



Communications Plan and Media Guidelines

May 2015

Purpose

This comprehensive Communications Plan and Media Guidelines document serves as a guide to achieve the communications and media relations goals of the City of Red Wing.

Objectives

The goal of the Red Wing Communications Plan is to provide a general guide to maximize effective communications with current and future residents and businesses. Accordingly, the plan will provide a road map of how to inform and empower all stakeholders in Red Wing to become more engaged members of the community.

The plan encourages decentralized communication in the organization and the use of cost-effective social media sources. Specific objectives of the plan are listed below:

- Inform the community about decisions made by the City of Red Wing so it can engage in the process and support outcomes.

- Communicate quickly and effectively in a crisis situation by developing key messages and delivering them in an organized fashion by trained spokespeople.
- Provide feedback mechanisms so municipal customers may comment about City Council actions, city staff, city services, and programs.
- Promote effective internal communications within the City of Red Wing organization, using a regular exchange of information and programs that allow city employees to be “in the loop” on major issues affecting the city, and also perform their jobs more efficiently, cooperatively, and with a greater sense of satisfaction.

Communications Philosophy

The City of Red Wing is committed to developing and maintaining an interactive partnership with all segments of the community through ongoing and meaningful communication with citizens, civic clubs, places of worship, city boards and commissions, local businesses, community-based organizations (Chamber of Commerce, Visitors & Convention Bureau, Downtown Main Street), elected officials, and city employees.

The city is committed to a proactive approach to communications. Each department is responsible for producing accurate and timely communications about city programs, services and activities, and developing feedback opportunities to ensure efforts meet the community's needs.

Effective communications will:

- Help policymakers and constituents cooperatively create and achieve common goals that will further the city’s organizational goals.
- Support the City of Red Wing's philosophy of providing quality services to all customers equitably and in a responsive and caring manner.
- Strengthen the City of Red Wing’s image and build support for municipal programs.
- Allow Red Wing residents to be informed about, and take full advantage of, city services.
- Educate and enhance citizens' understanding of issues facing the City of Red Wing.
- Promote an understanding of, and compliance with, city ordinances.
- Reinforce a sense of openness that encourages citizen participation in local government.

- Foster a sense of community among Red Wing residents.
- Grow relationships with other units of government, business and civic groups, and organizations active in Red Wing such as the Chamber of Commerce, Visitors & Convention Bureau, Goodhue County, Red Wing Port Authority, and major employers.
- Encourage ongoing open communication among customers, community groups, Red Wing City Council members, and city employees.

Target Audiences

Current residents. Inform them and keep them engaged in the city as stakeholders that aspire to be kept “in the loop.” Be sensitive to members of diverse communities within Red Wing and encourage involvement of people from all backgrounds.

Current business owners. Show them support for locating in Red Wing, inform them of local business developments, ordinance changes, etc. Ensure they are receiving accurate information to help their businesses thrive in the city.

Prospective residents. Recruit them to live in the city and help them become a productive part of our community.

Prospective business owners. Through the forward efforts of the Port Authority, recruit businesses to locate in the city to improve municipal tax revenue. Red Wing can recruit new businesses by showcasing its concierge approach to city services, along with its great location and any applicable development incentives.

Residents and government officials in nearby cities and communities. Maintain a positive reputation for Red Wing, help build bridges between communities for mutual benefit, encourage intergovernmental partnerships. Make sure Goodhue County and Pierce County are engaged partners with a stake in the success of Red Wing.

Business owners in nearby cities. Encourage businesses to add second locations in Red Wing in order to expand their customer base.

County, state and federal officials. Red Wing must keep these individuals apprised of local issues, successes and concerns so they can be the best possible representative of the community at various levels of government.

Media in the Greater Twin Cities, Rochester and western Wisconsin region. Red Wing is close enough to the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area to be covered by the major network news channels and newspapers. Red Wing also receives coverage from media in Rochester and other nearby media markets. It is important to proactively

keep journalists informed of developing stories so the city is not taken by surprise or put on the defensive.

