



SPARKING

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

PRESENTED BY

deNovo



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Foreward

Thanks for downloading this! We're guessing you're a city administrator, elected official, community development professional or you're just one of those people who are really into the place they live—AKA, a superfan.

Here at de Novo, we work with communities to help them find their intrinsic brand story. We believe you have an existing brand. We aren't talking about your logo or a city seal. We're talking about the vibe your community has. That energy and the unique attributes that only your community has. It's what makes where you live and/or work special.

All communities say they have great schools and are welcoming. Most cities have nice people, and it's even getting to the point where many can say they're walkable. Some have a deep historic pride, others may have experienced new growth that leaves them without a core identity. Regardless, your "brand" is already there. We're sharing elements from our process that will help you discover it.

Nothing in this e-book is all that complicated. It is inclusive and meant to drive conversation, which we believe spurs innovation. But it's also meant to discover what communities love about

themselves. **And when we say love, we mean loooooooooove.**

The things your residents and constituents love about your community are your context. Without context, you're just another city. Context gives color and emotion to your spot on the map. Color and emotion are what keep and attract people. The color and context are what help you map out the next 30 years and position your community for future growth and success.

Let's dig in.

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "Jen Neumann". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J".

Jen Neumann

CEO, de Novo Marketing and ICR Iowa Superfan

Chapter 1

WHY SHOULD A COMMUNITY SPARK ENGAGEMENT?

There are different reasons why a city or organization may want to engage their community:

- 1.** They're looking to rebrand and position themselves to attract residents, businesses and/or visitors.
- 2.** They need to understand more about the community.
- 3.** They're making future plans and want their community to feel they are part of the plan.
- 4.** They want to grow as a vibrant community and realize community input is the best way to generate ideas and vision, as well as participation.
- 5.** The community may be experiencing negative conversations, and they want to help direct the community towards productive dialogue and input.
- 6.** Any combination, or all of the above.

A NOTE ON THE NATURE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The reality for many involved in community development is that you spend a lot of time listening to the pain points of constituents. After all, non-squeaking wheels don't need grease—they just roll happily along until something goes wrong.

And on top of residents who need assistance achieving their goals, you'll always have grumps, NIMBYs and CAVE (Citizens Against Virtually Everything) people. Modern communications not only gives a microphone to these folks, but also an amplifier that would make Cher's traveling road show jealous. They easily drown out a complacent, less-vocal majority of folks who aren't willing to go into hand-to-hand combat in the cesspools of the internet with these people.

Engaging with those who care about your community turns the tide of the conversation—in most cases, not all. But our approach will always advocate for constructive dialogue, and lots of it.

THE TYRANNY OF THE MINORITY VS. MOVEABLE MAJORITIES VS. SUPERFANS

Here's a handy graphic to explain this concept:

We all know this guy, right? He's actually a part of a pretty small group. Seems big, but he (and his buddies) are just loud.

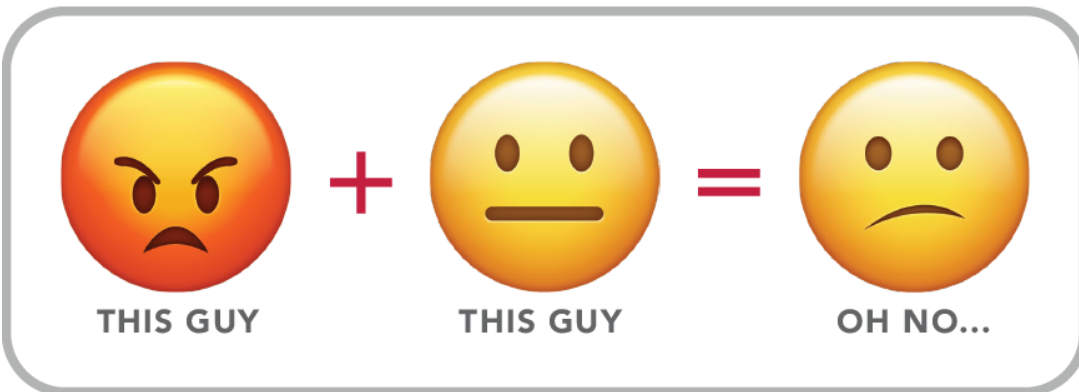


Then there are these people:



They are your moveable majority. They're reasonably content but can be swayed by exposure to positive or negative information. When they get too much of one or the other, they are going to move in that direction.

