

Sisters Civic Leadership Academy

2024 Final Report

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Introduction

The 2024 Civic Leadership Academy was charged with addressing the crucial question:
How can the City of Sisters improve community engagement and outreach?

Our team was assigned these three critical tasks: 1.) identify and interview key stakeholders 2.) research key facts pertinent to the issue and 3.) create clear questions to help the City define what is at the heart of their goal.

Over the course of six weeks, our group engaged in meaningful conversations with a diverse array of community members, as well as interviews with City Council and staff members to better understand their goals. This report is the culmination of our team's work, in which we have compiled quantitative facts and our findings about Sisters Country through our interviews and discussions. We do not make formal recommendations, but do offer many considerations for the City Council and Staff to use as they work toward improving community engagement and outreach.

Our team acknowledges the unique position the City of Sisters has in impacting citizens beyond city limits. Our research included the broader population group of **Sisters Country**, which is defined as "Sisters School District 006 and Camp Sherman, including the city of Sisters proper, along with outlying residential developments and unincorporated areas, ranches and farms." We recognize that Sisters Country does not include the entire **Sisters Community**, which also includes a substantial and vital commuting workforce staffing Sisters' businesses, schools, non-profits, city government, and working lands.

In organizing our findings, we identified five themes that came up in our research, interviews, and framing of key sub-issues. We have organized our report into these themes as follows: **Key Stakeholders**, **Communication Methods**, **City Capacity and Constraints**, **Measuring and Tracking Success**, and **Building Trust through Accountability**. Each theme contains one to three questions that our team deemed essential for consideration, with each followed by the findings from our research.

Key Stakeholders

1. How can the City identify and consider the needs of all current and future stakeholders in Sisters Country and foster community connectedness and conversations between them?

Despite its small size, the Sisters Community is still made up of a diverse set of people with different needs. Our cohort identified key stakeholders to interview to better understand how different folks in Sisters Country engage with the City of Sisters. Members of the Civic Leadership Academy interviewed people from various stakeholder groups, including but not limited to: property owners, renters, business owners, commuting workers, long-time residents, new residents, city residents, rural residents, Camp Sherman residents, retirees, parents with young children, high-school alumni, and Latine community members. Although we conducted over 30 stakeholder interviews, we did not capture the voice of all stakeholders and missed input from key groups such as: social service users, low income residents, people experiencing houselessness, resilience hubs, current students, non-resident high school alumni, and non-Latine minorities.

From our research we also identified demographic trends that can inform the city on whose voices may be missing from the conversation. Based on the easily accessible, publicly available American Community Survey data (including years 2011-2022), resident demographics have changed dramatically, especially since the outbreak COVID-19, with citizens over the age of 65 displacing other age groups as a percentage of population (Figure 1). Rental properties have also dramatically decreased, both in number and in proportion of housing stock (Figure 2). Housing costs and average income have also dramatically increased (Figure 3). We also note that racial diversity is increasing in the City of Sisters (Figure 4).

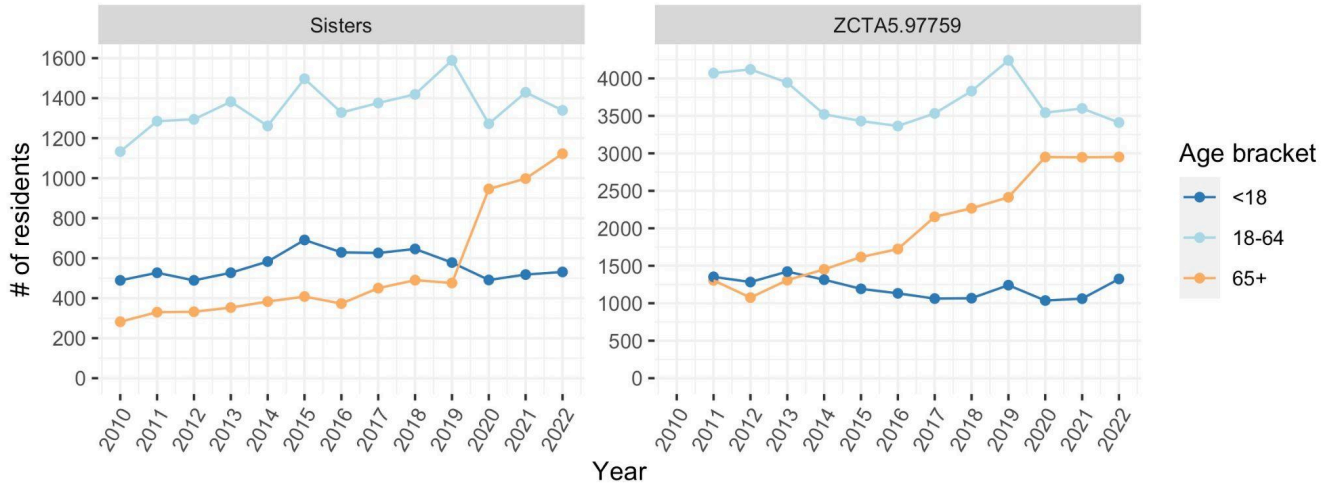


Figure 1 The number of residents falling into the under 18 age bracket (dark blue), the 18 to 64 age bracket (light blue) and 65 and over age bracket (orange) for the City of Sisters (left) and 97759 zip code which includes the City of Sisters (right). Figure generated by Anna Rasmussen using American Community Survey 5-Year Data.

