North St. Paul Communications Evaluation
Resilient Communities Project
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Introduction
North St. Paul is a town of 3.1 square miles, with a six-block long Main Street. With 125 years of history, North St. Paul is a tight-knit community with bonds to the town atmosphere, its neighbors, and their shared past. But it is also a town that looks to the future, embracing technology and seeking new ways to capture the next wave of innovation and ingenuity to propel the community forward.

In 2013, the City of North St. Paul was selected for a year-long collaboration with the University of Minnesota (UMN) through the Resilient Communities Project (RCP).

One of the Fall 2013 projects for UMN students in Evaluation Studies was to create a program theory for communication in the City of North St. Paul (to describe “how it works”). Graduate students enrolled in Spring 2014 evaluation courses then worked with the program theory and City staff to construct a survey that was implemented later that semester.

Purpose
Graduate students from UMN Evaluation Studies Program will consult and collaborate with staff from the City of North St. Paul to design and implement an evaluation plan to understand how the City can better reach, engage, and serve its residents.

Acknowledgments
- Course: DLDP 8595: Evaluation Problems
- Instructor: Dr. Jean King
- City Staff Lead: Laurie Koehnle, Communications Manager

Special thanks to Douglass Moon who served as project coach and mentor to this evaluation project; our data collectors: Eileen Klimm, Cheryl Varacora, Anne Schwabiel and Peter Kirwin; and to North St. Paul residents who made this project possible.

Survey Design
Students and City staff created a short, user-friendly survey and developed a data-collection process to reach a variety of community members.

Because a participatory approach and methods were important, students attended staff, business, and community meetings to describe the purpose of the project and gain local buy-in. With business support to reach their patrons, students were positioned at several locations to approach and recruit survey participants. Data collection locations in North St. Paul were:

- La Garage & Gallery
- Neumann’s Bar
- Ramsey County Library
- Silver Lake Park

Eligibility was limited to North St. Paul residents who were 18 years of age or older. Non-residents were ineligible to participate. A five-dollar Target gift card was given to each participant who completed the eleven-question survey.

Sample
- 80% of participants self-identified as White.
- Average age of participants was 42-49 years.
- Average length of time living in North St. Paul was 18 years.

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Age of Residents

Methods

Results

Preliminary Findings
Given the constraints of timing and students’ schedules, data collection took place 3 times at the Ramsey County Library in North St. Paul.

How much communication have you received from the city of North St. Paul?
- 71% of respondents felt they were receiving enough communication from the City.

Answer | %
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I don’t receive anything | 9%
Not enough | 20%
Enough | 71%
Too much | 0%

How often have you received information from North St. Paul in the following ways?
- 32% of North St. Paul residents reported receiving communication from the City.
- Newsletters are mailed with the monthly utility bill – however, only 65% of residents reported receiving information this way.
- 39% of residents receive communication through direct mail.
- Only 11% of residents reported using the city website.

Discussion

Recommendations
How would you prefer to find out what’s going on in North St. Paul?
- 57% of residents would prefer to receive communication by direct mail.
- 49% of residents would prefer to receive communication by email – a form of communication that is not yet in place.
- 91% of residents would prefer to not receive communication by word of mouth or open houses.

Although these preliminary findings suggest a majority preference of direct mail, residents also reported wanting an electronic form of communication (like a newsletter sent via email). One resident suggested a function on the City’s website to “opt in” to receive newsletters via email. Such an opt-in system might help to reach and engage more residents of North St. Paul, but also non-residents, especially those who live nearby.

In addition to community events, residents would like to know what is going on in terms of decisions made by the City that could affect its residents. Residents want to be informed of what committees are headed by which City Council members, what these committees do, and how to get involved.

Next Steps
North St. Paul residents are passionate about the city they live in; there is a desire to know where and what outlets are available to speak out and get involved with their community.

To provide better and more regular access for residents to City Staff, this survey could be linked to the City website. This might solicit continuous feedback regarding how to improvement communication efforts in the city of North St. Paul.