

Dialogic Connections: An Analysis of Groundwork Anacostia River, DC's Use of Facebook and
Twitter
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Abstract

The recent development of social media websites makes it much easier for organizations to interact with the community they are trying to reach. Research has been done regarding the most effective types of social media for this task, as well as how those websites can be used best to benefit the organization. This essay analyzes the Facebook posts and tweets of Groundwork Anacostia River, DC (GWARDC) and uses frameworks laid out by Lovejoy and Saxton to determine whether or not GWARDC is creating dialogic connections with their audience. To do this, the Lovejoy and Saxton framework, originally designed to analyze tweets made by organizations, is applied to Facebook posts. I analyze Groundwork's use of Facebook and Twitter and determine that they are on the right track to forming dialogic connections with their audience, however their practices still need to be refined for dialogic connections to occur.

Introduction

The presence of social media in the nonprofit communication sphere has increased dramatically over the past decade. The development of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram has made it easier to communicate a large amount of information to lots of people within a short period of time. As these new platforms gain popularity among the masses, the use of conventional websites is being questioned.

Companies and organizations, both for-profit and not-for-profit, utilize websites extensively to communicate with their audience. For nonprofits, which will be focus of this essay, the three groups that compose their audience are volunteers, donors, and other organizations similar to them. Websites act as a hub of information for an organization, allowing them to create a central location from which their audience can learn more about their practices and ideas. With the emergence of social media in the last couple of decades, nonprofits are moving towards using sites such as Facebook and Twitter to connect with individuals.

While most nonprofits utilize social media in some way, there are still the questions of which of these sites they should use and, furthermore, how they can best use those sites. Are there more efficient ways to use Twitter and Facebook than not? Should organizations operate these accounts based on frameworks laid out by scholars?

In order to attempt to answer these questions, I will study the social media habits of an environmental nonprofit organization called Groundwork Anacostia River, DC (GWARDC). This is a small organization based in Anacostia, DC, which focuses on environmental education and recreation for high school students. They rely mostly on their website to relay information to their audience. However, more recently Groundwork has been utilizing their Facebook and Twitter pages to communicate more with their desired audience. Whether or not they are using these pages effectively, however, is not entirely clear.

Overview of Social Media

Nonprofits have used websites to communicate information to their audience since the creation of the Internet itself. However, as the world rapidly approaches a time in which the Internet is no longer seen as revolutionary, there is a question developing regarding the relevance of websites.

The generation born after Generation X, also known as the Millennial Generation, has not known a world in which the Internet does not exist. When the Internet first went public it was such a different concept than anyone had ever imagined. One of the biggest fundamental differences between Generation X and the Millennials is that the Internet did not exist for all of Generation X's lifespan. The Millennials, on the other hand, have been using the Internet for their entire lives as they have grown up. Many teenagers and children these days are much more technologically savvy than their Generation X parents because they have used the Internet all their life.

In the past two decades, social media has become a 'fact of life for civil society worldwide' as more people and organizations use it as a communication tool¹. As the proportion of the world population that has grown up with the Internet increases, the need for innovative technology increases with it. People who have used the Internet for their entire lives are no longer intrigued by websites or social media platforms. It takes much more creativity and innovation to impress the Millennials, especially because they have grown up in a technological

¹ Clay Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change," *Foreign Affairs*, (2011): 1.

world that is constantly being renovated. In order to counter this insensitivity, new social media sites are being created regularly. Pre-existing sites are also being updated so that user interest does not deteriorate.

While they are technologically more knowledgeable, the Millennial generation is also lazier than previous generations. They have become accustomed to having the world at their fingertips through the development of laptops and smart phones. For many of these individuals, the information must be practically placed in front of them in order for them to absorb it. They are, generally speaking, less driven to acquire new information unless it is very easily accessible.

Social media sites, such as Facebook, compact information into one place where a user can quickly learn about an organization. Due to the constant revitalization of social media platforms, other types of websites are beginning to fall behind. Social media platforms make it easier for organizations to compile their most crucial information in one space, such as a Facebook page or Twitter bio. It is extremely easy to go onto Facebook or Twitter and type in the name of an organization, pull up their page, and scroll through the most recent posts. Through this process individuals can obtain large amounts of information about an organization very quickly. If the organization has attached a link to their website through the social media site, the individual may then visit the website.

Along with the aforementioned differences between social media platforms and other websites, the difference most relevant to this particular analysis is that SM platforms create a space in which dialogic connections can occur. They allow for interaction between members of a community in an organized and monitored fashion.