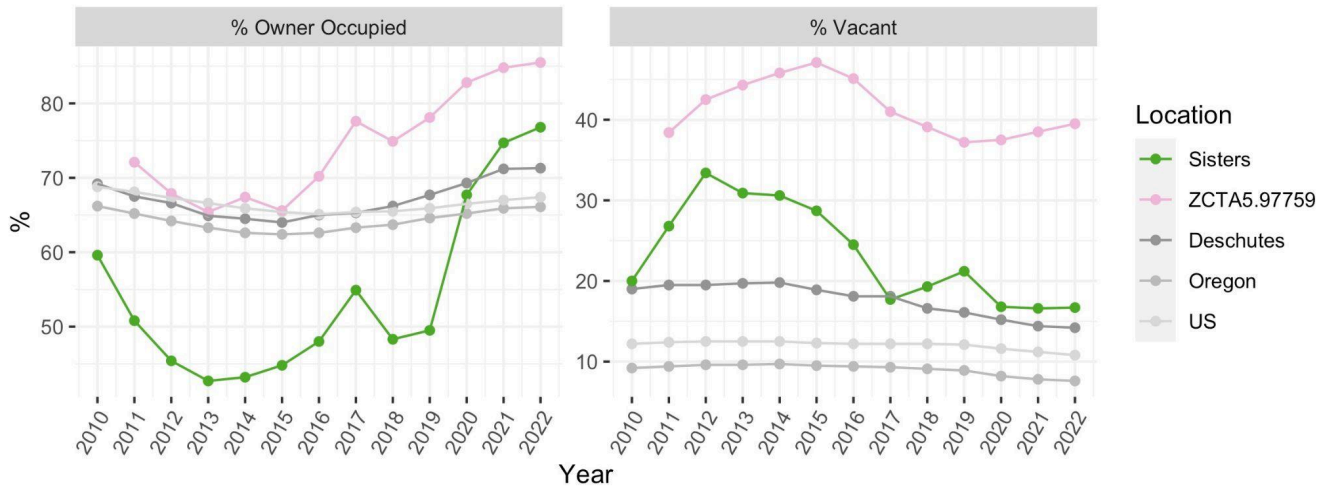


Figure 2 (Left) the percentage of housing units that are owner occupied. (Right) The percentage of housing units that are vacant. Each facet includes data for the US, Oregon, Deschutes County, 97759 zip code (pink), and City of Sisters (green). Figure generated by Anna Rasmussen using American Community Survey 5-Year Data.

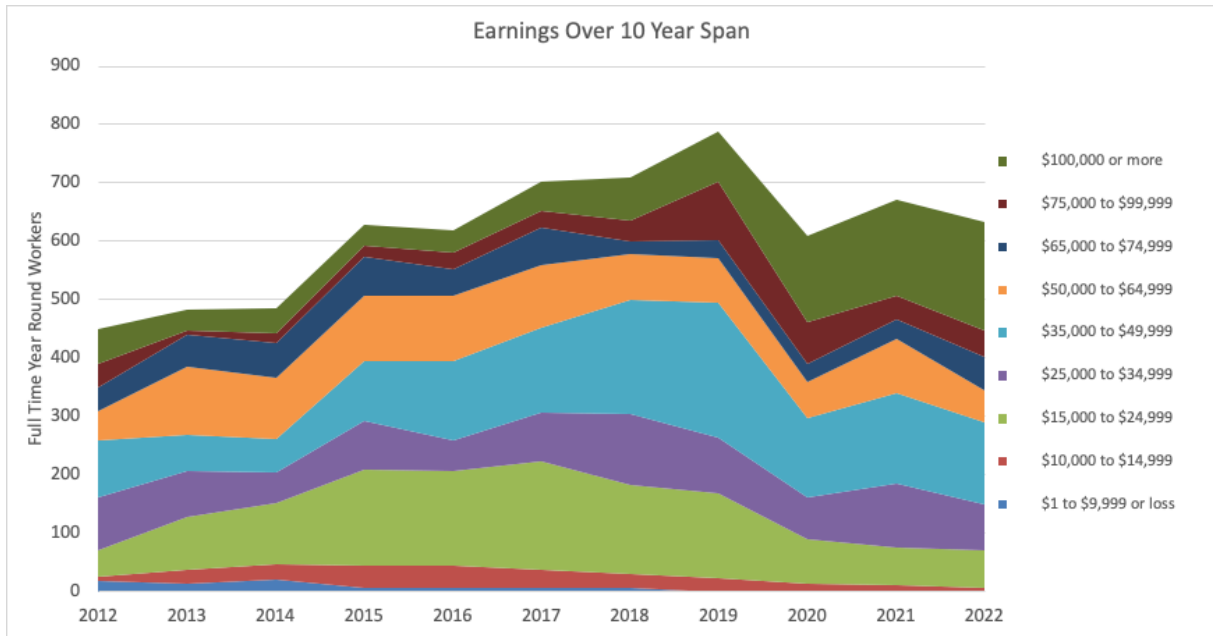


Figure 3 Earnings over a 10 year span (2012-2022) for the City of Sisters. Figure provided by Erik Fitchett using American Community Survey 5-Year Data.

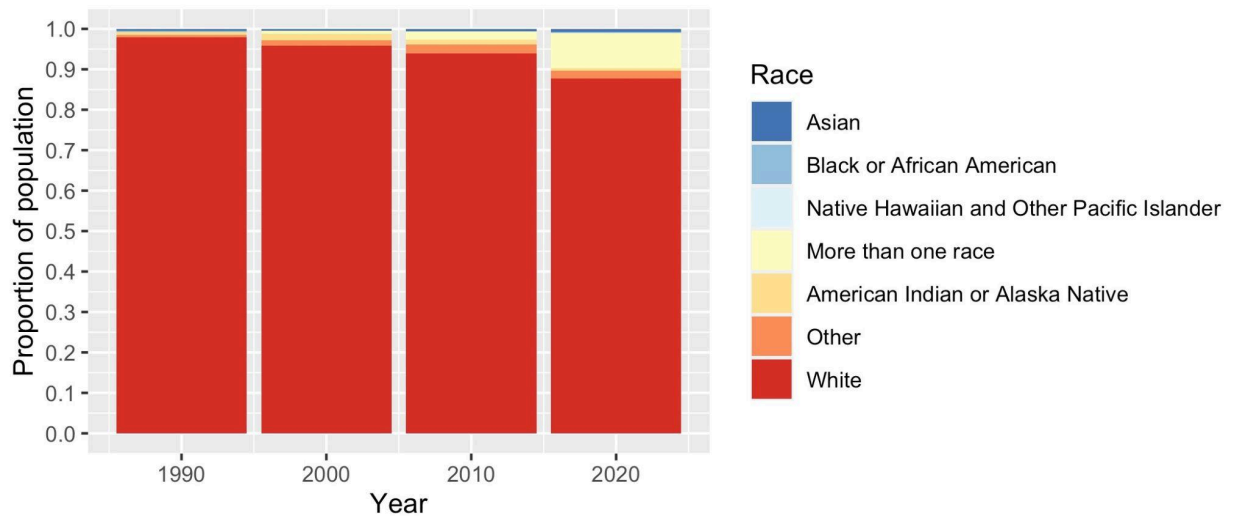


Figure 4: Proportion of people in the City of Sisters in different race categories defined by the US Census. Figure generated by Anna Rasmussen using Decennial US Census Data. Note 1990 census data did not report 'More than one race'.

