the review

July /August 2017

the official magazine of the michigan municipal league

How to Tell Your Community Story

STORYTELLING FOR LOCAL LEADERS

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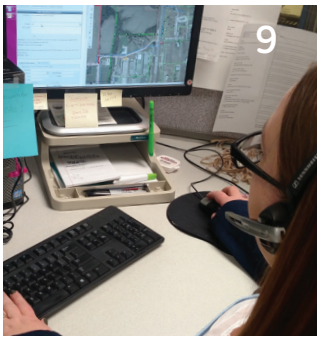

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michigan municipal league

the review

The official magazine of the Michigan Municipal League **Volume 90, Number 4**

We love where you live.

The Michigan Municipal League is dedicated to making Michigan's communities better by thoughtfully innovating programs, energetically connecting ideas and people, actively serving members with resources and services, and passionately inspiring positive change for Michigan's greatest centers of potential: its communities.

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Please recycle this magazine

The Changing Face of Communication

Hark back to the early 2000s and you get an idea of how technology has affected every aspect of our lives today. Humans now engage with one another in ways that were unimaginable back then. Wikipedia was still in the experimental stages, so for serious research we were still turning to the encyclopedia. Facebook was an idea still fermenting in some college students' minds.

The earliest forms of the Internet go back to the 1960s, with rudimentary constructions of email beginning to be utilized. Home computers and Internet chats started to emerge in the 1980s, laying the groundwork for social media and social networking as we know it today. In the late 1990s, online blogs began to appear, followed by an explosion of social media tools including MySpace, (remember that?) Flickr, LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, to name a few. We need to remind ourselves that a whole generation of kids now in high school have grown up with these tools and know nothing else. And prodigious millennials are already redefining the way we interact, connect, and do business—ways that were inconceivable 15 years ago. These are generations who demand instant feedback, 24-7 accessibility, and quick service at the demand of a few clicks. They are our customers and future leaders, and they're raising the bar on accountability, transparency, and engagement.

In recent years, Michigan local governments have been meeting these challenges with fresh ideas to create more seamless customer experiences through social media tools. You can read about some of those ideas in this issue. We're seeing more enterprising ways of engaging the public than ever before, with real effectual results. And you don't have to take big steps to make big impacts. In partnership with the University of Michigan School of Information, the City of Ferndale is exploring low-tech solutions to engage residents in their community and share information. Through texting apps, Facebook, and personalized calendars, the city can directly communicate with citizens about curbside services. Not only are these tools being used to create an engagement platform, they're also being used to think about city services from the Department of Public Works to the Police Department.

The City of Rochester Hills is looking for new ways to make civic engagement both informative and fun through philanthropic events. And if you are looking to update how you develop your communication plans, a takeaway from the Congress of New Urbanism (CNU) 24 in Detroit, teaches you how to establish quick and easy tactics for your team to help build a voice for change in your community. Twitter is in the news a lot these days—and it's not always good—but the city of Topeka, Kansas, found a way to take 140 characters and turn it into a big benefit by telling their story. Through this medium, the city peels back the layers of its services and introduces residents to the people who are providing them.

The ability of municipalities to communicate their messages to the world are bound only by their imagination. This issue of The Review shows that to its readers.

There is never any downtime for League events! If you haven't had a chance to sign up for the Michigan Association of Mayor's annual Summer Workshop, it's not too late to do so. This two-day event will take place July 13-14 in Monroe. The Michigan Municipal Executives will be holding their Summer Workshop in Muskegon, July 25-28. And we're only a couple of months out from our annual Convention, which will be held in Holland this year, September 13-15. To get more information on these upcoming events, visit www.mml.org/events/calendar.htm.

Daniel P. Gilmartin
League executive director and CEO
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UM students Corina Kesler, Karan Hallon, and Yongjia Duan worked with the City of Ferndale to create DocuBot, a Facebook chat bot meant to improve access to public records.

SMALL STEPS: The Benefits of Simple, Low-tech Engagement

By Scott TenBrink

See a rat? Start a chat! Those are the simple instructions for Rat Chat, a tool designed by a team of University of Michigan students to reduce the vermin population in Ferndale. This text-based service allows residents to report a rat sighting, request inspector services, and learn how to get rid of rats. It has been used hundreds of times since it launched in April, increasing government productivity, service transparency, and community engagement as it addresses this common urban problem.

You've likely heard similar claims from companies selling the next killer app for civic engagement. The civic tech marketplace has exploded in the past five years. In 2015, *Forbes* magazine reported that state and local governments would spend an estimated $6.4 billion on civic tech that year, and that this sector is growing 14 times faster than spending on traditional government technology ($19 billion/year). The result has been a seemingly endless stream of products promising efficiency, transparency, and engagement for local governments.

Such promises are often difficult to realize in small- and medium-sized communities (the vast majority of Michigan municipalities). Local governments have limited budgets for adopting new technology, so new investments feel risky. No one wants to find they traded the family cow for unproductive magic beans. Communities frequently don't have the capacity to implement and sustain such products anyway. IT resources are already strained, and "social media strategy" defaults to the youngest person on staff.

Most importantly, civic tech tools are misapplied, underutilized, or avoided because local governments don't have a clear strategy for engagement that aligns with the tools on offer. In short, the civic tech industry is selling solutions to problems that local governments don't recognize.

Citizen Interaction Design

The Rat Chat student team was part of the Citizen Interaction Design (CID) program at the UM School of Information, which aims to create information tools that support 21st century citizenship. In the past four years, CID has partnered with Ferndale and Jackson to create over 30 information tools supporting community engagement. We've built websites, set up open data portals, designed mobile apps, and implemented wireless beacons—some pretty high-tech stuff.

But over time, CID projects have increasingly aimed for simple, low-tech solutions to information problems. That may mean using postcards instead of designing a new mobile app, or tweaking the display of information instead of creating new tools. We might utilize existing Facebook features instead of creating a website. Initially, the switch was practical; it is difficult to develop a quality mobile application in one semester. But we began to see that this low-tech approach improved our ability to recognize and define the underlying information problem and potential solutions.

Our local government partners have told us repeatedly that working with CID is valuable beyond the specific project results because it gave a new perspective on approaching engagement. Over the course of four years, the CID program has honed in on three critical elements for creating effective "civic tech" solutions that are often easierto apply when you keep solutions simple and low-tech.

UM students show off Rat Chat, a system designed to help residents notify the City of Ferndale about rodent problems.

> "...WE BEGAN TO SEE THAT THIS LOW-TECH APPROACH IMPROVED OUR ABILITY TO RECOGNIZE AND DEFINE THE UNDERLYING INFORMATION PROBLEM AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS."

What Is The Problem?

Our students are trained to start with the problem, not the solution. Then they ask what the problem is, and why that is the most important problem. Repeatedly. This might seem like an obvious approach, but partners frequently identify their problem as "we need a website that explains our project," which identifies the problem as the lack of a website. Or they might say "it's hard to find correct information about this process," when the problem might be that the process is overly-complicated and could be simplified so instruction isn't needed. Finding the right problem is critical to developing the right solution, and envisioning a solution too early corrupts that effort.

Who Is The User?

In identifying the problem, it is critical to remember that it is not your problem. If you aren't thinking about the end-user of the product (citizens, for example), you end up designing a tool that theywon't use.

As designers of information tools, our students apply a variety of user-centered design practices to ensure that the tool is serving and benefiting the intended audience. They review demographic data; they do focus groups, interviews, and surveys of citizens; they observe real citizens interacting with the system; and they create storyboards and maps of the user journey. These techniques ensure that the problem reflects the user's experience and that the solution addresses their needs.

One student team worked with a city clerk who wanted to improve access to public documents in their office. Through interviews with citizens, the students discovered that most people didn't know what the city clerk did or that their community had one. As a result of this research, the team refocused the project on creating awareness of the role and resources of the city clerk.

Who Will Keep It Running?

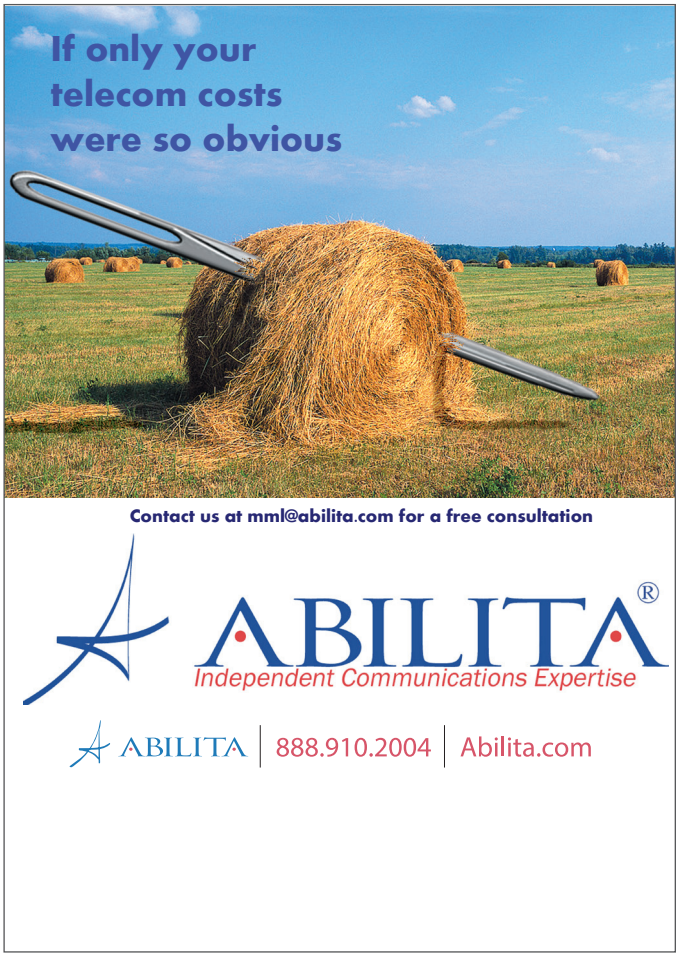
Mobile apps can be a really cool way to engage your community. But did you know that they need to be designed for Android and iPhone separately? Did you think about who would create the account in the Apple Store and Google Play to host the app? And who would be responsible for meeting the frequent and required code updates? We didn't, and those projects suffered for it.

