

GUIDE

# Listen and Serve

7 innovative ways governments can increase transparency and public participation



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## Introduction

How can social media help governments become more transparent and participatory? Stay ahead of the social curve with these seven innovative tactics.

In our white paper [“The Social Government”](#) you saw that social media is a cost-effective way for governments to increase transparency and reinvent how they serve constituents.

In this guide, you’ll gain seven new ideas to boost collaboration and harness the power of your constituents.

### By the end, you’ll find out:

- How a small town in Spain is experimenting with extreme transparency on social media—and the big lesson governments can learn from this experiment.
- How your community sensors can help increase the speed of emergency response on social media.
- Five pragmatic steps for centralizing social media from the innovative Fairfax County in Virginia, USA.
- Why your standard web analytics might be the wrong way to measure social media success (and what to track instead).

### New resources to help innovate government services with social media

Here are three additional resources to help governments embrace social media and better serve constituents.



[“The Social Government”](#) demonstrates how social media can lower the cost of services and help governments work more efficiently together. It includes case studies, expert quotes, and practical steps.



[“From Tweets to Impact”](#) shows how a centralized social media strategy helps governments to increase security and build innovative services.



[Watch our webinar](#) to discover how Fairfax County in Virginia, USA grew from just a few accounts and staff on social to a government with 30 different accounts—and almost 3 dozen staff—serving 1.1 million constituents via social media. You’ll gain practical insights from these government leaders.

## A brief note about global terminology



This guide offers a global perspective on government and social media. To account for differences in terminology from country to country, we'll use a few standard terms.

**"Constituents"** refers to the people, citizens, or taxpayers that cities, government branches, and agencies are trying to reach and serve on social media.

**"Federal government"** refers to national government branches such as the defense ministries, the U.K. Department of Education, or the National Treasury Board.

**"Local government"** refers to municipal and regional government branches such as county councils, district councils, metropolitan districts, and boroughs.

**"Agencies"** refers to ministries and organizations within governments responsible for specific functions such as public health, emergency response, or financial oversight, as well as federal organizations such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), CENAPRED, the National Environment Agency, or the British Secret Intelligence Service (MI6).

**"Departments"** refers to the divisions within federal and local government. For example, a small city might have a communications department, tax administration, public works, parks and recreation, police and fire departments. All of these departments will have different goals for using social media and perhaps different social accounts.

# 1. Activate your community sensors for fast emergency response

In a Hootsuite webinar, our customer Fairfax County in Virginia, USA revealed their strategy of two-way listening and information sharing with their community sensors.

Greg Licamele, Fairfax County's Director of External Communications, explains that these constituents act as "Facebook lighthouses, Twitter beacons, and YouTube or Periscope broadcasters. They can tell us what they are seeing and tell us what's going on."<sup>1</sup>

"These are people that can broadcast information in neighborhoods where we can not be. The community can inform us. We can inform the community. Community members can inform each other."

*Greg Licamele  
Director of External Communications  
Fairfax County*

The City of Boston, also a Hootsuite customer, uses their community as sensors in a similar way. The city invited residents to report potholes via phone, online, or by tweeting @NotifyBoston with the hashtag #spotholes.

"Our city works best when everyone works together," the late Boston mayor Thomas M. Menino announced in a news release. "With residents' help we can identify and repair potholes more quickly than if Public Works did it alone."<sup>2</sup>

In the two-week campaign, Boston's Public Works filled more than 2,000 potholes with help from social media and citizen reporting, a 333% increase in the number of citizen-generated reports compared to the same time period the previous year.<sup>3</sup>



## Expert Tip:

Use Periscope to increase transparency by live streaming events such as town hall meetings or new pilot projects. Periscope allows anyone to share and watch live video broadcasts from mobile phones.

You can also use Periscope to quickly disseminate vital information during emergency events. For example, you can ask a constituent to live stream videos of a rising flood and then instantly share this broadcast with the media and your social audience.

