govstack®
by GHD Digital

→ Transform for good

Harnessing the power of social media
↳ to increase citizen engagement

→ Transform for good

Contents *

→ **Transform for good**

Chapter 01

↳ Introduction
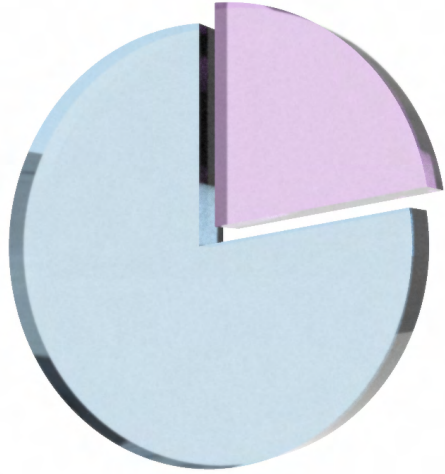
2.5
hours a day

More than half of the world's population uses social media regularly, spending approximately 2.5 hours per day doing so.

Followed by **Residents**

Social_Media Governments enhance transparency, foster trust, and promote public participation by embracing these platforms, ultimately leading to more effective and responsive government.

For municipalities looking to stay connected with their communities, social media must be a part of their communication strategy. Failing to harness its capabilities means limiting outreach, reducing transparency, missing the opportunity to engage residents on important issues, and running the risk of appearing out of touch.

Traditionally, local governments have communicated with their citizens through press releases, public speeches, community events and official websites. Many municipalities have only recently begun using social media to engage with their residents. Social media offers a dynamic and interactive channel that can significantly enhance the government-citizen relationship. While there are numerous benefits to government use of social media, it's important to note that these platforms also come with challenges.These challenges include ensuring data privacy, combating misinformation, managing employees' use of social media in corporate channels or when acting as corporate spokespersons and maintaining a respectful online environment. Local Governments must navigate these issues while harnessing the full potential of social media for the betterment of their societies.

→ **Transform for good**

1.1

How social media benefits governments

In recent years, the rapid growth of social media platforms has revolutionized the way governments interact with citizens and stakeholders. Below are few examples of how it is changing government communications.

Benefits →

❶ Real-Time Communication

Social media enables instant communication, allowing municipalities to share important updates, news, and emergency information with citizens immediately. This real-time aspect is crucial in times of crisis or when quick responses are necessary such as when addressing important misinformation.

❷ Transparency and Trust

By actively engaging on social media, municipalities can demonstrate transparency in their actions, decisions, and policies. This openness builds trust among citizens, leading to better relationships between the government and the community.

❸ Cost-Effective Communication

Compared to traditional advertising and outreach methods, social media is much more cost-effective. Creating and managing social media accounts are relatively low-cost, making it an efficient way for budget-conscious municipalities to engage with citizens.

❹ Promotion of Local Events and Services

Municipalities can use social media to promote local events, services, and initiatives, increasing citizen participation and boosting community engagement and brand awareness.

❺ Community Building

Social media fosters a sense of community among residents. It creates a space where citizens can connect with each other, engage in volunteerism, and promote local events to enhance participation.

❻ Feedback and Participation

Social media allows citizens to voice their opinions, concerns, and suggestions directly to the municipality. Through comments, messages, or polls, citizens can actively participate in public discussions and have their voices heard.

❼ Data Collection and Analysis

Social media platforms provide valuable data and insights into citizens' preferences, interests, and concerns. It can garner useful insights into popular trends, demographic statistics, and opinions. Once collected, this data can inform the municipality's decision-making process and help tailor services and policies to better serve the community's needs.

❽ Educational Opportunities

Social media can be used to educate citizens about various issues, such as public health initiatives, environmental conservation, or civic responsibilities. It serves as a platform to share valuable information that empowers and informs citizens.

❾ Youth Engagement

Social media is particularly effective for engaging younger generations, who are often more active on these platforms. By using social media, municipalities can bridge the generation gap and involve youth in civic matters. They can also use it as a recruiting tool to attract younger workers to government jobs.

