



MAKING THE MOST OF
SOCIAL MEDIA

7 Lessons from Successful Cities



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ABOUT THE FELS INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT

The Fels Institute of Government is the University of Pennsylvania's graduate program in public policy and public management. Fels was founded in 1937 by entrepreneur and philanthropist Samuel Simeon Fels of the Fels Naptha Soap Company in response to a wave of corruption and mismanagement in Pennsylvania government. Originally established for the purpose of training local government officials, over time Fels broadened its mission; it now prepares its students for public leadership positions in city, state, and Federal agencies, elective politics, nonprofit organizations, and private firms with close connections to the public sector. Its 1,800 living alumni work in leadership roles across the US and around the world.

Combining the strengths of Penn faculty, staff, and students with a network of affiliated senior consultants, Fels Research & Consulting Group brings academic depth and practical know-how to the tough strategic and management challenges facing governments and nonprofit organizations today. Although we have expertise in a broad span of issues, we specialize in three policy areas: urban revitalization and regional competitiveness, K-12 education, and sustainability issues. Within these policy areas and others, we apply a variety of approaches to help our clients and partners get better results, move ideas into action and pay for results that matter

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With increasing frequency, people in both the government and civic spheres are asked to find and use evidence-based solutions for community problems: solutions that have been proven to produce effective results. Public sector employees often lack the resources and time to mine for promising practices to address challenges their cities and towns are facing. In response to this need, Fels Research & Consulting Group created our Promising Practice series, which compiles public sector solutions on timely subjects in accessible reports. This report is the third in the Promising Practices series.

For more information, or to find out more about Fels, visit <http://www.fels.upenn.edu>

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ABOUT THIS MANUAL

Making the Most of Social Media is written for local governments—cities, counties, townships and their affiliates—that are beginning to experiment with social media and would like to get more out of them. Its emphasis is on the use of specific applications, such as Facebook and Twitter, by government managers and communications directors. More than two dozen “early adopters” were interviewed for this report. Their experiences offer some lessons to local governments about what sorts of tools social media offer, how to integrate them into a busy office, and how to use them creatively to be more effective.

Existing reports on social media are overwhelmingly written by technology enthusiasts or commissioned by IT consulting firms, and they tend to make grand claims about the “transformational” nature of social media. This is not that kind of report. For more than 70 years, the Fels Institute has worked with hundreds of state and local governments to tackle the practical challenges of delivering results that matter to citizens. We hope that this report will help you to put social media squarely at the service of work you are already accountable for, as part of a job you already know—and perhaps to help you to do that job even better.

ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA AND GOVERNMENTS

If you are familiar with Facebook, blogs, YouTube and Twitter, you have an intuitive sense of social media that is as good as most formal descriptions. Rather than focusing on the terminology around “Web 2.0”, think of these applications as *communications channels* that have a different set of rules and habits than traditional types of news and broadcast media.ⁱ Social media tend to be:

- ▶ **Interactive rather than authoritative.** Social media facilitate conversations rather than stories. Much of the value added to posts is provided by users who respond and recommend them, often in near real-time.
- ▶ **Personal rather than institutional.** Users exercise great discretion over their personal “channel”, subscribing to only the information they want and ignoring the rest.
- ▶ **Narrowcast through networks rather than broadcast.** Even a large government social media audience is small by the standards of radio or television broadcasts. But social media facilitate a more voluntary, interactive, and symmetrical relationship between an agency and its audience, and the right message can travel extremely quickly through these networks to the general public.

This excitement about interactive application platforms represents a major shift in thinking on the part of public organizations, which for the early part of the decade were focused on expanding

ⁱ Tim O’Reilly is credited with popularizing the term “Web 2.0”, though he seems to feel ambivalent about having done so. His article, “What is Web 2.0” is an excellent description of its history, definition, and relationship to social media applications. O’Reilly, Tim. “What is Web 2.0?” September 3, 2005. <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html> (accessed August 2009).

“e-Government.”ⁱⁱ The archetypical e-Government application is a web portal, an authoritative one stop shop for citizens and businesses to access government information and services. In contrast, social media and Web 2.0 applications emphasize interactivity, co-creation of content, subscription-based information services, and third-party application development. Governments who struggled to draw the public to one comprehensive Internet portal are finding they may gain more by pushing their information out to the many channels already inhabited by the public: traditional, social, and mobile.

Social media command a large and fast-increasing audience. Half of American adults have used at least one of these services, up from just 8% four years ago.ⁱⁱⁱ Social media users still tend to be young but are growing more representative of the general population each year, and the majority of all adult users are now over the age of 35. These users are creating and sharing a tremendous amount of information: 500 million pieces of content on Facebook every day and 200,000 new blog posts on the Wordpress platform alone.^{iv} In sum, a broad cross-section of Americans have moved to social media sites in the past half decade and this trend is still accelerating.^v Social media applications are now main stream.^{vi}

Local governments’ reactions to this expansion have been mixed. Some have made these services a central part of their communications strategies with the public and the press. Many others are ambivalent or concerned that social media are a distraction that they may nonetheless be asked to do something clever with. Underlying both of these points of view is a keen awareness on the

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ARE JUST BEGINNING TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA



50% of cities had no official Facebook presence as of July 2009, though one in seven of these had at least one department that did have a presence; often public safety. Only 13 of the cities we surveyed had an official Facebook presence with more than 500 fans—16%.



Roughly half—44%—of our surveyed cities did not have a Twitter presence in July 2009, though one in seven had at least one department active on Twitter. Only 7—or 9%—had a Twitter presence with more than 500 followers.

ⁱⁱ An excellent discussion of the “Hype Cycle”, the decline of e-Government portals and the move toward more granular, multi-channel communications strategies is available by free subscription in Di Maio, Andrea. “The E-Government Hype Cycle Meets Web 2.0” *Gartner*, 2007. <http://www.gartner.com/DisplayDocument?id=527920> (accessed August 2009).

ⁱⁱⁱ Lamhart, Amanda. “The Democratization of Online Social Networks.” The Pew Internet & American Life Project. Oct 8, 2009. <http://www.pewinternet.org> (accessed August, 2009). See also Ms. Lamhart’s “Adults and Social Networking Websites” from January 2009, also published by Pew.

^{iv} Facebook provides current usage statistics at <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>, Wordpress at <http://en.wordpress.com/stats/>.

^v See in particular the Slate article referenced below which reports that 600,000 people join Facebook every day and that “network effects” are the site’s strongest selling point. As with the adoption of telephones or the Internet, the most compelling reason to join Facebook is that lots of people are joining Facebook. Manjoo, Farhad. “Can Anyone Stop Facebook?” *Slate.com*, December 3, 2009. <http://www.slate.com/id/2237376/> (accessed Dec. 4, 2009) .

^{vi} The New Oxford American Dictionary has gotten into the act as well. Its 2009 “word of the year” is “unfriend.”

part of most public information officers that newspaper readership is declining, the quality of local coverage is frustratingly uneven, and the communications arms of governments are going to have to find new outlets. Gail Ortiz, the Communications Manager for Santa Clarita, California has been thinking about this since the *Los Angeles Times* closed its local office and essentially ceased covering the town. A lot of local news, she suggests, can degenerate into republishing city press releases as the major players exit. In response, her department has had to be creative about using new media to get the city's message out.^{vii} Rachel Strauch-Nelson in the Madison, Wisconsin Mayor's Office acknowledged the same challenge:

We are also coping with shrinking news rooms, so sometimes I will take a camera and tape a news conference that the mayor is at and we'll put it on YouTube even if the media don't make it there.^{viii}

Lynette Shaul in Winston-Salem, North Carolina summed up the general agreement among this report's interviewees: "Governments need to do whatever we can to communicate, and that means you go where the people are."^{ix}

Implicit here is a point worth reiterating: social media services like Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and video sites are *communications tools* and not more than that. Cities put off by the new technologies sometimes locate them in IT departments instead of information offices; Web 2.0 literature occasionally suggests that these services can fundamentally transform the constituent-government relationship. The message from the practitioners interviewed by Fels and the premise of this report is more measured. Social media provide new and promising ways for governments to communicate the value they provide their constituents and in some cases they offer cities a way to create additional value by providing more targeted, useful, information and opportunities for additional discussion. This is a new set of tools for a job that government communicators already know very well.

