



## 2013 COMMUNITY EXCELLENCE AWARDS Category Worksheet

### BEST PRACTICES, Social Media

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**Name of Local Government: City of Surrey**

#### Project Summary Paragraph

Please provide a summary of your project, program or practice in 150 words or less.

The City of Surrey is committed to open public engagement and providing high-quality client service to residents. Social media has been increasingly important as more residents engage with the City online. In the first 6 months of 2013 there have been 1,798,290 visits to [www.surrey.ca](http://www.surrey.ca), an 18% increase over 2012.

Through informative and educational posts, the City's goal is to improve awareness and create a two-way dialogue with citizens who may not have connected with the City through traditional means. Social media has also increased the City's customer service by being more responsive. Examples of how Surrey's social media has benefitted residents include:

- Having a city staff at a resident's home to inspect an exposed pipe in under four hours from initial contact on twitter.
- Clarifying misinformation online about a proposed casino application.
- Obtaining the second highest trending hashtag for its first Community Summit.

#### Check off the social media tools you use:

- text messaging
- comment-enabled blog or website
- micro-blog service (e.g. Twitter, Tumblr)
- instant messaging or online chat service
- online discussion forum
- social networks (e.g. Facebook, Google+)
- video or photo sharing service (e.g. YouTube, Flickr)

**Help us find your social media tools on-line** (provide website link, account or user names):

[www.facebook.com/thecityofsurrey](http://www.facebook.com/thecityofsurrey)  
[www.twitter.com/cityofsurrey](http://www.twitter.com/cityofsurrey)  
[www.youtube.com/thecityofsurrey](http://www.youtube.com/thecityofsurrey)  
<https://plus.google.com/+surreybc>  
<http://pinterest.com/CityOfSurrey/>  
<http://www.linkedin.com/company/city-of-surrey>

## Project Analysis

Please answer the question in 300 words or less in 11 pt Arial font (our judges value directness and brevity). If you experience difficulty answering a particular question, consider the aspects of your program that may relate to the question and show us how they are linked.

### 1. FOUNDATION

- a.) How did your local government come to the decision to integrate social media tools into business operations? Tell us about your process.

Surrey's content strategy goal is to increase community engagement and awareness around the City's services and initiatives, while enhancing responsiveness and transparency. Having a presence on social media was a natural fit in reaching a wider audience and facilitating this two-way dialogue.

Surrey citizens were already talking about Surrey online. By creating a presence on social media, the City was able to join conversations and interact with a community, using the channels they were already using. Through regular interactions, the City continues to build this online community and brand awareness.

The City adopted a crawl, walk, run approach for their social media strategy. It started crawling with the creation of a Facebook page, spending time to listen to its audience and establish a presence. Other channels were created as the City grew more comfortable with the new method of communication. Surrey spent much of its time listening to conversations and trying different ways to interact with its online community. This included testing content for engagement, and the tone and voice to assess its effectiveness. The crawl phase also included the creation of a social media policy, established mainly to govern the way internal staff used social media.

Currently in the walking phase, the City has a growing community on Facebook and Twitter, as well as a presence on LinkedIn, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram and Google+. With a defined voice, the City has developed an online persona to interact with citizens. Based on this interaction, the City's identified topics that resonate with the interests of its citizens.

As the City heads into the running phase, Surrey is looking for new technology and ways to interact with citizens. The City will also have a wide social media strategy to guide all City departments in creating more open and transparent citizen interactions.

- b.) How long has each of your social media tools been active?

Social Media Channel	Year of Creation	Years Active
Facebook	2008	5
Twitter	2010	3
YouTube	2010	3
LinkedIn	2010	3
Pinterest	2012	1
Instagram	2012	1
Google +	April 2013	>1

## 2. ROLE

Discuss the role of social media in your local government's overall communications strategy.

The overall communications strategy for the City of Surrey is executed in collaboration amongst multiple departments, including Marketing, the Mayor's Office, Legislative Services and the Web & New Media Team.

