2011

Social Media Use in Neighborhood Associations

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Introduction

Lind-Bohanon Neighborhood Association (LBNA) is a 501c (3) nonprofit organization established in 1997, and is the City's designated Neighborhood Revitalization Program(NRP) group for the Lind-Bohanon neighborhood. LBNA's mission is to improve and enhance our neighborhood in the areas of housing, business, safety and community involvement.

The vision of LBNA is to have a neighborhood that has housing that appeals to home buyers and a diverse population; to have a business community that produces decent jobs and fits the needs of its residents; to educate and inspire our community and encourage involvement from its residents and businesses to ensure a safe and clean neighborhood of which we can be proud.

The goal of the project was to explore how neighborhood organizations use social media to connect and gain feedback from their residents. Specifically, LBNA was interested in how they could use social media to engagement and get feedback from residents about various initiatives and activities in the neighborhood and city.

Methods

This research used both qualitative and quantitative methods to delve into the question of how neighborhood organizations use social media. A web-based survey was developed, which was implemented through SurveyMonkey for administration. The survey was sent out to 70 different neighborhood organizations in Minneapolis. A little over half of organizations responded, with 36 completing the survey (51.4%). Additionally, from those that responded, five interviews were conducted with staff at neighborhood organizations that do use social media. The interviews sought to expand further on how specifically neighborhoods use social media to connect with residents.

Findings

Respondent Demographics

Most commonly, organizations did not have any employees on their payroll (43.8%) but some did use independent contractors in place of employees (31.3%). The organizations that did have staff,

tended to be smaller with 25% only having one employee, 18.8% having 2-3 employees, and 12.5% having 4 or more employees.

Interestingly, number of employees did not directly correlate to organizational budget size. There was almost an even split of organizations between having a budget of $20,001-$50,000 (31.3%), $50,001-$100,000 (28.1%), and more than $100,000 (28.1%). The remaining 12.5% had organizational budgets of $20,000 or less.

Organizations Using Social Media

Most organizations reported that they used social media in some way (80.6%). Of those, a little over half had been using social media for 1-2 years (51.7%). About a quarter of organizations were new to social media (20.7%), having used it for less than a year. The other quarter of organizations had been using social media for 3-5 years. Almost all of the organizations indicated that they specifically use social media to connect with residents in the neighborhood (96.4%). Every organization that completed the survey indicated that they used Facebook as one of their social media tools (100%). Blogs (35.7%) and Twitter (32.1%) came in a distant second and third place. Few organizations why they specifically chose the tool they did, those that did clarify

indicated that the characteristics of being easy to learn, manage, and update were important in selecting a social media tool. Additionally, several organizations indicated they chose Facebook because "everyone" was using it.

To connect with residents, neighborhood organizations used social media in several different ways. Some organizations use

Social media is media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques. Examples include: YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Myspace, etc.

social media sparingly, posting no more than once per month to share an event notice or community happening (29.6%). At the other end of the spectrum, 33.3% use social media at least every other day. In the middle, 37% use social media at least once per month and as much as twice per week. Most organizations mentioned using social media to raise awareness of community happenings and events. One organization explained that they linked their blog to their Facebook

page so that posts would automatically be posted. The majority of organizations feel these methods have helped them reach more residents (66.7%). Although, organizations don't necessarily believe social media is a good return on investment, with only 56% believing it's has a goof return on investment. This may be related to the nature of how organizations use social media. Those surveyed indicated that it was primarily used in a one-sided fashion to broadcast news, events, etc to residents. It was not used extensively to interactively engage residents in dialogue and a little over half 51.8% believed that residents did not use social media to provide feedback about the community. One organization interviewed explained that they did have some success in connecting with residents on Facebook. The explained that they posted questions, such as "What things would you like to see in the community?" and reported that they would receive an average of 7-8 responses when they posted questions asking residents to respond. Most other organizations interviewed reported that they did not use Facebook (or social media) to interactively engage residents.

