

TOWN OF Burlington

Municipal Communications Plan



JUNE 2023

EDWARD J. COLLINS, JR. CENTER FOR PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

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Plan Introduction

In February 2023, the Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management (The Center) delivered a Communications Assessment¹ to the Town of Burlington. The Assessment provided an inventory of current tools employed by the Town and made recommendations for steps the Town could take to improve overall communications. This report provides specific goals, strategies, and tactics to implement the recommendations and to work toward improved townwide communication.

Central to the Communications Plan is for Burlington to make communication a key component of municipal services, rather than a compartmentalized department or function. Burlington needs to hire a communications professional whose responsibility will be to oversee townwide communication efforts as well as standardize, expand, and measure the ways in which the Town presents information.

The goals set forth below begin with organizational recommendations to leverage the depth of experience of existing departments and to create a culture that enables more impactful outreach to the community. Next are recommendations for stronger communication tools which utilize this new structure. The Plan then sets forth policies and guidelines to build a cohesive foundation for communications. The last goal discusses ways to improve resident engagement to ensure outreach is effective and inclusive of harder-to-reach residents, and that two-way communication is supported. A summary chart of the tactical recommendations and a general timetable for implementation are also included. Finally, the appendices provide examples and details of Plan tactics, and give a more detailed overview of the communication survey results.

Please note that this Plan is intended to be a living document that serves as a guide for implementation. The Plan should be continually adapted to changes in Burlington's community, analyses of tactics, and emerging communication tools.



COMMUNICATIONS CAN SET THE TONE FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

¹ Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management. (February 2023). Town of Burlington Communications Assessment.

Plan Context

By commissioning a Communications Plan, the Town of Burlington acknowledges the importance of communications to daily operations in local government and to civic engagement. Many municipalities struggle with communication in a rapidly changing field. As traditional local media outlets close at alarming rates and individual social media use splinters according to demographic or other divisions, communicating with a community has become increasingly difficult.

Two-way communications are a gold standard for any organization, but figuring out how to build them into already overtaxed municipal operations can be a struggle. Communication is what informs a community on their government's actions, decisions, and rules. It is also what can inspire residents to get involved and can ultimately determine whether a resident trusts their local government. The role of communication in civic engagement is so critical that the National Civic League's 2021 Model City Charter now recommends that provisions for communications and community engagement be included in the municipality's charter. Emphasizing the role of communications in engagement, the Model City Charter states, "The city shall treat engagement as a "multi-channel" endeavor that includes face-to-face meetings, virtual interactions, and other online communications."² Communications can set the tone for community engagement, and ensuring communications reach all townspeople has ripple effects on matters of equity and transparency.



HOW TO USE THE PLAN

This Communications Plan is designed to be a roadmap for Burlington as it implements the outlined recommendations. Building on the Assessment, this Plan details strategies and tactics that will address the gaps and areas of improvement identified by the project team's research. A tactics summary provides an overview of the steps needed, who should be leading, and a timeline for implementation. The Plan concludes with appendices which offer links to resources to guide the Town through this effort.

² National Civic League. (2021). Model City Charter, 9th Edition. <https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/resources/model-city-charter-9th-edition/>

Plan Goals, Strategies, and Tactics

This section outlines action items for the Town to pursue to improve its municipal communications. All goals, strategies, and tactics were based on analyses of 29 interviews and 747 online survey responses, as well as review of Town documents and existing Town communications.

The Center's project team interviewed department heads, employees responsible for specific department communications, members of the Select Board, the Town Administrator, leaders of local non-profit organizations, and Burlington Cable Access TV (BCAT). The project team also created and distributed an online quantitative survey using the help of Town officials, community partners, and local media. Details of the survey results are included in [Appendix A](#). It should be noted that the survey was conducted on an opt-in, non-scientific basis and may not represent the views or behaviors of the entire Burlington population. However, it is worth considering that the respondent pool is likely more engaged with digital communication than the town's population as a whole and has a high level of engagement with Town communications, which may suggest that their feedback comes from a place of familiarity.

Each goal is supported by at least one strategy, and each strategy has an objective to clarify its direction. Tactics for achieving each objective are offered; the Town may wish to utilize other tactics as well. These goals are offered as a baseline in the absence of a communications professional on staff. When and if a communications professional is hired, that person may wish to restructure the goals and their subordinate action items and to add measures such as deadlines to the objectives.

GOAL 1: ELEVATE COMMUNICATION AS A CORE PRIORITY FOR THE TOWN OF BURLINGTON

Burlington is not alone in facing communication challenges. With the decline of most local newspapers, residents are finding information from a multitude of sources and towns are scrambling to keep up with the many communications tools available. To face this challenge, communications must become a core priority for municipal services.



Strategy 1.1: Improve Town Systems to Support Communications

Throughout the interview process, The Center project team heard that departments felt their work, especially communicating with those who interact with their department, is often completed in silos. This creates natural inefficiencies and inconsistencies in informing the community about town business. The following recommendations address this issue by providing structure for communication coordination centrally and between departments.

OBJECTIVE

Create an organizational structure to ensure effective implementation of communication goals.

TACTICS

Create an Office of Communications and Community Engagement.

- As stated in the Communications Assessment, The Center project team “recommends (the Town create) an internal centralized communications position, as such a position will become a part of the fabric of the Town’s operations.”³ The project team further recommends the staff member’s title be “Director of Communications” and the position be full time.

BOX 1: COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR DUTIES

The Communications Director will be responsible for implementing many elements of this Plan and for the ongoing assessment of the Plan’s effectiveness and development, as outlined more thoroughly throughout this document. In brief, the Communications Director will:

- Draft Office of Communications and Community Engagement mission and vision statements.
- Create policies to standardize Town messaging and branding, ensure community access to information, and provide guidance to staff on communication matters.
- Assist with identifying Communication Team members from departments and facilitate intra-departmental coordination of communication objectives by managing the Communications Team’s efforts.
- Monitor, assess, improve and/or eliminate existing communication tools employed by the Town.
- Create or facilitate the development of new tools such as newsletters, video content, and media releases.
- Research and propose budget for external resources needed for the Office of Communications and Community Engagement.
- Provide or facilitate Communications Team training, as needed.
- Identify and maintain two-way communication opportunities with community partners.
- Employ and track assessment tools to measure the impact of communication strategies.

³ Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management. (February 2023). Town of Burlington Communications Assessment. Pages 19 and 20.

Empower a townwide Communications Team.

- Designate one individual in each department that performs external communications to oversee their departmental communications, maintain departmental-specific communication tools, and serve as a reliable contact to the Director of Communications.
- The Director of Communications convenes periodic (monthly is suggested) meetings for the Communication Team to review data, share resources, and plan for collaborative communications efforts, including a newsletter.

Adopt mission and vision statements.

- Suggested statements are provided below. Final language should incorporate leadership input.
 - **MISSION STATEMENT:** The Office of Communications and Community Engagement provides expertise and leadership for communicating the Town's services, initiatives, and mission to Burlington residents, businesses, and other community members.
 - **VISION STATEMENT:** The Office of Communications and Community Engagement advances the [stated mission of the Select Board](#) by improving service delivery and transparency to the community.

Strategy 1.2: Provide Training and Resources for the Communications Team

OBJECTIVE

Ensure successful implementation of the new Communications Team.

TACTICS

Create a communications budget.

- Provide resources to support the Office of Communications and Community Engagement and external technical support, as needed. This may include contracting with external vendors to provide expertise in graphic design, marketing, or public relations, to name a few of the resources the Director may need to perform their duties. The Director will be responsible for identifying which external resources are needed, budgeting and, potentially, procurement.

Make communications training available for all Communications Team members.

- Ensure appointed Communications Team members from Town of Burlington departments all receive training in communications policies and tools.



