



USING PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS TO **BUILD COMMUNITY** **AND TRUST**

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WHAT WE'LL TALK ABOUT TODAY



- Define and Explore Public Trust
- Current State and Trust Landscape of Local Media
- Public Engagement as a Community Builder
- Short Audience Poll
- Community Examples

Question & Answer



PUBLIC TRUST: WHAT IS IT AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Put simply, public trust is the goal, and the foundation for democratic governance. This means local government too!

It is crucial for ensuring our policies, programs, and initiatives are successful.

BUILDING TRUST WITH THE PUBLIC

Trust in local government has climbed during the pandemic

Local governments saw 25% higher public engagement with vaccine communications than state governments, 3x more engagement than federal government campaigns

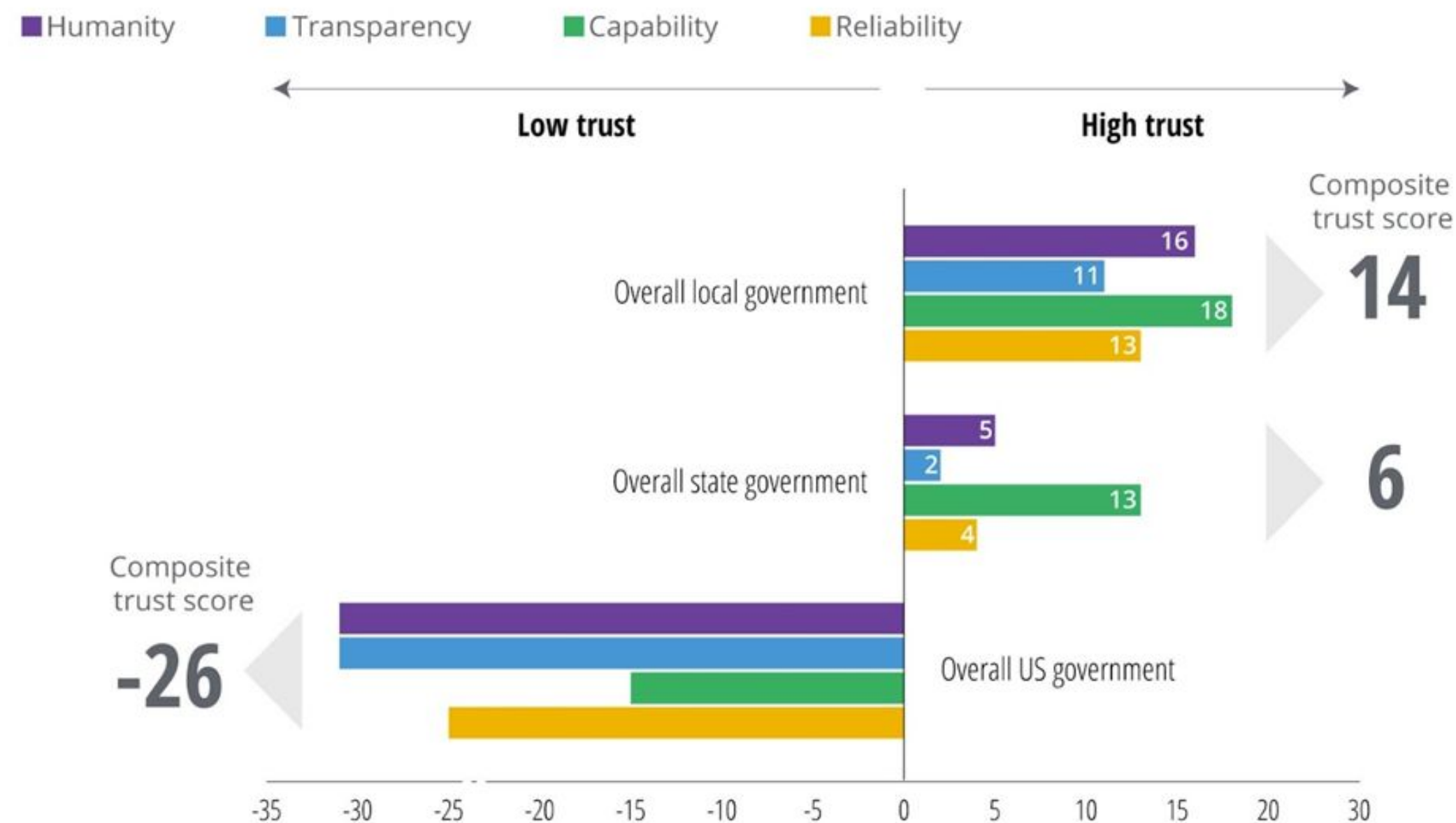
Local community leaders drive the highest engagement rates looking across message sources

