City of Baker, Louisiana
Rebecca Bond
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June 1, 2021

Re: 2020 COMMUNITY ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS COMPETITION

Dear Louisiana Municipal Association ,

Following please find the submission for the **2020 COMMUNITY ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS COMPETITION**. The City of Baker is pleased to submit under the project category **Technology & Connectivity** for municipal category 3. 10,001 to 25,000 residents.

Should there be any questions please feel free to contact me either at rbond@cityofbakerla.com or by phone at 225-364-6041.

Best regards,

Rebecca Bond

cc: Mayor Darnell Waites
Dr. Angela Machen CAO
Marysue Stage Director, Finance
Ashley Batts Treasurer

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**2020 COMMUNITY ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS COMPETITION**
**Technology & Connectivity**

**OBJECTIVE:**
As stated in the George Washington University CommGap roundtable regarding *"The Contribution of Government Communication Capacity to Achieving Good Governance Outcomes"* the purpose of a cohesive communications strategy is:

***Providing citizens with adequate information on priorities, programs and activities contributes to government legitimacy. To be legitimate players in public spheres, governments need to develop and maintain effective communication capacity. This allows them to take stock of citizens' needs and preferences, and to foster a more deliberative public space for multi-stakeholder participation, informed policy debate and development effectiveness.***

*Key areas for consideration include:*

- *The functions of government communication: There are three primary functions of government communication: informing, advocating/persuading (for policies and reforms), and engaging citizens.* ***Effective public communication efforts enable citizen participation.***

- *Incentives for government communication: Governments need to be aware of the incentives for communicating. They often do not realize that communication is part of their job and is fundamental to their functioning.*

- *The role of ethics in government communication: Government communication involves not only sending out persuasive messages to the public, but also explaining working policies, creating awareness of the rights of citizens, and developing mechanisms that enable two-way communication between citizens and government.*

- *The enabling environment for government communication: Well drafted, legally binding and enforceable policies on access to information are crucial factors of an enabling environment, along with media literacy and strengthened media organizations.*

The need for a cohesive communication strategy became especially critical in 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic where there was an immediate and urgent need for risk and crisis communications that are both effectively communicating critical health and safety information and exhibiting competent leadership became a real time, life and death situation for the general public in the United States.

The importance of and effectiveness of trusted leaders are summarized in *"Toward effective government communication strategies in the era of COVID-19- Bernadette Hyland-Wood, John Gardner, Julie Leask & Ullrich K. H. Ecker"* **These are central to the management of any crisis during rapidly changing societal and economic landscapes.** They assess that "*Communications strategies, when done well by agencies, can facilitate public trust, confidence, and, importantly, compliance with the behaviors needed from individuals, communities, and organizations. (Carter et al., 2011; Siegrist and Zingg, 2014). During a public health crisis, the governments' role*

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*includes enlisting public trust and cooperation to be part of the solution. People's engagement with and response to public health information and messaging is heavily influenced by their cultural and social identity, age, gender, and access to resources. These factors influence people's preferred modes of communication, who and what they perceive as a 'trustworthy authority,' and, importantly, their capacity to act and respond to information. The evidence-based policy literature details issues related to different forms of knowledge regarding salience, credibility, and legitimacy across geographies and jurisdictions (Cash et al., 2003; Tangney, 2017)."*

**SCOPE:**
The City of Baker had previously established basic social media accounts across various platforms appealing to different age demographics for promotion of social events. These mediums have attracted roughly 10-15% of various populations on each (social media platforms are typically generationally favored). Post engagement was not routinely reviewed nor were any of these mediums used in an ongoing manner for formal communication with the public.

Although it had been previously determined that there was a desire for a mass communication system, like other larger governments were utilizing which was capable of directly emailing and/or texting the citizens who opted in to receive messaging, a decision had not yet been made on a method and products were in process of evaluation when the COVID-19 pandemic began.

With the onset of COVID-19 the necessity to communicate information rapidly and across a broad spectrum of medias moved this project to a top priority. The City of Baker Communications Department was established, all social media accounts were immediately formalized to represent official communication from the City, a platform for email and text messaging was selected which is GovDelivery and the Mayor's television show shifted to an information driven platform reporting the actions the City was undertaking related to the pandemic as well as what actions were occurring related to investment and improvements in the community. Messaging was made more cohesive by having other community, parish, state and national leaders on to share fact-based information related to the health and welfare of the community as well as the coordinated strategies involved in investments and improvements. This strategy involved adopting PSA's which cross promote programs the City is undertaking, health and safety information as well as promoting proactive citizen engagement by signing up to the email/texting service. The cohesive strategy implemented tied all platforms together in unified messaging that revolves around the messages being distributed on the GovDelivery System.