GOAL 2: IMPROVE EFFECTIVENESS OF TOWN COMMUNICATIONS

Burlington is currently employing many communications tools that are very effective in reaching community members. [Survey respondents were generally happy with the information received but noted they would prefer more information about their key areas of interest](#). This section highlights specific strategies to improve the tools in use and to create new tools to maximize the Town's communications impact.

Strategy 2.1. Improve Communication Tools

OBJECTIVE

Maximize reach of townwide and department communication.

TACTICS

Update the website.

- Incorporate the recommendations on pages 20-21 of the Communications Assessment along with recommendations from this plan. [The recommendations provided in this Plan are informed by community responses to the survey](#).
- [Each departmental, board, or committee landing page should feature a brief, clear statement of the entity's mission and vision or function](#).
 - Each departmental, board, or committee landing page should offer at least one contact person, corresponding phone number, email address or contact form link.⁴
 - While each department or board/committee page will need to offer distinct information, core content elements (description and contact) should be offered in a consistent format and [similarly voiced and styled across pages](#). There is currently significant disparity among pages in this regard; see the disparity between the "Administration & Select Board," "Council on Aging," or "Building" department pages as examples.
 - Update the "Alerts" page (in the "For Our Residents" section) to a more detailed "Stay Informed"-style page, offering a list of channels for Town communications; include brief descriptions of the function of each channel. Note the current "Alerts" page allows residents to register for CodeRed but does not offer any explanation of CodeRed or of the types or frequency of notifications. See this ["Stay Informed"](#) page from the Town of Lexington as an example.
 - Make the "Meetings and Events" calendar more comprehensive of Town departments by including events for the Burlington Public Schools, the Council on Aging, the Library, etc. Also, consider moving the calendar to the website's landing page. An example of this can be found on the Town of Mansfield landing page here: <https://www.mansfieldma.com/>.
 - [Ensure that stand-alone webpages \(e.g., Library, Police\) have clear links on the town website landing page for that department](#).

⁴ Providing email addresses for staff is preferred. Contact forms create additional steps and can be frustrating for users. The project team understands the movement towards contact forms to protect staff from email harvesting and spam. Municipalities must weigh the safety risks without creating unnecessary barriers to accessing public officials.

Create a townwide newsletter.

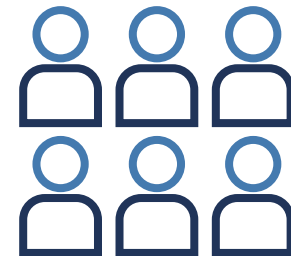
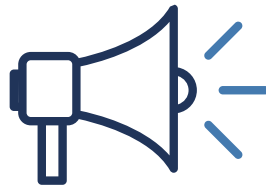
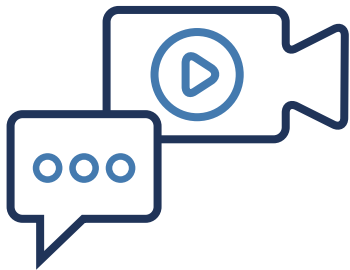
- Survey respondents indicated a strong preference for receiving centralized information about town news that includes information about major projects, special events, and general announcements. The routine Communication Team meetings recommended in [Strategy 1.1](#) will facilitate content creation. [Examples of municipal newsletters can be found in Appendix B](#). The Center project team recommends newsletter include the following:
 - A consistent distribution schedule. This will establish and maintain community engagement. A monthly or bi-weekly distribution schedule that coordinates with the department head meetings suggested in [Strategy 3.1](#) is recommended.
 - Translation accessibility should be prioritized. Include a Google translate icon for the digital version and consider translating both printed and digital versions into the top non-English languages spoken in Burlington. See an example of this in the bottom right-hand corner of the [Town of Reading's website](#).
 - The newsletter should be distributed via email, Town website, and departmental social media posts, media, and community partners and include links to subscribe.

Create video content.

- Collaborate with BCAT, or contract with a vendor, to produce periodic, brief video updates, based on newsletter content, that are distributed via BCAT, the town website, and social media, as appropriate. Informative short videos grab attention and are effective tools for municipalities.⁵

Establish and Maintain Two-Way Communication with Key Community Partners.

- Community partners can leverage the impact of Town communication efforts by providing access to community members who may not otherwise engage with the municipality. This is especially true for hard-to-reach populations like older adults, non-English speakers, and newly arrived residents and businesses. This relationship development should be a core component of the Office of Communications and Community Engagement. In addition to broadening the distribution of town messages, fostering partnerships creates opportunities for engagement from the community with the Town. The Town should anticipate that it may need to create a policy about what reciprocal information the Town will share on behalf of partner groups.



⁵ 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.

Reach Residents Who Speak a Language other than English.

- Burlington residents speak many languages other than English (see Box 2 for more information). Explore producing key town communications (newsletter, project updates, etc.) in the most widely spoken languages other than English. This will be most easily done through digital formats, but the Town should consider translating critical written materials for residents in the top languages as well. The Schools Department keeps the most up-to-date information on the languages spoken by Burlington's families, and the Town can access their data and methods for translation. Community partnerships may support this effort as well.

BOX 2: BURLINGTON'S TOP LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH

Approximately 13.26% of Burlington's households speak a language other than English at home. According to the Census, the most prevalent non-English languages are "other Asian languages," i.e., Burmese, Karen, Turkish, and Uzbek, (3.4%); Chinese (2.44%); Spanish (2.21%); Arabic (1.95%); "other Indic languages," i.e., Punjabi, Bengali, Nepali, and Marathi, (1.8%); and Gujarati (1.46%). According to the survey conducted for this plan, English was the most predominant language spoken at home, followed by Hindi and Gujarati. The United States Census does not identify Hindi as a prevalent non-English language in the Town of Burlington; however, survey data suggests it is spoken at home by at least 2% of the population.

United States Census Bureau (2021). *Census: Decennial census and American community survey (ACS)*. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>.

ΚΑΛΩΣ ΗΡΘΑΤΕ VÄLKOMMEN FÄILTE ДОБРЕДОЖДОВТЕ स्वागत छ BIENVENUE HOŞGELDİNİZ FÀILTE आपले स्वागत आहे
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BEM VINDA ԲԵՐԿԵՆԻՍԱՐԴՅՈՒՆ ՍԵՐԴՅՈՒՆ ՍԵՐԴՅՈՒՆ ՀԱՆԳՆԵՐ 환영 SALUTATIO வரவறோப் BI XÊR HATÎ
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வரவறோப் KΑΛΩΣ ΗΡΘΑΤΕ DOBRODOŠLI WILLKOMMEN VÍTEJTE HERZLICH स्वागत हे FÀILTE

Strategy 2.2: Improve Community Understanding and Access to Town Departments

Interviews and survey data demonstrated there is a need to provide fundamental information about town departments and services available to the community being confused about or unaware of municipal services. Residents reported being confused or unaware about what municipal services are offered. Town employees believe that sharing basic information about each department could improve resident interactions with staff and reduce frustration for both the public and employees.

OBJECTIVE

Educate the community about each Town department's purpose and services.

