

MANAGER'S GUIDE

Social media has changed local government in ways most managers are still navigating. A small group of vocal residents (we call them the STPs, the Same Ten People) can disrupt staff work, reshape policy conversations, and drain the morale of teams who are committed to representing their entire community.

But that's only half the story.

When both managers and elected officials understand the full picture of how their community consumes information, they become better partners. They respond differently to online noise. They make decisions with a broader sense of who they serve. And they bring the kind of leadership to social media that staff alone can't provide.

This guide is designed to help you facilitate that conversation. It works alongside a structured discussion guide you'll share with your elected official — one designed to be read together, section by section, with reflection questions that surface honest dialogue rather than prepared answers.

Our hope is that it leads to a genuine, eye-opening conversation. And ultimately, to shared understanding about where to direct your communications efforts going forward.

A note before you begin: this works best with elected officials who are open to the conversation. Not every board member will be ready, and that's worth knowing in advance. This may also challenge some of your own assumptions and staff's current approach to communications. This is deliberate and not meant to undermine your work or that of your team, but to guide you towards something more productive and well informed.

INTRODUCING THE CONVERSATION

The discussion you're about to share with your elected official wasn't built by a communications consultant or assembled from a collection of best practices pulled from typical sources. It was built by someone who has sat exactly where your elected official sits.

Sam Toles served on a City Council. He understands the weight of a public comment period. He knows what it feels like when a Facebook thread starts to feel like a referendum on your leadership. And he knows how rarely the people making the most noise represent the community you were elected to serve.

He also knows social media at a scale very few people in the world have experienced. As Chief Content Officer of Bleacher Report, head of digital at MGM Studios, and General Manager of Vimeo, he has watched these platforms evolve from the inside. He understands how they work, who they reward, and why the playbook that made sense five years ago is working against most local governments today.

What you're holding is the product of both of those experiences. Not a cookie-cutter resource designed by someone who led public communications a decade ago, but something built specifically for the conversation that most managers and elected officials have never had and urgently need to.

That's what makes this worth your time. And theirs.

HOW THIS WORKS

The discussion guide is designed to be used together, in person, with a simple process that takes the pressure off both of you to perform or persuade.

1. **Print two copies of the guide.** One for each of you. This matters as you'll each be marking your own responses independently.
2. **Read each section out loud together.** You can alternate who reads, or one of you can take the lead throughout. Either works. The point is that you're moving through the material at the same pace, in the same room.
3. **Complete the reflection questions independently and without discussion.** They're usually simple checkmarks, but there's space to write if something comes to mind. Don't compare answers yet just respond honestly.
4. **Swap guides and talk through where you align and where you don't.** This is where the real conversation happens. Agreement is worth naming. Disagreement is worth exploring; it's not a problem to smooth over. It's exactly what this process is designed to find.

WHY LOCAL GOVERNMENTS USE SOCIAL MEDIA YOUR GOALS

This opening section does something simple but important. It gives both of you a shared starting point before any of the harder material arrives.

- Read it together and let it land.
 - You don't need to editorialize or add context.
 - The framing speaks for itself.

- The Goals questions are where the conversation begins in earnest.
 - They look straightforward, almost too straightforward, but they're designed to surface something specific.
 - You and your elected official may have sat through dozens of meetings together and never once explicitly discussed what you each believe social media is for.
 - These questions create that opening.
- When you swap guides, pay attention to where your checkmarks differ.
 - If your elected official prioritizes explaining policy decisions while you've been focused on service updates and recruitment, that gap has probably been quietly shaping your communications without either of you knowing it.
 - Neither answer is wrong. But unspoken misalignment has a cost.
- The question about importance (Mission Critical down to Not a Priority) is your first honest read on how invested they are in this conversation.
 - If they land lower than you expected, don't react. Just note it and keep moving. The material ahead often shifts that answer on its own.

THE STPS: THE SAME TEN PEOPLE

This is where the guide starts to do its real work, and it's the section most likely to produce an immediate reaction from your elected official.

- The Costco analogy is deliberately disarming. Let it do its job. Read it straight through before anyone says anything.
 - The full picture needs to land before the reflection questions and interrupting it to discuss breaks the momentum.

- What you're likely to see when you swap guides:
 - Most elected officials will recognize the STP dynamic immediately.
 - Many have never had a name for it.
 - For some, just having language for what they've been experiencing is a relief.
 - For others, particularly those who have built their identity around public engagement and accessibility, this section may feel like a quiet challenge to something they're proud of.
 - If you sense that, don't push. The reflection questions will do the work.
- The three questions in this section are the most politically sensitive in the entire guide.
 - The middle one — how much online comments influence policy decisions — is the one most likely to produce a careful, diplomatic answer rather than an honest one.
 - If your elected official answers quickly and moves on, it's worth a gentle follow-up: *"Is that how it's felt recently, or more how we'd like it to work?"*
 - That's not a confrontation. It's an invitation to go deeper, which is exactly what this conversation is for.

WHY DO WE SHARE

This section shifts the conversation from what's going wrong to what's working, and where the silent majority is hiding. It tends to land with more energy than the STP section because it's fundamentally an optimistic argument. Your community is paying attention. They're just doing it somewhere you haven't been looking.

- Read the opening scenario carefully and let the working parent land before moving on.
 - The fire at Fred's place, the park groundbreaking aren't hypotheticals.
 - They're describing something that is already happening in your community right now, with or without your involvement.