Leverage this boost in trust moving forward, for communications, service delivery, and beyond



UNDERSTANDING TRUST IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local governments are the most trusted among the surveyed respondents



Note: The score for overall US government is based on the Deloitte federal trust survey conducted in November 2020 and taken from William D. Eggers et al., *Rebuilding trust in government: Four signals that can help improve citizen trust and engagement*, Deloitte Insights, March 9, 2021.
Source: Deloitte analysis.

Local governments are on the front lines of delivering key services and information—and of restoring trust in government.

We are the most trusted (according to several studies), when compared to state and federal government.

Distant governments tend to be distrusted governments.

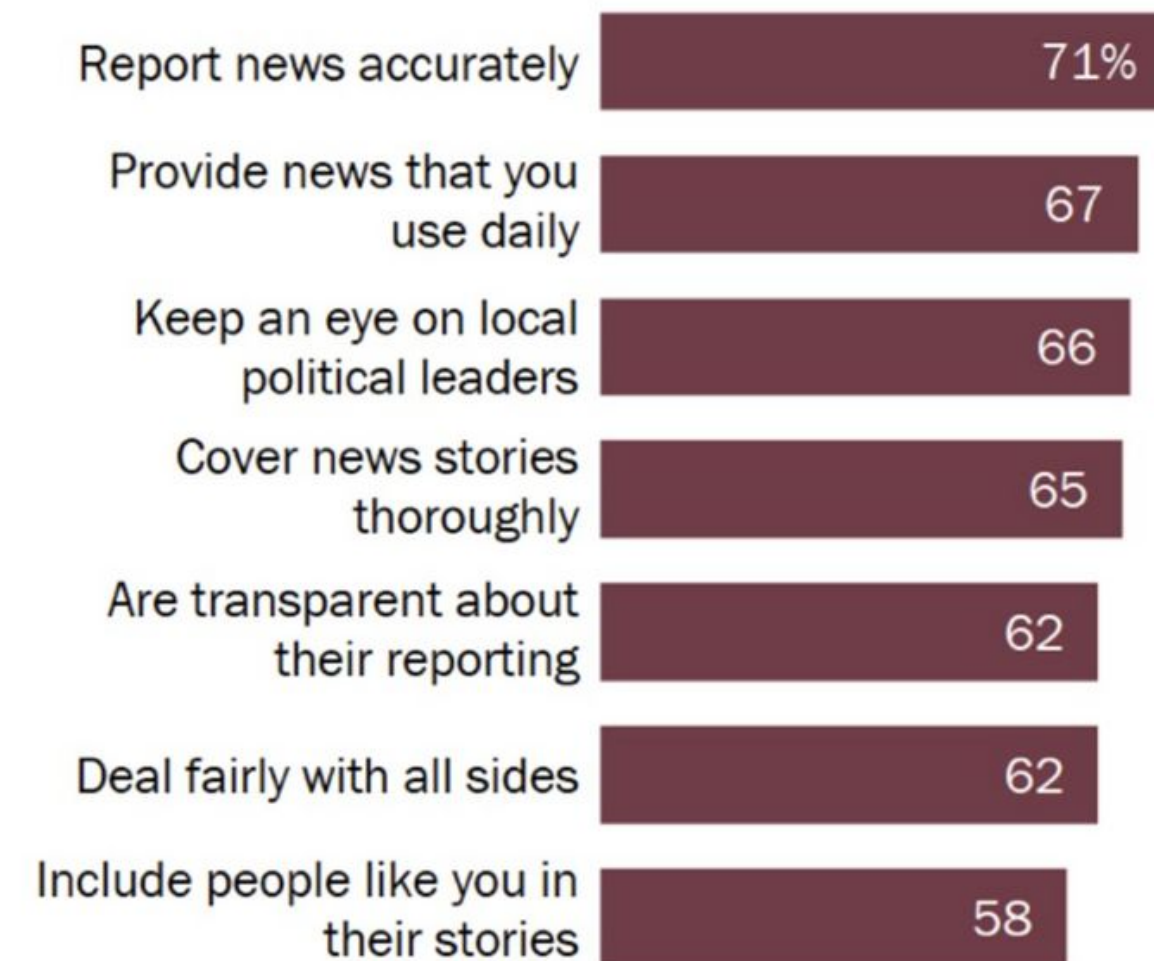
Americans give fairly high marks to their local news media, especially when journalists are seen as connected to the community.

