

Change by Us Philly

Mayor's Internship Program 2012

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Change by Us Philly is a website promoting "smarter, safer, and greener" neighborhoods— powered by a social networking capability.

How it Works

Change by Us allows members to not only share ideas for making the city better but also to turn those ideas into projects that have real impact. To assist in project implementation, the site helps members network, manage events, and connect with local resources. *Change by Us Philly*, is a unique tool that has a potential to bring people together in completing city-changing projects.

The Goals of the Project

- There were three goals for this project: *Change by Us Technology and Usage*—Identify challenges and recommend solutions to technological challenges with the *Change by Us Philly* website.
- *Change by Us Marketing Strategy*—Increase site membership
- *Change by Us Civic Innovation Grant Project*—Create a grant application and award process.

Process

In order to effectively meet our goals, we created three subgroups – technology, marketing, and grant application – to deal more intimately with the different aspects of the project. Within the different sub groups, challenges were addressed and solutions were proposed to increase site membership and create a grant application and award process.

Recommendations

Each subgroup created three levels of recommendations, Level 1 being the least expensive and demanding and Level 3 being the most intricate and complex. Level 3 recommendations would also

likely require the most resources to complete. At each level, our goal was to increase the community's use of *Change by Us*. Our underlying hypothesis is that the more effort the City invests in *Change by Us*, the greater the use of the website by Philadelphians intent on improving their community will receive.

Next Steps

The recommendations that were created will be forwarded to the Office of Civic Innovation and Participation, who will oversee – in partnership with others inside City government - the *Change by Us Philly* website and awarding civic innovation grants.

We acknowledge that some of our recommendations require intense investment by the City. We realize that some levels might be too time intensive. We hope that these recommendations provide some ideas that can be implemented if time and resources allow. Through the application of any levels or combination of levels, *Change by Us Philly* can become a more effective tool and can realize its potential as the go to social networking site for civic engagement in Philadelphia.

TEAM MEMBERS

Project Leader: Jeff Friedman

Manager of Civic Innovation and Participation

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Participating Interns

Jemima Aidoo "J," Newark, DE – M.P.A. Villanova, 2013, B.A. Business Administration, Queens University, 2006 Charlotte, NC - Managing Director's Office, Global Philadelphia Program - J's career in Public Administration spans from 1995 as voters' registration center supervisor for Ghana government to working for Mecklenburg County government for 14 years. J is currently pursuing a Masters in Public Administration and hopes to acquire the necessary skills to become an effective leader in local government.

Emily Dayton, Yardley, PA - Bryn Mawr College, 2013, B.A. Political Science and Russian - Office of the Inspector General - Emily plans to attend law school following graduation and hopes to pursue a career in public interest law.

Jack Denison, Philadelphia, PA - Allegheny College, 2014 - Procurement Department - Jack is entering his junior year at Allegheny College and is interested in local government.

Sarah Galbally, Philadelphia, PA - M.P.A Villanova University, 2013, B.A. Urban Studies, University of Pennsylvania - Joint Project between the Finance Department and the School District of Philadelphia - Sarah is interested in pursuing a career in the government or nonprofit sector, which will allow her to help shape policies and programs that transform the educational experiences of urban youth.

Arielle Herzberg, Westfield, NJ - University of Pennsylvania 2013 - Law Department Tax Unit - Arielle is a rising senior, majoring in European history. She is interested in attending law school after college and pursuing a career in public service.

Nina Lispi, Harrisburg, PA, - Temple University 2014, B.A. Journalism - Department of Records - Nina hopes to pursue public affairs journalism and cover a range of political and social issues affecting urban populations.

Caitlin McDonald, Decatur, GA - M.P.A., Villanova University, 2013, B.S. Political Science, Appalachian State University, 2010 - Office of the Managing Director, PhillyStat Project - Caitlin will also earn a certificate in City Management from Villanova in order to pursue a career in local government and urban management.

Maureen Quinn, Prospect Park, PA - George Washington University, 2014, B.A. Political Science and International Affairs - Office of the City Controller - Maureen is interested in pursuing a career in political consulting and public affairs after graduation.

Christine Simcox, Trevese, PA – M.P.H. Drexel University, 2014, B.S. Nutritional Sciences, The Pennsylvania State University, 2012 - Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Opportunity - Christine is a recent graduate of Penn State interested in nutrition policy, in terms of both food insecurity and obesity, and its affects on urban populations.

