

# City of Marceline, Missouri **Communications Plan**



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# **Communications Plan**

## **Introduction**

The City of Marceline recognizes the value of citizen involvement and the wealth of information and resources that citizens of Marceline possess. It is important to increase the City's understanding of citizen concerns, ideas and values so that they can be utilized to make better decisions. The City must identify, create and budget adequate resources to engage citizens and citizen groups to enable them to effectively become a part of the City's decision-making process.

Communication with the City of Marceline citizens, businesses, and visitors is critical for encouraging understanding of the value of living and working in the City and surrounding community.

Public engagement and communication plays a vital role in the overall health and well-being of the community, and this Communication Plan formalizes the purpose of the City of Marceline's public engagement and communication efforts. It provides a foundation for the most effective methods of two-way communication with respective audiences which includes the messages, tools and processes necessary to ensure the delivery of effective communication by the City of Marceline.

## Policy Statement

It is the policy of the City of Marceline to foster and encourage an atmosphere of openness with the public. Coordinating timely communication with the public about City programs and information is to be regarded as an important consideration in maintaining good public relations. Further it is the policy of the City of Marceline to:

- Provide the public with timely, accurate, clear, objective and complete information about its policies, programs, events, services and initiatives.
- Ensure that the City of Marceline is visible, accessible and accountable to the public it serves.
- Employ a variety of ways and means to communicate and provide information to the public.
- Identify and address communication needs and issues routinely in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, programs, services and initiatives.
- Consult the public, listen to and take account of people's interests and concerns when establishing priorities, developing policies, and planning programs and services.
- Deliver prompt, courteous and responsive service that is sensitive to the needs and concerns of the public and respectful of individual rights.
- Encourage City Staff to communicate openly with the public about policies, programs, services and initiatives they are familiar with and for which they have responsibility.
- Market the City's name and logo on all forms of communication with the public.

Marceline seeks to ensure a business-friendly environment and recognizes that many City organizations and businesses have limited resources to promote public activities that have far-reaching benefit to City residents and visitors. City communication resources may be used to publish non-city government news and information when

- the activity or event is open to the public;
- there is significant investment of City resources;
- the City is acting as a "distributor" of information for a City-partnered organization and that the organization's banner identifier is used;

- the City is a sponsor or co-sponsor of the program or event. Sponsorship is defined as either direct monetary support, in-kind services, or a combination thereof;
- the information is intended to inform residents of policies and programs of other governmental agencies having jurisdiction in the City; or
- art & entertainment events in Marceline that is open to the public, regardless of sponsorship.

City communication will not to be used for advocating support for a particular issue or individual unless as identified as a priority of the City. City informational media will not be used for any commercial advertising message or any purpose that constitutes libel, slander, invasion of privacy, violation of trademark or copyright, or that might violate any local, state, or federal law.

## Targeted Audiences

The identification of target audiences is a key component of the City's Communication Plan.

- Citizens of Marceline. The Citizens of Marceline are the highest priority targeted audience. Strengthening the relationship between City government and the 2,233+ residents of the City is the starting point of a sound communications plan. There are numerous subsets to this audience which includes, but is not limited to: Homeowner's Associations, businesses, schools, not-for-profit organizations, and local clubs.
- City Employees. Personnel employed by the City of Marceline in its various departments and agencies are an integral part of the success of the communication plan. Each individual reflects the organization in their daily work. Subsets to this audience include part time employees and members of City boards and committees.
- News Media. The media are important because their coverage of City events and activities can have significant influence on the image of government by the public.
- Residents of Linn and Chariton Counties and the surrounding region, including those who work and do business in Marceline.
- New or prospective residents and businesses
- Seasonal residents.
- Linn and Chariton County Local governments and government entities.
- City government associations and organizations.

