



TLG and LMC 2016 Case Study Application
Future Ready Communities



DUE: September 4, 2015

Email to: Ryan Spillers at rspillers@transformgov.org

COVER PAGE

- 1. Case Study Title: ___ Topeka Tweet-A-Longs: Innovative uses for social media _____
- 2. Case Study Category (Select only one, selection identified by highlighting your choice):

Planning for Your Future **Creating an Inclusive Community**

Reinventing Local Government Community Networks

Blinders

3. Jurisdiction Name: ___City of Topeka _____

4. Jurisdiction Population (US Census): ___127,473 _____

5. Would you like the application to be considered for our Rapid Fire Session? (Rapid Fire presentations are fast-paced, entertaining, interactive presentations. Each jurisdiction will have five minutes to make their presentations using 15 PPT slides set on auto-forward primarily containing photos/graphics. Participants will be seated at round tables to facilitate an energetic idea exchange. A cash bar will be available.)

YES

NO

6. Project Leader (Primary Contact for case study notification):

Name: ___Aly Van Dyke _____

Title: ___media relations director _____

Department: ___ City Manager _____

Phone Number: ___ 785-368-0991 _____

eMail: avandyke@topeka.org _____

US Mail Address, including zip code: _ 215 S.E. 7th Street, Topeka, KS 66607 _____

Twitter Account: ___ @cityoftopeka _____

List additional presenters contact information below:

1. Presentation title and description of the innovation. *100 word maximum.*

Topeka Tweet-A-Longs: Once every week, for two hours, Topeka media relations director Aly Van Dyke goes out with a different City crew to live-tweet what their average day looks like. She interviews the employees and supervisors beforehand to get relevant background. Then she tags along with the crew, live tweeting what they say and do with text, photos and videos. She then posts a blog about the experience. The blog is shared on all different social media (NextDoor, Twitter, Facebook) as well as the City's intranet, with department directors and City Council and in the monthly newsletter.

2. When and how was the program, policy or initiative originally conceived in your jurisdiction? *100 word maximum.*

The tweet-a-long concept was conceived in the spring of 2015 when Van Dyke came on board with the City of Topeka. She was prolific on Twitter in her past job as a newspaper reporter, and was challenged to find a new way to get out the City's message. This initiative embraces the relevance and importance of social media will play, now and in the future, toward open and efficient governance.

3. How exactly is the program or policy innovative? How has your innovation changed previous processes, products or services? *100 word maximum.*

The tweet-a-longs give Topeka residents a first-hand view into the work City employees do for them daily that they might not otherwise see or interact with -- like the sewer line camera crew or water meter readers. That allows them to meet other City employees, but it also has grown the City's following on social media. Since the initiative started, the City has picked up hundreds of followers on Twitter, Facebook and NextDoor. That means more eyes on the news we send out, outside of tweet-a-longs. As such, the City has become more regular and relevant about posting information on social media.

4. Explain how the program or initiative substantially stretched or improved the boundaries of ordinary governmental operations. *200 word maximum.*

This tweet-a-long initiative has broadened citizen's perception of the work we do as a City. They normally just hear from the City during Council meetings, when they mostly hear budget figures and big-picture policy discussions. Now they are able to see how our staff is working for them, every day, out in the community, and they can put faces and names to those services their tax dollars pay for. It also has been a 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 coworkers more exposure, and other employees -- in addition to Topeka residents -- are getting to know some of the public servants by name and occupation. The tweet-a-longs also call attention to different City services people often don't always think of. Being able to share photos and videos and personal accounts of the work behind those different services, through both Twitter and the blog, has helped bring those stories and employees even more attention.

5. What individuals or groups are considered the primary initiators of your program? How does the innovation engage stakeholders or demonstrate high performance teaming? Were strategic partnerships and/or community networks developed as a result of the innovation? *200 word maximum.*

The City's media relations director Aly Van Dyke initiated the program with the support of City Manager Jim Colson. Having both the social media and blog portions of the initiative opens the City up to a wider variety of stakeholders, from average citizens and reporters to employees and council members. They get a lot of interaction from the community, with people tweeting in questions and comments. One follower even came up with a cheer for our snow plow rodeo team. People can follow the tweets live or read the recap after, if they couldn't follow along or don't interact with Twitter on a regular basis. The blog allows videos and photos to be shared, so it isn't just a flat news release or website update.

6. If a private consultant was used please describe their involvement, identify the consultant and/or firm and provide contact information. *100 word maximum.*

No.

7. To what extent do you believe your program or policy initiative is potentially replicable within other jurisdictions and why? To your knowledge, have any other jurisdictions or organizations established programs or implemented policies modeled specifically on this project? Please provide verification of the replication. *200 word maximum.*

Tweet-a-longs are easily transferable to other jurisdictions: It just mostly takes a Twitter account and a few hours each week. Van Dyke generally dedicates about four hours for each Tweet-A-Long: Two hours to live-tweet, and two hours to compile the blog. The only other tweet-a-long we have heard of are those performed by Police Department ride-alongs. However, those only focus on live tweets with police officers, generally on the 3rd shift. Topeka's initiative goes outside the police department and incorporates all City services, plus has the added component of the blog for people who aren't on Twitter.

