increase awareness of educational programs, social services, and resources available to residents.

9. **Environmental Initiatives:**

   - Communicate and promote environmentally friendly initiatives and programs to encourage sustainable practices among residents.

10. **Crisis Communication:**

   - Develop strategies for effective communication during crises, ensuring residents receive accurate and timely information to protect their safety and well-being.

11. **Social Inclusion:**

   - Foster a sense of social inclusion by reaching out to diverse communities within the City, ensuring that communication is accessible and inclusive.

12. **Feedback:**

   - Establish accessible channels for residents to provide feedback and suggestions, creating a two-way communication flow.

13. **Brand Building:**

   - Build and maintain a positive city image, reinforcing the city's unique identity, culture, and values.

14. **Legislative Communication:**

   - Inform residents about new laws, policies, and regulations affecting the community.

15. **Data Privacy and Security:**

   - Ensure the responsible and secure handling of resident data, maintaining trust in the city's communication practices.

16. **Employee Communication:**

   - Enhance internal communication among city employees to ensure alignment with organizational goals and effective collaboration.

Target Audience:

1. **Adult Residents (18-44 years old):**

   - This segment constitutes 36% of the population and is likely to be involved in the workforce, education, and local community activities. Communication efforts can focus on issues relevant to this age group, such as employment opportunities, educational programs, and community events.

2. **Senior Residents (60 years and older):**

   - Comprising 24% of the population, this demographic is likely to be interested in services, programs, and events catering to seniors, including healthcare resources, recreational activities, and community engagement opportunities.

3. **Middle-Aged Residents (45-59 years old):**

   - This segment, representing 20% of the population, may be targeted with communication related to family services, career development, and community involvement. Messages could address the unique needs and interests of this age group.

4. **Youth and Families (Under 18 years old):**

   - With 20% of the population falling into this category, communication efforts can focus on resources, youth programs, and family-oriented events. Engaging parents and guardians is also crucial for the well-being of this demographic.

Communication Channels:

1. **City Website:**

   - A comprehensive and user-friendly website serves as a central hub for official information, announcements, and resources, highlighting important information and links.

2. **Social Media Platforms:**

   - Utilize popular platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube for real-time updates, community news, economic opportunities, events and sharing visual content.

   - Consider a City app

3. **Email Newsletters:**

   - Newsletters can be a form of communication, distributed to residents, businesses, and Council Members, delivering information about City news, events, and initiatives.

4. **Press Releases:**

   - Distribute press releases to local media outlets to share important city announcements, achievements, and updates.

5. **Public Meetings:**

   - Ensure public meetings are advertised and open to the public.

   - Provide opportunities for public comment at regular City Council meetings.

   - Take advantage of technology that allows for livestream or recorded Council meetings to increase public information and engagement.

6. **Community Events:**

   - Participate in and host community events to connect with residents in-person and share information about city services and initiatives.

7. **Local Newspapers and Magazines:**

   - Advertise in or contribute articles to local newspapers and magazines to reach a broader audience.

   - Engage with regional print and television networks.

8. **Outdoor Signage:**

   - Use strategically placed outdoor signage to convey important messages and promote city events.

9. **Community Flyers and Brochures:**

   - Distribute printed materials in public spaces, community centers, and local businesses to reach residents who may not be active online.

10. **Community Partnerships:**

   - Collaborate with local organizations, schools, and businesses to leverage their communication channels and reach a wider audience.

11. **Text Messaging Alerts:**

   - Implement and maintain an emergency notification system and phone/text messaging alerts for critical updates and urgent information.

12. **Interactive Maps and Infographics:**

   - Use visual aids, such as interactive maps and infographics, to simplify complex information and engage the audience.

13. **Employee Communication Channels:**

   - Implement internal communication channels for City employees to ensure alignment with organizational goals and effective collaboration.

   - Be transparent when communicating City plans and actions with City employees.