## Guiding Principals

1. **Open Two-Way Communication:** Ensure that information is shared throughout the community and the organization emphasizing two-way informational flow.
2. **Community Problem-solving:** Provide citizens with complete, accurate and timely information enabling them to make informed judgments. This will help the City to make the best decisions on their behalf.
3. **Proactive:** The plan attempts to give the City the opportunity to tell its story rather than rely exclusively on others to interpret the City's actions, issues and decisions.
4. **Inclusive:** including everyone in the process builds teamwork and a feeling of belonging, breaking down feelings of us vs. them, which are common in many city governments and in many relationships of city government with citizens. The goal is to include everyone who cares to participate and to motivate those who are not currently engaged.
5. **Strong and Consistent Messages:** A successful communication plan is built on strong themes and is more effective than one with unrelated and scattered messages. The communication plan should support, reinforce and reflect the goals of the. These goals were established by the City Council and City Staff, thus underscoring the idea of an organization with one common purpose: the citizens, businesses, and visitors of Marceline.

## **Duties and Responsibilities**

1. The City Manager shall be the official staff spokesperson for the City and shall act as the Public Information Officer (PIO). The Chief of Police or his designee shall handle inquiries concerning criminal investigations that are of a sensitive nature. The media shall contact the PIO concerning the administration or affairs of the City including but not limited to:
  - specific actions taken at official City Council meetings, Council Sessions, or other board meetings;
  - clarification and interpretation of City policies and administrative rules and regulations;
  - actions pending or under consideration by the City Council, board, or committee that have not yet been made official policies;
  - inquiries concerning City employees; and
  - routine inquiries regarding departmental operations.
  
2. It is the responsibility of:
  - the Public Information Officer (PIO) to maintain the City's official web presence via social media/networking and the internet. The PIO will also maintain the media distribution listings on the City's email server, to include: media contacts, local organizations, business, residents, and visitors.
  - all City Departments and employees who want to engage in social media/networking in an official capacity for their department to coordinate this activity with the PIO.

The responsibility for assuring complete compliance with the provisions of this policy rests with the Department Superintendents, supervisors and the individual employee involved. It is the responsibility of social media users and those engaged in social networking to stay informed regarding City policies related to this activity.

## Communication Tools

### 1. Official City Website (www.marceline.org):

The City maintains an active presence on the internet at [www.marceline.org](http://www.marceline.org). This site is the primary communication vehicle for the City and functions as a transparent, information portal, providing a convenient manner for the public to obtain current information, contact staff, and use on-line services. The City's website is designed as the City's communication portal, containing all elements of communications tools at the City's disposal. The following information is provided on the City's website:

- a. Static Information: The Marceline City Government and each department of the City, with a listing of services and resources provided, are represented on the City's website. In addition, services that are most utilized also have a page to provide information for the public to make informed decisions. This information generally does not change, but will be updated as changes occur.
- b. Dynamic Information: It is important that the public receives information in a timely and convenient manner. Below are tools that Marceline uses to communicate to the public, all of which are immediately posted on the website.

- |  |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| ✓ News Releases                        | ✓ Activity Reports (FAST FACTS) |
| ✓ Residential Notifications            | ✓ Council Agenda / Minutes      |
| ✓ Community Events Calendar            | ✓ Upcoming Events               |
| ✓ Emergency Operations                 | ✓ Social Networking             |
| ✓ Miscellaneous Reports / Publications | ✓ Public Event Flyers           |
|  | ✓ Citizen Action Request        |

### 2. News Releases:

The City produces news releases as a part of its ongoing pursuit of transparency for specific areas of interest such as City successes, business accomplishments, or promotional events. The City may also use news releases as an instrument to communicate human interest stories to convey positive emotion about ongoing City activities.

- a. Preparation: News Releases shall be written by the subject matter expert and forwarded to the PIO for formatting and final review prior to being released to the media. All news releases shall be routed for comment to any department that would be affected by the release prior to final approval by the PIO. This requirement will ensure that information is current and correct.
- b. Occurrence: News Releases will be published on a case-by-case basis.

c. Distribution:

