

Cities, towns take direct routes to citizens

Tell us what avenues your town or city is taking to communicate with citizens

(Editor's note: A new feature of Colorado Municipalities magazine, the Avenues column will explore how cities and towns approach a specific topic. The column idea originated from a suggestion made by the CML Executive Board. As always, feel free to submit topic ideas and/or comments to CML. Check the end of the column for the June topic.)

Boulder blazes trail with neighborhood program

Started as a pilot project in 2001, the City of Boulder Neighborhood Services Office manages a wildly successful six-member Neighborhood Association Contact Team. Team members serve as contacts for various Boulder neighborhood associations by attending association meetings, taking notes and serving as a conduit of information between the association and the city. Team members provide monthly reports that outline neighborhood needs and concerns, which the Neighborhood Services Coordinator follows up on within a few days of the association meeting. Team members also attend a mandatory contact team meeting once a month to discuss issues in the neighborhoods they represent and to learn about current city projects and programs.

Team members are current city employees recruited from within the city organization, typically live in the neighborhoods they serve and

are paid up to \$100 for each monthly association meeting attended for this work. Neighborhood leaders have responded favorably to the program and have come to rely on the regular, consistent exchange of information the program provides. And, because team members are assigned to attend regular neighborhood meetings (usually held in the evenings), the Neighborhood Services Coordinator (who runs the one-person office) is able to better spend time in key association meetings, public processes and other board and council meetings that require department presence.

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The Breckenridge beat

The Town of Breckenridge produces and mails out the *Breckenridge Bulletin* twice a year to all box holders and to homeowners from outside of Breckenridge. The four-color, 10- to 12-page newsletter addresses varied issues important to residents – from Main Street improvements to open space purchases to council goals to water

conservation tips. Each issue includes a letter from the town manager, a town meeting schedule, recreation highlights, upcoming event information, the town's mission statement and Web address.

The town also communicates to our citizens through the Web site, which is being revamped to be more user-friendly. It will include an A-Z Directory so users can locate the information quickly. The site will be divided into shortcuts for residents, visitors and business matters.

Another tool the town uses for communication is the good old-fashioned personal one-on-one contact. Twice each month, citizens are invited to have coffee with the town manager to ask questions and learn what's new in town. These informal, insightful Coffee Talks are held at a variety of coffee shops throughout town and offer citizens a way to keep up on current issues.

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Broomfield communication is getting out there ✓

In addition to the traditional outlets (newsletter, news releases, annual reports, recreation brochures, etc.) for communications to citizens, the City of Broomfield has additional tools in its arsenal for outreach.

The city uses Channel 8 for in-depth programs that help tell the story. Recent examples include a two-hour documentary about how Broomfield became a combined city and county and a library series that

features interviews with local authors. Broomfield hosts a six-month Citizens' Academy for residents ...and gains extra mileage from the academy by televising it on Channel 8 for others to watch. The academy explores a different segment of local government at each monthly meeting, which is presented by representatives of the featured department(s).

The city staffers reach out for personal connection, too, hosting open houses on various projects. Recent ones include the master-plan update and an improvement plan for a section of town known as Original Broomfield.

And the city organizes meetings for councilmembers who wish to meet with constituents – often on their own turf. The mayor hosted a February Coffee Chat in the lobby of the City and County Building; and Ward 3 councilmembers planned a Ward Meeting at a local King Soopers in March.

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Colorado Springs turns teens into teachers, ambassadors

While many students were out snowboarding or kicking back the last day of winter vacation, members of the Teen Action Council and students from Leaders Challenge were learning a lesson in civics. On Jan. 5, 13 members of the Teen Action Council in conjunction with city staff presented Civic Day to 45 Leaders Challenge students from Colorado Springs High Schools.

The students got a comprehensive dose of the inner workings of municipal government in Colorado Springs. Facilitating the meeting was Cheyenne Mountain High School senior Jacob Blumberg. Blumberg is a member of the Teen Action Council Advisory Board. He and each of

his peers on the Teen Action Council researched a city department and prepared a presentation for the Leadership Challenge students. The morning presentations prepared students for their next exercise – a mock City Council meeting.