Nicole Welk, Lancaster, PA - M.A. Anthropology, Brandeis University, 2013, B.A. Art History and Anthropology, Temple University, 2012--Office of Arts, Culture and Creative Economy - Nicole is a recent graduate of Temple University interested in the subject of public art, its current and future roles in urban planning, and its use in history by major political figures and other persons of power.

I. INTRODUCTION

Change by Us is a website built for Philadelphia by Code for America, with the purpose of connecting community members who share the common goal of wanting to improve the neighborhoods in which they live. A “social network for civic activity,” it is sponsored by CEOs for Cities and funded nationally by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, and the Case Foundation.¹ The intent of the website, also adopted in New York City, is to facilitate a connection between local projects, people, and City-wide resources to help make projects as successful as possible.

The purpose of this particular project was threefold. The first goal was to identify the technical improvements that needed to be made to the website. The second goal was to increase membership and projects on the website through the development and implementation of a market plan. The third goal was to design a Grant Competition to guide the allocation of funding to *Change by Us* projects. The Grants that will be awarded are sponsored by the Knight Foundation, which “supports transformational ideas that...engage communities.”² This paper details our recommendations on how to proceed with the project.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Research

For organizational purposes, the project team was divided into three focus groups: technology, marketing, and grant. The technology group’s main goal was to ensure that the website functioned to its full potential, and, if it did not, to make recommendations about how to improve its overall functionality. They explored the website and compiled a list of technical issues which could

¹ “Change By Us.” Local Projects. <http://localprojects.net/project/change-by-us/>.

² “Change By Us.” Knight Foundation. <http://www.knightfoundation.org/grants/20113433/>.

potentially confuse first time *Change by Us* participants. The marketing group examined ways to give the website more exposure in the public sphere. They discussed implementing a social media campaign, which included the creation of flyers, press releases, and newspaper articles focused on successful projects. The third group focused on the Office of Civic Engagement and Participation's goal to launch a Civic Innovation Grant Competition, as the City of New York's *Change by Us* team has done twice. They examined the grant application and proposed ways to make the application more users – friendly. They also created a list of recommendations to ensure a smooth grant writing process for participants and an organized process for those awarding the projects.

B. Interviews

A series of interviews were also conducted by the technology group to reach out to Philadelphians who had used the *Change by Us* site. The goal was to ask what participants liked and disliked about the *Change by Us* site, and what recommendations they would personally give.

The leaders of 5 different projects on the *Change by Us Philly* site were contacted via email and telephone. The main guideline for these leaders to be contacted was that they had to be part of a project that had three members or more on their project page on the website. Only 24 projects of the 62 currently on the website have three or more members, making this a pool of about 20% of the desired participants.

The interviews were open ended, leaving the leaders the choice of giving their own personal feedback on the site, without any initial guidance. If those contacted desired a structure to the interview, the following questions were asked:

- What initially attracted you to *Change by Us*? Did the website meet your expectations? If no, why not?

- Did you have difficulty understanding a particular component of *Change by Us*? If so, what was this?
- Are you still using *Change by Us*? Why or why not?

The following comments were made by individuals interviewed who chose to comment about the overall site and why they were attracted to it:

- “I really liked the idea of Change By Us and I thought it would be a good opportunity to voice my project.”
- “I was attracted to the fact that it was Philly neighborhood based and thought that we would be connected to potential resources that would help cut through the red tape and bureaucracy and who weren't just focused on what are deemed the "trendier, up and coming neighborhoods" that seem to be flush with interest via media, magazines, etc.”
- “I thought it was a great way to get exposure since our nonprofit is so small. The website met me expectations. It was easy to use and it was informative.”

The following comments are explanations as to why individuals no longer used the site:

- “Unfortunately, I realized I did not have the time to dedicate to it. I did like the site though.”
- “It doesn't seem to have helped our project in any way. I don't feel that the site is promoted enough to people who are looking to make ideas a reality. It feels like I put my project on a bulletin board hoping people will read it. It has almost become a wish list of great things that the city can have one day.”
- “It was easier to organize people in my neighborhood who were already on Facebook to rally for a particular cause.”

