**Digital Engagement for Neighborhood Associations**

Members of the Committee for Citizen Involvement requested additional information on electronic communication as it relates to developing and growing relationships within in Neighborhood Associations. Below is an overview of information as to how and why a Neighborhood Associations can utilize digital resources to enhance their engagement with residents along with research detailing preferred uses of communication and how it can be integrated into communication strategies.

**Social Media Benefits**

* + Promotes neighborhood and builds name recognition
  + Revives dormant relationships and is used to keep up with social ties or to avoid disintegration
  + Allows easy information sharing with others
  + Complements current outreach efforts
  + Many residents are current users - especially the young population

**How to Increase Digital Engagement**

* Identify a goal for the use of social media. For example, to establish social media presence, networking, fundraising, notifying, education, etc.
  + Monitor engagement (page likes, shares, retweets, responses, etc.)
* Identify your brand – postings should reinforce core elements and should be posted often
  + Content
    - Be specific and concise
    - Link content to goal, brand
    - Recognize partners (City, other NAs, neighbors, local businesses and organizations)
* Foster feelings of ownership
  + Ask those affiliated with NA to help manage the page, supply content
  + Seek participation on social media from followers (ask questions, designate a special hashtag, request followers submit photos from a neighborhood related activity, etc.)
* Create a communication campaign to announce/launch new social media site

**Literature Research**

* Social media is as inexpensive and immediate forms of communication (Shah et al., 2001; Kavanaugh et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2007; Evans-Cowley);
* Research shows online connections further encourage offline interactions in place-based communities like neighborhoods (Arnold, 2003; Carroll & Rosson, 2003; De Cindio et al., 2003; Hampton & Wellman, 2003; Hampton, 2007; Kavanaugh et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2011);
* Although technologies like the internet and mobile phones aid communication across vast geographic distances, they have also been found to enhance communities of place in terms of coordination and mobilization, social capital, and interpersonal or collective relationships (Wellman, 1999; Wellman & Hampton, 1999; Kavanaugh & Patterson, 2002; Pigg & Crank, 2004; Ellison et al., 2006);
* With the use of internet and phones, proximity is no longer as important for sustaining contacts and delivering information ( Johnson & Pattie);
* Social media must mesh with local contexts in order to foster engagement (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001; Postill, 2008).

**Case Study**

* Indian Hills , KS
  + Preferences for communication mediums: Mail (postal mail) (69%, n ¼ 212), Email (51%), Doorhangers (41%), Telephone (25%), Facebook (20%), Word of mouth (19%), Website (14%), Google þ (3%), Twitter (1%), Blog (1%), Mobile App (1%), MySpace (0%), and LinkedIn (0%). When asked if they knew that IHNA had a Facebook page and Twitter feed, only 9% (n ¼ 208) and 3% (n ¼ 191) respectively said ‘yes’.
  + ‘Do you think Facebook and/or Twitter are good ways to communicate with the neighborhood? Why/why not?’ were coded into four categories: No (41%), Yes (25%), Maybe (13%), No response (17%), and Don’t know/not sure (4%), (n ¼ 177)
  + Residents also voiced complaints about using social media in general and it being a waste of time or intrusive. A few respondents mentioned that they were already ‘super saturated’ or overwhelmed with Facebook pages and requests.
  + Common reasons given for avoiding social media for neighborhood communication were factors associated with ‘environment’, such as, the perceived large size of the neighborhood and not knowing many residents.
  + A few residents noted that they only use social media, such as Facebook, to communicate with people they already knew or already had ties with. These residents noted that the Indian Hills neighborhood did not feel like a close-knit group, therefore they would not want to use Facebook for neighborhood communication. Some residents noted that they do use Facebook to communicate with neighbors that are already friends.
  + This study shows that the respondents choosing social media as a preferred method of communication are the ones most interested in having a neighborhood association; more so than those who prefer other, more traditional, means of neighborhood communication (Email or postal mail).
  + Of particular note are those who chose Postal Mail as a preferred means of neighborhood communication. The regression results indicate that this group is least interested in having a neighborhood association when compared to those choosing email or social media.
  + The results of this study indicate that multiple communication methods are still a good idea but targeting residents via social media might be a good starting point for resource poor organizations.
  + If social media is used, it should not waste neighbors’ time with superfluous postings.
  + Email addresses are key to having a low cost, convenient means of communication and are key to branching out to social media. Organizations should not wait until their neighborhood ties are so low that they no longer have valid email addresses.
  + Neighborhood organizations with larger boundaries may find social media useful for holding larger areas together where people in the same neighborhood do not see each other on the same block or street.

**Social Media Concerns**

* Some social media users are hesitant about using platforms like Facebook and Twitter for neighborhood communication due to the lack of preexisting social ties.
* Unequal access to social media – age and life stage : digital divide
* Those who ‘fan’, ‘friend’, or comment on the association’s social media account may or may not be the same individuals that attend association meetings or events.
* Limited for non-English speakers, the use of media itself, a NA cannot forcer someone to use social media.
* The perceived effectiveness of social media is mixed
* Not just notifying neighborhood residents but all residents
* Social media might have a decline in the need to have face-to-face meetings

**Conclusion**

Social media is an efficient, and often effective, way to engage community Neighborhood residents that may not have a strong presence in the community. However, developing this source of communication can take time and it should not be relied upon as the only source of communication.

**Appendix**

Social Media Tools Used by Area Neighborhood Associations:

* Email
  + Oregon City
  + Lake Oswego
  + Milwaukie
  + Tigard
  + Canby
  + Gresham
  + Bend
  + Springfield
* Email Subscriptions
  + Oregon City
* Independent Website
  + Lake Oswego, OR (37,425)
  + Milwaukie, OR (20,510)
  + Tigard
  + Gresham
  + Bend
* YouTube
  + Milwaukie
* Facebook
  + Milwaukie
  + Gresham
  + Bend
* Twitter
  + Milwaukie
  + Bend
* Online Data Entry Form
* Online form to submit neighborhood association information.
* Can upload documents
  + Oregon City, OR (34,240)
  + Bend

Additional Tools to Support and Grow Neighborhood/Citizen Involvement:

* Committees/Offices
  + Oregon City – Citizen Involvement Committee (CIC)
  + Tigard – Neighborhood Involvement Committee (NIC)
  + Gresham – Office of Neighborhood and Community Engagement (ONCE)
  + Beaverton – Neighborhood Program
* Supporting Documentation
  + Lake Oswego - Citizen Involvement Guidelines
  + Lake Oswego - Neighborhood Association Bylaws
  + Milwaukie – Neighborhood Training Manual
  + Gresham – Neighborhood Association Handbook, Neighborhood Bylaws, and Neighborhood Ready
  + Beaverton – Bylaws
  + Bend - Bylaws
* City Newsletter
  + Milwaukie
  + Gresham
* Programs
  + Milwaukie – Neighborhood Grand Program (4,000 per fiscal year)
  + Gresham – Neighborhood Matching Grants
  + Beaverton – Neighborhood Matching Grant Program
  + Bend – Rollover Neighborhood Association Funds Program
* Other
  + Gresham, Rockwood NA – Brochure
  + Gresham, Wikes East – Non-profit Organization
  + Beaverton, West Slope – Flyer
  + Bend, Orchard District – Non-profit Organization
  + Sylvan-Highlands NA, PDX – Emergency Preparedness Trainings
  + Humboldt, NA, PDX – Community Workshops to identify needs & wants
  + Seaside Neighborhood Association - Scholarships
  + Michigan – Neighborhood Association Awards
  + Clark County, WA – Neighborhood Association Newsletter Award