The Importance of Dialogic Connections

A topic that has become increasingly prevalent in the literature surrounding social media and nonprofit organizations is the importance of dialogue, specifically the formation of dialogic connections between organizations and their audiences. Dialogue can occur in various social media sites in a number of different ways, depending on the features of the site. With Twitter, users have the option of retweeting, hashtagging, or replying to a public tweet to connect with other tweeters. Facebook allows users to like, share, or comment on the posts made by other organizations or people.

Dialogic communication can be defined as “a process of two-way, open, and negotiated discussion, where participants are able to exchange ideas and opinions freely, acknowledging the value of each other.”² Possibly the most important portion of dialogic connections is that they must be two-way. In order for interaction to be an actual dialogue between two or more parties, there must be input from either side to the conversation. If there is not input from both parties, what results is the dissemination of information from one group to another. While this type of information exchange is necessary in order for organizations to make themselves known to their audience, it does not constitute dialogic connection.

Dialogic connections between organizations and their audiences are crucial to their evolution as an organization within an increasingly social media-oriented world. With this essay, I will attempt to determine whether or not GWARDC is using Facebook and Twitter to foster dialogic communication between itself and its audience.

² Daejoong Kim, Heasun Chun, Youngsun Kwak & Yoonjae Nam, “The Employment of Dialogic Principles in Website, Facebook, and Twitter Platforms of Environmental Nonprofit Organizations,” *Social Science Computer Review*, no. 32 (2014): 591.

Information, Community and Action Framework

In order to review and analyze GWARDC's use of Facebook and Twitter, a framework will be necessary to make sure that the analysis is done in a fair and un-biased manner. To do this I will use the framework Lovejoy and Saxton presented in 2012 for viewing and analyzing the Twitter habits of nonprofit organizations³. Lovejoy and Saxton are both researchers at the University at Buffalo, SUNY in the Department of Communication. Their research focuses on social media and nonprofit organizations specifically. The framework they laid out is in relation to the types of tweets sent out by organizations, and subsequently the type of dialogic interactions those tweets then promote.

Most organizations send out tweets that can be categorized as "informational."⁴ These tweets contain information about "the organization's activities, highlights from events, or any other news, facts, reports, or information relevant to an organization's stakeholders."⁴ These tweets do not foster much of a dialogue between the audience and the organization itself; instead, they function mainly as a "one-way information exchange."⁵

Lovejoy and Saxton then go on to discuss the next level of tweets an organization can send out which are "community" tweets⁴. These are tweets made by an organization to facilitate "the creation of an online *community* with its followers."⁵ This group consists of tweets that are made in order to encourage direct dialogue between the two parties, and those whose purpose is to "[strengthen] ties to the online community" without necessarily involving an explicit interaction⁶.

Finally, "action" tweets consist of messages intended to spark mobilization among the organization's followers⁵. These tweets involve "promotional" uses of messages in which users are seen as "a resource that can be mobilized" to help the organization with the work they need to do⁷. Tweets falling into the action-based category promote involvement with the organization that occurs outside the realm of social media.

Although it seems that organizations should be very focused on creating a dialogic connection between themselves and their audience, the majority of the organizations analyzed in this study fell into the "information" category⁴. This may be because this is the easiest type, of the three types listed here, of tweet to send out. Information-based tweets are very one-dimensional and do not require a follow-up by the community organization. Groups can send out tweets as they wish to and do not have an obligation to interact with the community. However, this does not help the organization to foster relationships with their audience members. The case is the same for the "community" and "action" based tweets. When used singularly the individual paradigms are not strong enough to adequately communicate all that an organization wishes to.

³ Kristen Lovejoy & Gregory D. Saxton, "Information, Community, and Action: How Nonprofit Organizations Use Social Media," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, no. 17 (2012)

⁴ Kristen Lovejoy & Gregory D. Saxton, "Information, Community, and Action: How Nonprofit Organizations Use Social Media," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, no. 17 (2012): 341.

⁵ Kristen Lovejoy & Gregory D. Saxton, "Information, Community, and Action: How Nonprofit Organizations Use Social Media," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, no. 17 (2012): 343.

⁶ Kristen Lovejoy & Gregory D. Saxton, "Information, Community, and Action: How Nonprofit Organizations Use Social Media," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, no. 17 (2012): 344.

⁷ Kristen Lovejoy & Gregory D. Saxton, "Information, Community, and Action: How Nonprofit Organizations Use Social Media," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, no. 17 (2012): 345.

