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**POLICY**  
**TOWN OF WEST BOYLSTON**  
**SELECT BOARD**

**Communication Plan**

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# **Town of West Boylston, Massachusetts**

## **Communication Plan**

### **Introduction**

The Select Board members of the Town of West Boylston, Massachusetts, value citizen participation in every level of local public administration and seek to promote awareness of conditions, topics, and plans for current and future goals. Leaders also recognize and value the wealth of good information, talents, and resources that the people of West Boylston possess, and they affirm that it is important to increase the Town government's understanding of people's concerns, ideas, and values, so that they can be utilized to make better decisions. To these ends, Town government must identify, create and budget adequate resources to engage people and civic groups to enable them to continue to be an effective part of the Town's decision-making process. Adopting and implementing a communication plan ensures that communication is effective, efficiently transmitted, and responsive.

Much of the Town's overall success is shaped by the quality of its communication efforts. It follows that a proactive approach helps foster effective two-way communication. In West Boylston's case "proactive" includes:

- Engaging residents early;
- Boosting public participation;
- Creating new channels to distribute information;
- Having conversations with the public;
- Providing information that is clear and accurate;
- Keeping residents informed; and
- Listening to the public's ideas, concerns, and perspectives.

### **Goals of the Communication Plan**

- Ensure the Select Board and Town Administrator are an active and integral part of the overall Town Communication Plan.
- Improve Town communication to and from West Boylston voters, businesses and organizations.
- Improve two-way communication within the Town organization.
- Enhance and improve community and media relations.
- Increase awareness, interest and participation of the public of West Boylston in government goals and activities.
- Break down feelings of "us vs. them" between the Town government and the residents of West Boylston, between elected officials and staff, and between departments and agencies.

- Increase awareness, interest and participation of Town employees in the goals and activities of the Town.
- Build organizational pride among employees and foster positive identification with the Town government as a whole.
- Actively listen to residents' input and communicate information that acknowledges their input.

### **Guiding Principles**

Open Two-Way Communication – Ensure that information is shared throughout the community and the organization emphasizing two-way information flow.

Community Problem-Solving – Provide the public with complete, accurate, and timely information to enable them to make informed judgments. This will help the Town make the best decisions.

Proactive – The plan gives the Town the opportunity to tell its story rather than rely exclusively on others to interpret the Town's actions, issues, and decisions.

Decentralized – Strengthen direct communication between elected officials, Town departments, and the public rather than trying to funnel all information through a central point of contact or department. This provides for more knowledgeable discourse, strengthens accountability and also makes it easier to access or provide information on Town activities.

Inclusive – Including everyone in the process builds teamwork and a feeling of belonging, breaking down feelings of us vs. them, which are common in many town governments. The goal is to include everyone who cares to participate and to motivate those who are not currently engaged.

Strong and Consistent Messages – A successful communication plan is built on strong themes and is more effective than one with unrelated and scattered messages. The communication plan should support, reinforce and reflect the goals of the Town government as established by the Select Board and Town management, thus underscoring the idea of an organization with one common purpose: enhancing the public good.

Legal Compliance – The Town of West Boylston complies with legal requirements to publish information and provide public records according to the laws and regulations of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Such compliance includes, but is not limited to, posting meeting announcements 48 hours in advance on the Town website in accordance with the Open Meeting Law (MGL c. 30A), publishing an annual report (MGL c. 40, s. 49), providing access to public records under the Public Records Law (MGL c. 4 s. 7(26) and c. 121 of the Acts of 2016), posting and publishing election notices (MGL c. 39, s. 6), posting and/or publishing procurement notices (MGL c. 7, c. 30, s. 39M, c. 30B, c. 149), publishing announcements and other documents required by such regulatory agencies as the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Public Health, the Division of Elections, and other agencies governing municipalities too numerous to list here.

## **Targeted Audiences**

Identifying and prioritizing target audiences are key components of a communication plan. Without such identification, a communication plan can slip into a "ready-fire-aim" approach rather than a planned "ready-aim-fire" approach.

### Primary Target Audiences

- People of West Boylston  
The people of West Boylston are the highest priority targeted audience. Strengthening the relationship between Town government and residents is the starting point of a sound communications plan.  
  
