City Spotlights:
Communications & Public Engagement

Florida cities are increasingly adopting AI-powered public engagement tools. The technology helps cities better understand resident needs, strengthen public trust, and create more responsive communication channels. Cities are turning to AI for sentiment analysis, community surveying, and real-time feedback to guide outreach and improve transparency. These tools help agencies listen more effectively, shape messaging based on real data, and proactively address issues before they escalate.

Below are several examples of how Florida jurisdictions are using AI to enhance external communications and public engagement.

Tampa, FL: Uses an AI-powered engagement platform, Zencity, to run continuous community surveys, analyze open-ended feedback, and monitor resident sentiment across the city. The tool uses machine learning to ensure representative sampling, classify themes, and surface public priorities. The information collected helps the city tailor messaging around issues such as housing, safety, mobility, and downtown development. Tampa's Public Affairs team also uses the insights to determine when and how to communicate updates to neighborhoods, improving the timing and relevance of city outreach.

Fort Lauderdale, FL: Used Zencity to understand how residents truly feel about major city initiatives. The technology goes far beyond traditional public meetings or comment periods. During the redevelopment discussions for Lockhart Stadium in 2019, the city used an AI tool to analyze thousands of organic public conversations happening across social media, news comment sections, and online forums. The analysis revealed that while a small group of vocal residents dominated public hearings with criticism, the broader community expressed mostly neutral or supportive sentiment online. This insight helped the city communicate more clearly with residents and correct misperceptions. It ensures outreach efforts reflect the full spectrum of community views, not just the loudest ones. Today, Fort Lauderdale continues to use AI-driven sentiment intelligence to guide strategic communications and improve how the city responds to resident concerns in real time.

Palm Beach, FL: Uses AI to make it easier for residents to find information on the town's website. In 2024, the town launched an AI-powered search tool from Polimorphic that lets users ask full-sentence questions, such as "How do I pay my parking ticket?" or "What are the permit requirements for my project?" receive clear, accurate answers pulled directly from official web content. Instead of navigating

complex menus or dense PDF documents, residents can quickly locate the information they need through a conversational interface. This approach enhances external communications by reducing confusion, improving accessibility, and ensuring that residents receive consistent, up-to-date guidance across the town's digital touchpoints.

City Tips

- **Start with listening, not automation:** AI-powered sentiment analysis and community surveys give cities a quick, low-lift way to understand resident concerns and refine messages without adding staff or creating new processes.

- **Share "What We Heard" summaries:** Publishing insights back to the community builds trust and boosts participation. Showing your work matters as much as gathering the data.

- **Check for demographic blind spots:** AI tools can highlight which neighborhoods or groups aren't being heard. Use this to guide targeted outreach and ensure engagement is representative.

- **Connect insights to your communications calendar:** Use AI findings to decide when to push messages, which topics need clarification, and where misinformation or confusion may be emerging.

- **Measure perception, not just clicks:** Track shifts in sentiment, trust, and understanding, not just impressions or reach. AI lets you evaluate how residents feel about city actions, not just whether they saw the post.