Using Twitter in a solely information, community, or action-based way is not the most efficient way to utilize the resource. Lovejoy and Saxton argue that the paradigms should be used hierarchically instead of individually³. In their study, they discuss that when used orderly and precisely these types of tweets can work together to the organization's advantage. First, the organization should use tweets categorized as "informational" in order to make them better known within the Twitter sphere. Once they have established themselves, the organization moves to community-based tweets. These help foster involvement and begin to connect the organization to their audience. Finally, the organization should employ tweets that promote "action" among the community they are targeting. By this time, the audience that has been following the Twitter behavior of the organization will be invested and willing to act for the benefit of the organization.

Lovejoy and Saxton do not stop their discussion of the framework at this step. They continue on to state that in order for organizations to use Twitter to its maximum capacity, they must employ all of these steps at once. They essentially argue that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Community organizations are constantly growing in size and, subsequently, are increasing their connection to the community. They must employ tweets regarding "information" to not only grab the interest of new audience members, but also to update their current followers on information regarding the organization. The situation is similar in regards to the "community" paradigm. This portion of the interaction is the beginning of audience involvement. Once followers feel that they are involved and participating in the work of the organization, they will respond even more to calls to "action" by the organization. These calls to "action" must occur frequently enough to maintain the interest of the audience, however not to the point at which their meaning is lost.

Lovejoy and Saxton, at the end of their discussion, emphasized that these techniques be used as a "ladder" instead of individually⁸. They specify that the information is used to "attract" followers, who are then engaged with the organization through the community-based tweets, and go on to mobilize through "action" after building up that knowledge base through information and community. When these three categories of messages are used hierarchically and simultaneously, they can create the dialogic connections that organizations need in order to successfully connect with their audience.

Applying Lovejoy and Saxton's Framework to Facebook

Lovejoy and Saxton employ the three categories – information, community and action – to analyze the Twitter rhetoric of community organizations. These categories can also be used to analyze Facebook posts of nonprofits. For the purpose of studying Groundwork's social media habits, both Facebook and Twitter need to be analyzed in order to gain a complete view of their use of social media. The framework can be directly applied to Facebook while maintaining the information, community, and action categories. The information category, when applied to Facebook, includes posts made that do not foster any type of dialogic connection between the organization and the audience. These are posts that are solely used to inform the public about the workings and happenings of the organization. The community category consists of posts that encourage interaction and involvement through Facebook by the target audience and the organization itself. Finally, the posts categorized as "action" encouraged involvement with the organization outside of the realm of Facebook. These posts are used for calling the community to

⁸ Kristen Lovejoy & Gregory D. Saxton, "Information, Community, and Action: How Nonprofit Organizations Use Social Media," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, no. 17 (2012): 350.

participate with and for the organization. With this framework we can look at the Facebook and Twitter practices of Groundwork Anacostia River, DC in order to determine how efficiently they are using these tools.

Overview of Groundwork Anacostia River, DC (GWARDC)

Groundwork is an organization based in Anacostia, DC that functions as a smaller trust of Groundwork USA. They are a small nonprofit focused on increasing the environmental awareness, education and recreation of high school students and their communities. GWARDC's largest program is their Green Team initiative. This is an after-school program for which high school students apply and are selected. The students work with Dominique Skinner, the GWARDC Programs Coordinator, and learn about different environmental issues facing their community along with ways to counteract those issues. The students then perform some of the work within the community necessary to combat these problems. Groundwork also hosts various events throughout the year, such as hikes and Days in the Park to engage the community and encourage interaction through environmental work⁹.

Within the past couple of years Groundwork has moved towards using their social media websites more regularly. Their most frequently updated sites are their Facebook and Twitter pages. GWARDC posts to Twitter frequently, usually at least multiple times per week. Their Facebook posts are slightly more sporadic, often manifesting as multiple posts in one day followed by a period of no posts. This piece is not attempting to analyze how frequently GWARDC posts on their social media pages and whether that is efficient, but rather the type of posts they are making and whether their posts are targeted towards forming dialogic connections. Further, I will attempt to answer whether or not Groundwork is fostering dialogic connections within their social media platforms, and if not, in what ways they could change their practices in order to do so.

Groundwork's Use of Facebook

To begin the analysis of Groundwork's social media practices I will analyze their most recent Facebook posts to gain an understanding of the way they use this website. The majority of Groundwork's Facebook posts fall into the "information" category laid out by Lovejoy and Saxton⁴. Over a three month time period from August 8, 2014 to November 8, 2014, Groundwork posted to their Facebook page a total of fifteen times. Of those fifteen posts, twelve fall into the information category. However, while the majority of their posts were information based, Groundwork's "information" category was still more interactive than it may seem at the surface level⁴.

