



## Staff Report

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**Report To:**                **General Government Committee**

**Date of Meeting:**    June 2, 2025

**Report Number:** CAO-013-25

**Authored by:**        Leanne Walker

**Submitted By:**       Mary-Anne Dempster, CAO

**By-law Number:**

**Resolution Number:**

**File Number:**

**Report Subject:**    Results of the 2025 Communications Benchmarking Survey

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### Recommendation:

1. That Report CAO-013-25, and any related delegations or communication items, be received for information.

## Report Overview

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of Clarington's 2025 Communications "Pulse Check" Survey and provide Council with a summary of identified insights, trends, and areas for improvement. The report outlines how residents currently prefer to receive information and engage with the Municipality, their level of satisfaction with existing communication efforts, and opportunities to better connect with underrepresented audiences.

The findings will help inform future strategies, support evidence-based decision-making, and guide the ongoing development of inclusive, transparent, and responsive communications across Clarington.

## 1. Background

- 1.1 In 2023, Clarington retained Redbrick Communications to perform a service delivery review on the Communications Division.
- 1.2 As part of the review, Redbrick Communications hosted a public-facing survey to collect feedback from the community. This feedback helped inform the recommendations set out in the [Communications Division Service Delivery Review](#). The survey received 124 public responses.
- 1.3 Throughout 2024 and 2025, Communications staff have been working to implement the recommendations identified in the Service Delivery Review, including investing in more purposeful public engagement, increasing positive storytelling, sharing timely and factual information, and enhancing Clarington's brand consistency. To help measure the progress staff have made since implementing these changes, Clarington conducted a Communications "Pulse Check" Survey from March 13 to April 13, 2025. The survey was comprised of several key questions from the 2023 survey, as well as new questions to strengthen future benchmarking. It was designed to measure progress, identify gaps, and determine where additional improvements are needed as Communications staff continue to refine future communications and engagement strategies.
- 1.4 This benchmarking survey fulfills a key action within Clarington's [2024-27 Strategic Plan](#) under priority L.4.3, specifically, action L.4.3.2, which calls for targeted engagement to confirm communication preferences for both urban and rural audiences.

## 2. Survey Promotion and Distribution

- 2.1 With a goal of reaching as many Clarington residents as possible, Communications staff executed a robust campaign from March 13 to April 13, 2025, widely promoting the

2025 Communications “Pulse Check” Survey using both digital and traditional advertising methods, including social media, Clarington’s website and kiosks, roadside signage, local media coverage, newspaper ads and digital screens. Printed copies of the survey were also available in recreation facilities and Town Hall. As an incentive to complete the survey, respondents had the option to be entered to win one of three \$100 Visa gift cards.

### **3. Survey Responses**

- 3.1 A total of 471 responses were collected, including three paper submissions, representing a 280% increase over the 2023 response rate. This excellent turnout in participation provides reliable insights into what’s working, where improvements are needed, and how communication preferences are shifting among Clarington residents.

#### **Demographics**

- 3.2 The survey received responses from across Clarington, with most coming from Bowmanville (46%) and Courtice (28%). The survey also received responses from residents in Newcastle (11%), Orono (4%), and rural areas (7%). A few respondents chose “Prefer not to answer” (2%), while others (2%) noted that they most identified with Haydon, Hampton, Wilmot Creek, Newtonville, and Leskard.
- 3.3 The majority of survey respondents (80%) were 35 years and older. Specifically, 41% were between the ages of 35 and 54, and 39% were 55 or older. Younger adults aged 18 to 34 made up 17% of responses, while only 1% of respondents were under 18. An additional 2% chose not to disclose their age.

