

**Alliance for Innovation
2011 Transforming Local Government Conference
June 1-3, 2011 Clearwater, Florida**

***Close the Gap: A Case Study of the Southwest 20th Avenue
Annexation Campaign in Gainesville, Florida***

COVER SHEET

Case Study Title: Close the Gap: The Southwest 20th Avenue Annexation Campaign in Gainesville, Florida

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200 Word Case Study Description:

The proposed session topic is intended to provide an in-depth look at an innovative, highly successful, hands-on approach toward building public involvement and community consensus to achieve a desired outcome in a voter referendum on annexation. This case study examines a model that is easily replicable in other communities and cities in the State of Florida, and across the Nation.

The proposed SW 20th Avenue annexation area was comprised of 660-acres of land in a highly urbanized, densely populated, mostly student residential area with a thriving regional commercial retail shopping district, and located near a major Interstate Highway. This unincorporated area of Alachua County was geographically surrounded by the city of Gainesville on three sides. A previous attempt to annex this area was

unsuccessful. This case study discusses the second attempt to annex this area into the city of Gainesville through voter referendum.

By combining an innovative use of retail market data analysis and a fully integrated marketing communications strategy, including the creative use of social media tools, the “SW 20th Avenue Annexation Campaign” was able to successfully identify, inform, educate and mobilize a carefully segmented, tech-savvy, audience of potential voters to action in support of annexation, out of a total population of approximately 6,000 voters.

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PRESENTATION SYNOPSIS

The proposed session topic is intended to provide an in-depth look at an innovative, highly successful, hands-on approach toward building public involvement and community consensus to achieve a desired outcome in a voter referendum on annexation. This case study examines a model that is easily replicable in other communities and cities in the State of Florida, and across the Nation.

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The “Close the Gap!” campaign was the city of Gainesville’s first attempt to utilize a combination of the following annexation tools: the Alachua County Boundary Adjustment Act; city of Gainesville/Alachua County Annexation Transition Agreement; a city of Gainesville Orderly Annexation Team; retail market demographic data analysis and an integrated marketing campaign featuring proactive use of social media tools to identify and reach a targeted segment of potential voters.

As in the State of Florida, state laws regarding electioneering communications may impact the extent to which local governments can engage in direct advocacy with respect to certain political issues. However, generally local governments are well-positioned to exploit the use of available retail demographic data and evolving forms of social media tools to identify, inform and educate citizens regarding community issues that are best resolved through active public involvement.

Annexation ensures that urban services are provided in the most efficient way to citizens. Urban service provision is the responsibility of all municipalities. Once areas reach certain densities or level of service expectations, it is reasonable to assume that urban services should be provided by a municipality.

The city of Gainesville is located in Alachua County, Florida. In this jurisdiction, annexations are governed the State of Florida “Alachua County Boundary Adjustment

Act” and by mutual agreement as described in the city of Gainesville/Alachua County Annexation Transition Agreement. Under this agreement, the City and County identify fiscal and service impacts of annexations and how they may be mitigated. The Agreement also provides a schedule for the City and County to identify appropriate areas and chart a strategy for orderly annexations.

Annexation by referendum occurs when registered voters of the proposed area vote on the proposed annexation. A simple majority (50 percent plus one vote) prevails. A highly populated student area with urban densities seemed to be in the middle of Gainesville, although it technically was not part of the city. The same area was identified for possible annexation once before in 2003 prior to the development of a broad array of annexation tools, and failed.

With the renewed push for annexation of this area, the challenge was to work collaboratively with city and county staff, on and off-campus student organizations and the retail business community using robust demographic statistical analysis program called, “The Community Tapestry Segmentation System” to create a complete education and outreach campaign. The intent was to connect with specific targeted student populations living in the area to convince them that annexation would benefit them as citizens. All this was to be accomplished with an existing budget of only \$4,000.

Our goal was to create a campaign that reached our target audience as identified through the use of Lifestyle Segmentation Profiles, which are based on the theory that: people with similar tastes, lifestyles, and behaviors seek others with the same tastes hence the adage “like seeks like” and that, people are segmented by their propensity to consume. In this case study our sought-after profile consisted of tech-savvy college students between the ages of 17 and 24.

This age demographic primarily divided into two distinct categories named, Scholars and Patriots. Both student groups shared demographic characteristics which helped to identify and frame those municipal services with the highest potential appeal to each group. The identified municipal services were then used to develop and anchor an effective information and advocacy campaign.

The “Close the Gap!” theme was based on an obvious geographic feature which when depicted on a map of the area appeared as a significant gap in the city’s physical boundary line. The intended outcome for the “Close the Gap!” campaign was to literally close the gap since the proposed annexation area was part of unincorporated Alachua County, but was geographically surrounded by the city of Gainesville. Closing the gap would provide the students with additional bus routes, lower electric rates, police protection and the opportunity to vote in city elections.

The proposed annexation area was bounded by the city on three sides. Intuitively it was clear that municipal services should be provided to the area. The city of Gainesville’s

Strategic Planning Office and the City's Communications Office were tasked by the City Manager to develop a strategy to successfully annex the area by voter referendum.

