

Communications Strategy: Town of Glastonbury

8.2 Provide Effective Community Communications

To Submit: A copy of your communications strategy and completed worksheet.

DISCLAIMER! Municipalities are required to distribute certain information in accordance with local and federal regulations as outlined in the following sources: The Town Charter; Town Code of Ordinances; Statutory Regulations (e.g. Freedom of Information (FOI) Act); NIGP Code of Ethics (procurement related activities), rules and guidelines established by the Glastonbury Boards, Commissions, Councils, and Committees; and Roberts Rules of Order, (e.g. regulations concerning public meeting conduct, document filing requirements, etc.). Content governed by these sources includes, but is not limited to, public notices/hearings, budgetary information, requests for proposals, Board/Commission meetings and documentation. Glastonbury communicates information in accordance with the associated requirements and uses its discretion to leverage additional platforms as deemed appropriate on a case-by-case basis.

*****The communication strategy outlined herein is applicable only to Town content NOT subject to the aforementioned mandates and regulations.*****

MISSION

Provide an integrated, multi-dimensional communications strategy that enables the Town of Glastonbury to effectively communicate information and resources to all members of the community in a professional, transparent, and timely manner.

GOALS

1. Communicate information to the public in a clear, timely, transparent, professional, and consistent manner.
2. Use the most effective and timely platform(s) available to reach the general public and/or desired population(s) in all communications efforts.
3. Establish effective relationships with media and local interest groups and leverage their communications platforms for further expanded reach among target population groups.
4. Create forums to engage community members and develop two-way communication platforms for soliciting citizen feedback.
5. Evaluate existing communications platforms on an ongoing basis to determine effectiveness in reaching desired population segment(s). Continue to seek new platforms that adapt to changing technologies and/or needs.

AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

- General Public
- Property Owners
- Youth & Seniors
- Residents with unique needs (Disabled, Veterans, need for assistance programs)
- Minorities
- Religious groups
- Businesses and Nonprofit Organizations

COMMUNICATIONS ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

To formally structure the Town's communications processes, Glastonbury established a dedicated Marketing & Communications Specialist (MCS) position in 2014. This role is responsible for the integration, management, implementation, and ongoing improvement of the Town's communications strategy, as well as management of the Town website, newsletter, social media platforms, public relations activity, citizen request system, and other content.

While the MCS provides oversight of the Town website, Glastonbury has a structured process for managing website content throughout the organization's 23 operating divisions. To ensure all website content up-to-date, a minimum of one staff member from each department/division is assigned the role of Website Administrator. In this role, he/she is responsible for maintaining their respective departmental content on the Town website, including page updates, news and event information, and documentation. Each Administrator receives initial and ongoing training on publishing-related activities, including how to effectively integrate Glastonbury's communications objectives, and the MCS monitors content regularly to ensure compliance with Town standards. The MCS assists all departments with website updates as needed and is available to distribute content through additional communication channels as applicable.

Additional Town communications roles include the Police Department's designated Public Information Officer, who issues press releases, manages the Police Facebook page, and acts as the Department's Public Relations liaison when major events occur, and the Communications Coordinator for the Board of Education, who manages the School website, electronic and print communications, public relations activities, and overall content.

HOW, WHEN, AND WHERE INFORMATION IS MADE PUBLICLY AVAILABLE:

Glastonbury uses an extensive scope of print and electronic platforms to communicate information in the most timely and efficient manner (see **Communications Inventory document** for a complete list). The Town's communications platforms are designed to effectively reach all population groups and are used based on the intended audience(s), urgency, and complexity of the pertinent information. Among the many channels used, the four primary platforms used to communicate information to the public are:

1. [Town website \(electronic\)](#)
2. Cyclical publications (print & electronic)
3. Local media outlets (print and electronic)
4. Facebook (electronic)

The four primary platforms are outlined in greater detail below. These channels are used in nearly all communications efforts, however, additional platforms are integrated when doing so is deemed as advantageous to reach the intended audience(s). This includes, but is not limited to, informational meetings, collaborative workgroups, informational phone lines, direct mailers, signage, and inclusion in communication channels managed by third parties, such as the CT River Valley Chamber of Commerce. Glastonbury continuously analyzes its communications platforms to ensure they effectively reach all members of the public and provide opportunities for community engagement.

1) Accessible Town Website

As the primary platform for communicating information to the public, Glastonbury makes a concerted effort to provide an accessible, accurate, timely, useful, and 'easy to navigate' website.¹ In the fall of 2020, the Town updated its website to further improve upon its design, navigation and organization, content, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), and accessibility. In working with the Town's website vendor, the new site was designed to comply with WCAG standards which help ensure users of all ages and abilities can access the information and resources they need. During the design process, the Town reviewed website analytics and gathered feedback from a cross-section of Town staff to determine

¹ *In 2018, Glastonbury invested in a website management tool called SiteImprove, which evaluated the site on a number of accessibility standards and allows us to implement modifications to the site's content to ensure improved access for users of all abilities.

which pages were most frequently referenced, and what content is most frequently sought after by the general public. This influenced the page menu structures, icons on the homepage, and other design features. New features introduced to the website with this revision include a Service Finder button, where residents can quickly find the Services they want from any department, and improved “Search” function, which allows us to populate common searches periodically through the year, and the Accessibility button, which gives users several options to use website in the way that best suits them – e.g. changing the color scheme or increasing the font size for users with visual impairments, integration with screen readers, and more.