But we did learn from our mistakes, and now sustainability is a core principle for CID projects. For example, one student team worked with a local history museum to engage the community in the participatory nature of history—that we are making and relating to history every day. The team started with plans for an interactive, online experience built on the museum's extensive archives. But it quickly became clear that no one at the museum had the skillset to maintain such a tool, and it would be expensive to contract that work. So, they used postcards and Pinterest instead. They sent out postcards with a picture and description of a museum artifact and asked people to mail them back with their personal connection to that item. The returned postcards were scanned and posted on the museum's

Pinterest page. Mailing, scanning, and posting were all skills that already existed in the organization, and new staff could easily be trained.

Access to and understanding of information has never been more important to participating in our community than it is today. Local governments need to consider their role as a host of community information, as well as the role information plays in engaging citizens in community goals. While there are some amazing high-tech products that are benefiting many communities, the Citizen Interaction Design teams found that the solution-first approach of the civic tech marketplace can also work against understanding the core role of information for community engagement. In many cases, simple, low-tech solutions build stronger organizational capacity for data driven decision-making and improved community engagement approaches in local government.

Scott TenBrink manages the Citizen Interaction Design program at the University of Michigan School of Information. He can be reached at 517.914.6605 or dstb@umich.edu. More information about the Citizen Interaction Design program available at citizeninteraction.org.



Call center employee Ashleigh Meredith answers questions from residents.

SHORT & SNAPPY

TOPEKA'S TWEET-A-LONGS & VIDEOS GRAB THEIR AUDIENCE

By Aly VanDyke

People's attention spans are at an all-time low, and yet their noses are always stuck in their phones. How can cities make sure our media-devouring, attention-deprived citizens see their message?

Simple: By meeting them where they are. That means shortening your message. Videos no more than a few minutes. One-page news releases. Bullets rather than unbroken walls of text. And that takes heavy and creative use of social media.

In the City of Topeka, we developed two programs to meet those needs. Topeka Tweet-A-Longs use live social media to tell the stories of employees out in the field. And Topeka In Two videos share information about the city in only two minutes. Both are easy and inexpensive to replicate, and continue to pay off for the city.

Tweet-A-Longs

The services cities provide—clean water, reliable sewer systems, drivable streets—aren't often thought about until there is a problem. But city employees still come to work every day, regardless of whether anyone notices. It's time we introduce those services, and the employees who provide them, to our residents.

That's where Tweet-A-Longs come in. A Tweet-A-Long involves accompanying an employee or crew on a scheduled job for about two hours, capturing video, pictures, and information and sending it out on Twitter as it's happening. When the time is up, you can compile the tweets in a blog—storify.com is an easy one—and share the blog on other social media as well as internally.

Tweet-A-Longs are a creative, entertaining way to engage your residents and employees. The initiative creates pride in and for local government—both in and outside your organization. It costs next to nothing—just staff time on your communications team—and is easy to replicate. If you're looking for a way to grow social media followers, tell your own stories, and show members of the public the good work you do, Tweet-A-Longs are an easy, inexpensive, and fun way to reach those goals.

Gain Followers, Improve Employee Morale

Tweet-a-Longs combine the relevance and popularity of social media with the stories people aren't hearing about the accomplishments of cities and their employees. With Tweet-A-Longs, Topeka residents can see how our staff is working for them, every day, out in the community, not just the regular faces they see sitting at council meetings. They can put names and faces to the service providers funded by their tax dollars. One follower even snapped a selfie with a worker she recognized from a Tweet-A-Long.

Tweet-A-Longs also have helped grow the city's following on social media. Since the initiative started, the city has picked up hundreds of followers on Twitter,

Facebook and Nextdoor. Each blog post about Tweet-A-Longs has hundreds of views, some reaching into the thousands. Those figures don't account for people reading the blog information on Twitter, Nextdoor, or Facebook, so the reach is much higher.

Each view is another Topeka resident we have reached with our story, unfiltered, about individuals who love serving their community, but who typically don't get the recognition from the public they deserve,

Although the benefits to citizen engagement are great, Tweet-A-Longs have had an even greater effect on Topeka's employees. They have been a significant morale booster for staff, particularly those who have been featured in the Tweet-A-Longs. Staff members now are coming up with different ideas for Tweet-A-Longs to get their departments and co-workers more exposure, and other employees—in addition to Topeka residents—are getting to know some of the public servants by name and occupation.

Bring Tweet-A-Longs To Your Town

Starting a Tweet-A-Long program can be challenging if upper management doesn't understand or appreciate the importance of social media. Management also might be hesitant to allow unfettered access to employees who typically don't have contact with the public or media.

It is important to establish ground rules with department directors prior to scheduling a Tweet-A-Long. You want the Tweet-A-Long to be as organic as possible—the best ones come from letting employees be themselves—but that doesn't mean there shouldn't be some limits. In Topeka, having trust in one another and believing that everyone has the city's best interest in mind, helped overcome some of these roadblocks.

One of the great aspects of Tweet-A-Longs is that they don't require many resources. The Tweet-A-Long itself takes just two hours. Adding it to a blog can take anywhere from five minutes to an hour. Ideally, you're following a crew on a scheduled task, so it shouldn't interrupt workflow, either.

Topeka In Two Series

We launched the "Topeka in Two" video series in the fall of 2015, and it's consistently produced our most-watched videos on the city's YouTube channel.

The premise is fairly simple: Boil down your information into two-minute videos, and share it across social media.

We've used the program to cover a host of initiatives, from explaining our process to fix a water main break and how to use our performance portal to month-in-review summaries and a fun man-on-the-street video about the budget.

We also use the "Topeka In Two" program as a way to give our various interns valuable experience and a clip for their resume.

Any intern who works for the City of Topeka's Communications Department is tasked with creating a "Topeka In Two" before they leave. An intern from the University of Kansas produced a video about our program that helps build ramps and widen doors to make homes more accessible to residents. And last summer, our youth employee, a 15-year-old high school freshman, made a "Topeka In Two" about the youth summer employment program she was part of: Topeka Way To Work.

To see the full playlist, find the City of Topeka on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/user/CityofTopekaKS/playlists.

Tweet-A-Longs and "Topeka in Two" are easy, inexpensive, and fun to implement. We hope you give them a try in your city.

Aly Van Dyke is a marketing consultant for the city of Austin, Texas. She was formerly the media relations director for the city of Topeka, Kansas. You may contact her at aly.vandyke@austintexas.gov.

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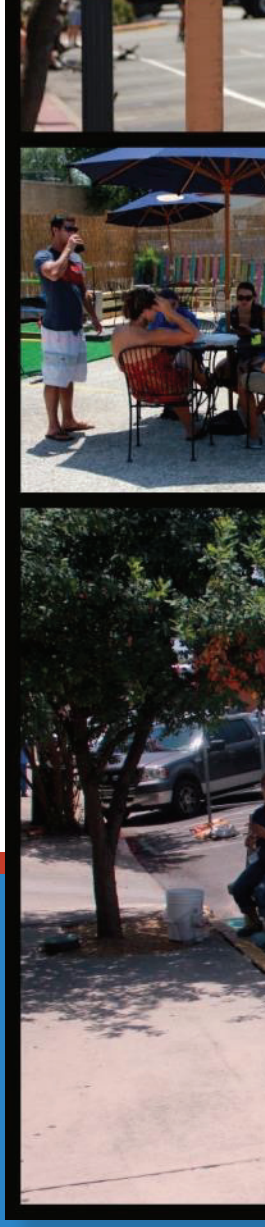
Topeka Zoo horticulturist, Rick Knight, helps clean up foliage in the rainforest.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT THAT POPS!

By Samantha Armbruster and Matthew Lewis



As planning and marketing professionals, our time and roles in municipal government were very different, but from early conversations we realized that our opinion about public outreach was exactly the same—it stunk. We had attended enough poorly-promoted, facilitated, and attended workshops to know that there had to be a better way to connect with the public.

In May 2016, we were given the opportunity to demonstrate a new way at the 24th Congress of New Urbanism in Detroit. In our "Public Engagement that Pops" session, we sought to bring together 30 people from across North America to study and breakdown what makes for powerful public engagement.

Step By Step

The first step is to identify what doesn't work. Many times, the process for a project involves studying, listening and informing, with each step having a feedback loop. The study portion can be conducted internally. Representatives from one or more departments can put their heads together and generate some recommendations for the project.

The typical city listening process is the dreaded public hearing or citizen comments. Too often, this piece is viewed as a task on a to-do list. It tends to be one-way communication where, at best, the citizen feels informed but out of touch with the project. This lack of true engagement has many detrimental effects and, more importantly, misses a real opportunity to humanize the project.

Imagine you are raising money for a great cause. What would get more people to rally around you? A billboard and a public notice, or a Facebook page and five parties hosted around the community? To truly engage your community, communication plans need to be less billboard and more pop-up. At the end of the day, the work of municipal government is finding and spending money for great causes that benefit the community, right?

Getting the People Mover On Track

So, where to begin. In our CNU session, we sought to reimagine one of Detroit's People Mover stations near the conference, with the goal of increasing ridership. For our communication plan, we added some attention-grabbing new steps to the process: study, listen, engage, inform, re-engage, and celebrate.

For the study portion, we encourage project planners to seek new as well as historic information that may be in the hands of other organizations, such as existing plans and previous workshops. In the listening stage, try going beyond traditional meetings and dive into social media and face-to- face with people in and around the station to get a real sense of what they thought was important.

Engagement wasn't seen as a task to be completed, but an opportunity to excite. The group came up with ways to start conversations by hosting events on the train. Unique activities on the train as well as at the station could generate smile-induced selfies on social media feeds around the country.

With an engaged public in hand, the informing stage can now be guided by the words and experiences of the citizens themselves. Not only is the message better received, it's better placed because the process has been focused on the end-users from day one. For example, instead of a billboard on the highway, advertisement for this project would be placed at eye level—the vantage point of People Mover riders.

Celebrations are the most fun part of the project, but they're often overlooked. Celebrations are a great way to thank people for their hard work and input, and they're also a great public relations tool. Media is more likely to run a story about a party on a train—with visuals of the station filled with balloons— than a photo of people staring at a PowerPoint presentation about the project.