There are numerous subsets to this audience: neighborhoods, business clubs and organizations, schools, age groups, civic associations, interest groups, etc.
- Members of Town boards, commissions and committees  
While these people are covered under the broad umbrella of People of West Boylston, the work they do on behalf of the community and government makes them a distinct and specific target audience.
- Town Employees  
People employed by the Town of West Boylston in its various departments and agencies are an integral part of the success of the communication plan. Each individual reflects the organization in their daily work.  
Labor unions are included here.
- News Media  
The media are important because their coverage of the Town government can have significant influence on the image of government by the public. Media includes a variety of print, broadcast, and on-line organizations.

### Secondary Audiences

- People outside of West Boylston, including area residents who primarily work and visit in West Boylston.
- Other local governments in Worcester County, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and beyond.
- Municipal government trade and advocacy associations and organizations.

## **Strategies and Actions**

### Strategies

- Expand our communication research program, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods to measure attitudes and opinions.

- Continue to employ a multi-media and multi-level communication approach and monitor and fine-tune the existing communication tools and seek additional tools. What worked in the past may have outlived its usefulness and may need to be abandoned and replaced with something else. Some people absorb information audibly and others absorb information visually. Be sure that the communication tools are diverse in order to reach various segments of the targeted audiences.
- Use interactive communication tools and techniques wherever and whenever possible to involve target audiences in the communication process and increase their commitment to the idea of community problem solving.

### Actions

- **Market Research**  
Conduct attitudinal surveys and focus groups. The method of implementation should include a diverse set of tools rather than just one form (paper surveys) as in years past. The implementation must reach a broad spectrum of West Boylston residents so that the results accurately reflect the demographic make-up of the community.
- **Communication Audit**  
Conduct a communication audit. It is useful to review the tools we have in place and our overall communication efforts in order to determine what more can be done. Use an outside firm to conduct a communication audit of the Town's outreach tools to determine what is missing, and identify tools that may be outdated and tools that need to be added.
- **Communications Training**  
Provide communication counseling and training for Town officials and staff. This tactic includes communication counseling/training with the Select Board, Town Administrator and Department Heads as well as mid-managers and members of Town commissions, committees and boards. We all *think* we do a good job of communicating, but without the benefit of others telling us their perception of how well we communicate, we may never improve.

## **Communication Tools**

### External

#### ***Web Page***

Description: Comprehensive web site designed to enable West Boylston website publishers to post information from any desktop computer. The site contains news items, department listings, calendar of Town meetings and events, Town Bylaws, agendas and minutes for commissions, committees, and Select Board. It offers easy access to Town programs, services, documents and more. Viewers can request that news items agendas, calendar postings etc. be automatically e-mailed when posted.

Objective: To provide "one-stop" access to Town information via the World Wide Web and cross reference information so that it is accessible from a variety of entry points.

Strengths: Extremely flexible and easy to read with a powerful search tool. Easy to keep current and to add or delete information.

Weaknesses: Is only available to people with Internet access.

Audience: Anyone with access to the Internet.

### ***Social Media***

Description: The West Boylston Police and Fire Departments use Facebook to connect to audiences. The Council on Aging also uses Facebook. This tool can be broadened to provide a more general town-wide page.

Objective: To provide immediate communication via the World Wide Web.

Strengths: Extremely flexible and easy to read with a powerful search tool. Easy to keep current and to add or delete information.

Weaknesses: Is only available to people with Internet access and social media accounts. Lack of timely postings may discourage the audience.

Audience: Anyone with access to the Internet.

### ***West Boylston Public Access TV***

Description: WBPA - TV is the name of West Boylston's public access television station and programming. WBPA – TV broadcasts meetings of many of our town boards and committees. Meetings are also posted to YouTube and wbpa-tv. Coverage of local events is provided as the budget allows, such as the Memorial Day parade, Candidates' Night, graduations, and concerts. WBPA-TV is also available to assist Town departments and community groups to produce videos that benefit the community.

Objective: Use public access television to provide information about Town issues to the community.

Strengths: Established audience of viewers.

Weaknesses: Television viewers tend to "surf" channels and land on the public access channels by chance. Lack of seasoned staff, who can consistently support and improve coverage. In addition, this service is only available to residents who have Charter Cable service.

Audience: West Boylston Public Access Cable Television viewers.

### ***Newsletters***

Description: Various departments prepare and disseminate newsletters (e.g., the Council on Aging's West Boylston Senior Community Newsletter, and the Library's newsletter/event calendar).

Strengths: Easy to write and distribute.

Weakness: Not always "picked-up" and used by the media.

Audience: Various targeted audiences depending on the message.

### ***Interpersonal Communication***

Description: Face-to-face communication between town officials and the public is a valuable communication tool.

