

## Flows of Information // Poughkeepsie

### Good Work Institute Fellowship 4 // Poughkeepsie Working Group

Vonda Brunsting, Caroline Fenner, Sarah Salem

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**“Stay within sight and sound of each other”**. -Rebecca Solnit

**“Showing up in community is the foundation of who I am”**. -Whitney Kimball Coe

(Both quotes from interviews with Krista Tippet, On Being podcast)

#### **Reflections:**

We set out to explore how the community on the North Side of the City of Poughkeepsie might be engaged with information more effectively. In completing our place story, we discovered that the elites and historians held a wealth of knowledge about the Fall-kill creek, but it seemed to us that the community was not involved in the planning around the pathway along the creek. Our group members experience informed our belief that elites weren't engaging the community effectively. Vonda's new project is trying to bridge the gap between investor's and the community. Sarah has been part of community efforts to engage the community where the expectation is on the community to show up and make their input known and Caroline's organization is comprised of a self selected group of progressives, without the diversity she hoped.

Our community engagement prototype set out to explore this dilemma: how do you most effectively engage the community? We wanted to challenge the premise that the burden is on the community to be involved.

We complete 3 engagements.

- 1) A survey that we developed and then used to collect information from people living and working in the North Side around the Fallkill
- 2) A discussion with Scenic Hudson to compare methods and receive feedback
- 3) A test to see what would draw people to community information

We wanted to understand the different ways that people access information. In our survey we discovered that people obtain information about what's going on in the community in a variety of ways. In particular, through word of mouth, flyers/bulletins, and online through social media. In the second engagement we learned that Scenic Hudson is open to expanding their community engagement to learn from our process. Our final engagement was to design the most effective local bulletin board. We set up 3 formats in Mansion Square Park to discover which presentation was most attractive to people passing by. On a traditional bulletin board with flyers, on a "wall" that people could read as they walked by, and on a "pole"; a historical tool used to spread information in colonial times.

We wanted to explore an interactive and attractive information exchange, not information as a passive thing. We wanted to explore an online/offline experiment as a way of having the information flow back and forth and through the community. We wanted to explore information as a catalyst for action.

In our process, we discovered an effort being undertaken to develop an online community resource called *“One Queen City”*. In our discussions with the creator of the website, we found a way for our work to be reflected in an online format. The people we interviewed, expressed a strong interest in one

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central online location to obtain information. This centralized focus is consistent with the hope of the online effort, and is being developed with Middle Main and the City of Poughkeepsie.

Our interaction with people at Mansion Square Park led us to reflect on the variety of ways people obtain information and a range of interests in how much they even want to know about what's going on. We learned of a "Point of View" board on Main Street, which is an innovative idea on receiving feedback from the community. Most of all, it was gratifying that people wanted to stop and engage with us; they were interested in learning about our project.

Our hope for follow-up includes establishing an online and offline "Ward Board". Where people from the community are charged with serving as the link between gathering information and making sure that its easily obtainable both offline and online. We would also like to explore if there could be paid jobs for people to be information ambassadors working on behalf of organizations, businesses, and campaigns within the community. Our effort to bring the past forward was also successful, as the "pole" was the most popular way people wanted to get information on the street.

Jane McAleve wrote in her book, *No Shortcuts, Organizing for Power*, "It is not merely if ordinary people - so often referred to as the "grassroots" are engaged - but *how, why* and *where* they are engaged." People need to be engaged where they are, based on their interests and needs, not based on professional staffs convenience and interest in obtaining community input. What we learned is summed up by Sarah Salem's experience in opening up the Farm Stand last Friday. The majority of the people that showed up where those who she had invited personally, when she walked the street talking with people earlier in the day. As Jane McAleve's title suggests: there are no shortcuts.

#### **Recommendations:**

Ensuring that the transfer of information within a community is comprehensive and inclusive is a full time job. That being said, we believe that there is an opportunity for job creation, community engagement, as well as improved community stakeholder cohesiveness in the creation of an organization who works on behalf of the community in the transfer and movement of information; **Community Couriers**. Paid Couriers would be tasked with coordinating with existing efforts, organizations, businesses, as well as local government to collect information. Once the information is collected it is sorted, weather proofed, and categorized. As we described in our reflection above, there are different methods for the delivery of information, some of which we surveyed for and tested include; Community Boards, Online Channels, Poles, Street Outreach, and "Ward Walls". Each of these methods will employed as needed by the couriers, and each point of access (if occupying a physical, consistent space) will be maintained by them as well to guarantee that the information is up to date and accurate. These Couriers will also receive and respond to community feedback, which can be administered by each and all of the involved parties. **Community Couriers** is established as a worker, community owned co-op organization and receives payment and income from invested parties including businesses, municipalities, and community organizations at varying rates and forms as determined by operating revenue, use of services, structure of organization.

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### **Survey 1: Northside Community**

**Name/Organization**

**Address:**

**How long have you lived/operated in the City of Poughkeepsie?**

- 1) How do you typically find out what's happening in your community?**
- 2) What kinds of things do you want to know about?**
- 3) How would you like to access information about what's going on?**
- 4) What do you know about the Fallkill Creek?**

**Results:**

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**Comprehensive Spreadsheet of results;**

**<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1M8h63kORM37r9YR2hR4E-Uzfvu26oRtFKK-MAbdPnRg/edit?usp=sharing>**

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### **Survey 2: Mansion Square Park**

**Name:**

**Address:**

**How long have you lived/operated in the City of Poughkeepsie?**

**1) How do you typically find out what's happening in your community?**

**2) What kinds of things do you want to know about?**

**3) How would you prefer to access information about what's going on?**

**4) What kind of physical structure with information on it would catch your eye?**

**Results:**

**Most of whom we surveyed responded that out in the community, by word of mouth was how they preferred to access information. The majority found our Info Pole most attractive and eye-catching as a point of access.**

**Area Surveyed;**

Orange Line: Fallkill Creek

Red Square: Mansion Square Park

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