TURNING FABULOUS FLOPS TO FABULOUS FEATS IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
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Ferndale’s Story
- Communications Department spent months planning a citizen town hall to educate media and residents about two crucial ballot measures
- Elected officials and staff came, flyers and posters were printed, schedule was communicated, but not a single resident or media member came!

Ferndale’s Lessons Learned
- Share stories, not stats
- Go where the people (Facebook or social media), meetings are out and person to person is in
- Ask, listen, and be willing to adapt to new communication methods
- Love your mistakes and avoid temptation to point fingers

Eagan’s Story
- Eagan Forward community visioning, assisted by Rebecca Ryan, to engage residents asking “What is your one wish for Eagan?”
- City hosted resident study action teams to execute strategies – city hoped for 80-100 people, but got 200+
- First presentation by teams to City Council was a flop as many recommendations weren’t feasible

Eagan’s Lessons Learned
- Staff hands-off approach resulted in frustrating disconnect of expectations, so the city began meeting with team leaders and provided Local Gov 101
- Buy cookies! Food helps comradery!
- Celebrating successes is important!

Now What?
Ferndale has applied what they learned to a new project! They’ve used three communication tools – a video (which got 2,200 views), digital push (which got 100+ questions), and social community groups (viewed and shared by 9,000 people)!

Eagan has executed many of the dreams from the action teams – a new nature park was built, a new splash pad is in the works and both are within confines of budgets and CIP!

Continue the discussion in your city:
- Where are your residents communicating? Are you there too?
- How can you involve citizens in executing your city’s vision?
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Did the city of Ferndale set measures of what was considered good?
- If they try anything digital or that includes any cost investment, they do track progress. Using any new tools, they set a time threshold when they reassess if that method (e.g. involvement in a particular guidebook) is working.

How do you deal with non-residents or trolls on the Facebook community groups the city doesn’t control?
- At the beginning, the Communications Director was hesitant about joining those community groups, but the Mayor, Council, and other high-level staff were, and if a resident tagged them in something that didn’t get a response for a period of time, they would then vocalize that elected officials didn’t care about it. There was also an issue with messages coming from a number of different people at different times with differing levels of correctness. Because of that, they developed a one or two spokesperson strategy. Mayor and council can communicate but don’t respond to complaints, just the Communications Director does. They also use a “one and done” policy – responding once with one helpful solution or answer, and providing direct contact information (phone call), but do not continue engaging if an attacking conversation continues.

Do you have a social media policy at work for engagement? How fast to you respond to posts?
- In Ferndale, they have completely rewritten social media policy to engage with these groups – Green light (good, fun positive stories are good to go!), yellow light (things you wouldn’t feel comfortable announcing to mayor should get department head approval before sharing on social media, red light (everything else – anything negative or proprietary) policy. If there’s any direct questions on social media, staff, even if they are residents, shouldn’t answer, that’s the Communication Director’s job. Ferndale will share their social media and Facebook community group engagement policy In Eagan, each department has a social media editor that communicates since it’s such a large city, but anything that gets escalated goes to social media team.

Eagan Forward hasn’t “sat on the shelf,” what helped make that an active, living document?
- It has become part of the vernacular of the city which was a much bigger investment than any prior engagement efforts. It has brought the community together, but does take ongoing staff support to keep it fresh. Communications staff for website and social media work brand and label things for projects and comments that have to do with Eagan forward. Keeping the brand fresh and at the top of mind is critical.

In Eagan, when recommendations were presented to council, did you notice that perhaps the council needed to be more flexible in finance these projects?
- Council and staff noted that residents don’t know who to reach out to for funding partnerships (e.g. grants). Council “stuck to their guns” about communicating budget limitations which forced some creative funding, but that turned out to be a benefit. There is not, and they do not picture an Eagan Forward line item in the budget.

When Eagan modified the direction of the focus study action teams, they got rid of the “Bad Apples” in team leadership. Was there any backlash to that?
- When they new they had to change the teams and leaders, they had some one on one conversations with those leaders. The message didn’t come from the city, it was the other community leaders that asked the other leaders to step down so they could change direction.