2. In what ways can the City remove barriers to engagement for the average citizen and the extra barriers faced by under-represented subgroups?

The initial question posed by the City is two pronged, focused on increasing both engagement with the citizens of Sisters Country and outreach from the City to Sisters Country. An important aspect of informing and engaging citizens is what communication methods are used by the City of Sisters. The current observable communication strategy for the City is focused on the email newsletter, website updates, and Facebook posts.

Although the newsletter has high open rates (with 1675 subscribers and 71% open rate), there was very low general awareness of the existence of the newsletter among our stakeholder interviewees. The newsletter's high open rate is primarily on desktops (96%), although current email trends in the industry show that this is indicative of an older demographic being reached more effectively as the majority of people under 40 check their email primarily on mobile devices (2016 Consumer Adoption & Usage Study by Adestra). Additionally, we observed that the newsletter signup is very difficult to find on the City's website in comparison to other cities that have a prominent call-to-action button on their homepage (e.g. Hood River).

We also observe that the City's Facebook page has very low engagement as seen with few likes or comments per post. This could be because content is not cross-posted in relevant high-traffic groups, and the content is not optimized for Facebook.

The general trends we observed were: 1. discoverability of information is low on both the website as well as Facebook and 2. the City is not currently cross-posting content to platforms like Twitter/X, Youtube, etc. A content marketing tool like ConstantContact or Mailchimp could provide cross-posting support with minimal effort.

Additionally, it is important the City considers barriers such as time availability, knowledge, distance, language, lack of access to online and in-person communication methods, lack of transportation, lack of child care, or no voter address for engaging with the City.

3. In what ways can the City constructively engage with active Sisters community members who live outside of the legal city limits?

Sisters has a strictly defined urban boundary and city limits. However, a significant proportion of the Sisters Country live outside of the city limits. To our knowledge, the City

currently does not have an outreach program targeting rural residents (~2/3 of Sisters Country), people experiencing houselessness, commuting workers, or parents and children enrolled in the Sisters School District who reside outside of city limits.

Although outside of the city limits, there are many active Sisters Country members who would like to contribute to the success of Sisters. For example, one interviewee from Camp Sherman stated: *"We funnel a lot of dollars into the city through our need for services. Our kids go to Sisters School District and we feel that we are a part of the city even though we don't live there."*

Communication Methods

1. *How can the City ensure correct information is consistently communicated across a variety of outreach channels (current and future) that is appropriately framed for each platform?*

We observe that the City is lacking one main channel of communication that consolidates information. Our team found four main websites with content specific to Sisters: sisterscountry.com, City of Sisters, sisterscommunity.org, and Explore Sisters. These multiple sources cause confusion on where information is coming from and whether it is official City news. For example, our stakeholder interviewees were asked: How do you receive information from the City of Sisters now? One person stated they use *"the Bend subreddit, [and] news aggregates that include Salem newspapers."* Another interviewee referenced a survey she received that came from the City, but was in fact from a different organization. These various "voices of Sisters" make it difficult for citizens to deduce what viable information they should give weight to. *"Love the round up email but often feel it is too little too late"* was a quote from one of the discussions. A consensus was that citizens desire a more singular and consistent voice from the city, which could be achieved by the feedback given from interviews as follows:

- *"Leveraging more modern communication tools could help reach a broader audience."* -Property Owner
- *"More public events in which the city is obviously present, like booths or parade sections similar to fire or police."* -Parent of young children

- *“I would also be more motivated if there was an anonymous or casual community feedback area online.”* -Sisters resident, <25 yrs old
- *“Keep [a] fluid mindset, majority communicate through tech and would at least see outreach grow if not engagement if tech was used more.”* -Parent of young children
- *“Perhaps there could be a dedicated page in The Nugget regarding changes happening in Sisters. That would make it easier to find and read this type of information.”* - Sisters resident, retiree

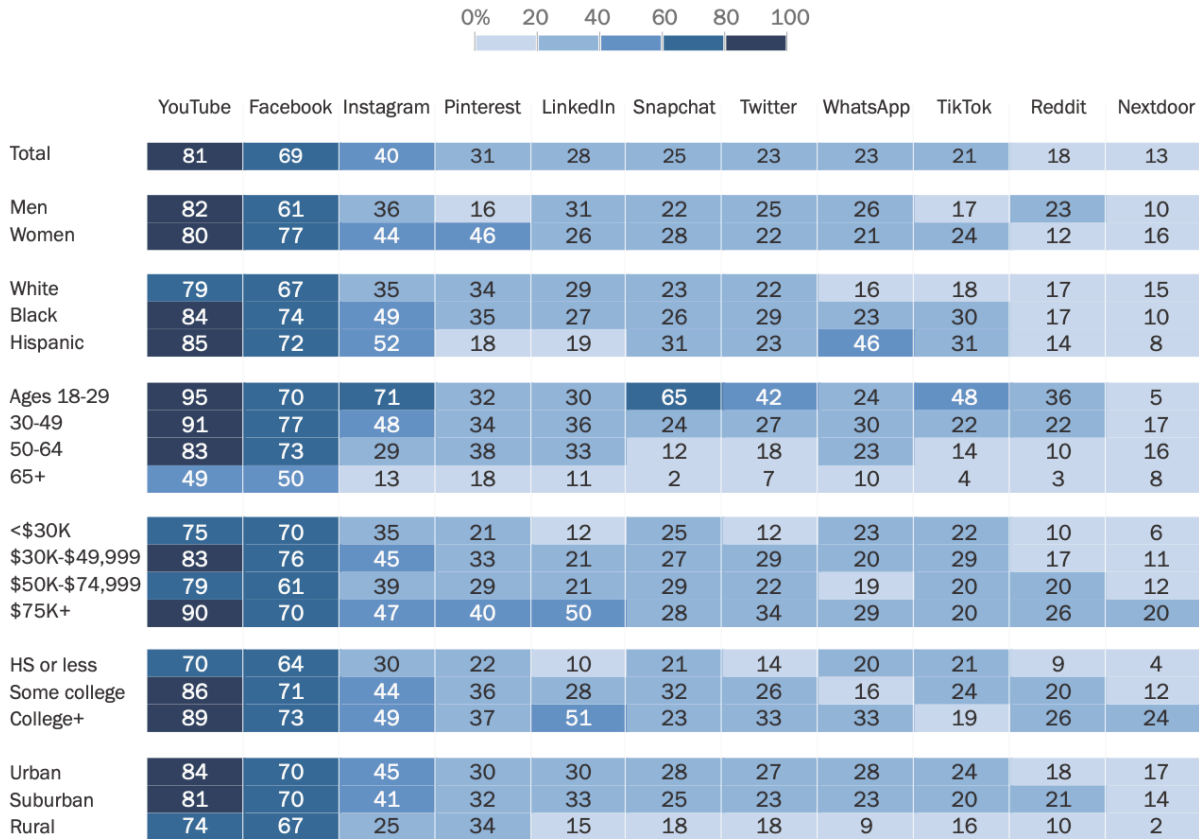
Our team’s research shows that the City’s medium of communication does not always fit with people’s expectations and usage. Figure 5 shows the most common social media platforms by demographics, with YouTube and Facebook consistently used for all age groups and Instagram more popular among the youngest group (18-29 years of age). Currently, the two most used communication methods in Sisters Country are the Facebook online communities (10+ groups, one with almost 5k members) and *The Nugget* (as identified as a main source of information in a vast majority of our stakeholder interviews, readership ~20,250). Neither of these methods are operated by the City. Additionally, other communication methods with smaller reach include various email newsletters, websites of partners to the City of Sisters, word of mouth, and fliers posted in town.