Communications Tools

Local Government Access Channel 6

Audio/Video Technicians are employees in the Information Services Division. Audio/Video Technicians produce live broadcasts of city government meetings and activities and assist with communications-related assignments and special events. They also help to coordinate all public information with the Information Services Director to ensure consistency throughout Channel 6, the website and social media.

Audio/Video Technicians prepare community calendar information and air the content on government access channel 6. They gather information from city departments and the public for broadcast. This also includes the video-on-demand and live streaming sites. They also assist with producing original programming related to city events, initiatives or public information for broadcast. They recommend program ideas, assist with development of interview questions, and coordinate on-location shoots

Online Communications

The city website, intranet, social media and government access sites are managed and updated by the Information Services Director. The Information Services Director is responsible for development, structure and functionality, training and public use of all online communications. Public Access programming is managed by cable service providers and serves to provide non-government information which strengthens the social network and fabric of our city.

The city website serves as the official voice of the city. This is where formal communications related to city events and projects including news articles, events and calendar updates are posted. The website also has information about city parks, cemeteries, volunteer opportunities and job postings.

Social media allows two-way, real time communication with citizens. The city posts information related to snow emergencies, road closures, meeting announcements, etc. Currently, the city updates Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

In 2012 the city created an intranet to assist with communications to city employees. The City of Red Wing CityWeb features a complete telephone directory, facilities information and forms. Weekly updates are also provided by Administration in an informal blog style allowing employees to comment on the information that is posted.

Online communication sites are as follows:

City website: www.red-wing.org

Facebook: facebook.com/cityofRedWingMinnesota

Twitter: [@cityofRedWingMN](https://twitter.com/cityofRedWingMN)

YouTube: cityofRedWing

Video-On-Demand: PegCentral

Streaming: PegStream

CityWeb: city.redwing.int/cityweb/ (only available on the city network)

These online sites offer an opportunity to communicate with a group of Red Wing residents that has, generally, been unreachable, uninterested and unrepresented in local government. The social networking sites can be used to inspire Generation X and Y residents to become engaged in local government. Ultimately, the goal is to see these age groups represented on boards and commissions, as elected officials and in other aspects of the decision-making process for local government. Another objective is to broaden access to city government through the use of the World Wide Web.

These social media sites have been used with great success to gain exposure for various public service announcements, and promote various public meetings at no cost other than staff time to post information on the sites.

Resident Survey

A statistical survey is conducted every three to five years. Staff then works through the vendor to refine the questions, conduct the survey, tabulate results, and present the information to the City Council.

Crisis Communications

In the event of a crisis situation involving city government, the interests of Red Wing's citizens, the public, the media, elected officials, and city staff are best served by timely dissemination of accurate and up-to-date information related to the crisis. A crisis situation could result from a variety of occurrences such as:

- People (scandal, injury, death)
- Products (safety, contamination)
- Process (fire, explosion, labor strike, operational error)
- Issues (environmental situation, investments)
- Security (theft, vandalism, extortion)
- Natural disasters (flood, tornado)
- A nuclear emergency at the Prairie Island Nuclear Power Plant

City of Red Wing Media Guidelines

The City of Red Wing must be proactive in providing reliable information of concern to residents, employees, the news media and local businesses.

Goals

The goal of the City of Red Wing's Media Guidelines document is to ensure that all city employees and elected officials are familiar with best practices that will guide their interactions with the news media.