METHODOLOGY IN BRIEF

The information from this report is derived from a sample survey of high-performing governments and a series of interviews with government practitioners. Both methods are described in more detail at the end of this document.

SAMPLE SURVEY OF HIGH-PERFORMING GOVERNMENTS

No list exists of governments with a reputation for great use of social media, but several organizations have indexed leaders in the area of "e-Government."^x These are cities and townships that

^{vii} Ortiz, Gail - Communications Manager for Santa Clarita, California with Ryan Drake, Webmaster and Evan Thomaston, Audio/Visual. July 28, 2009. Interview by Callan Smith. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

^{viii} Strauch-Nelson, Rachel and Sarah Edgerton - Office of the Mayor for Madison, Wisconsin. July 20, 2009. Interview by Jack Higgins. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

^{ix} Shaul, Lynette - Web Content Creator in the Marketing and Communications Department of Winston-Salem, North Carolina. July 23, 2009. Interview by Jack Higgins. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

^x See methodology section for full discussion. The Fels Institute chose cities from three surveys: the "2008 E-Cities Survey" from Rutgers University's E-Governance Institute, the Center for Digital Government's 2009 "Digital Cities Survey," and the Charles Kaylor's "Municipality eGovernment Assessment Project (MeGAP)" from 2002.

have been innovative in their use of technology over the past six to eight years, and who can reasonably be expected to lead the adoption of social media applications as well. 79 of these cities, ranging in size from less than 70,000 to greater than one million residents, were surveyed by Fels in July 2009 for their use of Facebook, Twitter, online video, blogs, and RSS feeds. Relevant results are published throughout this report.

PRACTITIONER INTERVIEWS

A subset of the cities surveyed by Fels were approached for follow-up interviews. Twenty one cities responded, and Fels conducted interviews with representatives of each government including public information officers, chiefs of staff, and directors of public safety. A full list of cities surveyed and description of the personal interviews is available at the back of this report. The insights from these interviews form the backbone of the Fels Institute's recommendations.

WHY LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ADOPT SOCIAL MEDIA

Governments report a number of motivations for experimenting with social media and the great majority report satisfaction with these experiments. Fels' interviewees ranked the importance of social media to their overall communications strategy as 3.7 out of 5, and nearly all believe their importance will increase.

This optimistic ranking reflects a strong desire on the part of local governments to create an unmediated line of communications with their constituents and to reach (younger) audiences that are difficult to target in other ways. This comment from Boynton Beach's Director of Public Affairs, Wayne Segal, is representative:

I see blogging and all social media as a way to extend our reach to people who might not get their news from more traditional sources and I look on it as a way to be more interactive with our residents. [...] That is what we want.^{xi}

Moreover, cities are excited that social media attract audiences that place a high value on receiving their information. These are people who opt in, who subscribe to news from their local government rather than glance past it in the local section of the daily paper. Frustration with those daily papers is an aggravating factor in some cities' development of social media. Several information officers felt that the local press was either "missing in action" or likely to print only negative or salacious stories. This can lead city line departments and the civil service to push ahead of their communications team in an effort to "spread the good news." As Philadelphia's then-Assistant Managing Director, Jeff Friedman, explained:

The value to us is being able to reach so many people at one time for zero cost. Again, we are such a big organization and there is so much going on. Certainly we feel as part of this administration that we're doing a great deal of really fantastic, transformational work and that we need to get this out to people. We need to tell people what's going on. And no one centrally here, or

^{xi} Segal, Wayne – Director of Public Affairs for Boynton Beach, Florida. July 21, 2009. Interview by Andrew Biros. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

in the major media, is going to have the time to reach out and identify a constituency and push out this information. So I think it's a desire to let people know, "here's what we're doing" and to ask "what do you think of what we're doing?"

Indeed, the "zero cost" is a factor that was stressed again and again by Fels Institute interviewees. The recent recession has left government managers with fewer ways to pursue more and better press as budgets for fliers, publications and pressers have been reduced with most local budget cuts. Social media services provide a free alternative which require little or no training to implement. In most cases, governments are just beginning to experiment with them. The average age of a municipal Facebook site during the period of Fels' research for this publication in mid-2009, for example, was just five months. Even cities that have been recognized as e-Government leaders are just beginning to experiment in this new area.

Elected officials are frequently catalysts for the adoption of social media. Many used it to some effect in their campaigns for public office and believe it can be adopted as a tool for governance. These officials often cite the Obama administration as the gold standard here, though it is not always clear how to directly apply the lessons of a national campaign to local government.^{xii} Several information offices cited the role of strong executive leadership in reorienting their cities' electronic communications strategies, including Mesa, Arizona and Huntsville, Alabama.^{xiii} But while this kind of top-down implementation can be extremely effective, many cities began their experimentation with social media in the other direction—from the departmental level up—and are now challenged to coordinate separate and overlapping efforts.

SKEPTICISM AND EXPERIMENTATION

Not all cities are using the same technologies and not all cities use the same services the same way. Even among cities that are relatively quick to adopt new technologies, some have avoided social media out of skepticism about their usefulness, hassle of management, legal concerns, or potential for political embarrassment. The Fels Institute's survey found that, as of July 2009, as many as a third of the cities recognized for their leadership in the area of e-Government several years ago had not yet implemented any major social media technology. On the other hand, this cohort of non-participants is quickly shrinking.

Most of our respondents were extremely positive about their use of social media and its utility to local governments—surprisingly so. While the right way to approach these technologies may vary from organization to organization, our survey suggests that, among the great diversity of experiments being conducted by local governments, some things do work better than others.

The rest of this report is a kind of "cook book" with seven suggestions for finding the right recipe for using social media in your jurisdiction. Its recommendations cover startup, structure, management,

^{xii} For more on this, see Valdes, Ray. "Social Media Lessons from the U.S. Presidential Campaign." Gartner. November 19, 2008. http://www.gartner.com/DisplayDocument?doc_cd=163114 (accessed July 2009).

^{xiii} This is outlined in more detail in the "Manage Up" promising practice.

and self-evaluation, and the report finishes with the message so frequently communicated to the Fels Institute by the public officials we spoke with:

The question is really “why not?” Why wouldn’t you be doing these things? The reality is, in our population, we have people from newborns to one hundred year olds; we have every type of ethnicity you can imagine. For us not to try and do things to reach more people would be silly.
Peter Robbins, West Palm Beach.^{xiv}

We hope this report helps you to experiment just that much more effectively.

^{xiv} Robbins, Peter - Public Information Officer for West Palm Beach, Florida. July 21, 2009. Interview by Chris Kingsley. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

SEVEN PROMISING PRACTICES FROM SUCCESSFUL CITIES

PROMISING PRACTICES SUMMARY

FACE YOUR FEARS Local governments face several common hurdles to the adoption of social media. But in many cases cities have found their concerns about legality, increased workload, and the potential for public criticism to be manageable and unwarranted.

MANAGE UP Cities with high-performing social media sites are typically led by communications offices that take direct responsibility for this effort and who enjoy the approval and (often) participation of the important elected officials and legal authorities in the jurisdiction. New communications strategies do not percolate from the front desk to the board room, no matter how good they are.

GET YOUR TEAM STRAIGHT Ask what resources you will need and what limits you are likely to face. Even cities blessed with strong leadership around social media strategies are unlikely to be able to make this transition throughout the public bureaucracy without the enthusiastic participation of at least the mayor's office, information technology staff, and public information officers from key departments.

