

City of Florence

Communications Survey, 2023



City of Florence
324 W. Evans Street
Florence, South Carolina



Introduction

City of Florence, SC Communications Survey

The City of Florence Marketing and Public Relations Council Committee has set improving communication between the community and the City of Florence as a primary goal. In summer of 2023, the City of Florence launched a communications survey aimed to evaluate current conditions and aggregate areas for improvement as recommended by citizens and customers of the City of Florence.

Methodology

The City of Florence Communications Survey 2023 (“the survey”) was conducted via SurveyMonkey, an online-based survey software. Hard copies of the survey were made available at the City of Florence City Center, all City of Florence Community Centers, and the Leatherman Senior Center. The survey link was sent out via the City of Florence Facebook and Instagram pages, in the City’s e-newsletter publication, and included in the July City of Florence utility bill, which is mailed to all utility customers. All city departments that handle transactions were given cards to hand out with receipts and both City Council and staff took survey information to community meetings in June and July 2023.

The survey opened on May 19, 2023 and closed on July 28, 2023. In total, 579 participants took the communications survey with a completion rate of 82%. Of the completed surveys, the estimated time to complete was 8 minutes. The days with the most responses collected were May 29 (94), June 19 (82), July 17 (88) and July 24 (77). Not all questions required a mandatory response. The most skipped question was Question 16: Do you have any additional feedback for the City of Florence’s communication efforts; 356 participants skipped this open-ended question.

Report Format

This report breaks down the information gathered in the City of Florence Communications Survey 2023. The survey included 26 questions that fit into six main categories. In this report, these are broken down under the following headings:

- About the Participants: Demographics of the participants
- About the Information Sources: Where survey participants find information related to the City of Florence
- About Communication: Overall sentiments about the City of Florence and its communication
- About the Website: Use of the City of Florence’s website
- About Social Media
- Additional Feedback: open-ended questions for participants to provide feedback and share stories of communication

This report also includes an executive summary and suggestions for next steps.



Summary

Generally, survey participants indicated they felt somewhat informed or well-informed about the City of Florence, but suggest the city has room for improvement across many communication channels. Some of the suggested improvements have already been implemented as of this report.

More than half (75.2%) of survey respondents felt well-informed or somewhat informed about the City of Florence.

Participants indicated that they were most likely to receive news information on social media (79.62%), followed by news media (television (60.62%), digital newspaper (39.21%), paper newspaper (14.34%)). Participants indicated they were most likely to find information about the City of Florence on social media (61.13%), the City of Florence website (40.24%), local news media (30.05%). Response to the city's website was mixed.

Overall, participants are eager for the City of Florence to share more information and to share information more often and through a diversity of channels. The top five categories participants want to hear about are City of Florence community events, water and sewer utility information, public safety advisories, economic development, and City Council and administrative meeting information and decisions. Survey participants were also polled about their interest in the implementation of a web chat service and text/push notifications. Respondents indicated that they would like the City of Florence to implement a web chat service on the existing city website (68.74%) and a push notification service (77.35%).



About the Participants

The City of Florence Communications Survey received 579 responses.

Of those participants, most (over 75%) provided demographic information on age, racial identity, household income range, and primary language spoken at home. All participants were required to indicate whether they were a resident of the City of Florence, owned a business in within the city limits, or were a utility customer.

Participants ranged across all age categories, but the majority (63.85%) of participants were between the ages of 45 and 74. Age categories included under 18 (0.22%), 18-24 (1.08%), 25-34 (8.01%), 35-44 (16.67%), 45-54 (20.56%), 55-64 (20.78%), 65-74 (22.51%), 75+ (8.44%), and prefer not to say (1.73%).

Of the participants, 46.47% indicated that they either were residents of or owned a business inside city limits (34.72% from District 1, 4.84% from District 2, and 6.91% from District 3). The remaining responses were split between "I'm not sure" at 10.88% or 63 respondents, and 35.58% who indicated they were utility customers living outside city limits. Only 7.08% (41) of respondents indicated that they were neither residents, business owners, nor utility customers. Since there was an overwhelming number of participants that indicated they were from District 1 and within that category were several incomplete surveys, there is reason to suspect that this was a default response from some participants.