The “mock” City Council consisted of members of the Teen Action Council and each described their respective roles as: Mayor, vice mayor, city councilmember, city manager, city attorney and city clerk.

The Teen Council listened to the presentations and asked questions as to how and why the groups distributed the budget revenues the way they did. After a short discussion, the council voted on the final budget, based upon the input they received from the groups. The presentations were lively as peer-to-peer discussions occasionally elevated to debates on a given point. Impassioned points of view made the exercise realistic for the Leaders Challenge guests.

The day was a great success and the students left with a good hands-on experience of what municipal government is and a taste of what is involved. Who knows, some day one of these teens might be the city manager or even the mayor!

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Frisco offers a media moment

The Town of Frisco invites the media to “Twice-monthly mid-week meeting of the minds with a medley of meaningful material from the manager to motivate media to master the motions, missives and meanderings of the municipal mission,” the e-mail invitation reads. The hope is that journalists will join Frisco Interim Town Manager Theresa Casey and Community Relations

Director Linda Lichtendahl for the meeting at Frisco Town Hall. The meeting provides the chance to interview department managers on issues from the Town Council meeting the night before and on other upcoming news. Meeting organizers hope the regularly scheduled time to talk with city staff will make the reporters’ jobs easier and provide information they need from the town government.

Linda Lichtendahl
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Greenwood Village adds color to storytelling

As part of Greenwood Village’s Community Outreach Program, the village prides itself in production of the *Greenwood Village Newsletter*. The nationally recognized publication fosters understanding of community values and the village’s commitment to quality of life. Published and mailed monthly to each household and business, and distributed to local libraries and through the chamber of commerce, the newsletter keeps citizens informed about community issues, events, programs and services. Community

values, image and identity are presented and reinforced in the newsletter, defined in stories and articles, and through use of photographs. The newsletter, which is in color, also features a business section highlighting a selected business, and includes a resident spotlight each month.

Since the village’s first biennial Citizen Survey was conducted in 1999, residents have indicated that, out of 13 sources of information, the *Greenwood Village Newsletter* continues to be the No. 1 source they find the most useful when learning about the village. The newsletter has earned several local and national communications awards, and is featured in a 2004 academic textbook titled, “Community Voices.”

In addition to the newsletter, the village publishes the *GV Kids, Ink!® Newsletter*, a monthly newsletter to educate children about local government; an annual calendar, and produces a monthly Mayor’s Show for GVTV Channel 8.

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Gunnison is party to festival for outreach

Every summer City Council and employees hold CityFest. The city provides a free barbeque lunch for all residents. The meat is from a 4-H animal auctioned off by a local child at the annual Cattlemen’s Days Rodeo held in the weeks preceding CityFest. Citizens are invited to come and visit with the elected officials, city staff and board and commission members in an informal setting. The event allows for a relaxed exchange of ideas outside of the “official” council chambers. Each city department also provides

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displays about the department. For example, the public works crew displays their new equipment, purchased with the citizen's tax dollars, and provides supervised rides in the electric department bucket truck. Citizens can see the newest Police and Fire Department equipment, such as the video equipment, in the police cars or the thermal imaging helmet used by the Fire Department. Last year, the Fire Department had a fire-safety trailer that demonstrated what to do in the event of a fire and how to prevent fire hazards. The electric crew has a "mini-city" electric display showing the kids the hazards associated with electric equipment such as overhead lines and transformers. The city's Customer Service Team passes out a customer-appreciation gift to each participant. Citizens can participate

in a capital-projects "dot exercise" where each person is given dot stickers and they indicate what projects are important to them. The event includes contests and games for the kids. CityFest has continued to grow and provides approximately 600-700 lunches each year. It's a great way to get information to the citizens and to hear what they have to say!

**Gailann Davidson, Gunnison city clerk
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Lakewood reaches out to Hispanic community

Along the eastern edge of Lakewood, there have been significant demographic changes, in recent years. One change is the major increase in the Hispanic population. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Lakewood's Hispanic population exceeds 20 percent in these areas of the city, a significant increase for data from the 1990 Census. However, Hispanic participation in community meetings as well as representation on city boards and commissions has been low, not even close to being proportionate to the population.