Sounds like a lot more work than a press release, doesn't it? You're right, but we feel the extra effort pays off. You're much more likely to avoid the outcomes of bad public engagement: poor design, poor execution, angry community, and political turmoil, to name a few.

Keeping The Budget On Track

The good news is that while the process may take more time, it doesn't have to cost more money. Many online tools make the process free or cheap. In our session, we utilized a Splashthat page for the event page and Piktochart to summarize the group's findings. These tools are not only free but integrate well with social media, email, and many other outreach tools your city is probably already using.

Community members are tired of conventional communication plans. Public notices in the local newspaper just don't cut it, and most people don't have the time or desire to wait through a long city process. Cities across America are constantly trying to find ways to be a more inviting place for their residents and businesses. Let's launch some new ways to engage our citizens in the process! To learn more about our CNU session, visit https://daydreamdetroit.splashthat.com

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> "WHAT WOULD GET MORE PEOPLE TO RALLY AROUND YOU? A BILLBOARD AND A PUBLIC NOTICE, OR A FACEBOOK PAGE AND FIVE PARTIES HOSTED AROUND THE COMMUNITY?"

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GOVERNTAINMENT

Engaging Your Community in a Fun and Innovative Way

By Maria Willett

Rochester Hills Mayor Bryan Barnett's State of the City address exploded off the stage.

As local governments continually try to find ways to bridge the communication gap between themselves and their residents, Rochester Hills has found the right formula for their community. The city is using new approaches to traditional government events to not only elevate fundraising and branding, but also increase the pride residents have in their community.

With the motto "Innovative by Nature," the city prides itself on looking for new ways to make civic engagement both informative and fun. To achieve this, Mayor Bryan Barnett implemented the first city creativity committee. This group of ten volunteers share their out-of-the-box ideas to answer questions like "How do we wow people on a budget?" "What visuals can we use?" and "How can we make this more innovative than any other municipality has before?"

Lights, Camera, Action!

It is a simple, inexpensive, and unique way to share often challenging and complicated messages with busy and potentially disengaged residents. Thanks to this new method, history has never been in higher demand. When the city was approached by Detroit PBS to tell the story of the community's founders, the suggestion was made that the event could be held at City Hall and discussed at a City Council meeting. However, Mayor Barnett wanted to take that idea and add some Hollywood flair.

Rochester Hills partnered with Emagine Theatre to turn this event from a simple film screening to a "World Premiere." *On Van Hoosen Farm*, an original production of Detroit PBS, attracted so many interested residents that the event sold out. TWICE. Guests strutted down a red carpet, and enjoyed a catered afterglow with the film's stars and producers. The event raised $17,000 for the city's museum and gave viewers an affinity for their hometown.

"The impact of this video has been overwhelming. At the premiere, guests left with a renewed sense of pride in our story," states Rochester Hills Museum Director Pat McKay. "Since the movie premiere, our attendance has increased 30 percent and every program we host now has a capacity crowd."

The success of events like this has continued as more than 600 people attended the mayor's annual State of the City Address. Showcasing the diversity of the city, guests experienced a night of cultural dance performance and lively music. The event ended on a triumphant high, as Mayor Barnett surprised the audience with indoor fireworks.

"I love telling our story in a unique and engaging way," states Mayor Barnett. "We attempt each year to exceed our guests' expectations and create an event that is completely unexpected by government. I'm proud to lead the most innovative team anywhere in the state."

Turning typically mundane speeches into can't-miss community events, especially when government is not often seen as innovative, offers both challenges and worthwhile rewards. Revolutionizing how we message helps our events go from civic bullet points to meaningful engagement.

Drawing In The Community

Not every connection to a resident is a large-scale event. Still, team members continually focus on how that can be changed from a transaction to an experience. Hundreds of city hall art programs take place throughout the country, but Rochester Hills wanted to make sure their approach was something that would be both self-sustaining and did not require significant time from employees.

With assistance from Westland Mayor William Wild and the City of Westland, team members were able to take a tour of the Westland art program and learn more about what aspects of the program had made it so successful.

We knew we didn't have to reinvent the wheel to have a successful program. Thanks to their help, we were able to use a successful strategy, customize it for our community, and avoid navigating the many phases of trial and error.

Rochester Hills collaborated with a local nonprofit, Paint Creek Center for the Arts, to initiate the program. Hundreds of local residents attend PCCA art classes, but due to their small facility space, they can only display a small fraction of their artwork.

"On Van Hoosen Farm" premiere packed the theater.

Now, at no cost to the city, formerly unused spaces now highlight the work of local artists, transforming empty walls into something truly special. This opportunity is on a rotating basis so that new artwork can be featured every 90 days.

Looking toward the future, the city plans to continue to mix creativity with innovation. With new partnerships and a little financial investment, the possibilities are endless.

Maria Willett is special assistant to the mayor of Rochester Hills. You may contact her at 248.841.2545 or willettm@rochesterhills.org.

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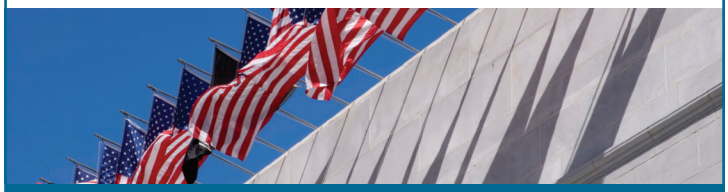

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NEW SCHOLARSHIP TO HELP LOCAL LEADERS GET LEADERSHIP SKILLS

By Gisgie Dávila Gendreau

John Barr has served as Ypsilanti city attorney since 1981, advises several other municipal clients and has taught law at Eastern Michigan University.

In 1993, he was awarded the Michigan Association of Municipal Attorneys' Distinguished Municipal Attorney Award. In 2008 he received the Association's highest award, the William L. Steude Ethics and Civility in Local Government Award. And just this March, he added to his long list of accolades when he received the Jim Sinclair Exceptional Service Award, named after Rogers City Councilmember Jim Sinclair, a tireless promoter of local government and fervent believer in education and training for elected officials.

In his customary unassuming style, Barr credits the League for helping him succeed. "I feel a big debt to the MML for all of the information and learning I've been able to access and all of the friends and connections I've made through the years," Barr said. "Local government is the bulwark of the system, a protector of our democracy and freedom."

A native of Mt. Clemens and Army veteran, Barr earned a bachelor's degree from Michigan State University and law degree from the University of Michigan. He's an expert in municipal law, estate planning, real estate and corporate law.

But there was a time when he was starting out in municipal law and helping local governments that he relied on the knowledge he gained from attending education sessions through the League and its affiliate organization, the Michigan Association of Municipal Attorneys.

It's this belief that led Barr to make a generous $10,000 investment to help the MML Foundation launch the new John Barr Leadership Education Scholarship. Matching donations from MML members, Foundation board members and DTE Energy reached an additional $10,000.

He envisioned a scholarship that would help provide local elected and appointed officials similar knowledge and skills they need to lead and govern their communities.

Supporting the Foundation, Barr added, makes him feel like he's helping society.

"As we go through life, I feel I'm very blessed and I want to give back," he said. "It's one way that, perhaps, I can leave society a little better than I found it."

Barr has been a major Foundation supporter, serving on its board and encouraging others to do the same. His involvement and generosity are in line with his style, said William Mathewson, the League's general counsel.

"He has an interesting, special blend of legal competence and unassuming demeanor," Mathewson said. "He exudes trust. He's thoughtful. Measured.

"You have the sense that he's not only going to do a good job, but that he's going to be thoughtful and thorough."

Ed Koryzno, the Ypsilanti city manager from 1996 to 2012, said he and the community benefited from those skills during a particularly tumultuous period that included a lawsuit and, eventually, led to the city enacting a human rights ordinance.

"John has a measured and calming personality, which is a strength, especially during a heated discussion in a public meeting," Koryzno said. "He was someone I could always contact and bounce ideas off of and he could provide valuable feedback."

That Barr would help fund a scholarship to help others get training comes as no surprise to Koryzno.

What you need to know about the John Barr Leadership Education Scholarship

- Established with a generous $10,000 investment from MML Foundation Board Member John Barr, the John Barr Leadership Education Scholarship was created from his vision to provide local elected and appointed officials the knowledge and skills they need to lead and govern their communities.
- Five yearly, one-time scholarships of up to $1,000 for training of local elected or appointed officials will be awarded.
- The training must have a leadership component and practical application to the individual's role as a public official in municipal government. The training can be offered through the League or another organization.
- The training may not be partisan.
- The scholarship may be used for registration, hotel or travel to a training event.

APPLICATION DEADLINE: May 31 and Nov. 30.

Want to apply?

VISIT
mmlfoundation.org/scholarships

Want to invest in educating municipal officials?

DONATE AT
mmlfoundation.org/donate

michigan municipal league
foundation

"I've worked with several municipal attorneys," he explained. "Overall, John was the finest."

Five yearly, one-time scholarships of up to $1,000 for training of local elected or appointed officials will be awarded. The training must have a leadership component and practical application to the individual's role as a public official in municipal government. The training may not be partisan. More information is available at mmlfoundation.org/scholarships.

"The Michigan Municipal League Foundation is truly honored to be able to provide this scholarship thanks to the enormous generosity of John Barr," said Foundation Board Chair Patricia Lockwood, the Fenton mayor pro tem.

The first scholarships were to be awarded in late spring, Foundation President Gisgie Dávila Gendreau said, adding that the organization hopes to grow the scholarship fund so that it can continue for years to come. Applications will be accepted each spring through May 31 and again in the fall through Nov. 30.

"The Foundation invests in training for local government officials, supports public spaces projects that improve quality of life, and connects communities with funding opportunities," Gendreau said. "This scholarship is another way we can help make communities better."

To be eligible, applicants need to be current members in good standing of the League. Priority will be given to members of one of the following MML affiliate organizations: Michigan Municipal Executives, Michigan Association of Mayors, Michigan Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials, Michigan Association of Municipal Attorneys and Michigan Women in Municipal Government. Need will be considered in the scholarship committee's decision making.

As the fundraising arm of the League, the Foundation helps create and maintain vibrant communities in Michigan by funding placemaking projects and educating community leaders and advocates. To support this work, please visit mmlfoundation.org/donate.