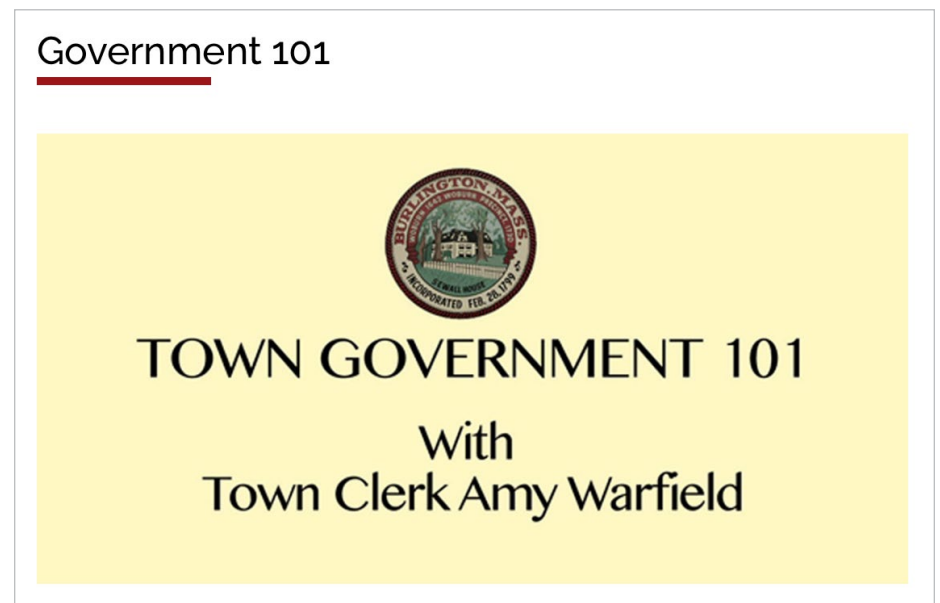
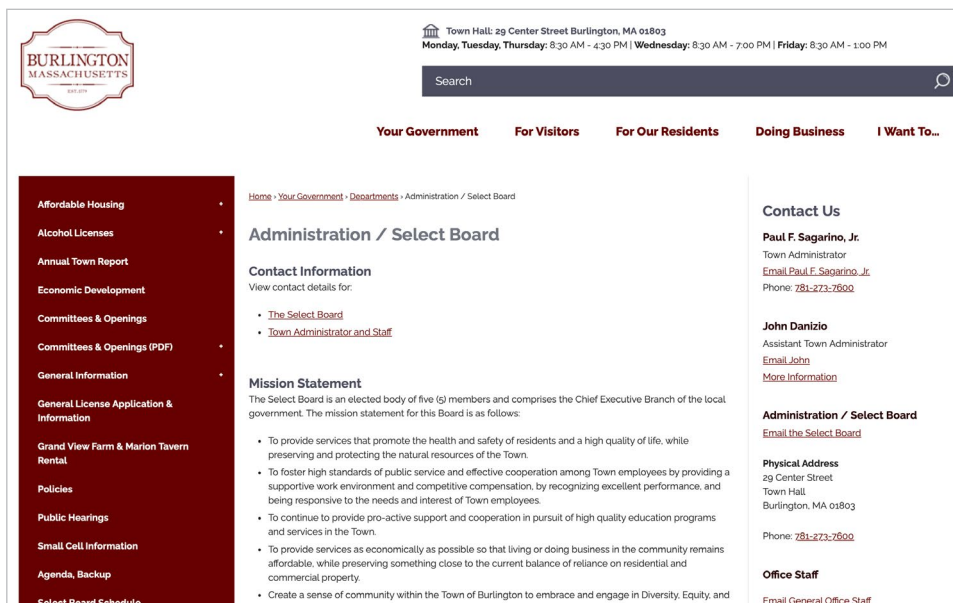
TACTICS

Create short videos with department heads providing an overview of the resources, services, and programs each department provides.

- Include these videos on each department's website landing page and use for social media content. Content can also be used for department features in the newsletter. Video is one of the most impactful marketing and communications tools available. BCAT has produced ["Who Works for Burlington" videos](#) about employees that provide an excellent example of the power of short videos to inform residents. [BCAT has also created a series of videos](#), like this one describing the [Planning Board](#), with the Town Clerk about town governance.

Ensure each department landing page on the town website provides a clear description.

- Landing pages should include department resources, contact information and other critical information for residents. Page design and content should be as consistent as possible, as discussed in [Strategy 2.1](#).



Strategy 2.3: Measure and Track Success of Communication Initiatives

OBJECTIVE

Use data analytics to streamline communication and improve effectiveness.

TACTICS

Clearly define key performance indicators (KPIs) in ways that are specific and measurable. Use quantifiable metrics that can be tracked and compared over time to assess performance accurately. To start, The Center project team recommends using existing KPI tools in CivicPlus, Facebook Insights, Instagram Insights, and Twitter Insights.

Establish a regular reporting schedule for KPIs to track progress across department communications in a timely manner.

Set benchmarks or targets to provide context and enable performance comparison. This will help identify areas of improvement and the ability to eliminate non-impactful tools.

Use data and analytics to identify trends, patterns, and areas of optimization and provide actionable insights that can drive future decision-making.

Share results with relevant stakeholders across the Town to foster a culture of transparency, open communication, and accountability.

GOAL 3: SOLIDIFY INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Consistent communication between departments offers significant value to a municipality and its residents. Departments can be key partners in boosting awareness of one another's events or programs. Streamlined communications across departments also provides opportunities for departments to discover opportunities for collaboration.

Strategy 3.1: Improve Interdepartmental Communications

Burlington enjoys a rare benefit in that many Town employees have exceptionally long tenures. As a result, some employees access an informal network of longstanding colleagues for ad hoc support. However, Burlington should strengthen its formal structures of inter-departmental collaboration. This will support a collegial network, ensure future collaboration, and support onboarding and relationship-building upon staff turnover. As noted earlier, breaking down departmental “silos” will improve the Town’s ability to communicate with and on behalf of residents. The following recommendations build on this goal by encouraging improved communication between departments.

OBJECTIVE

Expand knowledge across departments to create opportunities for collaboration, support communication goals, and reduce resident “run around” from department to department.

TACTICS

Convene regular meetings of all department heads specifically to discuss upcoming town events, programs, and processes.

- This recommendation is separate from the Communication Team meetings described in [Goal 1](#). This meeting will provide department leadership with a way to build internal understanding of other departments' work and break down structural silos. A facilitator, such as the Town Administrator or other senior official, should organize the agenda (see Box 3 for a suggested agenda) and efficiently manage the discussion.

Create opportunities to leverage existing communication tools by identifying overlapping audiences.

- The Director of Communications will establish cross-posting guidelines and expectations. For example, the Library and COA newsletter may benefit from providing links to the other in their publications. Similarly, the Department of Youth and Family Services may wish to incorporate some school programming in their communications.

BOX 3: SUGGESTED DEPARTMENT HEAD MEETING AGENDA

DEPARTMENT HEAD MEETING AGENDA DATE, TIME

1. Town Administrator Update

[Inform department heads about any significant Select Board votes or projects/initiatives from the Town Administrator or Select Board offices.]

2. Department Updates

- a) Is your department working on something in the near term that impacts the community or other departments?
- b) Are there any significant staff changes in your department?
- c) Do you need input from another department on an open matter? [If yes, schedule a follow-up meeting.]
- d) Has your department noticed any new trends in questions/concerns from residents?

Next Meeting: DATE/TIME

Strategy 3.2: Set Standards and Establish Policies

As stated on pages 19 and 20 of the Communications Assessment and in [Goal 1](#) of this Plan, the Town should adopt standard guidelines for style and content on various communication platforms. This will enhance the success of existing communications tools while providing a more unified voice and consistency across departments. To ensure departments have a solid understanding of their responsibilities concerning communicating with the public, it is important to develop, adopt, and train staff consistently on policies and procedures.

OBJECTIVE

Ensure that all departments communicate in a manner that conforms to laws, regulations, policies, procedures, and Town objectives.

TACTICS

Create a standard style guide for communication tools. Many departments stated they would benefit from a clear understanding of Town expectations for style, tone, and engagement when utilizing different communication tools, especially social media.

Create a social media policy that includes authorization for posting, engagement, and other Town expectations.

Once a style guide and social media policy are created, train staff adequately to ensure consistent implementation. This does not require abandoning tools that are highly effective, but rather allows for a more unified voice from the Town.

Inventory existing policies and ensure the Town has appropriate communications policies in place. Where missing, develop, adopt, and train employees on application of each policy. See [Appendix D](#) for more information on required and suggested communications policies and examples.