- a. Email: News releases will be distributed electronically through the City's email server via the Community Relations Distribution lists that includes regional media contacts, employees, local organizations, business, residents, and visitors. The public may request to be added or removed from the email distribution list on the City Website.
- b. City Website: News releases will be posted on the City's website at [www.Marceline.org](http://www.Marceline.org). News release announcements will appear on the website homepage and on the dedicated news release page for easy access. Each news release page will contain a "widget" which allows for easy printing, or further publishing to social media websites.
- c. Social Network Websites: News releases will be linked from the City's website to the City's Facebook and Twitter websites to reach a more diverse audience and encourage feedback.
- d. Identification. News releases will be sequentially numbered with the first number being the order number, followed by a "/", followed by the last two digits of the calendar year. All news releases will have a header banner identifying the organization responsible for the information. The City's banners will be specially made by the PIO to ensure easy identification and consistent use of the City's marketing brand.
- e. Exception. Fire and Rescue and Police Department responses to emergencies in the City may be reported directly to the media by a designated department spokesperson with the approval of the Fire and Rescue Chief or Police Chief. Police Department releases concerning traffic advisories, investigations and routine community relations activities may also be reported directly to the media. All releases should also be copied to the City Manager or his designee.
- f. Special consideration. News releases containing controversial or sensitive materials and/or matters relating to public safety shall be distributed to the Mayor and members of the City Council prior to release to the media.

3. Marceline E-Blasts:

The City continually promotes public events in the City through the dissemination of flyers for events that are open to the public, are community oriented, and are held in Marceline or held by a Marceline organization. The City's website has an active page containing event flyers that meet these requirements. E-Blasts are an extension of the

Events Page on the website. A Marceline E-Blast is a selected flyer embedded from the events page into an email and is used to bring an upcoming event to the public's attention.

- a. Occurrence: E-Blasts will be published on a case-by-case basis and are limited at the PIO's discretion as not to "spam" or overwhelm the accounts of members of the distribution list.
- b. Distribution: E-Blasts will be distributed via email through the City's email server via the Community Relations Distribution lists that includes regional media contacts, employees, local organizations, business, residents, and visitors. The public may request to be added or removed from the email distribution list on the City Website.
- c. Identification. Marceline E-Blasts are identified in the email subject line as "Marceline E-Blast", followed by the event title.
- d. Exception. Due to the large amount of event flyers posted on the City's Events Page on the website, E-Blasts are limited to those events held by the City or city-partnered organizations.

#### **4. Residential Notifications:**

The City produces a Residential Notification when road maintenance, utility maintenance, power outage, traffic occurrence, or any other unforeseen event targets a specific area of the City. The notification is used when information may not warrant a full news release and notifies only a specific group of people affected by an event short in duration.

- a. Preparation: Residential Notifications shall be written by the subject matter expert in each Department and forwarded to the PIO for formatting and final review prior to being released to the media. If initial notification is made by an employee onsite, the PIO will prepare the Residential Notification based on the information provided. This will ensure timely dissemination of the information. The Residential Notifications will be prepared so that they may be easily printed and used as a hand bill.
- b. Occurrence: Residential Notifications will be published on a case-by-case basis.
- c. Distribution:
  - c. Email: Residential Notifications will be distributed electronically through the City's email server via specific groups in the Community Relations Distribution list that may include regional media contacts, employees, local

organizations, business, residents, and visitors. The public may request to be added or removed from the email distribution list on the City Website. The email will contain only the text of the notification with the subject line identified by “Residential Notification” followed by the subject line.

- d. Hand Bill: Residential Notifications may be printed by the Department responsible for the information and distributed to residents and businesses directly affected by the project.
  - e. City Website: Residential Notifications will only be posted on the website if service interruption has the potential to affect a majority of the public in and around Marceline in excess of a 24-hour period. An example would include a traffic interruption due to a water main repair lasting several days. Posting of Residential Notifications on the City website will be at the PIO’s discretion.
  - f. Social Network Websites: Residential Notifications will be posted directly on City’s Facebook and Twitter websites in text only form.
- d. Identification. Activity reports will be identified the City’s Logo with “RESIDENTIAL NOTIFICATION” in the header, followed by the date.

**5. Citizen Action Request:**

The Citizen Action Request is a web-based form found on the City’s website. It is used to bring awareness of a citizen’s individual concern to the City’s attention and may take the form of a complaint, compliment, comment or suggestion for improving the quality of life in Marceline. The following highlights the process of a Citizen Action Form.

