

Activity 3: Table discussion about the potential of a specific method of communication as a tool for civic engagement.

1. How can your table's method of communication be used to support community networks?
 2. What are the advantages and limitations of that tool?
 3. Develop clear steps for using this tool, defining roles and responsibilities for both community members and the City.
 4. What would it take to create a sustainable citywide system of community engagement using this tool?
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1. How can your table's method of communication be used to support community networks?

Project Website

- Have one website with projects in subcategories – inclusive and up to date; *easy* navigation; *easy* search engine; use comment boxes/threads that city *responds* to; surveys; make this a school project – can help to engage youth
- Transparent place online to follow the process - show how community input is incorporated or not
- QR codes for standard operating procedure of city
- Geo fencing – registers when you are in the area of interest
- Consistent format throughout city/schools

Online forums

- Webinar first with Q&A that brings people in
- Quickly disseminates information to members of the online forum, and allows for discussion
- Use online tools to cross-promote, advertise, interlink
- Anyone should be able to start a thread and comment
- City-created community engagement WNA App (smartphone and desktop versions)
- Appropriate frequency; has to be worth your time; scale of project
- Use software/media that pushes information to users rather than seeking information from online forum – can monitor social media sites, such as Twitter or Facebook, for postings that mention “Alexandria” - can follow up on those postings
- HR directors to bring to workers

Group announcements

- Beneficial when many people hear the initial announcement – can share with their networks
- Good supplemental tool, doesn't replace formal announcement
- Could be used to point people to more info. e.g., central calendar
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Social Media

Create an online group on Linked-In

- Way for city to promote upcoming projects and gather feedback
- Create an app/mobile website

Newspaper

- Even though newspaper is online it features what's going on and highlights; you don't have to dig like you do with print
- Washington Post Thursday Insert: time consistency; good for disseminating info

Mail

- Upcoming events, resources, that we can use; should be inexpensive, can put on bulletin board – e.g. 'clean up' – postcards
- Put QR codes on it for those who use

Phone

Useful when:

- Contacting civic associations, officers about upcoming important actions, e.g. when time is short
- For contacting property managers to get permission to call renters
- Contacting those without computers (by choice or otherwise). E.g. aging disabled

2. What are the advantages and limitations of that tool?

Project Website

Advantages:

- 24 hour access
- Everyone gets the same consistent info
- Instant responses
- staff time to update in a timely manner

Limitations:

- People who don't have internet access;
- Need multiple languages
- staff time to update in a timely manner
- No one identified as responsible or can't find who it is; not enough resources

Online forums

Advantages:

- Allows members of the community to participate from their homes instead of having to gather in one space and at any time of day, yet be able to participate

Limitations:

- Who has access?
- Accountability and ownership over what is posted and said
- Are all members of the community able/willing to use the online forum?
- Need a way to keep conversation civil/constructive
- Language/translations
- Pros and cons of city being in charge
- City staff role – not dominate
- Redundancy – social media and online forums don't obviate 'traditional' communication

Group announcements

Advantages:

- Peer discussion; Known to group, have prior history
- Face-to-Face communication works best for some groups in the city (usurps email, literacy, etc. issues).
- Some groups have higher percentage of members who attending meetings (i.e., church)

Limitations:

- Size of gathered group; well attended or not
- timing of the announcement during the meeting
- Inconvenient way to receive info; need multiple channels

Social Media

Advantages:

- No anonymous posting
- use different social media tools; different people on twitter & FB
- reach individuals, not just groups – connects people with each other
- easier to provide in multiple languages
- reaching an active, established audience;

Limitation –

- Demographics- some people aren't on social media
- Language barriers
- Generational differences (especially effective with youth – has reduced youth apathy)
- Type of information (e.g. qualitative, quantitative depth)
- Nonusers (access barriers, privacy concerns, choosing other communication tools)
- Link to substantive sources
- Timely information (more often and cheaper than print media)
- Specialized purposes, advantages in certain areas
- One-way vs. two-way tool
- Media without responsibility (?)