It stands to reason that with prolonged exposure, this happens:



And over time, they begin to look more like this:



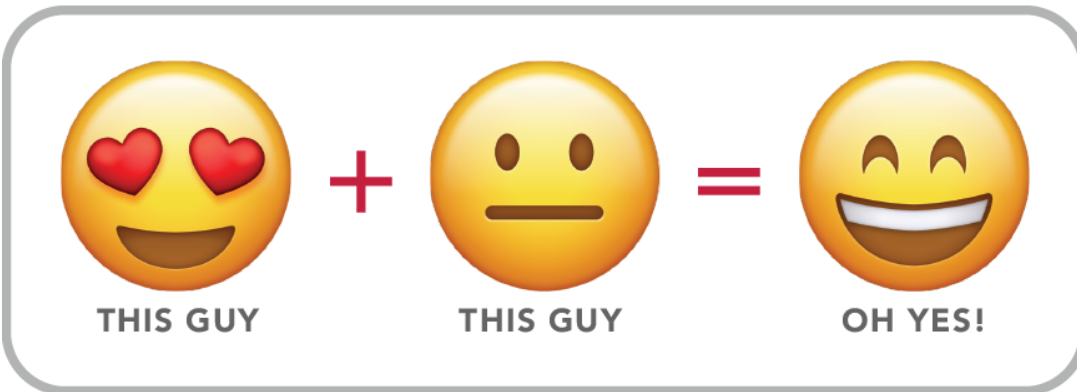
And eventually:



And if things get really bad, it all turns to:



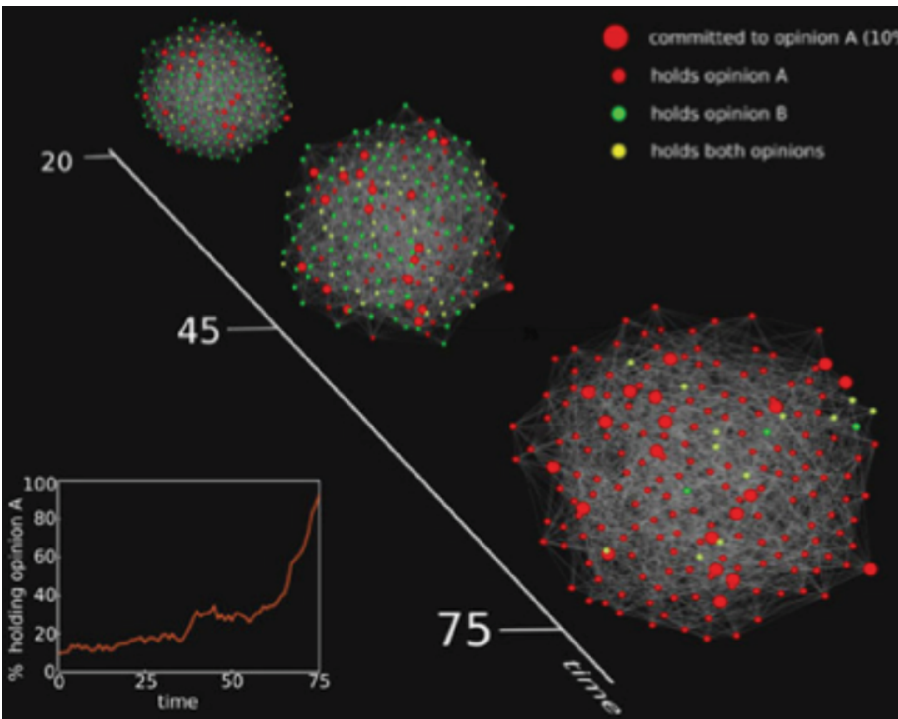
But, if you take the small group of superfans who really love the place they live and provide them with the microphone and amplifier (literally—see Spark Events, later on) then this is what happens:



TALK NERDY TO ME

If we want to get super nerdy about how small minorities can change a population, we point to the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's [study on social influence](#). Rensselaer found that 10% of the population that holds an unshakeable belief about something can tip the scales and move the belief of the overall population to

their way of thinking.