BUILD YOUR AUDIENCE Use press coverage, integrate your social media presence with your website and other communications channels, cross promote, and (e)mail. Be innovative. The most fundamental measure of your effectiveness is the size of your audience.

FIND YOUR VOICE There is no “right way” to use these tools but most cities find they get better results if they post regularly, keep it social, know their tools, and find creative ways to interact with their audience. Don't assume that you know how to communicate well through these channels and don't be afraid to experiment - or even to ask your users for help.

SELF-EVALUATE At a minimum, track your audience, monitor the way they interact with your social media presence, and repeat your most successful experiments. Faithful self-evaluation will give you valuable clues about how to improve your performance and hold you accountable for better results—this is not less true of social media than more straightforward government initiatives.

GET STARTED Social media has a large, growing audience and these tools present little downside risk. For many local governments the opportunity for better public engagement and the desire to spread “the good news” is extremely attractive.

NO. 1 FACE YOUR FEARS

Local governments report a variety of concerns associated with social media services around **legality**, **workload**, and the potential for direct **public criticism**. Few governments have found that these issues present much of a problem in practice, but it is important to address these fears up front. Each is considered below.

LEGALITY

Many local governments do not include their legal counsel in the decision to begin using social media, but those who do recommend it. If nothing else, review your jurisdiction's *open records compliance* and *sunshine laws* and, if the regulations in these areas are unusually strict, ask for the state attorney general's interpretation of their application to social media.

Open records laws require that government entities make available all public correspondence, on demand, to state citizens. Florida's state law is particularly comprehensive and Florida's attorney general has refused to exempt social media sites from these record-keeping requirements, although it is "wholly unclear what the applicable time period for retention would be," as the law was written before these web technologies were envisioned.^{xv}

In practice, even governments in Florida have found ways to ignore or accommodate this rule and move forward. Some towns make no special provision for open records laws, trusting to the search capabilities of the social media tools themselves. Others have developed backup strategies of varying complexity. The Fels Institute did not find any concern over open records laws outside of Florida.

Your options: Even lacking a strong legal requirement, the Fels Institute strongly advises that public organizations not count on social media services to archive or store important public information. These services are under no obligation to do so. Governments can, however, take certain steps to store and access old data on their own:

- ▶ The Internet Archive (Way Back Machine) can access *some* old web content, and is particularly useful for access to older municipal websites and blogs.^{xvi} A more complete record could be maintained by your webmaster and his or her system administrators.^{xvi}
- ▶ Services like Twitter XML, TweetTake and TwitterBackup can archive your city's Twitter presence. Look for similar services for each of your social media channels. Facebook does not have a comparable tool, but services like SocialSafe may grow to include some of these features.
- ▶ Both West Palm Beach and Tampa take screen snapshots of their Facebook presences and store these as an incomplete but secure record of each day's interactions. Tampa and Madison, Wisconsin also make it a point that most content posted to their social media presences is

^{xv} Florida state's open records law states that: "(1) It is the policy of this state that all state, county, and municipal records are open for personal inspection and copying by any person. Providing access to public records is a duty of each agency." Its application to social media is listed in the Florida Attorney General's Opinion 09-19 in 2009.

^{xvi} The Internet Archive is online at <http://www.archive.org>.

also published (and stored) elsewhere, although this method cannot capture comments, conversation, and user-generated content.^{xvii}

None of these efforts are completely comprehensive, but together they represent a good-faith effort.

Sunshine laws may place additional restrictions on how public officials may communicate with each other, for example by prohibiting “formal or informal gathering of two or more members of a public board or commission to discuss some matter on which foreseeable action will be taken by the board or commission.” This includes electronic communication such as email and message boards.

Your options: As a rule of thumb, public and elected officials should not communicate with each other about public business online and should avoid online relationships that could create the appearance of a conflict of interests.^{xviii}

WORKLOAD

Many cities worry that social media initiatives will require a major investment of time on the part of an organization’s staff. Fear of establishing a presence and then not having the time to adequately maintain it can be a major concern for smaller cities, in particular.

With few exceptions, the practitioners interviewed by Fels rejected this conclusion. Though nearly every city stressed that some centralized control over content publishing is important, many delegated the work of adapting press releases and drafting posts for social media sites to interns. College-aged interns and younger staff have a natural “voice” for this work, according to many public information officers. The implication is that most cities have, or can easily acquire, assistance. Jessie Brodersen of Mesa, Arizona’s says of Mesa’s social media presence that;

WRITE ONCE, READ EVERYWHERE

Cities that are simply looking to push their existing press releases through new channels to a new audience might look to the example of Madison, Wisconsin. The city’s centralized news release system receives updates from more than thirty departments. These updates are pushed out in real time to a variety of channels including Madison’s RSS feeds, website, Twitter account, and Facebook site. This kind of automation can be crucial in a busy press office, though many would stress that it is just the first step toward building a relationship with your constituents online.

There are a ton of people across the city who contribute to it. [...] Frankly, it’s not even me adding content. I check it out and make sure it’s working—people come to me if something is not working—but they’re the ones disseminating the information. The system is really not so bad. I wish *more* people were involved.^{xix}

^{xvii} Madison, Wisconsin is particularly aggressive about using a “write once, publish everyone” strategy that uses Twitter and Facebook as channels for content produced (and stored) elsewhere. This is done mainly for efficiency but has implications for the city’s record keeping strategy as well.

^{xviii} The Florida Supreme Court ruled in its opinion 2009-20 that state judges may not “friend” lawyers on social networking sites like Facebook, for example, arguing that doing so constitutes an “appearance of impropriety” and might cast “reasonable doubt on the judge’s capacity to act impartially.”

^{xix} Brodersen, Jessie - Web Specialist in the Public Information Office of Mesa, Arizona. July 22, 2009. Interview by Andrew Biros. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

Governments report that social media are not much of a drain on their resources. Survey respondents ranked the average time investment required to launch and maintain social media sites, on a scale of 1-5, as a “2”, corresponding to “very little.” Interestingly, nearly all rated the *importance* of these media as between 3-5 and 80% believe that their importance is “increasing.” Cities who have adopted social media technologies view them as a modest investment with the potential for major returns.

RICHMOND POLICE

The Richmond Police Department created its Facebook page in January 2009 and began using Twitter three months later. The audience for both services has grown quickly, to 1,700 and 2,000 followers respectively, and both receive daily updates. These include security updates, videos from the chief of police, and the “Daily Good News”—a feature that includes officer accolades, citizen recognition, and positive comments from residents. Public Affairs Officer Dionne Waugh acknowledged that the department was initially concerned, saying “we were opening ourselves up for criticism in a place where that is hard to police. Previously if people call and they’re negative, you deal with their concern, transfer to someone who can address their concern, or they write a letter. There are channels. But this is new, in terms of how to deal with negative feedback.”^{xxi} As it happened, after half a year of use Ms. Waugh had only removed a single comment: an off-color (but complimentary) remark about one of the department’s female officers. “It’s a great way to get out information on all of the good things we do, because sometimes people only hear about the negative things.”

PUBLIC CRITICISM

Public managers frequently worry that social media could open their departments up for criticism in a venue where they have very little control. Most managers are familiar with unruly online message boards and “Godwin’s law.”^{xx} The Fels Institute’s research suggests that this kind of criticism is likely where users remain anonymous, such as the comments section of many blogs and video hosting services.

Sites with a strong association between online and off-line identities, by contrast, remain civil. No public agency interviewed by the Fels Institute reported significant controversy on their Facebook site and several, including the Richmond Police Department, reported that they are overwhelmingly more likely to receive accolades than criticism online.