	Sisters Pop 3,200	Joseph Pop 1,200	Jacksonville Pop 3,000	Hood River Pop 8,300
Website	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Newsletter	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
FaceBook	Yes, 500 followers	Yes, 2k followers	No	Yes, 4k followers (EN & SP)
Instagram	No	Yes, 2k followers	No	Yes, 1,600 followers
Twitter/X	No	No	No	Yes
YouTube	No	No	No	Yes
Tik Tok	No	No	No	Yes

Table 1 Communication mediums used by several Oregon cities

Use of online platforms, apps varies – sometimes widely – by demographic group

% of U.S. adults in each demographic group who say they ever use ...



Note: White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Not all numerical differences between groups shown are statistically significant (e.g., there are no statistically significant differences between the shares of White, Black or Hispanic Americans who say they use Facebook). Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 25-Feb. 8, 2021.

"Social Media Use in 2021"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 5 Use of online platforms and apps by demographic groups by Pew Research in 2021

2. How can content, frequency, delivery method, and initial timing of outreach to stakeholders increase engagement for general and identified target audiences?

There is not one ideal platform for communicating with the entire Sisters Community. The City currently has few channels to broadcast its official voice and should consider expanding into additional communication platforms. Communication platforms could be used to have a "conversation" with the community, with specific metrics acting as "tools" to

guide the conversation. The City will need a strong grasp and understanding of what each communication channel is built for and relevant metrics on who is interacting with the City communications on each platform in order to pick the right “tool” to communicate with when and to measure successful interactions. The City can decide to “talk” in the conversation and put out information or “listen” to get responses, solutions, and feedback. Table 2 includes various communication channels and the effort needed to run them. The City should consider data presented in Table 2 and other relevant data in deciding how to fashion their voice and choose platforms for communication with the public.

Medium	Used	Reach	Engagement	Effort	Supported by Constant Contact?	Considerations
Website	Yes	N/A		Low	No	Newsletter signup
Newsletter	Yes	1600	72% Open Rate	Low	Yes	Content Creation
FB	Yes	505	32 posts have a total reach of 3036, 194 reactions, 13 comments.	Low	Yes	Implementation of best practices
Instagram	No	N/A	N/A	Low	Yes	Implementation of best practices
Nextdoor	No	N/A	N/A	Low	No	Reach
Twitter/X	No	N/A	N/A	Low	Yes	Implementation of best practices
Linkedin	No	N/A	N/A	Low	Yes	Implementation of best practices
YouTube	No	N/A	N/A	High	Yes	Content Creation
TikTok	No	N/A	N/A	High	No	Content Creation

Table 2 Types of communication and effort needed to use each

3. How can the City better emphasize and clarify where to find the appropriate resources and information for emergency preparedness specific to Sisters Country and rebroadcast urgent messages from responsible partner agencies to all people?

There are emergency plans in place by the City as required by law, but what are they and where can they be found? When asked, people did not know; *“More info on public events for families, big emergency broadcasts or non-emergency updates”* was one answer for what people wanted more communication from the city on. Another wished, *“Ideally, I would appreciate more frequent updates via digital platforms like a city app that could offer real-time notifications, particularly during wildfire season.”*

The City already goes above and beyond in its outreach as stated by City manager Jordan Wheeler: *“Most of the outreach the City does is technically beyond what is required either by state law or local ordinance but is good practice.”*

Efforts of City outreach are shown through the answers to this interview question: *“Do you know how to provide input to or get information from the City?”* The average interviewee’s answer was to go and look at the city website. *“I have no idea how to voice concerns or opinions, but I’d look online first”* one stated. Another stakeholder had this feedback, *“I am aware of the city council meetings and how to submit feedback through the city’s website. However, not everyone might be as informed, so increasing the visibility of these methods would be beneficial.”* The current city website and available information was compared to other cities with larger populations, which have longer running, streamlined policies/plans specifically for outreach and engagement.

Looking at other city websites of similar population, there are some new “best practices” that emerged which could be considered by the City of Sisters. These include:

- Immediate pop-up on the City website to receive a newsletter
- A highly visible place on the home page to report problems (based on type)
- Abundant images and more spaced out text for easier reading
- Clarity on committee responsibilities and specific issues they can address
- Elected officials and city representatives visible in fewer clicks
- Daily updates for specific services/alerts
 - e.g. fire lines or danger level, dangerous cold weather, closure status of seasonal roads

During our discussions and research it also became clear that Sisters Country citizens are hindered by not knowing when or how to reach the City, partially due to multiple streams of information, and the lack of one clear voice from the City. General confusion on how local government works, not knowing elected or city appointed representatives, or who to reach out to are also barriers citizens face before they can start engaging.