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## 2. Bring together innovators, departments and agencies to improve services

Local authorities could save up to £10 billion by 2020 through smarter and more collaborative use of technology and data, says a study by the UK's leading think tank Policy Exchange in the UK.<sup>4</sup>

As Martha Dorris, Director at the U.S. General Services Administration's Office of Innovative Technologies, wrote recently on the blog Digital Gov, "if your agency is looking for ways to improve the experience you provide to your customers, we recommend increasing collaboration with other agencies (federal, state, and local) to share best practices, as well as working with the private sector and nonprofits to make things easier for your customers."<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, we spoke to Ben Cathers, a Senior Strategic Solutions Consultant at Hootsuite, and asked him how governments are using social media to collaborate.

"There is always talk of having better alignment and internal communication. But we're finding social is the only tool that's actually driving ways to collaborate and bring different groups together. I remember how a government client realized that two-minute videos performed better than 10-minute videos. But changing internal policy to allow for two minute videos required collaboration across many groups to change contracts and rules and so on. Social was the driving force that allowed that to happen. It's leading to a big change in a lot of smaller governments."

*Ben Cathers  
Senior Strategic Solutions Consultant  
Hootsuite*

Governments need to break down silos, work together in new ways, and reinvent service delivery.

### **Assemble your core group**

Reach out to different departments or agencies and ask them to nominate passionate social advocates to represent their department or agency.

### **Pick a small project and work together**

Look for a small improvement to make. This could be improving how suggestions from the public are handled on Twitter or brainstorming a new format for YouTube videos. This works best when you are united around a common goal. For example, your health department might have an excellent record of success on YouTube. Is there a way groups could work together and learn from their success?

### **Share and train agencies, departments, and teams on best practices**

Now that you've solved a common problem—such as finding better ways to serve constituents on YouTube—share this new knowledge across teams, departments and agencies. Launch a training webinar via WebEx or GoToMeeting to spread this knowledge to other levels of the government.

### 3. Improve service by measuring task completion rate

One metric that we've found to be excellent for many government social media and digital initiatives is called task completion rate.

This metric measures how many of your visitors were able to complete the task that brought them to your website or inspired them to follow your social media accounts.

For governments, web analytics can be misleading. Twenty visits by one person to a parking permit form page is not positive and likely means that the sign-up process is cumbersome and inefficient.

Task completion rate helps you focus on the needs of constituents. What are they trying to achieve by following your Twitter account? What content will better serve them?

Avinash Kaushik, a world authority on digital analytics, explains, "web analytics tools will only tell you what content I wanted if the content was there (by reporting pageviews to you). But how would you know what content I wanted that you did not have?"<sup>6</sup>

#### How to measure task completion rate

- Use a web survey tool and ask this question: what brought you here today and were you able to achieve what you wanted to? You can ask this to your social media followers and website visitors.
- Bring your data sources together. Combine data gathered from web analytics, social media analytics, and survey data.
- Segment different sources of traffic to study behavior differences. For example, you might notice differences by neighborhood, social media channel, or device.
- Build new content or strategies around the responses.



#### Expert Tip:

SurveyMonkey integrates with Hootsuite. Add the SurveyMonkey app to the Hootsuite platform to quickly gain insights from your constituents.

Hootsuite also integrates with MailChimp. Add the MailChimp app to Hootsuite so that you can disseminate surveys.

## 4. Better understand constituent's needs by uncovering the hidden barriers to action

Your government probably already uses online surveys, focus groups, and other forms of qualitative data to understand the audience you are trying to reach.

But social media data can uncover hidden obstacles that focus groups may not reveal. Constituents are speaking and leaving valuable bits of input on social channels that

can improve websites, inspire new content ideas, and better generate innovation in policies and process.

Let's say that a student loan agency wants to discover why more students are not using their online services. Here's how social listening could discover common obstacles and improve the efficiency of services.

student loan	student	loan	debt		application deadline		interest rates	
			pay  less	expensive		school	tax form	
		missed payment		apply for loan	student loan advice			
					tuition	university	forgiveness	

- Use broad social media listening to conduct general research on a topic. In the example above, we'd pull social media data around the topic: "student loan."
- With an analytics solutions like Hootsuite Enterprise, you can discover the most popular conversations. For example, you might notice that "tax form" "missed payment" and "apply for loan" are popular topics for your constituents. This gives you a starting point and glimpse into what information they are looking for (and common obstacles when using your service).
- Create a listening search stream within the Hootsuite platform to regularly monitor discussions. This will pull in social media messages around your chosen topic. Remember to check these streams every day or week to see new conversations, discover influencers, and understand what types of content resonate with constituents.
- Once you've studied the social conversations of your constituents, you can create new content or make recommendations to improve your website. This will help you make services more efficient, boost the satisfaction of constituents, and give you new ideas for better serving different segments.