All city officials should aim to have a healthy relationship with the local media and be prepared for effective media interaction so that Red Wing residents, business owners and other stakeholders are equipped with accurate information on all topics covered by the press. Accordingly, the plan will provide guidance on how to inform and empower all stakeholders to become more engaged members of the community. These topics include:

- City of Red Wing policies, views and activities
- New developments being proposed for Red Wing
- City programs and services
- Ways the city is trying to attract new businesses, residents and visitors
- Crisis situations (weather, fires, derailments, terrorism, property damage, etc.)
- Adverse weather conditions
- Situations that could impact the city's integrity or reputation

Guidelines

- Information provided to the media should reflect the consensus opinion of the Red Wing City Council or the city administration's interpretation of the City Council's policy, and should not reflect the personal views of a city employee.
- When contacted by the media, employees and elected officials should contact the City Council Administrator prior to the interview. Staff will assist with developing key messages for the interview. If this is not possible, the official should contact the City Council Administrator shortly following the interview.
- Assume that everything said to a reporter is ON the record.

Key tools

- News releases
- Media list (contact information for all reporters and news outlets)
- Fact sheets
- City information (maps, demographics, safety records, organizational chart)
- Interviews
- Public meetings
- Press conferences
- City correspondence (letters, emails, utility bill inserts, city newsletter)
- City website
- Letters to the editor
- Guest columns

Media Interview Best Practices

You never get a second chance to make a first impression. Once you are on tape or quoted in the paper, you can't take it back. And it's even more challenging now due to the Internet. Your comments are not just out there for a day, they are out there forever in the speed of a few clicks of a mouse. However, there is an art to making media coverage work in your favor.

Here are some basic skills that will help individuals faced with a media interview.

Basic points

- Reporters are neither your friends nor your enemies
- Keep your own messages in mind
- With preparation, you can influence the outcome of the story

Your mission is twofold

- Meet the reporter's news needs if you choose to

- Get your message across

When a reporter calls

- Never engage in an immediate interview. Tell the reporter you are busy at the moment (which is *a/ways* true), but emphasize that you want to respond as promptly as possible.
- Get the reporter's name, phone number, email, deadline and a brief summary of what the reporter wants to know.
- Arrange a time at which you or the reporter will initiate a second call.
- Take some time to prepare for the interview.

How to prepare

- Consult with the appropriate content expert(s) on the topic at hand.
- Determine one to three key messages you want to get across in an interview.
- Think of a human story and/or compelling statistics that illustrate each of your key messages.
- Remember that the reporter has limited space and time, so prepare clear, concise, quotable answers.
- Using the information the reporter gave you in response to your earlier questions, anticipate what the reporter will ask.
- Be sure the most important information you have is in the first one or two sentences of your answer. Be prepared to support what you say with specific examples and data.
- Anticipate questions that will be difficult to answer. Work on the answers until you are comfortable.
- Think about what your ideal quote on this subject would be. Practice saying that quote out loud.

What are key messages?

Key messages are the one to three important points about your subject that you want to convey in an interview. It takes some time and hard thinking to boil down everything you know about the subject into the most important points.

Remember, the key messages must be what's most important to the reporter's readers, listeners or viewers, not what is the most important to you and your organization.

When developing key messages, make sure they meet the following criteria:

- They're true
- They're concise
- They're memorable
- They sound like a human being, not an institution
- They can influence your audience

How are key messages used?

1) As an answer to a question

Sometimes, you will get a question from a reporter like, "What's this all about?" If you get a general question like this, recite all of the key messages as your answer.

2) Logically connect a key message to the question

This is a bit trickier. You will be asked questions you don't want to answer, and you can't evade them. You need to quickly answer the specific question, then get back to territory you feel comfortable with by attaching a logical key message.

Example:

Interviewer: What does the governor think of the senator's political troubles?

Spokesperson: Not much. The governor is concentrating on his initiatives concerning education, the environment and the economy.

Lesson learned: The spokesperson answered the question in two words, then used the rest of his answer to insert one of his key messages about the governor's priorities.

3) Repeat key messages

Don't worry about sounding like a broken record. Stay focused and repeat your key messages as often as you can. That way, you give the reporter context and your audience is more likely to remember your key points.

Interview preparation checklist

Before doing the interview, answer these questions:

- Which reporter or anchor will do the interview?