The GovDelivery system was acquired in early April of 2020 and implemented in late April of 2020; it was funded by the City of Baker General fund.

Some of the obstacles that have been faced are public literacy associated with the use of text messaging sign up services, access to text services and email due to affordability or broadband availability or quality of connection. Conversely a Pew survey found that 90 percent of cellphone owners "frequently" carry their phone with them, and 76 percent say they turn their phone off "rarely" or "never." In one small 2015 study, young adults checked their phones an average of 85 times a day.

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**COMMUNITY INVOLVMENT:**
Subscription rates for the GovDelivery product reflected a growth rate of 150.58% (Table 1) in the first year once seeded with the email list from the mayor's business round table meetings that were initiated at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Social media metrics have reflected steady engagement.

The obstacles for many citizens cannot be overlooked, which is why we have continued with the multi-faceted approach of utilizing various social media accounts which are favored by most adult demographic subsets and complemented this with television. In addition, we have kicked off the Baker Broadband Initiative with the Governor's Office of Broadband and Internet Access which began a community wide speed test survey on June 1, 2021. The results of the 90-day window of testing will provide insight into where improvements are needed as well as where there is no broadband access whatsoever. This will allow the City of Baker to work with the OBIA and carriers to improve and enhance infrastructure for citizens.

**RESULTS:**
Overall, the installation of GovDelivery in combination with a cohesive communication strategy has resulted in greater awareness and increased engagement with the community related to public safety, job opportunities, events, and improvements the city is undertaking to promote the quality of life and quality of place in Baker. Increased subscription rates to the GovDelivery platform of 150.58% (Table 1) in the first year reflect the efficacy of a multi-platform approach coupled with quality content that is providing information related to matters directly effecting the community.

We find that social media, such as Facebook, remains relatively constant regarding engagement (note, algorithm changes can account for drastic fluctuations (Table 2). Data shows that during the period examined June 2020 – May 2021, Facebook impressions (people who saw posts) had 1000 or more engagements; the page has a 1526 subscribers so this is a consistent engagement rate of roughly 75% through social media. (Daily counts are not included in this paper but are available upon request).

Nextdoor, another social media application which has approximately 9% of Baker residents subscribed and which covers a demographic typically aged 40+ has been incorporated into the repertoire of mediums along with Twitter and Instagram. Nextdoor has an average 17% engagement rate whereas Twitter is reporting an average 114.8% engagement to user ratio (Table 5). (Nextdoor statistics are based upon daily counts which are not included but are available upon request). Each of these accounts have been online and actively used for significant shorter timeframe than the Facebook account so we will be looking primarily at Facebook from a statistical benchmarking perspective.

Additional metric reporting indicates that growth through direct email and texting yields exponential subscriber growth with interest in subject matter confirmed by Impressions (opens & click through) on GovDelivery (Table 3).

Similarly, GovDelivery engagement reporting reflects a higher-than-average interest in content, never dropping below 67%, for the past 12 months with rates averaging in the high 70's to 80% ranges (Table 4).

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Ultimately, we find that our combined efforts are maximizing the investment in a cohesive communications strategy where we center around the GovDelivery messaging platform as the driver to the public both directly and to social media platforms.

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Table 1.

06/08/2021 09:14 AM CDT **Account Performance Report - Jun 2020 to May 2021** GOVDELIVERY

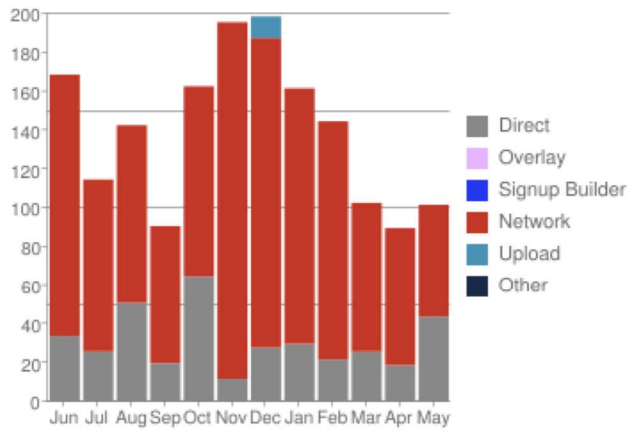
**City of Baker, La.**

## Effectiveness

*See how your organization is increasing reach and which sources are bringing in the most subscribers.*

