

BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT BLOGGING

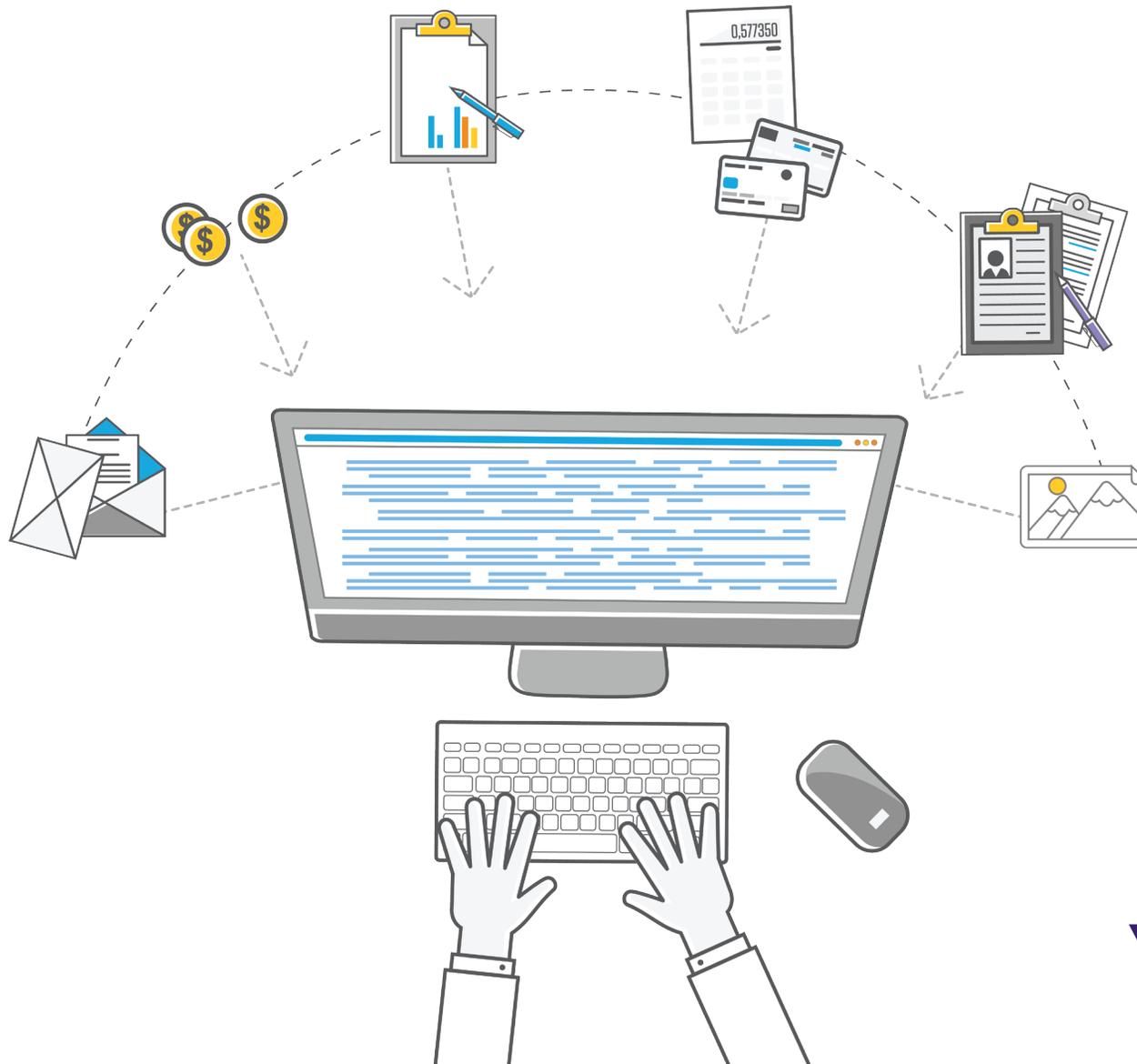


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INTRODUCTION

Blogging has long been used by private sector companies to share stories, inform customers, market goods and provide better customer support. Despite this success, Vision estimates that only 10–20% of local governments blog as a regular part of their communication strategy.

Why should governments consider a blog? Because it enables organizations to provide context and commentary around issues that need it, and it allows officials to communicate more directly with residents. It's not that your social channels and website pages cannot do this, but a blog provides a complementary channel that you own and that residents can access in one central place. This guide will walk you through best practices when getting started with a local government blog, so that you can quickly start reaping the benefits.



1. MAKE A PLAN

According to HubSpot, blogging can drive traffic to your website, help establish authority and improve long-term results for businesses. For government, web traffic and sales may not be your primary goals, but establishing yourself as the trusted, “go-to” information source can make a huge difference in the effectiveness of your engagement efforts.

To begin, think about what kind of blog or blogs you need –a communication tool for a given leader or department? A home for general news and updates? A blog tied to a specific project? Do you have someone who can comfortably incorporate this into their existing workload?

