



Communications Plan



CITY OF ROCHELLE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLAN

The City of Rochelle's Strategic Communications Plan provides a roadmap for building stronger trust, transparency, and engagement with our community. Developed through the nationally recognized TCU Certified Public Communicator® Program, the plan reflects best practices in data-driven strategy, listening, crisis preparedness, and employee engagement.

At its core, the plan is built around three strategic goals. First, we aim to position the City of Rochelle as the primary, trusted source of information for residents, businesses, and stakeholders. By strengthening newsletters, expanding social media and text alerts, launching direct mail campaigns, and introducing "RochelleU" educational sessions, the City will ensure that information is reliable, accessible, and engaging. Alongside these efforts, refreshed branding and signage will foster greater community pride and visibility.

Second, the plan emphasizes consistent and meaningful communication within City departments. Employees will receive information before it is released to the public, creating a sense of trust and inclusion. New opportunities for cross-departmental learning, networking, and staff recognition will encourage collaboration, strengthen culture, and help employees feel more connected to one another and the community they serve.

Third, the City will prioritize readiness for crisis communication. Through annual drills and mock press conferences, leadership teams and backup staff will build "muscle memory" so they can respond quickly, confidently, and accurately when emergencies arise. This commitment to preparedness ensures that Rochelle is ready to deliver timely and trusted updates under pressure.

The plan recognizes Rochelle's existing strengths, such as a responsive social media presence, a current website, and engaged communication channels. It also identifies opportunities to expand bilingual outreach, increase transparency in project updates, highlight employees through storytelling, and strengthen collaboration with local organizations. At the same time, it acknowledges challenges, including cybersecurity risks, misinformation, reaching non-digital audiences, departmental silos, and generational differences.

Success will be measured through tangible outcomes: higher newsletter engagement, strong participation in "RochelleU," improved employee survey feedback, and consistent completion of crisis drills. Together, these metrics reflect a City that communicates clearly, serves transparently, and listens closely.

Ultimately, this Communications Plan positions Rochelle to deliver not only information, but also connection. By treating communication as a core service, the City strengthens its role as a trusted community partner.



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All About the Hub City

The City of Rochelle is a quaint Midwestern community located at the Hub of Northern Illinois. With approximately 9,500 residents, the community is poised for growth in the coming years.

Rochelle, by referendum in 1994, adopted the Council-Manager form of City government. Rochelle is governed by a Council composed of the Mayor and six City Council Members. They adopt policies and ordinances, which are carried out by the Council-appointed City Manager. Council members, including the Mayor, are elected at large to staggered four-year terms.

Rochelle is known for three things: Planes, Trains and Grains. The Hub City is home to the Chicagoland Skydiving Center, Rochelle Railroad Park and the Kennay Farms Distillery - each of which draws visitors from across the country each year!

Rochelle offers an experience for all tastes – from relaxation to exhilaration – with that hometown feel.

Rochelle is bustling with activity in the summer months with a monthly Outdoor Market, Concerts & Movies in the parks, golf, swimming, hiking and more. The beauty of fall brings Hay Day, a trail of decorated haybales throughout our community. A Classic Downtown Christmas is celebrated in December with a fully lit parade and bustling Downtown. Spring boasts the Vince Carney Community Theater's Spring production, our annual Irish Hooley, a community-wide Easter egg hunt, and our Cinco de Mayo celebration.

Rochelle is the childhood home of actress Joan Allen. Ms. Allen attended Rochelle Township High School as a teen where she was nominated "Most Likely to Succeed." As a three-time Oscar nominee and Tony award winner, she has done just that. Rochelle makes the perfect film location for large-scale movie production. "A Thousand Acres," starring Michelle Pfeiffer was filmed throughout the Downtown and in the country surrounding the community. More recently the movie "At Any Price" was filmed Downtown Rochelle featuring the iconic Hub Theater as a backdrop. The movie starred Zac Efron and Dennis Quaid.





Our Mission

To provide a safe, connected, and innovative community with professional, personalized, and impartial services.

Our Vision

A vibrant community where all can thrive.



Our Values



The City of Rochelle values open, honest two-way communication between residents, business owners, staff and the City Council. The City is committed to listening to the input provided by all stakeholders. We are dedicated to fostering trust and advocating for the best interests of our residents.



Strategic Priorities



**Community Inclusivity
& Engagement**



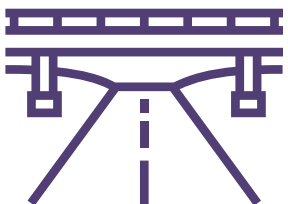
Core Service Delivery



**Economic
& Business Development**



**Financial Management
& Stability**



**Infrastructure Effectiveness
& Improvement**

Communications & Engagement



In the City of Rochelle, communications is a central and strategic function within the City Manager's Office. Effective public relations prioritizes building trust, fostering transparency, and strengthening the relationship between the City and its residents and employees. The overarching goal of Rochelle's Public Relations efforts is to ensure that true, accurate, and timely information is consistently provided to residents, businesses, and community stakeholders.