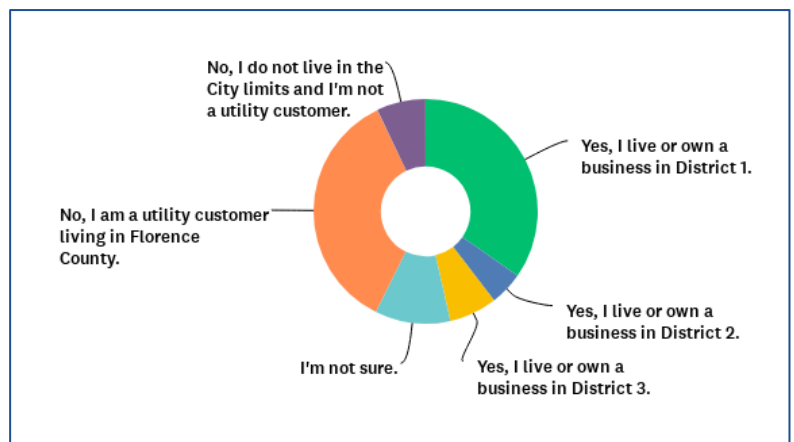


Figure 1 – Participant Relationship to City of Florence

Of those who responded "not informed at all," in response to **Question 14:How informed do you feel about what's happening with the City of Florence** (123 respondents), 20% indicated they weren't sure which district they lived in, 40% were utility customers only who live in Florence County, and 40% indicated they lived inside city limits.

Household income of participants was very diverse, ranging from less than \$20,000/year to over \$100,000 per year. Only 20.74% of participants declined to answer this question. 11.30% of participants declined to answer the racial demographic question. Those who responded to the racial demographic question broke down as follows: 1.74% Native American, 1.09% Asian, 0.87% Hispanic/Latino/Spanish, 31.09% African American, and 56.3% White. Overwhelmingly, the native language spoken in the home was English. Due to the limitations of the SurveyMonkey platform, we could not offer this survey in alternative languages.



About the Information Sources

Participants were most likely to receive information about the City of Florence from Facebook (50.6%), despite indicating that they use social media regularly to find news and information on other topics (79.62%). Also of interest is that 68.52% of respondents like/follow the City of Florence social media pages.

Only 3 respondents indicated that they regularly look for information on a website, despite 40.24% of participants who indicated they regularly receive information from the City of Florence website.

When asked which information source they used most often to find information about the City of Florence, survey participants responded with the City of Florence Facebook page (50.6%), City of Florence website (40.24%), local print or digital newspaper (27.64%), local TV news station or website (30.05%), City of Florence e-Newsletter (18.31%), other City of Florence social media channels (10.53%), municipal public meetings (8.81%), and the Public Access 1301 channel (1.73%). Participants were allowed to select all applicable options. Additionally, they were allowed to write in responses. Of those who wrote in, additional sources included:

- word of mouth
- departmental outreach (recreation and athletics information)
- utility bill notices
- local print magazines
- community meetings
- NextDoor app
- neighborhood websites

Those who stated they felt well informed about the City of Florence were the group most likely to find information on the City's website (47.37%) and subscribe to the City of Florence's e-newsletter (28.57%). Those who felt "somewhat informed" primarily receive information from the City of Florence's Facebook page (54.17%), but 40.42% of those respondents also indicated that they regularly use the City of Florence website.

About Communication

In **Q14: How informed do you feel about what's happening with the City of Florence**, over 75% of survey participants felt somewhat informed or well informed about the city. Around a quarter (24.8% or 123 respondents) did not feel informed.

Respondents were also asked to elaborate their reasoning if they answered "somewhat informed" or "not informed." Of those respondents, 13% indicated that they were not active in seeking information from the City of Florence on a regular basis. A summary of other common responses included:

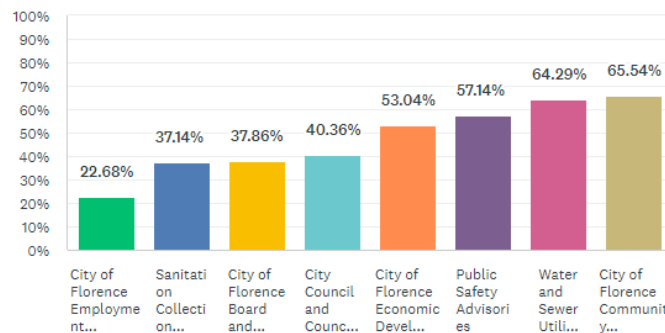
- New to Florence and unsure of where to find information
- Concern about water and safety advisory notification process



