

What We Learned from 70 Municipal Communications Professionals

Insights from the NCLM Social Media Webinar | January 2026

Context

In January 2026, Public Square Analytics delivered a webinar on research-informed social media practices for the North Carolina League of Municipalities. More than 70 municipal communications professionals registered, nearly all attended, and the majority stayed for the full two-hour session.

Following the session, participants shared detailed feedback about what resonated, how they plan to apply the insights, and the challenges they face in their daily work. This brief summarizes the most consistent themes we heard.

The intent is not to promote a product, but to reflect what local government communications professionals are experiencing and how they are thinking about using data to do their jobs more effectively.

What We Heard

1. Data is most valuable when it helps justify decisions internally.

Many attendees emphasized that analytics and benchmarks serve a dual purpose: improving posts *and* explaining decisions to others. One participant noted that their team is scheduled to present to Town Council on social media practices, and the webinar data *"supports much of the information we had already prepared but have often received pushback on."* Several others described using data to defend strategy choices to elected officials, managers, and peers—particularly when there is disagreement about priorities.

2. Quality versus quantity remains a persistent tension.

Participants repeatedly referenced internal debates around posting frequency. While leadership often equates more posts with better communication, many practitioners value clarity, relevance, and consistency over volume. As one attendee put it: *"We place value on quality posts while some in leadership value quantity."* Having research-backed data to support this distinction was cited as especially helpful.

3. Peer comparison carries real weight.

Attendees expressed strong interest in understanding how their municipality compares to similar jurisdictions. Peer benchmarks were described as useful both for self-assessment and for communicating performance to leadership in a neutral, non-defensive way. One participant appreciated *"the different examples with local municipalities"* and the *"great insight into other municipalities in the county."*

4. Social media is viewed as a communication tool, not a governing tool.

Several participants highlighted the importance of framing social platforms appropriately. One attendee particularly liked the comment shared during the session that *"social media platforms are a communication tool, not a governing tool."* Social media was consistently described as a channel for transparency, trust-building, and information sharing—rather than decision-making or governance itself.

5. Centralization and ready access reduce friction.

Participants valued having information consolidated in one place. One attendee described the value of *"sites such as GovFeeds as a centralized communication tool"* that supports *"clear, timely, and professional messaging."* Centralized views of peer activity, engagement trends, and topic patterns were seen as reducing guesswork and helping teams approach their work with greater confidence.

6. Positive, practical framing matters.

Attendees appreciated that the session focused on what works and how to improve, rather than emphasizing risk or failure. As one participant noted: *"I like that Bruce kept it positive—so many of these classes can hone in more on the negative, but we like our social media accounts and how they help, so this session was extremely useful!"* This tone made the content easier to apply and share internally with colleagues and leadership.

What This Means for Municipal Communications Teams

Across roles and municipalities, a consistent theme emerged: communications professionals are looking for ways to bring clarity and credibility to their work. Data is most useful when it supports professional judgment, helps manage internal expectations, and provides a common reference point for discussions with leadership.

Tools and insights that enable peer comparison, early awareness of emerging topics, and clear reporting are not simply conveniences. They serve as an *authority layer*—helping communications professionals operate with confidence in environments where scrutiny is high, resources are limited, and decisions must often be defended after the fact.

As one attendee summarized: *"It is always good to have good data and statistics to rely on."*

A Note on Continued Conversation

Several participants expressed interest in continuing the conversation, particularly around benchmarking, peer comparison, and ongoing monitoring. For teams exploring how data might support their specific context, a short conversation is often the most productive place to start.

If any of the themes in this brief reflect challenges you are navigating locally, I'm happy to spend 15–20 minutes comparing notes on how other communications teams are approaching similar situations. No preparation needed, no cost or obligation—just a chance to see whether continued conversation would be useful.