

# South Bay Cities Council of Governments

DATE: September 9, 2013

TO: Steering Committee

FROM: Jacki Bacharach, Executive Director

SUBJECT: Social Media: Update & Next Steps

## Background

On July 8, 2013, the Steering Committee directed staff to review social media options for the South Bay Cities Council of Governments (SBCCOG) and report recommendations. This memo provides an update on staff's progress with primary recommendations.

Currently, the SBCCOG uses social media to send messages regarding major programs and events of the South Bay Environmental Services Center and the Electric Vehicle program, as well as the programs and events of our partners. For these programs, our social media audience is primarily South Bay residents.

One of the first items considered for review by staff was if and how social media could be expanded. The social media field is dynamic and it can be difficult to track all the technology changes and potential uses. To address these issues, staff reached out to member cities to assess:

- How social media is used in cities
- What social media tools and services are used
- What their experience has been
- What resources are required including budget and staff time
- What policies have been developed
- How do they measure success

## Findings

In summary, staff found that of the 16 cities and the county, only 6 do not have a conventional social media presence (i.e. maintaining either a Facebook page and/or Twitter account - the 2 most popularly used social media platforms).. Of those that do, most do not have social media account(s) that are wholly representative of the municipality. Rather, various departments representing police, parks and recreation, public library, and economic development for example, open their own social media platforms, delegating online-savvy staff to maintain and contribute content specific information to the department's function. For the most part, there is no budgeting or specific time allocated for staff to oversee their department's social media and no schedule for monitoring or posting content. Posts are done on an "as needed" basis.

Most popularly used social media services among the municipalities are Facebook with several also present on Twitter and YouTube. Some use platforms that broadcast city council meetings or sell merchandise designed for the city. Others communicate with members of their communities through "listserv" email notification, specifically with Nixle.

Regarding policies, a couple of the municipalities have a line or two about social media within their staff media policies, while the City of Torrance and Los Angeles County have separate, detailed social media policies for staff to follow. Los Angeles County has a protocol for all of its 38 departments to follow when opening a social media account while the City of Torrance talks about the pros and cons of opening a group versus creating a page in Facebook. Both policies outline some of the main social media channels and what information should be present in an account's description for the public to view. Staff is also given advice on using their personal accounts when representing the municipality as well as how to handle feedback from the public, particularly when it is controversial or potentially damaging to municipal reputation.

Overall, the South Bay municipalities maintain a similar social media philosophy to that of SBCCOG's, one that is compartmentalized within specific departments/programs and serves to contact community members through email distribution. It appears that many of these social media accounts perpetuate one directional streams of communication—only as a means to notify, not interact. There not only seems to be lack of interaction between the municipalities and their constituents, but also an absence of social media strategy coordination between the municipalities themselves. Such disparities provide grounds for discussion and potential growth for both SBCCOG and its member communities in the social media realm.

### Conclusion

After reviewing feedback from the outreach efforts, it has been determined that it may be premature to establish a comprehensive social media plan at this stage, but instead work with the cities and the county to discuss social media strategies and flush out ideas for those who have or are interested in having a social media presence. Most cities expressed interest in collaborating on social media via a working group that would be hosted by the SBCCOG. Participants would include cities, partners (i.e. the utilities) and agencies, discussing subject matter ranging from how they contact the public for community events, emergency notification, general messaging, and other timely matters to what social media resources are most cost effective and receptive. An initial meeting to assess pertinent topics and discuss how often the group should meet is suggested. The agenda may include:

- What are the best and most affordable email notification /listserv services?
- What social media services would anyone like to learn more about?
- How can South Bay cities coordinate their social media strategies?

This kind of working group could provide cost savings, enhance our visibility, build our reputation and add value to member cities and partners. Possible coordinated efforts could include not only sharing knowledge between agencies by expanding the scope of the social media outreach, but also enhance recognizing each other in social media via retweeting, tagging, sharing posts, liking, etc.

### Recommendation

Direct staff to initiate a meeting with member cities and the county to assess the interest and value of establishing an ongoing social media working group.

Prepared with input from Kim Fuentes, Deputy Executive Director, Administration and Chandler Shields, Administrative Assistant, Communications.