Renssalaer Polytechnic Institute image.

We're not sure this really plays out exactly like the nerds over at Renssalaer think it does in every instance, but almost every community can find 10% of the population who are superfans. And if you support and fan their flames of ardor, you can shift more of your content majority to believe the same.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE A SUPERFAN

Your superfans are the ones who love your community and tell pretty much everyone about it. You're definitely a superfan if you're reading this, but you're also probably a little too close to the process. Superfans share crazy ideas (some crazier than others). Superfans recruit people to live in their community. Superfans rave about the schools, the parks, the trails... They are a rare bird, but not as rare as you think. And their energy can be of huge benefit to a community's future.

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY TO FIND YOUR INTRINSIC BRAND

Most cities deploy some form of a survey or public input process, often to glean specific information, gauge satisfaction or to measure support. They typically have mediocre participation and are either crafted to keep things highly quantitative or are too open-ended, resulting in useless input that doesn't give a prescriptive direction.

Very few (if any) communities seek stagnation. Some are already shrinking, others are experiencing growth at a high rate and want to wrap their arms around how to plan. Some are just plodding along. A little bit of growth. Nothing too exciting.

All communities need to discover what their differentiating factors are to get to what their true intrinsic brand story is. For some, the need is more immediate. For others, it's a longer process.

Public input can be gathered about a lot of things, and it takes different forms. When planned by engineers, it's foam core boards on easels. When planned by a city manager's office, it's a 20 page satisfaction survey.

But what if you simply asked people what they love, and then what their big ideas are for the future?

Chapter 2

HOW TO DISCOVER YOUR COMMUNITY'S INTRINSIC BRAND STORY



intrinsic

INTRINSIC | \IN-'TRIN-ZIK

Belonging to the essential nature or constitution of a thing.

Intrinsic means essential nature. Your intrinsic brand story is what is already there. No consultant can make up a brand that doesn't come from the true nature of the community. Here's our multi-point plan to find your superfans, objectively understand what people love about the community and to think creatively about what your

current unique attributes are, and what they might be in the future.

A NOTE BEFORE WE GO ANY FURTHER

Your superfans are the ones who love your community and tell pretty much everyone about it. We are advocates of an open process designed to draw out the positive. Everyone enjoys a good gripe, however, it's important to find balance in input and be honest and neutral when analyzing responses. You'll uncover/affirm some ugly stuff. **It's ok. *hugs***

STARTING WITH THE OPEN INPUT PROCESS

As a part of de Novo's Intrinsic Brand Discovery Process, we start with a medium length survey that helps us understand the general sentiments of a statistically significant portion of the population, as well as visitors, residents of outlying areas and inbound commuters. This allows us to develop a feel for the community "tone" and begin to uncover those superfans. As we discover those fans, we give them an opportunity to share their stories and ideas.

What else comes from the survey?

OUR PROCESS HAS MULTIPLE INTENTS:

- 1.** Acclimating the community to an inclusive engagement process. The initial survey should be the first of many steps toward engaging your community to drive positive growth.
- 2.** Measuring participation and benchmarking it against future efforts.
- 3.** Documenting and ranking overall community sentiment and

visualizing that sentiment (see word cloud map).

4. Discovering what is most meaningful to your constituents now and in the future.
5. Discovering the superfans, and engaging your creative, big picture thinkers in your community planning and development planning processes. This helps us drive participation in our Spark Events.

TRUTH

A more engaged community is more likely to support improvements and initiatives because they feel they have been given an opportunity to be heard and provide input.

Feedback you may hear from your board/boss/spouse: “Last time we did a survey, the results weren’t great.”

We know. It’s tough. But our survey method is different for a few reasons.

1. It’s coming from a third party.
2. We incentivize participation to dramatically increase participation.
3. We use a process that gets to more than your traditional email list by targeting specific areas with paid boost for extended reach.
4. Our process uncovers the things about your community that people truly believe— including the moveable majority that generally thinks things are going pretty well.

Post-survey

This should be step one in regular engagements. We recommend regular polling opportunities that ask only one question at a time, in order to continue to engage your participants.