Huntsville, Alabama went a step further, hosting an open town hall online and promoting the city’s Facebook page as a spot for active discussion. The mayor’s Chief of Staff, Trent Willis, was initially reluctant:

It’s easy to say that you want to be transparent, and we had the same internal discussion—believe me, it tore me in half too [...] especially in the blogosphere where there is this anonymity. With Facebook, people—90% of the time—are cordial and respectful because it is their name and associated with it. So we eliminated that anonymity.^{xxii}

^{xx} Godwin’s Law is a humorous observation made by Mike Godwin in 1990 which has become an Internet adage: “As an online discussion grows longer, the probability of a comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches 1.”

^{xxi} Waugh, Dionne - Public Information Officers, Richmond Police Department, Public Affairs Unit. July 17, 2009. Interview by Chris Kingsley. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

^{xxii} Willis, Trent - Chief of Staff and Communications Director of Huntsville, Alabama. July 20, 2009. Interview by Chris Kingsley. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

Mary Hancock in Virginia Beach shared this same concern over public criticism but decided, eventually, that it came with the job as a public manager. “You’re always going to have nay-sayers in local government. [...] But it’s OK if someone disagrees with you, because that can help you make better decisions.”^{xxiii}

Most cities report that the potential for establishing a positive relationship with constituents outweighs the down-side risk and they emphasize that it is important to have someone on staff help set the tone in this new space. Facebook’s lack of anonymity appears to be an important factor here, and direct discussion on other channels should be either carefully monitored or, in most cases, disabled.

NO.2 MANAGE UP

Cities with high-performing social media sites are typically led by communications offices that take direct responsibility for this effort, and that enjoy the approval and (often) participation of the important elected officials and legal authorities in the jurisdiction. Yet this is not the way many city social media presences were created, and this is not the way many are managed.

Often, less senior public employees are “first movers” when it comes to social media initiatives. Many use these applications personally and introduce them into their workplace as an experiment. Because these services are all essentially free, it is relatively easy to do this without oversight. Several departments may do this independently and more or less simultaneously, without any sort of coordination from the executive or communications offices. Results are mixed, but social media in these cities typically have smaller audiences, less resources, less visibility—and in the end, less impact.

Margaret Coulter and Kim Kann in Chandler, Arizona, strongly recommend taking the time to manage these relationships in advance:

It’s important to educate department directors and city officials on the purpose of social media. Many of them are not well versed in using such tools and may think it is frivolous or a waste of time, but once they see how it operates and see examples of how they can use it to get their message to the public, they become very supportive.

CASE STUDY—ALEXANDRIA

Alexandria, Virginia presents another example of an implementation led by a communications director who managed up to avoid this problem. As described by Tony Castrille, Director of Alexandria’s Office of Communications:

Basically, we started meeting once a week internally, within the Communications Office, to establish what we wanted to do and how we would do it. And then—we did this fairly quickly, over the past 4 or 5 months—then we met with city-wide communicators, which is a set of

^{xxiii} Hancock, Mary – Media and Communications Group in Virginia Beach, Virginia. July 2009. Interview by Catherine Lamb. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

communications people throughout other offices: police, fire, health and human services, etc. We got their input, we made guidelines, and we presented it to the city managers' senior leadership. We pitched it to them and said "this is what we'd like to do, this is how we would do it and these are all the things that come along with it—the guidelines, potential pitfalls and all of the positives as well."

With the approval of the city manager, deputy city managers, city attorney and human resources director, Mr. Castrille was able to commit the departmental resources he needed to the effort. The breadth, depth, and integration of Alexandria's social and online media sources is among the best surveyed the Fels Institute.

A clear lesson from this survey is that governments without a clear idea of how they intend to use social media tools have not been very successful with them, and that this "theory of action" must be presented to government leadership for approval at some point relatively early in the process. New communications strategies do not percolate from the front desk to the board room, no matter how good.

CULTURE VS. POLICY—WHAT'S THE RIGHT BALANCE?

Many of the Fels Institute's interviewees mentioned that office culture factors heavily into what they were able to accomplish. Philadelphia's managing director talks in terms of a "bias for action", for example, and many communications officers described social media as a natural extension of their already very pro-active offices.

This is an important point: clear and broadly understood expectations around office use of social media are much more effective than careful prohibitions. "Though shalt's" are better than fine print. In some cases, this is embedded in the city government's culture. Lisa Wonderash, for example, does not worry too much about Ann Arbor's somewhat distributed social media presence:

Any city employee is very, very familiar with our Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) laws and we are FOIA'd constantly for emails and public documents. Anything I do online I know could be on the front page of the Ann Arbor news, so it's something we live with all the time. I am not certain of an example off the top of my head that would make me concerned as it would relate to Twitter or Facebook that we don't already experience with the tools that we have.^{xxv}

That said, many cities find they do need to have a policy to "manage up", to keep their legal team or their mayor comfortable, and to provide a basis for correcting bad behavior. Often, local governments create two: one to list internal workflow and responsibilities, and a second policy to make explicit their expectations of those who use and participate in these social media sites. A public "acceptable use" policy, for example, can make editorial decisions much less painful.

Borrow a policy. There is no need to create these policies from scratch. Fels strongly recommends borrowing one from a peer city or correspondent in professional associations such as the National Association of Government Communicators (NAGC). The following sites also offer some valuable templates:

► Munigov.org

► WebContent.gov

^{xxv} Wonderash, Lisa - Unit Manager for the Communications Division in Ann Arbor, Michigan. July 24, 2009. Interview by Jack Higgins. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

NO.3 GET YOUR TEAM STRAIGHT

A second conclusion implicit in Alexandria's experience and confirmed by several other governments surveyed by the Fels Institute is that the *team* implementing your social media strategy matters a great deal. Even cities blessed with strong leadership around these strategies are unlikely to be able to roll this out across the public bureaucracy without the enthusiastic participation of the mayor's office, information technology staff, and public information officers from several key departments. Begin by getting this team right.

CASE STUDY—HUNTSVILLE

Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle was elected in late 2008. His campaign manager, Trent Willis, became his chief of staff and began with the mayor's blessing to migrate some of the social media technologies that the two had used during the campaign to city government. He faced some initial resistance from the city's information technology department which was concerned that social media "would zap [Huntsville's] productivity." So Mr. Willis negotiated a compromise limiting staff access during the work day and he established a great relationship with the city's webmaster. Over the next four months, the two worked together to overhaul Huntsville's city website. When it relaunched in March 2009, the simplified site clearly integrated the city's social media presence and the Huntsville Facebook page attracted 6,000 members in sixty days.

CASE STUDY—MADISON

Madison, Wisconsin began with this same close relationship between the mayor's office and the city webmaster. To Communications Director Rachel Strauch-Nelson, this is the key difference between a "mayoral initiative" and lasting change to how a city communicates:

It's interesting to look at what other cities are doing and where it was initiated. Because it's very clear in some cities that it's the mayor that comes in and really strongly wants to use some of these strategies. In other cities it's better integrated. And the good thing about having [our webmaster] at the helm of this is that we're creating a pretty integrated strategy across city government.^{xxiv}

Having established some early successes with this close-knit and multifunctional team, Strauch-Nelson prepared a formal presentation to the city's department heads to report, as she says, "here's all of the things we have done, now let's move forward from here."

More generally, cities beginning this work should ask themselves several questions about what **resources** they need and what **limits** they are likely to face. The answers to those questions will suggest which relationships to build before moving forward.

RESOURCES include the raw material—news, commentary, audio & visual content—and the staff needed to adapt this material for social media channels. Content that exists in other places throughout the organization can be routed through these new outlets but be sure you have access,

^{xxiv} Strauch-Nelson, Rachel and Sarah Edgerton - Office of the Mayor for Madison, Wisconsin. July 20, 2009. Interview by Jack Higgins. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

through your relationships, to the original source, or at least the right to syndicate it. Who is creating this content? Whose permission do you need to use it?

Adapting and curating content takes time. Staff makes all the difference, here, and many cities interviewed by the Fels Institute have found that younger and more junior staff members have excellent judgment about what content and tone are appropriate for the sites. Use interns. Above all, ensure you have enough people who are both comfortable with, and enthusiastic about, the task. This can be delegated.