The overall communications strategy seeks to accomplish the goals of:

- Two-way communication
- Crisis management
- Growing brand awareness
- Educating public and promoting City programs and services
- Communicating key initiatives, plans and strategies
- Encourage citizen engagement in policy development
- Understanding of City processes to get feedback that improves service delivery

Social media helps accomplish these goals by:

- Giving citizens another direct avenue to communicate with the City, making the engagement process more accessible
- Working closely with other City departments like the RCMP and Surrey Fire Services to establish emergency communication plans
- Working with Marketing to create a consistent engagement experience
- Sharing valuable information, and directing people back to the website for more information
- Advise citizens of open houses and other ways to provide feedback to the City, such as completing surveys on the City's engagement tool, CitySpeaks.

Social media has played a key role in the growth of City's communication strategy. Based on the feedback from residents, businesses and internal staff, the City's communication strategy continues to evolve to meet the needs of citizens.

## SUSTAINABILITY

What measures have you put in place to ensure the continued operation of your social media operations? (e.g. staff time, staff training, plans, resources, financial)

At the launch of its social media efforts, the City of Surrey partnered with Invoke, a Vancouver-based online PR firm. These two teams conducted a social media audit and made recommendations on a social media strategy to sustain and grow the City's social media channels. Through this process, the City made the decision to have a presence on one main account on each social media channel. This has resulted in a more manageable process as well as a consistent voice across all its channels.

A full time Social Media Coordinator was added to the Web Team in late 2012 and has been responsible for creating strategies and managing the City's main social media channels. The coordinator also works closely with City staff to assist them in promoting their programs and events.

The coordinator relies on various tools help manage social media and to help other City staff in the social media planning process:

- Hootsuite, an online social media management platform, helps the City monitor channels and schedule out posts. It also provides basic analytics to measure the successes of each social media campaign.
- Content calendar template, accessible on a shared drive, enables City staff to easily request a social media campaign and initiate conversations with the Web Team.
- Social media guidelines give City staff references on industry best practices for the major social media channels used by the City of Surrey.
- Monthly Web & New Media Newsletter educates content creators on social media best practices.

### 3. INTEGRATION

Explain how the social media tools you employ are integrated, and how they facilitate two-way communication.

Each message is tailored to each specific social media channel. The channels, though they are monitored through one channel, are not integrated with one another. This is purposeful, as the engagement styles, expectations of interaction and industry standards for each community are unique to the channel. For example, a Twitter user expects to see hashtags and receive instantaneous responses, while a Facebook user expects tags and is more forgiving with the response time.

However, each channel is integrated with the City's website, with social media being a core aspect of the City's web strategy. Every message on every social media channel directs a user back to [surrey.ca](http://surrey.ca) for more information. Providing this link allows users to get the essential information on the service or event, and has encouraged more meaningful dialogue and questions, rather than basic questions such as "What time?"

Similarly, for residents who are accessing City information through the website, the City has included Share buttons on each web page. This allows for easier sharing, sparking more conversations about the City. This integration has also helped the Web Team better understand what web content social media users value, providing insight for future content and social media initiatives.

As the Marketing team and Web Team work closely on executing the City's communications strategy, it's only fitting that social media and web content are tied closely with print marketing. Social media icons and web links are included on print materials and advertisements to remind viewers to connect with the City.

Encouraging social media awareness throughout all mediums (web, social media, print) is integral to facilitating two-way communication. By building broad awareness and by being responsive and consistent through every medium, we're assuring residents of the City's commitment to community engagement.

#### 4. BEST PRACTICES

What sets your local government apart from others in your implementation and use of social media? Why should your local government be chosen above the rest to represent “Best Practices in social media”?

The City recognizes the value of social media in encouraging two-way communication. We venture into each new channel with a responsible approach that balances best practices, understanding of our users and their engagement patterns with efficient social media management.

