

20 TIPS

TO UP YOUR AGENCY'S

SOCIAL

MEDIA

GAME



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WHERE TO BEGIN

IF YOUR AGENCY...

Is new to social media	INTRO 03
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For many government agencies, social media is an effective tool to reach their communities where they already are... online!

INTRO

Whether you're a social media newbie or a communications professional, there are always new trends, technology, and platforms to learn, and it can be overwhelming. This guide will help the average local transportation practitioner cut through the noise and identify best practices to more effectively communicate with local residents on social media for transportation and public works topics.

BACKGROUND

The Minnesota Local Road Research Board (LRRB) sponsors transportation research on behalf of Minnesota cities and counties. It sought to develop a social media best practices guide for local agencies as a result of challenges faced by local transportation practitioners. The information assembled here can help any agency get started or improve their game on social, with examples and tips from peer agencies of all sizes.

The following focuses on two primary areas the LRRB discovered was left out of available guidance:

- Transportation and public works-specific communications.
- How to run an effective social media channel in a small agency without dedicated social media or communications staff.

Top platforms used by Minnesota government agencies

- 1) Facebook
- 2) Twitter
- 3) YouTube
- 4) LinkedIn
- 5) Instagram

The biggest social media challenges for agencies

- 68% – Limited staff time
- 36% – Lack of staff knowledge
- 30% – Receiving critical posts
- 27% – Engaging intended audiences
- 25% – Staying on top of social media trends
- 25% – Limitations of organizational permissions
- 19% – Engaging diverse populations
- 19% – Tracking and responding to comments

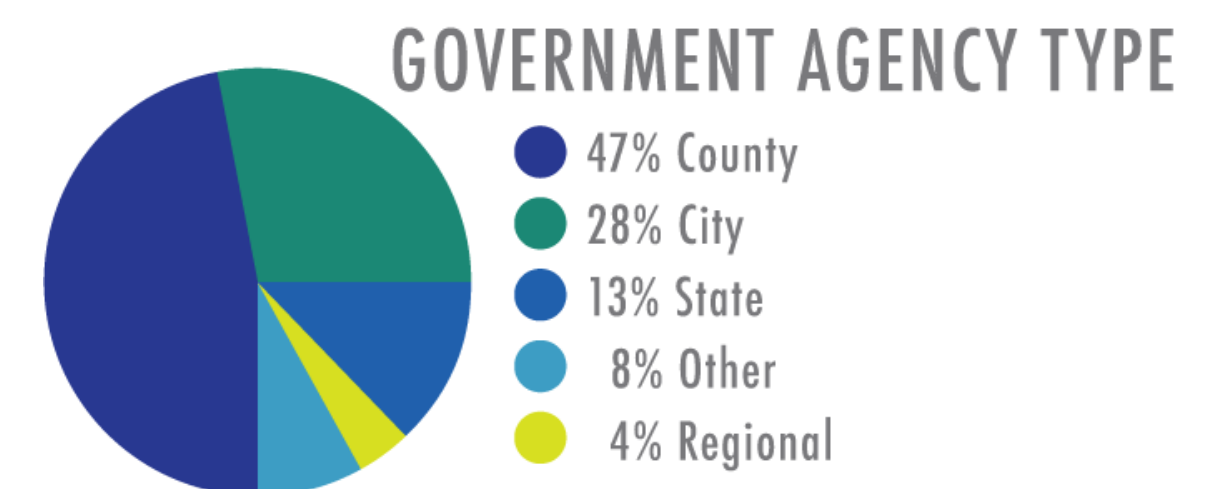
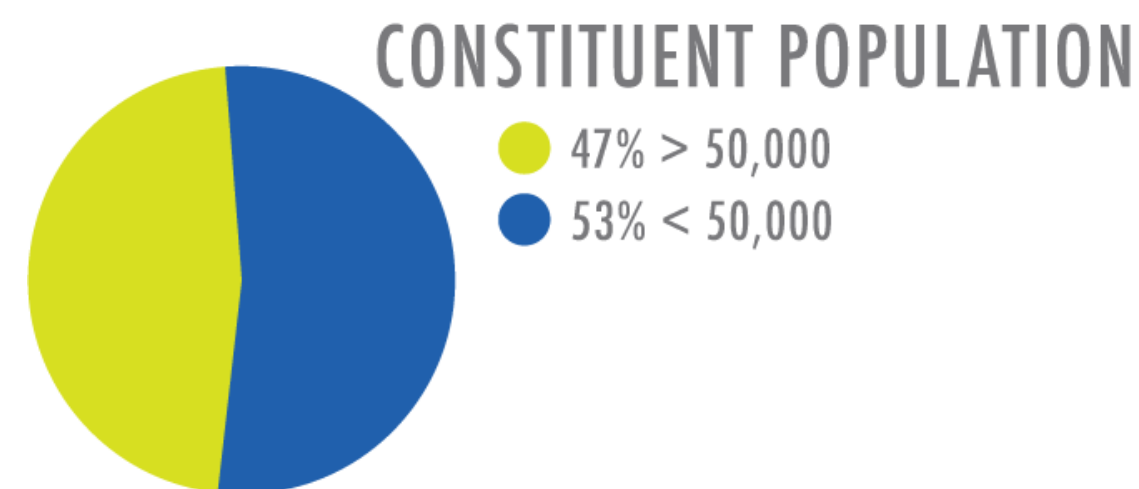
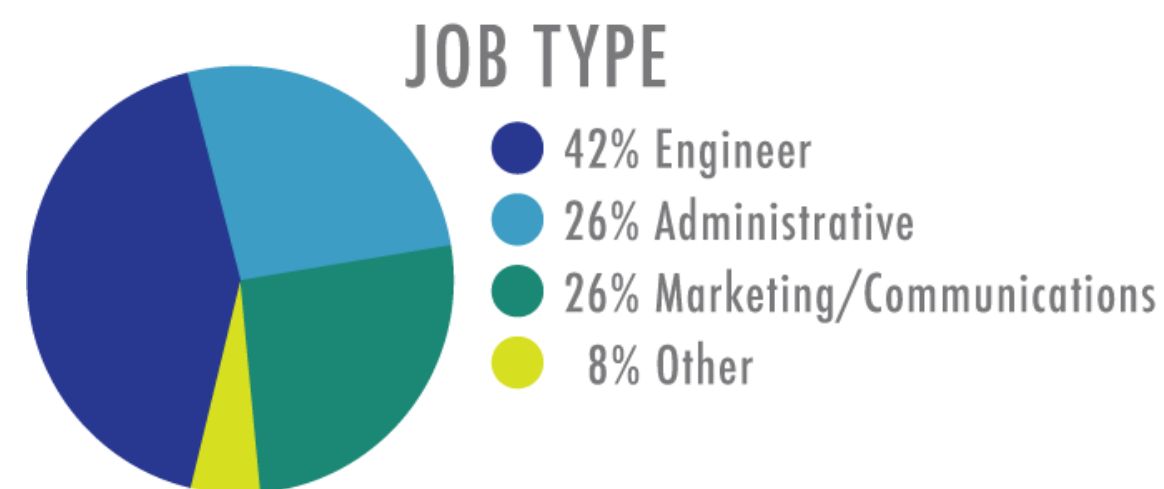
METHODOLOGY

The LRRB conducted a literature review, several interviews and multiple focus groups with government communication experts to identify the best practices in social media for transportation/public works communications, as well as gaps in available guidance.

Additionally, 72 transportation practitioners from 63 agencies completed an online survey to identify current use of social media and social media challenges faced by public agencies in Minnesota.

◀ FINDINGS

▼ RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS



GET STARTED

1-KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Knowing the people in your community will help you identify and narrow down which platforms to use, what kind of content to post, and what your online voice or tone is.

Things to consider about your community that may affect their social media habits or the things they're interested in online:

Location

Is your community rural, suburban, or urban? Geography can sometimes align with social media habits. For example, people living in urban areas are more likely to be on Nextdoor than people living in rural areas.¹

Age

What is the average age of your community? People from different generations might not be on the same platforms. For example, Instagram has younger users whereas Facebook has older audiences.¹

Language

What languages are spoken in your community? Consider translating posts about a project or event that affects communities that speak a language other than English.

Common Interests

Is there a common hobby in your community like boating or bicycling? Or a landmark or slogan that many community members would recognize? Consider how to incorporate these interests in your content to engage people who may not otherwise follow a government account.

Existing Online Groups

Are there existing groups on social media platforms where your community is already talking to one another? Does your community have a neighborhood group on Facebook or Nextdoor? Is there a subreddit community for your city on Reddit? Before posting to groups like these, contact the moderator to introduce yourself and let them know you are the official government account.



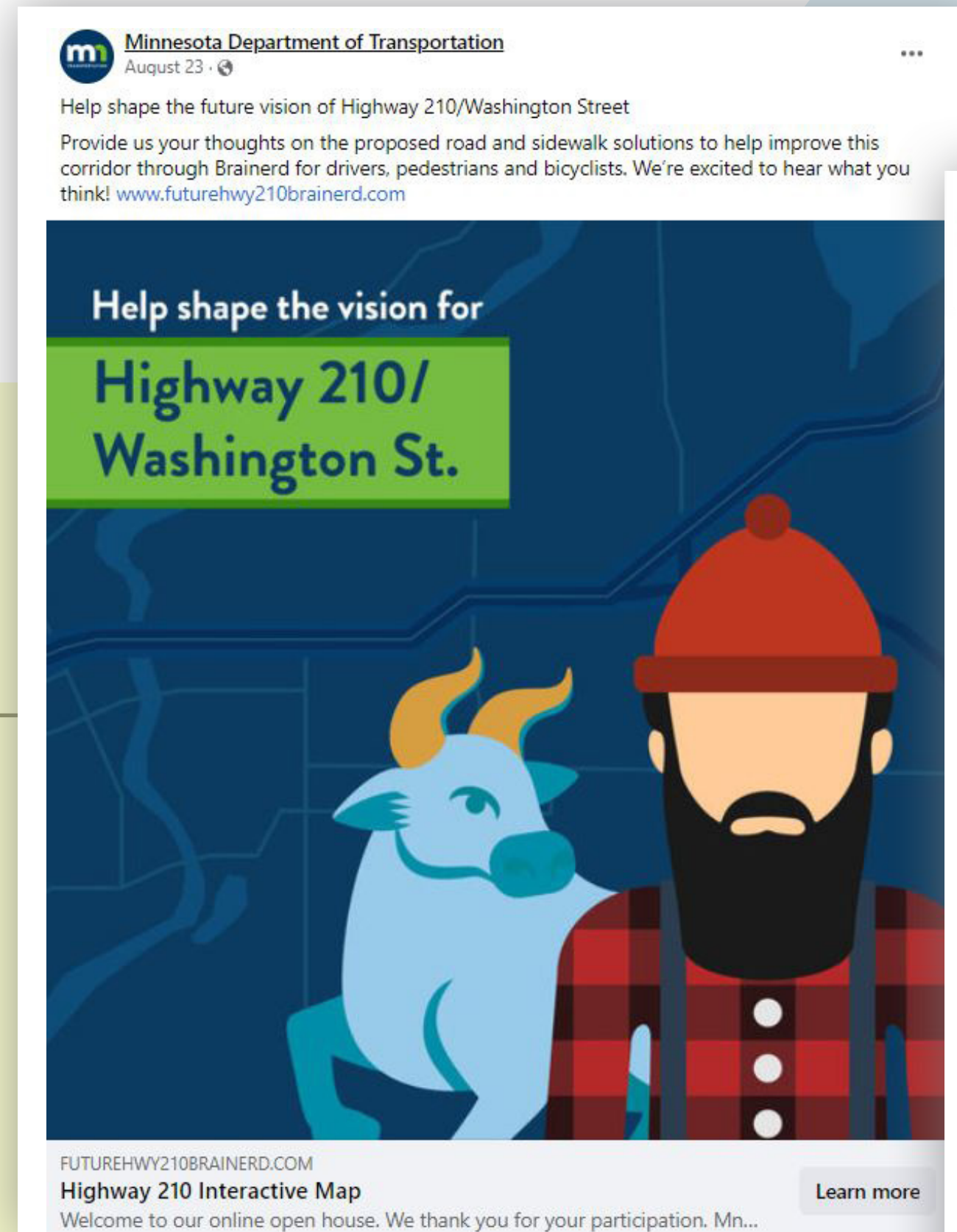
Knowing your audience is crucial to reaching and effectively engaging them on social media.

¹ Auxier, B., & Anderson, M. (2021, April 07). Social media use in 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/04/07/social-media-use-in-2021/>

1-KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE, EXAMPLES

Source: Minnesota Department of Transportation

MnDOT's Facebook post to collect feedback about a highway project in the Brainerd area uses Minnesota icons, Paul Bunyan and Babe, to connect with communities.



This tweet from the city of Nisswa shows the importance of knowing what information will resonate with your community. Nisswa is a small northern tourist town that sees a lot of golf cart use for local travel in the summer.

Source: City of Nisswa

2-CHOOSE YOUR PLATFORMS

Don't spread yourself too thin across many social media accounts. If you are struggling to post consistently or adapt content for different platforms, focus your efforts and invest your time and energy in growing your followers on fewer platforms. Consider which platforms your community is already using or which platforms will help you engage a segment of your community that traditional communications haven't reached. Government agencies in Minnesota report that the primary platforms they use are Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, followed by LinkedIn and Instagram.

Things to know about the big social media platforms:²

Ask yourself if you need to be [on a social media platform] at all – do you know your audience? If you don't know if your audience is using the platform, don't use it.

*Jordan Gilgenbach
City of Minneapolis, Digital Communications Coordinator*

Facebook

- 69% of Americans report using Facebook.
- People 50 and older tend to use Facebook more than other social media platforms.
- The biggest segment of Facebook users is between the ages of 30 and 49.
- Facebook Groups are becoming increasingly popular to connect people who live in the same city, and some local government agencies have been using them to create neighborhood groups for construction projects.

Twitter

- 23% of Americans report using Twitter.
- While a smaller percentage of people report using it compared to the other platforms listed, Twitter is the best platform to reach people who are interested in government and politics.