### Subscriptions

Source of New Subscriptions




Subscriptions

| | |
|---|---|
| Direct | 365 |
| Overlay | 0 |
| Signup Builder | 0 |
| Network | 1,290 |
| Upload | 11 |
| Other | 0 |
| Deleted | 630 |
| Change in Total Subscriptions | +1,036 |
| Total subscriptions as of 05/2021 | 1,724 |

Percent growth past 12 months:

**150.58%**

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Table 2.

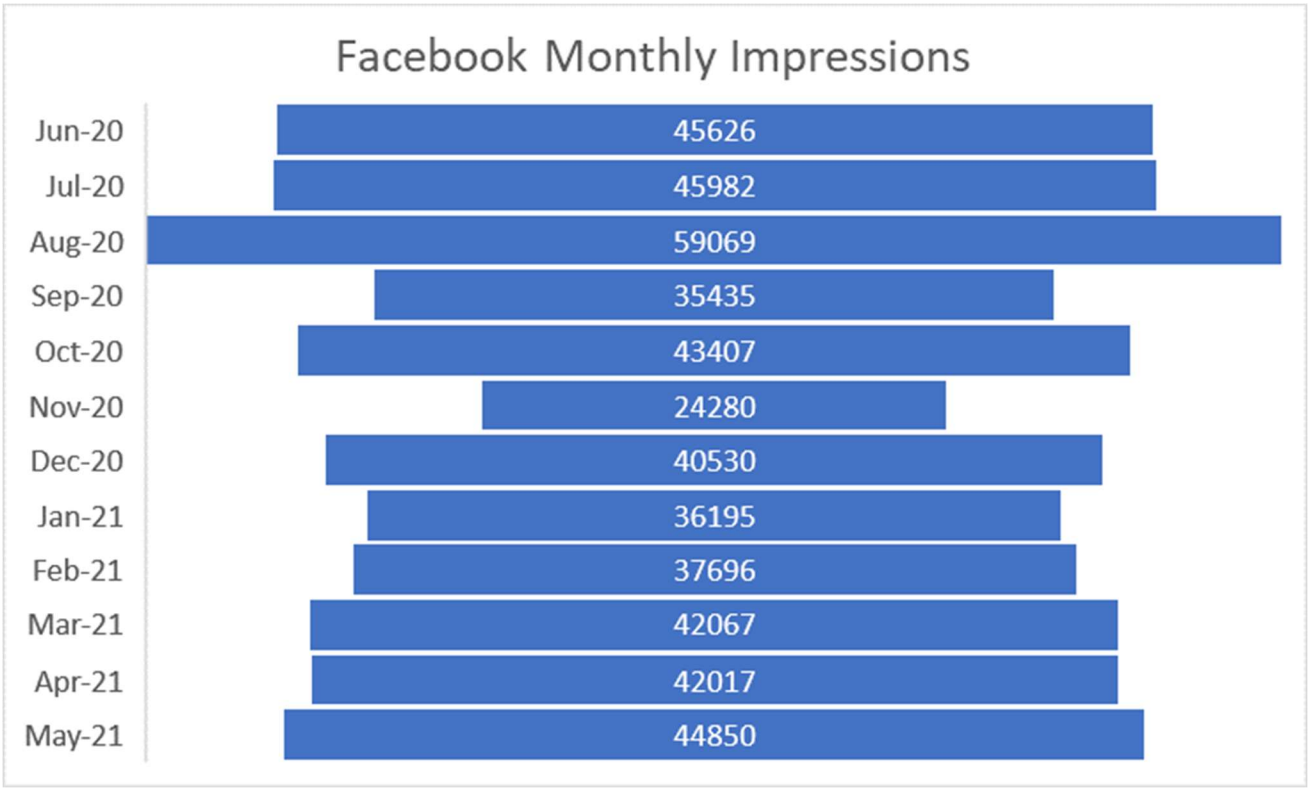

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Table 3.

