North St. Paul
City Communications Effort
Evaluation Plan

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Project A: Process Description

Rationale/"Philosophy"

The basis for the North Saint Paul communications effort is analyze and improve the city's current communication strategies with its residents, internal staff and business owners. Currently, the city uses several outlets as means of communication. The City of North Saint Paul issues a monthly utility newsletter, a City Manager newsletter to internal staff, a North St. Paul Business Bulletin, as well as an annual livability survey and produces the cable station program "North St. Paul Notes".

It is evident that the City of North Saint Paul devotes a significant amount of time and resources on communication with its residents. The City of North Saint Paul is currently home to over 11,000 residents, many of which have resided in the city for more than 20 years. Within this demographic, a vast majority of the population are over the age of 50. In addition to the aging population, the City of North Saint Paul has noticed an increase in temporary residents; residents who move to North Saint Paul and reside there for 6 months to a year before moving. Both of the aforementioned have created a challenge to the city in terms of identifying effective means of communication. The City of North Saint Paul hopes to determine which modes of communication will work best for the changing population. The city also hopes to improve the communication among internal staff as well; including both elected and appointed city officials. The City of North Saint Paul is eager to work with our University of Minnesota cohort in a partnership to design and support the improvement of its city communication effort.

Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes

The North Saint Paul City Council determined the objective for the city communications effort is to strengthen the communication between the City of North Saint Paul and its residents as well as business owners and internal staff. The City of North Saint Paul recognizes that the majority of the population is an aging group whose preferred communication modes need to be addressed.

The City of North Saint Paul also recognizes there is a need for improvement between the city staff, advisory committees, and city officials. The overall outcome for the city communications effort is improved current communications systems between the city and residents, business owners, and within the city staff leading to a more informed and engaged community.

Setting (physical, social, economic)

North Saint Paul is a small city in the eastern portion of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. With about 11,694 residents and roughly 4,600 households, the community boasts a very diverse group of occupants both in age and ethnicity. The city is home to many parks, its own schools, and old historic churches. North Saint Paul is also unique in having its own electric power company that began working in 1989 which is commonly used to power up many municipal utilities, households and businesses. People who live in the City of North Saint Paul enjoy a good quality of life, with many diverse jobs, cultural and recreational opportunities, higher education institutions and its "small town" feel loved by many. North Saint Paul has

been actively involved in creating public space for community members to recreate and connect with each other. Even though North Saint Paul is a tight-knit community, communicating between individuals is challenging due to the increasingly diverse and aging population. About 75 percent of the city's residents are 50 years or older, which presents a unique challenge in this era of mass media. A large portion of this older population lacks access and the know-how of using computers, thus requiring the city staff to rely more on historical, less cost-effective methods of communication.   With a specific budget set for communication that hinders the use of older communication methods, the city has had to rely on feedback of only 20 percent of the population to make fiscal and developmental decisions.

The community has committed itself to facilitate the development of local businesses/entrepreneurs with financial aid and technological assistance. The Economic Development Authority in North Saint Paul plays an important role promoting job growth and economic opportunities.

Staff, Participants, Funders/Sponsors

The communications effort in North Saint Paul incorporates a wide range of participants. The geographic parameters of the city may be clearly defined, but the scope of the communications effort extends beyond city limits. Broadly, the target audience for the communications effort is "the city," which includes not just residents, but also city employees, elected officials, business owners, and developers.

Thus far, the city has divided its communications efforts into three fields: internal, business, and citywide. Participants of the internal communications effort are relatively

obvious, as this includes city employees and government workers. Participants of the business

efforts include local business owners and operators (i.e., entrepreneurs, developers) as well as

those administering the efforts (city officials). Finally, the citywide effort is the most inclusive,

as participants include any stakeholder involved with the city on a personal or professional

level. For all communications efforts, the city identifies households, businesses, city council

members, and commissioners as the primary stakeholders. Additionally, it is worth noting that

the survey distributed annually to thousands of city residents is the result of an agreement with

the state auditor's office. Many questions on the survey were taken directly from the state

auditor. While the state government may not be the target audience of these communications

efforts, they do have a significant say in formation of the survey and should not be overlooked

as participants.