Once the blog has been defined, and your writer identified, start thinking about the target audience. Who would be interested and why? Consider taking a page from the **content**

strategy playbook and develop user personas to guide content development efforts. Blog writers should have an understanding about how those personas think, feel and speak, then shape messages accordingly. Knowing the audience can help guide the development of strategy and goals.

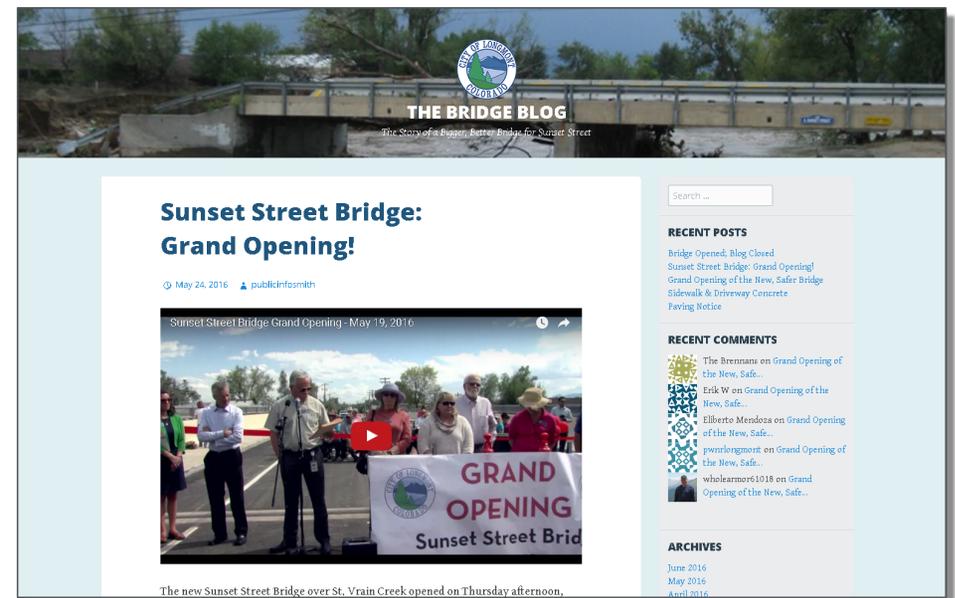
			
City Manager Rick Getschow	Eden Prairie Police Department	Eden Prairie Fire Department	Eden Prairie Liquor Blog
Latest Headline	Latest Headline	Latest Headline	Latest Headlines
#2 Best Place to Live in America	Congrats to the SWAT Team	Firefighter Recruit Open House	Cracklin' Savie Sauvignon Blanc and Mexican Shrimp Cocktail!

The City of Eden Prairie, MN has four blogs, each focusing on different areas of interest

2. SET GOALS

No one would suggest blogging for blogging's sake. Before launching a blog, consider what the goal of it will be. It could be a general communication channel or a vehicle to deliver updates on a specific issue or initiative. Setting a goal like "providing clear explanations of new policies" or "giving timely updates about roadwork closures" can take you a long way to focusing your efforts and gauging your success.

As your blog matures, check back with your goals and refine them, along with your strategies to achieve them. Goals can change over time, just like the needs of your residents.

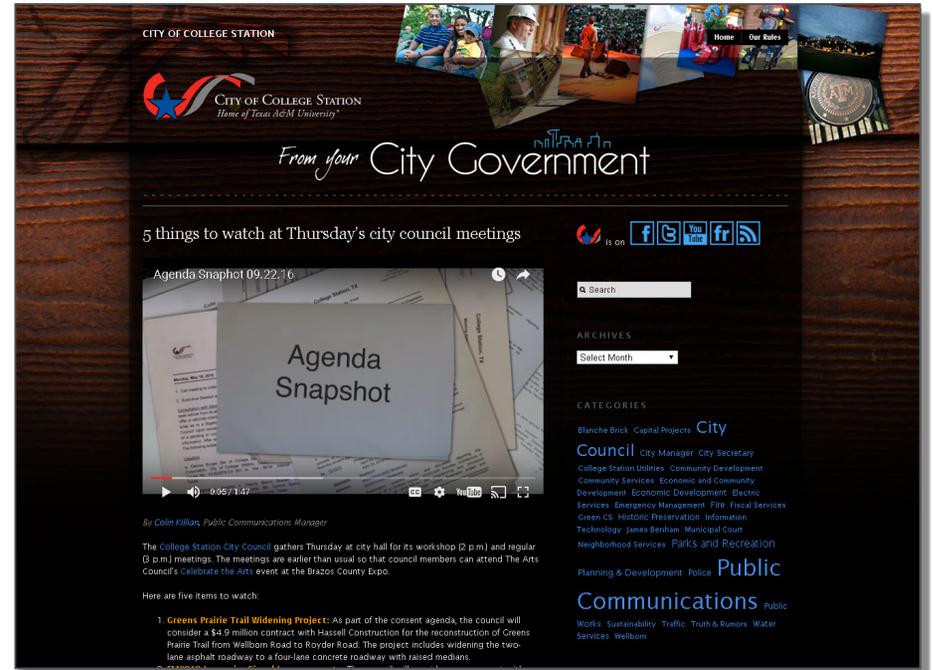


The City of Longmont, CO had a limited-time blog that focused on a bridge-building project

3. MAKE IT ENGAGING

Even if it's perfectly targeted, blog posts won't catch on with readers if the writing is dry and the headlines uninteresting. Focus on striking the right tone, and format copy so it's easy to read. Again, content strategy best practices can help in creating effective posts. Make sure to break up large blocks of copy with subheads and bulleted text where it makes sense. Write in plain language rather than legalese.