All of the leaders contacted made the comment that they had hoped their project would be noticed by a department or organization in the city, and that this organization would in turn help the leaders bring their project ideas to fruition. An additional recommendation by the technology group to improve the *Change by Us* landscape may be to create a way to encourage the organizations and departments listed on the *Change by Us* site to contact a project or two each year and help in their causes. This would be a third level recommendation, as it would be an effort that would take a great bit of time to achieve.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been organized by the three focus groups to improve the use, awareness and grant process that comes with the *Change by Us Philly* Project. Each grouping of recommendations used a “level system” to propose changes or strategies. There are three levels of suggestions made by each group, with the first level requiring the least amount of time and resources to implement and the third level requiring the most. Each level is meant to add on to the level before it.

A) Change by Us Technology and Usage

Overall, the *Change by Us Philly* website is very user friendly. The site functions well within its parameters as a tool meant to be used to bring people together to work on civic projects. However, extensive exploration of the site has revealed some potential issues that could discourage someone from using the website. With increased website use being a consistent goal for any networking site, we recommend that these user issues be addressed through the Office of Civic Engagement or with future Code for America personnel. We have also made recommendations based on functions users may desire from a civic engagement site like *Change by Us*.

Level 1:

- Add a note to the *Change by Us* login page to alert new users of a broken page issue that may occur when using the latest version of Internet Explorer. For new users to gain full access to the *Change by Us Philly* website, they are required to join by creating a login user ID and Password. Currently, site users are unable to register using Internet Explorer. There is nothing on the registration page that alerts users of this problem. This problem could become a potential deterrent to interested users who are unaware of the problem and unable to determine why the page refreshes but fails to submit their information.
- Direct users to create a login account by using the “Click Here” link, instead of sparking confusion by telling users they can login “using Facebook.” It has been found that some users who click the “login using Facebook” function believe they can use their Facebook account to create a *Change by Us Philly* account. This function simply links the actions one does on *Change by Us* to the user’s Facebook page, and does not allow the user to create a separate, *Change by Us* account.
- Remove the “It’s a BETA,” disclaimer as one opens the website. The BETA disclaimer makes the site seem like it is still under construction, and could discourage users from fully exploring the site.

Level 2:

- Make the registration page compatible with Internet Explorer, so that Internet Explorer users can successfully create a user login without experiencing the problem described in Level 1 suggestion.
- Make the Facebook Icon on the registration page usable for one – time registration, so that users can create a login using solely their Facebook account. Fixing this problem is highly

encouraged as most website users would rather use a one-click process to login rather than having to re-enter the same sign-in information repeatedly on different websites.

- Turn on the ability to make *Change by Us* blog posts on the site. In New York City, the blog is used to inform the public of future grant opportunities offered by the City, as well as to make users aware of smaller organizations that can support their projects. The tags on these blogs are searchable for users and project leaders can easily link themselves to these opportunities
- Launch and manage the “calendar” function that is also used on the New York City site. This will allow for project leaders to post their events to an easy-to-read calendar, making it easier for volunteers to find projects.
- Allow users to use the search engine on the site to search for the number of participants linked to each project. This may be helpful for administrators when the grant is launched to gauge grant participant progress.

Level 3:

- Allow project leaders to have the option of putting more contact information on their project pages. This could be done via a Post-It note message as is; however having this information consistent on the project page below the leader’s name is desirable.
- The Post-It notes that are featured on every aspect of the site become “Ideas” on the corkboard on the homepage of the website. This is useful in bulking up the corkboard for a visually pleasing aesthetic, however when one clicks the “Ideas,” either in a search or on the homepage board, it will not link them to the project the comment was meant for. Allow for the site to be able to link the user to the project a specific comment is intended for.

- Post-It note threads on the projects can be long and confusing, as users are not able to comment on specific messages posted to their project. Make the site function so that the user may click on a comment they would like to respond to, so a separate, smaller thread conversation could be made.

B) Change by Us Marketing Strategy

In order for the *Change by Us Philly* project to succeed, citizens of Philadelphia must know about the project and its successes. Therefore, one of the most important elements of our project is to reach citizens through various marketing strategies. We propose three levels – from basic marketing strategies to more time-consuming and expensive strategies – that will work to advertise the project so that it can be more widely used.

