whispir

A Guide to Multi-Channel Communication for Local Government

Increase engagement with your community to keep residents informed, safe, and connected to your message

Contents

Local Government 2021:
The State of Community Engagement

Historically, communities have placed more trust in their local government than they do state and federal governments. This has remained true throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, where trust has been more important than ever. A recent poll from The Essential Report[1] showed that while only **28%** of surveyed residents said they trusted the federal government, **42%** trusted their local council.

Still, the challenge remains for local governments to be able to maintain this trust and foster deeper connections with residents. To do so, the right tools and technology are needed. It's paramount that local governments adopt established and engaging communication tools that meet residents where they're at - within the digital space.

COVID-19 has further normalised interacting online, and with this the need for new methods of communication is growing. The most successful governing bodies are reinvigorating their current tactics as well as creating new approaches to foster community trust and connection.

Effective communication as a tool for community engagement

A successful government and community relationship is built on transparency, openness, and accountability. These pillars can only be forged through effective communication, with a focus on delivering timely messages, facilitating two-way communication, and meeting constituents in the digital space they live in.

Effective communications, by definition of being "effective", also need to make life easier for local government teams. It needs to give you and your staff time back to focus on long-term planning and new initiatives; or just time back in your day to create better work-life balance.

Communication and operational leaders that are paving the way in engaging their community are doing so with integrated and seamless communications, which effortlessly transition between email, SMS, voice, web, and more.

In this guide for local government leaders and their teams, you will discover the power of the multi-channel approach driven by Whispir's unified communications platform. You'll understand how you can use it to re-energise the relationship with your community, and galvanise your team around a software platform that increases efficiency and reduces your communication team's workload.

1. The Essential Report

Key Communication Challenges for
Local Government

1. Become a single source of truth to gain trust

The internet - particularly in the case of social media - is a powerful disseminator of information. With so much data available at our fingertips, communities begin to rely less on governing bodies as their one single source of truth.

The potential damage here is when the information being consumed is at best misleading and, at worst, harmful. The government must be proactive in delivering messages, even when the full picture is not clear, so that they are seen as the trusted source of accurate information.

2. Engage with community feedback and improve connection

An effective communication strategy should not be built as a one-way street. Instead, it must be possible to receive community feedback, collect information in real-time, and respond to queries.

Using a platform that allows for two-way communication is essential for achieving this. Two-way communication also drives higher engagement levels, as residents feel as though their voices are being heard.

3. Unified communication creates operational efficiencies

Siloed and "semi-integrated" communications software requires maintenance and manual workarounds — sucking up an employees' time.

Instead of helping, the technology becomes a distraction, or leaves teams dependent on 'heroes' to keep everything working.

The governing bodies that thrive over the next 10 years will be those that use software to do more.

The Three Pillars for Successful Multi-Channel Communications

A successful multi-channel communications plan requires dynamic channels (SMS, email, and voice) and building them into a continuous journey for each user, a common challenge that most local governments face.

A local resident may engage with you via a social post which prompts them to click through to your website or even trigger an SMS marketing/sales campaign.

With multi-channel communication, the quality of community engagement is paramount.

Some people will not engage with an email but will respond to text messages, while others will prefer one channel for reaching out to their local city council and another for finding out information about their municipality. Each resident has a different preference, and as best as possible, local governments need to offer a range of options that can accommodate all.

Community members are 'always-on', and multi-channel communication can make the difference between a resident feeling like a local government is there to support them or not.

Local governments that possess an integrated multi-channel marketing plan will continuously stand out, show they are open and trustworthy, and maximise the ability to foster community engagement.

The three pillars:

1   One size doesn't fit all

While many local governments have inhabited the digital space for some time, a legacy of static and basic rudimentary digital communication practices still exists.

98% of people might open your SMS but every individual resident within a campaign has dozens of communications channels in the palm of their hand today. And therefore, are now much more particular about what they respond to depending on the platform and timing through which the message is sent.

For many, an SMS with a basic response prompt won't be enough to fulfil their need for more information.

But by leveraging a contact's channel preferences, local government agencies can send a message via SMS or email with a direct link to a customised rich message landing page.

This can be personalised to the recipient, including more information and facilitating interactions such as booking an appointment, filling in a web form, providing feedback, and so on.

2   Creating a single view of the customer

A single customer view (SCV) provides organisations with the ability to track audience activity and their communications across every channel.

When the SCV and communications are managed via one platform, powerful reporting and analytics provides detailed insights into how interactions and behaviours will drive future engagement.