Instagram

- 40% of Americans report using Instagram.
- People 29 and younger tend to use Instagram more than other platforms.
- Instagram is a highly visual platform. Instagram Reels are short videos perfect for creators with just a smartphone who are learning video editing.
- Instagram Reels are short videos that can be filmed on a smartphone and require little to no editing.

YouTube

- 81% of Americans report using YouTube.
- Minnesota agencies post project overview videos, recorded public meetings and presentations, "behind the scenes" videos, or interviews with staff.
- YouTube Shorts, similar to Instagram Reels, are short videos that can be created with a smartphone.

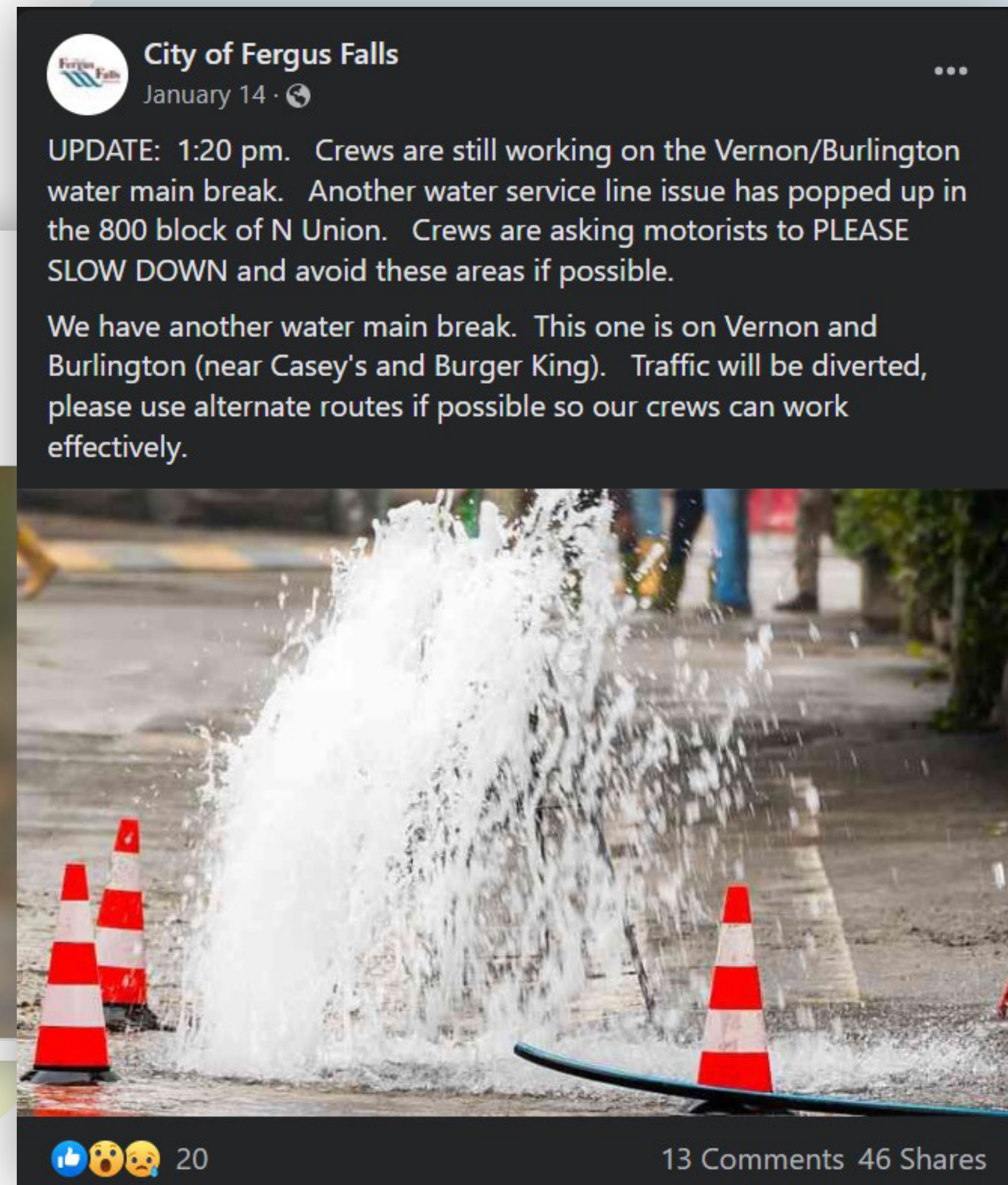
² Auxier, B., & Anderson, M. (2021, April 07). Social media use in 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/04/07/social-media-use-in-2021/>

2-CHOOSE YOUR PLATFORMS, EXAMPLES

Source:
City of St. Cloud

Twitter post featuring a pet.

Pro Tip:
You can find free-to-use stock photos if you don't have the opportunity to take your own photo.



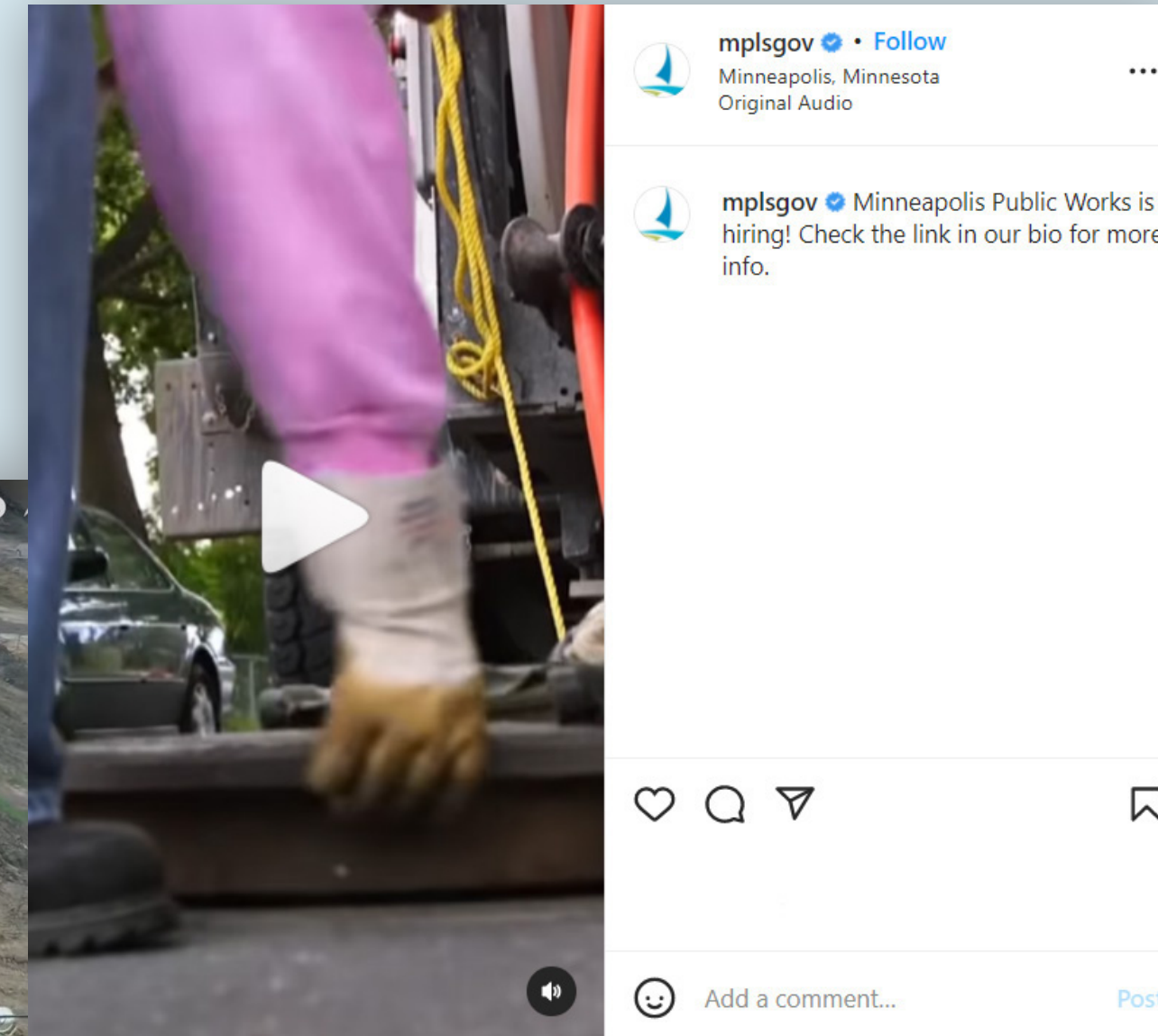
The City of Fergus Falls uses Facebook to announce a watermain break.

Source:
City of Fergus Falls

2-CHOOSE YOUR PLATFORMS, EXAMPLES

Source: Bolton & Menk

A drone video narrated by an engineering technician showcases an overnight watermain installation in the City of Carver.



City of Minneapolis Instagram Reel interviews a public works employee about why she loves her job.

Source: City of Minneapolis

3-SHOW SOME PERSONALITY

Developing a voice on social media takes time and practice, but the benefits are well worth the effort. Social media language tends to be conversational and informal, providing an opportunity for governments to connect with communities in a more casual way. Benefits of showing personality include:

- Gaining and keeping followers
- Increasing engagement (likes, reactions, shares, comments, etc.)
- Humanizing the work of government
- Connecting with followers in an authentic way
- Reducing negative comments

Consider the following tips to develop your personal voice through your agency's social media accounts:

Use Humor

Using humor online is one of the best ways to show your relatability, make memorable posts, and increase engagement. A joke roasting a rival city or about an over-hyped snowfall that didn't happen could help connect you with your audience. However, humor should not make fun of a sensitive situation.

Be Authentic To Your Own Voice

Being authentic helps connect with followers and reminds people that there is a person behind the government account. Consider writing in the same way you would talk so your posts read more conversationally.

Avoid Jargon

Avoid using jargon and stick with plain language on social media. Using jargon especially around infrastructure can alienate your followers, make them feel unintelligent, and prevent you from getting your messages across.

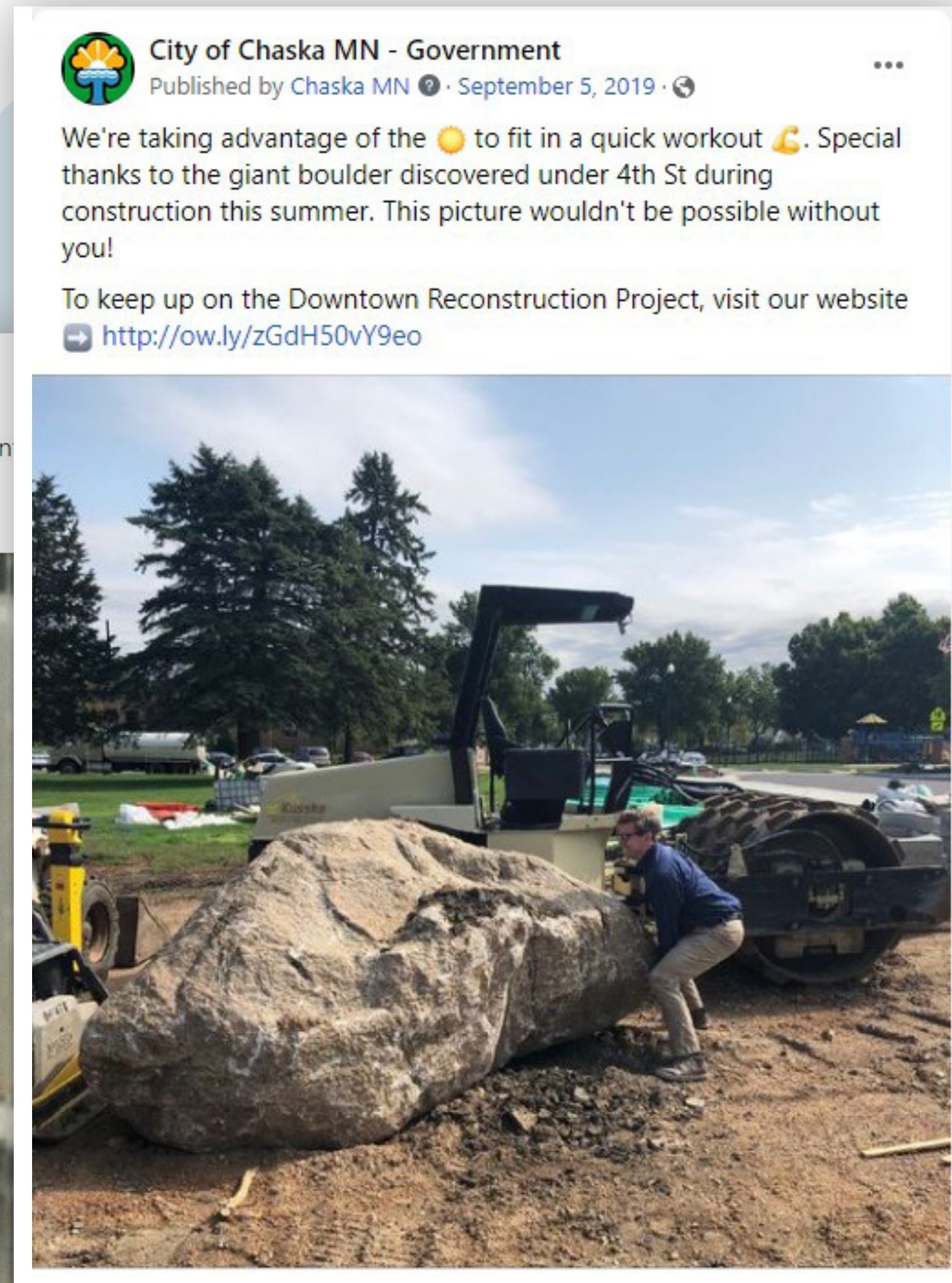
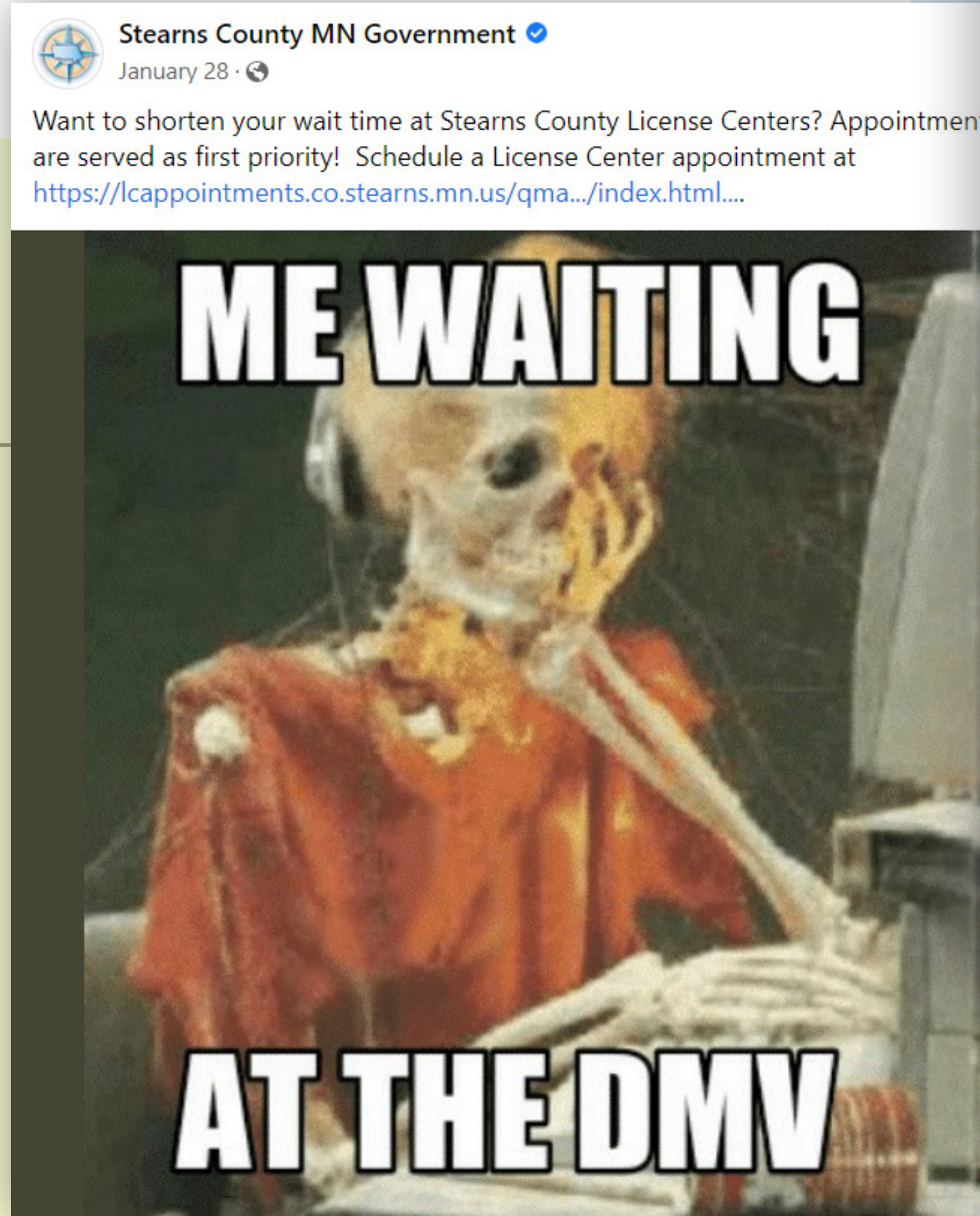
Listen To Your Followers