City Capacity and Constraints

1. ***How can the City create a roadmap for outreach and engagement that allows for immediate implementation within the current staffing capacity as well as a plan for sustaining and expanding practices with future capacity?***

Our team found three key constraints that may be hindering the current outreach and engagement program: labor hours, budget and social media policy.

Labor Hours as Constraint

Everything has limits. The City faces this truth with Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) staff labor hours and the annual budget.

Jordan Wheeler, City Manager, when asked about the level of Outreach & Engagement the City is currently involved in, shows his understanding of constraint: “One of our challenges is the limited resources and capacity in a small organization to manage a sophisticated communications function.”

When Jordan Wheeler was asked for clarification on how many labor hours are put into Outreach & Engagement, these are some of his responses:

“Since we don’t have a public information officer, communications manager, or similar position, our department directors and other key staff members are responsible for developing communication strategies and plans.”

“Larger cities can have more specialized positions that may be more narrow and deep.”

“Resource management in the public sector is important and allocating more existing resources to one program or activity can affect our ability to accomplish goals and objectives.”

“Eventually, as the city grows, or priorities change, we create a new program or establish an FTE to provide a service when it is justified.”

Kerry Prosser, Assistant City Manager, when similarly asked about labor hours spent on Outreach & Engagement had this to say:

“In the CMO’s office, if you include the time we spend in meetings with citizens, agency partners, updating the website & social media, responding to emails, planning, and facilitating meetings, etc, the three of us spend most of our time on outreach and engagement.”

Budget as Constraint

In the City’s budget, funds spent on outreach and engagement is line-itemed as “Public Outreach.” Over the last five years, there has been a high degree of variance in the actual monies spent on outreach and engagement as seen in Table 3. Although the group identified the large variance year over year there was not a clear understanding of what the City of Sisters has been allocating to the “Public Outreach” budget. Understanding the “Public Outreach” budget is a placeholder and not intended to be fully utilized over the course of the fiscal year, it may benefit the City and council members to consider allocating specific funds to improving outreach and engagement practices (e.g. 3rd Party services, Software, FTE).

Budget Year	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
Actual Spent	\$4,560	\$15,428	\$10,023	\$5,491	\$19,037

Table 3 City of Sisters Public Outreach Spending from City Budget.

Social Media Policy as Constraint

In 2019, the City of Sisters established a Social Media policy with the intent to guide the use of City operated websites and social media pages by the City, the City's employees, and the City's appointed and/or elected officials.

The City views the use of their website and social media platforms primarily as outreach. This view is made clear by Kerry Prosser (Assistant City Manager) stating, in regards to the City's use of Facebook and the Roundup newsletter that they are "often used to spread the word" and their "main purpose currently is sending out information." Outreach as the primary goal is also clearly stated in the City's Social Media policy: "Primary purpose of any City internet website and/or social media site(s), is to provide news, announcements, and other public information concerning City Business." The City of Sisters Social Media policy clarifies again that the use of social media is meant for outreach, not engagement: "City's use of any social media is not intended (nor will be construed) to create a public forum."

To similar ends, but in contrasting language: both Portland and Salem state in their Social Media policies, regarding engagement, that their City's social media use constitutes a limited public forum; defined as "where a government has intentionally reserved a forum only for certain groups or for the discussion of certain topics."

As the report will next examine ways to measure and track the success of outreach and engagement, the City may want to consider how the algorithm of social media companies responds to engagement on their platforms, as well as look into defining budget and labor goals aligned with increasing engagement.

Measuring & Tracking Success

1. ***What tools can the city use to gather data on outreach and engagement, and how can this data be used to both create a workable outreach and engagement plan, and show that plan is effective, practical, and convenient to stakeholders?***

In order to know whether the City is succeeding in its goal, it is imperative to define what success looks like both quantitatively and qualitatively. Our team asked the City Council:

What are your success metrics or definitions around what it means to have achieved the goal of "improve community engagement and outreach"? Below are some key takeaways from those conversations.

- **Mayor Preedin**
 - May not have an easy way to measure the success of engagement, but believes the city should continue to branch out and explore different avenues of engagement and outreach to reach those the city has not historically engaged with.
- **Councilor Cobb**
 - No metrics attached to this goal, suggests survey to baseline metrics and repeat survey every two years.
- **Councilor Ross**
 - Outreach metrics are more quantifiable, e.g. number of newsletters sent and opened
 - Engagement metrics may be less specific but seeing more residents attending city council meetings, volunteering for committees is an indicator.
- **Councilor Letz**
 - No specific metrics in mind regarding outreach with exception to the number of newsletters sent out, for example.
 - Measuring success can be a challenge because when people feel a topic is being handled well by the city, they don't get involved.

Although the council members did not have strong ideas for specific metrics to measure, we reiterate the importance of measuring outreach and engagement both quantitatively and qualitatively. Without both a current baseline and continued measurement of outreach (e.g., who and how many people are receiving information, from what platforms) and community engagement (e.g., who is participating on boards, how many are attending meetings, how are attendees participating at meetings, what is the quality of questions asked at open houses) it is impossible to gauge whether future efforts by the City are improving community outreach and engagement.

Gap Between City & Audience

As mentioned in the Communications Methods section, *The Nugget* was cited most frequently as the primary source for information. For 8 years, Sue Stafford was a reporter

for *The Nugget* that covered the City Beat. This column acted as a bridge between the Sisters Community and City updates but is no longer being written. To bridge this gap, the City has numerous tools that can be used for Outreach & Engagement, including: 1. City website 2. Facebook 3. Roundup Newsletter and 4. In-person events (council meetings, town halls, workshops, etc). The question is how can the city evaluate their use of these platforms to measure and obtain success.

Below are some key metrics, stakeholder quotes, and our findings about the City's current use of these platforms.

City's Website

- No website analytics are currently available (staff manages the website and is working on improvements including analytics).
- Number of "Contact Us" emails from website in April and May to date: 18

City's Facebook Page

- 506 followers, 68.7% Women, 31.3% Men
- Mid-April to Mid-May - 16 new followers, 3,036 post reach, 1,226 post engagement, 13 comments, 194 reactions
- *"I know about the official channels like the website and public notices at city hall, but leveraging more modern communication tools could help reach a broader audience."* -32 year old female.
- *"If the City had an account on Instagram I would probably follow it, and I believe more young people in our community would as well."* -Young Adult
- *"Keep fluid mindset, majority communicate through tech and would at least see outreach grow if not engagement if tech was used more."* -Parent of young children.

