



17 COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES FOR YOUR ASSOCIATION

(Including 3 You May Have Missed)

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Every great association is characterized by great communication. But what does that look like?

Great HOA or high-rise communication goes beyond simply informing residents. It provides context, information and the “why” behind important issues, policies and projects.

In an association characterized by great communication, residents know what their community or building’s vision is and they know what will ultimately elevate their lifestyle experience and property values.

Read on to see 17 communication best practices for your association (including 3 you may have missed).

Communication Best Practices: *Channels and Technologies*

Community association boards must keep up with technology to maximize channels of communication. Knowing the channels, when to use them and how to use them are all ways to ensure your residents and board members receive your messages — loud and clear.

1. Choose the right channels for YOUR community or building. Knowing the many ways board members and residents in the community receive communication from the association has become more important than ever, mainly because there are so many platforms to use.

“People have different preferences in how they receive communications, so if the goal is to get information into the hands of boards and residents, you should use every available method,” says Stephanie Parker, vice president of strategy and operations at FirstService Residential.

The variety of channels available includes email, your resident portal, community website and newsletter, [virtual communication tools](#), text messages, phone calls, flyers, bulletin board announcements and board meetings. Becoming familiar with the existing communication channels in your community will allow you to spot opportunities and identify gaps to communicate effectively.

DON'T MISS THIS:

To make sure that you're communicating to your association in the most effective and appropriate way, you may want to survey residents. Your management company should be able to help you develop and deploy a survey that asks about preferred communication methods. Then, use that information to craft your communication plans.

2. Use virtual tools for instant and accessible communication Now more than ever, having a management company that manages board meetings effectively during virtual meetings is essential to keep boards and communities harmonious.

Additionally, being comfortable with virtual tools allows you to instantly communicate with board members or residents from anywhere and at any time. This is particularly important for emergencies.

3. Default to email. While it's important to identify your audience's preferred communication format, if you're not sure, go with email. Email provides a universal way to track information and it is also a channel most people have access to. Sending information digitally is an excellent way to follow threads of information, track who has received information and elicit feedback from residents and board members.



Communication Best Practices: *Channels and Technologies*

4. Keep your resident portal or community website up to date. A community website is a great way to keep residents and board members informed about community events and activities (both live and virtual), policy changes and emergency instructions.

If your community has a resident portal, such as [FirstService Residential Connect](#), it should provide all the information above as well as a place for residents and board members to log in and access their account, documents and even sign up to use amenities.

Your website can provide access to forms and documents, including meeting minutes and financial statements for anyone who may need access to them. In addition, the website should give residents and board members the option of sharing contact information for a community or building directory. It's important to keep your website updated, and make sure it addresses the unique requirements of your association.

5. Develop a social media policy before posting.

Social media can be a good place to announce certain community events, meetings or maintenance plans for those who check their social media often. It is a good channel for many board members and residents to learn of community news when they are not reading emails or text notifications.

If you choose to use social media, be sure to first establish a strong social media policy in conjunction with your management company's guidance. Make sure you identify who is responsible for representing the board and/or association on the platform and monitor your accounts closely.

6. Streamline your mass communications.

Mass communication refers to the wide-ranging dissemination of messaging to a targeted audience. Depending upon your audience and messaging, you can use a plethora of different tools suited for various communications. These tools are efficient and allow you to get your message out clearly, concisely and quickly. For a more centralized system, using a mass communication system can enable you and your management company to easily provide instructions during any emergency and to inform residents and board members of meetings and other important information via text message, email and recorded voice message.

Streamlining the process using tools such as [FirstService Residential Connect](#) makes communication easier, especially when all residents, board members and associates need to be contacted quickly.



Communication Best Practices: *Roles and Education*

7. Designate roles for communication tasks.

Determining the roles required for an effective communication program will provide clarity on the responsibilities of your association manager and the board members. It also ensures that there's no overlap in efforts and nothing gets overlooked.

Roles can be determined based on task or topic, whichever works best for the skill sets on the team handling communication. For example, you can assign roles as based on type of job, such as writer, designer or editor, or you may want to assign roles based on the type of communication such as newsletter editor, events coordinator or emergency preparedness spokesperson.

8. Get trained on available communication tools.

Not every board member and resident use every channel of communication, so if there are channels you know you will use, but you're not sure if the staff or other board members know how to use them, a short training session may be necessary. Walking them through appropriate content, tone and messaging is also important to create cohesive messaging. Your management company should help facilitate these training sessions or refreshers.



