



# Communication Plan

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## OVERVIEW

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Effective communications programs foster informed decision-making and build productive relationships between citizens and their government. By communicating about government services in ways that are accurate, consistent and accessible, citizens can better find the information they seek and be reached when input or action is needed. This plan identifies the City of Normandy Park's communication goals and specific strategies for achieving those goals.

### About the City of Normandy Park

Located along the shores of Puget Sound in King County and with convenient access to downtown Seattle and the SeaTac International Airport, Normandy Park has long been a hidden gem amidst the suburban areas south of Seattle. Currently, the City of Normandy Park communicates with its 6,500 residents primarily through the City's website, email alerts and a printed newsletter mailed three times per year. The newsletter has been recognized for its innovative format and excellence in outreach and community-building by the Association of Washington Cities. The City also has some presence on social media, as well as community bulletin boards and other traditional methods of communication. Communications duties are shared by staff designated by the City Manager as the "Communications Team."

### Primary Audiences

Normandy Park Citizens: The main focus of the communications plan is to reach Normandy Park's 6,500 residents. High average incomes and education levels equate to relatively high civic involvement and volunteerism. Community events often attract high turnout. Many citizens are environmentally concerned, particularly regarding the community's trees and salmon passages. The average age in Normandy Park is 64 which means it is essential to continue traditional methods of communication while expanding to newer methods of communication. Residents tend to live in Normandy Park for a long time and generations are beginning to return to live in Normandy Park. This leads to a uniquely acute focus on the long-term protection of the community and property.

City Employees: People employed by the City of Normandy Park in its various departments are an integral part of the success of the Communication Plan. Each individual reflects the organization in their daily work and most employees reach some segment of the population everyday. Keeping employees apprised of the City's communication efforts is key to creating a sense of community within the organization and ensuring that citizens receive consistent and accurate information.

News Media: The media is an important audience to target because their coverage of City government provides additional channels for reaching citizens and can have a significant influence on the public's image of local government. Media includes print, radio, television and online news sources.

### Secondary Audiences

The City's communications also present Normandy Park to the region, other local governments, city government associations and organizations, future residents and potential businesses. While separate efforts may focus on marketing the City to these audiences, it is important to keep in mind that communications are public and the City should always put its best foot forward.

## GOALS

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Following are the City of Normandy Park's communication goals:

1. **Informed Decision-Making:** Engage citizens in decisions that affect the community and build an understanding of the breadth of city services.
2. **Strengthened Community:** Nurture relationships between the Normandy Park citizens and their government to solve problems and plan the City's future.
3. **Comprehensive Outreach:** Reach the right people at the right time through the right methods.
4. **Inclusivity:** Inform and involve diverse audiences within the community.
5. **Credibility:** Ensure that the City of Normandy Park is an accessible, reliable and trusted source of information.
6. **Resourcefulness:** Optimize communications while remaining mindful of budget limitations.

## STRATEGIES

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The following strategies will achieve the communication goals:

1. **Use communication tools efficiently.**
  - a. **Share content between multiple communication tools.** For example, an article written for the City Scene could appear on the City website then linked on Facebook and an email alert. Press releases can be rewritten into City Scene articles.
  - b. **Use one communication tool to refer to another to build awareness of where to get information.** For example, email alerts should link back to the City website and City events should advertise how to sign up for email alerts and the City's social media sites.
  - c. **Consider the audience the City is trying to reach.** If it is a specific segment of the population, use the tool or tools that would best reach that segment. Use an Outreach Checklist to ensure communication tools are leveraged for overlapping uses.
2. **Ensure multiple notifications for critical information.**
  - a. **The rule of thumb is that people need to be notified 5-7 times before they will consider taking action.** This means the City may need to use at least five different communication tools to reach citizens with critical information.
  - b. **Continue or develop methods of communication that vary in timing and method.** For example, social media is instant, email alerts might be weekly or monthly, and the City Scene is mailed on a quarterly basis. A single topic included in each of these will reach people three different ways and at three different times.
  - c. **Use an Outreach Checklist** when sending out critical information to make sure all possible tools are being used.
3. **Consolidate communications wherever possible so the City speaks with one voice.**
  - a. **Centralize communications within the Communications Team.**
  - b. **Rather than multiple department updates to citizens, consolidate communications into one package when feasible to do so.** This way, the City of Normandy Park can demonstrate the breadth of services provided to citizens and create a cohesive identity.
  - c. **Use a style guide** to ensure a consistent look and feel in City communications.

4. **Use internal mechanisms to share information.**
  - a. Share the Communications Plan with all staff and make sure they are aware of the Communications Team and its role.
  - b. **When information goes out to the public, send it to staff and the city council as well.**
  - c. **Have staff regularly report on information that should go out to the public.** In staff meetings, ask, “Is there anything happening that the public should know about?” When the City Scene or email alerts are being prepared, request content from staff.
  
5. **Build effective relationships with media.**
  - a. **Maintain an updated list of local media contacts.**
  - b. **Include local media in email alerts.**
  - c. **Meet with the reporter assigned to Normandy Park and/or the publisher of Westside Weekly at least annually.**
  - d. **Whenever feasible and appropriate, follow up press releases with phone calls.**
  - e. **Respond to media inquiries in a timely manner** and leverage inquiries to inform the public of additional information whenever appropriate to do so.
  - f. **Include “boiler plate” language** about the City of Normandy Park in news releases when appropriate.
  
6. **Create content that highlights City services.**
  - a. In the City’s publications, **include information about significant projects, awards, and accomplishments** whenever possible.
  - b. **Profile staff members and their areas of expertise.** Focus on the work they do and how it impacts the lives of citizens and avoid including information about their personal lives.
  