The City of Sisters utilizes a company called Constant Contact for their marketing emails. Managing multiple social media accounts, reposting to different platforms, and creating a unified message can be complicated. Constant Contact, which the city already uses, has packages that help distribute information onto multiple platforms, allow for consistent messaging, and centralize social media use across different staff.

Roundup Newsletter email

- 1,600 subscribers w/ 72% open rate
- 96% Desktop vs 4% Mobile Open
- *"It would be great to get an email newsletter, but I didn't know there was one."*
-Business Owner
- *"I don't follow the city on FB and I didn't know they had a newsletter."* -Rural Resident

The Newsletter outperforms (per capita) than any other platform used by the City. Registration tied to utility bills worked at the onset of the newsletter. The open rate of 72% shows high interest, however, the mode of accessing (desktop versus mobile) being overwhelmingly skewed to desktop (96%) could indicate a majority of older demographic users. Further data is necessary to better understand who the Sisters Roundup email is currently reaching but these findings support that younger demographics may not be engaging with the Roundup email as a very small proportion of opens are on a mobile device.

On the City's website users can sign up for various emails. To access this page, one must draw down the 'Government tab' and click on 'E-Notifications'. These email subscriptions cover City Council meetings, numerous boards and commissions, press releases, and other projects, however, the Roundup Newsletter is missing. In comparison, the City of Hood River has a "City of Hood River Stay Connected Newsletter Signup" button on the home page. Once clicked through, the "City wide E-News, Events, & General Information" boxes are pre-checked, waiting for an email address.

In-Person Events

- Open Houses
 - one completed in Spring 2024 (topic: Council Goals), ~40 attendees
 - Two more open houses are planned for this year.
- Other events that partnered with the city:
 - C4C Community Builders at City Hall, ~ 20 attendees
 - Representative Emerson Levy Town Hall, ~12 attendees
 - Deschutes County Comprehensive Plan Hearing, ~10 attendees
 - Deschutes County Property Tax Open House, 2-3 attendees
 - ODOT Roundabout Open House (Feb), ~70 attendees

- *“Hosting more frequent town halls and community workshops with varied timings could accommodate different schedules, increasing participation”* – 32 year old female resident.
- *“Council Meetings, Workshops, and Town Halls are not always compatible with working hours, with meetings at 4:00pm, 5:00pm, or 5:30pm at the latest.”* – Resident of 40+ years.

The city also uses in-person events to engage with the public, though events that are more question and discussion based, such as town halls and open houses, were not known to occur by many of our interviewees. Many stakeholders requested more frequent open forum/town hall meetings.

Overall, our cohort found that defining and using metrics is a key part to determining success in the goal of improving both outreach and engagement. Without having measurable data or definitions of what success looks like, it will be impossible for the City to know whether their outreach efforts are received or by who or if folks are increasing their engagement. If the goal is to improve, these data will need to be continuously collected and analyzed. Of the current platforms the City is using, a starting place is tracking website analytics and leveraging the capabilities of Constant Contact to distribute consistent messages across multiple platforms. Additionally, continued tracking of both attendance at in-person events and the quality of participation could be utilized to create a schedule and format that is more accessible for a wider range of community members.

Building Trust through Accountability

1. *What consistent and inclusive outreach practices can the city implement to build trust and foster long-term engagement?*

To build our social capital within Sisters Country, people must engage with the City of Sisters. In addition to barriers to engagement mentioned in the above sections, we want to address one of the most significant barriers to engaging with the City: broken trust.

On the positive end of the spectrum, the City's communication was brought up in our stakeholder interviews numerous times. A business owner mentioned that they *“always get a response from City Hall when I email a question,”* and a nonprofit member said that they

feel like their organization has *“an established line of communication with the City.”* However, there are some mixed feelings amongst our community when it comes to trust this communication will continue reliably. A business owner voiced disappointment that *“during COVID, the city reached out to us, but that’s not happening anymore.”* Moreover, there is distrust that takeaways from communications will be considered and used effectively. As a young, female homeowner told us, *“I sometimes feel that feedback gets acknowledged, but not always acted upon.”*

Our conversations around trust centered around two common themes: need for transparency and emotional challenges during engagement. In this section, we will examine these themes and present solutions to these issues as suggested by community members themselves.

Transparency

Transparency was often cited by our stakeholders as a pathway to renewing trust in the Sisters Country. As stated by a young, remotely-employed homeowner, *“it would be helpful to see more transparent follow-ups on how community input is used in decision-making...more direct outcomes visible from community input would enhance trust and engagement.”* Similarly, a workforce member voiced, *“I would like more transparency on how input is considered and integrated.”* This sentiment is felt by those actively engaged. As a Sisters’ High School Alum described, *“I wrote a public comment once, but [I’m] not sure what good it did.”* Like any relationship built on trust, Sisters’ community members cannot rely on being told that their voices are being heard; they need to see it with their own eyes.

2. How can the city communicate and be transparent about how citizen feedback is incorporated in the decision-making process?

According to our community members, a key way to establish transparency is the documentation of engagement between the city and the community over the lifetime of an issue. While this documentation exists to some extent through Public Records, its existence does not appear to fulfill the overall desired transparency. Why not?

One easy answer to this question boils down to issues within visibility and accessibility of Public Records. As a highly-engaged nonprofit member pointed out, *“public records are not always easy to find online.”* Our team member who interviewed this individual found this an

obstacle while researching Sisters Dark Skies, a topic of high engagement. A Google search for “dark skies sisters oregon” produces a defunct City of Sisters webpage as the top result, while a similarly titled webpage featuring a small link to Public Record in the addendum does not appear until the fifth result. Better streamlining and visibility of this information on the City website could be the start of a low-effort, high-reward solution to this issue. Additionally, expanding the visibility of public records to social media may provide a wider reach.