→ **Transform for good**
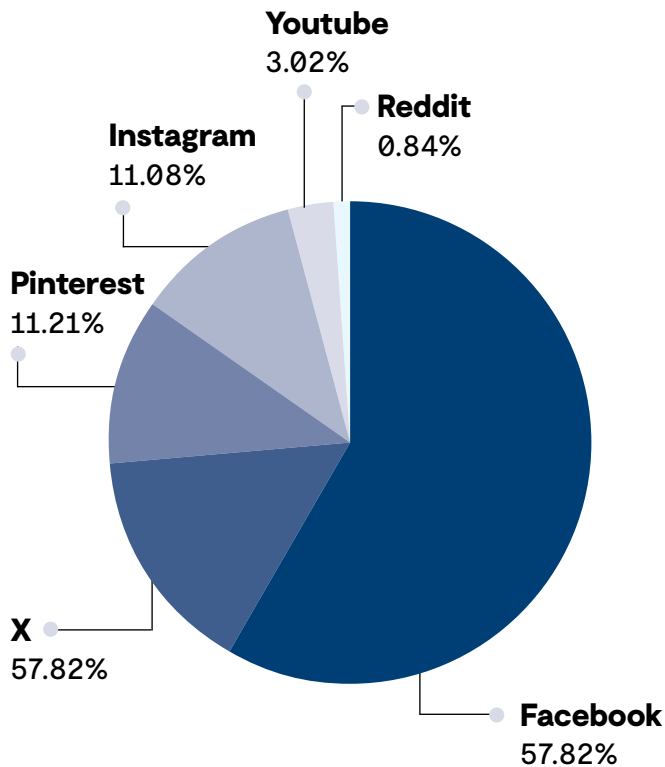
Chapter 02

↳ Establishing objectives

Figure 1.1
North American social media landscape

Source: https://www.tbdc.com/a-startups-guide-to-social-media/#:~:-
text=There%20are%20434.94M%20social,%2C%20Instagram%2C%20
Youtube%20and%20Reddit.

4.95 Ⓑ

4.95 billion people currently use social media worldwide, up more than double from 2.07 billion in 2015

To get the most from your social media efforts you need a good strategy.

Having a successful strategy allows you widen the audience reach, enable real time communication on important updates, and provide effective feedback channels to encourage citizen participation. This chapter delves into the importance of establishing objectives and provides a step-by-step guide to crafting meaningful and achievable goals.

✳

Why objectives matter

Before delving into the process of setting objectives, it's important to understand why they are crucial for successful social media initiatives in government.

First, your objectives should align with your broader mission to ensure that your social media efforts directly contribute to your overall strategy. They should be clear and well-defined with a focus on specific outcomes. This clarity will eliminate wasted effort and resources. Your objectives will then serve as a gauge for determining appropriate content and should also include a basis for measuring success and evaluating your strategies' effectiveness. Metrics tied to objectives will determine whether your initiatives are yielding the desired results.

Clearly defined objectives will help to guide effective communication with stakeholders, such as citizens, other government agencies, and partner organizations, fostering collaboration and engagement.

→ **Transform for good**

2.1

Identify target audiences

Step 1

Building a strong and engaged audience is crucial for local governmental social media communication and outreach. Yet success depends on more than just the sheer number of followers you have, it also depends on the quality of your audience and the social channels each frequents.

Defining your Audience

Government audiences are made up of very different groups of individuals.
To fully understand who these groups are, you need to consider three main criteria:

Demographics

→ What is the age range of your audience?

→ What is their gender breakdown?

→ Where are they located geographically?

→ What is their educational background?

→ Are they urban, suburban, or rural residents?

Psychographics

→ What are their interests and hobbies?

→ What are their values and beliefs?

→ What challenges or issues concern them?

→ What do they expect from government social media?

Professional roles

→ Are they government employees, businesses, or citizens?

→ What level of government are they associated with?

→ What industries or sectors do they work in?

→ What are their primary job responsibilities?