Two key staff members play an integral role in North Saint Paul's communications

effort. For the past five years, Laurie Koehnle, who is in charge of communications in the city's

administration department, has led the internal, business, and citywide communications efforts

alongside Nate Ehalt, the city's Community Development Director.

The agreement with the state auditor provides funding for the annual survey. Additional

communications efforts are paid for using money from the general fund—a combination of

local taxpayer dollars and local government aid.

Activities/Events

One of the city's primary communications efforts is an annual survey distributed in residents'

utility bills. As part of the Performance Measurement Program, the survey asks residents to rate

various city services, including water, sewer, electricity, street plowing, and general upkeep. Many of the questions are formulated by the state auditor's office, which uses the responses in a cross comparison of other municipalities. In addition to the state auditor's questions, North Saint Paul incorporates several of their own city-specific questions relating to a topic of their choice (i.e., police activity, parks and recreations, etc.). The state auditor's office reimburses the city financially for the survey expenses. Thus far, incentives have not been utilized to improve the response rate (551 out of 6,900 responded to the April 2013 survey for a response rate of just under 8 percent).

For the internal communications effort, the city publishes a 3-5 page city manager newsletter every other week. The newsletter is accessible by all city employees, from managers to interns. Additionally, the city maintains a website for communication within city government, allowing departments to share important forms or book rooms in municipal buildings. The business communications effort in the city includes a monthly e-mail newsletter and the citywide communications effort also utilizes a newsletter, which is included in residents' monthly utility bill. The newsletter covers information from city maintenance projects to upcoming events and was identified in one of the annual surveys as the most desired method of communication among North Saint Paul residents. Staff members also utilize local media outlets, including local newspapers and a public access channel. The city is also bolstering its online presence. The website, www.ci.north-saint-paul.mn,us, includes information on local ordinances, department contacts, and general city news. In addition, the city recently became active in social media, using popular portals like Facebook and Twitter to connect with citizens.

Along with the communications actions outlined above, the city also hosts several in-person events open to residents. The Mayor's Forum, hosted on Saturday mornings every four to six months, attracts approximately 8-10 regular attendees. City council meetings take place on the first and third Tuesdays of each month and are open to the public. Furthermore, council and commission meetings are streamed online in an effort to expand remote viewing options for the public.

Program Budget

The city council members have allotted a budget of approximately $100,000 for the city's communications effort. This budget is not inclusive of all the activities undertaken by the city. It consists of hiring of personnel, monthly newsletter printing, mailing expenses related to the newsletter and other overhead costs. In a personal interview with Ehalt, he mentions that, "Considering the warm political climate of the council members, the results of the evaluation may be used to increase the budget for communication." As a part of the larger communications budget the council members have allotted about $2,200 for the evaluation of the communication program. This budget was approved based on the agreement with the state auditors with whom the city has a contract. The contract includes the reimbursement of some of the survey expenses by the Office of the State Auditor to the city based on a per capita allotment on the survey. Currently the survey is mailed to all utility account holders in the city, so they can respond either electronically, via mail, or in-person by returning it to the City Hall. In the future the hopes are that with increased budget for communication efforts at responding to the survey can be minimized for the residents.

Project B: Evaluation Context

Purpose of Evaluation

The City of North Saint Paul is committed to meeting the communication needs of its residents.

Communication is continuously brought up at the City Council meetings, and so, improved

communication has become one of the key goals of the city. To move on their goals pertaining

to communication improvements, the city has outlined two reasons (purposes) for why they

wish to engage in an evaluation study. Those reasons are: goal attainment (is their

communication effort with the council members, the city staff, and city residents meeting its

intended goals?) and object improvement (in what ways can the city improve on their

communication objectives in the future?).

The focus on the communication effort's goal attainment is a result of the city's changing

demographics. The City of North Saint Paul is home to nearly 11,000 residents/business owners,

a majority of whom are over the age of 50. Considering this changing demographic and that

most communication is done through various technology today, the city wishes to know if they

are reaching the number of residents that they think they are. Once this number is determined,

the city's goal is to know if their communication efforts are effective. Upon completion of our

evaluation, the City of North Saint Paul hopes to use the data collected from our group's

evaluation design to guide their communication efforts.