Like most things, this experience can vary greatly by city, town, region and state however.

PUBLIC TRUST IN LOCAL MEDIA

Americans overall think their local news media do well at many journalistic roles

% of U.S. adults who say their local news media do each of the following well



Source: Survey conducted Oct. 15-Nov. 8, 2018.

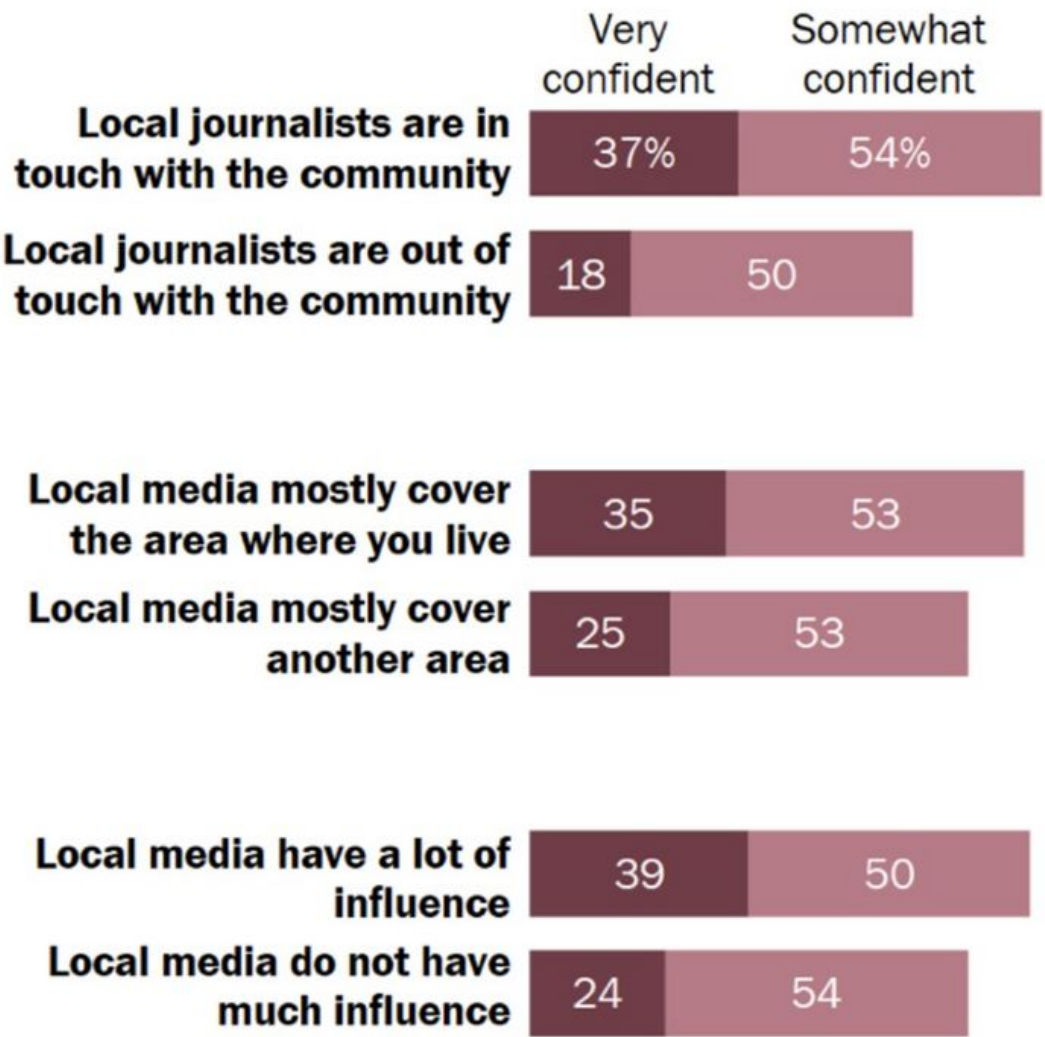
"For Local News, Americans Embrace Digital but Still Want Strong Community Connection"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

