

This document is an extract of a larger publication.

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- User Support: Providing support to website users, addressing inquiries, and ensuring that online services are accessible to the public.
- Integration of Online Services: Collaborating with various county departments to integrate online services and forms, making it easier for residents to access and submit information.
- Social Media Integration: Coordinating the integration of social media channels to keep the community informed and engaged.
- Accessibility Compliance: Ensuring that the website complies with accessibility standards to make it usable for individuals with disabilities.
- Data Management: Managing data on the website, ensuring accuracy, and implementing data protection measures.
- Analytics and Reporting: Monitoring website traffic, analyzing user behavior, and providing reports to improve the site's performance and user experience.
- Collaboration with Departments: Working closely with various county departments to understand their needs and ensuring that the website reflects the county's overall goals and objectives.

Napa County was the recipient of a 2018 National Association of Government Web Professionals Pinnacle Award for website excellence. The Pinnacle Awards are an annual celebration of the best in government web communications, design, development, and innovation. These awards recognize the hard work and dedication of government web professionals who are committed to delivering exceptional digital experiences for their citizens. The Pinnacle Awards showcase excellence in several categories, including website design, mobile app development, and social media integration. Winners are selected by a panel of judges who are experts in government web development and design.

During our review of Napa County websites, the Jury found that the majority of the County's websites are well designed and functional, with notable improvement since the last Grand Jury Report on websites in 2016. The current Jury did come across a few websites with broken links and some cases of outdated information. In one case, an online permit application allowed entry of user data, but when attempting to submit, the website did not save or forward the data. The Jury found a few department websites that do not list staff contact information such as phone number or email address. A helpful feature found on some websites allows the user to contact a webmaster if a link did not work. Some websites contain a chat feature, where clicking on an icon initiates real time contact with county staff. Napa County Library's research librarians are responsible for staffing this chat feature. The Jury found that there is an opportunity to expand this feature into other county department websites.

County website designers must stay aware of how the online experience differs by user device and accommodate various user devices. Currently almost half of all traffic to county websites is on mobile devices (see below) and as more and more citizens demand on-the-go access to government services this number is expected to rise. With this in mind, Napa County needs to assure that access to websites remains mobile friendly and easily readable allowing simple navigation.

Devices Used to Access County Websites (July- Sept 2023):

	Desktop	52.6%
	Smartphone	45.6%
	Tablet	1.5%

NAPA COUNTY LIBRARY

The Napa Library has one of the most commonly visited websites in the county, with thousands of citizen interactions every month. The library website and its many programs provide a variety of free digital resources and many other services that enhance communication with local residents. It plays an important role in promoting literacy, education, and community engagement and facilitates citizen interaction with other county departments. Some common features and services found in the library by accessing its websites are:

- **Book Collections:** houses a diverse collection of books, including fiction, non-fiction, reference materials, and more. They often cater to various age groups and interests.
- **Digital Resources:** offers digital resources such as e-books, audiobooks, and online databases that patrons can access remotely.
- **Computer and Internet Access:** provides public computers with internet access, allowing patrons to browse the web, work on assignments, or use library-specific resources.
- **Educational Programs:** organizes educational programs and events, including workshops, lectures, book clubs, and activities for children. These programs foster learning and community engagement.
- **Reference Services:** Librarians are available to assist patrons with research, reference questions, information inquiries and technical issues.
- **Media and Audiovisual Materials:** offers a collection of DVDs, CDs, and other audiovisual materials for borrowing.
- **Meeting Spaces:** has meeting rooms that community groups or individuals can reserve for meetings, workshops, or events.
- **Children's Services:** has dedicated spaces and programs for children, including story hours, reading programs, and educational events.
- **Community Engagement:** serves as a community hub, hosting events that bring people together, such as author talks, cultural programs, and local exhibitions.
- **Interlibrary Loan Services:** if the library doesn't have a particular book or resource, it may be able to obtain it from another library through interlibrary loan services.

Napa County's libraries are community hubs that bring people together and help connect people to essential services and resources. Local governments, libraries and citizens can work together to imagine and implement initiatives in their communities, taking advantage of the library's existing role as a community anchor. Library communication with citizens is important for fostering community engagement, promoting library services, and ensuring that residents are aware of the resources and programs available to them. Free access to library technology and information databases increases digital information access for all citizens and supports the

information and communication needs of an increasingly digitally dependent information society.

OFFICE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

During an emergency, it is important for the government to communicate quickly and effectively with the public. The Napa County Office of Emergency Services (OES), located in the Napa County Sheriff's Department, is the county's primary emergency notification and services leader. OES also manages the county Emergency Operations Center (EOC). This includes responding, directing, and coordinating resources and mutual aid assets across the county to support the communities and citizens. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides OES with guidance on how to communicate during an emergency, including issuing alerts and warnings, evacuation directives, and information about response status, available assistance, and other matters that impact preparedness, response, and recovery.