The majority of Groundwork's information posts on Facebook involved photographs of Green Team events. These were usually created as photo albums and then posted onto their main Facebook page, or the photographs were attached to a post made to the main page. Posts with photographs attached to them were categorized as informational because they are relaying information about the events that occurred at the Green Team meeting. Part of the Groundwork audience group is high school students who have some sort of previous connection to the organization, most likely through peers at school, and who may be interested in working with the Green Teams during their high school career. Uploading the photos to Facebook allows people looking into Groundwork from the outside sphere, whether they are donors, potential volunteers,

⁹ Groundwork Anacostia River DC, Website, www.groundworkdc.org

or people trying to learn more about the organization, to physically see the organization at work. Photographs of the Green Team at work allow Groundwork to present arguably the best program of the organization in a manner that utilizes more involvement than just text on a screen.

Over the three-month period Groundwork made one post categorized as “community”⁵. The post was made to promote an online fundraising campaign in which Groundwork was partnering with the Johnsonville sausage company. The post included text encouraging readers to follow the link to the campaign website where they could support Groundwork at no personal cost. It is categorized as community because while it does not explicitly begin the creation of an online community, it encourages community members to participate in an activity benefitting the organization online.

Groundwork’s two action posts are technically two separate posts made by the organization on separate days; however, the posts contained the exact same wording. The posts consisted of a text paragraph about volunteering to “clean up our waterways” accompanied by a graphic, essentially an online flyer, explaining the details of the event¹⁰. The posts were encouraging participation in these events by volunteers, donors, and other community members connected to GWARDC’s Facebook page. While the event was primarily to improve the river, it was also an opportunity for attendees to gain insight into the inner-workings of Groundwork. Once people had the opportunity to see the organization in action, they would be more likely to contribute their time or money to the cause.

Groundwork’s Use of Twitter

The same three month time period of August 8, 2014 to November 8, 2014 used to examine Groundwork’s use of Facebook was also used to evaluate their Twitter habits. Groundwork’s Twitter posts during this time were much more evenly spread across the three categories of Information, Community and Action. Over the three month time period GWARDC had seven tweets categorized as information, six categorized as community, six categorized as action, and one that did not relate to the work they were doing as an organization.

All but one of Groundwork’s “information” tweets contained a hyperlink to another website⁴. Most of them were articles on various topics that relate to the environment in and around DC or environmental education. While these were categorized as “information” because they did not foster direct communication between entities, they are still encouraging online activity⁴. Many of Groundwork’s information posts on Facebook did this as well, by posting photos online for people to look through. While this does not directly correlate to an increase in the amount of communication between the two parties, it helps create the platform within which that communication has the potential to grow.

Approximately half of the tweets by GWARDC that were categorized as “community” involved the direct, online action of community members⁵. Two of the tweets included hyperlinks to an online sponsorship campaign Groundwork undertook with the Johnsonville sausage company (the same campaign as in the aforementioned Facebook posts). Followers could click on the link and would be taken to a page on which they could donate to GWARDC without needing to contribute any money personally. In order to fundraise on the behalf of Groundwork, individuals had to simply follow a few basic steps, such as signing up for a newsletter and answering a few questions. This made the campaign much more popular among

¹⁰ Groundwork Anacostia River DC, Facebook Post, September 19, 2014

individuals because it did not require them to spend any of their own money, nor did it involve the hassles that come with donating money online.

One of the tweets included in this category was an example of inter-organizational interaction on Twitter. Groundwork retweeted one of the Potomac Piranhas tweets, an organization that works to “bring together the business and environmental communities¹¹”. The tweet was originally made to @PotomacPiranhas by the Prince George’s Green (PGG) Twitter page. PGG is an organization invested in growing the green economy in Prince George’s County, MD¹². Therefore, this interaction involved three environmental organizations in and around the DC area. The “community” paradigm involves fostering interaction between the organization and their audience, which for all organizations involves other groups performing similar work to their own⁵. Interaction online between organizations is as important as communication between organizations and potential volunteers or donors. Organizations, especially nonprofits, are constantly growing and evolving, part of which is due to learning from other organizations like them.