- The comments vs. shares distinction is the conceptual heart of this section.
 - It's worth pausing after you read it aloud and asking before you get to the reflection questions:
 - "When did we last put something out that we think actually got shared?"
 - Let that sit for a moment.
 - The honest answer for most organizations is that they don't know, and not knowing is itself the point.
- When you swap guides, the second reflection question is the one to watch.
 - How you both honestly characterize your current content (mostly information, mostly stories, mostly flyers) tells you a lot about how you experience your communications from the outside.
 - This a perspective most managers rarely get access to.
 - Receive it as useful information, not as a grade.

OUR PLATFORMS

This section tends to produce the most visible reactions of the entire guide. The YouTube statistic stops people. The Facebook reframe, that it's essentially an older, more engaged, more retired slice of your community, often lands as genuinely surprising.

- Read it straight through without commentary. The platform descriptions are deliberately concise, and the cumulative effect matters more than any single data point.
- A few things to watch for when you swap guides.
 - The question about where constituents mean when they say "social media" almost always produces the same answer: Facebook.
 - If your elected official checks that box, it's worth a brief acknowledgment.
 - To name it as the shared reality you're both starting from.
 - This honesty makes the next conversation easier.
 - The question about where your team spends its time is the one most likely to make you uncomfortable as a manager. Your elected official may not know the answer, but they'll have a reaction to it.

- If your organization is Facebook-almost-exclusively, this is the moment that reality becomes visible to both of you at the same time. That's not a bad thing. It's exactly the kind of shared clarity this conversation is designed to produce.
- The final question about the goal of your current social media presence is your lead into everything that follows.
 - If either of you checks "this conversation is making us rethink what our goal should be," make a note of it.
 - That's the most important checkbox in this section.

OUR STORYTELLING

This is the section most likely to create a lasting image in your elected official's mind. Laura isn't a statistic or a demographic. She's a specific person living a specific life, and by the time you finish reading her Tuesday night and her yoga mat, most elected officials have already thought of someone they know who lives exactly like her.

- The Canva flyer passage is where you may feel a quiet discomfort as a manager.
 - That's intentional, and it's worth sitting with rather than deflecting.
 - The guide isn't indicting your team's effort. It's describing the environment your content is landing in.
 - There's a difference, and if the moment feels pointed, it may be worth naming that out loud: *"This is something we've been working within, not something we created."*
- The reflection questions here are designed to meet them where they actually are, not where they wish they were.
- The barrier question will likely tell you more about what's in the way than any planning conversation you've had to date.
- Listen for the answer underneath the answer.
 - "We haven't prioritized it" often means "We don't know where to start."
 - "Concerns about message control" often means "We're afraid of the STPs."

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US

What happens in this section is different from everything that came before it.

The teaching is done. This is where the two of you figure out where you are and what you think.

Most importantly, it sets the table for how you'll move forward, together.

- Read the opening of What This Means For Us aloud and then put the guide down for a moment before moving to the principles.
 - This is a natural place to breathe.
 - You've covered a lot of ground and the principles that follow ask both of you to commit to something, not just reflect on it.
- The four principles are written as questions deliberately.
 - They're not a checklist. They're an invitation to negotiate and find out where you're aligned and where one of you needs more convincing.
- When you swap guides on the Final Reflections questions, pay particular attention to which principle each of you marks as furthest from where you are today.
 - That gap is your most actionable piece of information from the entire conversation.
- The prioritization and investment questions are the most consequential ones in the guide. They're also the ones most likely to produce careful, noncommittal answers in the moment. If your elected official hedges, don't push for a firmer answer right then. Just note where they landed and let the One Final Reflection do its work first.
- One Final Reflection is not a facilitation moment. It's a human one.
 - Close your guides, set the process aside, and just answer the question honestly with one another.
 - What struck you most?
 - What do you want to be different a year from now?
- Let that conversation go where it goes. You don't need to capture it or summarize it or turn it into an action item. The value is in having it.

Take a breath and know that you've done something most managers aren't brave enough to tackle. You've just concluded perhaps your first meaningful dialogue on social media.

WHAT COMES NEXT

If this conversation surfaced something real, a gap you hadn't named, an assumption you didn't know you shared, a direction you both want to move toward, there's a next step available to you.

The reflection questions you each answered aren't just discussion prompts. They're a picture of where your organization is, and where the two of you are aligned or not. If you're inspired to be proactive and improve your organization with the most effective professional guidance available in the local government space, we've built a digital capture form that allows you to submit your completed worksheets for a personalized recommendation on how to improve your social media approach.

- It takes about ten minutes to complete.
- What we'll send back will be specific to your conversation and organization, not a generic set of recommendations.

If you're not ready for that yet, that's fine too. We are here whenever the moment feels right. This conversation was valuable on its own terms. But if you want to do something with what you discovered today, the form is where that starts.

[LINK TO FACILITATORS RECORD](#)

This facilitation guide and all accompanying materials are the intellectual property of CiviSocial. A limited, non-transferable license is granted for internal use only.

Reproduction, distribution, or adaptation of this material, in whole or in part, without prior written consent from CiviSocial is strictly prohibited.

Commercial use by consultants, agencies, or third parties is not permitted. If you received this material from a commercial source other than CiviSocial please let us know!

© 2026 Disrupter Media Consultants, LLC (D/B/A CiviSocial®). All Rights Reserved.