



# CITY OF SAN MATEO

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## Agenda Report

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**TO:** City Council  
**FROM:** Drew Corbett, City Manager  
**PREPARED BY:** City Manager's Office  
**MEETING DATE:** June 07, 2021

**SUBJECT:**  
Citywide Communications – Informational Update

**RECOMMENDATION:**  
Receive an informational presentation about the citywide communication strategy.

**BACKGROUND:**  
Keeping the San Mateo community engaged and informed with timely, accurate information is a major priority for the City. During the January 2021 goal-setting session, City Council requested a study session on citywide communications to better understand the City's current activities as well as areas for improvement. San Mateo's Communications Program is housed in the City Manager's Office, however nearly all of San Mateo's City departments regularly communicate with the public, with several more public-facing departments having staff assigned to assist with communications.

San Mateo's ongoing communications are deployed through a variety of formats and cover a wide array of topics related to City services, programs, initiatives, and departments. Other larger initiatives, such as the General Plan, may have their own, more specific communications and outreach strategy. The specific communications strategy for these larger initiatives will not be addressed as part of this informational update. This update will provide an overarching summary of citywide communications.

**Communications Goals & Priorities:**  
Effective communication means providing the public with accurate, actionable and timely information in formats that are readily accessible. It is critical to building trust, maintaining transparency and promoting participation.

City communications typically have one or more of the following goals or objectives:

- **Building Trust:** developing relationships and community trust of local government. Communication, transparency and meaningful engagement enhances understanding and respect. It inspires confidence that problems can be solved – together. Public trust is easily lost and often hard for government to earn. By making communications and community engagement a priority, and identifying opportunities to integrate feedback into our processes, we can develop greater trust and confidence in our City.
- **Demonstrating Value:** highlighting the services and contributions the City offers to the community. The more the community knows about the connection between City services and the quality of life within San Mateo, the more they understand how their tax dollars are used. The City addresses a variety of issues and meets daily needs in the community. Promoting City accomplishments helps to build a positive reputation, trust, and civic pride.
- **Educational:** educate and inform community members about City business and areas of community interest. This

includes educating people about services, initiatives, policies, or upcoming projects that may affect their lives. The more informed the public is about their community, the more active they will become in helping to shape it.

- **Engagement and Public Participation:** informed participation in local governance. Decision-making processes are greatly benefited by a diversity of perspectives and input from the public. Community outreach and input are strongly encouraged in the development of policies, programs, plans, and projects. Participation in elections and City decision making is paramount to democracy.

### **Tactics & Methods**

The City actively works to build upon the formats and distribution methods that will most effectively and efficiently reach our communications goals and audience. The City uses a variety of traditional and modern communications methods including, but not limited to: printed materials such as flyers and mailers, print and digital signs, in-person and virtual workshops, surveys, websites, social media, news media, advertising, emergency alerts and email notifications. A summary of the City's social media accounts and digital channels is included as Attachment 1. The City also regularly collaborates with community partners and trusted messengers to further amplify City communications.

The COVID-19 pandemic has required the City to shift away from in-person communications and further lean upon digital platforms, relationships with community partners, and print materials. Communications is an evolving field as public preferences and habits, as well as new technologies, change. It's important the City be flexible and evolve alongside the community's needs while continuing to focus on enhancing our core channels.

The informational update will include an overview of an internal communications audit of current City communication strategies employed by City departments. The presentation will also review residents' communications preferences and satisfaction with City communications as identified through the statistically-significant 2020 Citywide Community Survey. The executive summary and communications section of the Community Survey is included as Attachment 2.

### **Accessibility & Efforts to Communicate with Hard to Reach Communities**

The City strives to engage all residents and recognizes accessibility challenges, including language barriers, exist in San Mateo. Staff analyzed Census data about language access needs in San Mateo. English is the primary language spoken in San Mateo, followed by Spanish then Chinese (including both Mandarin and Cantonese). Spanish speakers make up about 18.9% of the population, with 10.3% speaking English "less than very well." Chinese speakers make up about 8.4% of the population, with about 3.8% speaking English "less than very well." Detailed information from the 2019 American Community Survey is included as Attachment 3. Spanish speakers tend to be more concentrated in the North Shoreview and North Central neighborhoods, while Chinese speakers are more dispersed throughout the City.

Similar to many communities, San Mateo residents tend to have differing levels of engagement with City communications including: engaged, interested, newcomers, passive, and disinterested. Government agencies face unique challenges in communicating with constituents including addressing language barriers, accessibility needs, and inspiring passive and disinterested residents to be more involved. However, government agencies are also in a key position to serve as a trustworthy, reliable source of information. The informational update will touch upon challenges and opportunities for improvement, as well as provide time for public and Council feedback.

### **Branding & Consistency**

Staff is working on efforts to develop a unified San Mateo brand and voice. Examples of these efforts include uniform email signatures, PowerPoint templates, and newsletter headings. Staff will present a brief overview and visual examples of these branding efforts.

### **BUDGET IMPACT:**

This is an informational report and as a result it has no impact on the City's budget.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION:**

This informational item is not a project subject to CEQA, because it is an organizational or administrative activity that will

not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment (CEQA Guidelines Section 15378(b)(5)).

**NOTICE PROVIDED**

All meeting noticing requirements were met.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Att 1 – Summary of City Social Media and & Digital Channels

Att 2 – 2020 Community Survey Executive Summary & Communications Section

Att 3 – Census Demographic Data on Languages Spoken

**STAFF CONTACT**

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