One of the tweets in this category was a small piece of text asking individuals to sign a petition that was to be sent to the EPA, asking them to cut carbon pollution. Signing the petition was as easy for online community members as typing their name and email address when redirected to the website. While this post did not encourage direct communication between the organization and members of its audience, it fulfills the portion of the “community” paradigm that is focused on the beginnings of mobilization⁵. The “action” posts are those meant to directly encourage mobilization of resources and individuals for the cause⁵. However, the community-based posts can begin this process by increasing mobilization efforts online, which this tweet does.

The majority of Groundwork’s posts within the “action” category were invitations to events⁵. Four of the six tweets either included an address and time period for an event or had an attached hyperlink to a page where individuals could register. These events were the Washington Post Award Application Session, a Business Opportunity Reception, Celebrating the Future of the Anacostia, and a Coalition International Leadership Training Team event¹³. Followers of the Twitter account were invited to attend the events and connect in person with the Groundwork management team. The other two events that were promoted on the Twitter page were both encouraging GWARDC followers to vote in the election on November 4. While this does not encourage interaction between Groundwork as an organization and their audience, it nevertheless involves audience members interacting with the community, which is part of Groundwork’s mission. Groundwork’s inherent goal is to make their community more connected, which they choose to encourage through environmental activities and awareness. Voting encourages individuals to have input into the way their community will function; therefore, these tweets can be categorized appropriately as “action⁵”.

Analysis of Groundwork’s Use of Twitter – Are They Fostering Dialogic Communication?

After looking at GWARDC’s Facebook and Twitter posts we can begin to notice patterns within their use of these sites and subsequent consequences from those patterns. Groundwork’s

¹¹ Potomac Piranhas, Website, www.potomacpiranhas.org

¹² Prince George’s Green, Website, www.pggreen.org

¹³ Groundwork Anacostia River DC, Twitter Feed, 2014

Twitter page does an excellent job of presenting all three paradigms evenly. Lovejoy and Saxton emphasize that when this framework is being employed by an organization, it should be employed as an entire system. An organization cannot focus directly on making one type of post and be successful in their use of social media. They must consistently utilize all three as equally as possible. Groundwork's Twitter page not only uses all three categories of posts equally, but also successfully interchanges the order of the types of posts made. The tweets are not always in an information, community, action order; often there will be multiples of one type of tweet made in a row followed by multiple tweets of another type. Randomizing the order of the tweets sent maintains the interest of all groups of individuals following Groundwork's Twitter account. If too many of one type of tweet was sent out in a period of time, audience members who identify more with one of the other types may become disinterested and cease to follow the account.

Despite the fact that Groundwork is using their Twitter in the way that Lovejoy and Saxton recommend for organizations of this type, ie by incorporating all three types of tweets, there is still not the presence of dialogic connections. One of the most crucial components of these connections is that the result is an exchange between the community partner and the audience members. Groundwork, through its Twitter account, does an excellent job of reaching out to the community and attempting to interact with them through social media and subsequently in person. However, there is little to no response being made by the audience members. The conversation is one-sided and because of this cannot be categorized as dialogic connection.

There needs to be more exchange and interaction between GWARDC and their audience for their practices to be considered "dialogic connection³". This can occur in a number of different ways, such as community members retweeting, hashtagging, or favoriting tweets that Groundwork sends out. A possible area of study for future research within this field could be that given these conditions, how could nonprofits of GWARDC's size effectively foster dialogic connections between themselves and their audience? Groundwork is clearly putting in the effort with their Twitter account to create these connections, and no more can be done on their side. However, the involvement by the community members is not as prominent as it needs to be in order for these connections to come to fruition. Therefore, the lack of interaction could be the result of a failing on the part of the organization or the community as a whole.

Overall, GWARDC is using their Twitter account in the way that Lovejoy and Saxton recommend in their study. They are incorporating all three types of tweets and are interchanging the types of tweets they send out regularly. Groundwork's Facebook, however, is not being used as efficiently as their Twitter. The Facebook account does not seem to receive as much attention from the organization itself as the Twitter account does, from an outsider's perspective. Many of the posts made to the Facebook account occurred on the same day, whereas tweets seemed to be more spread out.

Analysis of Groundwork's Use of Facebook

When just looking at GWARDC's Facebook posts, the organization's social media presence comes across as very information-oriented. Their Facebook activity does not indicate the strong presence of dialogic connections. The majority of Groundwork's posts on their Facebook page consist of textual excerpts with attached photos of Green Team events. While these encourage people to find out more about the organization and see the students in action, it does not allow for much active participation by the audience.