A potentially difficult answer to this question is: transparency only works to build trust when it shows that input is equitably sought out, honored, and incorporated into decision-making. The evaluation of this integrity is subjective, but we heard from community members of various demographics and associations that they feel the City is engaging inequitably. Through the eyes of a renter, *“property owners have a disproportionate voice.”* From a Camp Sherman resident’s perspective, *“the city has never had a presence in Camp Sherman or asked us for our opinions or input.”* She contrasted this observation with the presence of Jefferson County, *“who make regular visits to Camp Sherman.”* Similar sentiments of underrepresentation were found amongst the local workforce, the Latine community, and younger age groups. We encourage the City to further the identification of stakeholders who have experienced historical underrepresentation while increasing engagement with these groups. Demographics with historical underrepresentation in the City of Sisters will only find transparency compelling if it reveals honest efforts in including and representing them.

Emotional Challenges

Engaging in conversations about our community’s past, present, and future can quickly turn into an emotional activity for many. It is important that these conversations allow psychological safety for all to process and express their emotions. However, our stakeholders voiced distrust in our current civic arenas’ abilities to provide this. Expressing their view of *The Nugget* as a forum for civic engagement, a Sister’s High Alum stated, *“[it] is a primary source of information but I am reluctant to participate in the discourse given the incivility [in letters to the editor].”* A workforce member also brought up concerns about the paper, asking *“who writes to The Nugget? It feels like the fringe and not the majority.”* Given these sentiments and the high reliance on *The Nugget* as a news source, there may be a disconnect between the number of people the paper informs and the number of people it

encourages to become civically engaged. We also acknowledge that solutions to this issue may be limited given *The Nugget* is an independent entity.

Similar sentiments expressed about our local paper also came up in conversations about City Council meetings. For some, the nature of the meeting is uncomfortable. *"[It] is intimidating for our supporters. We are unsure how to remove this barrier,"* voiced a non-profit member. This stakeholder pointed to the public speaking and lack of bidirectional conversation as sources of discomfort. For others, there is concern about the civility and effectiveness of these meetings. *"I don't want to go to a City Council meeting with the angry fringe—it does not seem constructive or a good use of my time,"* said a workforce member. While these meetings consistently extend open invitations to all, they may still be inaccessible due to apprehension about their psychological safety and capacity.

When considering "What consistent and inclusive outreach practices can the city implement to build trust and foster long-term engagement?" we want to share some things identified by our stakeholders:

- *"Perhaps there could be a dedicated page in The Nugget regarding changes happening in Sisters. That would make it easier to find and read this type of information."* - Sisters resident, retiree
- *Wants more unstructured dialog with public, e.g. coffee with a councilor, where there can be two-way conversation. This allows for a quick response and opportunity to correct any misinformation.* - Councilor Ross
- *"I would also be more motivated if there was an anonymous or casual community feedback area online."* - Sisters resident <25 years old
- *"Want in person forums advertised more and auxiliary forums in more informal spaces such as The Barn or Sisters Coffee"* - SHS Alum
- *"Hosting more frequent town halls and community workshops with varied timings could accommodate different schedules, increasing participation."* - Homeowner
- *"I would like public recognition that Camp Sherman and the other surrounding rural areas rely on the City of Sisters for services...An improvement would be them thinking ahead to future needs and considering Camp Sherman (and other rural residents) might have valid input and opinions."* - Camp Sherman Resident

Conclusion

Through the Civic Leadership Academy, our cohort identified 5 key themes, several pertinent questions, and many relevant facts to guide the City of Sisters in addressing "How can the City of Sisters improve community engagement and outreach?" The key areas we highlight in this report include identifying and engaging with **key stakeholders**, assessing the current and future **communication methods** utilized by the City, how outreach and engagement practices are **constrained by the City's capacity**, what specific **metrics** can be used to measure improvement and success for outreach and engagement, and finally how the city can **build trust** and hold itself accountable to the broad population of Sisters Country.

Appendix:

Stakeholder Interviews

Our cohort identified key stakeholders to interview to better understand how different folks in Sisters Country engage with the City of Sisters. Members of the Civic Leadership Academy interviewed people from various stakeholder groups, including but not limited to: property owners, renters, business owners, commuting workers, long-time residents, new residents, city residents, rural residents, Camp Sherman residents, retirees, parents with young children, high-school alumni, and Latine community members. Although we conducted over 30 stakeholder interviews, we did not capture the voice of all stakeholders and missed input from key groups such as: social service users, low income residents, people experiencing houselessness, resilience hubs, current students, non-resident high school alumni, and non-Latine minorities.

We asked the following questions to better understand how the public perceives current outreach and engagement from the city, and opportunities for more engagement.

1. How do you receive information from the City of Sisters now? How would you like to receive information from the City?
2. Have you offered input to the City of Sisters in the past? What motivated you to do so? Did you feel heard?
3. Do you know how to provide input to the City of Sisters?
4. Do you know how to get information from the City of Sisters?
5. What kind of information from the City would be most important to you?
6. Do you have ideas for improving the City's community engagement?

Here is what we learned from our interviews, grouped thematically.

General Themes:

- General confusion about City Government, how to engage (e.g. who is the Mayor, when to show up?)
- *The Nugget* is widely read and depended upon for information
- People want to be engaged but not always sure how
- Citizens skeptical they will be truly heard even if they do engage

- The City's medium of communications doesn't always fit with people's expectations and usage.
- There is not one official source of information from the City. Rather there are communications from various departments.

Communication methods

- The total print distribution of *The Nugget* Newspaper is 8,100+ copies per week,
 - readership of approximately 20,250.
 - Over 1,000 of these are left in local restaurants and businesses and 300± are sent to out-of-town subscribers, many of whom have a second home here.
- "I always get a response from City Hall when I email a question." -Business Owner
- "I didn't know I could subscribe to get emails from the city." -Business Owner
- "I'm unsure of the role of the Chamber of Commerce, SBA and Explore Sisters related to small businesses." -Business Owner
- Parents of young children are interested in engaging but not aware of current topics. They use NextDoor and Facebook.
- The structure of City Council meetings can be intimidating. Often City Council agenda topics are not of interest or they are difficult to navigate. -Community non-profit member
- "I have no idea how to voice concerns or opinions" - Workforce
- "I don't want to go to a city council meeting with the angry fringe- it does not seem constructive or a good use of my time" -Workforce
- "The open discourse in *The Nugget* is very unique- it is a very public space and goes out to everyone" -Workforce
- Uses the Bend subreddit, news aggregates that include Salem newspapers -Workforce
- "Love the round up email but often feel it is too little too late" -HS Alum
- "Engagement with City used to be much easier, more informal" -Property owner (resident for 30+ years)
- "Meeting hours often conflict with work hours" -Property owner (resident for 30+ years)
- Nugget is the go-to source for information -Latine community members, property owners, renters, retirees, Camp Sherman resident
- "[I get information] mostly [from] *The Nugget*. I was also in the loop on City events when I was receiving emails from the Sisters Indivisible group and the Astronomy Club. I don't follow the city on FB and I didn't know they had a newsletter. I get so many newsletters in my inbox, I don't think I would read it." -Camp Sherman Resident