##### **Sensitivity to Channels**

The City stresses the use of social media best practices. This ensures that the City is reaching the greatest number of people and is communicating with their online communities in an effective manner. For example, photos on Facebook garner more interactions than links alone and hashtags on Twitter help users track conversations. Meeting response expectations is also a best practice the City tries to adhere to. The City’s goal is to respond to each Citizen enquiry within 24 hours or at the very least, provide a response with a promise to follow up.

##### **Single Main Account for Each Channel**

With the use of one main account on each social media channel, users are able to get a broad understanding of all City programs and services and ensure new users can easily find the City’s accounts. This focus has given the City better insight into the content that engages residents. For example, the City tested the engagement around road closure alerts. Due to the high response received, the City regularly includes this information to help citizens effectively navigate the City.

Having one account has also made social media management more efficient and responsive to its citizens. For example, the Social Media Coordinator acts as the point of contact between citizens and internal staff and has helped reduce response time for enquiries. The Web Team’s goal is a same day response on Twitter and within 24 hours on other social media channels.

## 5. CHALLENGES

Tell us about some of the challenges you have faced in the implementation and operation of your social media platforms and the solutions to these challenges.

### **Monitoring Channels After-Hours**

One of the biggest challenges for the City is the continuous monitoring of social media, especially after regular working hours. To address this issue, the City has openly stated their hours of operation on its accounts. To ensure this expectation is set with its community, the social media coordinator only responds after hours in case of emergency or during special circumstances, such as large City festivals and popular City Council meetings.

### **Rogue Accounts**

Another big challenge is internal awareness and communication of the City's social media efforts and guidelines. The use of social media and the role of the Web and New Media Team are relatively new to the City of Surrey, so rogue social media accounts for various programs and initiatives have been created without the Team's guidance or knowing.

To overcome this challenge, the Web Team works with staff to ensure rogue accounts are compliant with social media guidelines and to create a plan to manage the accounts. In cases where it's assessed that the tool is not sustainable, the team work with staff on a sunset clause and create a plan to migrate the content into the main City account.

### **Internal Communication**

Social media is a relatively new method of communication and some City staff are hesitant to use it because of their lack of understanding. Not all staff are aware of the advantages that social media provides and are fearful of the responses that the City may receive.

To educate staff on the potential of social media and ways to help facilitate dialogue with citizens, the Web Team regularly communicates with staff members around the website and will take opportunities to mention social media as way to reach residents. For example, a social media tip is included in the Web Team's monthly newsletter to the City's 180 web editors.

6. ANALYTICS

Demonstrate through analytics or other data, how your local government’s use of social media has supported dialogue between your local government and its citizens, community and business stakeholders.

As a result of regular social media interactions, the City has seen an increase in social media referral traffic to the City’s website, which shows that users are consuming as well as sharing more content. The statistics below compares visits to social media over the five-month period January to June in 2013 and 2012.

Social Media Channel	% Increase	2013 Visits	2012 Visits
Facebook	1.92	10,791	10,588
m.facebook	114	5,061	2,365
Twitter	161	7,497	2,870
Twitter pageviews	241	18,807	7,801

- Content shared on social media from Surrey.ca (through ShareThis buttons) between January and June 2013:
  - 935 pages shared on Facebook
  - 633 pages shared on Google+
  - 312 pages shared on Twitter

In an effort to have more engaged citizens, the City always looks for ways to expand their reach and engage citizens. For example, the City identified an opportunity to share road closure alerts to help residents plan transportation routes. These Facebook posts reach 1500 – 1650 fans (32% of fans) and result in multiple shares to other Facebook users. One comment stated: “Oh I like this...This is a great way to let people know ahead of time for road closures.” These posts have also sparked conversations around the City’s transportation projects.

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The need for responsive customer service has also been top of mind for the City of Surrey. As social media usage grows, residents are finding that social media interactions with the City have been quite effective.