   - Create a secure communication channel and process for employees to report concerns and potential misuse/waste of public funds and resources.

Risk Management:

1. **Misinformation and Miscommunication:**

   - Risk: Incorrect or misleading information can be disseminated and amplified, leading to confusion and potential harm.

   - Mitigation: Implement rigorous fact-checking processes, provide clear sources for information, and correct inaccuracies promptly.

2. **Crisis Communication Challenges:**

   - Risk: Cities may face unexpected crises, and the communication team must respond swiftly and effectively.

   - Mitigation: Develop a comprehensive crisis communication plan, conduct regular drills, and ensure a designated spokesperson is prepared for media interactions.

3. **Lack of Public Trust:**

   - Risk: Negative perceptions or a lack of trust in the city government can impact the effectiveness of communication efforts and make the public vulnerable to distorted or incorrect information.

   - Mitigation: Consistently demonstrate transparency, honesty, and accountability in communications. Disseminate accurate information on a regular basis explaining government actions and the reasons behind them. Actively engage with the community to build trust over time.

4. **Social Media Backlash:**

   - Risk: Controversial or unpopular decisions can lead to rapidly amplified negative sentiment and false perceptions on social media platforms.

   - Mitigation: Monitor social media channels periodically and address inaccuracies, when needed. Have a clear social media policy in place.

5. **Data Privacy Concerns:**

   - Risk: Mishandling or unauthorized access to resident data can lead to privacy concerns.

   - Mitigation: Implement robust data protection measures, comply with relevant privacy regulations, and communicate clearly about how resident data is handled.

6. **Language and Cultural Sensitivity:**

   - Risk: Communications may unintentionally offend or exclude certain demographic groups due to language or cultural insensitivity.

   - Mitigation: Seek to use inclusive language and diverse perspectives in communication planning.

7. **Community Resistance to Change:**

   - Risk: Public resistance or backlash may occur when introducing changes or new policies.

   - Mitigation: Engage the community early in the decision-making process, communicate the rationale for changes clearly, demonstrate the community benefit and address concerns proactively.

8. **Overreliance on Specific Channels:**

   - Risk: Relying too heavily on a single communication channel can lead to information gaps.

   - Mitigation: Diversify communication channels, taking into account the preferences and accessibility of different segments of the population.

9. **Unforeseen External Events:**

   - Risk: Natural disasters, public health emergencies, or other external events can disrupt communication plans.

   - Mitigation: Develop contingency plans for unexpected events, maintain flexible communication strategies, and collaborate with relevant authorities.

10. **Internal Communication Breakdowns:**

   - Risk: Inadequate communication within the city organization can lead to conflicting messages and inefficiencies.

   - Mitigation: Establish clear internal communication protocols, ensure all departments are informed, and promote a culture of open communication among city employees.

11. **Political Interference:**

   - Risk: Political pressure or interference in communication can compromise the impartiality and transparency of information.

   - Mitigation: Uphold principles of neutrality and transparency, and establish guidelines to maintain the independence of the communication function.

Reporting and Documentation:

- **Monthly or Quarterly Reports:**

    - Provide councilmembers with comprehensive reports outlining key communication activities, metrics, and outcomes.

    - Provide the public with quarterly reports, or more frequently, as required by circumstances.

- **Annual Communication Reports:**

    - Compile communication data summarizing the year's achievements, challenges, and future goals within the annual State of City report.

Conclusion:

- Continuously monitor and adapt communication strategies, providing regular communications to the public.

- Regularly update key messages based on community needs and feedback.

- Establish a communication team-staff position (see attached, Community Relations Officer).

- Invest in ongoing training for the communication team.

- Stay informed about emerging technologies and communication trends.

- Foster a culture of continuous improvement and learning within the communication team.

- Regularly review and update the crisis communication plan in response to lessons learned.

- Maintain a proactive approach to community engagement and feedback.

- Improve internal communication channels.

- Foster collaborations with local organizations to amplify communication efforts.