The department's responsibilities extend beyond traditional communications. Staff are actively engaged in assisting residents with connecting to external resources, collaborating with local organizations and nonprofits, and supporting the planning and coordination of community events. These efforts ensure that residents have access to both City services and broader networks of support, while also promoting civic engagement and community pride.

Leadership & Oversight

The Director of Community Engagement plays a dual role, serving not only as the Assistant to the City Manager but also as the direct overseer of several customer-facing City departments. This includes the City Clerk's Office, Utility Billing and Customer Service, Fairways Golf Course, and the Rochelle Railroad Park. By integrating communications with these vital service areas, the City ensures that the community's first points of contact are guided by a strong commitment to responsiveness, clarity, and service excellence.

Public Relations Team & Department Collaboration

The Public Relations function is truly a collaborative effort across multiple City departments. While the Director provides overall leadership, team members from various departments contribute their skills and expertise to maintain a strong, engaging, and informative presence. Staff from the Police Department, Fire Department, Utility Billing, City Clerk's Office, and Water/Water Reclamation actively assist in creating graphics, drafting messaging, and managing the City's social media platforms.



Communications SWOT Analysis

The City of Rochelle's communications efforts show clear strengths both internally and externally, with reliable tools such as the intranet, e-mail updates, display screens, newsletters, social media, and a well-maintained website that provide timely information to employees and residents alike.

Collaboration with local media, quick responsiveness on digital platforms, and accessible leadership further reinforce the City's communication foundation.

However, challenges exist. Internally, not all staff have equal access to e-mail, front-line employees are not consistently engaged for input, and interdepartmental communication remains fragmented with employees located in many facilities across the city.

Externally, reaching residents who are not active online, addressing generational differences, and improving bilingual communication are ongoing hurdles. Across both areas, there is also a perception of secrecy or lack of transparency, as well as risks of apathy, burnout, or distrust to be considered.

Opportunities are plentiful, with potential to expand digital platforms like Teams and Office 365, increase text alert reach, record trainings for shift staff, and create initiatives that help employees connect across departments.

Externally, stronger ties with the business community, community organizations, and faith groups could broaden outreach, while storytelling, video, and employee spotlights can humanize City services.

Improved bilingual resources and direct mail campaigns could bridge gaps with non-digital audiences.

Threats such as cybersecurity risks, misinformation, political pressures, poor interdepartmental collaboration, cultural awareness gaps, and general public apathy remain pressing concerns. Together, these factors highlight the importance of building trust, fostering inclusivity, and diversifying communication methods to better serve both employees and the broader community.

Communication Channels

EXTERNAL CHANNELS

Community Newsletter
Text Alerts
Direct Mail
Radio - The Coyote 102.3/93.5
Newspaper - Rochelle NewsLeader
TV - WIFR, WTOV, WREX
Utility Bill Stuffer/Memo
Mobile App
Community Events
Surveys
Meeting Broadcasts

WEBSITES

City of Rochelle
Rochelle Municipal Utilities
Fairways Golf Course
Rochelle Railroad Park
Enjoy Rochelle
Excel in Rochelle
Rochelle Municipal Airport

INTERNAL CHANNELS

All Users E-Mail
Employee Newsletter
Employee Self Serve
Department Screens
Text Alerts

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook:

City of Rochelle
Rochelle Municipal Utilities
Rochelle Illinois Police
Rochelle Fire Department
Fairways Golf Course
Rochelle Railroad Park
Rochelle Municipal Airport

Instagram:

City of Rochelle
Rochelle Illinois Police

YouTube
LinkedIn



Strategic Communication Goals

1

Establish the City of Rochelle as the primary source for stakeholders to obtain information related to local government departments & services.

2

Communicate uniformly and consistently across all City departments and create a sense of pride in the role our employees play in serving the community.

3

Regularly drill the crisis communications plan with staff and backups.





GOAL 1: EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

**ESTABLISH THE CITY OF ROCHELLE
AS THE PRIMARY SOURCE FOR STAKEHOLDERS
TO OBTAIN INFORMATION RELATED TO
LOCAL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS &
SERVICES.**





Objective 1.1: Strengthen and enhance external communications efforts.

Strategy: Utilize various channels to engage with all stakeholders through identified topics that need additional education.

Tactics:

- Promote City services through an annual content calendar. Include all services such as vital records, waste management, electronics recycling, small business development, utilities, employment and public safety.
 - Goal completion: 2026
 - Measurement: Completion
- Create a more robust monthly newsletter that includes construction project updates and ask-us-anything two-way communication opportunities.
 - Goal completion: 2025
 - Measurement: Increased open rate by 3%. Increase resident feedback in Ask Us Anything by 3%.





