



Saskatchewan Municipal

Management Resource

Writing a Community Newsletter

There are many ways and many mediums you can use to effectively communicate with your ratepayers and community groups. Perhaps the most familiar medium is the municipal newsletter. Since most of us are already overwhelmed with an excess of information, your newsletter will only be effective if it is accessible and relevant, and people make the effort to read it. So how do you ensure that your efforts will not be wasted? There are some ways you can make your newsletters more attractive to your readers and help make sure that your already limited time is not spent unnecessarily.

Do the research

Before you start writing your newsletter, you must first determine which format will best suit your audience. Should it be a printed newsletter, an electronic newsletter, posted on your website, or both? Will you mail it to each household, have it available in your office, or e-mail it out? Will it be distributed monthly, quarterly, or bi-annually?

There are benefits to both the printed and the electronic newsletter. The print version can be read anywhere, can be placed in optimum locations, such as the coffee shop, and important information can be circled and clipped out. However, printing and distribution costs are something to consider. Electronic newsletters are easy to distribute, economical, and can be interactive by linking to surveys, or other online information. Some issues with the electronic newsletter can include downloading time and the size of the document, creating a distribution list, and the technological requirements of your audience. Find out the format your audience is most likely to read and what your budget will allow. You can also check into what your neighbouring communities are doing and how it is working for them.

Decide on “the look”

Once you have decided on a format, you will need to design the newsletter. Appearance is important, so give it an attention-grabbing title; however, it should be clean and simple. By breaking up the text with titles, subtitles and bullets, it will be easier for your audience to scan. While it is good to include some graphics, too many can obscure important content and notices.

Depending on your computer software, designing your newsletter could be as simple as opening your word processor and looking for a template. There is also a vast resource of newsletter templates readily available on the Internet through a simple search, or by visiting Microsoft Office Templates. Using a template can save you time and allow you to concentrate on what really matters, the content. You can also search the Internet for other ratepayer newsletters for ideas.

What to include

To help you decide on the content, talk to your councillors and staff who deal with the community on a regular basis and find out what they want to know. Once you have a handle on the issues, your newsletter can include articles that will respond to your audience's needs and can increase your readership. Some common features of a municipal newsletter include: office and councillor contact information, council meeting notices and schedules, recent bylaws or resolutions, community group news and events, community success stories, classified advertisements, construction and snow removal information, etc.

Basic tips for newsletters

1. Know your audience – what is relevant and important, what is the best way to distribute your news
2. Keep it simple – develop your design with the reader in mind, keep your text short and easy to read
3. Keep it consistent – a consistent look and distribution schedule will keep your readers familiar with your newsletter
4. Write well – write for your audience, avoid jargon, write simply and edit your text well – typos are very distracting and can detract from your news
5. Keep it relevant – give your readers accurate, interesting and timely information that will be useful to them, listen to your reader feedback to keep improving your publication

Newsletters can be a relatively easy and economical means to effectively communicate with your ratepayers. They can be a creative outlet allowing your municipality to promote its initiatives and policies while also ensuring that important information gets to those who need it.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Try searching for “Newsletter Templates” online, or search for “Microsoft Office Templates.”