COMMUNITY CONNECTION FACTOR

Americans have greater confidence in their main local news source when local media are connected to the community

Among those who say ____, % who are confident their main source for local news can get them the information they need



Source: Survey conducted Oct. 15-Nov. 8, 2018.
“For Local News, Americans Embrace Digital but Still Want Strong Community Connection”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Americans have greater confidence in their main local news source when local media are connected to the community, and that means US!

We all know the local news landscape has been incredibly difficult in the past few years...

THE RAPIDLY CHANGING FACE OF NEWS AND WHY IT MATTERS



THEN (2005 - 2015): Media and Communications During Governor Deval Patrick's campaign, administration

Dozens of reporters (print, TV, radio, online) on the campaign trail, in the State House including local reporters that covered municipal government:

- Globe, Herald, Regional Dailies, Gatehouse, AP, Local TV, Radio
- First administration to have a “digital office” focused on social media, digital storytelling
- Reporters and public servants relied on one another for news gathering, information sharing (ex: NECN's 100 Days Documentary)
- Competition among outlets produced better stories, required fact checking

THE RAPIDLY CHANGING FACE OF NEWS AND WHY IT MATTERS

NOW (2019 - Present): First PIO in the Town of Needham

- No dedicated local reporter
- Weekly Needham Times newspaper is no longer printed - available online only
- News is “regionalized,” “topic-based.”

**“WE WON’T COVER
ELECTIONS ANYMORE.”
- LOCAL REPORTER**

June 2022 report from the Medill School at Northwestern: an average of more than two newspapers a week are disappearing. Since 2005, the country has lost more than a fourth of its newspapers (2,500) and is on track to lose a third by 2025.

US lost more than 360 newspapers between late 2019 and end of May 2022. All but 24 of those papers were weeklies, serving communities ranging in size from a few hundred people to tens of thousands. Most communities that lose a newspaper do not get a digital or print replacement. The country has 6,380 surviving papers: 1,230 dailies and 5,150 weeklies.

THE RAPIDLY CHANGING FACE OF NEWS AND WHY IT MATTERS

Massive investment firm or hedge-fund backed firms are buying papers and then merging or shutting them down.

Bureau of Labor Statistics: newspaper revenues topped \$50 billion in 2005. By 2021, total newspaper revenues had declined 60 percent to \$20 billion.