Gisgie Dávila Gendreau is president of the Michigan Municipal League Foundation. You may contact her at 517.485.1314 or ggendreau@mml.org.

Traverse City:
A New Approach to Public Engagement

By Nathan Elkins

PlacePlans is a demonstration and technical assistance program developed in 2012 under the auspices of the statewide MIplace Partnership, with lead sponsorship from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. The program focused on assisting cities, selected through a competitive process, with the development of visionary yet realistic strategies to redevelop a key walkable, mixed-use area of their community. The League, along with faculty and students from Michigan State University School of Planning, Design and Construction and MSU Extension, worked with community leaders, residents, anchor institutions, and expert consultants to bring the best practices in placemaking and civic engagement to bear in a customized way for each of the 22 participating cities.

This article is the continuation of an ongoing series, *PlacePlans: Where Are They Now?*, which checks in on the progress in PlacePlans cities, with a particular eye on the lessons learned that can apply to communities everywhere.

Communities are growing, technology and way of life are constantly changing, so why should our public input meetings remain the same? Turning the dreaded municipal public meeting into an energized, creative, and engaging event isn't as hard as you might think.

In Traverse City, we used a unique variety of public engagement methods for the City Lot project, funded in part by the Michigan Municipal League's PlacePlans program. Influence Design Forum, the project consultant, collaborated with the city and a steering committee to generate new ideas for getting the community involved. The approaches we put into play included passive input, tactical urbanism, engaging project partners, stakeholders, picnics, parties, and kids.

Passive Public Input

Passive input is a term that developed and evolved throughout the life of the City Lot project. Early on, we decided to place a chalkboard on the site to allow the public to engage freely. This allowed the community's ideas to organically develop over the first eight weeks of the project. We also created a presence on the web as well as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to promote

events on the site. Yoga in a greenspace was one such event. City Lot was also a planned stop along a youth cycling organization's weekly bike ride, an outdoor classroom for a local elementary school, and a studio for local artists. The events and chalkboard ideas combined to create a buzz that helped support the project's public engagement success.

Tactical Urbanism

Tactical urbanism is an umbrella term used to describe a collection of low-cost, temporary changes to the built environment, usually with the intent to improve local neighborhoods and public spaces. City Lot introduced the concept to the steering committee early-on in the project as a hands-on approach to community engagement. Community ideas culled from the passive input phase were demonstrated on the property to show how they would look in 3-D. This pop-up demonstration was held in conjunction with the first public open house—a community picnic. Raised wood planters were constructed and filled with plantings to simulate urban farming; permeable pavers were placed in the alley to show how green infrastructure could improve storm water runoff into a nearby creek; and natural playscape elements were arranged to allow children a place to play while enjoying live music with their family. We even created a basketball court in a parking lot to represent activities that could take place inside a new community center, and set-up cafe tables along the street to provide an outdoor seating plaza.

Project Partners

Often, public projects and their consultants overlook engaging project partners throughout the lifecycle of the project—once just isn't enough. Municipalities should encourage consultants to keep lines of communication open among different departments. Interdepartmental interaction is key to the success of any project. For example, the project partners for City Lot were engaged many different times throughout the project. The city's Parks and Recreation Division, Department of Public Services, and Fire Department were engaged early and often to enable staff to learn about the community's ideas in real-time.

Stakeholders

The one common element that stakeholders share is their interest in the success of the project. To make their experience as interesting as possible, we formed working groups that combined stakeholders with different backgrounds but similar experiences and professional qualifications. The Natural Resources, Arts and Culture, and Neighborhoods groups were made of community members with backgrounds as diverse as arts, planning, finance, and environment.

Kids Of All Ages

An important component of placemaking and community engagement is ensuring that public input is rooted in the community and all ages are encouraged to participate. Kids want to be involved in the design process, too. Asking for their input shows them that their contribution matters, too. The City Lot process engaged children of all ages throughout the project—from youth cycling, live music, and natural playscapes, to hands-on art and local food.

Picnics Not Workshops

Try replacing your next workshop or public charrette with a community picnic. Some of the best ideas come from neighbors and friends sharing a meal around a table, families with children, and young professionals engaged in small-scale informal settings. The City Lot Community Picnic event featured an open house format. Six stations were set up to share information about specific areas of the property. Small temporary signs summarized the site's history, condition and shared ideas gathered from the community about potential uses. Tactical urbanism was used to frame ideas—a live music concert to simulate an amphitheater, temporary café tables to imitate public seating along the street, a basketball court in the parking lot to replicate an auditorium and gymnasium, and raised garden boxes to showcase the idea of urban farming.

Release Parties

Final presentations should be fun! Perhaps one of the most critical steps of any public planning and engagement process is the communication of the consultant's recommendations to the community. This also an opportunity to keep the project moving forward and continue building support. A party is a great way to celebrate the results of the community's ideas. The City Lot project organized a Concept Release Party complete with artisan beer, local food, art activities, and live music. The public was invited to attend this family-friendly event to review newly-created conceptual drawings for the use and design of the property. Community members also had a chance to provide additional feedback on the designs. The mix of new approaches of public engagement used for the City Lot project shows how a new location and environment for a public meeting can encourage more community members to participate. Taking things more slowly at the beginning allows ideas to marinate and begin to grow organically on their own. And don't forget—it's okay to engage kids and throw a party!

Nathan Elkins is the founder of IDF, an urban design and planning collaborative, www.influencedesignforum.com. You may contact him at 231-944-4114 or nate@influencedesignforum.com.

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YOU can join hundreds of local government officials from across the state in Holland, where you don't need a passport to enjoy this unique city on the shores of Lake Michigan. From its award-winning downtown to its white sandy beaches and quaint Dutch village, Holland is filled with small town charm and big city amenities. It's also home to the famous Tulip Time Festival, winner of USA Today's 2016 Best Flower Festival award.

The Michigan Municipal League's 2017 Convention will be held in downtown Holland, which is both historic and hip in nature. As you walk to sessions in a variety of downtown locales, you'll pass first class shopping and dining, creative arts venues, and traditional Victorian architecture.

In this European-inspired setting, municipal officials will have the opportunity to hone their leadership skills. Learn how to make ethics an integral part of your leadership style, partner with the business sector to boost the vibrancy of your community, and absorb the lessons presented by relevant U.S. Supreme Court decisions. We'll also show you the power of beautifying your city with flowers, trees, and other environmental and lifestyle enhancements, and much more!

Come see why Downtown Holland earned the "Great American Mainstreet" award and the accolades of thousands of tourists every year! Join us in Holland, Sept. 13-15, for a Convention experience you'll never forget.

Visit **convention.mml.org** to register online.

Keynote Speakers

Tony Ferrara, 1st Vice President, America in Bloom

Tony served 16 years on the Arroyo Grande, CA. city council and 12 years as the city's elected mayor. Tony has held several municipal leadership positions including Board President of the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments, President of the San Luis Obispo Regional Transportation Agency, Board Chair of the San Luis Obispo County Air Pollution Control District Board, and the County's Integrated Waste Management Board. More recently, Tony was also the President of the League of California Cities. Tony's passion is his 8-year involvement with Arroyo Grande in Bloom as both a volunteer and member of the AGIB Board. Arroyo Grande in Bloom is a multi-year, multi-category AIB award winner and proud member of the America In Bloom Circle of Champions. Tony is the founder and principal partner of Arroyo Consulting Group specializing in municipal project facilitation, strategic planning, and emergency management planning and training.

Scott Paine, PH.D., Director, Leadership Development & Education, FLC University, Florida League of Cities

After more than thirty years in higher education, Dr. Scott Paine (Ph.D., Political Science, Syracuse University, 1985) joined the staff of the Florida League of Cities in 2015 as the Director of Leadership Development and Education. Scott's perspective on municipal government and public service has been formed by both his academic career and his political activities, which included serving for two terms as a Tampa City Councilman. A popular conference presenter and author on leadership and public service, Scott has addressed audiences from Seattle, Washington to Augusta, Maine and from Bismarck, North Dakota to the Florida Keys.

He has appeared on numerous radio and television news programs including the *Today Show* and has been quoted in a wide range of news outlets including The New York Times. He is the author of *More than Self* (2017), *Rethinking Public Leadership for the 21st Century* (2009), a regular column in *Quality Cities* (QC) magazine, and a blog at drscottpaine.com. Scott and his wife, Carol, have ten children, including seven adopted children, and seven grandchildren.

MME Colloquium Speaker

Lisa Soronen, Executive Director, State & Local Legal Center

Lisa is the Executive Director of the State and Local Legal Center (SLLC). In this role, Lisa files amicus curiae briefs to the United States Supreme Court on behalf of members of the Big Seven (National Governors Association, National Conference of State Legislatures, Council of State Governments, National League of Cities, United States Conference of Mayors, National Association of Counties, and International City/County Management Association) in cases affecting state and local government. Prior to joining the SLLC, Lisa worked for the National School Boards Association, the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, and clerked for the Wisconsin Court of Appeals. She earned her J.D. at the University of Wisconsin Law School and is a graduate of Central Michigan University.

Visit **convention.mml.org** to register online.

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League Convention Overview

Wednesday, September 13

8:30 am-5:30 pm	Registration Hours
9 am-Noon	Convention Workshops
10 am-Noon	MML Executive Board Meeting
1-1:30 pm	Delegate Check-in
1:30-2:30 pm	Annual Business Meeting
2:45-5 pm	Welcoming General Session Community Excellence Awards
5:15-6:15 pm	Elected Officials Academy Board Meeting
6:00-7:30 pm	Host City Reception

Thursday, September 14

7:00 am-5 pm	Registration Hours
7:30-8:30 am	Michigan Association of Mayors Breakfast
8:30-9:45 am	Breakout Sessions
10:15 am-12:15 pm	General Session
12:30 pm-4 pm	Lunch & Mobile Workshops/ Breakout Sessions/Meet Ups
6-7 pm	Foundation Reception

Friday, September 15

7-11 am	Registration Hours
7:45-8:45 am	Michigan Women in Municipal Government Breakfast
9-10:15 am	Breakout Sessions/Meet Ups
10:30 am-Noon	Closing General Session Community Excellence Award "Race for the Cup" Winner Announced
Noon	Adjourn

MICHIGAN MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

CONVENTION2017

Breakout Session Preview

Breakout Sessions will connect attendees with ready-to-use resources and opportunities to help their communities thrive. Attendees will have the opportunity to attend up to three breakout sessions during the Convention. These sessions will cover everything from essential skills to innovative new ideas.

