

At its core, local government's responsibility is to represent and protect the needs of its citizens. Without citizen engagement, including a strong relationship and two-way communications, local government cannot be fully successful in identifying those needs. Relationships depend on conversation, which can be started through e-mail notifications, print or social media. In today's environment, citizen engagement tools are most effective when they are dynamic.

Hanover County's Public Information Office developed a Strategic Communications Plan that identifies citizen engagement as a primary focus of our efforts. Every three years, the County distributes a Citizens Survey whose results tell us what kind of a job we are doing and trends. The results of this survey help us identify priorities for future enhancements as reflected in the Strategic Communications Plan.

People are busier than ever and spend much of their time on the go, causing them to rely on social media apps and online news sources to stay informed. In today's society, we have found it imperative that local government tap into these platforms to keep their citizens safe and aware of what's happening around them. Social media offers a free means of sharing information, developing dialogue and communicating current issues and topics. Videos and posts about emergency information, road construction and traffic alerts receive a great deal of response from Hanover residents.

Short, informative videos attract many viewers. Well-done video content can enable viewers to forge an emotional connection with their local government that is hard to replicate with other media. Don't just tell your residents what you are doing, show them by telling a good story and enabling them to meet people in your organization and your community that are helping to make it a better place to live.

The relationship between citizens and local government continues to evolve rapidly with technological and cultural changes. But the need to engage our citizens 'where they live' is greater than ever. Providing citizens with the opportunity to engage with us in ways of their own choosing can pose challenges, but it also gives citizens the opportunity to become more fully invested in their local government.