Printed materials

Advantages:

- Noticed bulletins on Mount Vernon Ave in coffee shops
- Fairlington stores have them on windows, it catches your eye, having them at stores and windows is successful

Disadvantages:

- Bulletin boards?: barely look at them
- In terms of management – not very managed

Newspaper

Disadvantage:

Generational difference is now creating different groups, more effort to target

Mail

Advantages:

- Keepable - to put in hands;
- For people without computer access

Disadvantages:

- We get too much mail – that's not helpful
- Cost

Phone

Advantages:

- Useful when reaching out for upcoming important actions, e.g. when time is short; or contacting those without computers; e.g. aging, disabled

Disadvantages:

- Most people screen, don't answer, do not prefer to use phone; many don't have land line

3. Develop clear steps for using this tool, defining roles and responsibilities for both community members and the City.

Project Website

- Establish rules of engagement for online = proper behavior
- City – update, monitor for appropriateness and provides facts and not opinions
- Make it clear where we are in the process for each project
- Have a calendar that shows important dates, i.e., meetings/forums
- Have metrics- evaluation tools – feedback area on site

Online forum:

- Free internet access to everyone in the city (sponsored by city government)
- Determine different purposes for the forum and create effective ways to collect and disseminate information
- May need multiple forums
- Create effective search tools
- Consistent implementation
- Support development of Wikis for different projects, with editors with balanced points of view

Group announcements

- Email or utilize social media to prepare group for coming announcements (listservs), allows for people to know what to expect or know if they do not attend
- Make announcements at beginning of meeting
- Need a coordinator to get announcements to city groups
- Have a prepared (briefly/short) flyer about the announcement with contact information
- Clear steps: use backup copy – e.g. bring flyers to hand out. Need some policy or rule about making announcements. E.g. has to be on agenda

Social media

- City staff to monitor
- Create clear communications plan around social media
- Committee of community members and city staff review and monitor
- Easier to provide in multiple languages
- Identify community people willing to post/tweet/update
- Limit frequency

Printed materials

- Windows and bulletin boards should be distinguished – store front should be separate
- Sometimes out-of-date, should be maintained and managed
- Use at places to wait – bus stops/metro stops
- Consistency with identity/branding
- Medium length – enough to understand
- Repetition in title
- Address why it's important and for who – 'Uncle Sam Wants You'
- Name, contact, possible web address
- Determine if every city meeting warrants same amount of distribution

Newspapers

- Get department heads to write letter to editor to focus attention on new projects
- Consistent branding
- Set agenda of what to communicate with media
- Timely communication – should let community know of issues well in advance

Mail

- Evaluate current use of mail in community with residents. Ensure to target audience wants or needs this community approach
- Could use in small area plan implementation projects, e.g. neighborhoods?
- Not to use as priority communications tool

4. What would it take to create a sustainable citywide system of community engagement using this tool?

Project Website

Evidence that it has helped to open up lines of communication

- Community members know about it and are using it
- City staff update and use consistently
- Good example: Action Alexandria; Patch.com
- Managed by communications department; get assistance from TC marketing class
- Committee made up of city staff and community members who monitor

Online Forum:

- Facilitator who can monitor the discussions and postings immediately (maintain respectful exchanges and ensure balance); timely responses
- User friendly format; easily identified on city website
- Training provided for all users/neighborhood ambassadors
- Provide internet access to community members, and/or extend library hours

Group Announcements

- Need to distribute announcements in formats that are able to be copied and pasted or easily opened over a variety of software programs
- Need inclusive city calendar

Social media

- Can be a good two-way form of communication if responses/engagement is consistent
- Important but should not be prioritized over project website; they should work together
- Someone would need to respond in a timely manner

Printed materials

- Saving money, sustainability – circulating email
- Print media – very local (specific)

Newspaper

- Determine early on types of things city wants to communicate with media
- Timely communication – should make community aware of issues well in advance

Phone

- May be ‘a backwards step in time...’
- Identify targets for this type of communication upfront
- City return calls