GOAL 4: IMPROVE RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

As stated in the Communications Assessment, residents are external stakeholders a local government must include in their communications work. 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.⁶ 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 participate.

Strategy 4.1: Foster Two-Way Communication Opportunities Between the Town and the Community

In interviews and through the survey, many respondents noted the desire to improve two-way communication. Residents and businesses want to know who they can speak to with town-related questions, and staff would like feedback about their communication efforts and service delivery.

OBJECTIVE

Create opportunities for community interaction and make information more easily accessible.

⁶ Esterline, D. (2022, July 13). 4 trends in local government communications. Retrieved January 2, 2023, from [Revize.com blog archives](#).

TACTICS

Major Municipal Project or Event Outreach.

- Survey respondents, although not a scientific representation of the community, identified “major projects” as topics they would like to hear more about. The Center project team identified some tools below that can help the Town improve outreach on these topics to its residents.
- Organize public forums to highlight major projects. Make sure in-person formats have a virtual option and address accessibility issues such as transportation, daycare, and other barriers to in-person participation.
- Create video summaries of major projects and events and put them on the appropriate department pages and social media platforms.
- Conduct occasional pulse surveys when public input is sought and to gauge understanding of specific topics. Remember that surveys will not be representative of the entire population but will allow insight into respondents’ opinions.
- Where appropriate, create project timeline milestone calendars or infographics for department landing pages and produce short videos describing the project and its trajectory.
- Include community partners in all outreach endeavors to amplify messaging.

Emergency information is also keenly desired but should be conveyed using more urgent tools such as reverse 9-1-1, text messages and electronic signboards, in addition to website and social media alerts. These tactics should make clear how to obtain additional information.

As noted in [Strategy 2.1](#), having clear information on each department website landing page about who to call or email with questions will improve the community’s ability to directly interact with the municipality.

Strategy 4.2: Anticipate Community Inquiries

Many of the tactics described in this Plan provide specific improvements to how information is gathered and disseminated to the community. However, it is also important to anticipate and plan for expected inquiries to the Town. Instituting regular Communication Team and department head meetings will provide an opportunity to better predict and answer frequently asked and likely questions.

OBJECTIVE

Improving day-to-day communication with the community.

TACTICS

Monitor the Town recorded “phone tree” call-in options to make sure key issues of the week are anticipated and addressed. For example, during holiday weeks, make sure the information about trash pickup is on the recording. For major disruptions, like road closures, include an option which directs callers to more information.

Provide public-facing departments with updates on anticipated inquiries. These updates will be created by the Director of Communications. Having timely information will empower staff to provide timely answers. This information is more mundane than would be included in the newsletter but will prepare staff to be more responsive to calls and in-person inquiries.

Tactic Recommendation Summary

This table provides a recommendation of when the Town should start implementing the various goals, strategies, and tactics in this Plan.

NEAR-TERM IMPLEMENTATION	RESPONSIBILITY
Adopt Communications Plan	Select Board
Approve funding for an Office of Communications and Community Engagement	Select Board / Finance Committee / Town Meeting
Hire Director of Communications	Town Administrator
Create internal Communications Team	Director of Communications/Department Heads
Adopt mission and vision statements for the Office of Communications and Community Engagement	Director of Communications
Establish KPIs to measure and track communication effectiveness	Director of Communications
Eliminate defunct or ineffective communications tools	Director of Communications / Communications Team
Establish community partner connections	Director of Communications
Organize regular department head meetings	Town Administrator
Improve phone tree relevancy/provide routine updates to staff	Director of Communications/Town Clerk
MEDIUM-TERM IMPLEMENTATION	RESPONSIBILITY
Provide on-going communications training to Communications Team	Director of Communications/External Professional Development
Create communication policies and train staff on them	Director of Communications
Create standardized voice, branding, and style guide for all Town communications	Director of Communications
Improve website	Director of Communications
Create Town newsletter/video updates	Director of Communications /Town Administrator
Create video overviews of department services/programming	Director of Communications/Department Heads/BCAT
Implement accessibility tools for non-English speaking residents	Director of Communications
LONG-TERM IMPLEMENTATION	RESPONSIBILITY
Evaluate communication plan achievements and revise as needed	Director of Communications/Select Board/Town Administrator



Conclusion

With this Communications Plan, along with the Communications Assessment, the Town of Burlington is now well positioned to improve and enhance its communication efforts. It is recommended the Town of Burlington hire a communications professional to create and implement a comprehensive communications strategy informed by this Plan, including policies, training, and oversight. With an internal professional guiding it, the Town of Burlington will meet its communications goals.

BURLINGTON TOWN HALL

Appendix A: Survey Methodology, Limitations, and Data Overview

Introduction and Methods

The Center, with the Town, launched an online survey to gather information on how community members seek and receive communication from the Town. The target population were individuals who live, work, or own businesses in Burlington. The survey was conducted from April 10, 2023 to May 10, 2023, and it garnered 747 responses. The instrument included multiple choice, Likert scale, and open-ended questions and was advertised via traditional print media (e.g., Town newsletters and newspapers), radio media, social media, BCAT, and the Burlington Buzz. A paper version of the survey was also available. This questionnaire was conducted on a non-scientific basis and may not represent the views or behaviors of the entire Burlington population.

Attributes of Respondents

Over 90% of the respondents were 35 or older, a quarter of which were 65 years of age or over. Eighty percent identified as white and 60% identified as women, compared to 34% men and 6% transgender, non-binary, or other gender. English was the most predominant language spoken at home, followed by Hindi and Gujarati. The United States Census does not identify Hindi as a prevalent non-English language in the Town of Burlington; however, survey data suggests it is spoken at home by at least 2% of the population.

Seventy-nine percent of survey respondents had at least a bachelor's degree or higher, and 90% said they own their home. Table 1 compares demographic information from the Census compared to the demographics of survey respondents. Three-quarters of survey-takers live in Burlington, and roughly one-quarter of respondents either work for or own a business in the Town. One-third of participants have children currently attending one of more of the Burlington Public Schools.