Napa County recently transferred OES from the County Chief Executive's Office to the Napa County Sheriff's Department. This change was made recognizing that the Sheriff is the longtime county manager of the Emergency Operations Command (EOC) group. OES has appointed a Public Information Officer in the Sheriff's Department who oversees and helps coordinate emergency messaging along with the senior county communications staff and three OES county managers for the areas of preparedness, response, and recovery.

Their mandate includes responding, directing, and coordinating resources and mutual aid assets across the area to support the communities and its citizens:

- **Emergency Planning:** Developing and maintaining comprehensive emergency and disaster response plans that outline the roles and responsibilities of various agencies, organizations, and stakeholders during emergencies.
- **Emergency Response:** Coordinating the response efforts during emergencies, including the deployment of first responders, resources, and assets to the affected area. This may involve law enforcement, fire departments, medical services, and other relevant agencies.
- **Resource Management:** Identifying and managing critical resources, such as equipment, personnel, and supplies, to ensure an effective response to emergencies and disasters.
- **Information and Communication:** Establishing communication systems that enable timely and accurate dissemination of information to the public, emergency responders, and government officials.
- **Public Awareness and Education:** Educating the public on emergency preparedness and safety measures and providing guidance on what to do during various types of emergencies.
- **Warning Systems:** Operating alert and notification systems, including sirens, text alerts, and public announcements, to warn citizens of imminent threats or disasters.
- **Coordination and Collaboration:** Collaborating with local, state, and federal agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations and volunteer groups, to ensure a coordinated and efficient response to emergencies.
- **Training and Exercises:** Conducting regular drills, training exercises, and simulations to ensure that emergency responders and agencies are well-prepared for various disaster scenarios.

- Resource Coordination: Managing the allocation of resources and mutual aid agreements, where neighboring jurisdictions support each other during emergencies when additional resources are needed.
- Recovery and Rehabilitation: Assisting in the recovery phase after a disaster, which includes helping communities rebuild, providing financial assistance to individuals and businesses, and offering mental health services to those affected.
- Grant Management: Administering and distributing federal and state grants that support emergency management and preparedness efforts.
- Vulnerability Assessments: Identifying potential hazards and assessing vulnerabilities in the community to inform planning and mitigation efforts.
- Incident Command System (ICS): Implementing the Incident Command System, a standardized management system for emergencies and disasters that facilitates coordination and communication between agencies.

The OES keeps the EOC informed of their operations and status, helping to assist and coordinate large-scale preparedness among county decision makers, first responders, and other county services, employees, and citizens. When the county is experiencing an emergency situation, the EOC may be activated. If an EOC is opened, the latest information on an emergency situation will be posted on county websites and through citizen alerts via social media, texts and emails. OES is typically not involved in low-risk incidents but concentrates on events that impact the whole community that may involve a need for evacuations and/or sheltering.

NIXLE AND EVERBRIDGE

“Alert Napa County” is the county emergency notification system that sends digital messages when there is important safety information to communicate to residents. This includes situations such as severe weather, planned and unexpected road closures, missing persons, evacuations, natural disasters, and public health concerns. In the event of an emergency, public safety agencies such as Napa County Office of Emergency Services (OES), law enforcement agencies, fire agencies, city agencies and Office of Education are able to provide emergency information directly to subscribers. In order to receive these messages, citizens must enroll at the county website *Ready Napa County* (<https://readynapacounty.org>), where information is available on Everbridge, the county’s current alert notification system.

The Jury found that many citizens have found the “Alert Napa County” enrollment process to be cumbersome and confusing. This is limiting the number of citizens receiving important alerts. Additionally, many citizens do not have the ability to customize alerts that are meaningful to them.

In recent years, “Alert Napa County” has notified citizens of imminent threats using the digital alert systems Nixle and Everbridge. Last year, Napa County transitioned from Nixle to Everbridge for its citizen and emergency responder emergency notifications, using mobile phone applications, text messages, emails and social media postings during local emergencies. Fire, law enforcement, and EMS agencies may also utilize Everbridge messaging for less critical events that do not result in a need for mass notification.

Below are agencies across Napa County that have used Nixle and/or Everbridge to provide information to the public:

- Napa County Office of Emergency Services: information about extreme weather (ex: Red Flag Warnings, heat emergencies, Flash Flood Warnings, etc.), emergency events (including evacuation orders and warnings), public health and safety advisories
- Evacuation instructions are currently issued through Everbridge by the Office of Emergency Services located in the Napa County Sheriff's Office.
- Napa County Sheriff's Office: police activity, traffic accidents, road closures, and emergency information as necessary
- Napa County Public Works: utilized to communicate planned and emergency road closures

The Jury's investigation found problems with the transition to and effectiveness of the current Everbridge alert notification system. After a contract was negotiated last year, it quickly became apparent that Everbridge was not fulfilling many of the features in its contract with Napa County, resulting in some Everbridge subscribers not reliably receiving emergency notifications. It is unclear exactly how many Everbridge Emergency Alerts are being reliably received by county residents.