Objective: To convey accurate and useful information to select individuals or small groups. To receive information about popular sentiment and perceptions.

Strengths: Develops community engagement and builds community involvement. Provides opportunity for immediate exchange of information and flexibility about a wide range of topics.

Weaknesses: Easy to misconstrue information on both sides of the conversation.

Audience: Select individuals and small groups.

### ***Public Meetings/Hearings/Forums***

Description: In addition to the regularly scheduled Select Board, Planning Board, and assorted committees and commission meetings, which are always open for public comment, other public hearings targeted towards specific issues are also held as needed.

Objective: To present the community with an opportunity to express opinions and give input on specific Town issues.

Strengths: Attendees hear the opinions of others and have a greater appreciation for the issue as a whole beyond their own personnel opinions.

Weaknesses: Often attracts the same people again and again. Available spaces to meet are limited by Fire Code seating capacity.

Audience: Either broad-based residents, or specific targeted group.

### ***News Releases***



Description: A prepared news item about Town of West Boylston business. News releases should be timely and relevant and contain the facts of the information. The release should include basic information: who, what, where, when, why, and how.

Objectives: To provide the local media timely, accurate, and useful news about the Town of West Boylston. Releases are emailed to the local media.

Strengths: Easy to write and distribute.

Weakness: Not always "picked-up" and used by the media.

Audience: Local media.

### ***Public Service Announcements (PSA)***

Description: 30 second ad spots that air randomly on West Boylston Media cable television.

Objective: To call attention to Town programs and upcoming public meetings.

Strengths: Inexpensive, broad distribution, recognizable as Town of West Boylston information.

Weaknesses: Airs during non-prime time, limited creativity, competes with many other ads.

Audience: West Boylston residents.

### ***Annual Town Report***

Description: A comprehensive book for all residents, which includes information on finances, town meeting actions, departmental functions, vital statistics, and more. The Town Report is posted on the Website.

Strength: Easy to read, easy to reference.

Weaknesses: Produced only annually.

Audience: West Boylston residents.

### ***Electronic Sign Board***

Description: Electronic Sign Board on the Common is located on a well-traveled intersection and advertises elections, town meetings, and notices about town events and programs. The Town also uses temporary sign boards to advertise elections and town meetings.

Objective: To encourage high voter turnout for elections and town meetings. To encourage attendance at events and programs.

Strengths: Easy to set up and take down using West Boylston employees. Easy to read and timely.

Weaknesses: Does not reach voters who do not travel during the times when signboards are set up. Conveys only the most basic information.

Audience: All users of West Boylston roads.

### ***Constable Postings***

Description: The full texts of election warrants and town meeting warrants are posted by the Constables at Town Hall, United States Post Office, and other places as required by law. Posting by the Constables is a legal requirement for elections and town meetings.

Objective: To encourage high voter turnout for elections and town meetings and to inform the voters of the candidates for office and the content of warrants.

Strengths: Easy to set up and take down using the Constables. Contains the full text of election and town meeting warrants.

Weaknesses: Does not reach voters who do not visit those locations. Static display of information.

Audience: All registered voters.

### ***Code Red -- Reverse 911***

Description: An emergency message system that sends important information over the telephone to all known West Boylston telephone numbers. Code Red is activated by the West Boylston Police and Fire Departments, Water Department and DPW.

Objective: To provide immediate communication via telephone to the entire town or to targeted geographic areas about an emergency or other vital information.

Strengths: Conveys accurate and immediate information in times of emergency.

Weaknesses: Is only available to residents with a listed telephone number. There is a danger that the Code Red system may become ineffective if over-used to convey non-emergency, routine information.

Audience: Anyone who may be affected in an emergency.

### ***Annual Budget***

Description: Detailed and comprehensive budget document that lays out the proposed annual budget. The budget report provides detailed information on proposed spending for each Town function.

Objective: To convey accurate and useful information to the Select Board and Finance Committee, and voters to enhance decisions about the annual budget.

Strengths: Presents complex information in a unified and easy-to-read format. Contains explanations of important funding initiatives and strategies.

Weaknesses: Static information that is updated no more often than annually.

Audience: Web site viewers and Town Meeting participants.

### ***Master Plan/Comprehensive Plan/Open Space and Recreation Plan***

Description: The West Boylston Master Plan, which was formally adopted in 2005, conveys important information about the characteristics and features of the Town and provides goals and objectives for developing the town according to the values and ideals of the community. The Town Comprehensive Plan is currently being revised and a new Plan is expected to be adopted in the fall of 2020 and will be revised. The Open Space and Recreation Plan was finalized in August of 2018. All of these documents are available on the Town website.