Creating original content specifically for these new audiences can be especially valuable, but takes more time. Recruit help. Some cities have discovered enthusiastic short-term writers in their Parks and Recreation departments, or libraries. It's worth taking the time to find these people, wherever they may be in your organization.

Integrating your social media presence with existing outlets like government websites and various print publications requires good working relationships across department lines. Establish these relationships early.

LIMITS to social media initiatives are likely to come from information technology departments or communications departments concerned with protocol.

Protocol around message control is important. Be sure there is a clear set of policies around who can post what. Be sure, too, that you have the authority to post the content you intend to. Many cities adapt or create interdepartmental working groups to meet around these issues. Peter Robbins, in West Palm Beach, describes his:

We have a communications committee here that the police, libraries, etc., are on, where we all come together and talk as a team. We take it on a case by case basis, but we want to make sure that people are using [these tools] for productive reasons and that they're getting the type of communication out that we want gotten out.

IT departments present a second challenge, and are sometimes particularly loath to allow staff access to social media sites like Facebook—citing either security or productivity concerns. Negotiate with IT staff early and in good-faith. The communications directors the Fels Institute spoke with found that they were often able to strike a compromise in which at least a portion of their cities' employees received exemption from Internet filters.

NO.4 BUILD YOUR AUDIENCE

The most fundamental measure of your effectiveness, and the most easily measured, is the size of your audience. Yet this is an area where many cities struggle. Often, managers rely on “organic growth” to take the place of actively marketing this communications channel. The Fels Institute believes this is a missed opportunity and has collected some promising ways to expand the reach of municipal social media audiences from government practitioners who take this seriously.

PRESS COVERAGE

Traditional media are still the first places to look for publicity, and many Fels Institute interviewees had benefited from the relative novelty of local governments embracing these tools. Media love stories about media—even social media—and the fastest-growing cities have received a lot of help from their local television stations and newspapers.^{xxvi}

Sometimes social media can leverage additional press coverage. Reporters are usually the second group to follow local governments' channels, immediately after public employees. "They seem to use it really heavily," in Mesa, according to Jessie Broden in the city's Communication Office. "They don't pay attention to our email listservs for news releases anymore."^{xxvii}

"After the police officers, they were the second group of people to sign up to be fans on Facebook and followers on Twitter" of the Richmond Police Department, agreed Dionne Waugh. A week after their first video feed, "Ask the Chief", was published, a television station called to do an interview about it.^{xxviii}

Santa Clarita actually franchises the video content they create to online local papers for free, with a condition that they link back to the city website. This achieves the dual purpose of netting the city a bigger audience for its material and creating a free advertisement for its growing portfolio of directly-managed social media.^{xxix}

MAIN WEBSITE

At a minimum, local governments should publish a centralized list of channels available to residents and visitors: audio, video, RSS, Twitter, Facebook, and blogs. Alexandria, Virginia does this extremely well, as does Madison, Wisconsin. Use recognizable social media tool icons and link these consistently across the website where specific types of media area available.

CROSS PROMOTION

Social media are at their best when promiscuous. Organizations should reference their own social media channels early and often and be generous about linking to external news and new media as well. Chandler, Arizona uses their main Twitter account to re-tweet messages from specific departments and to refer residents to the accounts of various public officials. They recommend a "holistic" approach to communications tools:

If you are already producing press releases, newsletters, and have a web presence, it shouldn't take more than a couple minutes a day to keep Twitter, Facebook and listserv accounts updated.

^{xxvi} This was a nearly universal experience among the practitioners interviewed by the Fels Institute, and particularly in Winston-Salem, Huntsville, and Mesa.

^{xxvii} Brodersen, Jessie - Web Specialist in the Public Information Office of Mesa, Arizona. July 22, 2009. Interview by Andrew Biros. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

^{xxviii} Waugh, Dionne - Public Information Officers, Richmond Police Department, Public Affairs Unit. July 17, 2009. Interview by Chris Kingsley. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

^{xxix} Ortiz, Gail - Communications Manager for Santa Clarita, California with Ryan Drake, Webmaster and Evan Thomaston, Audio/Visual. July 28, 2009. Interview by Callan Smith. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

You just need to edit down the material from articles and press release to a brief news bite of about 140 characters for Twitter and not a whole lot more for Facebook and copy and paste it to the two accounts. You can attach a link to a web article or even link to a newspaper article you might want to promote. Also, if you are following the right people, you may have opportunities to re-tweet news that you pick up from other people and spread the word to a wider audience.^{xxx}

This general philosophy of connectedness guides most of the successful social media sites surveyed by the Fels Institute. The reciprocal nature of this kind of short-form communication means that cities almost always attract a larger audience by being generous with their referrals.

EXISTING NEWSLETTERS AND (E)MAILINGS

Local governments already direct a huge amount of mail to their residents as newsletters and utility bills, and through a variety of electronic listservs. West Palm Beach is among those that try to “up sell” their residents by including a link to their electronic newsletter in utility bills and links to various online media through the electronic newsletter. To West Palm Beach Public Information Officer Peter Robbins, there is a follow-on environmental benefit here:

We are trying to use a lot less energy and paper and ink here in the city. If we can use Facebook and Twitter as part of our tool belt to get the word to a few thousand more people, maybe that’s a few thousand less fliers and posters we have to print up.^{xxxi}

BE INNOVATIVE

Cities have other ways of getting in front of an audience that are less obvious but no less effective:

Santa Clarita’s city manager voices the town’s on-hold message, which now includes a plug for the city’s Facebook and Twitter feeds. The city also advertises its Twitter account on the signage for its major capital works projects. Residents whose commutes, for example, are affected by major road reconstruction can get regular updates on each project’s progress. Santa Clarita uses the opportunity to frame the inconvenience in terms of residents’ “tax dollars at work,” and to cross promote its other social media channels. According to Santa Clarita’s Evan Thomaston:

“[It is] a continuing goal not only make people aware when we are out in the community, but also to let our staff members know to use this as a resource and let them know these resources are available. It’s a very grass-roots effort.”

“Have fun with it,” advises Boulder, Colorado. Their Division of Parking Services sends the occasional tweet to “go say ‘hi’ to Craig, the parking attendant at 14th and Walnut Streets” for a half

^{xxx} Coulter, Margaret - Communications Manager in the Communications and Public Affairs Office of Chandler, Arizona with Kim Kann, Web Editor. July 20, 2009. Interview by Jack Higgins. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

^{xxxi} Robbins, Peter - Public Information Officer for West Palm Beach, Florida. July 21, 2009. Interview by Chris Kingsley. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

an hour's free parking.^{xxxii} People appreciate the occasional puckish note from the city desk—and they forward it on.

USE THE TOOLS... WELL

Perhaps the best way to attract an audience is to keep it lively and focus very deliberately on creating content your followers find valuable. The conventions around tone, frequency, and content in social media are somewhat different than traditional press outlets, and many cities have found it's important to develop an authentic voice in this new medium.

NO.5 FIND YOUR VOICE

Think of the value of your social media presence as a function of both its *size* and *velocity*—that is, the size of the audience and how fast and far your information travels beyond its initial pool of recipients through their social networks. Our conversations with government communicators suggest that the second piece of this equation, velocity, is important and can be affected by decisions you make about voice, content, and the relationship you create between your office and your audience.