LEARN MORE ABOUT:

Making Strong Towns:
The on-the-ground experience

How are Michigan communities rethinking their infrastructure and development practices to improve their fiscal solvency, resiliency, and sense of place? Some have begun to apply the lessons of past Convention speaker Chuck Marohn, from the national organization Strong Towns. A panel of local representatives will share what they've learned—and what they're doing differently as a result—in this session.

The Gender Balance Challenge

While women represent over 50 percent of the state and local government workforce, they quickly drop off to less than 20 percent at the chief executive level. Why does this occur and why is it important to you?

Getting Redevelopment Moving

So, you've identified some redevelopment opportunities in your community—now what? To get a developer on board, you've got to get the right information on their radar. This session will feature local efforts to market these properties, including lessons learned and resources your community can take home.

Additional Breakout session Topics will include:

- Social Media as Public Records
- State of the City
- Emergency Vehicle Operations
- MML Legislative Update
- Illegal/Improper Municipal Expenditures
- And More

Visit **convention.mml.org** to register online.

C17

A Downtown Convention!

We're excited to be holding our annual Convention in downtown Holland for the first time! The city has a delightfully walkable downtown, and that's just what you'll get to experience this year. Bring comfortable shoes as sessions will be held at several locations within a several-block area of Holland's award-winning downtown. On the way to sessions, you'll pass first class shopping and dining, creative arts venues, and traditional Victorian architecture. We're sure you'll appreciate Holland's hip and historic ambiance!

Community Excellence Awards —You be the Judge!

Wednesday, September 13, 2:45 pm

Join us in this good-natured competition and cheer for Michigan's best. See the Community Excellence Awards finalists unveil their winning presentations. You be the judge. Your votes will decide which community takes home the Cup. After the general session, cast your vote at the official Community Excellence Awards Voting Booth.

Don't miss the Cup Presentation on Friday, September 15, and be a part of the eleventh annual Community Excellence Awards Cup Presentation.

Sponsor the Convention

Sponsoring the League's annual Convention provides you with a unique opportunity to communicate with professionals from local government. When becoming our sponsor, we will do our utmost to satisfy your needs for involvement and exposure. Are you looking for networking and relationship building? Presentation opportunities? Company branding? Contact Allison Gotelaere at agotelaere@mml.org or visit the sponsorship tab at convention.mml.org for more information.

HOW CAN I REGISTER? Registration Opens June 27

Online!

In order to reduce the amount of printed paper and increase member privacy, the League no longer accepts credit card payments on printable registration forms for League events. All credit card payments are to be completed online via My League (mml.org). My League is your secure, interactive online League account. It's available to all members and nonmembers, with a quick and easy sign-up process.

Via Printable Form

Visit convention.mml.org to download and print a faxable registration form. Complete and fax to 734.669.4223, then mail with check payable to: Michigan Municipal League, PO Box 7409, Ann Arbor, MI 48107-7409.

How Technology Can Transform Municipal Management

By James J. L. Render

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business alliance program

Metro Consulting Associates (MCA) is a consulting firm providing land surveying, civil engineering, land acquisition, geographic information systems (GIS), and ecological services. MCA was founded in 2009 as a surveying firm and has grown to provide a wide range of services. Areas of expertise include: municipal, utility, commercial, energy, and residential. MCA has offices in Plymouth, Detroit, and Traverse City to serve any corner of the state.

There's a smarter way to oversee municipal management. It's called Geographic Information Systems (GIS). This technology is a game-changer for historically underserved communities that have often lagged behind municipalities with larger water and sewer system budgets. If you aren't familiar with GIS, it's time for an introduction.

GIS is a system designed to capture, store, manipulate, analyze, manage, and present spatial or geographic data. When used as a municipal tool, GIS has a proven track record of success—fostering solid communication among teams to positively transform municipal management. This technology allows all key players involved with a municipal project to co-exist in the same database—engineers, billing teams, municipalities, consultants and more—all in real time.

GIS delivers vital information that takes away the guesswork, with detailed property data, locations of water main breaks, billing history, infrastructure inventory and maintenance, maps, and more at your fingertips. Let's take a closer look at how each department in the municipal management system can utilize the convenience of GIS.

GIS is the hub for billing management and reference information. Once the system is built, it can effectively funnel information between the billing database and GIS, allowing everyone on the municipal team to remain on the same page using real-time data. GIS ensures that accounts are being billed appropriately because personnel have access to relevant data, such as meter information, to effectively do their job. The integrated system can also aid in community/economic development by providing the following:

- Ownership information updates
- Identifying parcel types—residential vs. commercial
- Pinpointing municipal or state-owned properties
- Assistance with marketing of vacant and state-owned property

State-of-the-art technology is imperative for engineers. With web-based GIS, the engineering team has the technology needed to maximize efficiency. The process of building a water-sewer system in GIS can be completed by using:

- Historical documents
- Field verification (feature location with GPS or mobile LiDAR). Upon successful completion of infrastructure mapping, engineers have access to the following features:
  - Water mains
  - System valves
  - Curb stops
  - Fire hydrants
  - Meters
  - Sewer mains
  - Manholes
  - Catch basins
  - Curb inlets
  - Cleanouts

Engineers now have real-time data to accurately calculate storm water run-off volumes in pervious (grass) vs. non-pervious (concrete, asphalt, gravel, roof tops) surfaces.

For field maintenance, the broad functionality of GIS can't be beat. The technology enables ease of access to:

- Update GIS data via secure web access
- Record conditions of water/sewer system features
- Track maintenance and replacement of water-sewer features
- Staff review of field service data in real-time

GIS seamlessly coordinates all aspects of a municipal sewer and water department. It is highly-regarded for its proven ability to:

- Help city leaders and planners plan for and drive growth
- Catch routine and hard to identify billing errors
- Reduce lost (unbilled) water payments
- Improve record management

Transform Your Municipality

For municipalities that struggle financially, additional funding to acquire GIS may be available via grants or loans. So, if you're looking to achieve a significant change with your municipal management system, look no further than GIS.

James J. L. Render is the GIS project coordinator for Metro Consulting Associates, LLC. You may contact him at jrender@metroca.net

Storyt for

Nina Ignaczak
Photo courtes

captures the story of a Pontiac resident.
y of Christian Marcillo.

elling Local Leaders

By Sharlan Douglas and Nina Ignaczak

When Pontiac Downtown Business Association Director Glen Konopaskie meets with potential business prospects, he has some explaining to do about the town he calls home.

"Pontiac has had a rough decade," said Konopaskie. We've been through three emergency managers and our downtown was in decline for years. Things are getting much better now, but it can be hard to tell that story."

There's plenty happening in Pontiac these days. Tech companies are setting up shop alongside new restaurants and boutique retail. Established businesses are expanding within the city. But the statistics and administrative details Konopaskie deals with on a regular basis—like jobs numbers, square feet of commercial space, tax revenue, and pro forma projections—do little to engender the excitement that he feels.

"We needed a way to capture the spirit of what's happening in Pontiac," said Konopaskie. "And to do that right, we needed to tell the stories of the people making it happen. It starts with meeting people face-to-face and listening."

So Konopaskie, working with a wider coalition of community leaders, helped launch an On The Ground Pontiac storytelling initiative with local digital magazine *Metromode*. The goal of the project was to find and tell the stories of those behind Pontiac's nascent revitalization. City leaders and journalists convened a Community Open Newsroom weekly in a downtown coffee shop, gathering story ideas and making connections in the process. People's stories were published online and shared across the community. And Pontiac's story got a little easier to tell.

"Now, I can point to the story of a local attorney who chose to set up his firm in a historic downtown building instead of a suburban office complex." says Konopaskie. "He built an entirely different kind of law firm that fits into Pontiac. His story tells us why this community is so unique."

"STORY WAS MORE CRUCIAL TO OUR EVOLUTION THAN OUR OPPOSABLE THUMB BECAUSE ALL OPPOSABLE THUMBS DID WAS LET US HANG ON. IT WAS STORY THAT TOLD US WHAT TO HANG ON TO."

LISA CRON, AUTHOR, *WIRED FOR STORY: THE WRITER'S GUIDE TO USING BRAIN SCIENCE TO HOOK READERS FROM THE VERY FIRST SENTENCE*, TED TALK 2014

Why Storytelling?

Many municipal leaders can relate to Konopaskie's dilemma. Local governments have plenty of data at their fingertips. For example, a graph showing relative expenditures may tell us all we need to know about the underfunding of public transit, or schools, or parks and recreation. But what does that graph tell us about the human impact of those funding gaps?

Without that human connection, it can be very difficult to get people to care. And unless people care, they aren't likely to become civically engaged.

Stories are the human brain's natural framework for processing the world. By leveraging the power of storytelling, local government leaders can tap into the very essence of what makes us human.

Local governments have endless stories in their communities, but it takes a little bit of effort to find them. It often involves going beyond the typical public meeting and town hall model of community engagement. It means being proactive, asking questions, and listening.

So, next time you need to explain that new water meter project, or the city budget, or the new millage, take a step back and think about asking people, "What's your story?"

Sharlan Douglas is president of Douglas Communications Group and serves as mayor pro tem of Royal Oak. You may contact her at 248.548.5460 or sdouglas@douglasgroup.biz.

Nina Misuraca Ignaczak is editorial director for Issue Media Group and managing editor of "Metromode" (metromodemedia.com). You may contact her at nina@metromodemedia.com

How To Tell Your Community Story

1. Identify your agenda

As a local government leader, your role is to find a story that helps you advance your goals. This typically includes reflecting the broader community, listening to all sides, gaining understanding, and reaching consensus. Ultimately, winning means understanding what the majority of citizens want and either giving it to them or helping them understand why you can't. The angle you are looking for in your story will help you meet your goals.

2. Find your story

The best stories keep it simple and keep it human. Stories, at their essence, are built around the 3 P's—a person, a place, and a problem. You need a person or a relatable character—maybe it's a local resident. You need a place or setting—maybe it's the resident's neighborhood. And you need a problem—maybe the resident is flummoxed by the new bike lanes planned for her street. The story then becomes a tale of how the person came to terms with the problem. Maybe the resident rediscovered a love for bicycling after a group in her neighborhood began a slow roll biking event each week.