Organizations may not have used social media as interactively as they could because of their own organizational limitations. The vast majority did not have social media as an item in their budget (86.2%), and most did not devote much staff time to developing it as a resource. Only 13.7% invested more than 10 hours per week on social media, with 34.5% investing zero staff time, and 51.7% investing 1-10 hours per week. Several organizations indicated that time spent on social media was "part of normal staff function" and that "staff does it in their "spare time." A fair amount of organizations indicated that volunteers either managed or at least assisted with their social media efforts.

Organizations Not Using Social Media

Few organizations (19.4%) indicated that they are not currently using social media. Over half of those organizations plan to begin using social media at some point in the future (57.1%). The remaining organizations do not plan to use social media and indicated they do not believe social media will help them reach more residents. Those that do plan to use social media indicated that they do believe that their residents use social media and that it would help them connect with residents. One organization explained that they weren't actively deciding not to use social media, "It was not a decision "not to", but rather, not making the decision "to". It's mostly a matter of

limited staff time and no volunteers willing to do it." When they do have the capacity to begin using social media, all indicated they would use Facebook (blogs and Twitter were also mentioned as possible tools they would use).

Social Media Tool Overview

There are currently dozens of different social media tools that neighborhood organizations can use to connect with residents. The three that neighborhood organizations reported using most commonly were Facebook, blogs, and Twitter.

Facebook

With over one-third of the population in the United States logging in to Facebook at least once a month, it is the most widely used form of social media. Facebook does not cost organizations anything to join, and has useful functionality for neighborhoods. Neighborhood organizations on Facebook can take advantage of a plethora of features including; a discussion board, polls, photo albums, reviews, event calendar, video, and updates. To view how one neighborhood association uses Facebook, see Lyndale Neighborhood's page:

http://www.facebook.com/lyndale.neighborhood.

Blogs

Blogs can be used in conjunction with or in place of an organizations website. Blogs are websites used to post information that anyone can read. Unlike Facebook and Twitter, blogs are not a member site – they are a website, so anyone can find the information online through searchs and anyone can view the information. Blogs can be interactive in a similar sense as Facebook in that members can comment on posts, and for those that are savvy in html, blogs can have all the functionality of Facebook – if not more. While starting a blog on Wordpress or Blogger is free, building in the functionality can be costly if you do not have a volunteer that can do it. Additionally, if you want to have the domain be your organization's name, there is an additional cost involved. Lastly, since it is similar to a website, people will not know when you update it unless they subscribe to your blog. Waite Park Community has integrated their website and blog into one online presence, see their website here: http://www.waiteparkneighborhood.org/.

Twitter

Twitter is a micro-blog website, in which people and organizations "tweet" short, 140 character messages to their followers. It started as a way for people to answer the question of "What are you going" and has evolved into a rich information sharing resource. Essentially, Twitter has the same function as Facebook's wall for status updates. Twitter does have some limitations in that there are not as many people on Twitter as Facebook, and that it is limited in functionality. Tweets can only be 140 characters, and cannot have polls, pictures, video, etc in the actual message. Organizations must include a link in their tweet to provide that, which can quickly use up the limited space available. Twitter is available at no cost and users typically recommend updating it more frequently than one would with Facebook. To view how one neighborhood association uses Twitter, see Waite Park Community's Twitter page: http://twitter.com/#!/waiteparkcc

Other Social Media Tools

Some neighborhoods around the country have taken a different approach to connecting with residents online. They have forgone using a pre-established social media tool and have created their own social media tool to connect with residents.

Neighbors to Neighbors is an example of a tool that was developed specifically for Boston, MA. Neighbors to Neighbors is built to have both city-wide and neighborhood forums for residents to participate. Similar to Facebook, residents can create a page for themselves, join groups, participate in discussions, and have friends on the website. In reviewing the website, it seems like some people are fairly active – but some neighborhood forum s have yet to have a single post or discussion started. While in theory, this tool sounds like a good fit for engaging residents, it doesn't appear to be as active as Facebook. It would likely take much more time and resources to develop since there wouldn't be residents already on the site as with Facebook.