- a. Citizen action: The public can access the Citizen Action Request on the left hand navigation panel of the City’s website at [www.Marceline.org](http://www.Marceline.org). After completing the required information, the individual completing the form will click the submit button and be directed to a receipt screen. The individual will also receive an email confirmation that the form was received by City Staff.
- b. City Action: Upon receipt by City Staff, a response to the Citizen Action Form will be provided within 2 business days via email. The response may be the ultimate answer, a request for more detailed information, or an indicator that more time may be needed to research and provide a thorough answer. If more time is required, a date of follow-up or completion must be stated and followed.

All communication regarding the Citizen Action Form, to include the final response, must be submitted to the PIO for file.

## 6. Social Media:

The City of Marceline will make every effort to use current technologies to communicate with the public, including social networks, blogs, video sharing, podcasts, wikis, message boards, and online forums. Technologies include: picture-sharing, wall-postings, e-mail, instant messaging, and music-sharing to name a few. Examples of social media applications include but are not limited to Google and Yahoo Groups (reference, social networking), Wikipedia (reference), MySpace and Facebook (social networking), YouTube (social networking and video sharing), Flickr (photo sharing), Twitter (social networking and microblogging), LinkedIn (business networking), and news media comment sharing/bloggging.

- Social Networking tools serve as a quick and easy way to obtain public opinion and keep citizens updated and informed. Social networking benefits include the following:

- Ability to build trust, relationships, and establish open lines of communication.
- Ability to allow the City of Marceline to be proactive and not reactive to citizens needs and concerns.
- Ability to drive traffic to the City's Web site and to keep citizens updated and informed.
- Ability to create better overall brand awareness for the City of Marceline.
- Ability to engage citizens, introduce new services, publicize upcoming events, reach a new demographic, and more.

Wherever possible, links to more information should direct users back to the City's official website at [www.marcelinemo.us](http://www.marcelinemo.us) for information, forms, documents or online services necessary to conduct business with the City.

### a. City Manager Guidelines

- All official City of Marceline presence on social media sites or services are considered an extension of the City's information network and are governed by this policy. The City Manager will review department requests to use social media sites and will be given administrative access for those departmental social networking sites.
- The City Manager will advocate using social media to help departments reach their stated goals by assisting departments in developing appropriate uses for social media, assisting the selecting of appropriate social media outlets

and helping departments define a strategy for engagement using social media.

- The City Manager will monitor content on each of the City's social media sites to ensure adherence to the Social Media Policy for appropriate use, messaging, and branding consistent with the goals of the City.

b. Department Guidelines

- Use of social media sites such as Facebook, MySpace or Twitter, in an official capacity, must be authorized by the employee's Department Superintendent and coordinated with the City Manager. The City Manager will serve as the official spokesperson for the City in the area of social media/networking.
- All Departments that use social media sites must be approved by the City Manager and provide the City Manager with administrative access. Existing sites must still be approved in order to continue and re-establish in accordance with these guidelines.
- Departments that use social media are responsible for complying with applicable federal, state, and City laws, regulations, and policies. This includes adherence to established laws and policies regarding Missouri's Public Records and Open Meeting Laws, copyright, records retention, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), First Amendment, privacy laws and information security policies established by the City.
- Employees representing the City government via social media outlets must conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the City. Employees that fail to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner shall be subject to the disciplinary action outlined in the City's Personnel Manual.
- Violation of this policy may result in the removal of department pages from social media outlets. The City Manager retains the authority to remove information or provide corrections or clarifications.

c. City Council Guidelines.

- City Council Members may become fans of City social media sites such as Facebook, MySpace or Twitter, but must refrain from posting comments on these sites, as interaction with other elected officials violates the Missouri Sunshine Law. Further, City Council Members are cautioned that interaction with City elected officials on personal social media pages may also violate the Sunshine Law. Postings by one or more City Council Members may be reviewed by the City Attorney to ensure violations have not occurred.

d. Rules for Posting and Comments (City Staff).