## Validate social data with offline data

In addition to social media data, look to your customer service teams. As Tonya Beres, the Lead Contact Center Specialist at the USA's General Services Administration, recently wrote on Digital Gov, "the best source of this information is a resource right in your agency—your agency's Contact Center."<sup>7</sup>

"Every day, the contact center interacts with the public, and is the human touch point that hears about customers' experiences—their needs, their satisfaction or dissatisfaction. You can turn that information into action and improvements in your digital environment."

*Tonya Beres  
Lead Contact Center Specialist  
USA's General Services Administration*

## How we help

Hootsuite Enterprise offers social media analytics to help governments better serve constituents.

- Measure all social media activity from one platform
- Monitor conversations and proactively identify risks or emerging incidents (such as a health rumor)
- Localize search results and monitor geo-targeted streams (such as neighborhoods during a crisis)
- Filter results by keyword to highlight action items

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### Expert Tip:

Ask your customer service department to send you the most frequently asked questions by channel (email, chat, phone). You can then look to build content that addresses these questions or recommend changes to the website or social media channels.

## 5. Show your work to increase transparency

A recent article by William Powers and Deb Roy, two researchers at the Laboratory for Social Machines (LSM), which studies how social information impacts cities and governments, tells the story of a small Spanish town that is using social media in a new way.

As the authors explain in their article “The Incredible Jun,” the mayor of the town has taken transparency to an extreme: Twitter is the primary communication channel between constituents and the government. The mayor even has his Twitter handle painted on the front of his office.<sup>8</sup>

For example, a resident of the town tweets the mayor’s personal Twitter accounts, telling him that a street lamp is out. The mayor responds to the Tweet in nine minutes. His Tweet (shown below and translated by the authors) includes the handle of the local electrician.

“That Tweet,” the authors explain, “is a public promise that the town will indeed take action, and to underline this it ends with the hashtag #JunGetsMoving.”

The next day, the electrician provides an update: a photo of the repaired lamp and a thank you to the constituent.

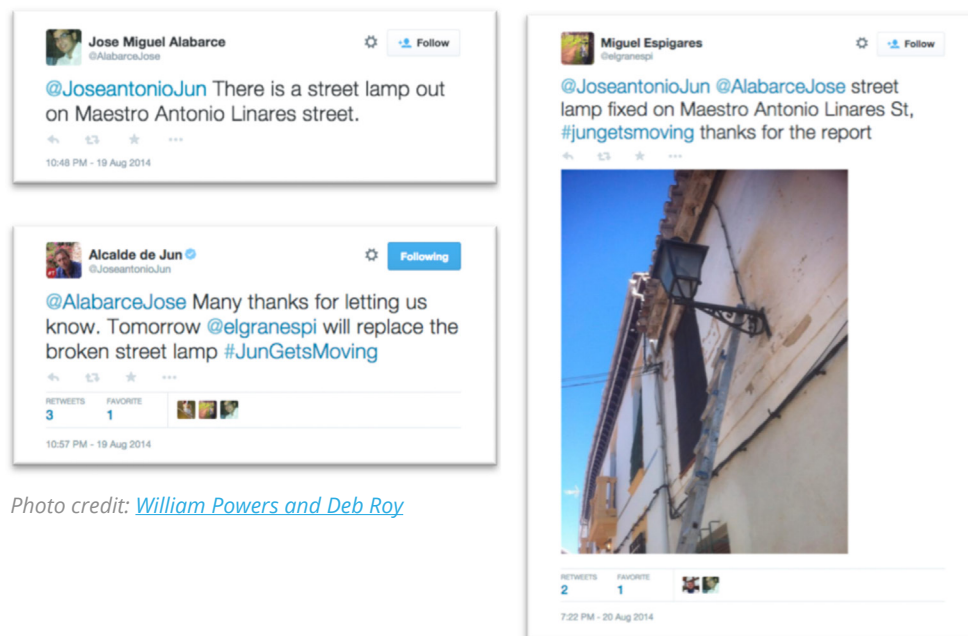


Photo credit: [William Powers and Deb Roy](#)