Table 1: Demographic Comparison

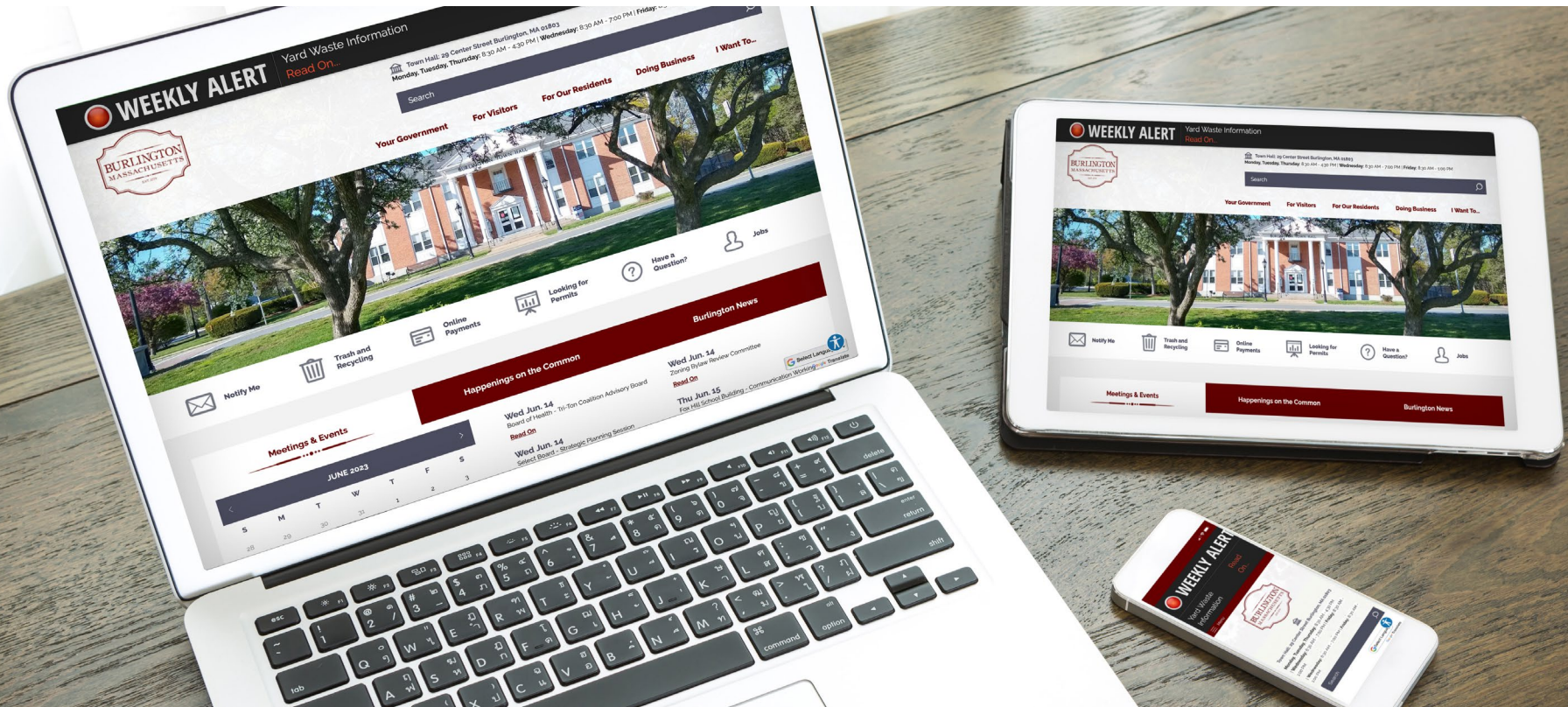
Attribute	Census Demographics	Percent of Survey Respondents
People 65 years and older	22.0%	26.4%
White	76.2%	80.2%
Asian	15.4%	9.7%
Black or African American	2.1%	1.4%
Hispanic or Latino	3.1%	1.0%
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.2%	0.9%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.2%	0.50%
Middle Eastern or North African	n/a	1%
Two or More Races / Other	4.9%	5.3%
Female	52.0%	60.0%
Non-English Language Spoken at Home	22.1%	13.1%
Bachelor's degree or higher	59.6%	79.1%
Homeowners	74.8%	90.1%

A limit to this survey is its representativeness; it does not claim to capture a representative sample as certain populations in the Town of Burlington are harder to reach than others. As evidenced in Table 1, older, white, female-identifying, English-speaking, educated homeowners are over-represented in the sample.

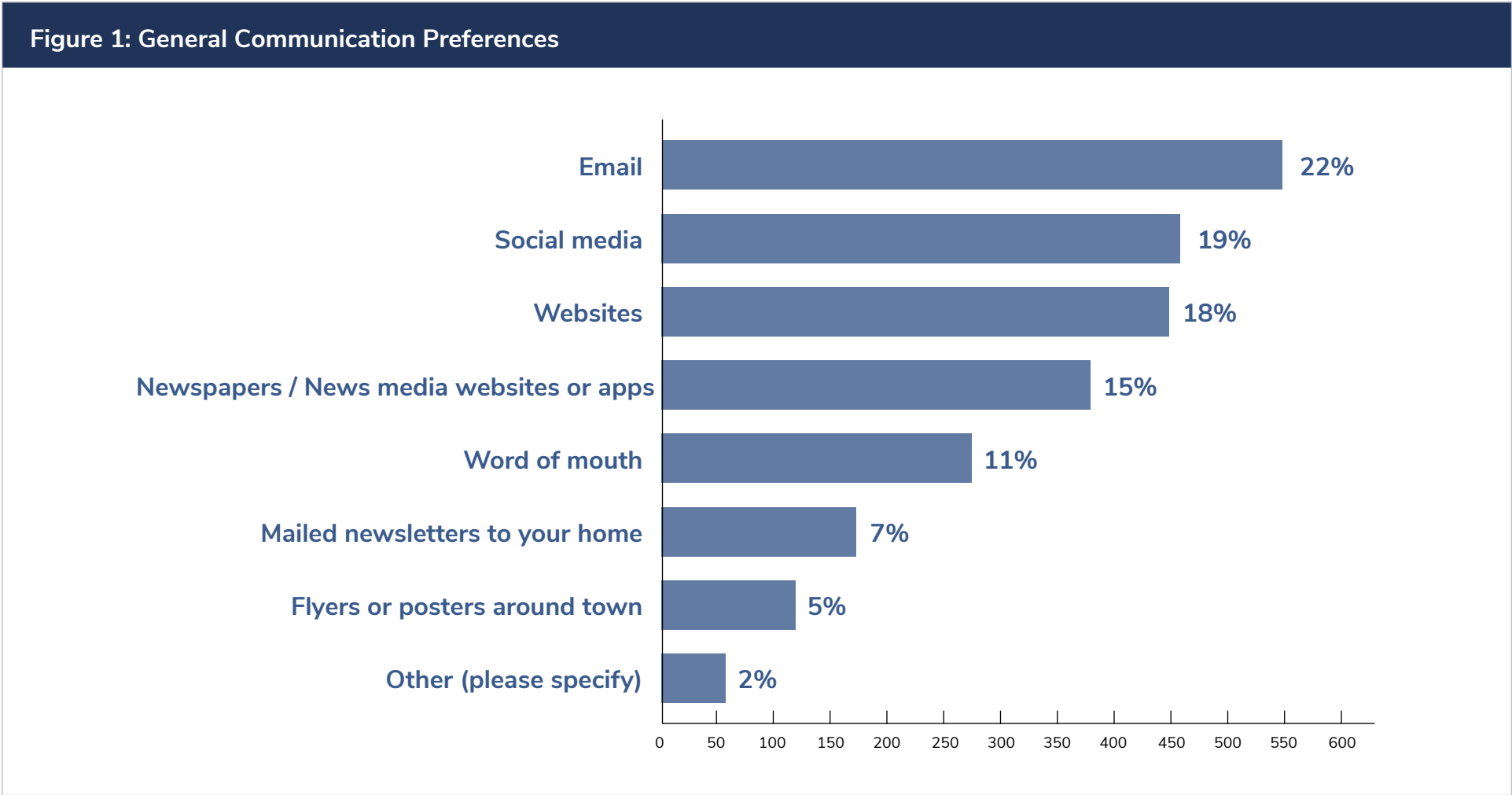
This survey was only conducted in English, which may have excluded non-native speakers or those with limited language proficiency. Additionally, the survey was administered predominately online, which requires an internet connection, digital device, and baseline digital skillset to participate. Thus, this study may exclude individuals with limited technological abilities. As this questionnaire was voluntary, respondents who self-selected to participate may hold different characteristics or opinions compared to those who did not participate.

Current Communications Landscape

The Town of Burlington is a relatively digitally connected community; 88% of respondents stated they own a desktop or laptop computer, 89% stated they own a smartphone, and notably, 69% of participants stated they own a tablet such as an iPad. Ninety percent of survey respondents stated they primarily access the internet at home, and 82% stated they primarily access the internet on their mobile phone. Other participants stated they use the internet at work, school, in public places with free wireless, or at a friend or family member's house. Only three participants (0.13%) indicated they have no way to connect to the web. This supports findings from the Communications Assessment that Burlington would not qualify as a digital desert.