The city began the Citizens Planning Academy for Lakewood's Hispanic Community in 2003 to engage the Hispanic community in the planning process, to provide citizens a solid understanding of community issues and planning processes and to develop a dialogue between the city and its citizens.

The academy was funded by a grant from the Lutheran Medical Center Foundation and conducted by Strategic Planning Division staff members.

The underlying objective is twofold. First, it is to educate members of the community and foster leadership development. Equally important, is to open up the lines of

communication, listen to concerns and identify how the city can best serve this growing segment of the community and to find ways for the Hispanic community to become more involved in city issues.

The 2003 academy consisted of four, 3 1/2 hour evening sessions. Each session focused on issues pertinent to planning and to Lakewood – including comprehensive planning, economic development, budget and quality development. Prominent planners in the community, developers, city staff and community leaders lead the sessions. The sessions did not advocate particular solutions, but rather challenged participants to think about planning from both a broad and community-based perspective. – *Roger Wadnal, strategic planning manager*

**Holly Boehm, Lakewood planner
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Loveland Public Works works to perform and inform

The City of Loveland Public Works Department has added three programs to enhance efforts to get information to our citizens.

Beginning late in 2002, the department began a more extensive performance-measurement system. The program ties city, department and division goals to clearly measurable performance objectives. The objectives can be measured and shared as a management tool and as an external information resource. Performance measures are released monthly, they also are posted to the Web for public review. They are shared with council quarterly.

In January 2003, the department published its first annual report. The primary audiences are external customers and stakeholders. The frame-

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work was drawn from highly received private-sector annual reports. The 2004 publication, *2003 Year in Review*, reports department activities, enunciates how taxpayer dollars are being spent, and how this ties into the mission and goals of the community. The 60+-page document is loaded with pictures, graphs and

detail where we're headed and how they can prepare for the work. It also works to overcome the stereotype of "no one ever tells us what's going on," and answer the question, "If I have a question, who should I talk too?" It helps city staff create a face-to-face customer experience and saves times by not having to answer



A Block Update in downtown Loveland. Photo by Kevin Gingery.

key figures. Reception from the public, media and elected officials has been outstanding. It is available to the public on the Web site, as well.

On a more day-to-day level, the city is undertaking a substantial upgrade of downtown this year. There will be significant disruptions throughout the area for traffic, parking, residents and business. To alleviate the sting and keep residents up to speed, the department has added a program with our contractor called Block Updates. Each week the contractor and city construction coordinator hold 20-minute meetings on the street for the block being worked on and the one that will be affected the following week. Residents and businesses have the chance to talk with our team to understand in more

the same questions repeatedly. The project has just kicked off and we are already seeing good results.

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Monte Vista on the Web

The Monte Vista City Council is experimenting with an official town Web site to increase citizen awareness of, and participation in, local government activities. It's also intended to counter an overactive rumor mill that hinders council efforts to improve the town and its government. The Web site is a combination of five basic elements that pertain to the town and its citizens:

1. a calendar of upcoming meetings and events

2. news of recent events, meetings, and decisions by the council,
3. an opportunity for citizens to express their concerns & questions,
4. detailed information about town government, staff and ordinances, and
5. a series of links to other sites containing background information about town history, demographics and amenities.

The plan is to use citizen and staff volunteers to compile and update information and create and maintain the Web site. This should make the site cost-effective, as well as interesting and useful for a broad segment of the citizenry. The calendar, current news items and citizen comments are available to local newspapers as a "Community Page" for citizens without access to the Internet.

The Web site probably will be on the Internet at www.ci.monte-vista.co.us/, although that address may be changed.

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Next issue in Avenues, tell us how your town or city is doing more – or the same – with less. Submissions should briefly describe the innovation or program, the why behind it, how it is different, the benefits and, especially, who to contact for more information, the phone number and/or e-mail. A submission can be provided as bullet points, a paragraph or a narrative up to 250 words. Deadline is April 15. Submit information to Allison Lockwood by e-mail, alockwood@cml.org, mail to CML, or by fax, 303-860-8175. Photographs or graphics also can be submitted. ■