Communication Best Practices: *Plans and Processes*

9. Plan each communication. Planning your message with fellow board members and your property manager up front will ultimately save everyone time and keep the process efficient. Here are a few questions to ask when planning:

- » What message do you need to communicate?
- » What is the purpose of each message?
- » How far in advance should you send it out?
- » Who will write the message?
- » What are the best channels to use when sending each message?
- » Who will send them?

Each message should focus on a single topic and keep it as brief as possible based on residents' current understanding of the topic.

10. Consistently communicate with residents (both good and bad news). Board members and residents appreciate a regular flow of information. Without it, they may fill voids with misinformation and rumors. Enlisting the manager and establishing a communication committee will help maintain a consistent flow of communication to the residents and other board members without overwhelming the board.

DON'T MISS THIS:

While you may be tempted to only communicate requests, new policies or seemingly “bad news” to residents (e.g., amenity closures, etc.), it is just as important to keep residents in the loop on good news. In particular, communicating the why behind important projects is key. For example, *“We are excited to announce our gate refurbishing project, as updating our current gate system will lead to less frustration with residents and add to the curb appeal of the community to help improve our property values. We will keep you in the loop with ongoing updates.”*

11. Fact-check your communication. Rushing communication can result in inaccurate information. Make sure that all information being sent to residents and board members has been checked for accuracy.



Communication Best Practices: *Plans and Processes*

12. Be transparent in your communications (to build your reputation). Open communication establishes trust, encourages participation and helps facilitate compliance, but some boards are guarded about sharing information because they fear potential litigation.

Even if you need to communicate bad news, resident and other board members will accept it better if you are honest with them and explain the process that led the board to its decision.

13. Give residents an opportunity to share their opinions and concerns (it's a two-way street). Residents need the opportunity to voice their concerns and share their opinions. Reserve time to openly discuss resident feedback during your virtual or in-person board meetings. Ensure that you regularly send out surveys to determine what's important to residents and other board members.

You may even want to set up listening sessions where residents can express their views to board members in a casual setting. However, make it clear that the board can only act during board meetings and only on items that are on the agenda.

14. Focus on high-priority items first. Ideally, you want to inform board members and residents about everything that affects them. However, if you have limited time or resources, focus on high-priority items first, such as meeting notices, financial information and policy changes.

DON'T MISS THIS:

It's important to strike a balance between too little and too much communication. As #10 says, don't simply focus on the negative even if it's the most "important" news. At the same time, don't communicate simply to communicate. Your messages will lose their impact over time. Instead, assess your communications before you send them. Make sure they share important information, communicate your mission and reinforce your reputation with residents.



Communication Best Practices: *Service and Support*

15. Work closely with your management company to develop and send out messaging.

Your management company should be able to successfully manage the tasks of developing and sending out resident communications — but only with your consent.

“ The board should never be surprised that a community manager communicated to your residents without your knowledge. ”

— Stephanie Parker

Your management company and manager should have a deep understanding of your mission and goals, which will help inform the communications you develop together.

16. Get up to speed with your management company's resources and self-service tools.

Your management company should provide an online self-service platform to make it easy for board members to conduct community business and obtain information at their convenience.

A great management company will also provide you with valuable resources and templates, including welcome packets. Packets should include your association's rules and regulations, contact information and other important details specific to your property.

Tutorials for using the online platform to communicate with the manager and board should be readily available and be part of the welcome packet as well.

In addition, the company should proactively communicate new laws and other changes that could impact your community, seek your feedback so it can improve its service and offer board training to help you become a better board member.

17. Make sure residents have access to 24/7/365 support.

Your association management company should provide 24/7/365 customer care support. This is particularly important when residents need to get in touch with the association after hours or for emergencies.



There's no doubt that communication plays a major role in how well your association operates, but effective communication can be a challenge. Follow the recommendations in this guide, and learn how to keep your residents, board members and community connected.

If you need help putting together an effective communication program, **contact FirstService Residential** today!



About FirstService Residential

FirstService Residential is North America's property management leader, partnering with 8,500 communities across the U.S. and Canada. HOAs, community associations, condos and strata corporations rely on our extensive experience, resources and local expertise to maximize their property values and enhance their residents' lifestyles. Dedicated to making a difference, every day, we go above and beyond to deliver exceptional service.

FirstService Residential is a subsidiary of FirstService Corporation (FSV), a North American leader in the property services sector. Find out how we can help your community thrive. Visit www.fsresidential.com.