In addition to the overall improvements to the general Town website design, the new site was also built to significantly improve the user experience for community members accessing the site from a tablet, phone, or mobile device. As individuals increasingly access websites from mobile devices, it has become more important that the Town website is conducive to us on ipads, tablets, and other mobile devices. The new mobile design has a simplified menu and prominent “buttons” so that users can quickly and conveniently find the most commonly referenced town services, as well as an improved search feature.

Website Features Overview:

Easily-Updatable Community Events Calendar - Glastonbury’s website has an [Events Calendar](#) which is updated regularly (weekly or more) to reflect upcoming Town programs. Users have the ability to sort the calendar by Department or Category of interest (e.g. “teens and youth”, “activities for residents age 50+”, “Board of Finance”) and it can be accessed a variety of ways on the website. The Web Administrators within each Town Department have access to Add/Edit upcoming events on the shared calendar and it is updated on an ongoing basis. The website homepage has a link to the calendar in the upper right hand corner, and the 6 soonest approaching events & meetings can be viewed directly on the homepage. Through an RSS feed, the Calendar integrates with the Town Facebook page, and through the eNotification feature, Calendar updates are automatically distributed to subscribing residents. (See **eNotification** section below). To ensure two-way communication with the public, the Marketing & Communication Specialist (MCS) also posts community-organized events to the calendar upon request (in addition to Town-sponsored events), provided they are held in Town and/or benefit a local group/organization. By supporting local organizations in their efforts, the Town gains a more comprehensive understanding of the various special interest groups and population subsets, and demonstrates the Town’s commitment to supporting community initiatives.

News - The News section enables staff to publish timely updates that arise on a daily basis. Announcements can range from an upcoming musical production within the Youth & Family Services Department to information about a proposed capital project pending referendum. Department Web Administrators all have access to publish News announcements related to their respective departments and this feature also integrates with Facebook and the eNotification system. (See additional detail below). News items display on the bottom of the website homepage with the 6 most recently posted items shown and quick link to access all/archived News. The MCS will also post news announcements on behalf of Glastonbury organizations, provided they are relevant to, and/or benefit, the Glastonbury community.

eNotifications - The eNotification feature of the Town website augments the Calendar and News features by syncing each update with a subscription-based email system. Residents can subscribe to as many, or as few categories as they wish within the Calendar and News features. Upon subscribing, residents receive automated email updates any time content is published that meets their desired criteria. This system is particularly useful in disseminating timely updates such as reminders for dog license renewals and roadwork/construction.² This convenient, personalized notification system saves citizens’ time in seeking updates on topics of personal

² For a complete list of eNotification categories, visit www.glastonburyct.gov/enotify.

interest. Glastonbury promotes the eNotification system throughout all of its communications platforms and is constantly growing its subscription base.

Friendly URLs – “Friendly URLs” are quick links that connect a user with a specific web page. They’re used for pages that are accessed year-round as well as to assist in promoting temporary or short-term Town campaigns or initiatives. Examples include www.glastonburyct.gov/covid19 and www.glastonburyct.gov/foodbank. Friendly URLs are easy to remember and convenient for residents therefore they are “advertised” often throughout the Town’s communications platforms to encourage use.

Facility Directory – The Town website features a [Facility Directory](#), which summarizes all Town-owned facilities, parks, open space sites, and attractions. Residents can search the facility directory by category or site amenity (e.g. hiking trails, playgrounds, venues, basketball courts, etc.) and find all the information they would need about that site, such as the address, hours, amenities, photos, and more. We have also introduced filtered views of the facility directory to highlight select community amenities, such as recreational fields, and hiking trails.

The Glastonbury Library (Welles-Turner Memorial Library) maintains an independent website for its content, however the Town website has several links to it for citizen convenience. In addition to its own website, the Library also publishes its content through the Town website events calendar, news, and eNotification system to provide a centralized information portal for citizens.

2) Cyclical Publications – Print and Electronic Media

Glastonbury delivers information to the public on a continuous basis, however, a sizable portion of Town content occurs on a cyclical schedule. To ensure timely communications of recurring content, the Town publishes a variety of cyclical publications through a multi-channel approach. Many publications are distributed as printed brochures or flyers via direct mail as well as electronically to mailing lists of subscribing citizens.

The newest publication the Town distributes with regularity is a monthly newsletter. “Glastonbury at a Glance” is distributed electronically each month through the Town website and enotification system and provides a snapshot of upcoming programs, events, deadlines, and other timely news for the subsequent month. This content represents updates from all departments/divisions within the organization. The Senior Services Department distributes a similar newsletter, the Sharing Tree, to its target audience on a seasonal basis, as well as by mail.* Additionally, the Library issues a weekly e-newsletter to its patrons.