One example is from a resident who had reported a problem about an exposed pipe in her front yard. She had made several reports through the online form, but had not heard a reply so tweeted the City’s account to enquire about her issue. Within a few minutes, the Surrey Web Team was able to respond and follow up directly with the City department responsible. A City representative was dispatched to resident’s home to assess the situation and resolve the issue. The City received the original tweet at 12:37pm on February 1, 2013 and by 4:00pm, a representative was at the resident’s home to help.



## 7. AWARENESS

Provide a specific example (case study) of how using social media has increased citizen engagement with your local government.

In spring 2013, the City of Surrey hosted its first Community Summit. It was designed to bring Surrey citizens and City staff together to discuss topics that are important to both groups.

The first part of the Summit asked Surrey citizens to vote and to tell the City what topics they wanted discussed during the Community Summit. The voting was done through the website and promoted heavily on the City's social media accounts. The City received over 400 votes and many other suggestions via the City's Facebook account and to its Twitter account.

There were 200 spots available for the Community Summit, to allow for meaningful group discussions. To allow for further engagement, the City encouraged event goers to share their thoughts on Twitter, using the hashtag #SurreySummit. With such an engaged audience at the event, the hashtag became the second highest trending topic in Canada that day.

The City also launched Google Hangouts for the two keynote speakers at the event so that more citizens would be able to see the presentations in real time. By using Google Hangouts, the keynote speaker videos were automatically added to their YouTube channel for people to review after the event at no extra cost to the City. These videos were then automatically featured on the City's YouTube channel, to allow for views after the event.

The event was a great success and was the first major step in moving towards being more transparent and responsive to the City's residents and businesses.

## 8. ACCOUNTABILITY

How has this program/project improved upon accountability to the community's citizens?

Open and transparent communication is the nature of social media, which is a great fit for a City committed to open and proactive public consultation. The City of Surrey has seen an increase in visits to their public meeting and open house pages as well as Council meeting pages. Residents are regularly informed of public meetings through social media and can often find open house documents online the next day, with details on ways citizens can provide feedback to the City.

Regular monitoring while actively reaching out to the City's online community creates opportunities for open and informative dialogues with residents. For example, during a contentious casino application going through to council, the Web Team was able to identify certain lobby groups and monitor conversations around the topic, joining the conversation to answer questions quickly and correct any misinformation. This helped citizens gain awareness of the consultation process and gather the information necessary to make an informed decision.

In their commitment to having open conversations, social media has proven to be a widely accessible and public medium. Through these public interactions, the City has also made efforts to be more responsive offline. For example, if a resident misses a waste collection, they are able to contact the City through social media. The Web Team will then connect directly with their contact in waste collection to receive a quick response to the issue. For example, if the resident is able to notify the City of the missed collection by the following day, the City is often able to send out a collection team to pick up the resident's waste carts.

## 9. KNOWLEDGE SHARING

What helpful advice would you share with other communities looking to implement the use of social media in their communications plan?

Social media is only as successful as those who implement it and in the City's case, includes many Surrey staff. The Web & New Media Team manages and implements the City's social media channels, ensuring a consistent voice across its online presence. However, department staff provide the content and the expertise to enable valuable engagement with citizens. The reliance on these two functions has enabled the City to be responsive and informative through its social media efforts.

In the management of social media, using social media best practices is important in building and engaging with the City's online community. Through best practices, the City is able to maximize its reach and converse with citizens that meet their expectations. For example, including relevant photos with the City's Facebook posts helps increase reach as well as the number of likes and comments.

Once the knowledge and support for social media are in place, having a concrete strategy for implementation is paramount to the success of an organization's social media efforts. Ensuring that the social media strategy aligns with the City's goals, vision and values along with its communication strategy will guide the interactions that take place online. A strategy will also help the City address resourcing, identify the opportunities and limitations that it may encounter, and tactics to address these issues.

The management of one account on each social media channel has helped the City become more responsive with limited resources. With one full-time employee dedicated to social media, consolidating content and engagement to a limited number of accounts makes monitoring and communication more efficient. Internally, staff are aware of contacting the Web & New Media team for all communication online. Externally, the City's online community doesn't need to question which account they should contact with their enquiries.