Objective 1.2: Create educational opportunities for stakeholders.

Strategy: Grow RochelleU program to incorporate Citizens Academy and small business educational series for residents, employees and business owners.

Tactics:

- Host a monthly RochelleU session with a new topic each month.
 - Goal completion: 2026
 - Measurement: >10 Participants per session
- Create social media and newsletter marketing content to coincide with RochelleU topics.
 - Goal completion: 2027
 - Measurement: 3% Increase in Engagement





Objective 1.3: Foster a sense of community pride amongst stakeholders.

Strategy: Following citizen feedback on the 2015 logo color change, reignite a sense of community pride by updating branding colors from red to purple.

Tactics:

- Update style guide to include purple and implement via digital marketing methods.
 - Goal completion: 2026
 - Measurement: Sentiment analysis, listening
- Update wayfinding signage and City Hall sign to incorporate purple.
 - Goal completion: 2026
 - Measurement: Sentiment analysis, listening





GOAL 2: INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

**COMMUNICATE UNIFORMLY AND
CONSISTENTLY ACROSS ALL CITY
DEPARTMENTS.**

**CREATE A SENSE OF PRIDE IN THE ROLE OUR
EMPLOYEES PLAY IN SERVING THE
COMMUNITY.**





Objective 2.1: Inform employees before the community.

Strategy: Communicate information regarding projects, programs, policies and opportunities to all employees on a regular basis, informing employees of City initiatives before the community.

Tactic:

- Release monthly e-newsletter content to employees before the general public via employee e-newsletter. Include opportunities for ask-us-anything in employee version of newsletter. Send all news releases and announcements to employees before public release via email and departmental display screens.
 - Goal completion: 2026
 - Measurement: Employee survey data, listening





Objective 2.2: Develop a thorough cross-departmental understanding amongst employees.

Strategy: Ensure that all employees have an understanding of the general function and role of departments outside of their own.

Tactic:

- Create a monthly educational opportunity for employees, rotating amongst departments.
 - Goal completion: 2027
 - Measurement: Participation & survey data.





Objective 2.3: Introduce employees to one another and the community.

Strategy: Break down silos by introducing employees to one another and the community via internal and external communications content.

Tactic:

- Create digital content to include in newsletters, social media posts and departmental screens to recognize & introduce employees.
 - Goal completion: 2027
 - Measurement: Participation & survey data, listening opportunities





GOAL 3: CRISIS COMMUNICATION

**BE PREPARED TO COMMUNICATE
QUICKLY AND ACCURATELY DURING A
CRISIS.**





Objective 3.1: Establish muscle memory with crisis communications plan amongst staff.

Strategy: Utilize a variety of resources to drill the plan including tabletop exercises, communications training and Incident Command System (ICS) training.

Tactic:

- Plan annual crisis communications drill to include mock press conference for leadership team & backup staff.
 - Goal completion: 2028
 - Measurement: Completion. Listening to ensure confidence in carrying out the plan.





APPENDIX



SWOT Analysis – Internal Communication

Developed via discussion & survey results

Strengths

Department display screens, ESS intranet, accessible HR team, e-mail communication from City Hall

Weaknesses

Front-line staff is not asked for input, interdepartmental communication, not all departments have easy access to e-mail, employees are not acquainted with one another, messages only come in one format sometimes, perception of secrecy from management to front-line, staff in many buildings

Opportunities

Recording internal training & presentations for shift staff, text alerts, allowing anonymous feedback, creating opportunities for employees to get to know one another, better cross-department job planning, utilize teams and office 365 platform to its fullest capabilities, develop an employee “yearbook” with photos & titles, combine facilities

Threats

Cybersecurity, burnout, too many emails, apathy, shift schedules, departmental division, poor customer service, lack of communication with City Manager, lack of trust, silos



SWOT Analysis – External Communication

Obtained via survey

Strengths

Social media, newsletter, collaboration with local media, website is current, quick responses on Facebook, mobile app

Weaknesses

Reaching those without social media, reaching those who have not signed up for e-news, lack of promotion of utility billing & construction projects, bi-lingual communication, generational differences

Opportunities

Improved communication with business community, improved bilingual communication, using direct mail to reach those not on social media/newsletter, highlighting individual employees, more text alerts, more notification of projects that affect specific addresses, increased transparency, collaboration with churches or local organizations, video, storytelling

Threats

Cybersecurity, politics, disinformation, misinformation, upset customers, lack of contact information available, lack of knowledge on what the City does, lack of internet or phone access, trolls, poor communication between departments, lack of trust, lack of cultural awareness, apathy



Additional Links

[Social Media Policy](#)

[Brand Style Guide](#)

[Crisis Communications Plan](#)

[How the City Communicates Handout](#)

[Communications Functions & Team](#)