Through retail data analysis, City staff quickly realized the greatest challenge would be to communicate with the large student population living in the area, a group that traditional had not been heavily involved in local issues or local elections. Research also indicated that the targeted younger populations were generally more tech savvy than many older generations, so the effective use of social media technology to reach the target audience was deemed to be a key factor in our potential for success.

In order to reach our target audience, we used the Internet and forms of social media, such as *Facebook*. Due to our limited resources and staff, the Communications Office recommended Strategic Planning hire a design consultant to develop the overarching design for the campaign. The designer then created a logo that was used on all items related to the "Close the Gap!" campaign. An informative Web site (www.voteforannexation.org and www.voteforannexation.com) was created in-house that let students know 1) they weren't inside city limits and 2) the benefits of being inside the city.

Another technological component of the campaign was a public service announcement and the accompanying ad on *Facebook*. The public service announcement featured students from both local schools, Santa Fe College and the University of Florida. It was available to view on the local government cable channel and the annexation Web site. On the Web site, viewers were encouraged to share it on their *Facebook* page.

The intent was to engage the public in a form of "[viral marketing](#)," to increase voter awareness of the annexation referendum and to engage the targeted public in support of affirmative advocacy by the city of Gainesville regarding the referendum vote. An advertisement was also placed on *Facebook*, targeting the area that would vote on the proposed annexation and directing them to the Web site for more information.

The University of Florida's student government also supported the referendum. That student involvement was consistent throughout the campaign and carried on until Election Day. On Election Day, both staff and students volunteered their own time to stand near the poll. This person-to-person outreach allowed volunteers to talk to voters about the benefits of annexation. Both the local newspaper and the student newspaper featured many articles about the annexation, encouraging the voters to vote for annexation.

The allocated budget for the "Close the Gap!" campaign was \$4,000. The design consultant who designed the overarching logo cost \$2,000. Other expenses included having t-shirts and signs made, purchasing the domain name for the Web site and

Facebook advertising. The total cost for the entire campaign was \$3,903, bringing the project in slightly under budget.

Out of the approximately 6,000 individuals who live in the area, the annexation referendum was approved by 1,611 votes, or 66 percent, far more than the 50 percent plus one simple majority that was needed. The campaign's success is attributable to many individual components.

One important factor is the commitment by Strategic Planning and Communications Offices embrace the use of retail market data analysis and integrated marketing communication strategies to identify, inform, educate and mobilize the public involvement in the annexation process. By having a well-rounded campaign that targeted its audience, the annexation referendum was approved. Effective June 1, 2009, this area officially became part of the city of Gainesville.

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PRESENTATION COMPONENTS

- 1) **Innovation/Creativity:** This project provided the municipal government with a new template for planning, developing, implementing and assessing the effectiveness of voluntary annexation voter referendums. It successfully incorporated traditional annexation tools and public information efforts with an innovative, adaptive use of powerful retail market data analysis tools and an evolving uses of new social media platforms to identify, inform, educate and mobilize targeted audiences toward public involvement to achieve a desired outcome.

A robust demographic statistical analysis program called, “The Community Tapestry Segmentation System” was used to create “Lifestyle Segmentation Profiles, or LSPs.” These profiles were used to identify affirmative annexation messages that were designed to resonant prospective voters that fell within the targeted LSPs. Online annexation websites were designed and established. Social media communication channels such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube were used to communicate affirmative annexation messages to the targeted audience.

- 2) **Outcomes Achieved:** Close the Gap: The Southwest 20th Avenue Annexation Campaign was a complete success. The proposed annexation voter referendum was approved by 1,611 votes, or 66 percent, far more than the 50 percent plus one simple majority that was required. The area was officially annexed into the City of Gainesville on June 1, 2009. Additionally, the city of Gainesville now has a group of city staff members who function effectively as an “Orderly Transition Team” and have access to cost-effective tools and strategies that can be used to directly impact the outcome of local annexation issues. Most importantly, area residents were actively engaged in a primary form of public involvement, by choosing to determine their preference on a given issue through a public vote.

- 3) **Applicable results and Real World Practicality:** This case study presentation chronicles a successful annexation effort from beginning to end. Although successful, the process was not without missteps. Lessons learned and best practices will shared with attendees. Best practices include the need to obtain public commitment and support from elected bodies of government,

being cognizant of legal considerations, and understanding the capabilities and limitations of social media tools. This case study takes place in a university community, which may differ demographically from other communities. Also, as in the State of Florida, state laws regarding electioneering communications may impact the extent to which local governments can engage in direct advocacy with respect to certain political issues. However, the aforementioned considerations notwithstanding, the process used to conduct this annexation campaign are cost-effective and potentially replicable in any community in which annexation is an issue.

- 4) **Case Study Presentation:** This case study will consist of a PowerPoint presentation with an embedded video, website locations, and a handout (Narrative and copy of PowerPoint) as a take away for session attendees.