Generally speaking, the Town uses printed brochures for disseminating information that residents will reference on an ongoing basis, (e.g. recycling programs, youth and senior programs), whereas electronic platforms are used for time sensitive content, static content, and information referenced less frequently. Supplemental channels are evaluated on a case by case basis and incorporated as deemed appropriate.

Town departments that are heavily structured in public programming (e.g. Library, Senior Services, Parks & Recreation), have more information to disseminate on an ongoing basis, therefore they tend to have more communication platforms available for their target audiences. In addition to the newsletters mentioned previously, the Parks & Recreation Department issues a seasonal program brochure electronically and by mail to all Glastonbury households, which now includes programming offered by the Senior and Social Services Department*

**Please note: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated need to reduce Town operating expenses, select publications that have traditionally been distributed by mail were limited to electronic documents only in 2020. However, residents can request hard copies if they do not have internet access.*

3) Facebook (electronic)

Glastonbury maintains several Facebook pages for distributing information to community members (see **Communications Inventory** for a complete list). As mentioned previously, information published to the Town website

automatically posts to the general Town Facebook page through an RSS feed, further expanding the Town's overall reach on an ongoing basis. Facebook is an effective platform for sharing updates in real-time and is particularly useful for posting information that arises outside of standard office hours. Although only about 4% of residents follow Glastonbury's Facebook pages, the platform is a useful forum for engaging with community members and establishing two-way communications on a variety of topics. Residents often engage with Town staff members through the comments and message features to ask questions, report concerns in town, and even send photos of events or concerns. The Town's departmental Facebook pages broaden their reach to prospective program participants and provide a form to engage with their niche community members in a more direct way. Currently there are independent Facebook pages managed by the following departments: Welles-Turner Library, Parks & Recreation, the Police Department, the Fire Department, Youth & Family Services, and Senior Services. The general Town Facebook page is managed by the MCS, and each independent departmental Facebook page is managed by 1 or more staff members within that office. Throughout all of its social media platforms, Glastonbury makes a concerted effort to respond to community comments in a timely and thorough manner, and Facebook continues to serve as an effective (low/no-cost) platform for gleaning community perspective on a variety of issues and sharing information.

4) Local Media - print and electronic

Glastonbury uses the local news outlets to communicate a high volume of information to the public. Many town residents read the Glastonbury Citizen (print only) and Community edition of the Harford Courant (print & electronic) regularly, therefore the publications are an effective channel to reach community members. Both media sources are cooperative in sharing Town news with their readers and Glastonbury occasionally supplements articles with paid advertisements. Glastonbury's population over the age of 65+ is projected to increase by 8% between 2020 and 2030³ and, with a significant population over the age of 50, these channels are useful in reaching those community members, as well as residents who prefer traditional news outlets.

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATIONS: ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Glastonbury continuously seeks opportunities for two-way communication between staff and community members. Platforms used on an ongoing basis include the Citizen Request System, Website Forms, Workgroups, and Facebook. (See the **Communications Inventory** for a more detailed description of each). The Town also creates unique engagement opportunities when doing so would provide added benefit to community members. This is particularly valuable in communicating sensitive or potentially controversial information. For example, the Town issues surveys periodically to gather public feedback on projects, Town programs/services, customer satisfaction with Town departments, and similar matters. When issued, surveys are made available in both print and electronic format to accommodate residents without internet or printer access. Printed surveys are typically offered in Town Hall, the Library and Senior/Community Center, all of which are easily accessible via the local bus system and sidewalk/bike networks for residents who use alternate transportation methods. Survey feedback is reviewed and analyzed by the associated department(s) and incorporated into town operations as applicable. Past surveys have included a community health assessment and Police Department Satisfaction Survey.

Glastonbury's Marketing & Communications Specialist (MCS) serves as a point of contact for community members looking to share program and event information. Upon request, the MCS shares programs, events, and opportunities that benefit the Glastonbury community through the town website, Facebook, and additional platforms as deemed appropriate. The MCS also dedicates time each week to gathering insight on citizen perspectives towards topical issues. By reviewing 'Letters to the Editor' and following community Facebook pages, the Town identifies opportunities to engage in real-time conversations with citizens, connect citizens to town resources, and provide additional information

³ Source: partnership for Strong Communities Housing Data Profiles 2018

in response to questions or concerns. Glastonbury assesses community feedback on an ongoing basis and incorporates feedback into the overall strategy when feasible.

CLOSING SUMMARY

Technology and community needs are constantly evolving therefore this document represents a fluid strategy which is subject to ongoing review and revision. Glastonbury's communications goals will continue to drive communications efforts and new platforms will continue to be explored to enhance communications capabilities and foster ongoing interaction between staff and community members. Glastonbury is committed to sustaining the community's status as a great place to live, learn, work, play, and do business and recognizes the substantial influence successful communications can have on achieving this objective.