Don't be deterred if your post doesn't get a lot of engagement or if a joke doesn't land. Instead, listen to your audience (or listen to their silence) and adapt your messages and voice for the next post as you recognize what works best for your audience.

3-SHOW SOME PERSONALITY, EXAMPLES

Source:
Stearns County

**Example of
self-deprecating
humor.**



Humanize your work.
Source: City of Chaska

**Pro Tip: Sometimes
you have to be the
person in the photo!**

4-BE RESPONSIVE

Responding to comments can be time consuming, especially if a lot of people comment on a post or if you need to track down information from other staff. That being said, regularly responding to comments is important and can:

- Help grow followers
- Strengthen relationships with your audience
- Provide an opportunity to show that your agency is listening to the public

To respond consistently and efficiently to comments, consider these practices:

Don't Respond To Everything

Focus on responding only to people who have genuine questions or people who comment with misinformation. Responding to these types of comments can save time by answering a common question that many people have by preventing the spread of misinformation. Having a social media policy (page 35) that provides guidelines for staff responses to comments can help make it clearer which types of comments need responses.

Eliminate Response Review Requirements

If your agency currently requires each comment response to be reviewed before being posted, consider eliminating that step and allowing the person doing social media to make the judgment on whether they need to get their response reviewed. To make this happen, take steps to make sure the staff doing social media have all of the resources they need to respond on their own such as...

Meet Regularly With Project Staff

Make sure staff doing social media know what work is coming up so they know what the impacts will be on communities. Being better informed will help them anticipate questions and concerns.

Follow Up With Additional Information

If you don't know the answer to a question or need extra time to draft a response, post an immediate response telling the commenter that staff are looking into their question and will follow up later with more information.

Link To The Website

Many questions are already answered on the project website. Your response can include a direct link and simply say, "Thank you for the question. Check out this resource on the project page."

Publish Posts When You Can Respond

Consider publishing social media posts with announcements or hot topics at times when you are able to respond to immediate comments that come up.

Deal With Negative Comments Offline

If you have a follower that regularly posts negative comments, consider directly messaging them. You can politely request that they call project staff to help get their concerns addressed. For many people, it's easier to be negative online than it is when they connect with an actual person through another method. It can also be easier to address issues that require a more complex answer over the phone than in the comments.

4-BE RESPONSIVE, EXAMPLES

The City of Chaska received comments on social media about traffic problems caused by a road closure for a watermain break. Rather than continuing to respond to individual comments, city staff took the opportunity to address the issue head-on with a new post.

Source: City of Chaska

City of Chaska MN - Government
Published by Hootsuite · February 8, 2019 ·

During the Pioneer Trail closure, we have heard some residents asking for police officers to direct traffic, and we would like to provide more details regarding traffic control. With Bavaria Rd being offset on the north and south of Hundertmark and Village Rd and Hwy 41 also in close proximity, we would have to post officers at multiple locations to make traffic control work effectively. Unfortunately, we do not have the necessary staffing resources to run traffic control at a safe level for a sustained period of time. While we can't add police officers, we have worked in different ways to relieve some of the congestion. MnDOT has made some adjustments to the traffic signal timing at Hundertmark Rd/Hwy 41 and Pioneer Trail/Hwy 41. A local detour route was created, and we encourage motorists to use this and other alternate routes to bypass some of the congested areas. Thank you for your patience during this closure! If you have any questions or would like more details, please call us at 952-227-7568.

Pioneer Trail - Road Closed Traffic Detours

Public Works Division
11360 Hwy 212, Suite 1
Cologne, MN 55322
(952) 466-5200
Created: 2/5/2019

Carver County Sheriff's Office
March 15 ·

Highway 212 from Carver jcp to Cologne has pothole issues that has been disabling vehicles. Mndot is aware and is addressing the situation- perhaps try a different route if you can, for the short term future.

Ja Anne Gramith, Matt Sower and 202 others · 128 Comments · 218 Shares

Like · Comment · Share

All comments

Write a comment...

Author: Carver County Sheriff's Office
We were simply trying to give you a heads up if you are driving on this road to watch out for these tire popping holes 😊

Like Reply · 2bw · 15

Jay Ehlers
Carver County Sheriff's Office TY. However MNDot should have done something sooner. Cones or repair should have been done sooner. I know you were just passing the word, but if the Sheriff's Office is aware and notifying people, MNDot should have been... See more

Like Reply · 2bw · Edited · 3

The Carver County Sheriff's Office used a social media post to get ahead of a common springtime complaint and remind residents to be careful driving.

You can see that people appreciated the Sheriff's Office's response to negative comments, which showed the human side of its post.

Source: Carver County

Pro Tip:
Don't be afraid to respond to negative feedback or to allow your other followers to respond on your behalf.

5-MAKE IT VISUAL

Visuals on social media are a great way to grab attention. Studies have shown that people tend to look longer at social media posts with a visual.³

Common visuals for transportation and public works posts include:

Images/GIFs

- Photos of project sites
- Stock photos and icons (road work ahead sign, construction cones, walking icons, etc.)
- Custom images and GIFs created in Adobe Creative Suite and Canva

Video

- Construction overview videos
- Recorded presentations uploaded to YouTube
- Virtual public meetings broadcasted on Facebook Live
- Short videos published on Instagram (reels and stories) or TikTok

New to graphic design? Consider the following when developing visuals:

Use Canva

Create images and GIFs using a [beginner-friendly design software](#). The free version has a library of free graphics, photos, and templates.

Get Photos

Ask project staff to take photos when they are on-site or go out and take photos yourself. Even when you don't have a post in mind, having a library of photos can make future posts easier.

Share A Link Preview

Make the clickable link preview on Facebook and Twitter which posts the image for a quick and easy graphic.

Make Visual Mobile-Friendly

Most social media users access social media platforms through their mobile device.³ Make sure your graphics, particularly maps, are mobile-friendly, and easily read on mobile devices.

Add Alternative Text

Add descriptive captions or alt text to images to help people visualize images. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram provide fields to add alt text to graphics.

No Photo? Don't Sweat It!

It's okay to not include a graphic depending on the context of the post (or if you have an urgent message). Instead, be descriptive and use plain language. Consider using a relevant emoji in place of a visual from time-to-time (but don't go overboard).

³ Kemp, S. (2019, April 13). Digital 2019: Global Digital Overview - DataReportal - Global Digital Insights. DataReportal. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2019-global-digital-overview/>


5-MAKE IT VISUAL, EXAMPLES

Source: Washington County

Example of a link preview that can be created using simple white text on a project photo.

Washington County MN @WashingtonCoMN

Grading work is substantially complete in the northeast quadrant of the new Manning Interchange! Curb & gutter has been installed & asphalt pavement for the loop, ramp, & shoulder has also been completed. More info in this week's construction update.



Highway 36 & Manning Avenue Interchange

October 1, 2021 Construction Update

express.adobe.com
Highway 36 & Manning Avenue Interchange
See the story

Jordan MN @CityofJordanMN

Spring is here, watch for motorcycles & don't blow your grass n leaves into the streets.



You don't have to be a graphic artist to get your point across.

Source: City of Jordan

6-MAINTAIN A COHESIVE BRAND

Your agency's social media pages reflect your agency overall. Your voice, messaging, and visuals should look and sound cohesive to build a presence or brand that your followers recognize. Here are some practices to help maintain a cohesive brand:

Keep A Consistent Voice

Is your agency's voice and personality on social media upbeat and casual? Or is it more serious? Maintaining a consistent voice will help your messages sound cohesive to followers.

Use Agency Branding And Style Guidelines

Maintain existing agency brand and style guidelines on social media. Make sure staff or consultants that create content for your social media pages have your agency's brand guidelines.

Consider Graphic Style

Use your brand colors as the dominant color scheme for custom graphics to tie your content together visually. Consider establishing regular design elements and, if you don't have brand colors, use colors in your agency's logo.



Two Instagram graphics that have different subjects but use similar fonts, headers, and colors.

Source: City of Inver Grove Heights



GROW FOLLOWERS

7-CREATE SHARE-WORTHY CONTENT

Growing followers on social media and increasing the amount that followers engage with posts can be challenging, especially for transportation and public works communications. Transportation and public works information can be technical and your projects may have longer periods between essential touchpoints. This makes it all the more important to post content that excites and engages followers.

Examples of share-worthy content you may want to consider for your social media include:

Projects

Grow social media followers by capitalizing on transportation and public works projects in your community. You'll be a reliable source for project information; use it to your advantage to be the go-to source for updates and news.

Current Events

Be aware of what's going on in your community. For example, you can post information on road conditions during a blizzard or storm.

Data

Share striking and easy to understand data on social media to increase engagement. You could compare traffic volumes on major roads or share the average miles of streets a plow driver clears after a snow event.

Trends

Be aware of what's trending on the platforms you're using and try using the popularity of trends in your messages. If you decide to adapt a social media trend for your post, it should feel effortless. If you're trying too hard to connect your message to a trend, then it's probably not the right fit.

Cute Or Funny Content

People love pets, children, and humor on social media. Consider creative ways to incorporate this type of content while remaining true to your voice. For example, consider highlighting the work of your agency's staff by sharing a funny two truths and a lie about them and ask people to respond what they think is the lie in the comments.

7-CREATE SHARE-WORTHY CONTENT, EXAMPLES

Source:
Minnesota Department of
Transportation

**MnDOT's road safety
message resonated
with an inside look at
what it's like to work on
a Minnesota highway.**



**MnDOT used social
media to generate
widespread interest
in a snowplow-naming
contest, and later
the agency shared
an update on the
plow named after
the late-Golden Girls
actress Betty White,
whose character was
from Minnesota.**

Source:
Minnesota Department of
Transportation

8-PROMOTE YOUR OWN SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

Don't miss opportunities to promote your own social media accounts using other communication methods. Consider sharing your social media platforms through these means:

Website

If you don't already, include links to your social media accounts either in the header or footer of your agency's website.