The message from high-performing cities is clear: don't assume that you know how to communicate well through these channels and don't be afraid to experiment; even ask your users for help. No consensus exists on how to use these tools. Cities such as Huntsville, Alabama have elaborate Facebook pages and relatively little presence on Twitter. Others find Twitter more valuable. Many cities produce little, if any, online video while for some, such as West Palm Beach, Florida, online video is an extremely valuable and popular service. There is no "right way" to do this. But here are some rules of thumb:

POST REGULARLY

Most successful cities have firm commitments to not miss a day on main channels such as Facebook and Twitter and to post at least weekly on blogs and video channels. Several find that they get the best results with two to three posts per day. While much of this material may be adapted from press releases or area events, not every post should be so perfunctory. Have the resources ready to do this when you launch your account, advises Liana Lopez in Tampa, Florida, because "there's nothing worse than having something and not being to update it and provide quality information."^{xxxiii}

"IS THERE SUCH A THING AS ANTI-SOCIAL MEDIA?"

Absolutely. A good definition might be "news you don't care about from people you don't like." Periodically measure yourself against this benchmark. Would the information you are sending out over social media make for engaging conversation at a baseball game or cocktail party? Do you talk too much or talk only about yourself? Do you ask questions? Periodically reviewing your social media presence with this in mind is a more useful exercise than you might think.

^{xxxii} Labreque, Leslie and Jodie Carroll of Boulder, Colorado. July 27, 2009. Interview by Callan Smith. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

^{xxxiii} Lopez, Liana – Director of Public Affairs for Tampa, Florida. July 28, 2009. Interview by Callan Smith. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

KEEP IT SOCIAL

What makes media “social?” Posts should be consumable and associative. Messages should contain a single idea, like a quick burst of conversation rather than a monologue, and should often be placed in context as a response to another post or summary of an article off-site. Posts don’t have to stand alone, and they usually should not. Instead, recommend and link to other articles, sites, and posts. Ask questions or exhort your audience. Even informational posts should be written with the implied request that they be forwarded.

KNOW YOUR TOOLS

You may approach each channel somewhat differently, of course. From Chandler, Arizona:

We have found for us there seems to be a different demographic for each tool. The Facebook user tends to be younger and interested in special events and entertainment opportunities. This has been a great resource to reach a young audience that doesn’t typically follow municipal information. The Twitter follower seems to be more interested in hard news and information about city services and facilities. We get more direct questions that need follow up through Twitter. [...] It seems that Twitter users like to talk and get an answer, while Facebook users tend to want just to comment.^{xxxiv}

BUT WHAT’S A HASHTAG?

Twitter has a number of syntactical conventions that are mystifying to beginners, beginning with “#” —the hashtag. Twitter users attach the “#” sign before a word to aggregate contents into categories like “#Phoenix” or “#StormWatch” so that related tweets can be read together and searched by other Twitter users. For more on hashtags, as well as the uses of “RT”, “@” and more, see the guide to Twitter at Mashable.com: mashable.com/guidebook/twitter/

This varies from place to place. Huntsville has conducted entire online debates through Facebook, but “just hasn’t found the correct function for Twitter yet.”

LISTEN (& RESPOND, WHEN APPROPRIATE)

Boulder, Colorado and Mesa, Arizona particularly like Twitter’s hash tags and the ability to monitor and respond to certain conversations. Says Jessie Brodersen in Mesa’s Communications Office:

Twitter has been really interesting. And not just Twitter itself. I have Tweet Deck up on a computer in my office so that I can follow the people that I normally follow but can also do a search. So I search for anyone who happens to tweet the word ‘Mesa.’ I think I’ve surprised a couple of residents when I read, “I saw a City of Mesa truck flying down my street. This is ridiculous. I wonder what the city would say.” I tweeted her directly: ‘The City would say, “I need a truck number so that I can do something about it!”’^{xxxv}

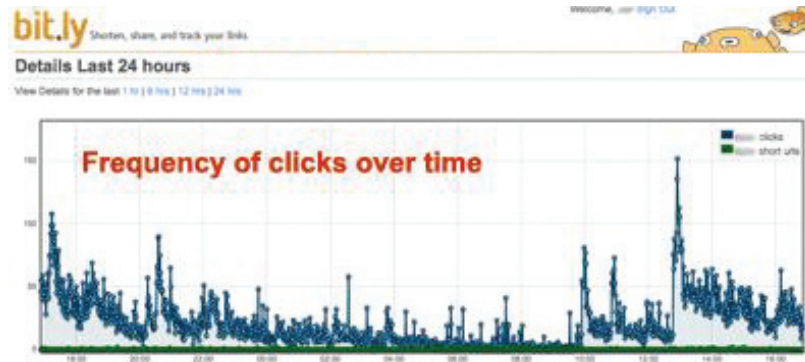
^{xxxiv} Coulter, Margaret - Communications Manager in the Communications and Public Affairs Office of Chandler, Arizona with Kim Kann, Web Editor. July 20, 2009. Interview by Jack Higgins. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

^{xxxv} Brodersen, Jessie - Web Specialist in the Public Information Office of Mesa, Arizona. July 22, 2009. Interview by Andrew Biros. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

TWITTER

#BIT.LY

The 140 character limit of tweets makes link shorteners crucial. Services like Bit.Ly also provide a “dashboard” with information about whether people are following those links. <http://bit.ly/>



#TWEETDECK

Offers a comprehensive way of sorting multiple tweet conversations and managing global searches for particular #hashtags. Update Twitter, Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn directly from this application. <http://www.tweetdeck.com/>

#SOCIALLOOMPH and #HOOTSUITE

Two further management suites that allow to cities to organize multiple users and Twitter accounts, schedule future tweets, and track information about their followers and posting habits. Several managers interviewed by Fels used these tools to post their tweets into the future, to better-correspond with their townships’ events calendars or their personal work schedules. <http://www.socialloomph.com/> and <http://hootsuite.com/>

#WORDPRESS TWITTER TOOLS

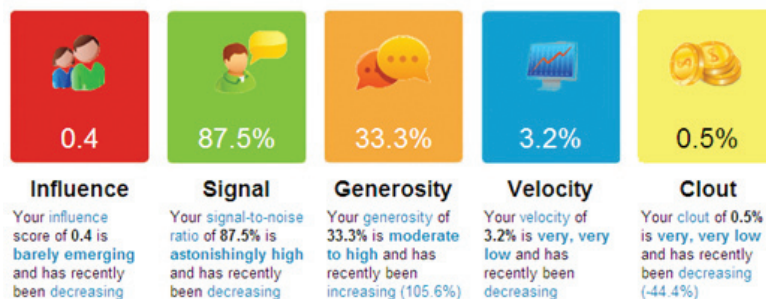
An example of integrating a blog and Twitter account in both directions; Twitter posts appear on the blog and the blog automatically creates Twitter posts with appropriately shortened URLs. This kind of integration is increasingly common. <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/twitter-tools/>

#TWEETSTATS

A simple, clean interface to graph your own use of Twitter, over time. <http://tweetstats.com/>

#TWITALYZER

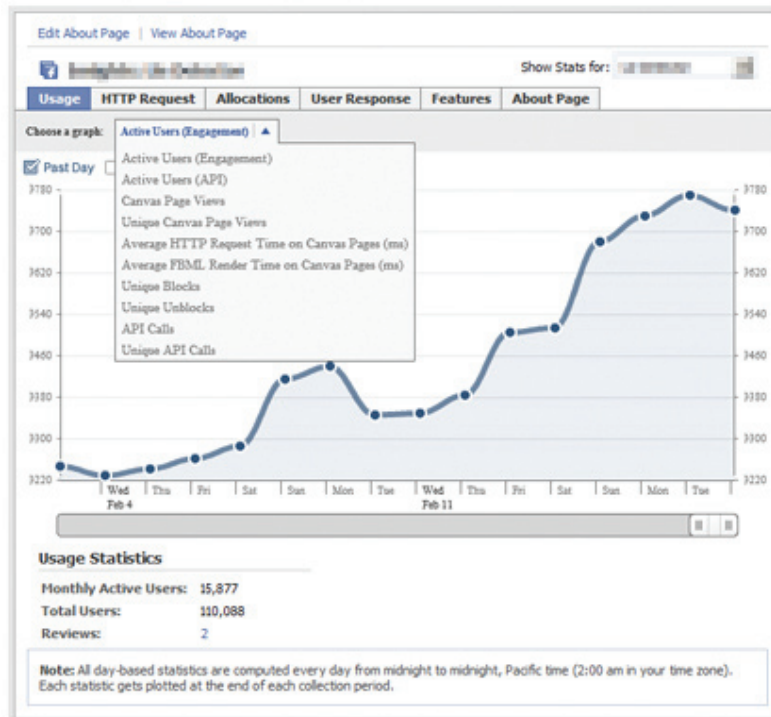
Use this application to track the effectiveness of your feed across five criteria: influence, signal-to-noise ratio, generosity, velocity and clout. Integrates with bit.ly and Google Analytics to collect information about audience click-through and integration with your blog or website.