- Would like to see more information shared by Council Members on their personal media outlets
- User-friendliness of website and municipal registration pages
- Social media algorithm issues prevent City of Florence information appearing in newsfeeds
- Lack of non-paid news outlets in the community
- Lack of local news coverage by TV stations except for negative news
- Interest in push notification service for emergencies
- Confusion over City of Florence and Florence County issues
- Desire to have complete information about projects/subjects of community interest
- Would like complete information in social media posts rather than linking to website
- Several respondents live in the County and are only interested in utility information
- Information on website in conflict with actual practice on issues such as yard waste

Participants were asked to choose the types of information they would like the city to share. Participants were encouraged to select all options that applied from a list of eight different topics. A free response option was also available.

Overall, the most selected topics were City of Florence Community Events, Programs, and Athletics (65.54%), Water and Sewer Utility Information and Advisories (64.29%), Public Safety Advisories (57.14%), and City of Florence Economic Development Information (53.04%).



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
City of Florence Employment Opportunities	22.68% 127
Sanitation Collection Information	37.14% 208
City of Florence Board and Commission Meetings, Agendas, and Minutes (Design Review Board, Board of Zoning Appeals, Planning Commission, Parks Commission, etc.)	37.86% 212
City Council and Council Committee Meetings, Agendas, and Minutes	40.36% 226
City of Florence Economic Development Information (Projects, New Businesses, Capital/Infrastructure Improvements)	53.04% 297
Public Safety Advisories	57.14% 320
Water and Sewer Utility Information and Advisories	64.29% 360
City of Florence Community Events, Programs, and Athletics	65.54% 367
Total Respondents: 560	

Figure 2 – Information Participants Interested in Receiving



Those who checked the box for “Other” could provide specifics. A summary of those responses included:

- Permitting information for various processes
- Family-focused activities
- Water quality information

About the Website

Several questions in the survey focused on the City of Florence’s website, www.cityofflorence.com. Of 539 respondents, 72.36% indicated that they use or have used the city’s website. Participants were also asked how they accessed the website and they were able to select all applicable options: 42.62% used a mobile device, 39.29% used a computer at home, 9.36% used a tablet device, and 8.73% used a computer at work. On a scale of 1% to 100%, survey participants rated their satisfaction using website with an average score of 43%, but there were 61 (12%) respondents who rated the website at 70% or higher.

Of the 109 survey participants who indicated that they do not use the City of Florence’s website, 75 of those still answered the question about how they accessed the website and 80 of those participants answered the website satisfaction question.

A correlation also exists between participants who don’t use the city’s website and how well informed they feel. All respondents who indicated that they do not use the City of Florence’s website indicated that they either felt somewhat informed or not informed at all about what’s happening with the City of Florence. A conclusion from this data set could be that participants are more likely to feel informed if they use and can easily find information on the website. Of those respondents who indicated that they receive information from the City of Florence website, 28.33% of those do not regularly check for updates.

The most common reasons for visiting the City of Florence website included: Online Payments (54.98%), Water and Sewer Utility Information (42.95%), City News or Press Releases (38.17%). Participants were also able to write in a response. A summary of those responses included:

- City directory information
- Crime information
- Yard waste notification
- Events and programs



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
City Permits or Applications	6.85% 33
City Publications (budget, plans, audits, water quality, etc.)	12.03% 58
City Department or Staff Contact Information	15.35% 74
City Codes and Ordinances	16.39% 79
Employment Opportunities	19.09% 92
Economic Development Information (starting a business, planning and zoning, business license, capital improvements, etc.)	19.09% 92
Recreation or Athletics Programs and Registration Information	22.61% 109
Maps (District maps, city limits, trails, etc.)	23.44% 113
City Council, Committee, Board, or Commission Meetings, Agendas, and Minutes	24.90% 120
Sanitation Collection Information	26.35% 127
City News or Press Releases	38.17% 184
Water and Sewer Utility Information	42.95% 207
Online Payments	54.98% 265
Total Respondents: 482	

Figure 3 – Information Most Interested In - Website

Additional website feedback throughout the survey in various free response questions included:

- Sometimes links are broken or information is not up to date
- Would like to see the front page of the website more compact to limit scrolling (mobile)
- Hard to find information such as holiday schedules, sanitation information, utility outage information
- The City’s new website design is easy to use and well organized

About Social Media

One of the primary ways the City of Florence communicates information is through social media including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Several survey questions were deployed to discover whether that tactic was useful for participants. Of those surveyed, 81.15% use social media. Within the group that uses social media, 68.52% like or follow the City of Florence’s social media channels. The City’s Facebook page was the most popular social media source, with 94.62% of respondents followed by Instagram at 11.43% and Twitter at 6.50%.