In some instances, unreliable receipt of emergency notices is due to issues with the performance of the Everbridge app. Residents who have signed up for the app have experienced poor performance of the app or have not received a message at all. County OES Staff indicated that the transition last year from Nixle to Everbridge resulted in loss of resident contact information contained in Nixle. According to OES staff, these issues are being addressed with Everbridge staff in an ongoing attempt to improve this emergency notification system.

COUNTY COMMUNICATIONS PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

Napa County has a new Communications and Public Information Officer (PIO) who is attempting to work closely with the County Executive Officer, elected officials, department heads and information services staff throughout the county to strategize, develop, and maintain the County's public information, social media and community engagement activities. The county executive office PIO has oversight for a number of county communications functions such as media relations, social marketing, public information activities and websites, emergency response and special events planning.

COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

The County Department of Public Works (DPW) has oversight on multiple county services: maintenance and building of roads, county facilities and property, county airport, animal shelter, storm water and creek cleaning, county waste services, and resorts. DPW relies on the County PIO and OES to distribute information to the public, including planned road maintenance, emergency road closures and other DPW oversight issues that involve residents in the county. These messages are then distributed by the County PIO primarily via social media websites, and in some instances where large numbers of residents may be involved, via text or email alert notifications including Everbridge.

Citizens can communicate their questions or concerns to DPW staff via their website, email or phone calls. Citizen complaints or concerns are then reviewed and prioritized by DPW staff.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

As a result of the Jury's investigations into Napa County's communication efforts, as well as examination of several other county websites and published studies on effective government communication, the Jury has identified a number of key principles and strategies for effective county government communication with citizens:

Clear and Accessible Information:

- Ensure that information is easily accessible through government websites, social media, and other relevant channels.
- Use simple language to make information understandable to a wide audience.

Timely Updates:

- Provide timely updates on government activities, policies, and events.
- Utilize various communication channels, such as websites, email newsletters, press releases, and social media to disseminate important information.

Two-Way Communication:

- Encourage citizen feedback through various means, including digital media, surveys, public forums, and town hall meetings.
- Respond to citizen inquiries and concerns promptly and constructively.

Transparency:

- Keep citizens informed by publishing reports and data on government processes, decision-making, and financial information.

Educational Campaigns:

- Raise awareness about important issues, such as public health or emergency preparedness and implement campaigns to educate citizens about their rights, responsibilities, and the services available to them.

Customize Communication to citizen groups:

- Tailor communication to different demographics and regions to ensure relevance and cultural sensitivity.
- Work with local community leaders and organizations to improve communication at the grassroots level.

Use and Update Technology:

- Leverage digital tools and platforms for online engagement and dissemination of information.
- Implement mobile apps for citizen inquiries and service delivery.

Crisis Communication:

- Have a well-defined crisis communication plan in place for emergencies and crises.
- Provide accurate, timely, and reassuring information to citizens during such situations through multiple communication modalities.

Collaboration with Media:

- Foster effective relationships with the media to ensure accurate and unbiased coverage of government activities.
- Hold regular press conferences and provide press releases to inform the public through the media.

Public Relations and Marketing:

- Develop public relations campaigns to promote government initiatives and successes.
- Use marketing techniques to engage citizens and raise awareness about important issues.

Access to Data:

- Publish current government data in open and understandable formats to encourage innovation and accountability.
- Collaborate with tech communities and organizations to develop useful applications and services.

Accountability and Evaluation:

- Develop metrics that monitor the effectiveness of government communication strategies for feedback and data analysis, making adjustments based on these results of evaluations and citizens' feedback.

Engagement in Social Media:

- Actively engage with citizens on social media platforms, promoting two-way communications with timely response to citizen questions and concerns.

Community Partnerships:

- Collaborate with non-governmental organizations, community groups, and civil society to enhance the reach and credibility of government messages.

Disabilities and Cultural Sensitivity:

- Recognize and respect the diversity of languages and cultures within the population.
- Provide information in multiple languages as needed.
- Provide access for citizens with disabilities and special needs.

In this current digitally dependent communication society, there is a growing expectation that local government should quickly and reliably interact with citizen needs and be a trusted source of information. Effective government communication with citizens should involve clear messaging that is delivered via accessible and easy to use platforms. Ultimately, the long-term success of government and citizen interaction depends on developing and maintaining public participation and trust. For communications to be most successful, efforts should accommodate diverse audiences, various user devices, and update website information regularly.

Napa County websites, the Office of Emergency Services, the Public Information Offices, and our libraries are key citizen communication entities endeavoring to keep the public well-informed about government activities, policies, initiatives, and local issues. The Jury found that these entities are playing an important role in maintaining transparency, accountability, and providing effective non-emergency communication, but there are areas in emergency notice systems that need to be improved. It is important for the County to periodically re-evaluate the effectiveness of their communication efforts and adjust strategies to stay successfully engaged with the citizenry.

FINDINGS

F1. Since the 2016 Napa County Grand Jury report on county websites, the county has increased its senior communication staff, appointed a webmaster, and implemented improved methods of communicating with citizens for routine, non-emergency notifications.

F2. Napa County has made some improvements to provide timely and accurate information to citizens through enhanced website design and performance.