By developing a comprehensive picture of each resident and their communications journey, you will have better information for future interactions which are more engaging and meaningful, helping to increase the lifetime value of each customer.
Siloed communications are executed as a series of individual efforts connected only by similar branding. In contrast, an SCV approach connects the marketing efforts.

3 Giving your contacts 'choice' in their communications journey: Integration of channels

Many local governments adopt multiple channels as part of a comprehensive communications strategy. The problem this can cause, however, is an ever-growing collection of siloed and divided channel platforms.

Whispir gives local governments unprecedented flexibility in multi-channel communications. You can have real conversations with your audience on the platform that suits them by effortlessly pivoting across multiple channels.

- **Two-way SMS and email**

- **Voice message and IVR (Intelligent Voice Recognition)**

- **Instant video conference requests**

- **Direct message via Facebook or WhatsApp**

- **Twitter and Facebook updates (social channels)**

- **Data channels (RSS, CAP) and XML feeds**

- **Mobile web experience**
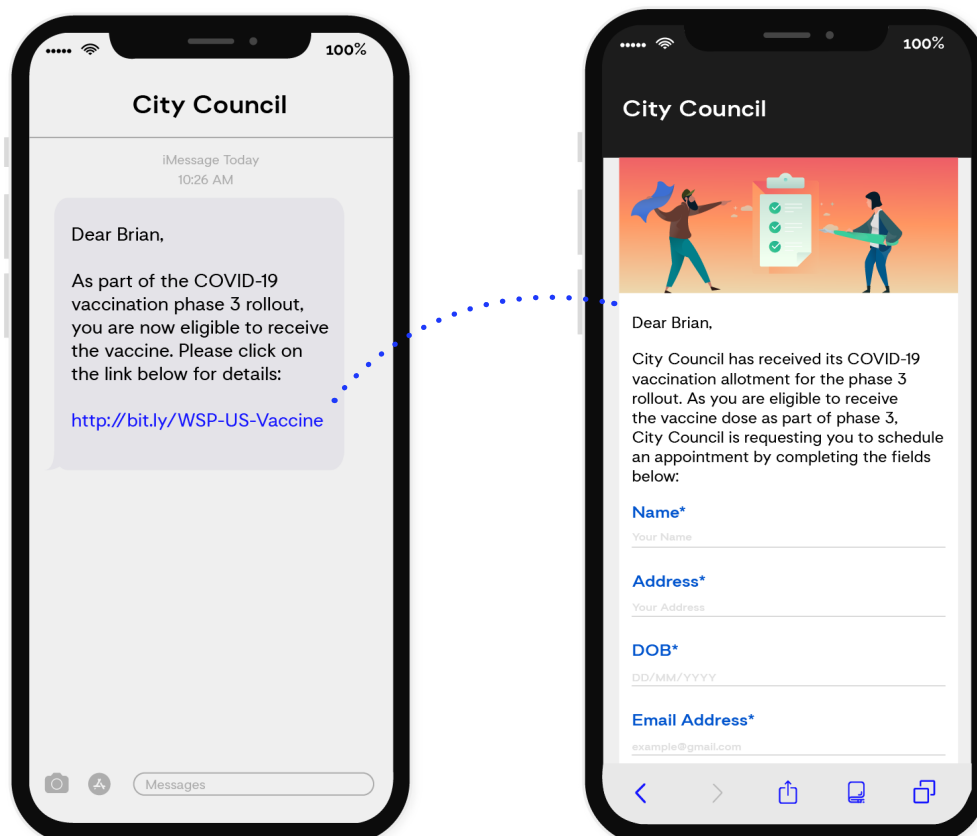
Building and Executing a Communications Strategy for Community Equity

One of the key benefits of multi-channel communication is that it provides an equitable approach that keeps all residents engaged. As a local government you have a diverse audience to speak to, so equally diversifying the channels and methods in which you communicate is paramount.

Some of the primary ways in which a multi-channel communication strategy can promote community engagement in an equitable way include:

Accessibility for all Australians

It's estimated that 1 in 6 Australians are living with a disability.
When you include temporary or situational accessibility needs - for example, someone trying to use their phone while holding their toddler in their arms, or someone with a broken arm - this number increases even further. Therefore, inclusive communication strategies must be considered for those with accessibility requirements.
Be sure to design your communications and related tools, such as online booking forms, so that anyone can use them, including those who are differently abled. For more information, visit the Website Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

Communicating in multiple languages

Australia has a diverse population, with approximately 1 in 5 Australians speaking a language other than English at home[2]. When providing information and updates, it's essential to create a communications strategy that is multilingual and readily available to diverse communities.

