

COMMUNICATIONS ASSESSMENT

EDWARD J. COLLINS, JR. CENTER FOR PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

FEBRUARY 2023

Town of
Shrewsbury

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Executive Summary

Like many towns in the Commonwealth, Shrewsbury is faced with the dual challenge of a rapidly changing landscape of communication opportunities and shifting demographics within its resident base. No longer can a town depend on a single website and the neighborhood newspaper to properly inform the community. The Town of Shrewsbury has tasked the Collins Center with assessing the current communication tools used by the Town and with identifying ways to improve messaging and information sharing.

This first report provides an inventory of the tools currently employed by the Town's departments, identifies strengths and weaknesses, and recommends a path forward. Specifically, the Collins Center recommends hiring a dedicated communications specialist to oversee the development of a detailed communications strategy, the implementation of consistent protocols for social media, website, and traditional communications, and oversight of these tools.

By clearly defining Shrewsbury's communications strategy, the Town will be better able to employ the multitude of communication tools available and reach targeted resident populations, as needed, as well as provide reliable methods to inform the entire community.

Introduction

The Town of Shrewsbury hired the Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management (Collins Center) to assess the Town's public communications efforts. The Town's leadership is concerned that the Town's current communication methods do not reach all members of the Shrewsbury community, particularly the Town's underserved populations.¹ This report analyzes the state of the Town's public communication efforts and makes recommendations for improvements.

The communications assessment is intended to help the Town understand its existing communications as a baseline for a future communications strategy.

Using data on Shrewsbury's demographics, this report reviews the types of communications methods best suited to target segments of Shrewsbury's populations. The forthcoming Communications Plan will go into more depth on specific recommendations for getting messages out to the community.

Methods

This communications assessment was completed using the following methods: document review, including a review of relevant data collected in parallel projects;² a survey of departments and boards that issue communications; audits of Town social media accounts and its website; and cross-referencing all data with Shrewsbury's demographic data.

The Shrewsbury municipal website was evaluated using the E-Government Survey Instrument, currently the most comprehensive index for e-government research. The audit systematically utilizes a unique E-Government Performance Index to classify websites on 86 scaled measures across five categories. Specifically, this audit analyzes privacy/security policies, interface usability, website content, the type of services currently offered, and the degree of citizen engagement and participation established by the municipality.

The project team collected research on current trends and best practices in government communications, including social media and applied these findings to develop recommendations.

¹ See [Appendix A: Shrewsbury's Underserved](#) for a brief overview of the term.

² During this project's timeframe, the Town was also working on a Strategic Plan and a Community Survey. Where relevant, data from both projects were used to inform this Communications Assessment and the subsequent Communications Plan.

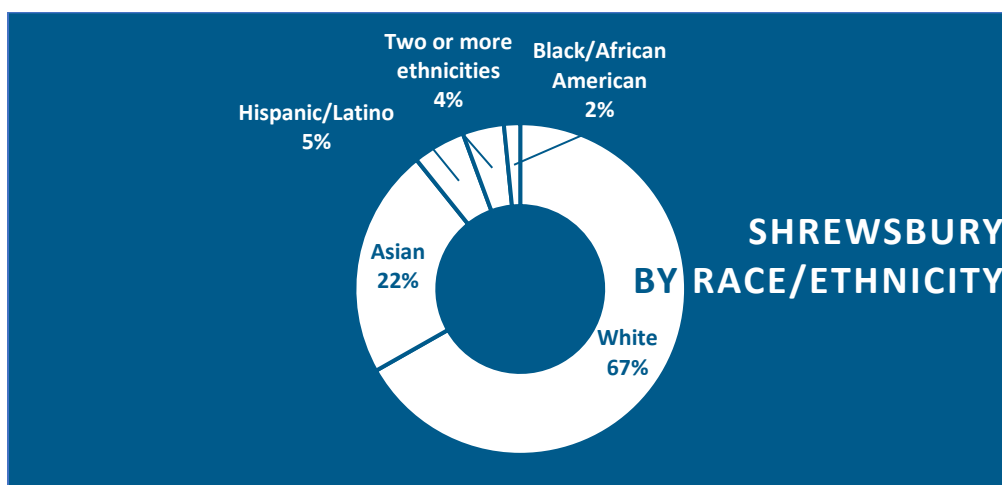
Shrewsbury at a Glance

The total population of Shrewsbury, according to the 2020 Census, was 38,325.³ Its population is split almost evenly among children, adults between the ages of 25 and 44, and adults between the ages of 45 and 64. There are few young adults (ages 18 to 24) and a small proportion of the population is seniors (aged 65 and older).

Shrewsbury's residents by age group



Shrewsbury has 13,753 households with a reported median income of \$108,870. The median income of individual residents is \$53,180. On average, there are 2.73 people per household. Three and a half percent (1,341) of Shrewsbury residents are reported as living in poverty.