3. Find your sources

Find the real people who embody your stakeholders in the community. Innovative techniques for story gathering might include a pop-up storytelling booth at the local library, an open newsroom, storytelling hour at the corner coffee shop, a door-to-door story finding campaign, or a special storytelling event modeled after NPR's *The Moth*. The key is knowing what kind of story you are looking for and how to ask the right questions. Here are some likely sources:

- People who contact you to praise or complain
- People who comment at meetings or public hearings or attend a town hall or charrette
- People who comment in social media
- Experts; e.g. a local history professor who's active in the community

4. Interview

Once you have your sources, it's time to interview, Learning the art of the interview is not rocket science. It's a conversation. Here are some tips:

- **Plan ahead.** Know what you want to get out of it. Have some questions ready.
- **Be open.** Let the interviewee take you into a side topic—there may be a gem there.
- **But stay on task.** You know when you are hearing someone ramble. Be ready to pull the interviewee back on-topic.
- **Be dumb. Ask open ended questions.** Don't assume you know anything.
- **Be interested, not interesting**. It's about them, not you. Maybe you can relate, and even share a story to help build rapport. But resist the temptation to talk about yourself.
- **Being silent is important.** Silence can feel uncomfortable, but it lets people process, have time to think, and give you better answers.
- **Give people an opportunity to tell you more,** Ask them to "Tell me more about that."

5. Capture

There are many ways to capture and document your story. What do you document? People, interviews, places, sounds, visuals. How do you document it? Notes, photos, audio, video, scans of documents. You have a documentary powerhouse in your pocket. Use. Your. Smartphone.

6. Write and produce

Once you've done your research and reporting, it's time to write and produce. Are you making a blog post? A photo-and-text slideshow? A podcast? A video? The tools of digital media-making are now highly accessible, easy to use, and affordable or free. The sky is truly the limit. To get started, check out Adobe Spark, a free multimedia-making tool.

7. Publish and promote

In the 21st century, there are three broad types of media: earned, paid, and owned. Earned media is the traditional press coverage gained by doing something newsworthy. Paid media can mean advertising but may also include underwritten or sponsored content. Owned media is media you own yourself—your website, local cable channel, Facebook page, or your paper newsletter. Consider which sources of media you have access to and where your audience is. Share your story on as many platforms as make sense for who you are trying to reach. From Snapchat to the library newsletter, your audience is everywhere, so you have to go to where they are.

MAXIMIZE YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Michigan Women in Municipal Government

By Rebecca Hopp

Reinvention has been at the forefront of Michigan Women in Municipal Government's activities in recent months. Clearly, much has changed since 1978, when Alma city commissioner Marcia O'Brian became the first MWIMG chair. So we have put a lot of thought in to how we can better meet the needs of 21st century women in elected positions.

Mission Statement

Part of the reshaping process involved creating a new mission statement that reflects who we are at our core:

We are a state-wide organization of women serving in local government focusing on the critical roles of development of women in leadership, recognition of achievement; providing training and mentoring to those seeking positions in local government.

Vision & Values

Building on the mission statement, we developed MWIMG's vision and values, which we divided into three main topics:

- **Advocate:** Serve as a voice on critical issues; make a political statement; lessen barriers; speak for policy changes; and encourage involvement of women in local government.
- **Educate:** Provide members with ready and timely access to resources; meet training needs; connect members with knowledge-sharing opportunities; and establish mentor/mentee channels.
- **Support:** Reach out to women in government service, and those who should be; sustain and embrace members; provide acceptance; reinforce inclusiveness; establish an atmosphere of camaraderie; and create a safe place for advice and counsel.

The reshaping of MWIMG was unveiled to more than 60 women at the "Coffee and Talk" event during the League's Capital Conference in March. The attendees' level of energy and excitement during this event reflects their drive and determination to advance women leaders in local government.

There was also a tremendous amount of interest in the two newly-created board seats. We are very excited to welcome Maria Willett, special assistant to the mayor of Rochester Hills, and Valerie Kindle, Harper Woods councilmember, to the board. We're looking forward to working together to improve and expand this amazing organization.

Rebecca Hopp is the mayor pro-tem of Ferrysburg. You may contact her at 616.842.5803 or rhopp@ferrysburg.org.

New MWIMG Board: Rebecca Hopp, Maria Willett, Valerie Kindle, Deborah Stuart, and Marie Wicks.

New MWIMG V.P. Deborah Stuart addresses the group's annual meeting at Capital Conference.

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Vice President: Deborah Stuart, city manager, Mason

Secretary: Marie Wicks, clerk, East Lansing

Board Member: Maria Willett, special assistant to the Mayor, Rochester Hills

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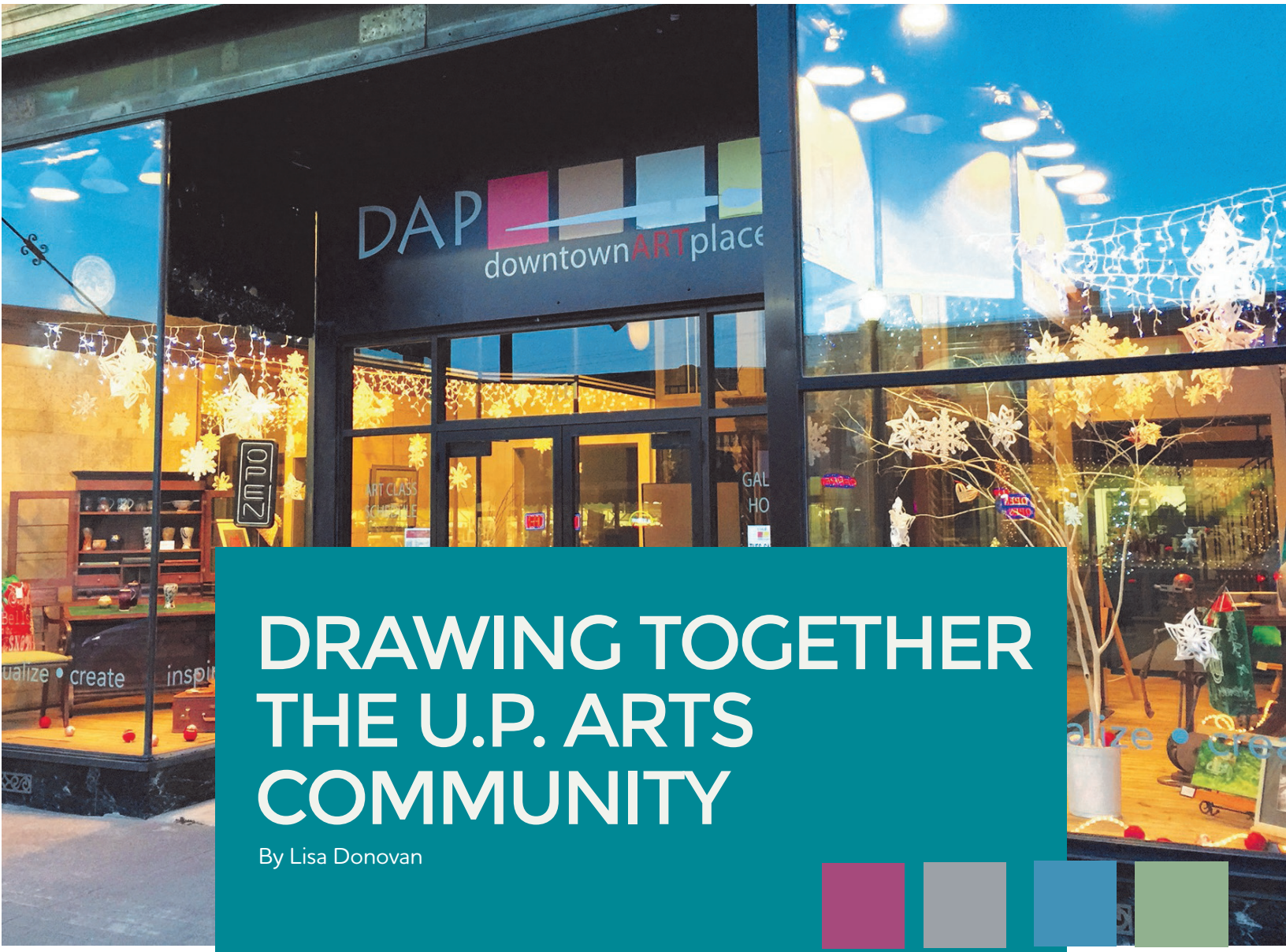


DRAWING TOGETHER THE U.P. ARTS COMMUNITY

By Lisa Donovan

Crisp, cold water cascades over Tahquamenon Falls' craggy rocks. Sunlight dapples through towering hardwoods, white pine, and hemlock in Hiawatha National Forest. The peaks of the majestic Porcupine Mountains brush the sky in one of the last wild places in the Midwest.

Stunning vistas like these draw artists of all types to Michigan's Upper Peninsula. But the same vast expanse of land that provides them with inspiration also makes it difficult for them to feed off each other's creativity. That challenge has led to the creation of a U.P. Arts and Culture Alliance. "We're so diversified and spread out. This alliance and the gathering of resources is going to be a great advantage," said Tina Harris, manager of the Arts and Culture Division for the City of Marquette. "It's a way for all of us to be supported and connected."

The First Brushstrokes

Last year, the idea for the U.P. Arts and Culture Alliance began to bubble up. In Pasqua Warstler's conversations with arts organizations across the U.P., she had sensed a lot of energy and interest in working together. They felt they would have more to gain by working together, marketing regionally, and sharing programs.

"The time is right," said Warstler, executive and artistic director of Bonifas Arts Center in Escanaba. "We're all frustrated, our resources aren't what they used to be, and everyone has the same concerns. Where's the next grant? How do we grow our membership and keep up with technology?"

Over lunch one day, Warstler, Harris, Howard Sandin, board member of Ironwood's Downtown Art Place, and Tom Nemachek, executive director of the Upper Peninsula Travel and Recreation Association, began launching plans for the alliance. As a first step, they decided to test the waters at last year's ArtPrize in Grand Rapids. They pulled together 51 artists in one spot at DeVos Place, displaying a unified U.P. presence at the competition.