Print Material

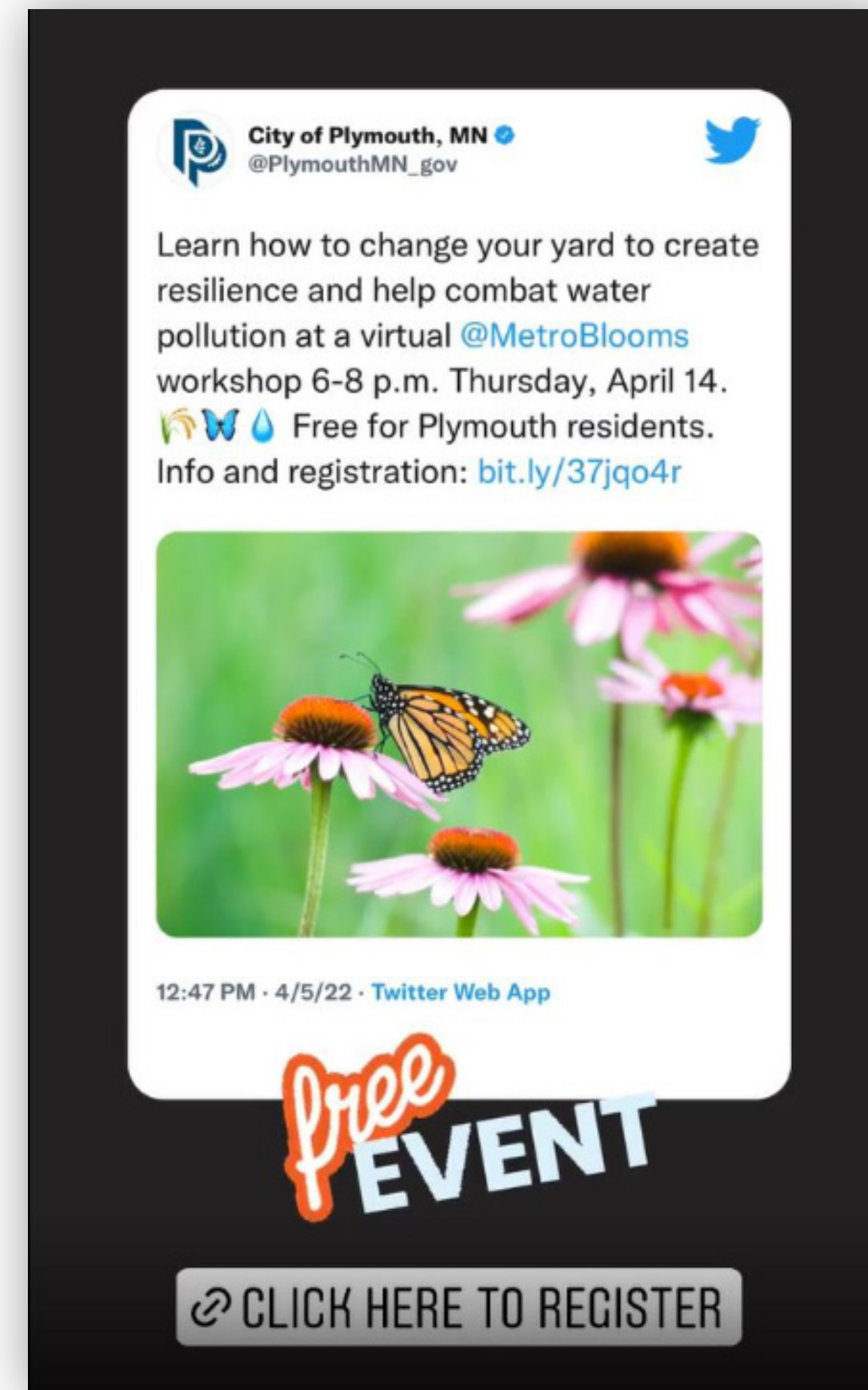
Include social media accounts on print materials like postcards, flyers, handouts, or newsletters. Consider using a QR code so people can easily get to links.

Cross-Promote

Promote your social media accounts across your different platforms. For example, you can encourage followers on your Facebook account to follow you on Twitter. You can also point to some of the features within existing platforms. For example, you can promote a new project-specific Facebook group on your primary Facebook account.

Get Creative

You could do a giveaway contest to solicit new followers or post yard signs with contact information including social media accounts in the project area to promote ways to stay informed during projects.



Use the linked accounts feature in Instagram to automatically re-share Twitter posts.

Source: City of Plymouth

9-COLLABORATE WITH PEERS

Collaborate with staff from peer agencies and organizations to post more engaging content and to make it easier for you to develop ideas for posts. Examples of subjects with cross-audience interest include:

- Public comment period or survey promotion
- Open house for transportation projects
- Major project news, milestones, and decisions

Here are some specific ways that you can consider collaborating with your peers:

Follow Other Agencies

Follow other agencies and organizations in your area to get ideas regarding what works for them and reach out to their staff with questions on how you can reach your intended audience.

Tag Others

Tagging is the social handle or username of the person or business in your post or photo. Consider tagging the social media channels of project partners on posts that have to do with a mutual project. Tagging is a great way to build relationships online by exposing new audiences to each other and letting followers know who your agency is working with. You can also share relevant posts from other agencies and localize them by sharing additional information. Helpful guidance: <https://ocreative.com/using-hashtags-tagging-social-media-strategy/>

Joint Campaign

Take the next step with project partners and collaborate to run a joint campaign. A joint campaign could include a series of posts that meet both partner's project goals, or a public conversation between the two partners asking about the opportunities of the project for both sets of followers to see.

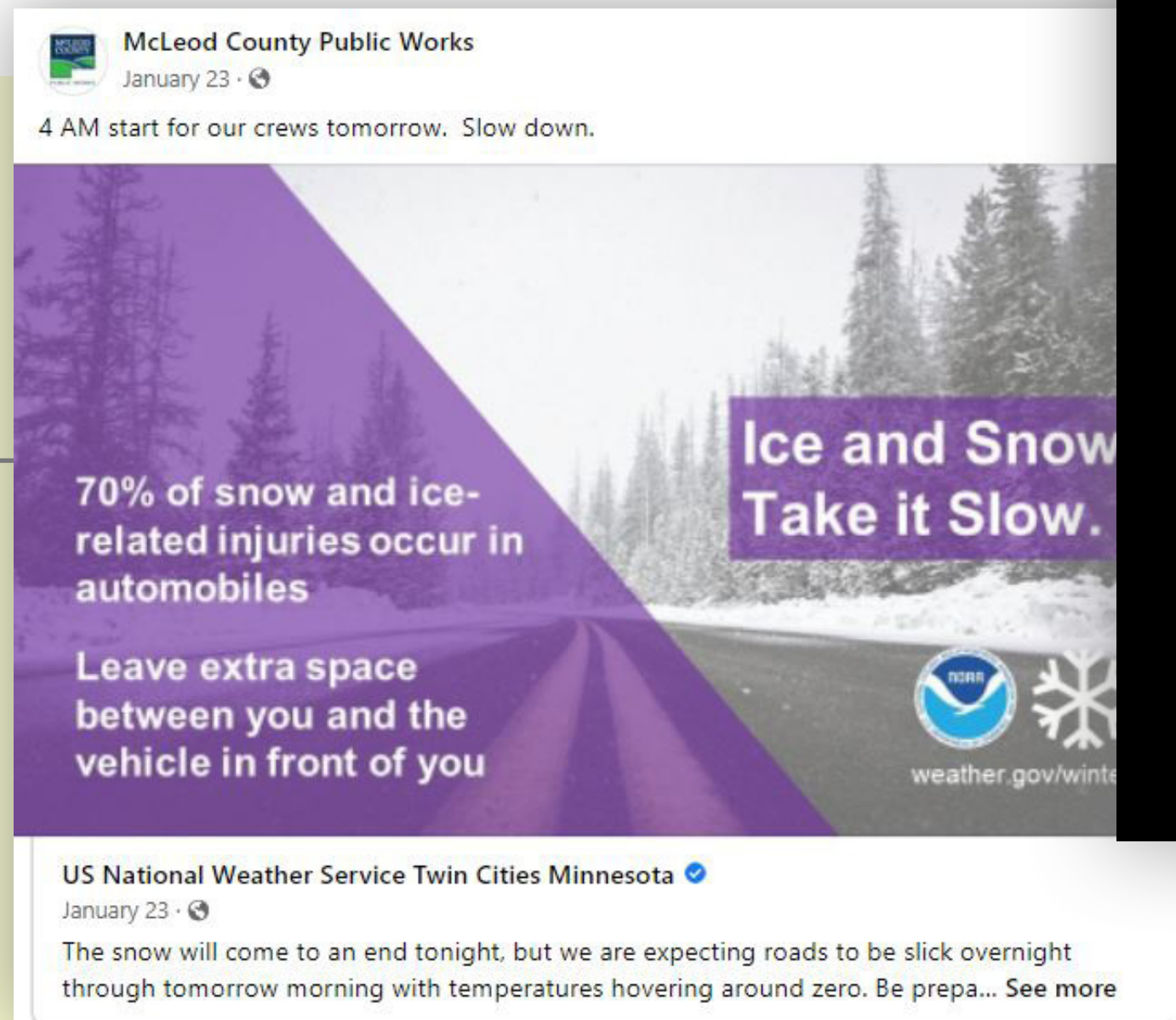
Professional Groups

Join social media professional groups like the Minnesota-based Minnesota Association of Government Communicators (MAGC) or the national Government Social Media group to learn about new ideas and build relationships. Both groups are comprised of people who work on government social media and create opportunities to learn from one another. See more in tip 20 (page 37).

9-COLLABORATE WITH PEERS, EXAMPLES

Source: McLeod County

McLeod County effectively localizes a winter weather message from the National Weather Service.



McLeod County Public Works
January 23 · 🌐

4 AM start for our crews tomorrow. Slow down.

**Ice and Snow
Take it Slow.**

70% of snow and ice-related injuries occur in automobiles

Leave extra space between you and the vehicle in front of you

US National Weather Service Twin Cities Minnesota
January 23 · 🌐

The snow will come to an end tonight, but we are expecting roads to be slick overnight through tomorrow morning with temperatures hovering around zero. Be prepa... See more



City of Marshall Retweeted

Runnings Stores @MyRunnings · Apr 28

🌟 Excited to unveil our Newest Semi-Trailer Design, celebrating #MarshallMN, Runnings home city since 1947. The real kicker? This year represents the city's #Sesquicentennial - that's 150 years old. We are Marshall!

@VisitMarshallMN @Marshall_Radio @Marshall_MN



6 6

This retweet from the City of Marshall takes advantage of a local hashtag (#MarshallMN) and tags other local social media channels.

Source: City of Marshall

10-USE HASHTAGS

Hashtags can allow new followers to find your content with low effort on your part. Social media hashtags allow users to search for similar content they are interested in. Adding hashtags to posts can provide more visibility for your content, help you reach new followers, and enable the public to find past posts on the same topic. Additionally, you can also use hashtags to follow conversations related to your post.

When using hashtags, consider the following tips:

Use Specific, Rather Than Generic, Hashtags

For example, instead of #Construction, use something more specific like #MainStConstruction. Check out what hashtags are already being used to see if they align with your content.

Create Your Own Hashtags

Get creative with hashtags and create your own agency- or project-specific hashtag. This can be a way to solicit positive user-generated content, which is content created by your followers, about your agency, posted on social media. An example is #BetterRoadsAhead. This is a hashtag that a local agency uses for road construction projects.

Be Organized

Some hashtags are especially useful for transportation and public works content to organize your projects for your followers. For example, your agency may have multiple projects in one season that you will post about. You can use project-specific hashtags to help organize your content for followers who, for example, may be interested in news related to a Main Street repaving project, but not in the storm water pipe replacement on Loon Avenue that doesn't affect them.

Don't Overdo It

You don't need a hashtag for every single post, and you certainly don't need to include a huge number of hashtags in a single post. Consider using one or two hashtags at most, when appropriate.



Tweet using a creative hashtag. #BRTaFasterRide

Source: Metropolitan Council

11-ADVERTISE

Paid advertising on social media can have a large return on a relatively small investment, especially when targeting a specific geographic area. Most staff who shared insights for this guide said their agency has advertised on Facebook while a few said they also advertise on Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn. Advertising will help your agency reach more people in your community and gain new followers with benefits that include:

- Low cost relative to other promotional methods
- Geotarget capabilities, so only people in areas that you select will see your advertisement
- Ad results with detailed analytics

Content to advertise

- Promote an open house or public meeting
- Solicit feedback for a public comment period or survey
- Build public awareness for a major project or initiative
- Announce road closure/detour information
- Share job opportunities

Here are some tips to consider when advertising on social media:

Know The Advertising Objective

Knowing your ad objective will help you better identify and reach your targeted audience. Common objectives for ads include:⁴

- Brand awareness: Maximize views to people who are most interested in your content, like when you have a construction detour notice.
- Engagement: Maximize views to people most likely to like, comment, share, or respond to events, like when you have an open house.
- Link clicks: Send people from the social media platform to an external link, like when you have an online survey.
- Video views: Maximize views to people who will watch your video.

Boosted Post

A boosted post is a specific type of advertisement on Facebook and Instagram where you pay for your regular post to reach a targeted audience. An ad is not published on your regular Facebook or Instagram page for followers. An ad is just shown to your targeted audience. When advertising an open house or construction project, many cities and counties choose a boosted post over an ad so that the announcement is also published to their regular followers.