Don't be afraid to put your marketing hat on and write eye-catching headlines. "Top" lists and evocative questions can be a fun way to catch readers' attention. For example, visitors are more likely to read a post with a headline like "5 Things to Watch at Thursday's City Council Meeting" than "Council Notes from 10/15."

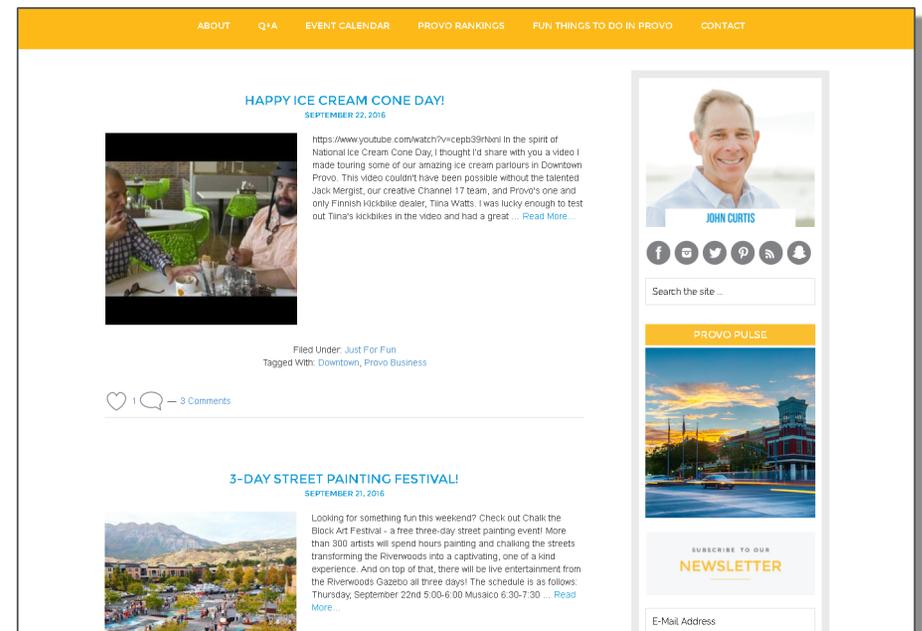


The City of College Station, TX blog calls attention to city council meeting highlights with eye-catching headlines

4. ENHANCE WITH VIDEO AND IMAGERY

Great images catch the eye and encourage engagement, and break up copy-intensive blog pages. According to **Writtent**, images can boost engagement with your post up to 50%.

Depending on your audience and topic you can take it a step further and embed GIFs or videos that help tell your story, and make your audience smile.



The mayor of the City of Provo, UT writes a blog that incorporates interesting imagery and videos

5. COMMIT TO MAINTAINING YOUR PRESENCE

One of the biggest concerns about blogging we hear from local government leaders is that they don't have time to do it. While it's true that blogging takes time, it needn't be too demanding. Writing blog posts can follow the same approach as writing for the website and social media. Like these other channels, responsibility can be shared or rotate across teams and departments. Multiple topics and viewpoints that reflect the diversity of your organization are a bonus, especially if you have only one blog. Think of blogging as part of the content creation your organization already does.

Blog posts don't need to be long and exhaustive, they just need to be relevant and reliable. Nothing looks worse than a half-hearted blog with few entries, but there's no reason to write a novel each week.



The City of Sandy, UT posts frequently to their blog about timely, general-interest topics

TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT

Bloggging has not been an obvious must-have for many local government agencies, but should be considered an untapped opportunity to connect and engage with residents. You may face concerns about time and effort, but it takes only a little of each to get started.

Once you're rolling, be prepared to refine your approach over time. The potential benefits are significant. A well-executed blog demonstrates that your organization is interested in engaging with residents while providing a lasting archive of important stories and information in a single location. Each organization has its own goals – how can blogging help support yours?





ABOUT VISION

Headquartered in El Segundo, Calif., Vision is a national leader in government website development with more than 700 government, non-profit and education clients in U.S. and Canadian communities with populations that range from less than 1,000 residents to more than 5 million. For more than 20 years, Vision has created cost-effective solutions that increase government efficiency, transparency and interactive communications with citizens. The company's powerful, easy-to-use visionLive™ content management system continues to evolve with feedback from hundreds of municipal clients. In 2016, Vision was named to Government Technology magazine's GovTech 100, a listing of leading companies developing innovative or disruptive offerings to improve or transform government. For more information please call 888.263.8847 or visit visioninternet.com/inforequest

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