Best practices for engaging your community

CITY OF ROANOKE, VA
MAYOR SHERMAN P. LEA
What does Roanoke’s Office of Citizen Engagement do?

The Citizen Engagement Officer is a communications and marketing professional who focuses on building trusting relationships between our government and our community.

The Officer represents the City Manager’s Office and leads the city’s efforts in many areas, including social media management, digital marketing, graphic design, web development, videography, research, strategic communications, issues management, crisis communications, event planning, and campaign development.
Communicating proactively and transparently accomplishes three things:

Develops trust and builds mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders

Engages citizens in decision-making

Allows governments to proactively anticipate questions and manage issues (before they become issues)
4 Ways to Engage:

1. Social Media Engagement
2. Events and Special Campaigns
3. Public Consultation
4. Community-Based Projects
Social Media
How did Roanoke build a digital audience of 218,000+ followers in a just few years?
We create new content every day.

In FY18, we posted 7,240 times on the City of Roanoke’s 53 profiles (roughly 22 unique posts per day)

In FY18, City content reached 17.9 million people, resulting in 1.3 million interactions and engagements with the City through social media alone

The City’s top profiles are on: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Nextdoor, and LinkedIn

We stream City Council Meetings, Ribbon Cuttings, and more events on Facebook Live to keep our community informed
We listen and are responsive.

The City maintains high responsiveness to messages and comments—even on nights, weekends, and holidays.

In addition to social media, we offer digital service request forms and the iRoanoke app to automatically generate service tickets for our team.

We frequently ask citizens to provide input and ideas—whether it’s a simple poll, or a question. The key is to empower citizens to use their voice and share their ideas.
If you invest in your social media strategy, you will have a captive audience in the event of emergency.
During Hurricane Florence, we distributed more than 200 social media safety messages in multiple languages to help prepare our community.

These emergency alerts reached hundreds of thousands social media users, resulting in thousands of content engagements, and helped prepare our community for the storm.
It also gives you the opportunity to share positive stories that highlight your talented staff.

Our PD's lip sync video was watched more than 2.5 million times worldwide and won a national contest.
Special Events and Campaigns
Welcoming everyone in our community.

In 2018, we hosted our first Welcoming Week campaign. More than 400 people participated in a week of events – ranging from a DJ soccer party, to Arabic classes and a community discussion about immigration cases with Senator Kaine’s Office.

After distributing 1,000 buttons, stickers, flyers, and storefront “Welcomer” posters, the grassroots campaign earned dozens of positive PR stories, including coverage on NPR.
Roanoke awarded research grant and immigration integration plan assistance.

Through Welcoming Week, the City strengthened new relationships with seven local non-profits who serve immigrants and refugees.

As a group, we were awarded the Gateways for Growth research grant and technical assistance through Welcoming America and New American Economy to help us continue to support our city’s growing international community.
The annual Lea Youth Outdoor Basketball League

For three summers, we’ve played basketball twice a week on Tuesday and Thursday nights with the community in Melrose Park.

The PD provides a cookout for the community, we listen to music, and we play basketball. Before each game, we invite a special guest speaker to tell our youth an inspiring story about their lives.

The program has built trusting relationships with community members and our police department, and reduces criminal activity around the park every year.
Cleaning up our neighborhoods.

In our current HUD Target Areas, we introduced a new event this summer: a Clean Sweep.

Fifty-eight staff members from nearly every department and 35 volunteers from the community worked hard on a Saturday to help target and clean up a specific neighborhood.

Our Solid Waste team collected 38 tons of unlimited bulk, brush, and trash items at no cost.
Improving the livable built environment with local artists.

In 2018, the Arts Commission selected six artists to create stormdrain inlet artwork that had an environmentally-conscious message.

The most popular artist through a Facebook contest won a cash prize.

The campaign digitally reached 51,000+ people through social media in one week and the City now has public art on seven inlets throughout the city.
Asking our community to weigh in
Plan Roanoke 2020 – 2040 Comprehensive Plan

In July we launched a homegrown Public Consultation platform: www.planroanoke.org to help engage our community in the development of our next 20-year comprehensive plan.

Since the summer, thousands of community members have filled out city surveys for various infrastructure and planning projects through the Plan Roanoke portal.
Something we’re working on in 2019: a new Tactical Urbanism program

Photo: Andrea from our Transportation Division testing a floating crosswalk concept.
Empowering Citizens to Take Action and Solve Small Problems

Tactical Urbanism, also known as DIY Urbanism, refers to when a locality, non-profit, or community member approaches a problem with a short-term, low-cost, and scalable solution.

Our Office of Citizen Engagement is currently working with staff from different departments to develop a permitting system to launch this program in 2019.
Example of tactical urbanism: painting temporary bike lanes in Snellville, GA
Example of tactical urbanism: temporary parklet in Franklin, TN
Example of tactical urbanism: temporary greenway ramp

“Whoopdeedoo” public art in Vancouver, Canada.
Thank you!

Mayor Sherman P. Lea

540-853-2444

sherman.lea@roanokeva.gov