Level 1:

- To the extent not already undertaken, compile a list of organizations in the city that may be interested in using the *Change by Us Philly* tool. Contact these organizations via email with grant information and applications. By circulating this information to these organizations, we will not only target these organizations as potential users of the *Change by Us Philly* website, but also publicize the mission of the project and empower these organizations to spread the word to other organizations or interested parties.
- Use city government list-serves to reach many members of city departments, who may want to make use of the website themselves or who will help publicize the project by talking to their peers and neighbors.

- Use social media sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, to advertise the grant and grant workshops. Social media reaches a wide audience, and targets a specific audience of people who are inclined to use websites, such as the *Change by Us Philly* website.
- Advertise the website by sending out press releases to Philadelphia area news sources so that the community is aware of the project.

Level 2:

- Post flyers in neighborhoods in order to make more people aware of the opportunity *Change by Us Philly* provides.
- Set up meetings with various community leaders or groups to inform them of the *Change by Us Philly* grant and tell them about the opportunity.
- Hold a press conference announcing the grant.

Level 3:

- Host a large event centered on *Change by Us Philly* and the grant. This could be a carnival, festival, or concert, which would help us publicize *Change by Us Philly*.
- Run an advertisement campaign, either on the computer or in newspapers, presenting *Change by Us Philly* and the grant. Hopefully through the advertisement campaign, many more people will become aware of the possibility of using *Change by Us Philly* for their organization.

C) Change by Us Civic Innovation Grant Project

As part of the campaign to attract more members and entrepreneurs to the Philadelphia website, *Change by Us* will announce the Change by Us Philly Civic Innovation Grant. The grant is funded by the Knight Foundation and facilitated by CEOs for Cities. Awards between \$500 and \$3,000 will be given to projects that show the most entrepreneurial problem solving in the public space to make Philadelphia smarter, safer or greener. \

Eligibility for a grant requires that the applicant be a volunteer-led group based in a neighborhood in Philadelphia. While groups are not required to have 501(c)(3) status, groups that do not have this status will need a fiscal sponsor or bank account if a grant is awarded. The aforementioned group must have or create a project on the *Change by Us Philly* website and recruit a certain number of members. Individuals, for-profits projects, businesses, and religious, fraternal, and partisan/political organizations are not eligible for the Civic Innovation Grant.

All groups must provide a workplan for the project explaining in depth what the project will do, the people involved, a timeline, the intended results of the project, and a project budget detailing all planned expenses. Applicants wishing to include a stipend as part of the budget are limited to a 25% maximum allowance of the total budget (meaning for a grant budget totaling \$1,000, the maximum amount allowed for stipend is \$250).

As part of the application process, *Change by Us Philly* would offer a series of workshops either in person, on-line or over the phone to answer questions and assist in the application process.

All grantees are required to provide a thorough progress report to *Change by Us Philly*, as required by the Knight Foundation, as the project advances either in written, video, or photographic form.

The Grants Committee suggests the following three levels of recommendations in addition to all of previously mentioned requirements.

Level 1:

- Kick-off the Civic Innovation Grant with a press release or Public Service Announcement (PSA),
- Establish that a minimum of 10 project members is required for all potential grant projects
- Host an application workshop consisting of one in-person workshop and one conference call
- Make a grantee announcement via press release or PSA.

In terms of investment by Jeff and his team, this is the baseline. If the grant application process were to be kicked off tomorrow, these would most likely be the steps taken. These suggestions are also the most attainable for groups applying, since average membership of existing groups on *Change by Us Philly* is approximately 3-4 members. However, this level provides the least aid to groups and advertisement for the grant and grantees.

Level 2:

- Kick-off the Grant with a press campaign targeting multiple media outlets in addition to a PSA
- Establish that a minimum of 15 project members is required for all grant projects,
- Hold application workshops consisting of one in-person workshop and an online webinar workshop
- Make a grantee announcement through multiple media outlets, including television and print.

Level 2 costs are slightly higher for *Change by Us Philly* because resources used to access different forms of media may incur charges, and hosting an online webinar that is free for applicants may

incur a slight cost to host. Since the advertising at this level is slightly more comprehensive, 15 members seems to be a reasonable request of groups applying. This medium level of aid to applicants and grantees is sufficient but not extensive.