Evaluation Stakeholders

Stakeholders span three categories based on their level of investment. Primary stakeholders

are those with a direct influence on the evaluand. These stakeholders typically work with the

day to day operations of the program or supply funds and might include developers, sponsors, and staff members. Secondary stakeholders are those that may have a significant investment in the evaluand, but may lack the direct influence of primary stakeholders. Examples of secondary stakeholders include students at a school or customers at a store. Finally, tertiary stakeholders are those who may have some investment in the program but primarily will use the evaluation for planning or to compare with related programs. These stakeholders include government agencies or future participants in the program.

In the North Saint Paul communications effort, the communications staff—composed primarily of a communications manager and the community development director—are primary stakeholders. These employees have designed and implemented the communications effort. Along with the communications staff, the City Council and the Mayor both control funding for communications at the municipal level. Because these stakeholders allocate the money that allows the program to function, they are also considered primary stakeholders.

Secondary stakeholders in the North Saint Paul communications effort include the city manager, who oversees the operations of the city but may be slightly removed from the communications effort specifically. Additionally, most of the communications efforts' targeted audiences are considered secondary stakeholders. This includes other government employees, businesses (and business organizations), and citizens of North Saint Paul. Each of these groups will benefit from improved communications and suffer from a poor communications program, but they lack the authority to directly alter the program. Such change would need to come from primary stakeholders.

Finally, tertiary stakeholders in the North Saint Paul communications effort include intergovernmental organizations, like the League of Minnesota Cities, or neighboring municipalities. These stakeholders might use the evaluation to compare communications efforts across multiple municipal governments. Prospective or future residents of North Saint Paul would want to understand what steps the city takes to deliver information to its citizens. Other organizations within the city, like neighborhood associations or social action groups, may be interested in how North Saint Paul publicizes meetings and public input opportunities. Finally, people who spend extended periods of time in the city but live elsewhere—like commuters—may be interested in knowing how North Saint Paul communicates emergency information, like snow removal alerts or road closures.

Table 1 shows all stakeholders, their category, and their role or concern regarding the North Saint Paul communications effort.

Evaluation Questions

All the evaluation questions should be based on the purpose of the project. Since improved communication is one of the key goals outlined by City Council, the evaluation should find effective strategies to meet the expectation. Currently, the city issues newsletters, utilizes social network sites (Twitter, Facebook), public broadcasting and the World Wide Web, and invites residents to attend the Mayor's Forum as ways to communicate with the city residents. However, it has not been determined whether these strategies have facilitated the internal communication. Thus, the first evaluation question is to what extent the current modes of communications are successful in reaching city employees, city residents, and businesses?

Table 1: Stakeholders for North Saint Paul Communications Effort

Stakeholder	Level	Role/Concerns regarding program
Communications staff	Primary	Responsible for designing and implementing the communications effort
City Council	Primary	Budgets money for the communications effort
Mayor	Primary	Budgets money for the communications effort
City Manager	Secondary	Oversees daily operations of the city; slightly removed from communications effort but still has influence over city employees
Other city government employees	Secondary	One of the main audiences for the communications effort; actions by government employees are being communicated to the public through the program
Citizens	Secondary	One of the main audiences for the communications effort; may not have a direct impact on program, but public opinion can significantly affect the way city government operates
Businesses and professional organizations (i.e., North Saint Paul Business and Professional Association)	Secondary	Businesses are a main audience for the communications effort; interested in how well North Saint Paul is meeting the communications needs of businesses
Developers	Secondary	May not live in North Saint Paul, but will want to know whether the city is effectively meeting the communications demands of its citizens and businesses
League of Minnesota Cities	Tertiary	Interested in comparing communications efforts across municipalities
Prospective residents	Tertiary	Interested in how city will deliver important information
Commuters to North Saint Paul	Tertiary	Interested in business communications and communication of time-sensitive information (i.e. snow emergencies, road closures)
Neighboring communities	Tertiary	Interested in comparing North Saint Paul's communications effort to their own; finding areas for improvement
Neighborhood associations	Tertiary	Interested in how North Saint Paul will communicate safety information, public meetings, and opportunities for public input
Social change organizations	Tertiary	Interested in how city will communicate opportunities for public input

Another goal of the project is to determine which specific modes of communication are the most effective ones. However, not only should the evaluation identify the most effective modes of communication, it also needs to investigate the ineffective modes and find the problems and obstacles, and then modify these ineffective modes to facilitate internal and external communication.