### The takeaway from this example is what the author’s call “mutual visibility.” They explain:

“Because these communications occur on a public social platform, they can be seen by everyone in the community. This serves as both a carrot and a stick. On one hand, the government’s performance comes under greater public scrutiny. If a broken streetlight isn’t fixed, everyone knows it and the slacking employee is more likely to be disciplined or, if it becomes a pattern, fired. That’s the stick. But the good work done by public servants is also now visible to all and thus more likely to be recognized and rewarded.”

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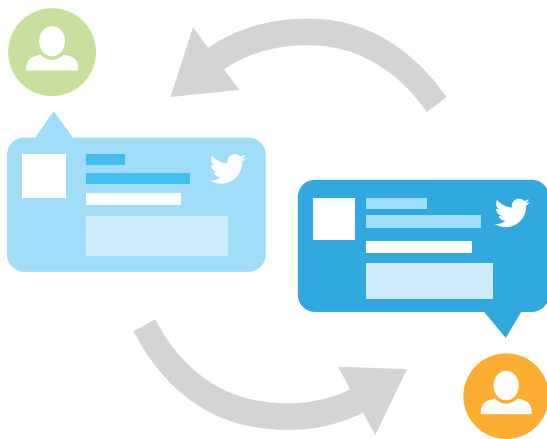
## Here are two ways that your government can deploy this strategy at a larger scale:

### Share behind-the-scenes training

Your government likely already runs simulated training exercises to prepare for emergency events.

One way to increase transparency is to share these training exercises. Create blog posts about what your teams learned and use a live-streaming app such as Periscope to give constituents a behind-the-scenes look at emergency planning.

This social content can highlight how the different agencies and departments work together and connect constituents to their local or federal government.



### Bring employees into the story

In the city of Vancouver, garbage and recycling collection schedules were confusing constituents, leading to overflowing bins on streets and in front of homes.

So the city turned to Twitter. It set up a website where residents could sign up to be tweeted the night before garbage and recycling collection. Specialized bulk tweeting and scheduling tools in Hootsuite made it possible.

The results were cleaner streets and sparkling customer service at a fraction of the cost of traditional phone centers or email.<sup>9</sup>

We recommend that you also bring employees into this story to increase transparency even further.

For example, have a few frontline employees drafting Tweets and posting updates. These can be approved by a manager in your social relationship platform—but having a truck driver share a real-time update about a delay is an excellent way to connect constituents to their government in a human, tangible way.

## 6. Centralize for greater collaboration

The best way to increase collaboration in your government is to centralize social media.

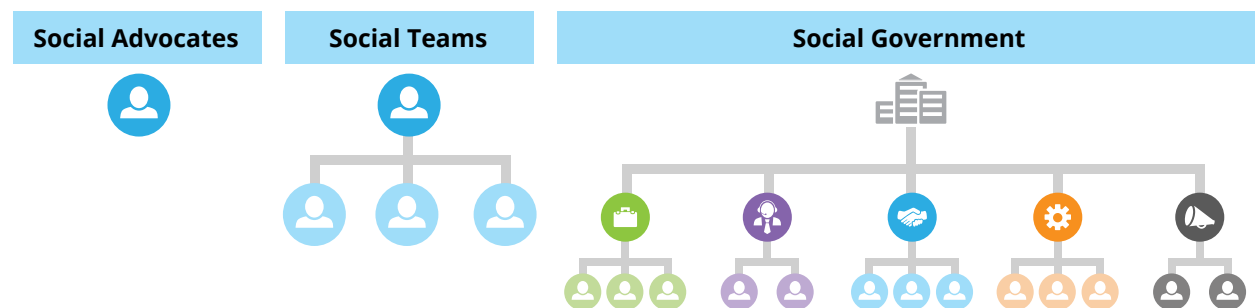
In our experience working with governments around the world—the City of New York, Barcelona City Council, the City of Melbourne, the City of Boston, Australia Post, Centro, UK Trade and Investment, and Scottish Enterprise—they typically progress through three stages.