8. What were the costs? What were the savings? *100 word maximum.*

The only costs involved are those of staff time of one employee, generally four hours each week. The blog was set up using blogspot, which is a free service. The web app to compile the tweets, storify, is free. And obviously Twitter is free. Van Dyke only publicizes the posts on social media, so there is no promotional cost, either.

9. Please describe the most significant obstacle(s) encountered thus far by your program. How have they been dealt with? Which ones remain? *200 word maximum.*

The most significant obstacle was finding staff time to do this initiative. Van Dyke made it a priority, and fits these in each week, regardless of other news events happening. She keeps her cell phone and iPad on her in case a reporter or staffer calls or emails needing something, so she continues to be accessible. Tweet-a-longs are time well spent for this organization, and she makes sure it happens regardless of her schedule.

10. What outcomes did this program or policy have? What baseline data did you collect? How did you measure the change based on the intervention, and why do you believe in the credibility of this assessment? *200 word maximum.*

The outcomes so far (first tweet-a-long was end of July) have been a substantial increase in followers and interactions with our Twitter and other social media accounts, including Facebook and NextDoor, more engagement from and with the public, improved perceptions of the City from the public and higher employee morale. We add followers

every day -- so even more eyes see the things we post outside of the tweet-a-longs -- and a lot of people are tuning into these tweet-a-longs when they can. Each blog post has more than 100 views, with multiple being more than 300 and one (on animal control) reaching more than 1,100. Those figures don't account for people reading the blog information on Nextdoor or Facebook, so the reach is definitely higher. With about 5,300 followers on Facebook and Twitter, that readership is impressive, especially considering we rely only on our own social media platforms to promote it. Each view is another Topeka resident we have reached with our story, unfiltered through media, about individuals who love serving their community, but typically don't get the recognition from the public they deserve.

11. Has the program received any press or other media coverage to date? If yes, please list the sources and briefly describe relevant coverage. *100 word maximum.*

No press yet, though several of the reporters follow along and interact with the program.

12. Please provide web links where the innovation can be seen/tested (in the case of something that is web-based) *100 word maximum.*

The best place to go is the blog: www.cityoftopeka.blogspot.com.

It has developed since July to include a (free) software known as Storify, which lets us compile the tweets from each specific tweet-a-long for those who don't or couldn't follow on Twitter. Storify embeds easily into blogspot for an easy transition, so videos and photos show up better (see snowplow rodeo as an example)

Other links:

Storify: www.storify.com/cityoftopeka

Twitter: www.twitter.com/cityoftopeka

On our website: www.topeka.org/communications

13. Please provide any key references and their contact information who can be interviewed/called to discuss the innovation and its impact. *100 word maximum.*

Topeka City Manager Jim Colson: 785-368-3725
Deputy City Manager Doug Gerber: 785-368-3947
WPC general manager Bob Sample: 785-368-4233
Finance Director Brandon Kauffman: 785-368-0919
Budget Manager Nickie Lee: 785-368-1653
WPC manager Sylvia Davis: 785-368-4239

14. You've been to a lot of conferences. TLG should be a unique experience for everyone. Describe how your case study presentation will be different than other conference presentations. *200 word maximum.*
- How will you make the session creative and unique?
 - How do you plan to be both entertaining and educational?
 - Include a description of how your session will facilitate group activities and/or interaction.

If we were able to present the Topeka Tweet-A-Long initiative, conference attendees would be guaranteed an innovative, engaging, easily replicated way of getting out their story. Each governmental organization has employees who love their jobs and do them well, every day, despite any criticism from the public. Tweet-a-longs let you showcase those people and services, and demonstrate to the naysayers the good work your organization does each and every day. The presentation would feature some of the highlights from the tweet-a-longs, like the video of a root saw clearing a sewer drain, video footage from the snowplow rodeo the Topeka team won (again) this year, a video of our forestry crew felling a tree or a photo that demonstrates the heartbreaking realities our animal control officers encounter daily. Tweet-a-longs are built for interaction, and a presentation would be no different. A brainstorming session for different tweet-a-long options would be a lot of fun. The concept also generates several questions, like how to know what to post, what to include in the blog and how to find the right person to do these tweet-a-longs -- it can't be just anyone.

15. Anything else you would like to add? *200 word maximum.*

The Topeka Tweet-A-Longs have been a creative, entertaining way to engage our residents and our employees. The initiative engenders pride in and from our local government. It has benefits both out in the community and internally at the City. And with its low cost and ease of implementation, it can and should be replicated in agencies across the country. If you're looking for a way to grow social media followers, to tell your own stories, to show the members of your public the good you do, Tweet-A-Longs are an easy, inexpensive and fun way to do it.