✱ Answering the above questions will require a good deal of research. This can be done through surveys and feedback to determine the most frequently used channels. (Facebook is currently the favorite with X following closely behind.) Competitive analysis is also necessary to gain a better understanding of what other government organizations are doing and to gauge their success.

→ **Transform for good**

2.2

Conduct a SWOT analysis

Step 2

Before you can implement, or enhance your social media strategy, you need to evaluate the status of your current social media efforts. Conducting a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) will help assess its effectiveness, identify areas for improvement and anticipate any threats and challenges. The analysis will also offer insights into where social media objectives can make the most significant impact.

strengths

List the strengths of your social media strategy. These are factors that give the strategy an advantage.

Q. What have you done well?

Q. How have your efforts boosted your "brand"?

Q. How closely does your messaging align with your goals?

weaknesses

Find out where your strategy is being hindered.

Q. Has your engagement dropped?

Q. Is your posting schedule inconsistent?

Q. Have you devoted enough time and resources to your social media efforts?

opportunities

These can include emerging social media trends or platforms, collaborative opportunities with other government organizations, increased public interest in specific issues or topics and expanding to reach underserved communities.

Q. What are some external opportunities that your social media can make use of?

threats

These could include negative public sentiment or backlash, regulatory changes affecting social media use, competition from other information sources, and security and privacy concerns.

Q. What are some factors that can challenge or derail your social media strategy?

Once you have identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to your social media strategy, you need to analyze their significance and prioritize them based on their impact and importance to the plan. Once that has been done, you need to evolve your strategy to leverage strengths, exploit opportunities, address weaknesses, and create a roadmap for constant improvement.

→ **Transform for good**

2.3

Set SMART objectives

Step 3
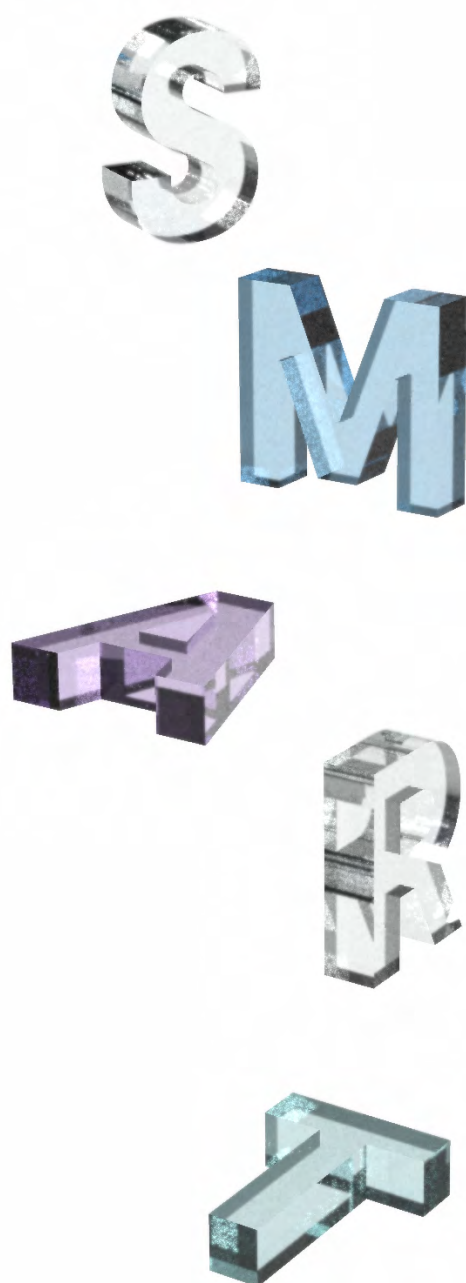
Once you fully understand the strengths and weaknesses of your current social media approach, setting a SMART objective framework can help you better achieve your social media goals. The acronym SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. The following criteria help ensure objectives are precise and attainable within a specific timeframe.

(S) **Specific**
Clearly define what the objectives aim to achieve.

(M) **Measurable**
Determine the metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess the success of the objectives.

(A) **Achievable**
Ensure that the objectives are realistic and attainable within the government's resources and capabilities.