- Responses to comments shall be limited to providing factual information. Moderators shall not argue with customers or post comments relating to City policies and practices. Moderators will not express opinions relating to City policies and practices.
  - Comments must be within the scope of the City's post, weblog, tweet, etc. New postings must be relevant, current, and appropriate.
  - Keep comments short and to the point.
  - Do not include personally identifiable information within your comment, such as addresses, phone numbers, social security numbers, or other sensitive information.
  - Responses must be civil. They must not contain malicious, offensive, threatening, profane, or insulting language. Above all else, respect others. No references to the personality of other participants or individuals, or attacks on individual character will be permitted.
  - Any links to other Web sites or pages must be in accordance with the City's Linking Policy.
  - Self-promotion and personal advertising are not allowed.
- e. Rules for Posting and Comments (Public Users).
- Anonymous comments will not be accepted. Depending on the functionality of the site, users must be registered to post comments.
  - Users cannot represent themselves as another person.
  - User comments must be civil and must not contain the following:
    - ✓ Profane language or content.
    - ✓ Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability, or sexual orientation.
    - ✓ Sexual content or links to sexual content.
    - ✓ Threats of violence.

- ✓ Solicitation for political or charitable purposes.
- ✓ Solicitations of commerce (advertisements).
- ✓ Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity.
- ✓ Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems.
- ✓ Content that violates proprietary information of any other party.

Failure to comply with these rules shall result in the removal of the comment and the possibility of being barred from accessing the City's Social Networking sites.

#### **7. Emergency Management:**

In the event of emergency due to severe weather or that which threatens the overall health and welfare of the City of Marceline, all communications tools listed in this plan will be utilized to communicate with the public and other governmental entities to ensure the welfare and safety of its citizens.

#### **8. Organization / Corporate Communication**

Face-to-Face communication on City matters is preferred many as a more personable form of interfacing with the public because body language and eye contact amplifies trust. The City Council and all Marceline employees are representatives of the City and should always be available to communicate with the public in this matter.

Communication may include, but is not limited to:

- City Council Meetings / Executive Sessions
- Trade shows
- One-on-one Meetings / Office visits
- Client group meetings
- Conferences
- Public events
- Board meetings
- Home owner association meetings

## **Guidance on Speaking to the Print and Broadcast Media**

1. The City Manager or his designee shall be notified immediately of any contacts or requests for information from television, print, or radio media. Questions concerning new programs and policies that are under consideration by the City Council shall be referred to the City Manager or his designee. At his discretion, the City Manager may designate a person to serve as spokesperson on a particular issue.
2. In the case of formal written news releases, all such releases will be disseminated from the City Manager's Office or with the prior review and approval of the City Manager or his designee. If a particular employee or Department Superintendent wishes to bring some information to the attention of the media, that matter should be coordinated with the City Manager or his designee.
3. Department Superintendents, or designated departmental representatives, may handle routine requests from the media that are within their area of expertise. Other employees who may be asked questions should refer the reporter to the Department Superintendent or designated representative. If there is any question as to whether or not a request constitutes a "routine request", clarification should be obtained from the City Manager or his designee prior to responding to the request.
4. Department Superintendents may address questions from the media on sensitive issues relating to their area of expertise, including topics that may affect City policy and/or matters that may ultimately result in Council action only after obtaining authorization from the City Manager or his designee.
5. Unless otherwise required under applicable law, reports prepared by City staff for submission to City Council shall not be shared with the media or the general public until the agenda packets have been delivered to City Council and authorization has been provided by the City Manager or his designee.
6. News releases shall not contain information which is confidential pursuant to provisions of State or Federal law, or has which been received by the City pursuant to a representation of confidentiality. Documents or information exempt from disclosure shall not be contained in any news release without City Manager approval.

## **Monitoring & Evaluating City Communications**

The effectiveness and impact of communication activities in the Marceline Communications Plan must be continually monitored and evaluated to ensure that clear and timely information is provided to the right audience using the right communication method.

The PIO will be responsible for evaluating the needs and communication methods and address their relevancy and value. Evaluation tools include:

- Website Analytics
- Polls & Surveys
- Social Networking Site Analytics
- Technological Trend Monitoring
- Public Feedback (one-on-one, email, social networking)

Changes as a result of identified communication improvement may result in a restructuring of current communication method(s), implementation of new communication method(s), increased / decreased budgeting, and/or a modification to the Marceline Communication Plan.