Thus, the next evaluation questions are what makes some modes ineffective and how can we modify these modes to be more effective?

In addition, the project also wants to create an overarching communication plan. Besides the current modes of communication, the city is also looking for other strategies to improve communication. Thus, this evaluation should help to find out additional approaches, which may have been utilized by other communities and proven successful, or which may be recommended by experts. After identifying new communication modes, integrating them into the existing communication plans is also essential. The new overarching communication plan should take full advantage of all the strategies, instead of offsetting each other. Therefore, the last evaluation question is how can we identify new communication modes and how do include these modes in the communications effort? In conclusion, this evaluation will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are the current modes for communication meeting the needs and expectations of city employees, city residents, and businesses?

2. Which currently applied mode(s) of communications is (are) more effective in reaching city employees, city residents, and businesses?

3. What are the reasons that some modes are more or less effective and in what way can the modes be modified to better serve the city?

4. What new communication modes could be developed to improve communication citywide and be combined with current modes that are already successful to ensure greater outcomes?

Evaluation Constraints

The evaluation study's constraints can be separated into three categories: time, budget, and contextual factors. The city has authorized our group to carry out the first phase of the evaluation project which includes an evaluation design. The project is to be done within a semester of a normal school year, which in addition to our other school commitments makes it a considerable time constraint. In addition to time, the budget of only $2,200 for the whole project poses another challenge. This is particularly difficult if we take into account all the costs associated with printing, mailing, survey creation, and staff salary that goes into reaching out to 4,500 households within the city. Luckily, the city is well aware of the challenge posed by the limited budget and their initiatives in the past have demonstrated this. For example, to cut costs the city has been asking residents to mail their survey responses back in with their utility bills. While this approach has been inventive, we (the evaluators) believe this approach may be hindering the number of surveys that are mailed in and hence is reducing the overall effectiveness of their efforts. Other factors that may pose as a constraints are contextual, such as public's engagement with the survey. As mentioned before, more than half of the city's population is over the age of 50, who, according to community development officer, are not very technologically savvy. Reaching out to this particular population is not a problem, however, getting them to respond has been. The constraint and or challenge here would be to

design the study in a way that is user-friendly and easy to follow, for all ages to be able to take part in. In the past, the response rate relating to participation in the study has varied between 10-20 percent. We believe this response rate will be limiting our findings.

Advisory Group Roles and Responsibilities

Incorporating an advisory group into evaluation planning and execution can reap tremendous benefits. First, and perhaps most importantly, an advisory group presents an opportunity to involve key stakeholders in the evaluation process. Including stakeholders in important decisions regarding a project's planning and implementation significantly improves the chances that the evaluation will be taken seriously and the results will be utilized. Essentially, stakeholder involvement through an advisory group can facilitate "buy-in" resulting in a more worthwhile evaluation producing more meaningful results. Secondly, creating an advisory group can help manage the politics of an evaluation. Evaluation is an inherently political activity, but the presence of an advisory group provides diversified input and recommendations and limits the power one individual can have over an evaluation. Finally, an advisory group could make an evaluation—particularly the methods employed—more culturally competent. Stakeholders may be more sensitive to ethnic or cultural differences and could point out areas where an evaluator's methods may not be appropriate.

The advisory group for the evaluation of the City of North Saint Paul's Communications Efforts will be comprised of the following:

- One (1) city council member – North Saint Paul City Council is a primary driver of the push to improve communications. Including a councilman or councilwoman on the

advisory group will ensure that the evaluation is accurately measuring what the city is

interested in. Additionally, because the council makes budget decisions, the members

may be in the position to best utilize the results of the evaluation.

- Two (2) city government employees – One portion of North Saint Paul's

    Communications Effort is focusing on internal communications with city staff. Including

    city government employees in the group will allow them to offer input on what issues

    matter most to government employees and thus, inform the evaluators of focus areas.

- Two (2) members of the business community – A second portion of the communications

    effort focuses on communicating with businesses. The advisory group should

    incorporate two members of the business community—possibly recruited from the

    North Saint Paul Business & Professional Association or the Maplewood/North Saint

    Paul Business Council.

