




Office of the City Manager

April 7, 2014

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Christine Daniel, City Manager 

Subject: Social Media – Nixle Pilot Project

At its April 1, 2014 meeting the City Council requested that the City Manager provide a report to Council on staff efforts to create a Social Media Policy and an implementation plan for use of social media by City departments. The City is developing a policy for use of social media. This is a significant undertaking and requires coordination and input from numerous stakeholders to address policy and legal issues. While the City's social media policy is being developed, there is an opportunity to engage in a pilot project that will allow the City to obtain experience with one media platform, Nixle, prior to finalizing a City-wide plan. This pilot allows the Police Department to communicate information of benefit to residents on an as-needed basis.

Background

For a six month period, the Berkeley Police Department (BPD) will use the Nixle platform to convey non-emergency public safety information to the community. The purpose of this program is to provide a tool that allows the Police Department to push out information periodically to community members while gaining experience with developing a messaging structure that best adapts to certain social media platforms. The pilot begins today, April 7, with an initial period that focuses on encouraging subscribership. The Police Department will begin sending messages on May 1, 2014.

The City's website (www.CityofBerkeley.info) will remain the City's primary and predominant internet presence. Whenever possible, content posted to alternative social media platforms will also be posted on the City's website. In general, content posted to alternative city communications platforms will contain hyperlinks directing users back to the City's official website for more in-depth information, forms, documents or online services necessary to conduct business with the City of Berkeley.

Community Access

Nixle is already used by many local and regional public safety organizations and allows government agencies to send text and email messages to people who have signed up for the service. A subscriber can choose the level of notification and the method, such

as whether s/he only wants to receive emails or would rather receive texts. There is no enrollment cost to the community subscriber. Subscribers can sign up now to receive the City's alerts at <http://nixle.com/city-of-berkeley-california> or by sending a text message with their zip code to a 6-digit number: 888777. The City encourages community members to establish a free Nixle.com account to allow greater personalization of the service.

The Nixle platform requires individual community members to enroll at no cost to the subscriber. Through existing communication channels, the City will inform the community about the pilot program, Nixle and its uses, and how to subscribe to Nixle. These communication channels include BPD webmail, BPD Area Coordinators, Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) email lists, and the City's website. Other City departments will be asked to send out information to their constituencies as well. In addition, this memorandum about the pilot is being provided to the City Council for inclusion in their monthly newsletters or to send out to their constituents via email.

The Nixle Platform

Each type of messaging system has its own set of expectations determined by the capacity and limitations of the specific platform and how the agency chooses to use it. Nixle is a "push" notification system, which means that subscribers may choose to get the message over mobile phone or email regardless of whether they are on a particular website or mobile application. Subscribers can also find this information by visiting the City's Nixle page, <http://nixle.com/city-of-berkeley-california>, even if they are not receiving push messages.

Nixle Services

The City will use a Nixle service plan which includes the ability to send geographically targeted messages to particular sections of Berkeley. Nixle service subscribers can choose the level of notification they desire, such as whether they want to receive emails or texts or be a part of a geographical distribution list, or any combination of these services. Over the course of this pilot, Police will have an account that allows access to 24-hour live support, and the capacity to implement a variety of functions such as pre-scheduling messages, Spanish-language translation, publishing remotely, and integrating with other social media.

Pilot Program Conclusion

If the pilot program is successful, the City will incorporate Nixle as a standard communications tool. The City is currently developing a social media policy and will be exploring the implementation of other social media tools.

cc: William Rogers, Deputy City Manager
Ann-Marie Hogan, City Auditor
Chief Meehan, Police
Mark Numainville, City Clerk
Matthai Chakko, Assistant to the City Manager