Almost a third of Shrewsbury's households (30.2% or 4,153) speak a language other than English at home. The most prevalent non-English languages are languages from India (7.2%), Chinese (4.1%), other Asian languages (3.7%), Spanish (3.5%), Arabic (1.6%), African languages (1.1%), Portuguese (1%) and Russian (1%).⁴

Shrewsbury residents are highly educated, with almost two-thirds (62.5%) of residents having completed a bachelor's degree. Veterans comprise approximately 4% (1,541) of the total population. Where possible, the project team uses Shrewsbury's unique demographics to inform this assessment.

³ United States Census Bureau (2021). Quickfacts on Shrewsbury town, Worcester County, Massachusetts. Retrieved January 2, 2023, from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/shrewsburytownworcestercountymassachusetts>.

⁴ "Shrewsbury, MA" *NeighborhoodScout*. Location Inc., n.d. Web. 2 January 2023.
<<https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/ma/shrewsbury/demographics>>

Communication Methods by Demographics

The best way to communicate with a group often depends on characteristics of that group, including demographics. Much of modern communications occurs through online channels, which is fitting for Shrewsbury, as most of the Town is connected to the Internet. Which methods the Town chooses to use should depend in part on which groups it is attempting to reach.

According to Census data, most Shrewsbury households (95.8%) reported having a computer and 92.9% reported having a broadband internet subscription.⁵ This leads the project team to conclude there are very few digital deserts in Shrewsbury.

There are a plethora of digital technologies and communication tools available to municipalities. For this assessment, the project team overlayed Pew Research Center data on social media use, access to broadband internet at home, and smartphone dependence onto Shrewsbury demographic data.^{6,7}

The information contained in this section comes from overlaying Shrewsbury's Census data with Pew Research on social media use, broadband access, and smartphone dependency. Each of these indicators impacts the ability of the Town to reach its intended audiences.

The variables included in this section indicate:

- Whether members of the group are online
- Where to find them (via social media applications)
- Whether the group is primarily online using a smartphone

This information can then be used to make data-informed decisions about how best to communicate with a given group. This section reviews groups of Shrewsbury's adult populations in light of this data.

⁵ United States Census Bureau (2021). Quickfacts on Shrewsbury town, Worcester County, Massachusetts. Retrieved January 2, 2023, from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/shrewsburytownworcestercountymassachusetts>.

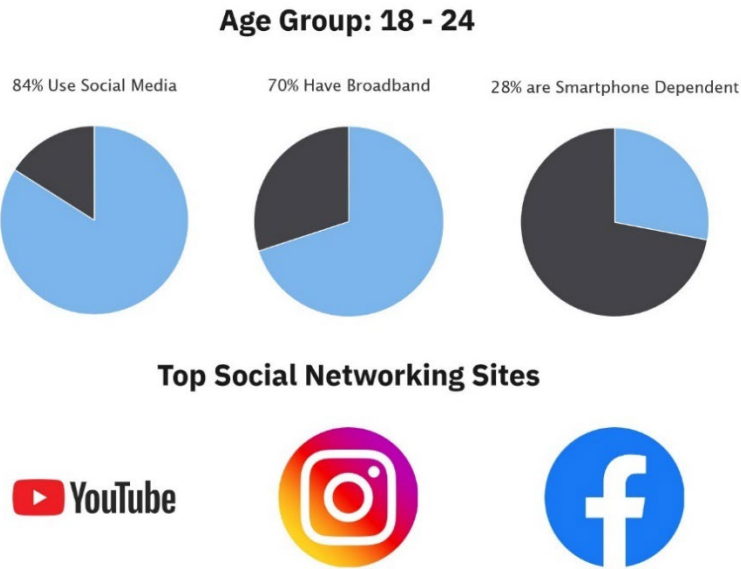
⁶ The U.S. Census Bureau and Pew Research Center do not use the same age and income groupings; there is some overlap in each group. However, the groups are distinct enough to allow for recommendations.

⁷ Pew Research Center. (2022, November 16). *Mobile fact sheet*. Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech. Retrieved January 2, 2023, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/#panel-8fffa996-faa6-4cee-ae6b-d58c239bc009>

A note on smartphone dependency: it is defined as using a smartphone as the primary means of accessing the internet while at home. According to the Pew Research Group, “Reliance on smartphones for online access is especially common among younger adults, lower-income Americans and those with a high school education or less.” Smartphone-dependent users may be using cellular data to access web and social media sites, rather than broadband. Understanding the proportion of the population who is smartphone dependent demonstrates the need for government communications to be smartphone friendly and for communication methods that are smartphone accessible (e.g., do not require a computer).

The most illustrative demographic data for Shrewsbury comes from the groupings by age. The images below show which social media apps are used, as well as what percentage of that age group uses social media, has access to broadband, and is smartphone dependent.