- Why do they want to talk with me?
- What kind of story are they doing?
- What publication, station or website is represented?
- What kind of information do they want?
- Do they want to shoot video or take photos?
- When will the story be published or broadcast?
- How will the interview be used?
- Who else is being interviewed and supplying information?
- How much time will the interview take?
- Where and when will the interview be held?
- Should I record the interview?

Have I prepared by...

- Defining my communications objectives and key messages?
- Organizing and identifying the support I will need from my staff?
- Developing sample questions?
- Developing sample answers?
- Determining the ground rules (mine and theirs?)
- Gathering evidence to support my assertions?
- Identifying a human example that will illustrate my points?
- Preparing important numbers or statistics for the reporter in written summary, table, charts, or graphs?
- Preparing notes I can put in front of me as I interview (radio and phone only)?
- Conducting an interview rehearsal?

Conducting the interview

Remember, the reporter's job is to tell a good story – not hurt you and make you look bad (nor help you and make you look good). Don't be affected by the reporter's charm,

aggressive demeanor, or apparent sympathy with your point of view. Only pay attention to the content of the question.

Be brief, simple, clear and slow in your answers

- Use short sentences.
- The less complex you are, the less room for error.
- Don't use jargon.
- Make your point at the top, and don't beat around the bush.

Have in mind what you want to say

- Insert key messages where they logically fit.

Support your points

- Use human anecdotes, comparisons and examples.
- Choose two or three compelling statistics.

Don't over answer the question

- When you have said what you want to say, stop talking – don't fill the silence.
- Avoid going off on tangents.

If you don't know the answer, say so

- Don't bluff.
- Say you will find out the answer, and do so. Call back the reporter quickly.

Answer the tough questions truthfully

- Don't dodge. If something has not worked out as well as you hoped it would, say so. Explain why.

If you aren't going to answer a question, explain why

- NEVER say "no comment" without an explanation. Often, even if you say "no comment," the reporter will use what you say anyway.
- Legitimate reasons not to comment include:
 - o Proprietary information

- o Pending litigation
- o Internal review not completed

If a reporter asks several questions at once, choose one

- If two related questions are asked, answer them in the order you choose.
- If a barrage of questions is asked, choose the one you like best.

Correct mistakes, tactfully

- If the question is based on faulty information, or a false premise, say so simply, matter-of-factly, and politely.
- Do not condescend.

Be creative (within reason)

- Use metaphors and descriptive language, if that comes naturally.
- Use humor only if it is not open to misunderstanding.
- If you're unsure, don't use humor.
- Let your voice work for you – be expressive.

Don't try to sell the reporter – sell the audience

- The reporter is not your audience. The people who will read, listen to, or watch the reporter's story are your audience. Speak to them.
- When you're on camera, don't look at the camera! Look at the reporter.
- Use your hands as you speak on camera.

Ending the interview

- If a reporter has failed to ask a key question that will help sell your perspective on an issue, raise the subject yourself.
- Offer to be available for clarification as the reporter writes the story.
- If you have provided statistics in response to questions, check them again with the reporter. Offer to email him or her any additional facts to ensure accuracy.

- Never ask for pre-approval of statements attributed to you. You won't get it, and your credibility will plummet for asking. Your best opportunity to head off mistakes is to offer to be available for follow-up calls.
- Remember – anything you say when a reporter is around – even if you aren't speaking to them directly – may be quoted!

Special advice: Broadcast news interviews

- Make your point in six to nine seconds.
- Make sure your points are clear and easy to remember.
- Viewers and listeners remember two or three main points if they are listening and watching attentively. When they are cooking dinner or chatting about school with the kids, chance are they will only vaguely recall what the story was all about.
- Any interview is publicity for our city, as well as an opportunity for positive public relations if you are temporarily in a tough spot.
- Content can be easily overshadowed by video in television stories. Your non-verbal cues and the video can have a greater impact than what you actually say. Keep this in mind when agreeing to an interview location and allowing cameras access to your facility.