Another example of a social media tool that has been used is SeedSpeak. It is a pre-established tool that is used to bring neighbors together around an idea. Their website explains,

> SeedSpeak is a social network designed to help you quickly share great ideas with friends, neighbors and everyone else in your community. Here's an example. Say you know of an empty city-owned lot that you think would be an ideal place for a public park. SeedSpeak makes it easier than ever to turn your idea into a reality! Using the SeedSpeak website or iPhone app, simply place your idea (aka a 'seed') on the map right where you'd like to build the park. You can add a description, photos or video to help explain your idea and then categorize it as 'neighborhood cleanup' or 'parks

and recreation.' You can even add tags to make it easier to find. Through the website or iPhone app, other SeedSpeakers can then discover your idea, build on it, volunteer their time or use their connections to build that new park. Even elected officials, public agencies or community groups can help grow your idea! (http://seedspeak.com/)

SeedSpeak appears to be a useful tool for specific initiatives or ideas, but not necessarily for the purpose LBNA is seeking – to engage residents in a dialogue about various neighborhood and city issues.

Final Thoughts

For organizations both small and large, Facebook appears to be the social media tool of choice. This is likely related to its low cost (free), ease of use, and wide-ranging appeal. The problem most organizations seem to have is being able to have additional staff time devoted specifically for social media. Without that, Facebook rarely becomes more than a forum to talk at residents versus talk with residents.

For Lind-Bohanon Neighborhood Association (LBNA), Facebook would likely be the best choice as the tool to engage residents. While starting an online network like Neighbors to Neighbors might be a nice option, it would likely not be feasible due to time and budget limitations of the organization. Additionally, Neighbors to Neighbors is successful because it is city based, with forums for each neighborhood – a large undertaking one neighborhood organization couldn't undertake on its own. LBNA would like best make use of Facebook as many other neighborhood organizations have. To truly be successful, LBNA would have to devote resources to develop a community on Facebook. It would take a fair amount of time to create this online community for residents. The recommended steps to develop this online community are as follows:

1. Develop a social media plan (how frequent will post, what will post, who will manage, what goals are in terms of use, etc)
2. Create the Facebook page (add information, links to community resources, pictures from community events, add value to page to make people want to join, etc)
3. Develop the fan base (pull resident lists, invite residents to join LBNA page, perhaps have some sort of contest to draw in residents)

4. Be active (without frequent and interesting content, residents will not look at the LBNA page often – which will diminish the capacity of LBNA to use Facebook to gauge resident opinion and procure input)

Resources for Starting on Facebook

A neighborhood organization walks you through their process of starting on Facebook

http://socialmediadynamics.com/blog/?p=1286

A beginner's guide to Facebook for non-profits

http://www.wildapricot.com/blogs/newsblog/archive/2007/05/23/put-your-non-profit-on-facebook.aspx

How Nonprofits Can Use Facebook

http://eweinb04.blogspot.com/2006/11/how-nonprofits-can-use-facebook.html

Facebook 101 for nonprofits

http://www.socialbrite.org/2010/07/12/facebook-101-for-nonprofits/

How to Set Up a Non-Profit Facebook Page

http://www.wildapricot.com/blogs/newsblog/archive/2008/06/16/how-to-set-up-a-non-profit-facebook-page.aspx

Facebook Best Practices for Nonprofit Organizations

http://www.diosacommunications.com/facebookbestpractices.htm

Lind-Bohanon Neighborhood Association
2011 Neighborhood Organization Social Media Survey

1. Does your Neighborhood Revitalization Program neighborhood association use social media in any way? (Social media is media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques. Examples include: YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Myspace, etc.)
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

Neighborhood Organizations Using Social Media

2. How long has your organization been using Social Media?
   ☐ Less than 1 year
   ☐ 1-2 years
   ☐ 2-5 years
   ☐ More than 5 years

3. Does your organization's budget have a line specifically for social media?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

4. What is your organization's current annual budget for social media?
   ☐ $0
   ☐ $1 - $50
   ☐ $51 - $100
   ☐ $101 - $500
   ☐ $501 - $2,500
   ☐ More than $2,500

5. How much staff/contractor time did you allocate to your organization's social media efforts in the past year?
   ☐ None
   ☐ Less than ¼ of a full time employee (less than 10 hours per week)
   ☐ ¼ - ½ of a full time employee (10-20 hours per week)
   ☐ ¾ - 1 full time employee (21-40 hours per week)
   ☐ More than one full time employee (More than 40 hours per week)