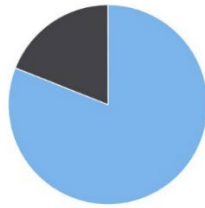
Shrewsbury’s youngest adults are the most smartphone dependent and are also the most active on social media.



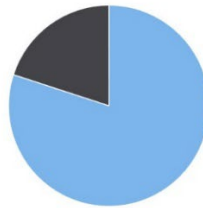
Residents between the ages of 25 to 44 are reportedly the least smartphone dependent of all the age groups, and they are quite active with social media.

Age Group: 25 - 44

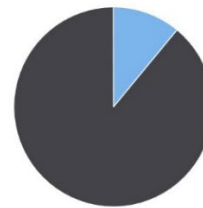
81% Use Social Media



80% Have Broadband



11% are Smartphone Dependent



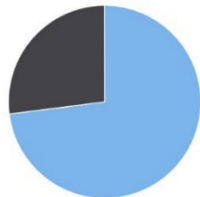
Top Social Networking Sites



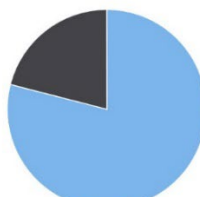
Residents between the ages of 45-64 have a low dependence on smartphones. Just under three-quarters of this age bracket use social media.

Age Group: 45 - 64

73% Use Social Media



79% Have Broadband



13% are Smartphone Dependent



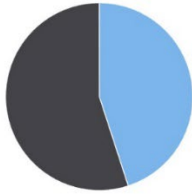
Top Social Networking Sites



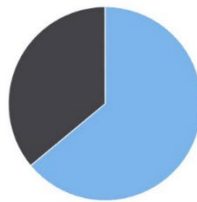
Under half of Shrewsbury residents 65 use social media. This group reports a low smartphone dependence rate.

Age Group: 65+

45% Use Social Media



64% Have Broadband



12% are Smartphone Dependent



Top Social Networking Sites



The Pew Research Center only reported social media usage data for three ethnic groups: Black/African Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, Whites. The project team was unable to find data on social media usage, access to broadband, or smartphone dependence for Asian American populations, which would be more applicable to Shrewsbury. A few highlights of the Pew data available include that Hispanic/Latinos (25%) and Black/African Americans (17%) reported high levels of smartphone dependence, and Hispanic/Latinos have the lowest reported rates of broadband connection at home (65%). The social media sites most frequently used by these ethnic populations were YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram.

This information is offered as a guide, not a textbook. Social media preferences change, sometimes rapidly, and people use different social media applications for different purposes. What's most important is having a coherent communications strategy that encompasses all Town departments, so any method the Town chooses is optimized and used appropriately for that audience.

What are Municipal Communications?

Municipal communications are essential to the functionality of local government. Communications are how residents are informed about their government, including its operations, plans, day-to-day events, programs, and services.

All entities seek to build trust with their audiences (consumers, constituents, etc.) through communications. Like private sector communications, poor communications from government can confuse

messages and create difficulties. Government operations can deteriorate if communications are perceived as untrustworthy or unreliable.

Communications is how the Town shares information – the methods it chooses, the messages it conveys. Municipal governments have at least two main target audiences they must communicate with and to:

1. External stakeholders (town residents; other local, state, and federal government entities; the private sector, including regulated businesses); and
2. Internal stakeholders (town employees, local elected or appointed officials).

In ideal circumstances, both types of communications are performed by professionals who are trained in communications. While the goals and responsibilities of a municipal communications department may vary, generally they are tasked with setting communications policies, handling media requests, overseeing branding and image, managing websites and social media accounts, and approving and reviewing any outgoing messaging.

Best Practices in Municipal Communications

There are many aspects to a good municipal communications strategy. Included here are the Center’s basic tenets of sound municipal communications.

Be inclusive

- The pandemic taught municipal governments all over the world that their residents want to be involved and pay attention, even if they are unable to attend an in-person meeting. Digital technology can help.⁸ Continuing to hold online options for meetings – whether through an online meeting platform, live broadcasting meetings on social media, or hosting town halls on social media – is a great way to continue to engage the public, particularly those who otherwise may not engage.

⁸ Esterline, D. (2022, July 13). 4 Trends in Local Government Communications. Retrieved January 2, 2023, from <https://www.revize.com/blog/4-trends-in-local-government-communications/index.php>.

Meet constituents where they are

- Use the methods and media they use, when its feasible and meets strategic goals.
- Conversely, do not jump on every social media trend, as it's not a good use of communications resources. Choose wisely and spend time building the municipality's presence on the chosen application(s).
- Use plain language in all materials and messaging.
- Translate materials or ensure that translation services are available for non-translated materials. This includes ADA compliant translation services.⁹

Be strategic

- Communicate early and often, particularly with big projects and initiatives.¹⁰
- Repeat messages often.