⁴ Kemp, S. (2019, April 13). Digital 2019: Global Digital Overview - DataReportal – Global Digital Insights. DataReportal. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2019-global-digital-overview/>

A social media ad should be designed to attract users and fit the design standards of the social media platform you are paying. Here are some tips to keep in mind when designing your ad:

Graphics

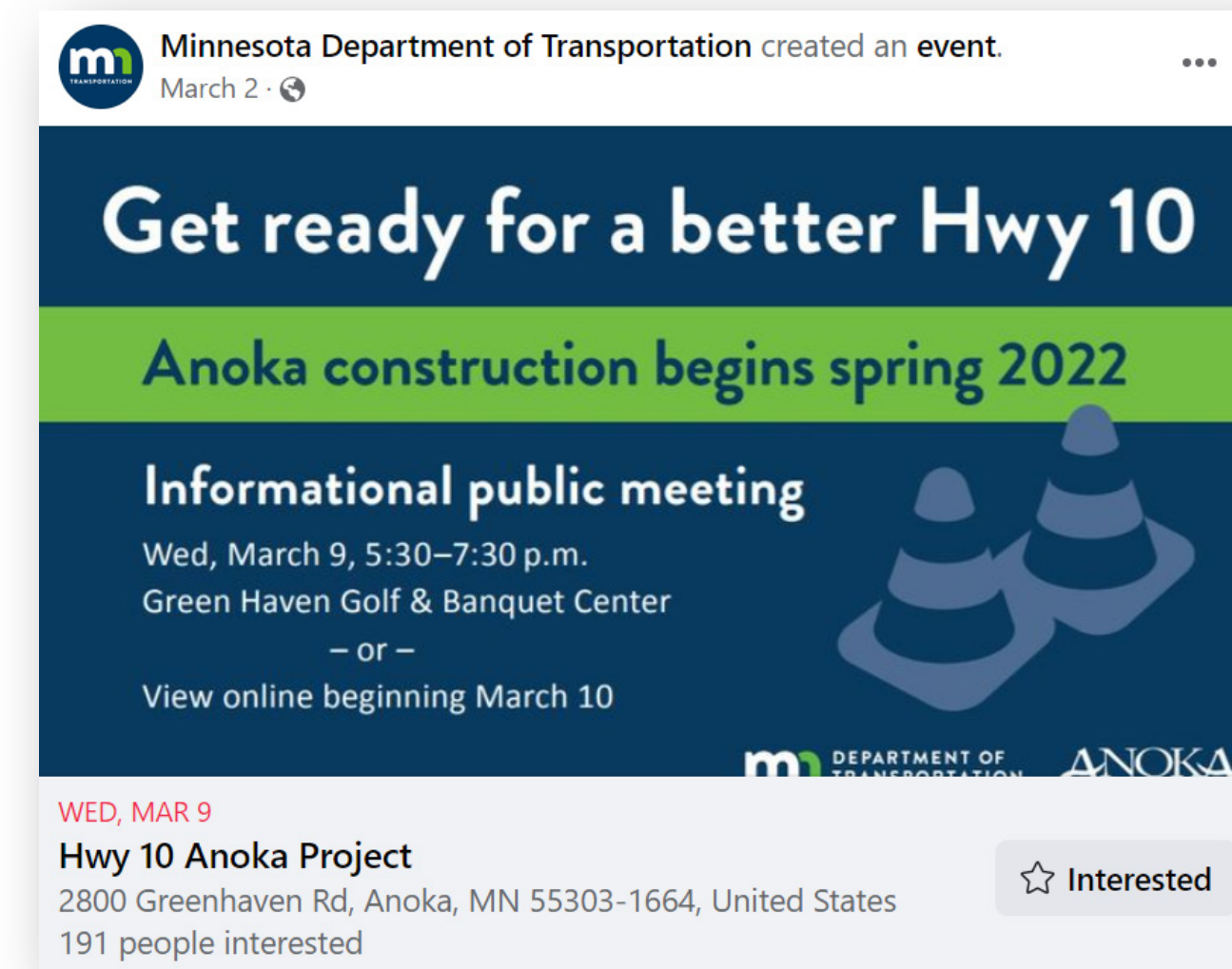
Make sure your graphic is the correct dimensions. Facebook has three ad sizes: 9x16, 16x9, and 1x1. Only one of these sizes is required, but it's a best practice to provide all three so your ad can run in all types of ad placements. Additionally, it's best that graphics have minimal text. Facebook advises that graphics have less than 20% text to perform best on their platform.

Mobile

Most social media users access social media platforms through their mobile devices.⁵ To get the most out of your social media advertisement, make sure your graphic and font sizes are legible on a phone screen and avoid lengthy messages.

How Much To Spend And For How Long

Ultimately, how much you spend is going to depend on your objectives and the size of audience you are trying to reach. Agencies who gave input on this guide said their ads usually run 1-2 weeks. A larger agency said they do \$100-\$300 for the lifetime cost of an ad and another said they do \$20 per day. Another agency who does boosted posts said they do \$15-\$25 per day for each boost.



Facebook ad for an open house that helped the event reach more people – nearly 200 people responded on the event page.

Source:
Minnesota Department of Transportation

⁵ Social Media Advertising 101: How to get the most out of your ad budget. (2020, September 9). <https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-advertising/>

BE INCLUSIVE

12-CONSIDER TRANSLATIONS

As leaders in the community, it's our responsibility to be inclusive and equitable in our communications and outreach. Whether collecting public comments on a road design project or sharing construction detour information, it is important to reduce barriers to learn about and participate in government processes. Social media is an important tool to reach our broader communities, and reaching diverse populations on social media takes additional efforts, like translating content.

Here are some tips for advertising on social media:^{6,7}

Know Why You're Translating

Not every community will need translated communications and not every communication needs to be translated. Research the languages spoken in your communities. If, for example, there is an upcoming construction project in a neighborhood that predominantly speaks Spanish, translate Facebook posts to Spanish for project notices.

Avoid Machine Translation

Hire an interpreter to translate your posts rather than trying to translate posts yourself using a machine translation like Google Translate.

Consider Character Limits

Character limits on social media may not allow a direct translation of your post.



Translation isn't as expensive as people think it is, especially when bundling all project needs at one time on a project. Spending \$150 to get everything translated is very worth it.

*Allison Winters,
Ramsey County Deputy Director of Communications*

Be Prepared To Respond

Have a plan to respond to questions in the languages you are posting in. Let your interpreter know your posting schedule and that you may follow up with them to translate responses so you can respond as quickly as possible.

Avoid Translating Hashtags

A direct translation of hashtags might not make sense. Either don't translate hashtags or research a more effective hashtag in that language.

⁶ Bianchi, C. (2020, November 10). How to Translate Social Media Content [Best practices]. Language Buró. <https://languageburo.com/blog/how-to-translate-social-media-content>

⁷ Dimitrova, I. (2018, December 20). 5 social media translation mistakes most brands make - and how to avoid them. Translate Plus. <https://www.translateplus.com/blog/social-media-translation-mistakes/>

12-CONSIDER TRANSLATIONS, EXAMPLES

Source:
Minnesota Department of Transportation

**Minnesota Hmong speakers
are asked their opinion about
self-driving cars.**

mndot Sponsored

Qhia rau peb paub txog hais tias seb koj xav li cas txog cov tsheb uas nws tsav nws tus kheej.

THOV PAB UA PEB QHOV KEV TSHUAJ NTSUAM XYUAS LUV NOD KOM TIAV!



Learn more

mndot Cov tev naus laus zis (technologies) uas tshwm sim nod muaj feem yuav los pauv hloov tau lub ... more

Minnesota Department of... Sponsored

¡Residentes del área metropolitana en el suroeste, viajeros, y negocios! El ...See more



Autopista 41 Hacia el Norte Ruta de Desvío
Autopista 41 Hacia el sur Ruta de Desvío
Vía Cerrada por construcción

Daniel Rodriguez and 25 others 5 Shares

Share

Paid Facebook ad about a local road closure targets large population of Spanish-speaking residents in Chaska and Shakopee.

Source: Minnesota Department of Transportation

13-BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

The history of structural racism, discrimination, and exclusion from government processes has resulted in some mistrust of government within communities. One way that you can be part of actively building trust is by developing relationships with community organizations and religious institutions in your community that serve historically underserved communities. Building relationships make it easier for you to reach out to their staff to share your posts during major project milestones or when you need to gather public feedback.

Know That Language Is Not The Only Factor

While language is important, it isn't the only factor to effectively engage your audience. More important could be posting culturally relevant content that resonates with the values and experiences of your community.

One method of using translations on social media is to display a post with a series of images that feature the same message in different languages.



This Ramsey County job board post was displayed in six prominently spoken languages.

Source: Ramsey County

14–MAKE CONTENT ACCESSIBLE

Following best practices for social media accessibility will help ensure all people, including people with disabilities, can navigate and understand your social media content. These best practices ensure people with a vision or hearing impairment can understand your social media posts.^{8,9,10}

Images/GIFs

Add Alternative (Alt) Text

Add descriptive captions, or alternative text to images, to help people with visual impairments understand the images. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn provide specific fields to add alt text to images and GIFs.

Refer to these helpful articles for more information:

[Alt Text For Social Media Images](#)

[Digital Accessibility](#)

Use Color Contrast

Use good color contrast between text and background on social media graphics to ensure legibility, particularly for people with color blindness or who have low vision. You can check color contrast by using a downloadable analyzer tool like:

[Color Contrast Checker](#)

Video

Include Closed Captions / Transcript

Many video platforms auto-generate captions for videos or allow you to upload your own captions with an SRT file. Because of the jargon typically used in public works content, an SRT file is advised to ensure the audio is correctly transcribed.

Add Video Descriptions

For non-verbal videos, add a description to explain what is happening.

Text

Avoid All Caps

Phrases or sentences with letters that are all capitalized can be misinterpreted by screen readers.

Use Camel Case For Hashtags

Hashtags should capitalize the first letter of each word in multi-word hashtags without using spaces to be more legible #CamelCase

Hashtags, Links, And Mentions Go Last

Hashtags, @ mentions, and links can disrupt the flow of text for screen readers.

Shorten URLs

URLs are read character-by-character by screen readers. Make them short by using a URL shortening tool like Bitly.

Limit Emoji Use

Emojis are read aloud by screen readers. Avoid using more than one or two in a post so they don't disrupt the flow of text.

⁸ Improving the accessibility of social media in government. (2014, July 16). <https://digital.gov/resources/improving-the-accessibility-of-social-media-in-government/>

⁹ Sehl, K. (2020, October 15). Inclusive Design for Social Media: Tips for Creating Accessible Channels. Hootsuite. <https://blog.hootsuite.com/inclusive-design-social-media/>

¹⁰ Social media tips for effective, accessible social media use and outreach. (2020, September 23). <https://mn.gov/mnit/about-mnit/accessibility/social-media.jsp>

Facebook post practicing proper color contrast between text and background

For this post, the edit feature must be used to add invisible "alternative text," so the image text can be read by people with visual impairments.

Source:

Minnesota Department of Transportation

Minnesota Department of Transportation shared a post. April 7 at 8:24 AM ·

Survey closes tomorrow (4/8)—place your comments on areas of concern now!

Take the interactive map survey at www.mndot.gov/d3/region7w

Why is your feedback important?
It will help us develop a long range plan and guide priorities for projects seeking federal transportation funding in the four-county area (except St. Cloud, which is part of another planning entity).

INTERACTIVE MAP SURVEY
Open March 4–April 8, 2022

Pinpoint Transportation Needs
Benton, Sherburne, Stearns, Wright counties

Help us identify and develop the future Region 7W Long Range Transportation Plan
Take survey at www.mndot.gov/d3/region7w

REGION 7W
TRANSPORTATION
Benton, Sherburne, Stearns, Wright counties

Example of this same Facebook post with poor color contrast. The text can't be distinguished by people with color blindness.

INTERACTIVE MAP SURVEY
Open March 4–April 8, 2022

Pinpoint Transportation Needs

Your input will help us identify and develop the future 30-year Region 7W Long Range Transportation Plan. Take survey today at www.mndot.gov/d3/region7w

REGION 7W
TRANSPORTATION
Benton, Sherburne, Stearns, Wright counties

MAKE IT SUSTAINABLE

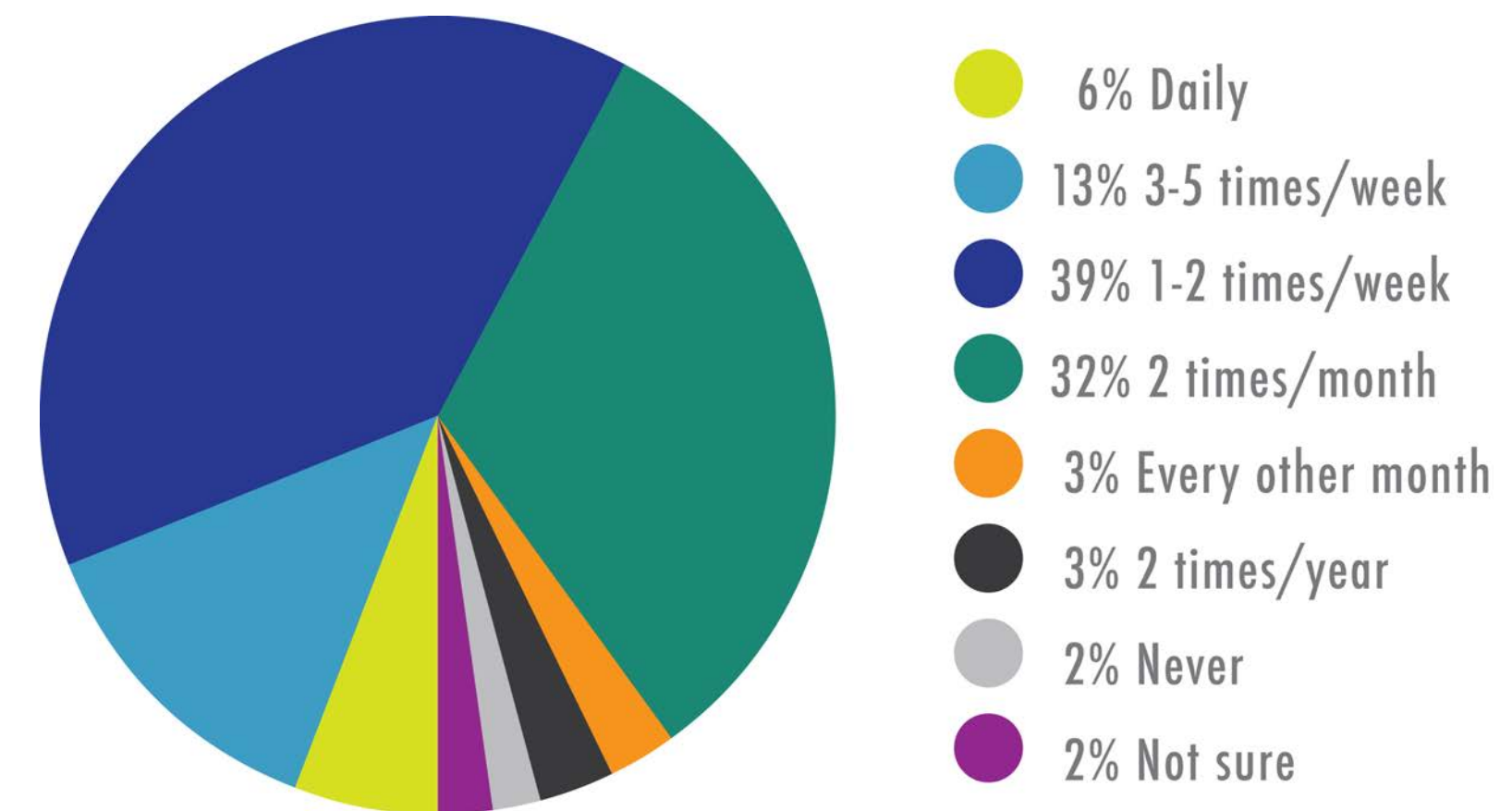
15-BE CONSISTENT

Consistency is key on social media. Very few people are likely to follow a social media account if there haven't been any recent posts. Posting regularly will help maintain visibility with your existing followers. In addition, all social media platforms have an algorithm to sort the content on users' feeds and the algorithms tend to favor accounts that post consistently.^{11,12}

Frequency

The recommended frequency of posts depends on which platforms you use and what you can realistically maintain. The most successful agencies post about transportation or public works related content at least a couple of times each month during off-peak months on Facebook and Instagram and more frequently during higher peak periods throughout the year. Twitter requires more frequent posts due to the speed at which people consume information on the platform.