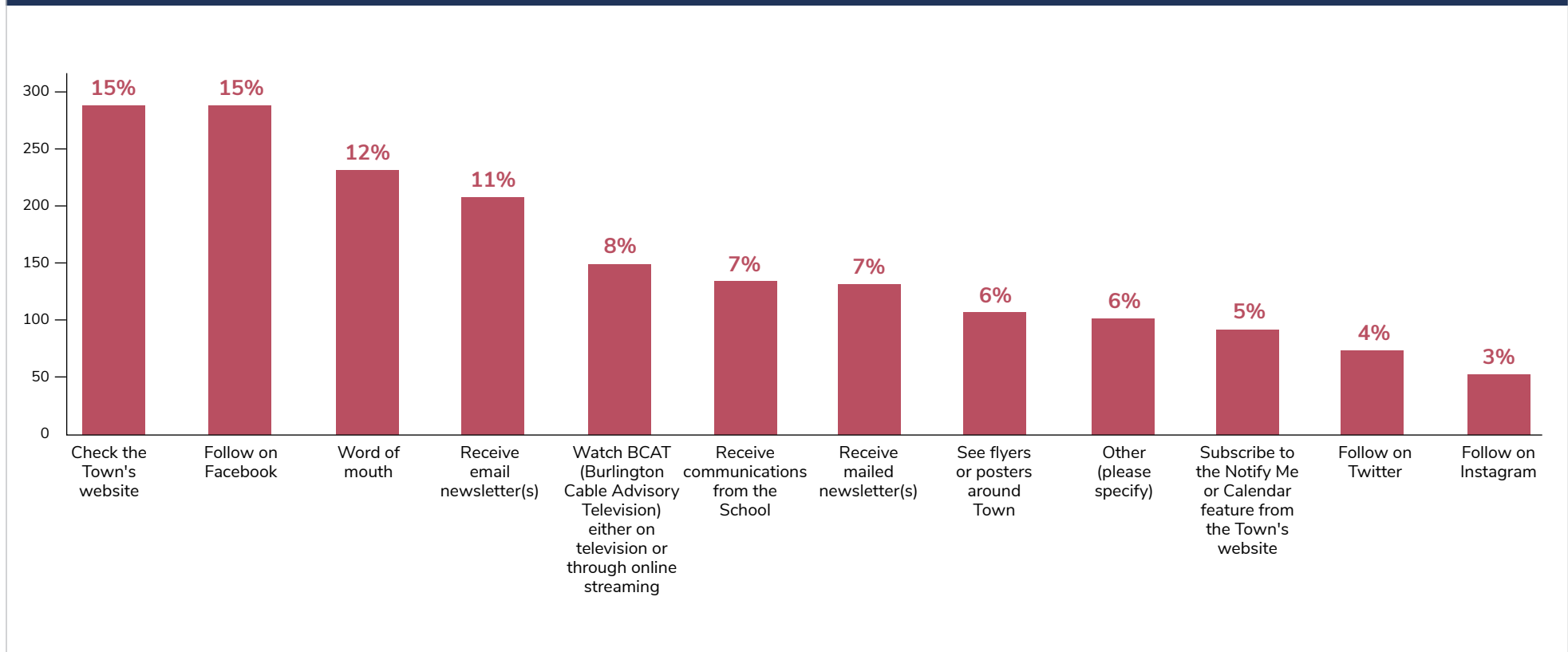
As demonstrated in **Figure 1**, survey-takers prefer to receive news and information digitally. Three-quarters indicated they prefer email communications; 63% visit social media accounts for information, and 62% visit websites for information. Less preferred methods of communication include word of mouth (38%), newsletters via post mail (24%), and flyers or posters around town (16%).



For individuals who use social media, the overwhelming platform of choice is Facebook, with 65% of all participants indicating they use the application on a regular basis. However, to further increase reach, community members also use and can be engaged via Instagram (39%), YouTube (25%), and Twitter (22%). These findings are consistent with what was reported in the Communications Assessment.

Twenty percent of survey participants suggested there are actions they would like to be able to do on the website that are not currently possible. Some of these actions include directly emailing elected officials and Town employees, which supports the recommendation to post staff email addresses on the website; viewing an integrated events calendar that includes activities from the public schools, Library, Council on Aging, etc.; participating in question-and-answer sessions with the Board of Selectmen; and generally finding information easier and faster.

Figure 2: Information Received from Town of Burlington



Survey participants receive information and notices from the Department of Parks and Recreation the most, followed by the Library, Department of Public Works, and the Police Department. **Figure 3** depicts a frequency distribution of communication by department.

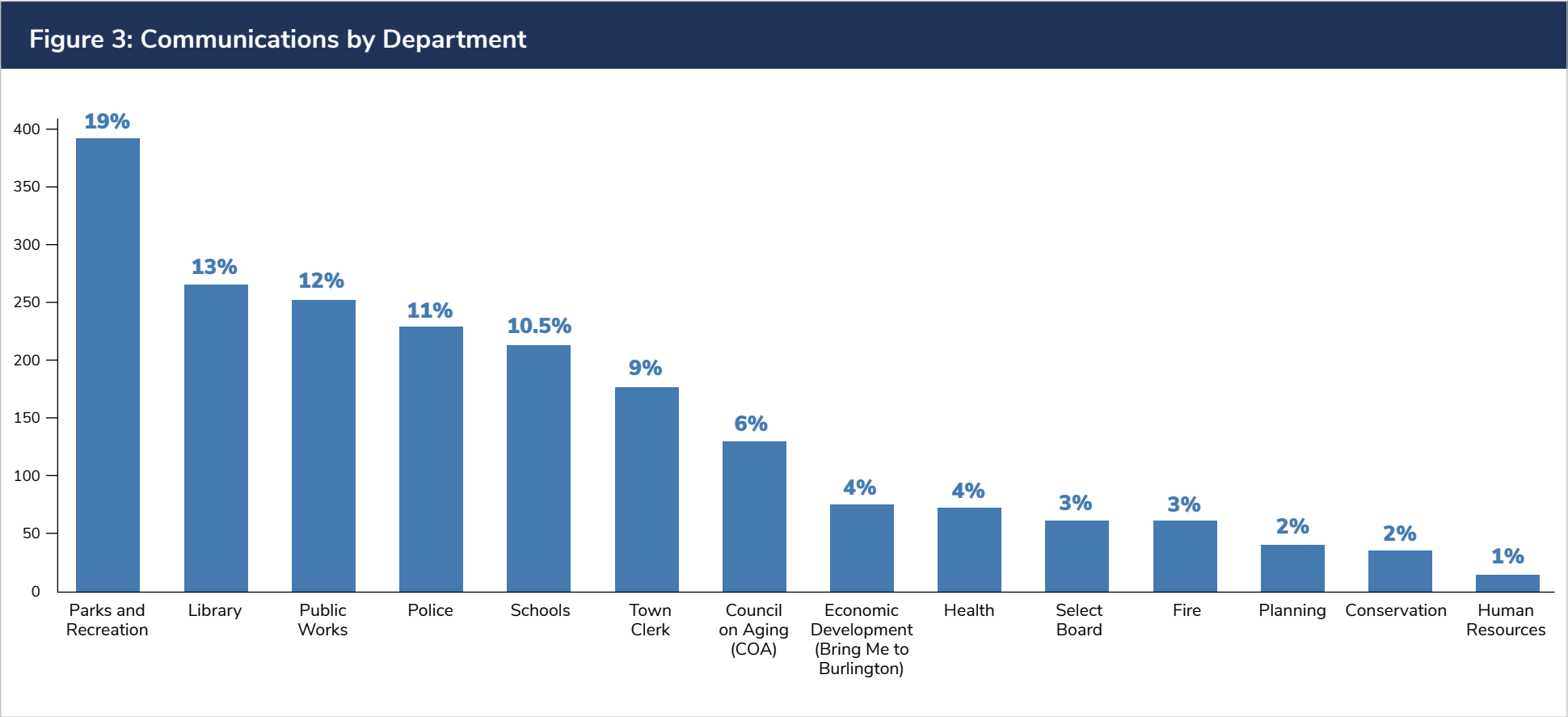
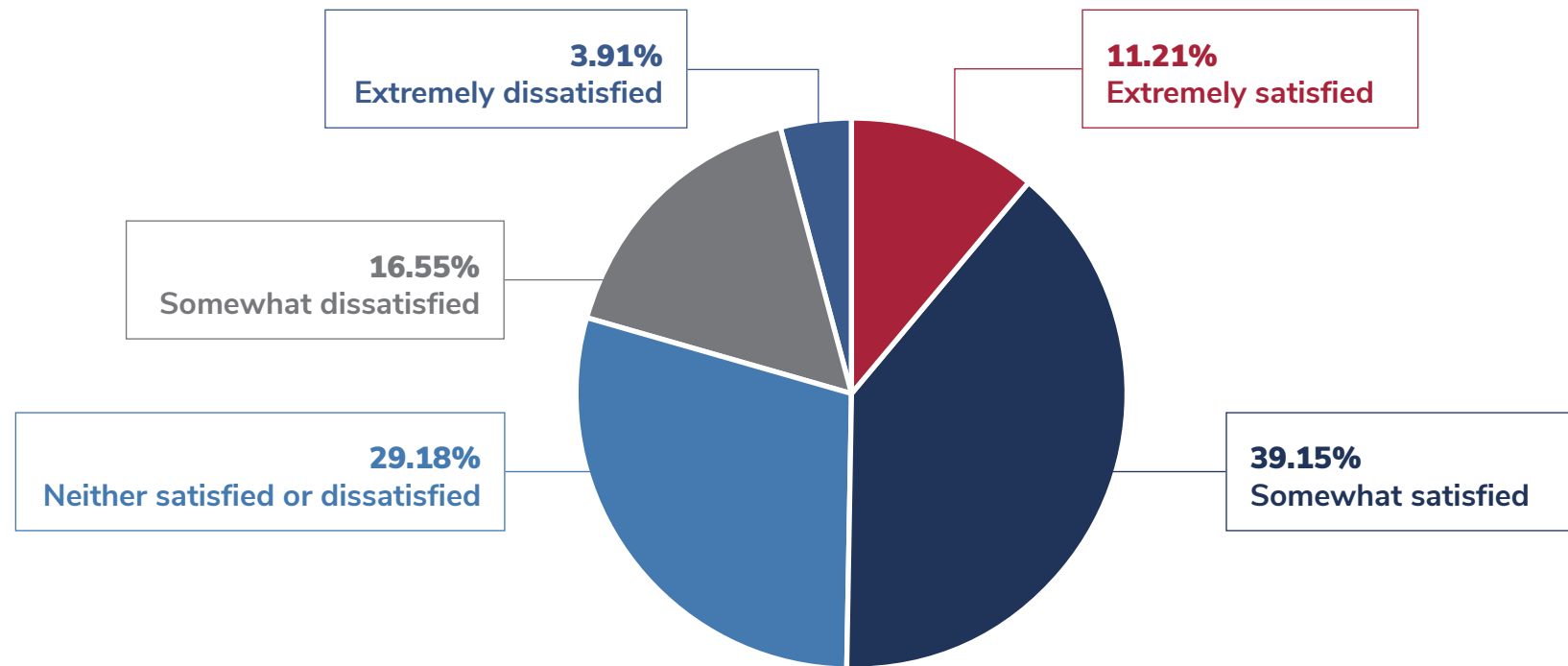