Two-way communication for better outcomes and feedback

Depending on the communication requirements, it can be necessary to seek feedback from residents in certain circumstances.
Local governments can measure outcomes and success as they continue to build trust through two-way communication. By responding to your community in real-time, you can keep your residents informed with important information. This is a critical requirement to ensure the most vulnerable people are protected and importantly, the information is encrypted and secure.

Leveraging Best Consumer Practices for Improved Community Engagement

Local governments don't need to consider market competition in the same way businesses do. Still, a lot can be learned from the best practices that businesses apply when engaging with consumers.

Using these six guiding principles, local governments can build engagement, support, and trust with residents.

1 **Personalised**

People want to be treated as unique individuals, and expect personalised communications that reflect their lifestyle, habits, and digital/technology footprint, as well as how they interact.

73% of customers/clients expect businesses/companies to understand their needs and expectations at an individual level while 62% want businesses to adapt based on their actions and behaviour[3].

2 **Proactive**

People expect organisations to proactively anticipate their needs and add value to the interaction.

85% of customers will share relevant information about themselves in exchange for proactive customer service[4].

3 **Predictive**

People want seamless experiences irrespective of interaction channel and department.

78% of customers expect consistent interactions across departments[3].

3. State of connected customer research, Salesforce Research, 2019
4. Reimagining Insurance: The New World of Digital Customer Engagement
5. McKinsey Center for Government: Putting Citizens First

4 Productive

People expect each interaction to produce the desired outcome and quickly.

More than one-third of people believe that the convenience of "getting things done the first time" is more important than contact options[4].

5 Convenient

When it comes to communicating with government, people want the easiest and most convenient access possible.

The majority of people say they care about speed, simplicity, and efficiency more than anything else when it comes to the process of interacting with the government[5].

6 Secure

People treat robust security protocols as a standard requirement when dealing with organisations.

84% of customers are more loyal to companies that have strong security controls. This includes securely stored communications that house confidential personal and proprietary information[4].

This is where leveraging a communication intelligence platform will empower you to rapidly enhance the quality of engagement with your local community.

3. State of connected customer research, Salesforce Research, 2019
4. Reimagining Insurance: The New World of Digital Customer Engagement
5. McKinsey Center for Government: Putting Citizens First

Building a Seamless Communications Experience with Whispir

The Whispir platform connects devices, systems, and people to create conversations, engage audiences, and streamline key communications processes, enabling local governments to:

1 Connect

Instantly send compelling and relevant interactions to your audience by SMS, chat apps, email, personalised web apps, tailored videos, and video chat.

2 Create

Use simple drag-and-drop tools to create studio-quality content in minutes without the need for designers or developers.

3 Report

Understand your audience and make data-driven decisions that lift levels of engagement with intuitive reporting features.

4 Automate

Simplify complex interactions into scenario-based triggers that make end-to-end solution workflows. Accelerate user journeys, provide proactive and seamless experiences, and manage communications.

Whispir Innovates Solutions in:

Contact Management:

Segment different audiences and tailor your communication strategy accordingly.

Messages:

Send clear and concise information directly through email, SMS, rich messages, and more.

Workflows:

Create 'workflows' that allow you to map out your user's journey and set up automated messages for each step.

Reporting:

Make your interactions intuitive and driven by data, thanks to comprehensive and insightful reports.

# Whispir's Features and Capabilities for Local Government Communications

Whispir has been helping government agencies around the globe for over 20 years create frictionless and secure end-to-end experiences. Our platform makes it easy for local governments to understand community needs, and engage with them accordingly.

Whispir is designed to be easy for anyone to use, with a simple drag-and-drop interface that requires no technical skills. Along with seamless integration, which makes it possible to rapidly import contacts and start sending messages, you can start to drive community engagement through impactful communication sooner rather than later.

Transform your vision into meaningful dialogue for your community and create a unique experience that is personalised and builds loyalty.

Key features:

- **SMS:**
  Create and send rich SMS messages securely through Whispir's online SMS platform.