Participants were also asked about the regularity of their social media use. Understanding that all social platforms have continuously changing algorithms that affect how



information is shared and whether a post is shown to a user, this question was important to find out how likely a post is to be missed. Overwhelmingly (73.18%) of respondents indicate they use social media daily. Other responses included: 12.66% used it a few times per week, 8.38% don't use it regularly, 3.17% use it a few times per month, 1.49% use it once per week, 1.12% use it once per month.

Additional feedback related to the City of Florence's use of social media as a communication outlet included:

- Would like to see more complete information posted on social media rather than providing a link to learn more (more comprehensive posts)
- Information doesn't always appear in news feeds on social media; suggestion to pay for boosted posts during water or emergency advisories
- Would like more frequent Twitter posts
- Good information is shared on social media
- Suggestion to post about how to use social media to ensure those interested can see posts with more regularity
- Would like to see more information about the City's growth on social media
- Suggestion for pre-prepared emergency information to share across platforms in case of a future holiday emergency
- Social media is the best way to advertise for sports or recreation. Deadlines and information should be easy to find with a flyer on social media.
- I'd like to see the city communicate all meetings and what will be discussed in detail—agendas, etc. on all their social media well in advance.

Additional Feedback

Throughout the survey, participants had opportunities to provide input on what they feel is going well and what could be improved in City of Florence communications. Question 16 provided participants an open-ended opportunity to give additional feedback for the City's overall communication efforts. Many respondents brought up concerns about notification of utility disruptions, water quality, and the need for a push notification service to address emergencies.

Another recurring theme throughout the survey was that many respondents clearly did not understand which issues related to the City of Florence, and which related to Florence County. As the county seat with the same name, it can be confusing for residents to know whether something is happening inside city limits and therefore the city's responsibility, and outside city limits and the responsibility of another entity to provide communication for. This was especially true when discussing countywide events and programs which are the responsibility of many other entities to report on.

Select additional feedback is included below:

- Local city and county offices are confusing when someone needs help; new in area and not sure where to go for help



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- I see that you are trying with programs like the City U. That is very informative for those who can attend.
 - The newsletter is useful, please keep it up. The City's website is also a good resource.
 - Find a better way to let utility customers know ahead of time before cutting off water in their neighborhoods.
 - I appreciate this effort to connect with the citizens of Florence.
 - City employees are doing a great job. There just needs to be more communication between City Council and the community.
 - I think the City really tries hard to reach as many residents and businesses.
 - A focus should be placed on seniors who may not use the internet and social media platforms to ensure they are informed. Promote the City Council virtual attendance option.
 - I find the email newsletters to be convenient, informative, and well-organized. I can get completely up to date on everything in a very short period of time.
 - Increase communication on Instagram. When there were issues with the water over the holidays, I had to get someone else with Facebook to look for updates since I don't use that platform.
 - It would be useful if a system for real time push notifications could be utilized. City Council agendas and public hearing notifications should be sent this way as well. Engaged and empowered citizens make for a better city.
 - I'd like to see the city communicate all meetings and what will be discussed in detail on all their social media well in advance. It would be nice if council members would be out in front of the media a lot more discussing lots of local issues—good and bad. We need to see faces and hear stories of exactly what's going on so we can be involved, too.
 - I would like text notifications/updates about water advisories.
 - I think the website design is easy to use and well-organized. I see news on TV about the City of Florence all the time, I just don't pay a lot of attention to it like I should.
 - I definitely think things have improved over the last couple years
 - Communication is key. There are a lot of updates about the exciting things going on in regard to growth and activities. Improvement can be made on important day to day and public health information.

Many comments referenced city representatives not communicating well or an overall negative impression of the city, especially as it relates to wait times, responses to critical incidents, and the timeliness of information. Respondents were also generally pleased with the opportunity to provide feedback in the form of a survey. Future similar opportunities for engagement could be a great resolve issues moving forward. Some feedback was department or location-specific, generally related to water quality and road conditions.