How often does your agency post on social media for public works, transportation, and community development projects?



¹¹ Barnhart, B. (2021, March 31). Everything You Need to Know About Social Media Algorithms. Sprout Social. <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-algorithms/>

¹² Hopper, T. (2021, March 22). Why Posting Consistently Matters on Social Media. Teah Hopper Consulting. <https://www.teahopper.com/blog/2018/11/15/why-posting-consistently-matters-on-social-media>

Some tips on how to post consistently:

Reuse Content

Reuse content by presenting it in a new format. This not only saves you time but will reinforce your message and reach followers who may have missed your post when it was initially published. An example of reusing content is publishing an old graphic with a refreshed message.

Cross-Platform Publishing

Make sure you're posting on all your agency's platforms. If you're posting an announcement on Facebook, then do the same on Instagram or Twitter. Depending on the platform, you may need to adjust dimensions for graphics.

Get Ideas From Your Peers

Look at what other local agencies are posting and ask about the strategies or templates that work for them. For example, some local agencies have found that their communities enjoy historic photos of Main Street for a Throwback Thursday post.

Create A Content Library

Create templates and a library of graphics or photos for reoccurring content such as open house announcements, snow emergencies, road closures, traffic impacts, or annual holidays. Having a template for a graphic or go-to photos will help you be organized and ready to post when there is new information to share with your communities.



The City of Crookston uses a danger sign for alerts about hazardous conditions.

Source: City of Crookston

16–USE SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT TOOLS

Social media management software can help coordinate multiple social media platforms and help you create, schedule, post, and respond to questions and comments on all of your agency's social media channels. There are several free and paid social media management software; some of the popular ones used by Minnesota government agencies include Hootsuite, Sendible, Sprout Social, and Co-Schedule.

You may prefer using a social media calendar on Outlook or Google to manage and organize social media content for projects. There are a range of methods, and we suggest trying out a couple of tools or methods before committing to one.

Pro Tip

Some agency staff who work together closely said they use an online request form, like Formstack or Google Form to request a social media post. A form like this could be used by co-workers as well as consultants to help the people who coordinate all of the posts.



If you manage multiple social media accounts, using a scheduling software can save you a lot of time to push all posts out at once.

*Member,
Minnesota Association of Government Communicators (MAGC)*

17-BUILD IT INTO PROJECTS

Social media takes time and energy to strategize and create posts for projects. Local agency staff should build the time they need into public works projects and programs, like other public communications and outreach activities.

Average Social Media Workload

Most government agency staff said they work on social media 1-5 hours a week (40%). However, by job function, engineers typically spend fewer hours working on social media, while for staff whose main job is marketing, communications and/or administration, posting is a more significant part of the job, usually falling somewhere above 5 hours a week.

A huge challenge for people who do social media is just understanding time and energy that needs to go into the work.

*Stephanie Roth,
Communications Consultant at HDR*

This matrix developed by HDR for a Carver County construction project outlines advance notice required for each project action, related communication materials and the project team member responsible for distributing project information.

Source: HDR

HIGHWAY 41 EXPANSION PROJECT COMMUNICATION MATRIX

This communication matrix outlines advance notice required for each project action, related communication materials and the project team member responsible for distributing project information.

PROJECT ACTION	PROJECT ACTION										
	Letter	Postcard	Door Hanger	Phone Call	One-on-one Meeting	Website and/or Email Update	Press Release	Social Media Post	Electronic Message Board/Signage	City Notification	First Responder/Transit Notification
PROJECT	Construction start	7				7	7	7	10	14	14
TRAFFIC	Restrictions (lane/shoulder closures, narrowed lane)					7		2	5	7	7
	Full road/intersection closures					7	7	2	7	10	7
PROPERTY	Disruptions (noise, dust, lights)	14*	2		5*	7				14	
	Driveway closure/access changes			7*	7					14	14*
	Tree removal/relocation	7	2*	*	*	7				14	
	Private property relocation (mailbox, fence, rain garden)	14	5	*	*						14*
	Signage/fencing placement	14	5*	*	*						
	Equipment within 500 ft of property	14	2*	5*							14*
	Public ROW	7	1*			7		2			14
RESTORATION	Easement	30		7	7*						
	Restoration activities	14	5			7					14

10 Numbers shown in boxes identify the **minimum number of days** for communication notice in advance of work
 * Optional - if needed or requested by property owner

■ Project Manager and/or Consultant
■ County Staff (i.e. ROW, Maintenance)
■ Agency Partners (City)
■ Contractor

Tips for government agencies to build social media into projects include:

Meet Regularly

Have check-ins throughout the project to keep the staff who post for social media in the loop on social media opportunities.

Share Out The Results

Share out the number of followers, comments, likes and link clicks, and ask people on surveys and at open houses how they heard about the project. The more that government leadership understands the value of social media as a tool to connect with communities, the more likely they are to give resources to it and plan for it in the future.

Have A Policy

Plan out your social media goals, review process, and comment response process at the early stages of project planning to set your team up for success. See more details in tip 19 (page 35).

BECOME A MASTER

18-DO THE MOST WITH YOUR PLATFORMS

Once you've addressed these tips, consider taking your social media presence to the next level. You can jump on new trends and innovations in government social media by using all of the tools available to you on the platforms you are already on. Social media algorithms tend to reward content that is created within that platform, so take advantage by using tools like:

Groups

Groups on Facebook are designed to connect with people who have similar interests. Some public works departments have used Groups for specific construction projects or a construction season to keep information that only affects a specific community or neighborhood off the main page.

Events

Create an Event on Facebook and Nextdoor to get more visibility for an open house or public meeting. You can provide more details on an Event page than you would in a typical post, and people can RSVP, or note if they're interested in attending, and they'll get a reminder sent to their account prior to the event.

Video

Video content tends to get high visibility in social media algorithms. Create a Reel on Instagram or a Short on YouTube. Some ideas for short video content include recapping participation and feedback from an open house, interviewing a project manager on their upcoming project, and sharing footage or a photo reel of crews working on a construction site.

Live

Use live streaming on Facebook Live, or live audio conversations on Twitter Spaces. Some agencies recommended live streaming an open house presentation or live streaming a coffee and conversation with the project manager to answer questions about a project.



We create a private Facebook Group for each construction season rather than individual project Facebook pages. The construction flyers and signs push residents who are in the neighborhoods of our construction page to the Group rather than the main page, so our larger group of followers aren't getting all the project updates.

City Community Relations Manager

19–HAVE A POLICY

A social media policy, or social media plan, is a document that provides guidance for your agency's social media presence. A social media policy often identifies goals and objectives, roles and responsibilities, security protocols, crisis response, and comment guidelines.

Many government agencies who have a social media policy say they help alleviate uncertainties with social media practices for both staff and agencies. There are several examples of social media policies from local agencies like MnDOT, the City of Plymouth, and Ramsey County. There are also several templates online to create a social media policy, including one from the League of Minnesota Cities.

64%

of surveyed agencies have a social media policy

Every city and county should adopt a [social media] policy, especially a comment strategy. It takes a lot of stress off social media managers. Some intentional vagueness is built [into our policy] because people are creative with their swear words.

Former Social Media Manager for a Minnesota State Agency

Common Social Media Policy Topics and Considerations ^{13, 14}

Goals and objectives

- What are your goals for using social media?
- Who is your audience?
- Which social media channels will you use?
- What content do you want to post on social media?
- How often do you want to post?
- How will you measure success?

Account management guidelines

- What are the roles and responsibilities for people working on social media?
- What is the review schedule for social media content?
- How will you protect your agency's security online?
- How will you document social media data and records?
- How will your content be accessible to all people?

Comment guidelines

- How and when will you respond to comments?
- How will you address inappropriate and offensive comments?
- How will you address misinformation?
- How will you make your comment guidelines transparent to the public?

¹³ League of Minnesota Cities Model Policy: Social Media Policy. (2021, June 24). <https://www.lmc.org/communication/>

¹⁴ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2012). *Uses of Social Media in Public Transportation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/14666>

19-HAVE A POLICY, EXAMPLES

Example of a staff rules of use sample policy.

Rules of Use

City social media managers are responsible for managing City social media accounts or websites.

Facilities or departments wishing to have a new social media presence must initially submit a request to [redacted] [City Administrator/Manager/Council/ or other designee] in order to ensure social media accounts are kept to a sustainable number and policies are followed. All approved sites will be clearly marked as the City of [redacted] site and will be linked with the official City website (www. [redacted]). No one may establish social media accounts or websites on behalf of the City unless authorized in accordance with this policy.

The City's social media page must conspicuously display or link to a public notice that informs the public of the purpose of the social media presence and the terms one agrees to in accessing, using, or posting to the City's social media page.



A sample notice accompanies this policy.

Example of a social media channel public notice.

SAMPLE PUBLIC NOTICE

The purpose of the City of [redacted]'s social media presence is to provide members of the community with information in more places and more ways than were traditionally available. All content of this site is public and is subject to disclosure pursuant to the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act. Please be aware that anything you post may survive deletion, whether by you or others. Do not post sensitive or personally identifiable information, such as social security numbers.

Following or "friending" persons or organizations is not an endorsement by the City and is only intended as a means of broadening communication. The City is not responsible for content found at links to third parties, nor the views or opinions expressed by third-party comments.

Please be advised that comments falling into the following category or categories may be removed:

- Obscene or pornographic content
- Direct threats to persons or property
- Material asserted to violate the intellectual property of another person
- Private, personal information about a person published without his/her consent
- Information that endangers the public by compromising a public safety security system
- Statutorily private, confidential, or nonpublic data
- Commercial promotions or spam
- Hyperlinks to material that falls into at least one of the foregoing categories

Should your comment be removed by the City and you believe it does not fall into one of the above categories, contact [redacted] in writing to explain how the comment does not fall into one of these categories.

Should you wish to challenge the legality of any portion of this notice or the City's social media policy, you may contact [redacted] in writing and explain the basis for the challenge in detail.

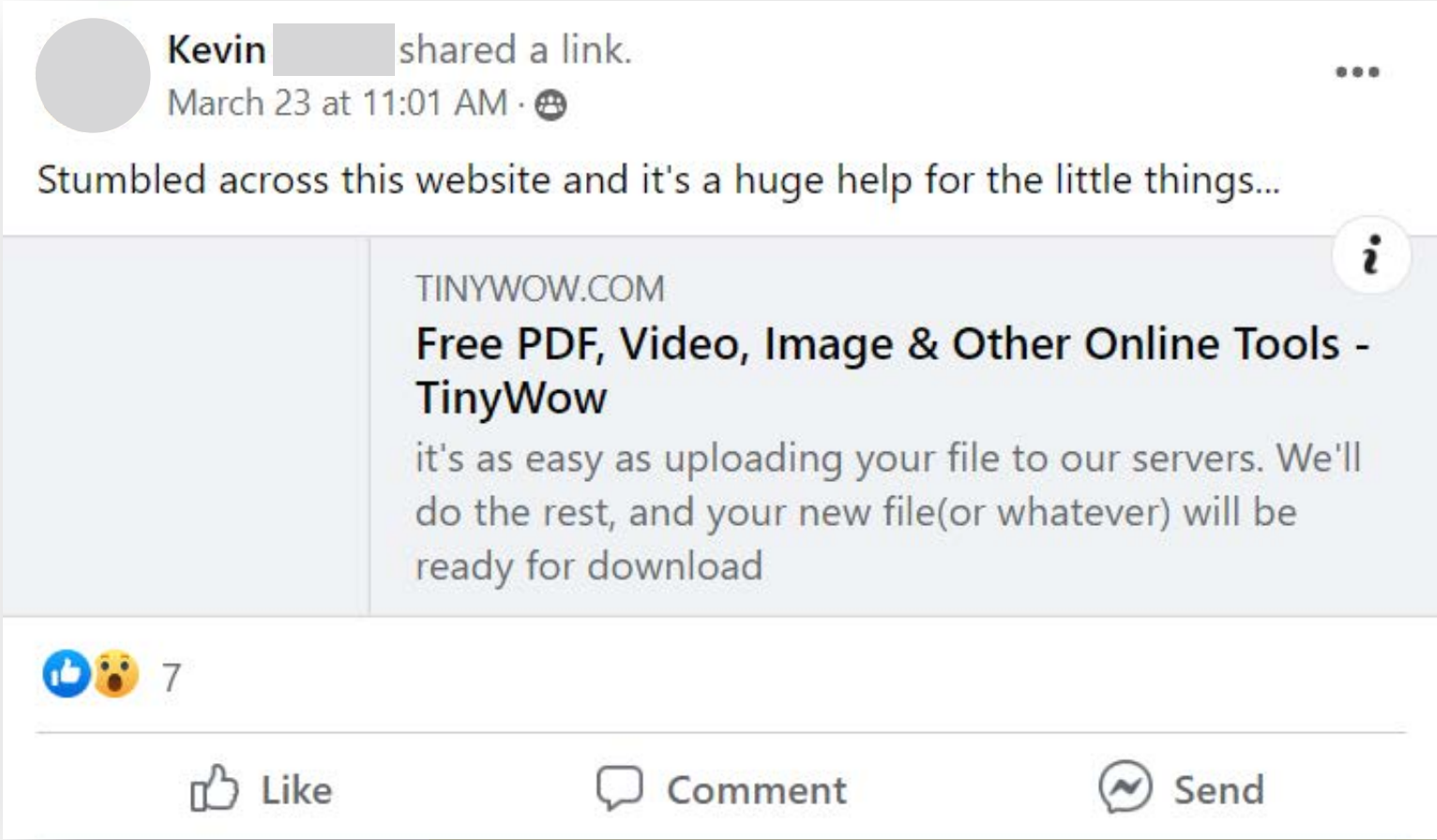
Source: League of Minnesota Cities

20-SHARE KNOWLEDGE

Working with other agencies and joining social media professional groups can provide you with a supportive work community to learn from and to share what you've learned. Several people recommended joining the national Government Social Media professional association and the local Minnesota Association of Government Communicators (MAGC).