FACEBOOK

FACEBOOK INSIGHT

This built-in tool for Facebook “pages” allows you to track your volume of traffic, basic demographic information about your fans, and the quality of interaction with your fans over time.



YOUTUBE

YOUTUBE INSIGHT

Similar to Facebook’s product, YouTube Insight offers a “dashboard” with information on viewership, demographics, and the location of your audience. Want to know more? Search for “Insight” on YouTube.

PODCASTS

PODBean

This podcast publishing tool provides a set of tools for analyzing your audience. Podbean tracks the number of streams and downloads of individual episodes over days, weeks and months. It also integrates with Google Maps to pinpoint the location of your listeners.

Boulder monitors chatter around the city and responds to direct questions, while Huntsville has used Facebook for issue-based polling. “So it really just allows us to communicate with the public,” says Chief of Staff Twent Willis. “It’s raw unfiltered feedback, and we have it our finger tips free of charge. It’s been a wonderful resource.”

Some cities feel that government communicators who block or discourage two-way communication may want to avoid social media altogether. According to Chandler, Arizona:

When you send out a message, you shouldn’t be surprised to get a message back. In fact, you know you are using these tools correctly when the public does respond to you. It shows they find your messages useful. [...]If a city doesn’t want to be interactive, they should stick to newsletters, press releases and public service announcements and skip social media.

ASK FOR ADVICE

Finally, several respondents mentioned to the Fels Institute that they had turned to their audience for advice as they tried to strike the right tone. Peter Robbins, in West Palm Beach, decided he needed to retool his approach after a post of his urging water conservation received a chorus of virtual “boos.”

I got into a conversation with a guy—a polite conversation—and said, “you know what, we’re new to this. If I were to tell you how to conserve water, what would you want to hear? What would be effective?” I was able to have that conversation with this gentleman and he was great about it. He said, “Keep it up beat, you know, or tell us to do a rain dance. Be a little more subtle.” [...] And I really took that to heart. It’s amazing to be able to have that two-way communication.

Again, this is an area where interns—properly managed—can be extremely useful to a busy city public information officer.

ADD VALUE TO YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE — 3 STAGES

	STAGE ONE: USE WHAT YOU HAVE	STAGE TWO: ADD WHAT YOU KNOW	STAGE THREE: LEARN WHAT YOUR AUDIENCE KNOWS
Characterized by	One-Way, Informational, Linear	One-Way, Social, Associative	Two-Way, Discursive
Examples	RSS, Events Calendar, Press Releases, Automated to Twitter/FB	Recommendations (Editorials, Boosters), “Items of Interest” that appeal to the audiences interest, not all city stuff.	Instapolling, solicit information (Richmond Police mugshots, Boston & Philadelphia 3-1-1), elevate comments, begin conversations
Personality/ Attitude	Formal, Public Record	Informal, Personal	Friendly, Social

NO.6 SELF-EVALUATE

It is a Fels Institute axiom that anything worth doing is worth measuring—and doing better. Faithful self-evaluation will give you valuable clues about how to improve your performance and can hold you accountable for better results. This is not less true of social media than more straightforward government initiatives, though the metrics are less precise than one might like.

TRACK YOUR AUDIENCE (& ITS GROWTH)

The single best measure of your success with social media, as we have written, is the size of your audience. Periodically record this figure for each of your channels and chart your growth against initiatives you have taken to grow this audience. What seems to work? How does your audience compare with peer governments?

It can be more difficult to dig beneath these top level figures to disaggregate your audience by age, gender, residency, or the way they use your services, but some social media applications provide a set of tools that you can use to get much of this information. Facebook and YouTube's "Insight" tools provide surprisingly extensive information on service subscribers that cities can use to chart their growth over time. Twitter does not provide a similar service.

For information on how social media use is trending in the United States as a whole, check the Pew Internet and American Life Project. These semi-annual surveys provide extremely useful data about the demographic profile of people who use social media and mobile services, and are an excellent starting point for thinking about where you can best invest your time and effort.^{xxxvi}

MONITOR USAGE

Knowing how—and how often—people use your services is sometimes more useful than knowing *who* is using them. Many blogs include "track back" functions that will notify you when others link to your posts. Google Analytics is one of several services that can provide extensive data on traffic to web services such as blogs, including information on how people are referred to your site, how long they stay, and what they view. ULR shorteners like Bit.ly can track a limited (but useful) set of information about who "clicks through" links you distribute through social media services like Twitter and Facebook, which is a great way of sifting what your audience finds interesting and useful from what they ignore.

EMULATE YOUR OWN SUCCESS

Many cities describe struggling to find a "sweet spot" for creating material to post to social media channels. The right combination of length, content, and tone can vary from channel to channel and may depend in large part on the demographic of each city's audience (see above). The overwhelming advice from cities interviewed by the Fels Institute was to experiment liberally and to watch carefully to see what works.

^{xxxvi} The Pew Internet and American Life Project. <http://www.pewinternet.org/>.

Managers defined “what worked” differently depending on the situation. Sometimes it meant that a post had inspired an online conversation or sparked an important connection; these are anecdotal but important outcomes. Sometimes posts have more clearly measurable goals like increasing attendance to city events or having as many people as possible click through to a news release on the city website. These are social media: do more of what your audience responds to and if you are having trouble—as several of the Fels Institute respondents emphasized—don’t hesitate to ask your audience for help.

NO.7 GET STARTED

Social media has a large and growing audience—and it’s not just kids anymore. People’s attention is decreasingly captured by the “portal” sites pioneered by Internet media companies a decade ago and emulated by local governments. Instead, people are increasingly able to create their own channels of information, personalized to their interests and tastes. Local governments, naturally, are eager to be a part of that mix.

As this report has illustrated, there is no single right way to do this. The cities interviewed by the Fels Institute were almost uniformly enthusiastic about the potential for social media but had a diverse array of approaches to their use. Some heavily automated their social media presence—so-called, “write once, read everywhere” strategies. Others emphasized interactivity rather than uniformity. Several cities were just beginning to experiment with the technology while others had presented bulleted action plans and received the approval of the town managers. Our research suggests that some approaches to social media do tend to yield better results than others, and this report’s authors hope that this publication has armed you with ways to think about structuring, managing, and improving your social media presence.

When asked to offer some final advice for peers either beginning with, or working to improve, their social media presence, most of this report’s interviewees were very straightforward:

“Get your best face on and jump in” said Gail Ortiz in Santa Clarita, California. “Be cautious, but don’t be afraid” concurred Jessie Broderson in Mesa, Arizona. “The world is to the point now where you either [participate] or you fall behind.” Dionne Waugh’s work with the Richmond Police Department has been emulated by law enforcement agencies in and around Virginia. “Be open” and experiment, she advises:

You need to initially be able to explain it to the people who need to approve it [...] and to explain what it is and how it can benefit who you work for. And then just be willing to try new things and interact with people, and realize that they may criticize you or may not like this. But I think the vast majority are supportive and are willing to help you put more of yourself out there. It can be a slow process. Be willing to try things out.^{xxxvii}

^{xxxvii} Waugh, Dionne - Public Information Officers, Richmond Police Department, Public Affairs Unit. July 17, 2009. Interview by Chris Kingsley. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

At the end of the day, “it’s all about public engagement and trying to have taxpayers understand that there is a value proposition for the money that they’re paying,” says Philadelphia’s Jeff Friedman. At their best, argues Kim Walesh in San Jose, California, governments use social media to encourage civic engagement.