Sparking Engagement

We've mentioned before that this isn't complicated. But we will note that it can be nuanced. Our process is derived from multiple types of events we've produced and participated in over the years. Our events are formally called [Spark Events](#). We'd love to help you produce this entire process, but you can also do this on your own. (And if you do—please be creative and name it something else!)



Spark Events are high energy events meant to bring together stories of love and community, spark conversation and share big ideas. These events generate buzz, dialogue, earned media and a feeling of community. Every community is different, and we make sure that we adjust the production to meet that need.

Spark Events: Location! Location! Location!

We like to hold these events in a casual venue that is conducive to performances, has good AV capabilities, often has a food and

beverage service option and is willing to be a community partner (ex. a community theater or large restaurant with a big, open space for catering, seating and a cash bar or beverage stand).

Most of these events are sponsored by municipal entities, which sometimes prohibits the sale of any alcoholic beverages. We do recommend that these events not be held in “community rooms” or City Halls. (Or anywhere that has a color scheme described as “beige.”)

Remember, this event is about sharing ideas. Nothing is binding a community to do anything with them. Some may find private support, such as a mural. Others may find a connection to a local organization that can help this happen. Others yet may spur an idea that the community inserts into their master plan and makes happen. It’s all about ideas that your own community generates because they love where they live.

Our Format

- 1. We devote the first hour to social networking and interactive idea sharing.** This can be participants adding their ideas to huge wall-sized posters, running a live hashtag feed on a screen, adding input via an online sharing platform, an interactive art participation project or any combination that allows people to add their own thoughts without having to be on a stage.
- 2. The emcee matters.** A lot. You need an emcee who understands the structure and goals of the event and brings a ton of energy to the stage. This person should be able to command a room easily, get peoples’ attention, notice when it may be waning—

and know how to win it back.

- 3. The participants:** When you open up public participation, you often don't know what you will get. When we hold Spark Events, we use an online form to gather interest and willingness to share. Through our survey, social media and partner networks, we actively seek out the superfans, the crazy idea generators and the people who have the ability to think big picture, and we encourage them to participate. There is some level of recruitment that needs to happen at the community level.
- 4. The sharing format:** After the emcee opens the stage to participants, each will have five minutes on the stage to share their story/idea. The story should go with the idea, but an idea can also be presented alone. They can have a presentation, but it should have no more than three words to a slide and should be large images. At the end of five minutes, a signal is given and they have to wrap up in 10 seconds or less.

WHY, YOU ASK? Because no one can read boring paragraphs that fast. Slides should be image-centric and have no more than three words to a slide.

THIS PORTION CAN BE LIVE-STREAMED ON FACEBOOK. A moderator should be monitoring for appropriate content.

- 5. After all the presentations, the audience can vote** either online (with a text to vote program) or via ballots that will be shared out later.

WHAT DOES THE TOP VOTE-GETTER RECEIVE?

Nothing. Just the satisfaction of knowing their idea was well-

received and that they are appreciated.

6. Wrap up the event with a thank you and the importance of community engagement in the future of the community.

We know you're wondering, "What if someone gets up there and is really negative or inappropriate?" We can't promise it won't happen. But this isn't an event where everyone gets to stand up and talk. This is an event where people submit their stories and ideas in advance, and the committee should decide which of the 10 go forward.

Chapter 3

FINALLY, WHAT DO YOU DO WITH THIS INFORMATION?

Maybe you are rebranding and positioning your community. Or perhaps launching a campaign to attract new residents. Maybe you are looking 30 years down the road and generating the vision and roadmap to be the best city in the U.S. of A.

Whatever your intentions are, engaging your community around innovation and future thinking will pay dividends. An engaged community is more likely to understand the importance of investments in schools, infrastructure, public art, affordable housing and the amenities that will help your community thrive as U.S. populations begin to shift due to economic, political and environmental factors.

If reading this makes you both excited and a little exhausted, give us a call. Community engagement, brand storytelling, positioning and facilitating the visioning process is what we do.

No foam core boards or easels allowed.

Thanks for reading this.

You can find more information and content on our website at [**THINKDENOVO.COM**](http://THINKDENOVO.COM).