(R) **Relevant**
Align the objectives with the government's mission and the needs of the target audiences.

(T) **Time-bound**
Set a timeline for achieving each objective. This provides a sense of urgency and helps in tracking progress.

2.4

Prioritizing objectives

In many cases, governments may have multiple objectives in mind for their social media use. Prioritizing those objectives is essential to ensuring that your efforts align with your organization's mission, engage the public effectively, and achieve the desired outcomes. Focusing on a few key objectives allows for better resource allocation and concentrated efforts.

01

Understand your mission and goals

Start by clearly understanding your government organization mission and overarching goals. Your social media objectives should directly support these high-level objectives.

02

Make sure your objectives align with your goals

Ensure that your social media objectives align with broader government priorities, policies, and initiatives. This alignment can help secure resources and support.

03

Prioritize Objectives Based on Impact

By evaluating the potential impact of each objective, you can determine which ones may have a greater effect on public engagement, transparency, or communication, and give them a higher priority.

04

Consider Legal and Ethical Considerations

Ensure that your objectives adhere to the legal and ethical guidelines established for your government communications and social media use.

05

Budget and Resource Constraints

Understand your budgetary and resource constraints and plan accordingly. Only prioritize those objectives that can be realistically achieved with the resources you have available.

06

Evaluate Public Needs and Preferences

Survey your residents to understand their needs and preferences regarding the kind of information they expect governments to provide via social channels.

07

Risk Assessment

Evaluate potential risks associated with each objective and prioritize those that are more likely to mitigate risks or enhance crisis management.

08

Communication and Transparency

Ensure that your social media objectives prioritize transparency, accountability, and public engagement, as these are often crucial for government agencies.

Chapter 03

↳ Developing strategies and action plans

*

Once you have established and prioritized your objectives, you will need to develop strategies and action plans for achieving each one. These strategies should outline the specific activities related to determining content strategy, engagement approaches, platforms used in your social media implementation, resource allocation and evaluation and improvement.

Developing a content strategy

A social media content strategy is essential to successfully reach your target audience. You will need to create a content strategy tailored to each selected platform. Determine the types of content you will share, your posting frequency, and the engagement tactics to use on each platform. Ensure that your content aligns with your organization's mission and values and provides value to your audience. You should also make sure that your selected social media platforms comply with government regulations and policies, including **accessibility standards**, data privacy laws, and records retention policies.

3.1

Types of contents

There is a wide range of content types that governments can use to reach their target audiences. Each offers a unique advantage; with suitability largely based on the platform being used. The key ones to consider include:

News feeds

News feeds to inform residents about important regulations, policy changes, events, etc.

Polls

Polls to solicit feedback and ensure residents are heard on important issues and projects.

E-books

Educational content like e-books and how-to guides to help residents better understand and access municipal services.

Interactive challenges

Interactive Challenges and Contests to boost citizen engagement and participation.

Digital ads

Digital ads to promote local events, festivals, and activities happening in the community.

Emergency alert

Emergency alerts about severe weather or safety instructions during times of crisis.

Success stories

Success Stories that highlight positive developments in the community.

Interactive maps

Interactive Maps of city services, parks, and other important locations (especially helpful for newcomers to an area).

Citizen spotlights

Citizen Spotlights to showcase citizen contributions to the community.

Transparency reports

Transparency Reports on budgets, spending and progress on various community initiatives to promote transparency and accountability.

User-generated content

User-Generated Content to encourage residents to share their own content such as photos, stories, or testimonials pertaining to the community.

FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to address common questions and concerns residents have about city services or policies.

Videos and infographics

Videos and infographics to effectively convey information, highlight partnerships with local businesses, nonprofits, and community organizations, showcase landmarks and other cultural achievements to engage residents.

Community spotlight

Community Spotlight that highlights the contributions of individual groups within the community that demonstrate their dedication and commitment to bettering the lives of their fellow residents.

Government recruitment

Government recruitment through online platforms to reach a younger demographic. Crisis Communication Plans to be shared during emergencies, with established protocols for dissemination.