- Four (4) additional community members – The largest emphasis in the North Saint Paul

    communications effort is on citywide communications. Therefore, the advisory group

    should include four additional community members who do not necessarily fit into any

    of the other three categories. In an effort to maximize the cultural competency of the

    evaluation planning and implementation, the group should be as ethnically and

    culturally diverse as possible. Additionally, there should be one 16-24 year old, two 25-

    54 year olds, and one 55+ year old to reflect the various ages of residents in North Saint

    Paul.

The evaluators and the communications staff—two key stakeholders—are

conspicuously missing from the above list. However, this does not mean they are not involved

with the advisory group. The group will meet together and the evaluators and communications staff will be present at each meeting to answer questions and moderate debates.

The advisory group will have several responsibilities. First, the group will create a logic model of the communications effort in North Saint Paul, identifying inputs, outputs, and outcomes. Creating this model will facilitate a mutual understanding of the communication effort's function and objectives. Secondly, the advisory group should help create and approve evaluation questions. This will ensure that all stakeholders understand the objectives of the evaluation before it is underway. Next, the group should be available to review the proposed evaluation methods and make recommendations. The stakeholders in the advisory group know the community of North Saint Paul and know which data collection methods will be most appropriate. While the ultimate data collection methods should be determined by the professional evaluators, an advisory group can offer unique insight. Finally, the advisory group should develop guidelines for how the evaluation results will be utilized. One of the benefits of bringing stakeholders together is to encourage "buy-in" into the evaluation process. By thinking ahead of time how the evaluation will be used, stakeholders are providing more meaning to the project and are more likely to support the evaluation process.

Project C: Evaluation Plan

Evaluation Purpose & Approaches

Our evaluation design for the City of North Saint Paul Communications Effort is intended to help the city achieve its main goal for 2013: better communication with residents, businesses, and staff members.

It is our hope that our evaluation will provide the City of North Saint Paul with a guide as to how to best analyze its current communication methods while also providing the city with a framework for implementing the evaluation in a way that will best meet the needs of all involved stakeholders.

We believe our clients will use the information gathered from our evaluation to assess their current modes of communication and will also benefit from the information gathered throughout the evaluation implementation process. Our evaluation is designed to not only analyze the effectiveness of the current modes of communication, but to also provide the city with valuable suggestions and ideas for improvement in communications, including potential new communication modes that are not currently being used.

What makes our client unique is that they are interested in improving their communication efforts at multiple scales. The City of North Saint Paul invests in communication with its residents (monthly newsletters, cable access channel, Facebook and Twitter pages), internal communication (including staff, city advisory committees, city officials) as well as communication with the city's business owners. The City of North Saint Paul recognizes the importance of improving upon the communication efforts at each level. In order to both

evaluate the effectiveness of the current communications methods and identify new areas for improved communication, our group recommends employing a variety of methods to collect qualitative and quantitative data. These methods include three surveys (one for each target audience), a review of archival data, and finally, a focus group incorporating city residents, staff members, and business representatives. We believe the variety and insights of those targeted by the communications efforts will provide the most valuable and enduring feedback that will ultimately help improve the city's communication efforts.

Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Question 1: To what extent are the current modes for communication meeting the needs and expectations of city employees, residents, and businesses? And are there some new modes that can also improve the communications efforts?

We are interested in evaluating which communication modes are most effective in improving the city's communication. We have a list of the communication modes that are applied currently, including the city-issued newsletter, social network sites (Twitter, Facebook), public broadcasting and the World Wide Web, and a Mayor's Forum. It has not been determined whether these strategies have effectively facilitated communication since they have been applied. We want to determine the attitudes and opinions of participants regarding these communication modes. We believe that the city residents, employees, and business owners may help us define the effective ones that are worthy of continued application. In addition, we intend to obtain more new communication modes through the recommendation of the participants. The participants also will be asked to provide logical and appropriate

reasons supporting their recommendations. The new modes may help us refine the structure of the communication modes.