#### **Underrepresented voices in Clarington**

- 3.4 When asked whether they identify as part of a group that has an underrepresented voice in Clarington, 18% of survey respondents answered yes. The question was framed to include individuals or groups who may not feel they are fully reflected in decision-making, services, or community discussions due to factors such as age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, income level, or other aspects of identity.
- 3.5 Respondents who chose to elaborate identified a wide range of communities and lived experiences, including racial and cultural identities (e.g. Asian, South Asian, Black, Latino/a, Indigenous, Jewish, Caribbean, Muslim, Métis, newcomer), age-related groups (e.g. youth, seniors), members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, persons with disabilities, and people from rural or farming communities. Others noted underrepresentation based on socioeconomic status, parenting status, or community interests such as cricket.

- 3.6 This feedback highlights the diversity within Clarington and the importance of continuing efforts to ensure all voices feel heard, seen, and included in municipal decision-making and communications. As such, Communications will continue working to find new ways to reach underrepresented voices across Clarington.

#### **4. Preferred methods for providing input on municipal matters**

- 4.1 When asked how they prefer to provide input on municipal matters, 63% indicated a preference for online surveys. Other preferred methods include email or written submissions (43%) and direct contact with the Municipality by phone, email, or in person (34%). A significant number of respondents (32%) also expressed interest in using social media to ask questions or share feedback.
- 4.2 Less commonly preferred methods included providing feedback at a local event (14%), attending public open houses (19%), contacting the Mayor or Councillors directly (14%), participating in focus groups (7%), or speaking at Council meetings (5%).
- 4.3 These results suggest that digital engagement is key. The strong preference for online surveys and digital communication methods (e.g. email, social media) highlights the importance of maintaining accessible and easy-to-use online engagement tools—like our Clarington Connected website and the kiosks available in Clarington recreation centres and Town Hall.
- 4.4 The popularity of asynchronous methods like surveys and email also suggests that residents value convenience and the ability to provide input on their own time, without needing to attend in-person events.
- 4.5 It's important to note that in-person engagement still plays an important role in community engagement. While less popular overall, in-person formats such as open houses, local events, and Council meetings still appeal to a segment of Clarington's population, reinforcing the need for a balanced approach that includes both digital and face-to-face opportunities for engagement.

#### **Differences in preferences between urban and rural residents**

- 4.6 When comparing how residents in Orono and rural Clarington prefer to stay informed, the top two results aligned with the overall trends of all respondents: Clarington's social media channels (84%) and municipal websites (63%). This was followed closely by residents who preferred subscribing to Clarington's news and notices (57%). Orono and rural residents also reported staying informed through Facebook Community Groups (55%), Clarington's recreation emails (47%), local media (43%), word of mouth (39%), and Clarington newsletters (37%).

- 4.7 Notably, compared to the overall results, Orono and rural residents showed a stronger preference for staying informed through direct contact with Municipal staff (11% higher) and the Mayor's office (8% higher), local media coverage (17% higher), Clarington kiosks (7% higher), and by following Council agendas and meetings (7% higher).

## **5. Comparison to 2023 Results**

- 5.1 The 2025 Communications "Pulse Check" Survey included several key questions from the 2023 survey to allow for a direct comparison over time and support ongoing benchmarking. The information below compares the results from the 2023 and 2025 surveys. See [Communications Division: Service Delivery Review Report](#), p.11 for 2023 results.

### **Shifts in how residents receive municipal information**

- 5.2 The survey results show a notable shift in how residents receive information about municipal programs and services between 2023 and 2025.
- 5.3 In 2023, the top three sources were the municipal website (55%), local media coverage (49%), and Clarington's official social media channels (29%). In 2025, the leading sources have changed significantly. Clarington's social media channels have become the top source (58%), followed closely by municipal websites (57%) and Facebook Community Groups (53%).
- 5.4 The significant increase in Clarington's social media channels as the primary source of information indicates a growing reliance on real-time, accessible, and engaging platforms to stay informed about municipal matters.
- 5.5 While digital sources scored significantly higher, non-digital sources like word of mouth (37%), the mailed newsletter (34%), and signage (33%) still play a significant role in communicating with Clarington residents. It's clear that no single channel reaches everyone. A layered communication strategy is essential to ensure Clarington maintains an engaged audience across all demographics.