→ **Transform for good**

3.2
Engagement approaches

While the social media engagement approach can differ from municipality to municipality depending upon their specific goals, available resources, and community demographics, there are some common tactics that can be effective for most:

Active Presence: Maintain an active and consistent presence on the platforms that your community uses.

Transparency: Use social media to foster transparency by sharing information about government activities, budgets, projects, and decision-making processes. Address concerns and questions from residents openly and promptly.

Community Engagement: Encourage community engagement through surveys, polls, and discussions on social media. Ask for input and feedback on local issues, projects, and initiatives.

Consistent Branding: Maintain consistent and professional branding across all social media platforms. Use the municipality's logo, colors, and a clear profile description.

Responsive Customer Service: Monitor social media channels for questions, concerns, and complaints. Respond promptly and professionally, directing individuals to appropriate channels for issue resolution.

Use Hashtags: Utilize relevant and trending hashtags to increase the discoverability of your posts. Create custom hashtags for local campaigns and events.

Collaboration: Partner with local organizations, businesses, and influencers to expand your reach and engage a wider audience. Cross-promote each other's content when it aligns with community interests.

Advertise Selectively: Consider using paid advertising on social media platforms to reach a broader or more targeted audience for specific initiatives or events.

Accessibility: Ensure that your social media content is accessible to all residents, including those with disabilities, by providing alternative text for images and captioning videos.

Training

Invest in training for staff members responsible for managing social media accounts and to stay up to date with the latest trends and best practices in social media engagement.   Training should include:

– Social media policies and guidelines so that staff is familiar with the municipality's social media purpose, and scope, and the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of using social media, as well as the legal and ethical implications, risks, and best practices.

– Information on social media platforms and tools so that staff are aware of the different platforms and tools available, and how they can be leveraged for maximum impact.

– A content strategy to teach staff how to create and share relevant, timely, and engaging content for their target audiences, such as text, images, videos, etc., and how to plan and execute a social media strategy that aligns with the municipality's vision, mission, and values.

– Analytics to measure and evaluate the performance and impact of social media activities, such as reach, engagement, sentiment, feedback, etc., and they should learn how to use the data to improve their social media outcomes.

– Training can be delivered in multiple formats, such as online courses, webinars, workshops, or coaching sessions, depending on the needs and preferences of staff. It can be customized and regularly updated to reflect changing trends and technologies.

Keep in mind, the effectiveness of your social media engagement strategy will depend on your ability to adapt and evolve based on the needs and preferences of your community. Regularly solicit feedback from residents to ensure that you are meeting their expectations and improving your approach over time.

→ **Transform for good**

3.3

Social media platforms

Platform Analysis

To maximize your social media reach, you need to analyze the various social media platforms to understand their strengths and weaknesses for government use. Consider a mix of platforms to reach different segments of your audience and achieve various communication goals. For example, use Facebook for community engagement and Twitter for real-time updates.

Here is a closer look at the most popular platforms.

Facebook remains the largest platform with 2.9 billion monthly users, most of whom are between 25-34. It is used widely by consumers and marketers and contains mixed media (text, images, videos).

Instagram has an active user base of 2 billion monthly, most of whom are between 18-24. The platform maintains a steady growth rate, with slightly more Gen Z users than Millennials. It is a highly visual medium with short form videos (Reels) as its primary content type.

TikTok is a video-based platform used by 834.3 million users monthly with a rapid growth rate. Most users are between 18-24. TikTok is ramping up to meet the needs of business users, but it must be mentioned that Tik Tok often includes controversial content and misinformation. Until business accounts are more curated, it may be too risky to participate in this channel

X (formerly Twitter), has a daily user base of 237.8 million, most of whom are between 18-29. It has maintained steady growth year-to-year. One third of its users are college-educated and make over 75K per year. It is the prime platform for breaking news and discussing current events.