The Government Social Media association is a nationwide community of government social media professionals. They have an active Government Social Media Facebook Group for you to share what you're working on, ask questions, and meet people nationwide doing similar work for their agencies.

The local MAGC is geared toward people working on communications, public relations, and outreach for their agencies. They hold monthly virtual Social Media Coffee meetings for people around the state to share what they're working on and ask questions related to social media.



Facebook post of someone sharing a helpful resource on the Government Social Media Group.

Source: Government Social Media Facebook Group

BONUS

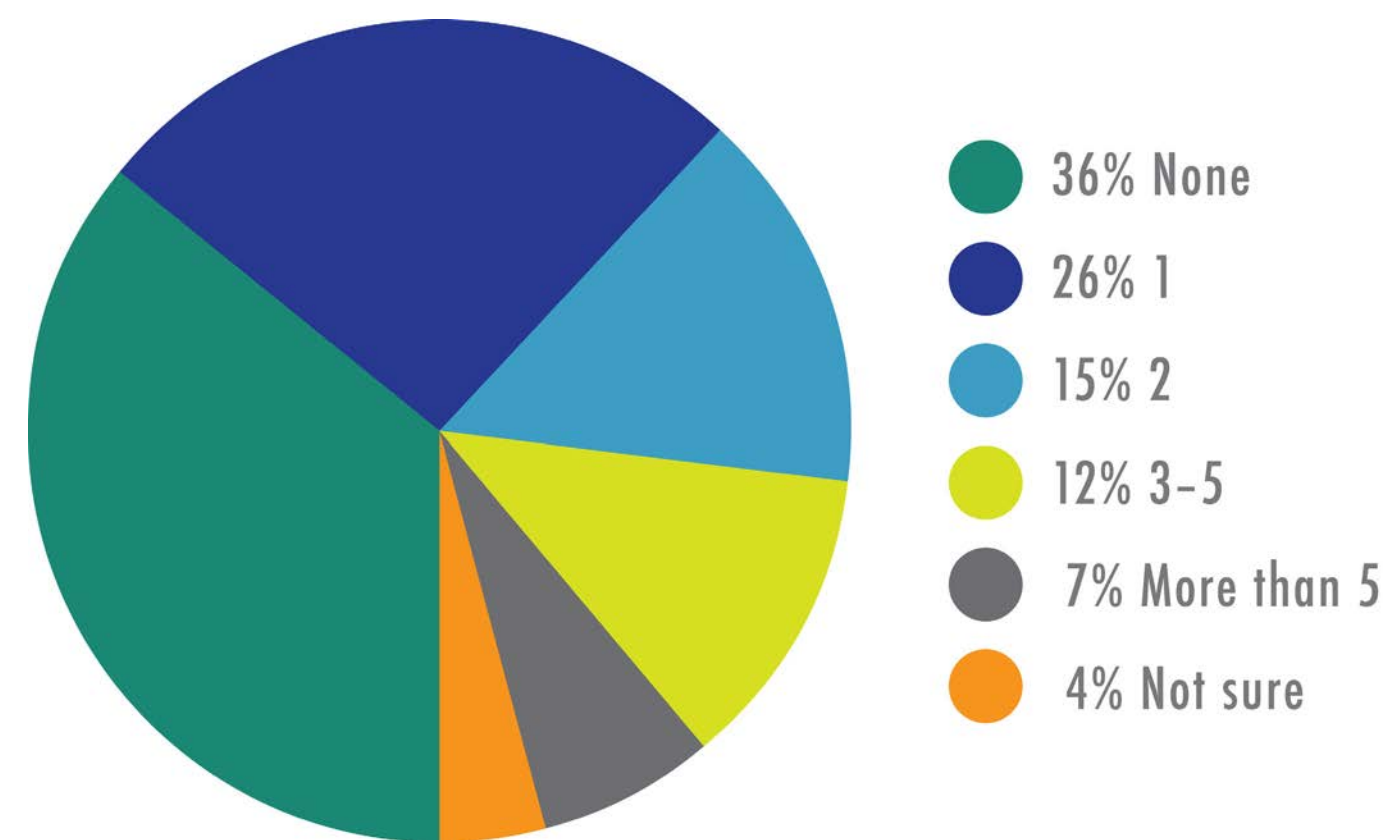
21-MAKE IT PART OF SOMEONE'S JOB

Social media isn't going away anytime soon, and the increasing number of platforms, tools, trends, and innovations for social media make it more necessary than ever to have someone knowledgeable about social media at your organization. Designate a person or a team responsible for posting on social media and responding to questions.

Some agencies are moving toward hiring a full-time communications or social media coordinator who manages social media accounts for the agency. Other agencies hire consultants to work on project-specific social media content or spread the social media responsibilities across multiple employees so that no one person is responsible for all social media activities. The most successful government social media accounts tend to be run by trusted staff who know the agency's brand and messages and can post with limited internal supervision.

Number of employees assigned to social media ►

Over half of local agency staff surveyed said that they have at least one employee who has a primary job responsibility to work on social media. Only 36% said their agency doesn't have a staff person designated to work on social media.



We needed a staff person that had experience in public communications and plain language writing skills. We created a new communications position because of the need to grow relationships with the public.

Darin Mielke, Carver County Deputy County Engineer

22-EXPAND YOUR PLATFORMS

Only after you've mastered your agency's existing platforms AND have identified a need to reach a new audience, consider branching out to new social media platforms. Social media platforms tend to gain and wane in popularity over time; while Facebook is beating out other platforms in number of users, it's also not a platform that younger audiences tend to join. Some agencies who are on the cutting edge of social media have tried newer platforms like TikTok to reach younger audiences in their community.

Some recommendations for agencies who are considering expanding to new platforms:

Make Sure You Have Time And Resources


It takes a lot of work getting a new account running and growing followers. Realistically consider what you have time and resources to do well.

Try It Personally First

Before signing up an official account for your agency, test out new platforms by joining it personally. See how people are using it and if it would be a good fit for your agency's messages.

Talk To Other Agencies

Follow other government accounts to see what kinds of content they're posting and reach out to their staff to see if they are willing to meet to discuss their successes, challenges, and lessons learned using the platform.



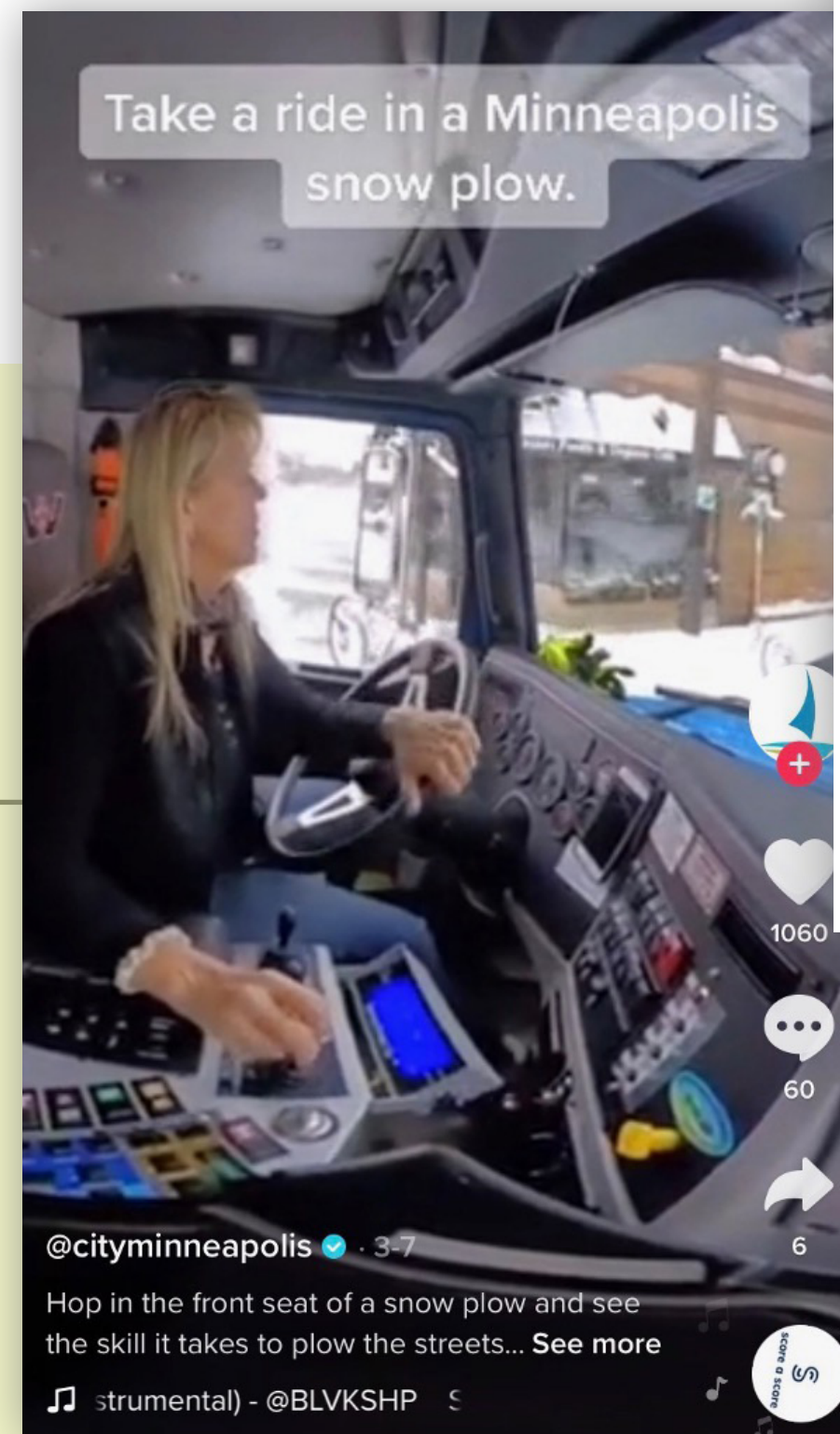
We just started a TikTok account a few months ago. The platform is primarily used by teenagers, but they are driving so why not try to connect with them? A couple of employees who were personally active on TikTok took this on for the agency. It has gone well so far, but it can be a challenge keeping up with the platform and new things that people are doing.

Mike Allende, Social Media Manager at Washington State DOT

22-EXPAND YOUR PLATFORMS, EXAMPLES

Source: City of Minneapolis

A classic 37-sec TikTok video clip with over 1,000 likes, showing what it's like to drive a snowplow.



NextDoor is a hyper-local social media platform underutilized by many cities and counties. Local governments can create a profile on NextDoor to communicate with residents at a neighborhood level.

Source: City of Saint Paul

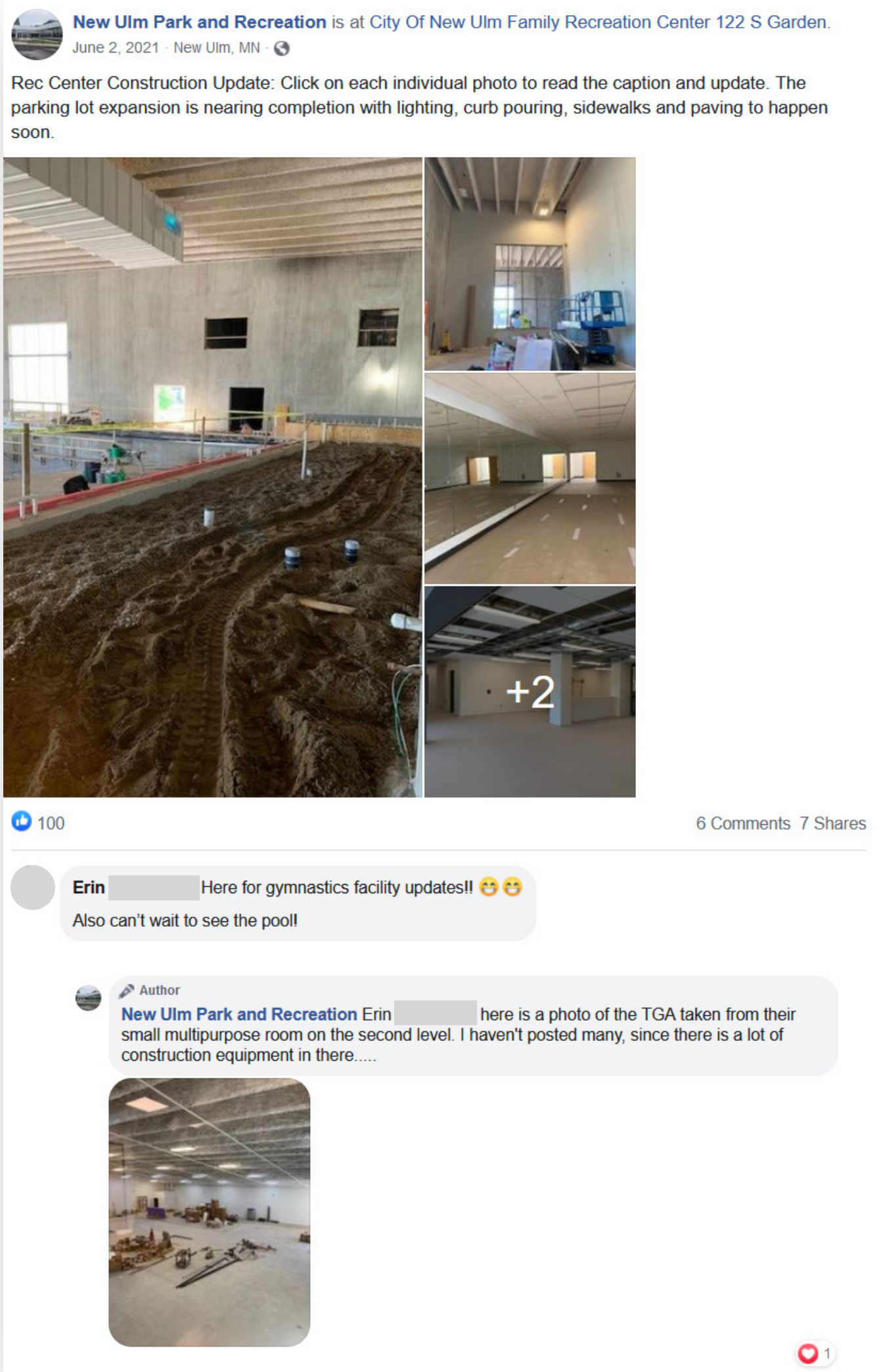


Some local agencies are turning to LinkedIn to promote, and recruit talent for, hard-to-fill transportation positions. The City of Mankato even creates video profiles of existing employees to lure candidates for openings in engineering and public works.