Be accurate

- Whether conveying positive or negative information, the best strategy is to be as accurate and forthcoming as possible. The public does not respond well to "sugar coating."¹¹

Make processes and policies clear and easy to navigate

- Even the most skilled communications expert cannot make a byzantine process understandable. Ensure government processes are clear and easy to navigate and communicating how to access those processes will be much smoother.

This assessment is primarily about tools and methods for communication; the forthcoming Communications Plan will go in more depth on goals and strategies for Shrewsbury's municipal communications.

The Town of Shrewsbury's Current Communications

Shrewsbury has no centralized communications department or communications professional to oversee the Town's messaging.

⁹ Hyland-Wood, B., Gardner, J., Leask, J., & Ecker, U. K. (2021). Toward effective government communication strategies in the era of COVID-19. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 8(1), 1-11.

¹⁰ Global Infrastructure Hub. (2019, May 9). *Project Preparation Government Project Communication*. Global Infrastructure Hub - A G20 INITIATIVE. Retrieved January 2, 2023, from <https://www.gihub.org/articles/project-preparation-government-project-communication/>

¹¹ Hyland-Wood, B., Gardner, J., Leask, J., & Ecker, U. K. (2021). Toward effective government communication strategies in the era of COVID-19. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 8(1), 1-11.

Individual departments similarly lack their own communications plan or policies, and communication efforts are siloed within each department. Within each department, employees generally take turns performing communications tasks such as updating websites and social media pages, and these functions are not performed by staff trained in communications.

One department, the Fire Department, retains a public relations firm (John Guilfoil Public Relations, LLC). While public relations are one of many marketing and communications tools available to support a municipality's goals and objectives, without a comprehensive Town communications plan, these efforts may fall short of the municipality's strategic outreach goals.

The primary communication methods currently utilized by the Town are discussed below. A list of other communications methods occasionally employed by the Town is available in [Appendix B](#).

Website

The Town of Shrewsbury's website is user-friendly. The homepage is an appropriate length, and the navigation bars are formatted consistently throughout the site. There is a clear indication that navigation bars are "clickable" and there is a link to the main homepage on every page. A search tool is available that allows users to narrow down a set of returned results. All forms on the website are clearly marked with which fields are required. If errors on the form are submitted, the site explicitly labels which fields need changes and provides additional information about how to fix them.

Shrewsbury's website scored high for content. Website content is dynamic and critical for good communications. No matter how technologically advanced a website is, if the content is outdated, difficult to navigate, or incorrect, then it is not fulfilling its purpose.

When examining website content, five key areas were considered: access to contact information (specifically, information about each department listed on the website); public documents; access for those with disabilities; multimedia materials; and time sensitive information. Key content, such as information regarding the location of offices, contact information for all departments, and a calendar of public events, is included and easy to locate. The site also offers a listing of external links, which is helpful.

The site contains a sophisticated searchable database of public meeting archives in downloadable formats. Downloadable documents and reports are a best practice in municipal website design, as is the provision of budget materials, which Shrewsbury also provides.

Links to supportive assistive technologies, the ability to translate the website into different languages, and a mobile friendly version are all features that increase accessibility. Shrewsbury also provides a searchable database of job listings and vacancies and allows for the online submission of job applications.

An important aspect of municipal websites is the provision of public services online. Municipal services are divided into two different service types: those that allow citizens to interact with the municipality (which can be as basic as forms for requesting information, paying bills, or filing complaints) and those that allow users to register online for municipal events or services.

The site allows citizens to pay their utilities and taxes online and can access the links from the home page “pay online” icon. However, parking ticket online payment, while available, is not included on the dropdown menu options on this page. The project team suggests adding this category to the online payment menu, as well as text that explains the user will be sent to an external site to pay the parking ticket.

Shrewsbury’s website lists contact information for elected officials. There is also an option to subscribe and unsubscribe from a newsletter listserv. These are best practices.

It appears the Town of Shrewsbury lacks a privacy policy, or at least an accessible one. There is no link at the bottom of the webpages where the policy is typically stored. Additionally, when using the site’s search feature to search for a privacy policy, the first result shows a privacy page that has no content. It is possible a policy existed at some point in the past, but it is no longer viewable to visitors. A privacy policy should be posted that identifies what data is being collected on the site, the intended use of the data collected, whether personal information is disclosed to third parties, the use of “cookies” or “beacons,” and specific contact information for more information, including an email address.

Facebook

Facebook is the social media platform used by the most Town departments, and most departments that use Facebook have a relatively high number of followers (4,000 or more). A review of recent posts from each of the department’s Facebook pages showed that engagement was steady, meaning there were at least some likes or comments whenever a post was made.