6. How does your organization fund its social media work? (Check all that apply)
   ☐ Received grant/donation designated for social media

☐ Reallocated money from programming to pay for social media
☐ Reallocated money from other part of organization (not programming) for social media
☐ Raised additional undesignated revenue specifically to pay for social media
☐ Other: _____

7. Does your organization plan to increase spending (including staff time) on social media in the next year?
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Unsure

8. Please check which of the following your organization is currently using.
☐ Blog
☐ Wiki
☐ YouTube
☐ Flickr
☐ Facebook
☐ Linkedin
☐ MySpace
☐ Twitter
☐ Other: _____

9. Why did your organization decide to use the above form(s) of social media? (written response)

10. Does your organization use social media to reach residents?
☐ Yes
☐ No

11. How frequently does your organization use social media on average?
☐ At least once per day
☐ 3-6 times per week
☐ 1-2 times per week
☐ 1-3 times per month
☐ No more than once per month

12. Please describe how your organization uses social media to reach residents.

Please state your level of agreement with the following statements.
13. Social media is an important tool in our organization.
☐ Strongly disagree   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree

14. We reach more residents using social media.
☐ Strongly disagree   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree

15. Residents participate in our social media efforts (i.e. commenting in wall, re-tweeting, etc.).

☐ Strongly disagree   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Strongly agree

16. Residents provide feedback about the community via social media.
☐ Strongly disagree   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Strongly agree

17. Social media have a strong return on investment in our organization.
☐ Strongly disagree   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Strongly agree

18. Social media is a tool that many of our residents use.
☐ Strongly disagree   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Strongly agree

Neighborhood Organizations Not Using Social Media

19. At this time, does your organization plan to use Social Media in the future?
☐ Yes
☐ No

20. Why did your organization decide not to use social media? If your organization plans to use it in the future, why? If your organization does not plan to use it in the future, why not?

21. Please check which of the following your organization is planning to use.
☐ Blog
☐ Wiki
☐ YouTube
☐ Flickr
☐ Facebook
☐ Linkedin
☐ Twitter
☐ Other: _____
☐ None

Please state your level of agreement with the following statement.
22. Social media would help us reach more residents.
☐ Strongly disagree   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Strongly agree

23. Social media is a tool that many of our residents use.
☐ Strongly disagree   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Strongly agree

Organization Information

24. What is the zip code of your organization? _____

25. How many employees does your organization have?
☐ None

☐ No employees, but do use independent contractors
☐ 1
☐ 2 - 3
☐ 4 - 5
☐ Over 5

26. What is your organization's annual budget?
☐ Under $5,000
☐ $5,001 - $10,000
☐ $10,001 - $20,000
☐ $20,001 - $50,000
☐ $50,001 - $100,000
☐ More than $100,000

27. Please paste links to your social media sites.

28. Would you be willing to be interviewed about your organization and its use of social media?
☐ Yes
☐ No

29. Which Neighborhood Revitalization Program neighborhood association did you complete this survey on behalf of?

30. If you are willing to be interviewed, please complete the following information.
    Name:
    Title:
    E-mail:
    Phone:

Lind-Bohanon Neighborhood Association
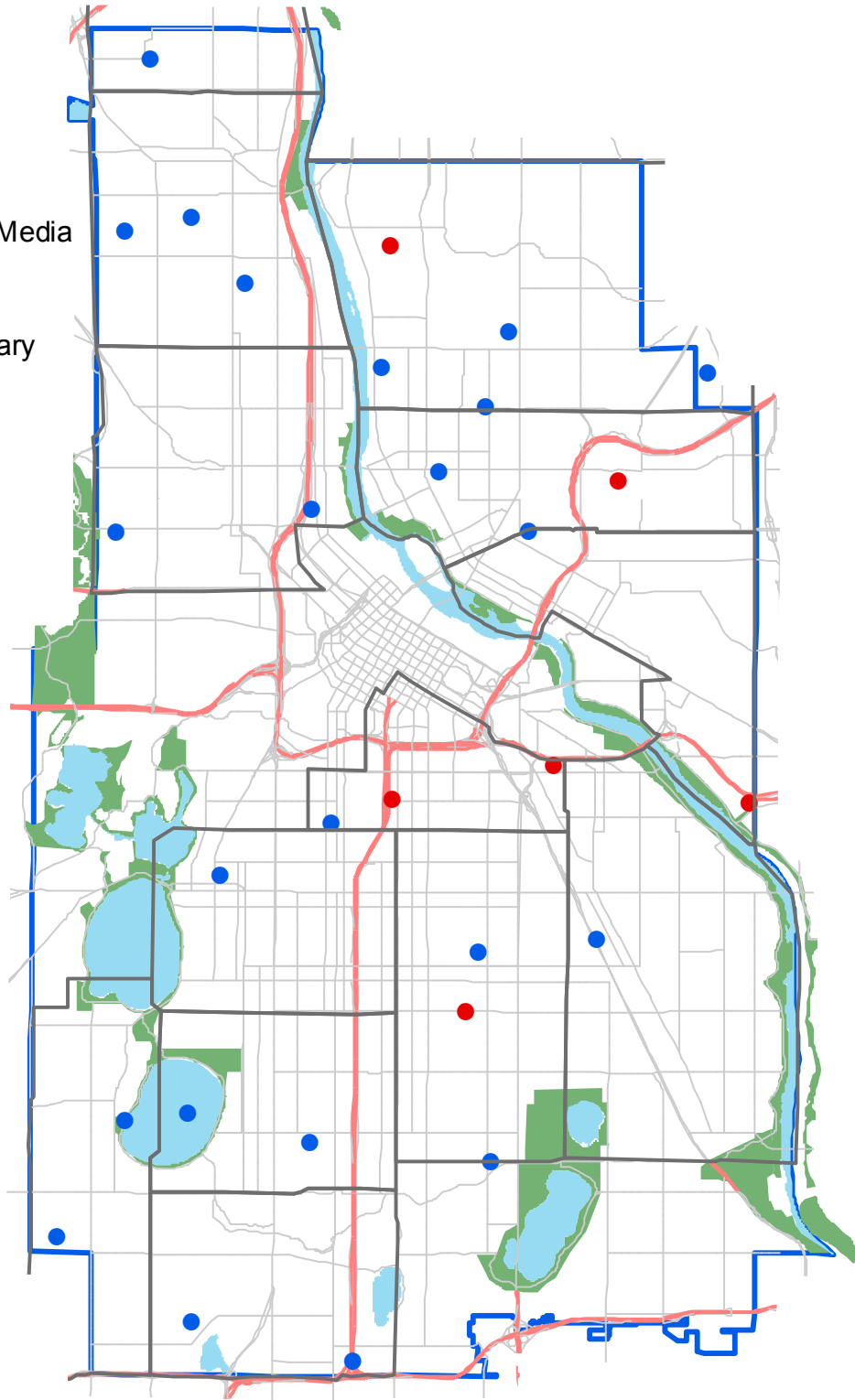## 2011 Neighborhood Organization Social Media Interview Questions

1. Tell me about how your organization first got involved with using social media.

2. Please describe how your organization uses social media in its work.

3. Has your organization tried any social media tools that were not useful? Please explain.

4. How do you manage your social media efforts? How has your focus on social media impacted staffing at your organization?

5. What are the positive outcomes you have seen from using social media? The negative outcomes?

6. How has social media enabled you to better connect with your residents?

7. Please share an example of how social media has brought residents in your neighborhood together.

8. How has social media empowered residents to get more involved in community matters? Please share an example.

9. If you were working with a neighborhood organization that had never used social media, what advice would you give them?

10. Do you have anything you would like to add on any of the questions I asked today, or on your organization's social media efforts overall?

Minneapolis Organizations
Social Media Use by Zip Code

Legend

- ● Use Social Media
- ● Do Not Use Social Media
- ▢ Zip Code Boundary
- ▢ Minneapolis Boundary
- Major Roads
- Highways
- Lakes & Rivers
- Parks

N

0   1   2   4
Miles

CURA
Center for Urban and Regional Affairs

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