7. **Measure and report communication efforts.**
  - a. **Maintain records of communications.** For issues requiring citizen input or action, track the methods of communications used to reach citizens.
  - b. **Track use of communication methods** wherever possible such as the number of Facebook followers, the number of people signed up for email alerts, the percentage of email alerts opened, and website traffic.
  - c. **Update the Communications Plan** as needed or at least every two years.

## THE TOOLS

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### City Scene

The City Scene magazine is published in partnership with Philips Publishing on a quarterly basis and is mailed to all Normandy Park residents. The 32-page publication includes articles about all city services in addition to business listings and advertising. Articles are due several weeks in advance of distribution in order to accommodate the design and printing schedule. *Best used for: All City information that does not require immediate dissemination. This is the most comprehensive method of communication that the City employs.*

### E-News

Currently, email alerts are sent on an as-needed basis and include various information about events, safety, and upcoming meetings. It is recommended that the e-alerts for timely

information continue (such as meeting agendas), but items that can be reported on monthly basis should be consolidated into a single e-newsletter. The current system provided by GovOffice, while it has some advantages, does not allow for customization of the look and feel of the emails nor does it track readership. Converting all e-alerts and e-newsletters to a single system with tracking capabilities will simplify the distribution list and provide a better experience for citizens. In either case, email is an inexpensive method of outreach compared to printed materials and mailings. *Best used for: Reaching citizens who are signed up for the service in a timely manner. While only a fraction of the community receives these emails, those who sign up for e-alerts tend to be engaged and interested in their local government.*

### **Website**

The City's website [www.normandyparkwa.gov](http://www.normandyparkwa.gov), is hosted by GovOffice.com. It houses comprehensive information for Normandy Park citizens and is updated on an as-needed basis by staff. *Best used for: Providing information that citizens will seek out or backup information to articles included in other City publications.*

### **Direct Mail**

Postcards and letters are periodically mailed to citizens regarding projects, events and issues. Mailings typically require a lead time of 1-2 weeks to allow for printing and assembly and Mailings are limited by budget due to the high cost relative to electronic communications. *Best used for: Legally required notices, and issues of high importance for which residents need a lot of information.*

### **Traditional Media**

Earning media coverage can be challenging for communities the size of Normandy Park and depends heavily on the ability of the local newspaper to cover the community's stories. However, relative to printed or mailed materials, earned media coverage can not only be inexpensive, but also highly effective in reaching citizens. *Best used for: Stories of high importance and issues for which there is much public interest.*

### **Social Media**

The City of Normandy Park currently maintains Facebook and Twitter accounts, as well as participates in community blogs. Social media's strength is in its immediacy and interactive communication. The disadvantage is that not all citizens engage with social media and it can require constant monitoring and updating. By leveraging content used in other communication methods for postings, Normandy Park can maintain dynamic social media sites. Participating in community sites is particularly effective because it reaches people where they are at. *Best used for: Drawing audiences to information already posted on City website, engaging audiences in dialog, measuring response and readership.*

### **Events and Speaking Engagements**

The City Manager and Police Chief periodically speak to community groups or at community events. These venues provide a means of personal and interactive outreach. While usually attended by a small percentage of the community, the attendees tend to be engaged and willing to share the information within the rest of the community. *Best used for: Issues for which there are a lot of questions within the community and for building more personal relationships with the City administration.*

### **Signs and Banners**

Strategically placed signs and banners can be an effective way to get the word out, especially in a community the size of Normandy Park. The disadvantage with this method is that verbiage is often limited so it is important to provide backup information on the City's website as well as get the word out through other communication methods. *Best used for: Event notices, project notices, safety alerts.*

### **Community Bulletin Boards**

There are several bulletin boards spread throughout the community that provide space for flyers. While not the most comprehensive way to reach citizens, these bulletin boards provide an additional means of outreach that might be particularly effective for those not engaged in electronic communications. *Best used for: Notices of events and issues that are also distributed through other communication tools.*

### **Brochures and Handouts**

Brochures and handouts available at City Hall and other public venues can be a helpful way to convey a lot of information, particularly for audiences who are less comfortable with electronic communications. However, since distribution is often limited, brochures and handouts should never be a primary means of communication. *Best used for: Project and issue overviews, background information.*

### **Welcome Packets**

The City provides packets of information to new residents. *Best used for: Basic information about the City of Normandy Park and how residents can participate in their community.*

### **Door-to-Door**

The City provides information directly to citizens at their homes when there is a need for comprehensive and immediate coverage such as projects or events that will impact residents. In general, door-to-door campaigns are neighborhood-specific. In 2012, the Normandy Park Communications Committee embarked on an ambitious community-wide door-to-door campaign to let Normandy Park citizens know about the many ways they can get information from their government. While it took many volunteers and hours, a community-wide door-to-door campaign is effective and achievable because of the size of the community. *Best used for: Critical information.*

### **Video/Government Access TV**

Normandy Park runs a government access television station, Channel 21, to broadcast City Council meetings and other City business. Online outlets such as YouTube provide the means to share video and can enhance messaging through other communication tools such as social media and the City's website. There is a wide range of production costs and time requirements, from short, unedited snippets that can be instantly uploaded, to professionally shot and edited video. *Best used for: Information that benefits from visual and audial components.*

### **Employee Advisory Committee**

A committee that includes a representative of each City Department meets periodically to discuss employee relations and areas of potential improvement. *Best used for: Sharing information among City departments and identifying information that needs to go out to the public.*