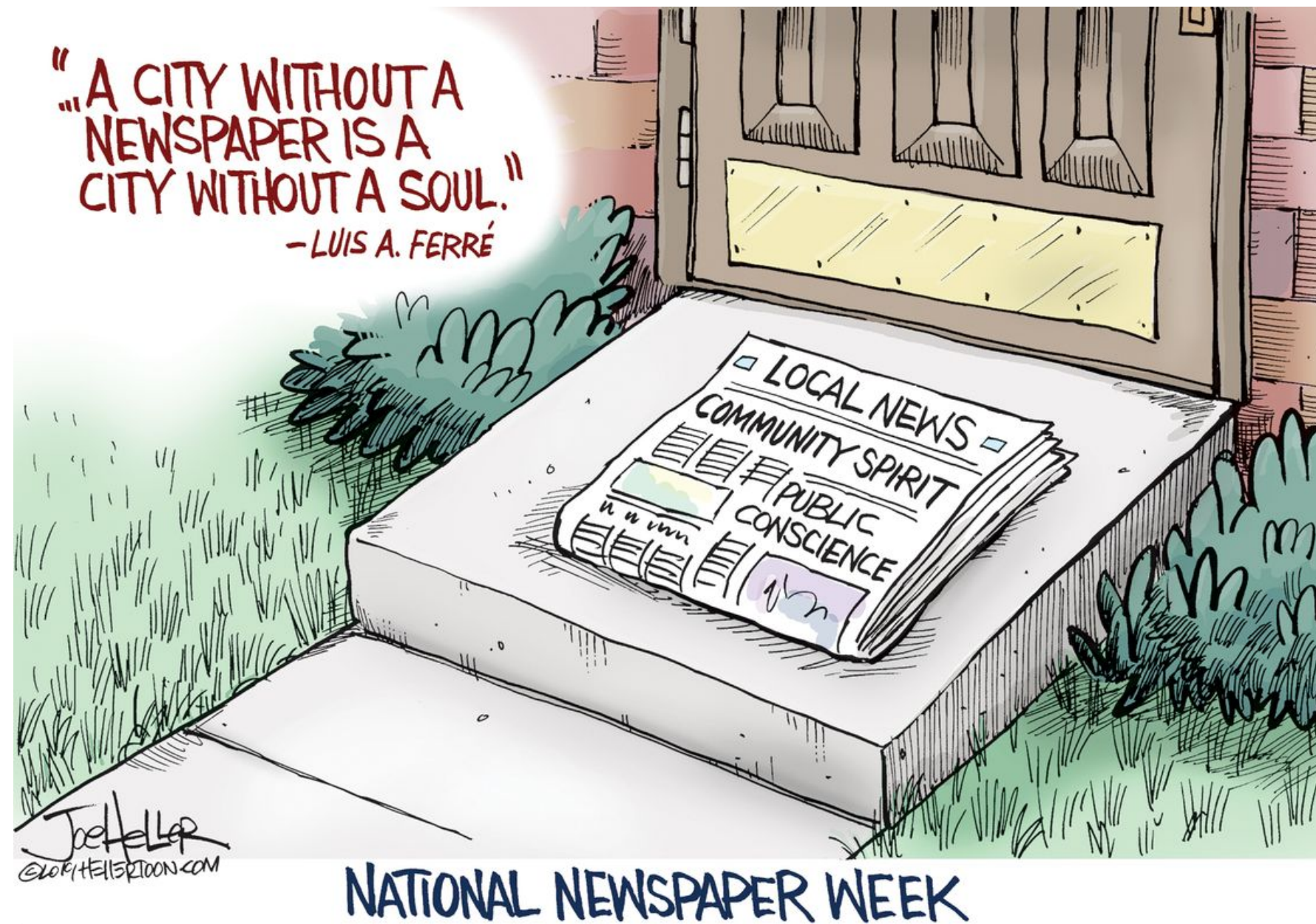
Number of journalists declined in lockstep with revenue decreases -- by almost 60 percent from 75,000 in 2005 to 31,400 in 2021. The vanishing journalists included investigative reporters, assignment and copy editors, editorial writers, beat and regional reporters employed by the metro dailies, who covered outlying communities, as well as issues of statewide importance, such as education and politics.

Why does this matter?