Clothing and other appearance-related choices

- Dress comfortably and conservatively. Choose something that complements your coloring and physique. Avoid white fabrics with busy patterns.
- Navy blue is an excellent color choice. Research has shown it connotes trustworthiness – that's why politicians wear navy – and campaign logos often include it.
- Red is a great accent color. It's considered a power color that, generally, should be used conservatively.
- Minimize accessories. Avoid lots of jewelry. Don't wear dangling earrings. Stay away from scarves.
- Check your hair. Use hairspray or mousse if needed. An ungroomed head of hair is a major distraction.
- Trim beards and mustaches.

- Use makeup modestly. If you're granting an in-studio interview, ask about makeup (women and men alike). Studio lights are unflattering.
- SMILE! (when appropriate).

Crisis Response Communications

The City of Red Wing's actions before, during, and after crisis situations will be determined by the severity of the situation. It may involve all city departments, Goodhue County, the State of Minnesota, the federal government, and other emergency service organizations. The city's crisis communications plan establishes policies for the effective development, coordination and dissemination of crisis information to the public, media, city elected officials, and City of Red Wing employees.

The goals of the city's crisis communications plan are:

- To warn of dangers, their effects and proper countermeasures
- To coordinate the city's release of public information
- To instruct the public on survival and recovery measures
- To increase the public's capability to survive and recover
- To control rumors and reassure the public about emergency operations
- To train city staff on emergency communications
- To instruct the public on disaster and recovery services and procedures

Internal city communications may occur through meetings, phone calls, emails, memos, intranet, and posted notices. External communications may occur through news releases, city website, media interviews, social media, news conferences, memos and phone calls.

The Crisis Response Team (CRT)

The City of Red Wing's Crisis Response Team (CRT) consists of the Mayor, City Council members, and key city staff. Key staff will vary depending on the emergency, but will always include the City Council Administrator and Information Services Director. Each CRT member should have an updated copy of the media guidelines document at their work station and/or at home.

By establishing an ongoing relationship with appropriate media outlets, the City of Red Wing will be ready in the event of a crisis to initiate the first media contact, rather than being in a reactive mode. The city must ensure all reporters that information it gives out is accurate and as timely as possible.

Appointing a spokesperson

In order to control the flow of information coming from the city, all information must be channeled through a single spokesperson. To ensure that the city is speaking with one voice, no one should be permitted to speak with the media other than the designated spokesperson.

Typically, the spokesperson should be the City Council Administrator, Police Chief or Fire Chief. An elected official may serve as the spokesperson, however, a city employee rather than an elected official should serve the City of Red Wing in this capacity. The City Council Administrator, Police Chief and Fire Chief should undergo specialized and concentrated media training geared toward crisis situations.

The spokesperson should keep the City Council President, Mayor and City Council members informed as conditions warrant.

The CRT will be formed and called together by the City Council Administrator. The CRT will discuss what each team member can contribute and also work closely with emergency personnel. The CRT will also determine if the news media should be contacted and then assess which communications channels should be used.

Any release of information will be done in accordance with state and federal data practices law. You may wish to contact the City Clerk's office for clarification if needed.

Prior to speaking with the media, the spokesperson should:

- Be briefed by relevant CRT members on what has happened, what's being done, and why.
- Anticipate questions that will likely be asked by the media.
- Seek legal advice and decide beforehand which questions or issues would be best handled by the city, and which would be best handled in cooperation with legal representatives.
- Work with the CRT to prepare the city's key messages.

- Create messaging that includes just the information that tells the story without including speculation or irrelevant information.
- Be able to speak knowledgeably about the situation, answer questions under pressure, and present information in a calm manner.
- Tell audiences what is known, when it is known, and what steps are being taken.
- Understand that statements should be limited to city information only.

If the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is activated, the city's Public Information Officer (PIO) will be called to respond. The PIO - as designed by the Goodhue County Emergency Plan - is the City Council Administrator or the Mayor. Depending on the duration of the event, the City Council President or Information Services Director will assist with PIO duties.