Evaluation Question 2: *Which of the current modes of communication are most efficient via balancing cost and ability to achieve desired outcome? The cost could be monetary, time, human capital/resources. How to combine the new modes into the current structure by replacing the ineffective ones?*

Regarding this question, we intend to determine which specific modes of communication contribute most to the improvement of city communication. To explore the efficiency of each communication mode, we need to take the cost into consideration and find equilibrium between their cost and their potential to facilitate city communication. For example, the most effective way of communicating with residents might be personal, face-to-face contact with each individual citizen. While this method would certainly deliver information to residents, the exorbitant amount of time, money, and human capital needed would make this method largely inefficient. Weighing the efficiency of various methods of communication will allow us to determine which options are most viable and sustainable for the municipality. In addition, we are interested in replacing the inefficient modes with new communication modes identified by participants throughout the evaluation process.

Evaluation Questions 3: *What kind of information delivered by the City is valuable and relevant to each target audience (city residents, employees, and business owners/associations)?*

Information (city issues, events, activities, etc.) is an essential part of the City's communication effort. In order to ensure that the communications effort is truly effective, we must detect what kind of information is most crucial to the target audiences. It is necessary to

seek the answer to this question from different target audiences, because different groups have different information needs. The information contained in the different communication modes should be useful and valuable to each target audience. We also assume that the different communication modes can convey different kinds of information. Thus, we also need to find the best match for specific information and specific communication modes (i.e., which information is best-suited for online communication, mail, television, et cetera).

Types and sources of data to answer evaluation questions

In order to answer our three main evaluation questions our group decided to find our evaluation information from sources of data that were readily available in the City of North Saint Paul. These sources of information included: city residents, business owners, business associations, city employees, and the city's business personnel. It is worth noting that these information sources have been utilized for their responses in the past by the City.

In answering the first evaluation question regarding the extent to which current modes of communication are meeting the needs of the target audiences, we define our target audiences as businesses, employees, and residents. Helpful information includes the circulation of the monthly resident newsletters and how many homes it reaches. Secondly, the viewership of the cable channel can determine the effectiveness of the channel at reaching residents. Finally, data to help understand the effectiveness of the City's online presence is crucial. This will include the number of the City's website hits as well as Facebook and Twitter followers. Currently, the City is utilizing the survey to gauge what modes of communication our various sources prefer over another.

In our effort to answer question number two, related to cost effectiveness of the modes of communication, it is imperative to determine the cost to implement the various communication modes. This includes: the budget, the number of staff needed to carry out its activities, the time that staff spend implementing those activities, and the resources (e.g. hardware and equipment) that are needed to carry the work. Furthermore, we must evaluate the efficiency of the communication modes. Since our sources of information were the city employees and the city business personnel we wanted to know which communication modes they use most often and how often they use these communication modes to determine which communication mode provides the most "bang for the City's buck."

Question three was aimed at finding out what kind of the information was valuable and relevant to each target audience. To answer to this question, we will utilize our sources of information (i.e., city residents, city employees, business owners/ associations). Our methods were aimed at finding out what information each source received and the type of information they each preferred to receive through the different communication modes. Please read the Data Collection Methods and Rationale for Selection" section for a more detailed explanation of the methods employed to collect this information.

Data Collection Methods and Rationale for Selection

The City of North Saint Paul is interested in improving its communication efforts for three target audiences: city residents, businesses, and internal city staff. In order to minimize bias in the information obtained, the City should employ a variety of data collection methods, including surveys, archival data review, and focus groups.

Surveys

To properly evaluate the City's communication efforts for each of the three target audiences, three surveys should be conducted. Surveys provide a relatively inexpensive way to collect data from large groups of people, like the population of North Saint Paul (Russ-Eft and Preskill, 2009). Additionally, surveys will provide quantitative data to help answer the three guiding questions of this evaluation.

The first, most extensive survey should be delivered to the residents of North Saint Paul. Of the 4,485 households in North Saint Paul, approximately 862 surveys should be returned in order to obtain a 95 percent confidence level with a ±3 confidence interval (United States Census, 2013; Creative Research Systems, 2012). To date, the survey has been distributed in utility bills to the households throughout the city. This may still be the best method of distribution, as all households in the population are guaranteed to at least receive a survey and a bill is more likely to be viewed as important rather than "junk mail". However, it is imperative to minimize as many barriers to response as possible. For example, the survey should include a business reply mail envelope so residents are not expected to pay postage, as this could skew the data obtained from the survey. Additionally, depending on the survey budget, the city should consider offering an incentive to induce participation, like an affordable prize (i.e., a drawing to win $100).This would not add dramatically to the evaluation budget, but it could have tremendous results by drastically improving the response rate.