Creates an information vacuum, leads to misinformation, leads to less informed citizenry and reduction in voter turnout



OK, LOCAL NEWS IS DYING! NOW WHAT??



BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT



Good public engagement is:

Intentional

An active and intentional two-way dialogue between the public and governmental agencies, where the public has the opportunity to influence the decisions made by public-sector officials.

Inclusive

Government brings the public to the table, not just those who show up to every meeting. Equitably incorporates diverse people, voices, ideas, and information to lay the groundwork for quality outcomes and democratic legitimacy.

It takes effort to make sure we bring those to th

Public engagement is NOT one-way communication.

Don't do it half-heartedly just to check a box.



Engagement strategy **MUST** be considered during the initial stage of project planning to be successful.

- Gives citizens the opportunity to weigh in on decisions that affect their lives
- Better outcomes that create a shared vision for the future
- Creates and maintains a community that is educated, aware, motivated, engaged, and fulfilled
- It builds the trust needed to move important projects forward

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE



Unlike most private sector organizations, we have to reach a diverse audience

Look at age, gender, race, educational attainment, etc.

Census data can help with this, also surveys

Take inventory of the different channels you use to communicate with the public and monitor how much engagement you get from each

How people consume information varies within your community; what works for your older residents may not necessarily work for your younger residents!

CHOOSING THE RIGHT CHANNEL TO DELIVER YOUR MESSAGE

To maximize your reach, you must use both
digital and non-digital communication
channels

Digital

- WEBSITE
- SOCIAL MEDIA
- EMAIL

Non-Digital

- REVERSE 911 CALLS
- Physical signage, electronic sign boards
- Mailings (e.g. water bill inserts)
- Local newspapers
- Cable access/PEG
- In-person events

It's unrealistic to assume you'll use every channel at your disposal every time you engage the public.

Use your judgment to know if a project or initiative rises to the level of needing all your communication channels.

Example:

- **Select Board public hearing for water/sewer rates:** website, social media, email, newspaper
- **Gathering feedback on a proposed major construction project in your downtown:** all of your digital and non-digital channels

FOLLOWING THROUGH: WE OWE IT TO THE PUBLIC!

Once you've delivered the message, got your feedback, and incorporated it into your project...**you aren't done yet!**

Good public engagement involves **following up with those you've engaged**. They took the time to engage with you; acknowledge that, and respect their efforts by keeping them in the loop on how their feedback shaped the project.

Otherwise, you risk stakeholders feeling their contribution was ignored or pointless, therefore disincentivizing some of them from **engaging in the future**.

Note: This does NOT mean that feedback is automatically incorporated. Summarize how public engagement shaped the project; you do not have to go point by point though all the feedback you received from each person.



LIVE POLL: TELL US ABOUT YOUR COMMUNITY

**GO TO [WWW.MENTI.COM](https://www.menti.com)
AND USE THE CODE**

42 94 77 5



NEEDHAM: NEWSLETTER



Replacing the local newspaper with a well....local newspaper....sort of...

Needham launched the News You Need(ham) in June 2021 with return to office.

- Born out of a necessity to continue sharing COVID-19 information.
- Saw an opportunity to keep 2,000+ people informed and engaged on other Town news/information
- Built support for it by including non-Town specific information from non-profits, school groups, other organizations who use the newsletter as their “newspaper”

NEEDHAM: NEWSLETTER



News from the Town of Needham



Good morning, Needham!

The summer wind down has begun. As mentioned in [last week's newsletter](#), the pools at Rosemary will close this Sunday. This upcoming week is also the last week of [Summer Hours](#) for municipal buildings. Regular hours will resume Tuesday, September 6th.

This weekend kicks off [Early Voting](#) at Town Hall for the State Primary Election. Early voting will be available at Town Hall Saturday, August 27th and Sunday, August 28th from noon to 5 pm and Monday, August 29th through Friday, September 2nd from 9 am to 5 pm. Primary Election Day voting will take place Tuesday, September 6th from 7 am to 8 pm at the designated local polling locations.