Objective: To convey accurate and useful information about the Town and to describe concrete steps for developing housing, preserving the community's character, promoting economic development, preserving natural resources, addressing transportation, and more. The Master Plan identifies which agency or group is responsible for carrying out its recommendations.

Strengths: Provides accurate and detailed information on a wide range of community topics. Easy to read and easy to navigate to topics of interest.

Weaknesses: Static information that is updated no more often than every 10 years.

Audience: West Boylston residents, businesses, planning agencies, and state agencies.

### ***Town Tax/Utility Bill Inserts***

Description: Bi-fold/tri-fold publication. Included in tax bills, the insert includes information submitted by Town officials about Town programs, meeting dates, tips, and general information.

Objective: To provide general Town information to the community.

Strengths: No additional postage required, easy to read, flexible and attractive format.

Weaknesses: Timeliness is limited to a three-week advance deadline. Mailed only to tax accounts in each billing cycle.

Audience: All West Boylston tax accounts (not all West Boylston households).

***Brochures and Handouts***

Description: A variety of brochures are created in-house, including information about environmental issues, water and sewer rates, veterans' services, state ethics, campaign finance regulations, and more. These are placed in display racks at Town Hall and at the Senior Center. They are mailed in response to inquiries and used as a resource by front-line staff.

Objective: To provide brief easy-to-understand information about Town services and programs.

Strengths: Inexpensive, simple, easy to create.

Weaknesses: Limited distribution.

Audience: West Boylston residents.

***Town Meeting Mailer***

Description: Seven to ten days prior to each town meeting a Town Meeting Mailer is sent to every resident. The mailer contains information on when and where town meeting is going to be held, how residents can obtain a copy of the warrant and often contains seasonal announcements.

Objective: to provide voters with information about town meeting and get a quorum.

Strengths: Provides specific information designed to targeted town meeting attendees.

Weaknesses: Often the entire warrant is not mailed out with the mailing.

Audience: All West Boylston residents.

Internal

***Web Page Broadcast E-mail***

Description: Town employees receive email directed to "all users". E-mails include news releases, Select Board agendas, minutes, training opportunities etc.

Objective: Ensure that employees hear news from the organization before reading it in the papers or hearing it "on the street".

Strengths: Quick and timely information.

Weaknesses: Not all employees have access to email or check their email on a regular basis.

Audience: Employees.

***Department Head Meetings***

Description: Directors of the various departments gather to review up-coming issues and events, necessary action items and to keep each other informed of issues in their own departments. The

meetings provide an opportunity for department heads or their staff designees to keep abreast of what is happening in all departments, not just their own.

Objective: Ensure that all departments are familiar with broad issues related to Town business.

Strengths: Presents the opportunity to share information face-to-face and to establish and maintain bonds between departments.

Weaknesses: Information is not always communicated to other departmental staff. Elected officials and volunteers often have a hard time attending.

Audience: Department Heads or Staff Designees

### ***Department Meetings***

Descriptions: Each department meets regularly to exchange information and to update each other on issues and activities within the department.

Objective: to share information with all department employees about department business and Town-wide business.

Strengths: Provides an opportunity for employees to "catch-up" and "check-in" with each other.

Weaknesses: Because of busy schedules and conflicting meetings, department meetings are not always held on a regular basis.

Audience: Employees.

### ***Financial Management Team Meetings***

Description: The Financial Management Team (FMT) started as an informal gathering of all finance team members, who advise the Town Administrator and each other on various financial matters. The FMT meets monthly.

Objective: To develop policy and strategy recommendations involving complex financial management.

Strength: Presents the opportunity to share information face-to-face and to establish and maintain bonds between departments.

Weaknesses: Meetings can be rushed and the scope of the issues can be somewhat daunting.

Audience: Accountant, Treasurer/Collector, Assessor and Town Administrator

### ***Talking Points***

Description: Reference sheets provided to presenters at town meetings related to specific and often complicated issues. Talking points generally contain the basics: who, what, where, when,

why and how of an issue and enable presenters to become familiar with an issue quickly and respond factually to public questions.

Strength: Easy to read, easy to reference.

Weakness: Reading straight from the talking points can convey the impression that the speaker is not conversant with the topic at hand.

Audience: West Boylston residents as well as external audiences.