- "I read about things in *The Nugget*. I don't use Facebook. I might be interested in a newsletter. I would attend a neighborhood event." -New resident, retired female >65 yo
- "If the city had an account on Instagram I would probably follow it, and I believe more young people in our community would as well." -City resident <25 yo
- "I know about the official channels like the website and public notices at city hall, but leveraging more modern communication tools could help reach a broader audience." -Property Owner, 32 yo female

Skepticism/Trust

- "Eric from EDCO (Economic Development Central Oregon) visits our store, but not sure if our concerns get back to the city." -Business Owner
- "During COVID, the city reached out to us, but that's not happening anymore." -Business Owner
- "Not sure what being heard would look like." -Workforce
- "I am disgusted by the chicken-shit response [of the city] to pushback on the cold weather shelter" -Workforce
- "Do not feel heard as a renter/young professional" -HS Alum
- "Property owners have a disproportionate voice" -HS Alum
- "The old guard are not interested in welcoming young or new folks to town" -HS Alum
- "They encouraged us to pursue a degree but then they make it difficult to come back and afford to live here" -HS Alum
- "I grew up here but cannot afford to make a living" -HS Alum
- "Wrote a public comment once but not sure what good it did" -HS Alum
- "*The Nugget* is a primary source of information but I am reluctant to participate in the discourse given the incivility [in letters to the editor]" -HS Alum
- "I would like public recognition that Camp Sherman and the other surrounding rural areas rely on the City of Sisters for services. The city has never had a presence in Camp Sherman or asked us for our opinions or input. This is in contrast to Jefferson County who makes regular visits to CS. I know we are in a different county and don't pay the same taxes as Sisters residents, but we funnel lots of dollars into the city through our need for services. Our kids go to Sisters School District and we feel that we are a part of the city and invested in it, even though we don't live there." -Camp Sherman Resident
- "I have not made attempts to communicate with City of Sisters, but from what I have seen it seems they do a decent job of addressing issues brought up by the community, although some responses or featured issues may have appeared somewhat biased in the past." -City Resident, <25 yo

- “As a resident, I sometimes feel that feedback gets acknowledged, but not always acted upon. It would be helpful to see more transparent follow-ups on how community input is used in decision-making.” -Property Owner, 32 yo female
- “I have participated in community surveys and public meetings to express my views on local projects. My motivation stemmed from a desire to improve local amenities and ensure that community developments reflect the needs and wants of all residents, especially concerning public spaces and local education. It was reassuring to see some responses to community inputs, but it often feels like the feedback loop could be closed better. More direct outcomes visible from community input would enhance trust and engagement.” -Property Owner, 32 yo female
- “I’m not clear on the scope of Chamber of Commerce, new SBA, and Explore Sisters related to my business.” - Business Owner

Opportunities

- Desire for more proactive “check-ins” from the City of business owners.
- Desire for more information that impacts businesses, such as traffic improvements and special events. - Business Owner
- “I feel communication with the city will improve with the new Sisters Business Association (SBA) that’s launching.” -Business Owner
- “[I want the City to] keep a fluid mindset, majority communicate through tech and would at least see outreach grow if not engagement if tech was used more.” -Parent of young children
- “[I want] more info on public events for families, big emergency broadcasts or non emergency updates.” -Parent of young children
- “[I want] more public events in which the city is obviously present, like booths or parade sections similar to fire or police.” -Parent of young children
- “Want more transparency on important issues on social media” -HS Alum
- “Want in person forums advertised more and auxiliary forums in more informal spaces such as The Barn or Sisters Coffee” -HS Alum
- “Want more frequent newsletters to email” -HS Alum
- “Want to give direct feedback that is received” -HS Alum
- [I want to know] what the city is doing to meet the community’s needs (e.g. affordable housing, daycare, ect.)” -Latine community member
- “I do not know how to give feedback. We lack a liaison to support the Latine community and listen to our needs.” -Latine community member
- “The City seems insularly focused. An improvement would be them thinking ahead to future needs and considering Camp Sherman (and other rural residents) might have valid input and opinions. Obviously certain topics don’t apply (like water & sewer), but other issues absolutely affect us (like childcare services).” -Camp Sherman

- “Perhaps there could be a dedicated page in *The Nugget* regarding changes happening in Sisters. That would make it easier to find and read this type of information.” -New resident, retired female >65 yo
- “Environmental and city planning issues would probably be what I would look for, or information or local career opportunities.” -City Resident, <25 yo
- “I have not offered input before, but I might in the future if there was an important issue I was aware of being brought up in town, since currently I am mostly unaware of what is being discussed besides the most major topics. I would also be more motivated if there was an anonymous or casual community feedback area online” -City Resident, <25 yo
- “I would appreciate more frequent updates via digital platforms like a city app that could offer real-time notifications, particularly during wildfire season.” -Property Owner, 32 yo female
- “I am aware of the city council meetings and how to submit feedback through the city’s website. However, not everyone might be as informed, so increasing the visibility of these methods would be beneficial.” -Property Owner, 32 yo female
- “[I want} updates on local infrastructure projects, community events, and changes in city policies are crucial. Information on emergency responses and public health advisories would also be critical to receive promptly.” -Property Owner, 32 yo female
- “Implementing a more robust digital strategy would be key. This could include a more interactive city website, a dedicated mobile app, and more active social media channels. Additionally, hosting more frequent town halls and community workshops with varied timings could accommodate different schedules, increasing participation.” -Property Owner, 32 yo female
- “I would like to have provided input on the TLT fund allocation, but not sure if there was an opportunity.” - Business Owner
- “I always get a response from City Hall when I email a question.” - Business Owner
- “I didn’t know I could subscribe to get emails from the city.” - Business Owner
- “More info on public events for families, big emergency broadcasts or non-emergency updates. More public events in which city is obviously present, like booths or parade sections similar to fire or police” - Parents of young children