It begins with **Social Advocates**. These are the innovators who evangelize and spearhead social media adoption.

Next, these early adopters organize into **Social Teams**. Social now has increased budget and buy-in from leaders. A strategy takes shape and best practices are developed.

The final stage is **Social Government**. This involves centralizing your strategy, guarding against cyber vandalism, and building an innovative and integrated approach to social media.

### Emergence of Social Government



Here are five tips from Fairfax County for building a collaborative and centralized social media strategy. These were provided in a one-hour webinar with Fairfax County ([you can watch it here](#)).<sup>10</sup>

- **Departments need to apply for accounts.** Have a defined process in place and ask departments to provide example content that they will be posting.
- **Have one person create all accounts in your social relationship platform.** “This controls access and mitigates the risk of any attempts at cyber vandalism,” says Licamele. “Our Twitter publishers, for example, don’t have the Twitter password. That’s something that the Office of Public Affairs has because we create the accounts.” This helps to secure accounts and coordinate content between different agencies, departments, and contributors.
- **Offer social media training.** Fairfax County doesn’t necessarily offer Twitter 101 training but rather teaches staff how to be “official spokespeople of the government.” They also teach best practices—for example, the shelf-life of a Tweet is only a few hours which means during emergencies information must be regularly updated.
- **Encourage cross-promotion.** Let your departments start publishing and focus on collaborating on content and amplification.

- **Centralize support and coordination.** In Fairfax County, the Office of Public Affairs is “a silent administrator of all accounts.” This helps to coordinate during emergencies and send coordinated messages. For example, if the police have an important message that needs to be shared they don’t need to rely on all departments retweeting—the single administrator can publish the same message to all government accounts.

We recommend that you watch the [full webinar here](#). It includes more practical advice including seven new ideas from Fairfax County’s social media strategy.

## 7. Move from listening to driving human action

Retweets, social traffic, and follower growth—these metrics are useful to share with communications professionals but to gain greater buy-in from the public and budget support from leadership, you need to connect these metrics to the bottom line impact.

Use these tips when sharing social media success with leadership and the public:

- Tie every metric (such as follower growth, social shares, or traffic) to bottom line metrics such as lower costs of service, increased use of government services, and return on investment.
- Do they need to know this metric? For example, click-through rate may be important to your communications team. But leadership is focused on the big picture: public participation, cost savings, and efficiency.

For example, the Fairfax County Animal Shelter has one of the highest engagement rates in their county on social media. But when they share this success with the public, they make sure they demonstrate the impact of all this social attention.

### Why centralizing social media helps to demonstrate impact

By centralizing social media and controlling accounts with a social relationship platform, it’s easier to collect data. You can pull reports on all social media activity, revealing popular content, long-term patterns, and overall success.

- Locate your most successful content by department
- Gain a central view of all social media results
- Easily pull reports and monitor all social media activity

See it in action: [request a demo of Hootsuite Enterprise](#)

“50% of our adopters say they saw us on social media prior to our social media many people didn’t even know our animal shelter existed and would often go to other jurisdictions to adopt animals.”

*Kristen Auerbach  
Director of Communications and Outreach  
Fairfax County Animal Shelter*

They’ve used social media to help decrease euthanasia rates from 28% in 2009 to 13% in 2014.<sup>11</sup>



## Next Steps

You've learned seven ways that social media can help build innovative government services. Use these practical steps to better listen to constituents and improve the efficiency and transparency of government services.

## Endnotes

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# About Hootsuite Enterprise

Partner with Hootsuite to accelerate your social transformation



Hootsuite Enterprise empowers organizations to execute business strategies for the social media era. As the world's most widely used social relationship platform, Hootsuite Enterprise enables global businesses to scale social media activities across multiple teams, departments, and business units. Our versatile platform supports a thriving ecosystem of technology integrations, allowing businesses to extend social media into existing systems and programs.

We help organizations create deeper relationships with customers and draw meaningful insights from social media data. Innovating since day one, we continue to help businesses pioneer the social media landscape and accelerate their success through education and professional services.

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