Figure 4: Satisfaction Summary Chart



As shown in **Figure 4**, a majority of Burlington community members are pleased with the content they are currently receiving. Of those who answered the question, 50% of respondents shared they are somewhat or extremely satisfied with present communication processes. A smaller percentage (20%) are somewhat or extremely dissatisfied, and nearly 30% indicated they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

The data suggests that a source of dissatisfaction stems from not receiving enough information from the Town, rather the dissatisfaction is with frequency of communication. Of those who responded to the question, 78% revealed they would prefer to be communicated with “somewhat more” or “much more.”

In general, 61% of respondents feel as though there are opportunities to share thoughts and concerns with the Town, whereas 39% feel as though there are not. Community members most prefer to have their voices heard through Townwide surveys, calling a Town office or department, or attending a Town focus group or other listening session.

Desired Communications

Regarding the types of information survey-takers want from the Town, about three-quarters specified that major projects, emergency communications, and special events are their top priorities. Except for emergency situations, the preferred communication method is overwhelmingly by email newsletter. Respondents prefer to receive emergency updates by text messages or phone calls. The table below lists distinct categories of communications, the percentage of respondents who indicated they were interested in receiving information on it, and the most preferred medium(s) for each type.

Aside from the dissemination of emergency updates, phone calls were the least or second-least preferred method of engagement, indicating this communication method should be used sparingly and strategically.

Summary of Findings

The findings presented here are derived from a non-scientific survey, and therefore, the results should be considered anecdotal and may not be representative of the wider population.

In sum, Burlington community members largely have the digital capacity and desire to be engaged through email, online newsletters, the Town website, and social media (specifically Facebook). While half of the respondents are currently satisfied with current communication methods, many feel as though they are not being communicated with frequently enough. The data suggests Burlington’s Town website is one of the most preferred vehicles for information, however nearly 80% of users access it only a few times a month. The survey also captured reports of the website being outdated and difficult to navigate. While only 18% of respondents indicated they currently receive email newsletters, they were noted as a preferred way to get a variety of categories of news and information.

Table 2: Desired Communication Topics and Mediums

Type of Information	Percent Interested	Preferred Methods
Major Projects (e.g., construction)	74%	Email newsletter, Town website
Emergency Communications	73%	Text message, Phone call
Special Events	71%	Email newsletter, Facebook
Day-to-day Information	60%	Email newsletter, Facebook
Services and Programs	59%	Email newsletter, Town website
Opportunities to Get Involved	42%	Email newsletter, Facebook/website (tied)
Updates to Regulations or Procedures	35%	Email newsletter, Town website
Community Stories	35%	Email newsletter, Facebook
Town Job Postings	22%	Email newsletter, Town website
Opportunities for Businesses	16%	Email newsletter, Town website



Appendix B: Municipal Website and Newsletter Examples

Websites Examples

Many municipal websites are created through CivicPlus platforms. These examples demonstrate some of the features which can be employed to improve Burlington's website. Not all functionality is needed in every municipality, but some constants, as described in [Strategy 2.1](#), will make the site more user-friendly. Many of the websites referenced below are recipients of the Massachusetts Municipal Association's annual website achievement awards ([MMA award criteria](#)).

[Town of Reading, MA](#)

[Town of Mansfield, MA](#)

[Town of Amherst, MA](#)

[Town of Avon, MA](#)

[Town of Weston, MA](#)



Newsletters

Below are examples of digital newsletters. The styles vary widely, but the key elements of current information, presented in a timely and consistent format, with reliable distribution schedules, are consistent.

[Town of Franklin, MA](#)

[Town of Mansfield, MA](#)

[Town of Westwood, MA](#)

[Town of Sudbury, MA](#)

[Town of Swampscott, MA](#)

[Town of Princeton, MA](#)

[Town of West Goshen, PA](#)

[City of Waupun: Newsletter Creation Guidelines](#)

Appendix C: Municipal Video Examples

Videos are highly effective in communicating efficiently with municipal communities. Whether the information is about a specific project, event, or is meant for general education, the key is to be brief, use humor (where appropriate), and let people know how to get more detailed information. Videos can promote transparency when widely distributed.