Table 1: Overview of Shrewsbury Facebooks Accounts (as of December 2022)

Department	Facebook Handle	# of Followers
Police Department	@Shrewsbury, MA Police Department	5,400+
Fire Department	@Shrewsbury, MA Fire Department	6,500+
Town of Shrewsbury	@Town of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts	4,800+
Shrewsbury Public Library	@ShrewsburyPublicLibrary	4,013
Shrewsbury Council on Aging and Senior Center	@Shrewsbury Council on Aging and Senior Center	134

The Council on Aging account was launched less than a year ago and, presently, has few followers. If participation does not grow in the coming year, it may indicate that this platform is not ideal for its target population, or the department has not optimized the application for its outreach purposes.

Twitter

There are three municipal Twitter accounts. As of December 2022, the Town's central Twitter account has 2,849 followers and is following 182 profiles, primarily other municipalities and state organizations. The description of the account is, "Official Page of the Town of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts. #ShrewsburyMa." The profile also provides a link to the official government website. The account is not verified.

Table 2: Overview of Shrewsbury Twitter Accounts (as of December 2022)

Department	Twitter Handle	# of Followers
Town of Shrewsbury	@ShrewsburyMAGov	2,849
Shrewsbury Library	@ShrewsburyLib	1,117
Parks and Recreation	@ShrewsburyParks	1,804

Engagement, defined as either likes or retweets, was found to be low on most tweets. The tweet with the highest engagement was made on April 21, 2016. It reads, "Burns Bridge shines Purple tonight. #ShrewsburyMa #Worcester @MassDOT" and includes a photo of Burns Bridge lit up in the evening. It was retweeted 27 times.

Similarly, the Library and Parks and Recreation Twitter accounts showed relatively few followers and almost no engagement.

Instagram

The Shrewsbury library account (@shrewsburypubliclibrary) described as “the official Instagram of the Shrewsbury public library” has only one post and 66 followers, while the account with a linktree in its profile also appears to be an official Twitter account for the Library and has over a thousand followers. The account with the most followers (@shrewsburylibrary) averages less than 20 likes per post, although the posts are well designed with images that are clear and easy to read.

The Shrewsbury Library teens Instagram account (@shrewsburylibteens) also averages less than 20 likes for most posts. The posts are similarly well designed and compelling.

The Parks and Recreation Department averages between 5 and 30 likes for its posts, which are generally reminders about the food truck festival or farmers' market. The posts with the most likes were those that showed and referenced the now former Parks and Recreation director.

Table 3: Overview of Shrewsbury Instagram Accounts (as of December 2022)

Department	Twitter Handle	# of Followers
Shrewsbury Library	@shrewsburylibrary	1,199
--	@shrewsburylibteens	506
--	@shrewsburypubliclibrary	66
Parks and Recreation	@shrewsburyparks	1,215

It may be that Instagram is useful as a one-way means of communication. If turnout for the events posted on these accounts is reasonable, then the lack of engagement or likes does not mean that the Town should stop using the method.

There is one account @town_of_shrewsbury that has been inactive since 2017 and is not an official Town account.

Newsletters

There are four newsletters issued by Town of Shrewsbury departments, or their regional equivalent: Select Board, Council on Aging, Library, and Regional Public Health Alliance.

The office of the Select Board provides a monthly online newsletter, “From the Desk of the Select Board.” The publication features actions of the Board and its meetings to inform residents and employees of Town business. Highlights include headlines such as, “Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Timeline,” or “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Committee Appointments,” with short blurbs about the events listed underneath. The bulletin also contains videos of full Select Board meetings and

roundtables. Lastly, the content ends with a list of upcoming meetings and links to the Town's Facebook and Twitter pages.

The subject matter is useful for Shrewsbury citizens who are interested in the Town's operations. A counter on the top of the page indicates that the newsletter has been viewed just over 600 times at the time it was audited. There are also accessibility features available in a right-hand side toolbar that allows the reader to increase the font size, enable high-contact mode, or translate the document into various languages.

The Council on Aging offers their monthly publication, "The Senior Edition," in both a digital version and in hard-copy form. The Council prints 2,500 copies per issue. An ongoing [archive of the newsletters](#) can be found on the Town of Shrewsbury website. Each edition is around 20 pages long. This is a typical length for a municipal newsletter; the content is all relevant to the population it serves.

Each issue's cover page has a holiday theme appropriate for that month, and every version contains key information, such as the COA mission statement, contact information, and a list of Council on Aging board members on the second page as a masthead. The newsletter also contains a disclaimer that the reader may encounter material that is outdated and provides an appropriate phone number to call for the most recent information. Other pages in the issue provide monthly transportation services, flyers for community events, and resources for healthcare. Upcoming programs are listed alphabetically by event name. The newsletter contains a myriad of different font styles, sizes, and colors, some of which are more readable than others.