If the EOC is activated, the city may consider holding a news conference to report activation, explain why, announce the PIO, and discuss when reporters can expect the next news conference or press release. Some crises may warrant establishing a Media Center, which is set up away from the EOC. There, news releases should be posted in a visible location, along with a news conference schedule. Extra copies of the news release should be made available and accessible.

The city website and all social media channels are good mechanisms to release accurate, timely information to the public, as well as city employees. The city should also use the intranet to communicate with employees and look for alternative ways to share information with city staff without computer access. Frontline employees who may receive inquiries from residents and/or the media, must be provided with prepared statements and instructed to stick to the message provided and not speculate or give opinions. They should immediately notify the CRT and/or the City Council Administrator of the questions they were asked, and also about any rumors they may have overheard.

After the crisis is over, the City of Red Wing should tell its key audiences how the issue was resolved. If applicable, report that the EOC has been deactivated and provide media with a contact name and phone number for further inquiries. Keep in mind, it may be necessary to issue a status report well after the situation is over (such as in the event of a tornado or other disaster).

Addendum

Additional suggestions to enhance City of Red Wing Communications

Ensure there is a steady flow of press releases coming from City Hall. The City of Red Wing proactively develops relationships with members of the news media. The city must ensure that it stays in touch with the media with positive information (activities, new businesses, appointments, ordinances, parks and recreation news, etc.) The city also provides news releases for all public safety incidents such as fires, street closures, water main breaks, major police department events, etc. When negative news arises, the city will already have a positive, trusting relationship with reporters and editors covering these stories - this will go a long way to determine how negative stories are ultimately covered and how the city's image is affected. A good rule of thumb is that 90 percent of your interactions with the news media should be positive. Treat them as your partners in the communications process.

Hold bi-annual community focus groups to gauge communications effectiveness. Communication experts recommend hosting focus groups with key stakeholders in the Red Wing community on a bi-annual basis. Another idea is a rotating editorial board similar to what the newspaper has. These interactions will allow you to touch base on a face-to-face basis with residents, business owners, and others who are involved in Red Wing and have good feedback to share with you about how they learn information from the city government. These groups will also help the city build on its credibility with the community as issues arise and give you a resource to tap into as needed should a major event or controversy take place. It's important that these groups contain a representative sample of stakeholders from Red Wing, with residents, business owners, clergy, government officials, and community organization members involved. It's also important to include members of various ethnic and religious groups, as well as an even gender mix.

Continue to hone Red Wing's identity (brand) and determine how the government can assist. Red Wing is a great, unique community and it will benefit from sharing its story with audiences both inside and outside the city. This must be done in a coordinated fashion that involves all stakeholders. The city needs to take an active role in driving this process and ensure that residents and business owners are kept informed along the way.

Create additional citizen outreach opportunities. Find new ways to get more Red Wing residents involved in their community.

A few ideas:

- Sponsor a bi-annual bus tour of Red Wing for interested citizens. Residents would see new developments, redevelopment projects, and be given on-site briefings on current city issues by city staff members and elected officials.
- Develop a resident “ambassador” program to help promote positive aspects of the city, both inside and outside Red Wing. City Council Members, chamber members and others could be used in this role. Red Wing city staff at all levels should also be encouraged to think of ways to advance the city government’s standing in the community.
- Adequately promote city events in a variety of ways to boost turnout and encourage resident involvement. This would include the city newsletter, press releases, cable television, website, and posting flyers in key, high-traffic community locations.

Increase the city’s emphasis on quality customer service. For many residents, the only contact they’ll have with a city official is a brief interaction on the phone or a short encounter at a city-sponsored event.

A few ideas:

- City employees undergo customer service training on an annual basis.
- Maximize opportunities for city officials to interact personally with residents. Events such as National Night Out and River City Days allow for informal conversations that personalize city staff and build an approachable image.
- Customer service is directly tied to the city’s overall image and this affects Red Wing’s ability to effectively communicate with its residents. As a result, the city should consider all departments (including public safety) make customer service satisfaction cards available to all clients.