The survey distributed to residents is part of a larger survey funded in part by the State Auditor's Office. While many of the survey's questions are standardized for the Auditor's office

to compare across municipalities throughout the state, the City of North Saint Paul is able to include additional questions of its choosing. Questions regarding communication with residents should focus on how residents use the current modes of communication. Questions might include, "Which of the following is your preferred mode of communication with the City of North Saint Paul?" followed by a list of the city's current modes of communication (i.e., mail, e-mail, Facebook/Twitter, etc.). Furthermore, the survey of residents should gather data to help answer the third evaluation question regarding the value of the information being communicated. For example, a series of questions might list statements like, "The information delivered through Facebook and Twitter is useful to me" and ask residents to rate how much they agree or disagree using a Likert scale: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree. These questions will help the city understand not only which modes of communication deliver the most valuable information to residents but also which modes possess room for improvement.

The second survey the city should distribute should target businesses in North Saint Paul. This survey will be at a much smaller scale than the resident survey and should focus on how information is delivered to the business community in the city. Once again, the city might consider distributing the survey through utility bills distributed to commercial buildings as this would ensure that all businesses receive a survey, or perhaps utilize a local business organization to distribute the survey at a meeting. Similar to the residential survey, questions for the business survey might ask business owners and managers to identify their preferred mode of communication with the City of North Saint Paul and the value of information currently being delivered.

The final survey should be distributed to city staff members. Because all prospective respondents are employed by the city, inducing participation may be less difficult than with the previous two surveys. To save money and materials, the survey could be distributed to all employees via staff e-mail. Follow up e-mails should be sent four to seven days after the initial contact and the communications staff may consider asking managers to encourage their employees to take the survey. Questions in this survey should focus specifically on internal communications—preferred mode of communication (i.e., e-mail, intranet) and how valuable the information being delivered is to city staff members.

All surveys should include open ended questions asking the target audience to identify additional modes of communication not currently being employed by the city. While responses to this question may be limited, understanding areas where residents, businesses, and staff members believe the city could have a stronger communication presence could help identify major gaps in the city's communication efforts thus far.

Focus Group

In addition to the survey data, a focus group will help provide qualitative data to help answer the three overarching evaluation questions. Unlike surveys, which may struggle from a nonresponse bias and a disconnect resulting from asynchronous communication, focus groups can provide immediate answers and greater context for information. Additionally, a focus group is more efficient and feasible in terms of time than individual interviews across the three target audiences.

For the sake of time, only one focus group should be conducted and include stakeholders from all three target audiences. One possible combination of participants would include two representatives from the business community, two city staff members, and four North Saint Paul residents (since this is the largest population of the three target audiences). Since it is possible that staff members and business representatives will also be residents, all participants should be clear what their role is throughout the focus group process. Questions in the focus group should attempt to answer the first evaluation question by asking participants to identify what they like and dislike about the current modes of communication with the City. Additionally, the focus group will help answer the third evaluation question, as participants can provide insight into whether or not they find the information they are receiving to be valuable and how the City might be able to deliver more relevant information to residents, businesspeople, and staff members. Finally, the focus group will provide an open-ended forum for participants to brainstorm new, unexplored methods of communication. Because these methods are presently unknown to the City, a survey full of multiple choice questions would be less effective at identifying new communication techniques, and an extended response question will not likely have a high response rate. A focus group, on the other hand, may allow participants to identify creative communication solutions simply by talking about them with other group members.

Review of Archival Data

The final data collection method is a review of archival data. This data collection method will be most effective in answering evaluation questions one and two, as information like newsletter circulation, television channel viewership, and Facebook/Twitter followers can all be obtained through a review of City files and records. Additionally, one of the benefits of archival data review is that it can provide historical context for the data being obtained. In other words, depending on the extent of the City's records, the archival data review will allow the evaluators to see how viewership, newsletter circulation, et cetera has changed over time.

Archival data review is also helpful for determining the cost of a communication mode. For example, a review of the communications budget will allow evaluators to determine how much money is being devoted to certain modes of communication (i.e., money spent on newsletter materials). This data will be most helpful in determining the efficiency of a communication mode, for a method of communication may be more effective at reaching its target audience, but less effective in terms of cost or time.

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