LinkedIn has 930 million members between, the majority between 30-39 years old. It has a reputation as a business platform. It contains a mixture of videos, images, and text messages.
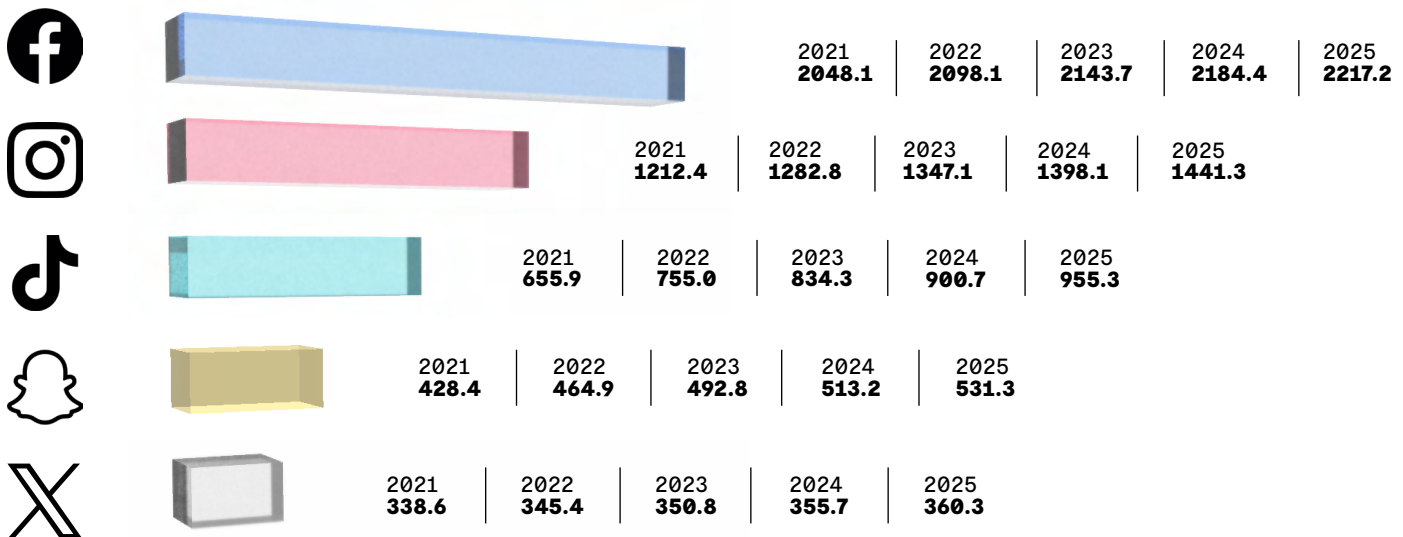
Snapchat is solely image based and has 750 million monthly users, most of whom are between 18-24. It is most popular with Gen Z. It is a great place for trendspotting and understanding the interests of younger residents.

Youtube has 2.1 billion active users monthly. Most users are between 15-35. It is largely responsible for the overall shift to video content. Its short-form video content has grown rapidly over the last few years. It is a great place to advertise, and promote, although most users still view it as primarily an entertainment platform. It's also important to note that some content on YouTube may be deemed appropriate for public viewing, so municipalities may want to consider disabling the autoplay option for their channels.

→ While there is no "right" social media platform for government organizations to use, careful consideration of the target audience, communication goals, and available resources may help to make the choice easier. If you followed the suggestion earlier in this article and have defined your audience, a major step in selecting the right platform has already been taken. By determining the demographics (age, location, interests, language, etc.) and preferences of your target audience you will gain a better understanding of where they are most active so that you can create the right type of content.

Figure 1.2

Social media users worldwide expectations by platform. Source: eMarketer, Nov 2021

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Facebook	2048.1	2098.1	2143.7	2184.4	2217.2
Instagram	1212.4	1282.8	1347.1	1398.1	1441.3
TikTok	655.9	755.0	834.3	900.7	955.3
Snapchat	428.4	464.9	492.8	513.2	531.3
X	338.6	345.4	350.8	355.7	360.3

Strategy implementation & resource allocation

> → Remember that social media is dynamic, and it may take time to see significant results. Continuously evaluate and adjust your strategy to stay relevant and achieve your business objectives.