Includes:

- New or timely information

Ex: election information, storm information, building closures, etc.

- Updates from the community

- Surveys, polls

- Meeting notices with agendas

NEEDHAM: NEWSLETTER



Pros:

- Better informed citizenry
- Ability to highlight good work
- Stakeholder building through collaboration with outside groups
- No delay in information, no newspaper deadlines, no newspaper editors

Cons:

- Time/Labor intensive
- Setting expectations

NEEDHAM: NEWSLETTER

Today:

- 5,140 subscribers and growing weekly
- Average open rate of over 70%
- Click rate of 10-20%

“I love your newsletter! It’s strange, but between News You Need(ham) and the Charles River Chamber newsletter, both of which I read religiously, I feel better informed than when the mediocre Needham Times was the main local news outlet. The Hometown Weekly has improved slightly, too. So even though I deplore the news desert that has developed in the Boston suburbs (and throughout the country), thanks to you and others stepping up, there is much to appreciate.”

~ Margaret



News from the Town of Needham



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LEVERAGING YOUR WEBSITE

Rule of thumb: If you're pushing information out to the public, it should also be available on your website.

Your website is your baseline. The hub of information for local government.


It's where your residents expect to find information about what's happening in your community.

Especially things like:

- Major road construction
- A bylaw/ordinance change with broad impact
- Town Meeting/Select Board/City Council information
- Voting/election details

Having this information easily available makes it more likely your community will trust you.


NEWS & INFORMATION



January 18: Route 128/I95 Land Use & Transportation Study Informational Meeting

Massachusetts Department of Transportation (DOT) invites you to register for and attend the third and final Virtual Public Information Meeting for the Route 128/I-95 Land Use & Transportation Study

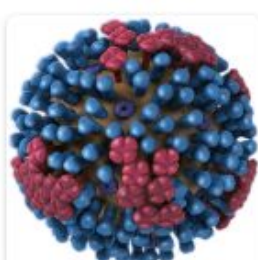
[Read on...](#)



Select Board Seeks Residents to Serve as Trustees of Lexington's New Affordable Housing Trust

Special Town Meeting approved a bylaw on November 1, 2022 creating a municipal affordable housing trust for Lexington, and the Select Board is looking for interested residents to be the first to serve on the Board of Trustees.


[Read on...](#)



Upcoming Vaccine Clinics

Get COVID and Flu vaccinations, as well as "catch up" vaccinations - TDAP, MMR or Meningitis


[Read on...](#)



Ad Hoc Transportation Committee: Senior Resident and Local Business Representatives Needed

The Select Board has created an ad hoc Transportation Committee (Committee) to evaluate the Town's Lexpress bus service and provide a recommendation to the Select Board.


[Read on...](#)



Help Plan for Lexington's Open Spaces and Recreation Areas: Share Your Feedback

Our Conservation Division and Recreation & Community Programs Department are working to update the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). Share your thoughts by January 30.

[Read on...](#)



Residents Aged 65+ Eligible for Property Tax Deferral

If you are a Lexington resident aged 65 or older with a 2021 gross household income of \$90,000 or less, you can postpone paying all or any part of your property tax bill and let the value of your house pay the tax bill later.

[Read on...](#)

Using web analytics to map out your website with the most

LEVERAGING YOUR WEBSITE

PAPER SHREDDING

The Department of Public Works periodically holds shredding events for residents to safely dispose of any paper you're looking to safely dispose of, and watch as it's shredded in front of you.

Please do not bring junk mail to be shredded, and please do not bring plastic bags.

Upcoming Dates

- September 3, 2022
- October 29, 2022

9:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Having a website with fresh info translates to trust in government.

It's most likely that a resident's first interaction with their government is through your website. Make sure it's a positive one!

Outdated content leads to frustrated calls and emails, in the long run taking more staff time than it took to post the info in the first place.