Multiple survey participants gave suggestions for improvement that the City is already addressing, or that the City already has in place. This suggests the City of Florence could do more to promote existing programs, services, and processes. For example, multiple



respondents said the City should have an e-newsletter, offer online applications for specific programs or services, and offer live streaming of meetings.

Respondents were highly critical of the availability of local media sources including local newspapers, both digital and online, the quality of reporting, and the coverage of local TV and radio news. The City of Florence is not as easily able to address these issues.

Lastly, an overwhelming number of responses concerned issues completely unrelated to City of Florence communication including specific requests for senior programming (the survey was made available at two senior centers), issues with City Council, issues related to Florence County, services offered by Florence County, suggestions for additional facilities (dog park, aquatic center, etc.), voting confusion, confusion about whether a respondent lived inside city limits or outside city limits, road and lighting improvements, sanitation, and codes enforcement.

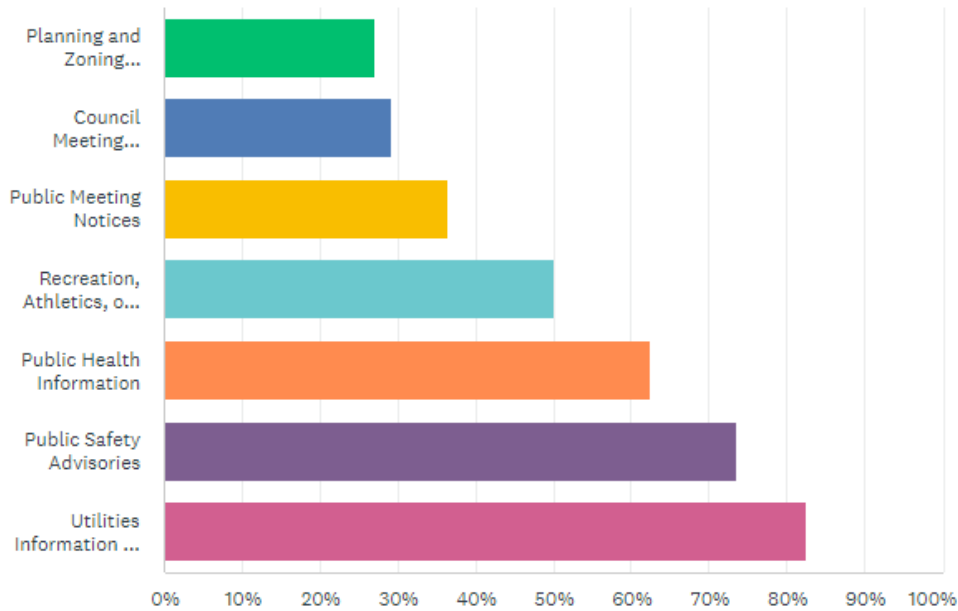
Next Steps

Within the survey, participants were asked whether they'd be interested in a webchat assistant on the City's website to help them find information (68.74% indicated yes) and whether they would be interested in receiving text or push notifications related to City news, alerts, or advisories (77.35% indicated yes). Already underway is an RFP for such services to be applied to the City's communication portfolio.

Respondents indicated that they would most like to receive text and push notifications on the following topics from a list that included seven options: Utilities Information/Advisories (82.61%), Public Safety Advisories (73.46%), Public Health Information (62.47%), Recreation, Athletics, or City Event Information (50.11%). Additionally, respondents could write in information they'd like to receive:

- Major policy changes related to sanitation or yard waste
- Want geo-fenced alert capabilities
- Job fair/employment opportunities
- Emergency preparedness information
- Major traffic issues





ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Planning and Zoning Information	27.00% 118
▼ Council Meeting Information	29.29% 128
▼ Public Meeting Notices	36.38% 159
▼ Recreation, Athletics, or Community Event Information	50.11% 219
▼ Public Health Information	62.47% 273
▼ Public Safety Advisories	73.46% 321
▼ Utilities Information or Advisories (boil water notices, water outages, etc.)	82.61% 361
Total Respondents: 437	

Figure 4 – Information Most Interested In – Push/Text Notifications

Overall, the next steps should be to share more targeted information about basic local government functions more often, evaluate the website regularly and interdepartmentally to ensure information is up to date, accurate, and that the responsibility to update is assigned to someone within each department.

To increase engagement, the City should consider a feedback solution to actively engage with community members such as increased frequency of surveys, opportunities to engage with city departments, and continue to offer City U. Also recommended is to see how other municipalities have handled specific issues or communication challenges.