Election Information: [Town of Scituate, MA Town Clerk](#)

Town Promotion: [Revere, MA Community Tour](#)

State of the City Address: [Atlanta, GA “Meet the Mayor”](#)

Weekly News Update: [Durham, NC Civic Information](#)

Public Forum Video: Amherst, MA: [Questions about Bears](#)



Appendix D: Required and Suggested Communication Policies

Municipalities use communications policies to set the rules and expectations for their communications practices. Communications policies are intended to ensure that communications are effective, accurate, and consistent with the goals and values of the municipality as well as meet legal requirements.

All policies should clarify the communications media and modalities covered by the policy. The content standards should apply to email, print media, social media posts, phone calls, and live media events such as press conferences or television coverage. Determine and state whether there are any employees, officials, or departments exempt from any part of this policy, or, conversely, if the policy extends to Town volunteers or contractors.



REQUIRED POLICIES

The following policies are required by law.

1. ACCESSIBILITY

Guarantee that content is accessible to residents with disabilities. Accessible communications are required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), including on social media, where posted images must be accompanied by descriptive text.

From the United States Department of Justice:

- a) "Communication is an essential part of providing service to the public. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires state and local governments to communicate as effectively with people with disabilities as with others. Because the nature of communication differs from program to program, the rules allow for flexibility in determining effective solutions. Sometimes the solution will require the state/local government to provide aids or services, like a sign language interpreter."⁷

2. PRIVACY POLICY

The Town is required to post privacy policies on the municipal website. The presence of privacy statements can improve public perception and trust and enable greater citizen engagement with government.

A privacy policy should identify:

- a) What data is being collected on the site.
- b) The intended use of users' data.
- c) Whether personal information be disclosed to third parties.
- d) Whether the site uses cookies.
- e) Specific contact information including an email address for further information.

⁷ ADA.gov. (2023, February 1). State and local governments. Retrieved February 2, 2023, from <https://www.ada.gov/topics/title-ii/>

RECOMMENDED POLICIES

The following types of policies, listed alphabetically, are recommended to ensure professional communications and conduct.

1. APPROVAL

Establish which Town roles or positions have authority over a particular communication method.

Specify what approval is required for the creation of a Town department social media account, email list, or webpage, and designate the employee or official who has the authority to sanction the creation of a new Town account.

2. ASSIGNMENTS

Clearly delineate the departments or positions that are responsible for specific communication methods and tools.

a) For example, each employee is responsible for their own email account, phone, or video calls, while a specific department member is responsible for a departmental social media account or for departmental content on the Town website.

Establish or clarify which position oversees coordination of messaging.

a) For example, for a Town newsletter comprising regular updates from multiple departments or programs, one position is responsible for managing the timeline for submissions from each department and for editing content for consistency and clarity.

While all content generators should be trained in the communications policies, one employee should be responsible for reviewing content for adherence to the Town Communications Policy.

3. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Train account users on conflict-of-interest laws as they pertain to advertising, endorsement, political messaging, etc., in official Town communications.

Determine which employee position grants others administrative access to the Town website.

4. CONTENT STANDARDS

Describe in detail the guidelines for the written or spoken content of official messages.

Establish expectations for essential elements of official messages, especially word choice and tone or “voice.” Describe the way account users should represent the Town.

State that the Town reserves the right to remove content that violates this policy.

Set and mandate training for account users regarding First Amendment issues in public comments, including on social media.

5. INCLUSION

Ensure that content is developed and delivered with all residents in mind.

Town content should be available in Burlington's top languages.

Town communications should reflect Town Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) policies.

6. PERSONAL ACCOUNTS

Set rules for usage of employees' personal email or social media accounts, etc., as they relate to Town business.

7. POLICY VIOLATIONS

Determine the steps taken when the communications policy is violated, either accidentally or intentionally.

8. SECURITY

Mandate best practices regarding passwords and multi-factor authentication, such as those described [here](#).

Describe steps all account users must take if they suspect an account has been compromised, including password resets and specified officials or employees to notify.

9. SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY EXAMPLES

Recommended considerations for Social Media Policy development from the Massachusetts Municipal Association: [Social Media Policy Guidelines](#). Burlington should also be mindful of recent court rulings about free speech and municipal responsibilities as outlined [here](#).

MUNICIPAL POLICY EXAMPLES

- [Andover, Massachusetts](#)
- [Dryden, New York](#)
- [Winchester, Virginia](#)
- [Cary, North Carolina](#) (includes translation option)



Appendix E: Communication Tools for Municipal Governments

The blue, underlined words below are hyperlinks to the tools described. To access a tool, click the hyperlinked (blue, underlined) words when reading this document on a computer.

TRANSLATION TOOLS

- [Localize](#) helps government agencies and municipalities provide their communities with essential services and information in the language they understand best. Automated content detection and delivery system coupled with advanced translation management helps remove language barriers and disparities quickly and easily. Pricing ranges from \$275/month - \$625/month.
- [Para-Plus Translations](#) is a translation and interpretation company offering global translation and interpretation services to governments and municipalities to reduce disparities and inequalities. They offer transcription, voice-over, sign language and braille services in more than 100 languages.
- [Government Machine Translation Software](#) master list. Machine translation software facilitates the translation process by translating text automatically from one language to another without the need for human editing.

PLAIN LANGUAGE CHECKLIST

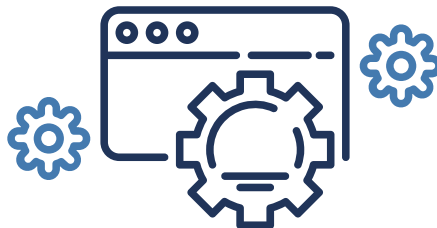
- [Readable](#) is an online tool that assists in improving text readability. Free usage of Readable is limited.
- [Text Readability Consensus Calculator](#) uses seven popular readability formulas to calculate the average grade level, reading age, and text difficulty of sample text.

COLOR CONTRAST CHECKER

- Contrast and color use are vital to accessibility. Users, including users with visual disabilities, must be able to perceive content on the page. Use a [Contrast Checker](#) to ensure a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1 for normal text and 3:1 for large text.

POLLS AND SURVEYS

- Polls or surveys are great for getting feedback and giving residents an opportunity to share their opinions on city matters.
- Several social media sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have options that let accounts easily incorporate simple polls into posts.



ADA CHECKLIST

- Many Microsoft 365 applications include an [Accessibility Checker](#) that finds accessibility problems and lists suggestions for making content accessible to all on Outlook, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, OneNote, Sway, and Visio.
- The Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management provides a comprehensive audit of ADA accessibility guidelines for municipal government websites.

CONTENT CREATION

- [Hashtagify](#) is an Instagram and Twitter hashtag tracking tool. It allows a user to find the best hashtags to reach an audience, gives custom suggestions, and helps identify influencers and competitors.
- [Trendsmap](#) is a Twitter trend tracking service that sticks tweets onto an interactive map, then onto a Google Map where users can sort by city or general region and see trending topics in real-time. It offers real-time geographic visualization for emerging Twitter trends.

CONTENT CLEANING

- [TweetDeleter](#) allows the user to search through all their tweets by likes, keyword, date, type, or media, and delete selected tweets with one click.
- [Social media archiving tools](#) enable organizations to archive all social media posts and activity for compliance purposes. Tools can capture and archive posts from Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Sales Navigator, Tumblr, YouTube, and more.

CONTENT MANAGEMENT

- Screen readers are software programs that allow blind or visually impaired users to read the text that is displayed on the computer screen with a speech synthesizer or braille display. Utilize software from this [list of screen readers](#) to ensure documents are accessible before uploading.
- The [Wayback Machine](#) is a digital archive that allows users to go "back in time" and see how websites looked in the past.
- [Hootsuite](#) is a social media management platform that supports network integrations for Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube, and TikTok. Plans range from \$99/month (up to 10 social accounts) to \$739+/month (up to 35 social accounts).

WRITING STYLE

- A style guide is a collection of conventions for writing for an industry, brand, or project. Selecting one of the [main style guides](#) will improve the Town's communications.