"We made a good case to say to our legislators and the tourism industry that investing in your existing arts organizations is the basis for cultural tourism," said Warstler. "Some of the same resources that bring people with kayaks and bikes have brought artists to the U.P. They sought seclusion to enable them to work quietly, deeply. We can share that interest."

Formalizing Their Creation

To keep the momentum going, they were able to secure substantial grants from ArtPlace America and Michigan Council for the Arts. Some of those funds were used to bring in Sharon Rodning Bash from Arts Midwest, an organization that runs programs to ensure that arts and culture are an active part of communities. Bash is senior program director for ArtsLab, which specializes in professional development, building the capacity of small arts and culture organizations, and working with communities on cultural planning.

Bash helped them decide who needed to be involved in the crucial first meeting of the fledgling alliance, held in December 2016. They looked at all major stakeholders—from universities to performing and visual arts and people they knew wanted to play a role in the new organization. "The goal of the first meeting was to see if there was interest in moving forward. The answer was a resounding yes!" said Harris. "The professional development and all the connections that were made were so fruitful. We realized that our communities' needs, challenges, and struggles were so similar."

"Everyone involved in this is excited that it drew people from all 15 counties of the U.P.," added Bash.

At that meeting, two parallel goals were established:

1. Formally create the U.P. Arts and Culture Alliance
2. Decide on the alliance's future goals

In April, the second meeting was held in Ironwood. Bash was pleasantly surprised to hear people saying they were looking forward to the meeting. She said they're pleased that, for the first time, there is a concerted effort to bring the artistic community together and establish a communications network. She admits that there's a long to-do list, but they've made a lot of progress already. In particular, they have a clear statement of identity and purpose.

The U.P.'s arts organizations are as varied as the people who first settled this land, so as the alliance develops it's important to keep those differences in mind. "Some have far-reaching goals, others have more modest goals," said Warstler. "For all, if we can develop a cohesive voice, we can develop new audiences, share marketing, and step into cultural tourism. We can each accomplish our own individual goals and add to the collective whole."

Communication Challenges

To advance the alliance's goals in the U.P., where cities and towns are often far apart and snowfall is abundant, they knew good communication was going to be key. Their first purchase was a web cam and an omni-directional mike, which resides in a beautiful handmade wooden case crafted by a U.P. artisan

"For any work in a rural area to go forward, technology and communications are number one in terms of building relationships," said Bash. "It was extremely fortuitous that the first meeting was held at Michigan Tech. We used *Go To Meeting* in a smart conference room, which enabled a group from Sault Ste. Marie to participate. I was able to see and hear the entire group so everyone was equally seen and heard."

The group is also building a robust website and Facebook page to serve as a communication hub. These elements will be key to their joint messaging and marketing, as well as supporting and growing their network.

"It's an exciting time to be in the U.P.," said Harris. "We have a choice to make. What do we want our destiny to be? We can wait for people to tell us, or decide for ourselves. I'd like our communities to decide and retain our culture and unique way of life."

Lisa Donovan is the communications specialist/editor for the League. You may contact her at 734.699.6318 or ldonovan@mml.org.

Art lovers enjoy the gallery at Downtown Art Place.

Bonifas Arts Center.

Gladstone artist Scott Leipski at ArtPrize 2016.

U.P. Arts and Culture Alliance meetings are getting the group off the ground.

IT'S YOUR DEAL

Understanding the Roles & Responsibilities When Issuing Municipal Bonds

By Lynnette Kelly

Financing a public project with municipal bonds is a team effort in which many professionals work together to achieve the goals of the municipality. But as government officials considering issuing municipal bonds in 2017, keep in mind that it's *your* deal.

You are the stewards of taxpayer dollars, and you make the decision to borrow. You decide whether to hire a municipal advisor to act as your fiduciary, and through the process you select the underwriter of your choice—competitive or negotiated. Throughout the life of any municipal bond, you assume responsibility for providing investors with information that is timely, accurate, and complete.

And while the issuance of municipal bonds is your deal, municipalities have an important ally in the Municipal Securities Rulemaking Board (MSRB), the national regulator responsible for promoting a fair and efficient municipal securities market. Protecting municipal bond issuers is a central aspect of the MSRB's mission. Importantly, the MSRB does not regulate state or local governments; its rules are designed to make sure you are treated fairly by the underwriters and with the utmost good faith by the municipal advisors you hire.

Lynnette Kelly

The MSRB also operates a public platform called the Electronic Municipal Market Access, or EMMA®, This website is your key to accessing important information about the municipal market and communicating information to investors. Additionally, the MSRB provides free, objective educational materials for municipal issuers.

Since issuing bonds may be only an occasional event for certain communities, it's helpful to understand how the MSRB can support you when you decide to issue bonds.

The Decision To Borrow

The decision to access capital from the $3.8 trillion municipal securities market is always handled at the state and local level. Government officials have a responsibility to their taxpayers to make informed decisions about how to finance a public project. Understanding conditions in the municipal securities market and evaluating your locality's existing bonds are important steps in the decision to borrow.

The MSRB's EMMA® website provides free access to information and data about the municipal market and nearly all existing municipal bonds. Before deciding to issue bonds, visit EMMA®'s Tools and Resources page to see what issues are scheduled to come to market and how they are priced, monitor the trade activity of your locality's existing bonds, and view upcoming federal economic reports or other events that can have an impact on the municipal bond market.

Working With Financial Professionals

Once a municipality has decided to issue bonds, an important step is assembling the deal team—which can include municipal advisors and underwriters. Check the MSRB's website at www.msrb.org to ensure

that any firm you are considering is properly registered with the MSRB and that individual professionals have passed the appropriate professional qualification examinations. Working with unregistered or unqualified financial professionals puts a municipality at risk.

MSRB rules and professional qualification requirements are designed to ensure that the advice you receive from a municipal advisor is in the municipality's best interest. MSRB rules require underwriters working with a municipality to deal fairly, disclose potential conflicts of interest, and honor your wishes about some of the ways bonds are marketed and distributed to investors. You can read more about protections for municipal bond issuers in the Education Center on the MSRB's website. If at any time you suspect a municipal finance professional of violating MSRB rules or acting unfairly, report it to the MSRB by phone at 202.838.1330 or by email to complaints@msrb.org and the MSRB will forward your complaint to the appropriate enforcement authority.

Continuing Disclosure

Once a municipality's bonds have been issued, it is the municipality's responsibility to provide investors with required, ongoing material information in a timely and complete manner. Annual financial and operating information, notices of major events that may affect bondholders, and other information is essential to helping investors make fully informed decisions about buying, selling, or holding a municipality's bonds. The MSRB's EMMA® website serves as the official platform to disclose this information to investors.

Municipalities can schedule free email reminders from the MSRB to alert key individuals of upcoming filing deadlines. The MSRB also offers free phone support, how-to videos, and educational resources to support state and local governments with understanding and fulfilling their continuing disclosure obligations.

Assess Your Understanding

The MSRB offers a free online course specifically for municipal government professionals that provides engaging lessons about considerations for communities financing public projects with municipal bonds. The course, called "Being an Informed Municipal Bond Issuer," highlights best practices and potential pitfalls in the municipal bond issuance process—information that is useful for elected officials as well as any government professional involved in a bond transaction. Among the topics covered are the roles and responsibilities of key members of a financing team, and the disclosure obligations of an issuer when issuing bonds. MuniEdProSM is a 45-minute course and participants can earn continuing education credit.

Education Center

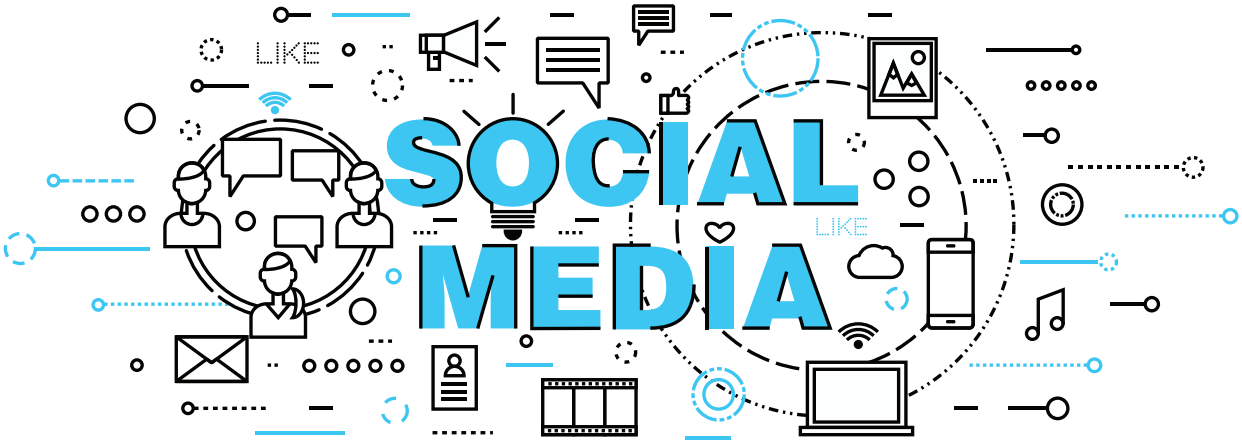
The MSRB's online Education Center is an additional resource for state and local governments seeking objective information about the process of issuing municipal securities. Our multimedia library of information includes guides for working with financial professionals and a series of video tutorials for using the EMMA® website, among other resources.

> GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO THEIR TAXPAYERS TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT HOW TO FINANCE A PUBLIC PROJECT.

Whenever a municipality decides to issue bonds, remember—it's your deal, and the rules and resources of the MSRB are there to help ensure the process is fair. Take advantage of these tools and resources to help you make informed decisions about issuing municipal bonds and communicating with investors.

Lynnette Kelly is executive director of the Municipal Securities Rulemaking Board. You may contact her at 202.838.1500 or lkelly@msrb.org

This column is designed to simplify complex technology topics for municipalities. Have an idea for a future column? Contact the League's Dene Westbrook at 734.669.6314 or dwestbrook@mml.org.