The Library provides a quarterly online and print newsletter, "Chapters," to every resident. Past newsletters are available in the online [archives](#). The publications are eight pages long and begin with a personalized letter from the Library Director. Other content includes book recommendations by staff and information about adult services, programs, and events organized chronologically. There are separate pages for children's and young adult programming. The circular ends with information about technology-themed talks and events. Each issue is formatted uniformly with a simple and accessible template.

Lastly, the Central MA Regional Public Health Alliance (CMRPHA) Newsletter is published by the Worcester Division of Public Health (WDPH) to share stories about how the Alliance is working in its partner communities. WDPH is the lead agency of the CMRPHA, a coalition of five municipalities (Grafton, Millbury, Shrewsbury, West Boylston, and Worcester) working cooperatively to create and sustain a viable, efficient regional public health district. The circular is put out monthly and typically ranges from 6-8 pages. It provides mostly textual articles about

health studies conducted in the area and updates to any policy changes. There are a few images embedded in the articles with captions. The issues also contain opportunities to get involved with focus groups, trainings, or conferences.

Recommendations

After reviewing the Town's existing communications efforts, residential demographic data, and best practices for municipal communications, the project team offers the following recommendations:

Prioritize Professional Communications

A Town of Shrewsbury's size and level of service requires professional communications to inform and engage the community on Town operations, initiatives, and offerings. The Town can choose to either create a communications position or department or subcontract communications to a private firm. The project team recommends an internal centralized communications position, as an internal position will become a part of the fabric of the Town's operations.

The core functions of this position would be to issue and manage the Town's communications, including acting as the point person for all media inquiries. The position would be responsible for developing comprehensive communications policies and strategies, as well as a coherent brand identity. The position would oversee all Town communications. Once the person in the communications position has had time to understand the Town and further develop a communications strategy, then they can evaluate the current practice of outsourcing pieces of the Town's communications.

[Appendix C](#) offers a comparison of municipalities of a similar size to Shrewsbury, with an overview of their communications efforts.

Develop Communications Strategy, Protocols, and a Coherent Brand Identity

The Communications Plan this project team is developing for the Town will be a helpful tool to launch the new communications efforts. The communications professional will need to have a deep understanding of the Town, its people, and its challenges and strengths to design a tailored communications strategy and coherent brand identity, which will be used to guide communications for the entire Town.

The position will also develop communications protocols for departments and boards to follow. It is neither appropriate nor necessary for the communications position to issue all the Town's communications, particularly for some departments that communicate directly with their targeted audiences. However, ensuring that every communication issued from any Town department or board adheres to set protocols will ensure

that all Town communications function as a whole and help move the Town and its efforts forward. Additionally, the communications position would be briefed on, and ideally review prior to release, all Town messaging, which ensures that the person is prepared to handle media or citizen inquiries about outgoing communications.

The communications professional would also be responsible for developing branding materials for use in all Town communications, including:

- Creating a brand manual including color(s) and fonts to use on logos, website, non-digital and digital marketing tools.
- Assembling a photo catalog of residents, government officials, locales, businesses, etc., to rotate on physical and digital marketing products including the Town's website.
- Assembling a video catalog of residents, government officials, locales, businesses, etc., to rotate on digital marketing products including the Town's website.
- Developing communications guidelines that include topics such as: how to use logos, social media, who to call for printing physical marketing tools, when to engage the communication director for community events, etc.

[Consider a Broader Approach to Service Delivery](#)

Currently, the Town of Shrewsbury offers the SeeClickFix feature, which allows residents to report public works-related concerns to that department. Communications can be built into programs similar to SeeClickFix, like 311, which improves community relations in addition to enhancing communications. provide communications and deliver services to residents.

311 is a phoneline used by municipalities to handle general and non-public safety-related inquiries and to manage complaints and reports of problems. A well-designed and implemented 311 program enables residents to communicate efficiently and effectively with the municipality by phone, email, or other means, while also collecting data that municipal leaders can use to understand and address systemic service issues. 311 facilitates communication with constituents, allowing them to have their questions answered and concerns addressed, while freeing staff in individual departments to focus on their day-to-day duties.

Shrewsbury may wish to explore 311 as a more comprehensive strategy to both provide communications and deliver services to residents. provide communications and deliver services to residents. Ideally, implementing a 311 program would increase residents' engagement with Shrewsbury's services as well as build trust in government.

Continue Updating the Town Website

Currently, the Town's website content is heavy on text and minimal on visuals. There are no pictures or videos with residents and local government officials in them. Existing photos are all landscape-type pictures with no identification of where these locales are in Shrewsbury for residents to visit.

Website text could use improvements as well. One possibility is to transform some text to infographics. Infographics make text information easier to digest and share and are more engaging.¹²

The communications position would be tasked with overseeing updates to the Town's website. The project team recommends this assessment as a baseline for that effort. Posting website's privacy policy, moving more services online, and offering infographics are all priorities for further improvements.