Source: City of Mankato

EXAMPLES OF GREAT CONTENT

City of New Ulm posted regular updates on the progress of their Recreation Center construction project. This type of photo update could be replicated for other types of projects.



Source: City of New Ulm

Short description is easier for your audience to read. Tells people who are interested where to go for more information.

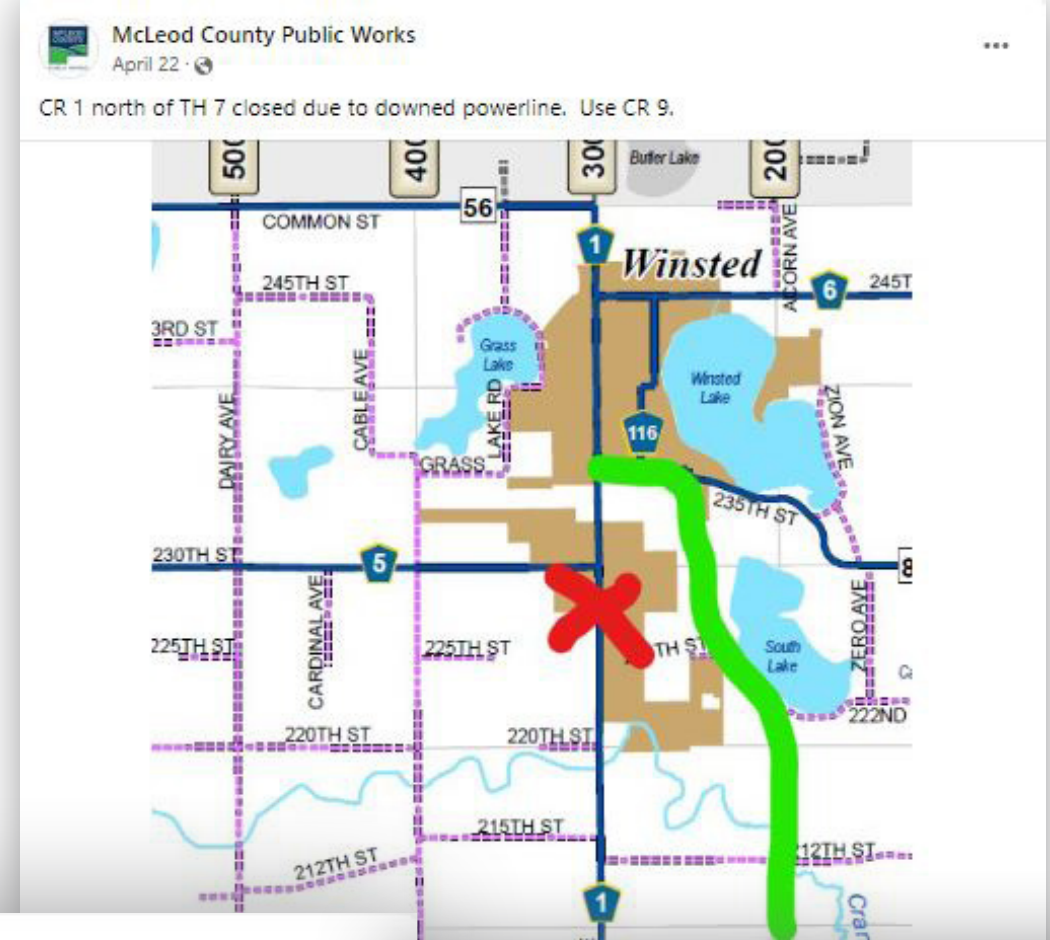
Photos provide an interesting visual for people to look at.

The post garnered many likes, and some comments and shares. The more engagement, the more likely your post will be seen by people who aren't existing followers.

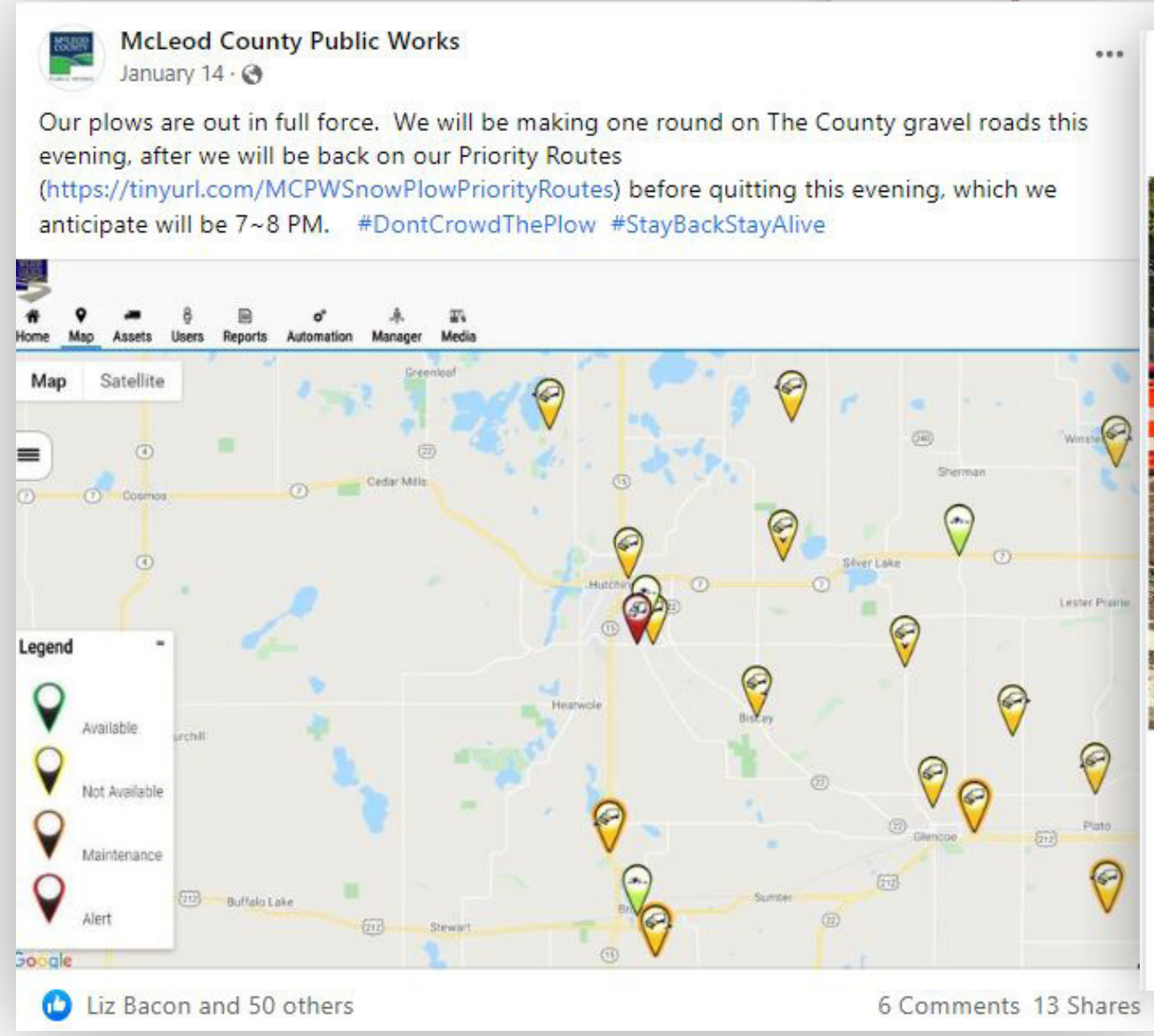
Responding to followers is a great way to connect with your community and show that your agency is listening. This response received a heart reaction.

EXAMPLES OF GREAT CONTENT

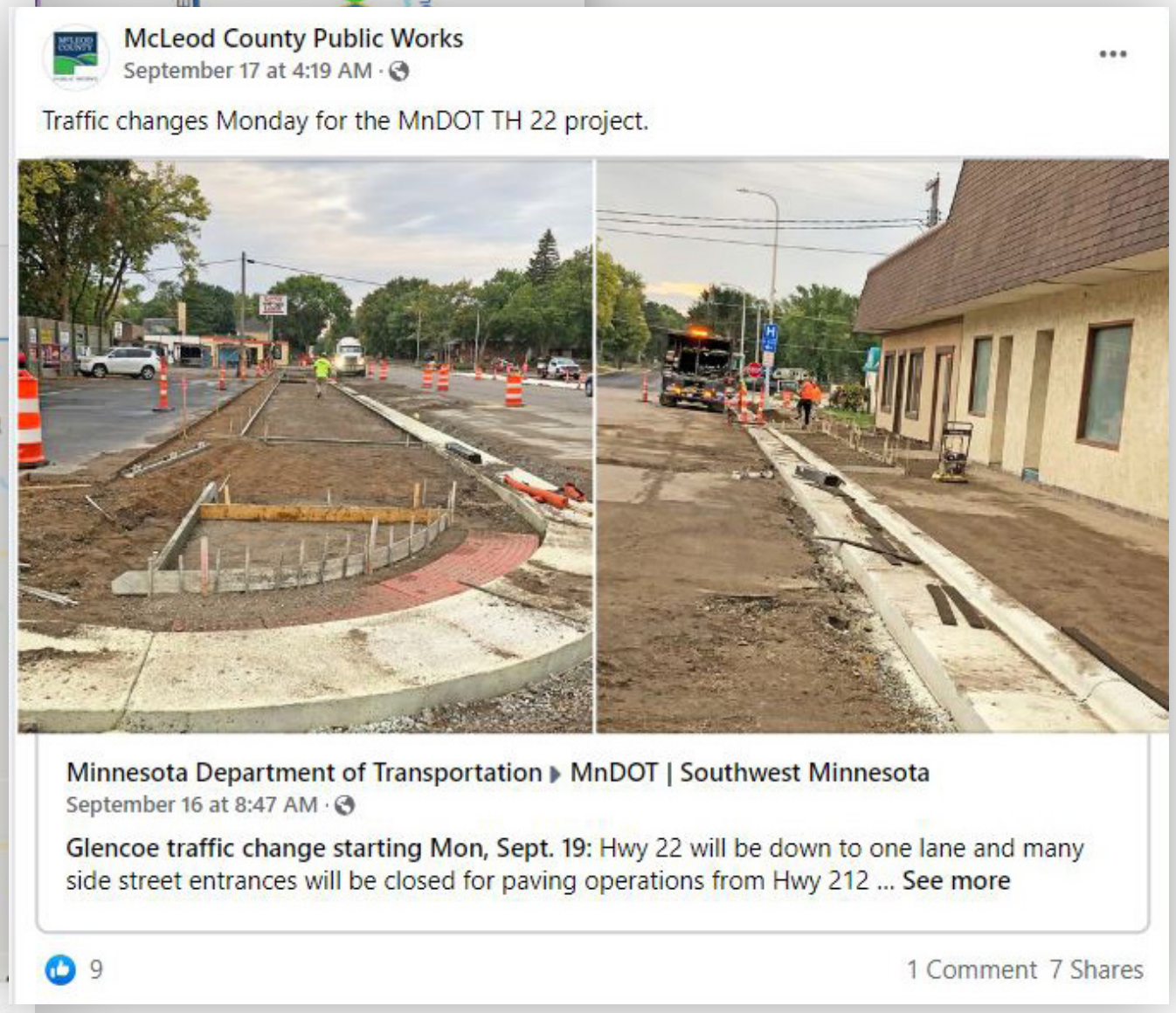
McLeod County is a rural county of less than 40,000 people without a dedicated social media staff member for public works communications. However, their public works staff regularly publish simple, but relevant content using the resources they do have, and their own creativity. Their posts have attracted 4.6K followers to their public works Facebook page.



A public works staff member utilized basic computer drawing tools to get the word out quickly about a downed power line.



A simple screenshot from a maintenance operations software system powerfully illustrates a winter storm update.



Before/after visuals are an easy, but effective way to generate interest.

Source: McLeod County

EXAMPLES OF GREAT CONTENT

City of Plymouth held a road naming contest and engaged followers on Facebook.



Source: City of Plymouth

Short description and explains the reason for the road renaming in plain language.

Eye-catching graphic with minimal text.

Post received many likes, shares and comments.

The state representative commented, gaining more visibility on the post.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This guidebook was funded by the Local Road Research Board (LRRB) on behalf of Minnesota cities and counties.

The LRRB formed a Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) to guide the research and represent the perspectives of local agencies. The 12-member advisory group was comprised of government communications managers, social media specialists, and transportation engineers.

Technical Advisory Panel

Kevin Wright (Chair)
City of Chaska

Allie Berndt
Washington County

Emilie Kastner
City of Plymouth

Emily Gunderson
City of Savage

Hannah Broadbent
MnDOT Office of
Communications

John Brunkhorst
McLeod County

Shannon Fiecke
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Joy Miciano
Zan Associates

Stacy Mann
Zan Associates

Kat Sanchez
Zan Associates