### **Facebook Community Groups as an information source**

- 5.6 More than half of the survey respondents (53%) reported that one of the ways they receive information about municipal programs and services is through Facebook Community Groups. A follow-up question asked these respondents how they typically verify municipal-related information they see in those groups. The majority (75%) said they check Clarington's official website or social media channels for confirmation. Other methods included checking traditional news sources (32%), relying on discussion within the group (21%), asking staff directly (9%), or asking the Mayor or a Councillor (3%). Notably, 9% of respondents said they trust the information without verifying it.

- 5.7 This result suggests that trust in peer-to-peer networks is growing. Residents are increasingly influenced by community-driven content and peer discussion, even when it comes to official information. Communications will continue monitoring these channels for misinformation and weigh in when necessary to correct it.
- 5.8 In 2023, 25% of respondents indicated that they get their information from social media channels not run by Clarington, which may include Facebook Community Groups.

### **Decline in traditional media**

- 5.9 The use of traditional media has declined sharply over the past two years. In 2025, only 27% of respondents said they received information from local media coverage—a significant drop from 49% in 2023. This decline can likely be attributed to the loss of the Clarington This Week newspaper (Metroland) in September 2023, as well as the Meta News ban, which came into effect in August 2023, in response to the passing of the Government of Canada's Bill C-18.
- 5.10 Notably, in 2025, several non-digital channels ranked within the top six information sources: word of mouth (37%), the Clarington Connected mailed newsletter (34%), and community signage (33%), highlighting the continued importance of offline communication methods.

## **6. New questions on 2025 survey**

- 6.1 Communications introduced five new questions on the 2025 Communications Survey to help establish a strong benchmark for future tracking. Each question had respondents identify how strongly they agreed with the following statements:
- I feel informed about municipal programs, services and issues that matter to me.
  - I trust information provided by the Municipality of Clarington.
  - Clarington's communications are accessible and inclusive.
  - Clarington gives me a voice and an opportunity to share feedback.
  - I am satisfied with the overall communications and information sharing from the Municipality of Clarington.
- 6.2 The majority of survey respondents (64%) indicated that they feel informed about municipal programs, services and issues that matter to them. This result suggests that current communication efforts are reaching a large portion of Clarington's population, but there is still room for improvement.
- 6.3 The survey results show a strong indicator of trust, with over 83% of survey respondents indicating that they trust information provided by the Municipality.

- 6.4 Nearly three-quarters of respondents (73%) indicated that Clarington's communications are accessible and inclusive. This provides a solid foundation to build on, as staff continue to seek feedback from underrepresented voices in Clarington.
- 6.5 Approximately 61% of respondents feel that the Municipality gives them a voice or an opportunity to share feedback. This presents an opportunity to provide more clarity on how public input is used and "close the loop" to demonstrate how public feedback helps shape municipal decisions. It's worth noting that in 2023, only 33% of survey respondents felt the Municipality was effective in providing opportunities for the community to give input on local programs, services and decisions. This result demonstrates a marked improvement.
- 6.6 When asked about overall satisfaction, 70% indicated that they are satisfied with the overall communications and information sharing from the Municipality of Clarington. This suggests that efforts to keep the community informed are having a positive impact, and staff should continue building on this success by maintaining clear, timely, and inclusive communication, while also looking for ways to improve outreach to less engaged or harder-to-reach residents in Clarington.

## **7. Financial Considerations**

Not Applicable.

## **8. Strategic Plan**

- 8.1 This report supports the actions necessary to complete priority L.4.3: Continue to cultivate an informed community through meaningful communications. Specifically, action L.4.3.2 states that the Municipality will survey the community to confirm communication preferences for both urban and rural audiences.

## **9. Climate Change**

Not Applicable.

## **10. Concurrence**

Not Applicable.

## **11. Conclusion**

It is respectfully recommended that Staff Report CAO-013-25 be received for information.

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Attachments:

Attachment 1 – 2025 Communications “Pulse Check” Survey Results

Interested Parties:

There are no interested parties to be notified of Council's decision.