Ensure Content is Accessible

The Town wants to ensure all residents, including the underserved, have access to the information about the Town and its programs and services. One way to do this is to ensure all content is accessible – to smartphone users, to non-English speakers, to people with visual impairments, to residents whose reading comprehension is at or below middle school level, and more.

The communications director can offer guidelines, policies, and trainings to staff on how to ensure their communications are meeting these standards. This professional can also provide quality control by reviewing messages before they are released.

Shrewsbury has a significant immigrant and non-native English-speaking populations. Ensuring communications materials are all easily translatable, or providing materials in multiple languages, is a best practice. Bloomberg Cities Network recommends that municipalities "think beyond Spanish"¹³, which is vital for a community as diverse as Shrewsbury.

¹² Neomam.com. (n.d.). *13 scientific reasons why your brain craves infographics [interactive]*. We Create Content That People Want to Share | NeoMam Studios. Retrieved January 2, 2023, from <https://neomam.com/interactive/13reasons>

¹³ *Communicating in a pandemic: How cities can better reach non-English speakers*. Bloomberg Cities. (2020, July 24). Retrieved January 2, 2023, from <https://bloombergcities.jhu.edu/news/communicating-pandemic-how-cities-can-better-reach-non-english-speakers>

A good resource for plain language, particularly in government resources, is plainlanguage.gov.

Additionally, for large scale communications efforts, such as a big planning project or Town meeting article, it may be helpful to use community reference groups or focus groups. These groups can advise appropriate messaging platforms and modes of communication (e.g., sign language, TV broadcast, text messaging, various social media platforms) and the framing and tone of messages.

Delete Twitter Accounts

Twitter can be a great tool for communications if it's appropriate for the target demographic. In Shrewsbury's case, this application does not appear to be the right fit for Shrewsbury's populations. There are three departments currently running Twitter accounts. Engagement with each account is low; there are hardly any likes or retweets. There are better uses of Town communications resources than Twitter.

Strengthen Facebook Strategy

Shrewsbury has five municipal Facebook accounts, four of which have over 4,000 followers. The Town may wish to keep and strengthen the well-performing Facebook accounts. A communications professional, after getting to know the community and observing how residents use Facebook, may wish to adapt the Town's Facebook strategy, perhaps streamlining or combining pages. They may also decide its worthwhile to fortify the Council on Aging's Facebook presence, as that is a preferred social media application for the COA's demographics. The goal of the Town's Facebook strategy should be to maximize engagement and followers.

Further Review Goals and Utility of Instagram

The project team was unable to determine whether Instagram is a useful tool in communicating with Shrewsbury residents. National data indicates that it is utilized by Shrewsbury's younger demographic groups (ages 44 and younger), and it may be useful as a one-way means of getting programming information out to targeted populations. The project team recommends the new communications position further review the goals and utility of Instagram for individual departments to target their demographics.

Increase Use of Video Content

This recommendation is more future-oriented than the previous recommendations. It is something to Town may wish to consider for the longer term.

As the social media demographic data indicate, video is a popular and successful communications medium. Video can be shared across almost

any social media platform and is digestible for most viewers. Some researchers believe that videos are the future for local governments to maintain constituent trust.¹⁴ Note that the project team is not recommending the Town start a YouTube channel, rather that it considers utilizing videos for storytelling across its existing communications platforms for the medium's ability to tell stories in an accessible way.

The Town already posts its public meetings in video format online, and no change is recommended for those. A new communications professional will be significantly burdened with other recommendations from this assessment and the forthcoming Communications Plan and will not be able to turn their attention to creation of new video content for some time, if at all.

There are other options, however, to incorporate video content into a longer-term communications strategy. One, could be to add a social media marketing position to the new communications department. The creation of video content would be included as one of that job's roles. The other is to capitalize on the Town's relationship with Shrewsbury Media Connection, if that organization is interested and willing to produce video content for the Town.

Municipal video content should be brief, accessible, and used for informing the public about new or updated programming and projects. The Town may wish to also develop video primers to introduce municipal departments and processes that may be unfamiliar to the average resident (examples: "What the Planning Department Does," "How to Apply for a Building Permit," or "Representative Town Meeting 101").

All video content should be offered with subtitles which preferably can be translated to other languages. Video content can be uploaded to the Town's website and associated social media pages. Comments from residents on the videos posted should be responded to in real time or no later than 24 hours.

[Incorporate Metrics into Communications](#)

Good communication efforts prove to be good by meeting goals and objectives. The only way to tell if goals and objectives are met is by using data metrics. The project team recommends that the communications professional set goals and provide standards to show the efficacy of

¹⁴ Hyland-Wood, B., Gardner, J., Leask, J., & Ecker, U. K. (2021). Toward effective government communication strategies in the era of COVID-19. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 8(1), 1-11.

chosen communication strategies and methods. [Appendix D](#) gives an overview of possible performance metrics.