- **Email:**
  Send rich, interactive emails in bulk from anywhere in the world.
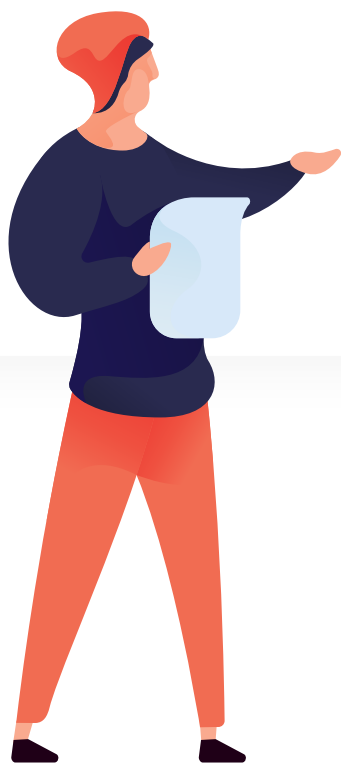
- **RSS:**
  Generate RSS feeds and publish online simultaneously across a variety of channels for maximum reach.

- **Social:**
  Send updates to multiple social media accounts using a single message, including Twitter, Facebook and Yammer.

- **Voice:**
  Create powerful voice experiences with easy-to-implement, two-way workflows.

- **Mobile Apps:**
  Incorporate our mobile apps into your communications plan and reach your audience regardless of location, device or carrier.

The Whispir Impact on Community Engagement

> " *Given the COVID-19 pandemic, we are especially pleased to be able to send members timely information and measure the member engagement using Whispir. We send ~1 million emails weekly using the Whispir API. With Whispir's help, we developed an automated process to run our campaigns via the API.* "
>
> **– Alina K**
> Senior Project Manager, LinkedIn Review

| Whispir Capability	Use Case
Alerts and Notifications	**Send important updates in real-time** Update your community with important alerts and news in real-time, utilising two-way conversations for collecting feedback and important data.
Multi-Channel Communications	**Communicate across multiple channels at-scale** Ensure all residents are engaged effectively, by utilising email, SMS, voice, and more. Build and manage multi-communication strategies at-scale that can be easily deployed, i.e. when communicating a disaster.
Segmented Audiences	**Create tailored messages for each audience type** Segment the members of your community based on relevant demographics, to truly connect and engage with individuals. Utilise data from segmented groups to better understand what is and isn't working, and adapt your communications accordingly.
Whispir's Return to Work Communications Suite	**Establish a safe return to work communications strategy** Using Whispir's pre-templated return to work communications suite, help businesses within your region navigate and manage the process effectively. Effectively communicate regulations and advice on returning to work, including workplace capacity planning, health declarations, and more.
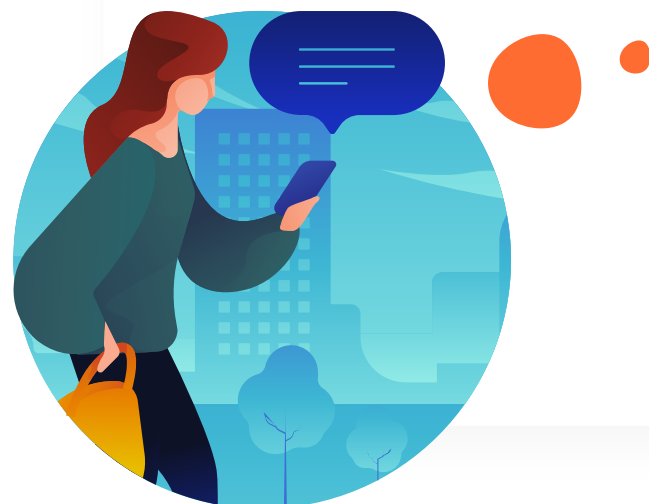
About the Whispir Platform

The Whispir platform is a multi-channel automated communication workflow solution, designed to be robust, scalable and customisable enough to meet the most stringent messaging security requirements.

Whispir's no-code platform allows local governments to create automated, effective, and great looking communication without design or development resources. Our drag-and-drop templates enable organisations to automate personalised two-way interactions for individual recipients at scale using smart logic and dynamic content.

The platform also facilitates customised actions based on certain real-time events or 'triggers' to determine responses across multiple communications channels. The Whispir platform integrates with pre-existing IT systems, enabling organisations to modernise legacy systems including systems of record (databases), systems of intelligence (AI platforms) and systems of engagement (communications channels such as SMS, voice and IoT). Reporting and dashboard functionality improve situational awareness, speed up decision making and increase critical responsiveness.

Whispir has helped a number of governing agencies around the globe, including The City of Oak Hill, Moreton Bay Regional Council, Cairns Regional Council, Shire of Noosa, and Tamworth Regional Council. Customers use the platform for critical communications such as crisis response, emergency management, community notifications and IT incident management as well as customer engagement and general operational communications.

To find out more:

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