It’s about more people and more diverse people by age, by ethnicity, being involved in helping to shape policy and local decision-making here. That is what every government entity, local, regional, state, federal, needs. And the whole underlying philosophy of social media is that there is intelligence in the crowd; and there is creativity in the crowd; and no ideas or policies come out of anybody’s brain fully hatched, right? There is a power in inputting an idea out there and having others work the idea and improve on it. Good ideas can come from anywhere in a community. They don’t just come from the top or from people in formal authority. So if the public sector can figure this out, it will have better policies and decisions and it will have a more trusting and transparent relationship with the public.^{xxxviii}

Government communicators understand that these technologies can be ephemeral. David Ramirez in Phoenix, Arizona:

I wouldn’t be surprised if Twitter is something of a relic two years from now and another tool comes by. Whatever the next tool comes up, though, we’re going to jump on it. I think we were late jumping on this train, quite frankly, because of the apprehension and anxiety some of the senior management here felt about it. But I think we’re turning their heads. [...] I think people recognize the value, they recognize its useful, they understand that it’s not just the young crowd looking at this—it’s a wide audience over many demographic and socio-economic groups.”^{xxxix}

Local governments will very likely have a new set of tools to wrestle with in several years, argues Jessie Brodersen in Mesa, Arizona. “But that’s OK. These social media applications are here now and if you can use them to better communicate with your constituents, absolutely do it.”

^{xxxviii} Walesh, Kim – Chief Strategist for San Jose, California. July 29, 2009. Interview by Andrew Biros. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

^{xxxix} Ramirez, David – Public Information Officer for Phoenix, Arizona. July 28, 2009. Interview by Jack Higgins. Audiorecording. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania.

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE SURVEY OF HIGH-PERFORMING GOVERNMENTS

Research for this document began with a comprehensive list of US cities recognized for their achievements in E-Government. We drew on highly ranked cities from three sources:

- ▶ The 2009 Digital Cities Survey, an annual survey conducted by The Center for Digital Government and Digital Communications, in conjunction with the National League of Cities (NLC). [<http://www.govtech.com/dc/surveys/cities/89>]
- ▶ The 2008 US City Survey from Rutgers University's E-Governance Institute. [<http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~egovinst/Website/researchpg.htm>]
- ▶ The 2002 Municipality E-Governance Assessment Project (MeGAP) survey conducted by Charles Kaylor of the PSI Group. MeGAP provided a selection of smaller cities and towns. [http://www.psigroup.biz/megap/summary_wave2.php]

The final list consisted of 79 cities representing populations from roughly 30,000 to several million. Between the dates of July 6th—18th 2009, each city was evaluated on its social media presence, defined as the existence of government run and/or sanctioned Facebook, Twitter, videos, blogs, RSS and podcasts. The Fels Institute inspected each government's web page for references to these media. If a social media presence could not be found on a municipality's home page, the Fels Institute searched for its presence through the search engines provided by Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Each city was searched for as "(municipality) government" (i.e. Philadelphia government). If this proved fruitless, a second search was conducted as "(municipality)" city (i.e. Philadelphia City). For Facebook, the search consisted only of 'pages'—a more defined search for organizations and municipalities that excludes individual accounts. The first three pages of each search engine's findings were reviewed. If a city presence was discovered with no discernable connection to city *government*, it was not included.

The Fels Institute examined each city's social media presence and, in the case of Facebook and Twitter, recorded the number of 'Fans' or 'Followers', respectively. The presence and frequency of podcasts, video recordings and blogs was noted, and innovative-looking uses of these technologies were marked for follow-up. Having compiled the quantitative data of a municipality's use of social media, the Fels Institute invited three dozen of the most interesting and active cities for interviews. Twenty-one interviews were conducted.

The 79 cities surveyed are as follows, in three population categories:

250,000 or more

Aurora, CO
Virginia Beach, VA
Miami, FL
Tucson, AZ
Tampa, FL
Riverside, CA
Mesa, AZ
Corpus Christi, TX
Nashville, TN
Honolulu HI
Houston, TX
Fresno, CA
New Orleans, LA
Washington, DC
Seattle, WA
St. Paul, MN
Kansas City, MO
Albuquerque, NM
Portland, OR
Los Angeles, CA
Charlotte, NC
Denver, CO
San Diego, CA
Dallas, TX
San Jose, CA
New York, NY
Indianapolis, IN
Chicago, IL
Philadelphia, PA
Phoenix, AZ
Sacramento, CA
San Francisco, CA

75,000 to 250,000

Lincoln, NE
Winston-Salem, NC
Salt Lake City, UT
Madison, WI
Alexandria, VA
Norfolk, VA
Irving, TX
Hampton, VA
Hollywood, FL
Cape Coral, FL
Richmond, VA
Chesapeake, VA
Lakewood, CO
Durham, NC
Roanoke, VA
Independence, MO
West Palm Beach, FL
Richardson, TX
Santa Monica, CA
Arvada, CO
Orem, UT
Lawrence, KS
Ann Arbor, MI
Westminster, CO
Boulder, CO
Lee's Summit, MO
Pueblo, CO
Huntsville, AL
Chandler, AZ
Augusta, GA
Beaverton, OR
Birmingham, AL
Gilbert, AZ
Davis, CA
Glendale CA
Rialto, CA
Santa Clarita, CA

30,000 to 75,000

Lynchburg, VA
Town of Flower Mound, TX
Town of Jupiter, FL
Town of Blacksburg, VA
Charlottesville, VA
Annapolis, MD
Medford, OR
Delray Beach, FL
Town of Manchester, CT
Boynton Beach, FL

PRACTITIONER INTERVIEWS

During the weeks of July 18th—August 7th 2009, the Fels Institute conducted follow-up interviews with representatives of twenty one of these governments, including public information officers, chiefs of staff, and directors of public safety. These twenty-one cities are listed below. The insights from these interviews form the backbone of this report.

INTERVIEWS

Alexandria, VA

Tony Castrilli
Director, Office of Communications

Ann Arbor, MI

Lisa Wondrash
Unit Manager, Communications Office

Boulder, CO

Leslie LaBrique
Information Technology

Boyton Beach, FL

Wayne Segal
Director, Public Affairs Office

Chandler, AZ

Margaret Coulter, Communications
Kim Kann, Public Affairs

Delray Beach, FL

Guy Buzzelli, CIO

Honolulu, HI

Keith Roleman
Senior Advisor, IT Department

Houston, TX

Patrick Trahan
Mayor's Press Secretary

Huntsville, AL

Trent Willis
Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office

Madison, WI

Rachel Strauch-Nelson, Comm. Director
Sarah Edgerton, Web Master

Mesa, AZ

Jessie Brodersen
Web Specialist, Communications Office

Miami, FL

Kelly Penton
Director, Communications

Philadelphia, PA

Jeff Friedman
Assistant Managing Director

Phoenix, AZ

David Ramirez
Director, Public Information Office

Richmond, VA

Dionne Waugh
Public Information Officer, Police

San Jose, CA

Kim Walesh
Chief Strategist, City Manager's Office

Santa Clarita, CA

Gail Ortiz, Communications Manager
(with Ryan Drake and Evan Thomaston)

Tampa, FL

Liana Lopez
Director, Public Affairs

Virginia Beach, VA

Mary Hancock
Media and Communications Group

West Palm Beach, FL

Peter Robbins
Public Information Officer

Winston-Salem, NC

Lynette Shaull
Marketing & Communications