Conclusion

This assessment found the Town of Shrewsbury's communications efforts are decentralized and lack a cohesive strategy, leading to varying effects and outcomes.

Understanding what the Town is currently offering in terms of communication is the first step. The project team offers some baseline recommendations in this assessment to improve communications, namely by creating a department tasked with centralizing and streamlining communications.

The Town of Shrewsbury has plenty to communicate with its community, and has residents that are engaged, but the Town lacks a central communications strategy and a unified voice. The forthcoming Communications Plan will provide actionable steps to further improve and expand the Town's communications.

Appendix A: Shrewsbury's Underserved

"Underserved" has been used as a general term for years. However, in January 2021, President Biden issued an executive order titled "Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government" in which underserved residents and underserved communities are defined and enumerated as follows:

- Black
- Latino
- Indigenous and Native American persons
- Asian Americans
- Pacific Islanders and other persons of color
- Members of religious minorities
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons
- Persons with disabilities
- Persons who live in rural areas
- Persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality

The Executive Order defines underserved communities as "populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life".¹⁵

The first phase of the Collins Center's work in Shrewsbury culminated in a Needs Assessment which identified the following populations as underserved in Shrewsbury:

- Residents with accessibility concerns
- Residents with mental health concerns
- Residents who are not native-English speakers
- Low-income residents
- Seniors, homebound, and the chronically ill
- Residents who struggle with transportation
- Youth

Using either definition, good municipal communications seek to include, at minimum, and at times explicitly target underserved community members to ensure they are aware of services and feel engaged and included.

¹⁵ The United States Government. (2021, January 21). *Executive order on advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities through the Federal Government*. The White House. Retrieved January 2, 2023, from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/>

Appendix B: Other Means of Municipal Communications

Shrewsbury staff reported also utilizing the following means of communication:

- NotifyMe notices
- Posters
- Bill inserts
- CodeRed alerts
- Brochures
- Press releases
- Cable Access channel broadcasts
- Variable message board (highway)
- Public meetings / open houses
- LinkedIn
- Table at community event

Appendix C: Communications Departments in Comparable Municipalities

The following chart compares Massachusetts cities and towns of a similar size to Shrewsbury and their communications efforts.

Town	Pop.	Communications Mission	Implementation	Staffing	Links
Amherst	39,263	Provide residents with direct access to town service providers; increase engagement; target information delivery	1. Created Engage Amherst website 2. Created and implemented comprehensive social media strategy 3. CivicReady for emergency notices (opt-in)	1. Communications Director 2. Dept. social media maintained by designated Communication Officer (add-on responsibility)	https://engageamherst.org https://www.amherstma.gov
Andover	36,921	Improve customer service	1. Created "Andover Central" 311 center 2. In-person customer service center (2022) 3. Mobile Town Hall (2021) 4. Customer Service Kiosk downtown	1. Deputy and Assistant Town Managers oversee communications	https://andoverma.gov/socialmedia https://andoverma.qscend.com/311/
Lexington	33,309	Promote the interests of the Town in concert with Arlington's goals; create a communications plan to expand resident engagement and information.	1. 2020 Enhancing Communication in Lexington Committee formed and roadmap to improve communication created 2. Dedicated Comms Director hired 3. "Stay Informed" page on website links to all communication tools 4. CodeRed for emergency notices (opt-in)	1. Director of Communications/ Special Projects 2. Dept. social media management	https://www.lexingtonma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/2549/ECIL-Report-PDF?bidId https://www.lexingtonma.gov/708/Stay-Informed
Needham	31,200	Encourage participation in Town government and educate and inform community about important issues, projects, events, and news	1. Hired Public Information Officer (2020). 2. Conducted community surveys and forums (2021-22) 3. Updated website and social media policy and plans based on feedback (2022) 4. Robust cable video page	1. Public Information Officer 2. Dept. social media management (PIO created style guide, staff training and provides oversight)	https://www.needhamchannel.org http://www.needhamma.gov/3305/How-Do-I

Appendix D: Performance Indicators

The following performance indicators can be utilized to track performance of specific communication methods. This list is not exhaustive, and the municipality may have other priorities or strategies to measure.

- Media
 - News release
 - News sentiment
 - Reach
- E-Newsletters/E-Blasts
 - Subscribers
 - Open rates
 - Click-through rate
- Website
 - Unique visits
 - Page views
 - Top pages
 - Bounce rate
 - Search terms
- Social Media
 - Followers
 - Engagement
 - Reach
 - Quantity of posts
- Printed Materials/Paid Advertisements
 - Distribution rates
 - Event turnout or participation
- Other Metrics
 - Quantity of survey responses
 - Feedback of elected officials
 - Reduction in unsolicited inquiries to departments
 - Video views
 - Event attendance
 - Quantity of complaints
 - Number of materials translated into other languages/made available in other formats for people with disabilities