MEASURE WHAT MATTERS

Awareness and the building of public trust through communications and engagement are necessary steps, but measuring that trust is just as important.

Your analytics can help!

In Amherst we compile engagement and communication data from many sources, to get a clearer picture of our impact and services. These include: web, media streams, social platforms, search, and more.





FY22 Overview: July 1, 2021–June 30, 2022

Main Website Visits

1,261,046



Total Websites Managed

6



COVID Website Visits

172,822



News Items Published

217



Town Manager Reports Sent

22



Subscription Categories on Website

44



Subscribers

Website Features

6,592



Emergency Alerts

7,892



Social Media Follows

6,100+



Traffic by Device Type



Issues Reported Online via See Click Fix



259

www.amherstma.gov
www.amherstmarec.org
www.amherstpd.org
www.engageamherst.org
www.amherstcovid19.org
Amherst Online Career Portal



FY22 Overview: July 1, 2021–June 30, 2022

Engage Amherst Visits

13,477



Cuppa' Joe Events

8



COVID Website Visits

172,822



YouTube Views

10,265



YouTube Videos Added

501



Social Media Posts

1,379



Community Activity Forms Submitted

211



Applications to Career Portal

1,601+

Subscribers

Website Features

6,592



Emergency Alerts

7,892



Social Media

6,100



Questions?



Contact Brianna Sunryd
Director of Communications & Civic Innovation
sunrydb@amherstma.gov
www.amherstma.gov/stayconnected



SO WHAT IS

At its most basic, analytics describes what has happened over a period of time. It can show trends and be used for measuring our performance.

For example in local government communications we can readily use:

- website traffic and search information
- online views of meetings or newsletters
- interactions on social media
- complaints and issue reporting



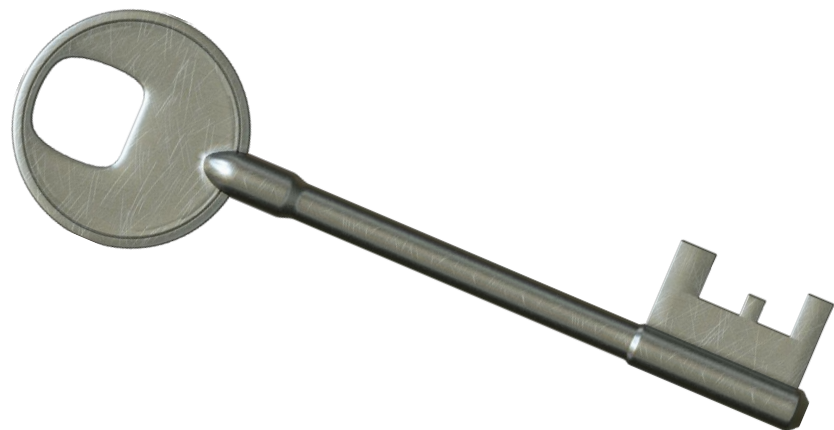
WHAT GETS MEASURED

What gets measured, gets done.

Beyond getting a clearer picture on public trust in your organization, regular review of your analytics can be used to:

- Support data-driven decision making
- Audit & improve services
- Determine if resources being allocated align with our goals
- Exhibit the progress being made or show where we





KEY TAKEAWAYS

01

Grow Trust

Don't lose any ground, maintain and grow the public's trust in your organization through continual, consistent, and customized communications. Be sure to measure what matters and use that to inform next steps.

02

Be Creative

Be willing to think creatively about how to engage with people. Make it easy - send it straight to their inbox, collaborate with others in the community to spread your message

03

Strategize Early

Public engagement cannot be an afterthought. It has to be considered in the early stages of project planning. It can be the difference between success and failure of your program/service/initiative.

The background is a dark, textured surface filled with numerous question marks in various shades of blue, green, and purple. A large, light green semi-circle is positioned on the right side of the image. A horizontal, semi-transparent dark band runs across the middle of the image, serving as a backdrop for the text.

QUESTIONS?