Social Media Specialist

To implement your social media strategy and get the most out of your efforts, it's important to make sure it falls within your budget so that you can allocate suitable resources, both human and financial. You may require a dedicated social media specialist or at least someone who understands social media marketing so they can fully implement your social media plan, use paid advertising where needed and engage with the community in a public forum where discretion, and adherence to established guidelines is essential. You may also need to budget for a social media management tool like Hootsuite, or Sprout Social to manage your calendar and engage in social listening.

Monitor and Evaluate Progress

Evaluating and monitoring your social media strategy is crucial for determining its effectiveness. It will allow you to make data-driven adjustments and course corrections where needed. Here's a step-by-step guide on how to do it effectively:

SMART Goals

Here is where you find out if the SMART goals you established are aligned with your overall business objectives.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Determine which metrics are most relevant to measure the success of your social media strategy. Common KPIs include engagement rate, reach, clicks, conversions, follower growth, and customer sentiment.

Use Analytics Tools

Utilize social media analytics tools provided by platforms like Facebook Insights, Twitter Analytics, Instagram Insights, and third-party tools like Google Analytics and Hootsuite. These tools can provide valuable data on your social media performance.

Regularly Monitor Metrics

Monitor your chosen KPIs regularly, such as daily, weekly, or monthly, depending on your objectives. Keep track of changes over time to identify trends.

Compare Against Benchmarks

Benchmark your performance against industry standards or competitors' performance. This can help you gauge how well you are performing relative to others in your industry.

Analyze Audience Insights

Gain a deeper understanding of your audience demographics, interests, and behaviors. Use this information to refine your content and targeting strategies.

Assess Content Performance

Evaluate the performance of your individual social media posts and content types. Identify which content resonates best with your audience and adjust your content calendar accordingly.

Monitor Engagement

Pay attention to comments, likes, shares, and other forms of engagement on your posts. Analyze the quality of these interactions to determine if they align with your goals.

Track Conversion Metrics

If your social media strategy aims to drive conversions, track metrics related to forms or services, event sign-ups, information downloads, or other desired actions. Use UTM parameters to attribute traffic and conversions to specific social media campaigns.

Measure ROI

In addition to the measurement methods listed above, you can also calculate the return on investment (ROI) of your social media efforts. Compare the revenue generated against the costs involved in running your social media campaigns.

Gather Feedback

Collect feedback from your audience through surveys, comments, and direct messages. Use this feedback to make improvements and better align your strategy with residents' needs.

Adjust and Optimize

Based on your analysis, make data-driven decisions to optimize your social media strategy. Experiment with different approaches, posting schedules, content types, and advertising strategies to see what works best.

Generate Reports

Regularly compile all your findings and insights into comprehensive reports. These reports should highlight key metrics, successes, challenges, and actionable recommendations for improvement.

Adapt to Changing Trends

Stay updated on social media trends, algorithm changes, and emerging platforms. Be prepared to adapt your strategy to capitalize on new opportunities or address evolving challenges.

Establish a Feedback Loop

Establish a feedback loop within your team to ensure that insights from monitoring and evaluation are integrated into your ongoing social media strategy.

Chapter ⦰4

↳ Conclusion

As society becomes increasingly digitized, and the demand for instantaneous information grows, social media will continue to pay in key role in any communication strategy. It continues to transform the way we communicate, interact, and engage with information. The private sector was quick to adopt social media and has benefitted greatly from doing so. Governments, by comparison, have been much slower to board the social media train. But things are changing.

Social media is now becoming an indispensable tool for modern governance, helping to create more connected and responsive communities.

It enhances transparency, enables real-time information dissemination, facilitates public engagement, aids in crisis management, and supports policymaking.

To be effective, governments must use these platforms responsibly, ethically, and with a commitment to open and honest communication. By doing so, they can harness the power of social media to better serve their citizens and build stronger, more responsive governments.

If your organization is ready to enhance your online services? Find out how the Govstack Platform can help you transform service delivery and boost your citizen engagement.

→ **Start engaging now**