Engage Your Community using Social Media

Communities are online and connected, now more than ever before, providing new ways to interact and engage with citizens. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube have proven to be the most popular and effective, but how can communities best utilize these tools? Having a social media strategy as part of your communications plan can help.

Strategy and Content

A community can benefit tremendously from having a social media presence, if done correctly. Like your website, social media is available 24x7, and can be an excellent tool to develop two-way conversations with your community members. However, jumping into social media without thought can end in a haphazard mess, often with terrible results. Instead, if you haven't already, evaluate your needs and begin with a specific set of communication goals in mind. Discuss content sources, what constituents need to see and hear about, and staffing of feeds.

Many communities are already taking advantage of these media platforms, and doing it in different ways. Some of the most popular uses of social media include:

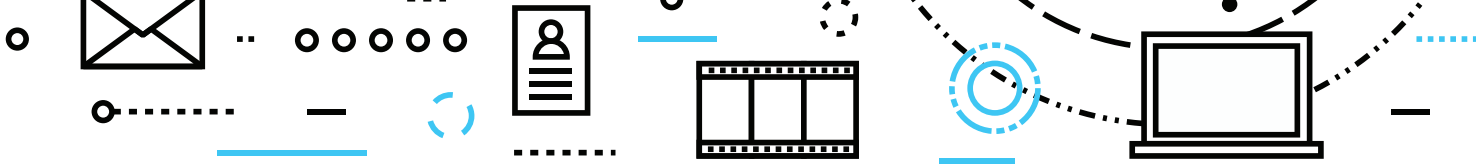
- Public service announcements
- Community employment opportunities
- Construction notices/road closings
- Upcoming community events
- Council meeting notices
- Live streaming community events or areas of community interest
- Community news
- Crime prevention and police assistance
- Tourism/community imagery

While this type of content is widely used (and needed), it may not be the best source of engagement. If you're looking for ways to have more genuine interactions, try these ideas:

- **Storytelling.** Find stories of interest that are happening around your community that people can connect with on a personal level. When followers realize it's their neighbor you're talking about, engagement will grow.
- **Encourage participation.** Creating the initial ask for people to engage is necessary to start a conversation. If a committee or board needs input on a new project or initiative, just pose the question to followers. Casting a wider net for new ideas may spark some open innovation and produce great results.
- **Self-promotion.** What makes your community the best, or what are you doing really well? Flaunt it as much as you want! We can all connect with community pride.
- **Respond promptly.** Part of having a conversation involves answering the questions or comments followers send to you. Social media is immediate, and a prompt answer is expected, otherwise the value of the interaction is lost.

Know Your Audience

An understanding of your community members and what they like or don't like, as well as a record of if or how they respond, will affect your communications plan. For example, if a question or call for assistance doesn't garner the engagement you hoped for, try a different platform and see what happens. Eventually, you should be able to somewhat predict response rates and activity based upon the content and how you send it. Also, something to keep in mind, is that not everyone is on social media. Don't neglect the offline community.



Evaluate Your Efforts

Social media platforms all have analytics, which measure the number of followers, posts, engagements, clicked links, shares, etc. Evaluate these statistics regularly, and these will help gauge the effectiveness of your strategy. Also, keep an eye on your website traffic (which also should have analytics), and pay specific attention to the referral or channel area. This statistic will help you determine the origin of your website traffic. If it's coming from your social media platform, then you must be doing something right!

Adopt a Social Media Policy

If your community is actively using a social media platform, hopefully you already have a policy in place. It can provide guidelines and a 'code of conduct' for staff that use your platform as part of their job description. It should cover what can or can't be posted, such as items of a confidential nature, inflammatory or inappropriate content, or even how staff can post community information on their personal pages. To request sample social media policies and resources from the League, please email info@mml.org.

Go For It!

There's a huge opportunity for communities to generate civic engagement on social media platforms, provided the appropriate thought and strategies are utilized. In fact, in most cases, the members of your community are already actively using these tools—ready, willing, and expecting to interact with their local government. Don't keep them waiting!

Dene Westbrook is the internal operations director for the League. You may contact her at 734.669.6314 or dwestbrook@mml.org.

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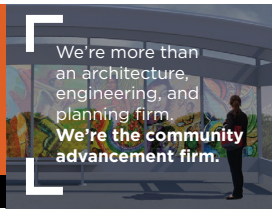

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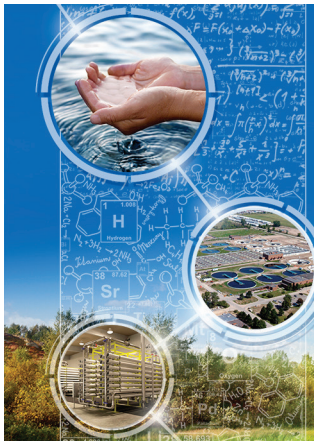

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SPECIAL ALERT

Change in Responding/Fulfilling FOIA Requests

The May/June edition of this column included a Q&A on the Michigan Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the difference between *responding to* a request and *filling* a request. The answer was based on *Cramer v Oakley*, a case that has since been appealed. The Michigan Supreme Court vacated the Court of Appeal's decision. So, that leaves us back at square one: a municipality should respond to and fulfill a FOIA request within five business days after receiving it. A municipality can no longer make a distinction between responding to and fulfilling a request (The ability to extend a deadline by more than 10 days remains unchanged.)

Q: . I heard that municipalities can no longer regulate taxicabs. Is that true?

A: Yes. The Legislature passed a new law stripping all local control over taxi carriers. PA 345 of 2016 was signed into law and went into effect on March 21, 2017. The new law prohibits a local unit of government from imposing a tax or fee upon, or requiring a license for, a limousine carrier, taxicab carrier, or Transportation Network Company (TNC) such as Uber or Lyft, a limousine driver, taxicab driver, or TNC driver, or a limousine, taxicab, or personal vehicle, if the tax, fee, or license is related to the provision of limousine or taxicab service or TNC prearranged rides.

Under the new Act, a local unit of government may issue a civil infraction to a limousine, taxicab, or TNC driver for a violation of sections of the Act regarding signage, a TNC driver carrying proof of insurance, a TNC driver accepting a request for transportation outside of a TNC's digital network, and nondiscrimination.

Regulation of these entities will now be handled by the state Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA).

Under this new regulatory framework, each entity is required to register with the department, complete a vehicle safety inspection if the vehicle is five years old or older, post proper signage on the vehicle, and ensure each driver has passed a criminal background check and obtained proper insurance.

For information on this new Act, see the League's Fact Sheet "Limousine, Taxicab, and Transportation Network Company Act" at mml.org.

Q: Have any Michigan cities or villages opted in to the new Michigan Medical Marihuana Facilities Licensing Act?

A: We only know of a few—the cities of Clare and Walled Lake and the village of Webberville (at print time). The League is receiving a lot of calls from entrepreneurs/vendors asking this same question. If your community opts in, please notify the League at info@mml.org. We would love to have a copy of your ordinance. We are keeping copies of ordinances in our library, and we have a medical marihuana information and resource page on our website at mml.org.

Q: . I am the clerk in a General Law Village. The president and president pro tem will both be out of town for the next council meeting. Who chairs the meeting?

A: The General Law Village Act does not say who fills in as chair of a council meeting if both the president and president pro tem are absent. This is a situation that can be addressed in your village's council rules of procedure. Many villages provide for the most senior member of council to fulfill this role. Sample language to adopt and add to your council rules could be the following:

"In the absence of both the president and the president pro tempore, the member present who has the longest consecutive service on the council shall preside."

To see sample council rules of procedure, visit mml.org.

The League's Information Service provides member officials with answers to questions on a vast array of municipal topics. Call 1.800.653.2483 or email info@mml.org.

Sue Jeffers is a legal consultant to the League. You may contact her at sjeffers@mml.org.

When is an invocation by legislative body acceptable under Establishment Clause?

FACTS:

The Jackson County, Michigan Board of Commissioners opened its monthly meetings with a prayer by one of the commissioners. All the commissioners are Christian. Everyone attending the meeting is asked to "rise" and "assume a reverent position" during the prayer.

Peter Bormuth, a resident of Jackson County and self-described pagan and animist, began attending the Board meetings because of his concern that the county was releasing pollutants into a local river. At two of the meetings, prayer was offered and attendees were asked to rise. Bormuth did not stand but was concerned that the Board would hold against him his decision to stay seated. At one of the meetings, a commissioner "made faces expressing his disgust" while Bormuth was speaking and turned his chair around, refusing to look at Bormuth. Bormuth subsequently filed suit alleging that the prayer practice violates the First Amendment's Establishment Clause. During the course of the action, Bormuth (with three years of experience on related issues) applied to serve on the county's Solid Waste Planning Committee. The Board did not nominate him for the position

QUESTIONS:

Did the Board of Commissioners' prayer practice violate the Establishment Clause of the federal Constitution?

No. The Court concluded that, although the prayers were "exclusively Christian," they were composed of only "benign religious references." The Court acknowledged evidence of lack of respect by the Board toward Bormuth, but stated that such conduct "does not demonstrate that the Board was prejudiced against him because he declined to participate in the prayer."

ANSWER ACCORDING TO THE SIXTH CIRCUIT COURT APPEALS:

Yes. The Sixth Circuit noted that the U.S. Supreme Court has only addressed the issue of legislative prayers in two decisions—Marsh v Chambers and Town of Greece v Galloway. In Marsh, the Supreme Court bypassed previously constructed tests for Establishment Clause violations, reasoning that "the practice of legislative prayer" had co-existed with the principle of religious freedom from colonial times. Town of Greece confirmed that Marsh does not require defining the "precise boundary of the Establishment Clause where history shows that the specific practice is permitted." Town of Greece outlined practices, however, that might stray from traditional purposes, including, "if town board members directed the public to participate in the prayers, singled out dissidents for opprobrium, or indicated that their decisions might be influenced by a person's acquiescence in the prayer opportunity." In this case, the Court found that the identity of the prayer givers i.e, the commissioners themselves, the exclusion of other prayer givers, and the direction of the public to participate not only resulted in a deviation from traditional purposes of legislative prayer but also coerced the public to participate in the exercise of religion, in violation of the Establishment Clause. The Court also found that the Board attempted to silence Bormuth and insulted him for criticizing their prayer practice.

Bormuth v County of Jackson, No. 15-1869 (February 15, 2017)

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