06/08/2021 09:14 AM CDT

## Account Performance Report - Jun 2020 to May 2021

GOVDELIVERY

**City of Baker, La.**

### Key Metrics

*Summary of key metrics indicating account performance, growth, and engagement.*

**687** **Change in Subscribers** more details
Net change in subscribers to your account

**1.04K** **Change in Subscriptions** more details
Net change in subscriptions to your topics

**1.5** **Subscriptions Per Subscriber** more details
Average number of topic subscriptions that each subscriber has as of 05/2021

**74.9%** **Engagement Rate** more details
Percentage of recipients who opened or clicked on a link in a bulletin in 90 days prior to 05/2021

**124K** **Impressions**
Total number of bulletin opens and link clicks

**241.8%** **Network Impact** more details
Percentage growth in subscribers as a result of using the GovDelivery Network

Total Subscribers

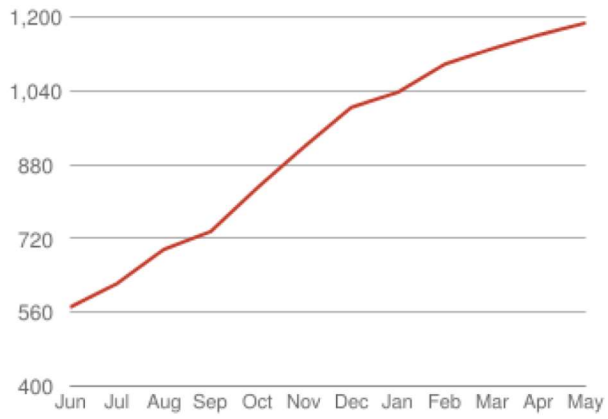

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Table 4

06/08/2021 09:14 AM CDT **Account Performance Report - Jun 2020 to May 2021** GOVDELIVERY

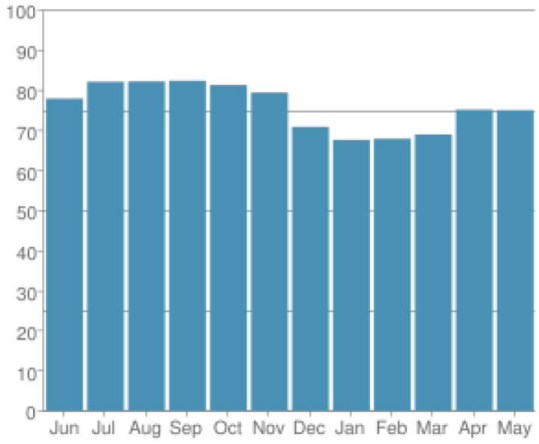
**City of Baker, La.**

## Engagement

*View your most popular topics and how many subscribers are engaging with your communications.*

Engagement

Month

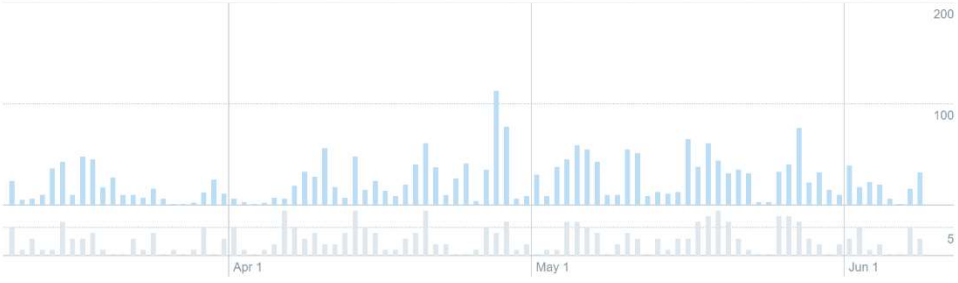



Engagement by Month

| Month | Unique Recipients | Engagement Rate* |
|---|---|---|
| May 2021 | 916 | 74.89% |
| Apr 2021 | 908 | 75.00% |
| Mar 2021 | 931 | 68.85% |
| Feb 2021 | 903 | 67.77% |
| Jan 2021 | 827 | 67.47% |
| Dec 2020 | 786 | 70.74% |
| Nov 2020 | 666 | 79.28% |
| Oct 2020 | 626 | 81.15% |
| Sep 2020 | 596 | 82.22% |
| Aug 2020 | 568 | 82.04% |
| Jul 2020 | 521 | 81.96% |
| Jun 2020 | 459 | 77.78% |

Table 5

Your Tweets earned **2.3K impressions** over this **91 day** period




YOUR TWEETS
During this 91 day period, you earned **25 impressions** per day.