Level 3:

- Host a kick-off event celebrating a completed (or mostly completed) *Change by Us Philly* project in addition to the above mentioned media campaign,
- Establish that a minimum of 25 project members is required for grant applicants,
- Hold three application workshops including two in-person workshops and a webinar or conference call,
- Make a grantee announcement event at the groundbreaking of one of the grantees' sites in addition to a media campaign.

This level incurs the most cost to *Change by Us Philly*, since hosting two events requires supplies and city employees (or interns) support. Since the advertising is extensive and comprehensive, we believe that the high membership requirement will be attainable. Higher membership of the site as a whole is one of the ultimate goals of offering the grant, and this level contributes most to that. This level provides the most aid to applicants and grantees through the application process and the advertising encourages new members and donors to help the project as it continues.

Level 3 is suggested as the best method to apply to the grant process. Since *Change by Us Philly* hopes to have at least three rounds of grant distribution occur, providing support at this higher level encourages project success and self-promotes the next round of grant awards. Level 3 also creates the highest level of competition for the grant, ensuring higher levels of creativity and entrepreneurial problem solving in the public space, resulting in a better Philadelphia for all citizens.

V. CONCLUSION

In brief, *Change by Us Philly* is a website built by Code for America for the City of Philadelphia. The website allows citizens to share ideas, start projects, connect with resources, and make the community of Philadelphia better. One marketing strategy of *Change by Us Philly* is to promote safer, smarter, and greener neighborhoods. The purpose of this task was to identify technical improvements that need to be made to the website, increase users on the website to boost project participation and to create a Grant Award Competition to fund various projects. The Knight Foundation is sponsoring the civic innovation grants that will be awarded to *Change by Us Philly* community projects.

Change by Us Philly, partnered with city leaders and volunteer projects, can provide the citizens of Philadelphia with an online forum to share ideas to make the city better. These individual and community projects can have a real impact on Philadelphia. The previously mentioned recommendations can provide the tools and resources to make *Change by Us Philly* an outstanding resource for Philadelphia.

Change by US Philly

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Nina Lispi

Emily Dayton

Caitlin McDonald

Jack Denison

Maureen Quinn

Sarah Galbally

Christine Simcox

Arielle Herzberg

Nicole Welk

Jeff Friedman – Project Leader

HEY PHILLY!

How can we make smarter, safer & greener neighborhoods?

My idea is:
|

ADD
my IDEA

NEW IDEAS

SEE MORE IDEAS →



0/175

Like 354 people like this.

Mission

- *Change by Us* allows members to not only share ideas for making the city better but also to turn those ideas into projects that have real impact.
- To assist in project implementation, the site helps members network, manage events, and connect with local resources.

Methodology

Research

Interviews

Recommendations

Change by US
Technology and
Usage

Change by US
Civic Innovation
Grant

Change by US
Marketing
Strategy

Technology

- **Level One**

- Alert Users
- Internet Explorer Login
- Facebook Login

- **Level Two**

- Internet Explorer Compatible
- Facebook Registration
- Blog Post
- Add Calendar
- Update News
- Add Search Engine

- **Level Three**

- Project Leaders
Contact Information
- Direct Users to
Intended Projects
- Users to Respond to
Comments

Marketing Strategy

- **Level One**

- Grant Information Workshop
- Community Partners
- Government Agencies
- Social Media
- Press Release

- **Level Two**

- Neighborhood Flyers
- Community Leaders
- Organizations
- Press Conference

- **Level Three**

- Special Event
- Advertise Campaign

Civic Innovation Grant

- **Level One**

- Grant Kickoff – PSA
- Eligibility – 10 Members
- Application Workshop – In person and conference call
- Grantee Announcement – Press Release/PSA

- **Level Two**

- Grant Kickoff – Multiple media outlets
- Eligibility – 15 Members
- Application Workshop – In person & webinar
- Grantee Announcement – Multiple media outlets

- **Level Three**

- Grant Kickoff – Completed project celebration
- Eligibility – 25 Members
- Three Application Workshops
- Grantee Announcement – Grantee's site

Conclusion

- Website by Code For America
- Share ideas, start ideas, connect with resources, and improve community
- Goals:
 - Technology improvement
 - Marketing – Increase website users
 - Grant award competition