In order to successfully form the dialogic connections that they need to form in order to function on social media successfully, Groundwork needs to utilize their Facebook page to its full capacity. To do this they must increase the amount of community and action posts they are making. If possible, they need to make a community post and an action post each time they post an information post before they make another information post. In other words, the amount of information, community and action posts made needs to be equal. This is the only way to build upon the knowledge and relationships being formed through these online interactions.

Once Groundwork increases their community and action-based posts, they will have reached the same point with their Facebook page that they are currently at with their Twitter account. Once this point has been reached, if there is again a lack of interaction with the community members, the question of whether or not this is the fault of Groundwork may again arise. The interaction with members of the community on Facebook will be more difficult to gauge, considering that many of the individuals may look through the photo albums or read all of the posts without explicitly taking action themselves. However, unless actions such as liking, sharing or commenting on posts or photographs that are posted occur, the relationships GWARDC is fostering cannot be classified as dialogic.

Groundwork has the potential to be very dialogically connected to its audience members. Their Twitter account has already created a space for online interaction and community involvement by their audience members. By increasing their Facebook posts and encouraging more community involvement through their Facebook page, Groundwork will become an even better known name within the social media world of their audience members. Their follower base will continue to grow as will their presence in the social media world. GWARDC may be a small nonprofit, however they have the capability to be very influential in the District of Columbia environmental education world, granted they can utilize social media to foster the dialogic connections necessary to reach that point.

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Groundwork's Facebook –August 8 2014 - November 8 2014

Posts:

1. **11/6/14:** GWARDC (Groundwork Anacostia River DC): Hello Groundwork Supporter. If you have not had a chance to support the youth in our green team program, you still have time. Just click on the link below and follow the few steps. It is quick, easy, and FREE! We just need you to "Support this Group" and Johnsonville will donate the money to our program. Thank you for your

continuous

support!https://www.pearup.com/groundworkdc/rally?og=329421&fb_action_ids=10152825496982154&fb_action_types=pearupapp%3Ashare

Link: "Groundwork Anacostia River DC" + Johnsonville sponsorship

2. **10/21/14:** GWARDC (Groundwork Anacostia River DC): The District Department of Environment has completed yet another wonderful Stream Restoration project. Broad Branch Stream has been day lighted and on it's way to being restored. During the celebration of the project, the Green-Teamers from Groundwork Anacostia River DC was able to complete a water quality demonstration for the community members and partners. Our young people did an amazing job explaining the importance of monitoring the stream and how we all can help to increase the health of the stream. #SustainableDC#GreenTeamRocks
PLUS 23 photos added
3. **10/16/14:** GWARDC (Groundwork Anacostia River DC): Green-teamers touring the Fort Circle Trail and learning about invasive plants with Julie Kutruff from the National Park Service.
Photos: 14 photos
4. **10/8/14:** GWARDC (Groundwork Anacostia River DC): Water monitoring training with green-teamers at Dunbar High School. — at [Dunbar High School](#)
PLUS 7 photos
5. **10/8/14:** GWARDC (Groundwork Anacostia River DC): <http://www.potomacpiranhas.org/>
6. **10/8/14:** GWARDC (Groundwork Anacostia River DC): Thanks to the Shenandoah National Park Trust, the Green-teamers from Groundwork Anacostia, [Groundwork Richmond](#), and [Groundwork Hudson Valley](#) were able to experience week long adventures in the beautiful Shenandoah Mountains. During their time in Shenandoah National Park, they were able to help maintain trails and remove invasive plants, hike the Appalachian trail, and learn about the history of the park. Thanks again SNAPT! This summer was a great one.
<http://us1.campaign-archive1.com/?u=15b87fa36996ffa4059f7b57e&id=29f3fdb20b&e=d8666ebd85>
Link: "SNPT Awards Nearly \$200,000 to Shenandoah National Park"
7. **10/3/14:** GWARDC (Groundwork Anacostia River DC): The work the Anacostia Watershed Society does is incredible. Check out the Anacostia River through the years in honor of their 25th anniversary!
Link: "Visions of the city's "other river" throughout history"
8. **9/22/14:** GWARDC (Groundwork Anacostia River DC): The "Clean Waterways" Cleanup with Anacostia Riverkeeper and Groundwork Anacostia River DC! 9.20.2014
Photos: 37 photos
9. **9/19/14:** GWARDC (Groundwork Anacostia River DC): COME OUT TO VOLUNTEER!!!
We need your help to clean up our waterways! Come out to volunteer this Saturday, Sept 20th from 9am-12:30pm to the Clean Waterways Cleanup at Kenilworth Recreation Park in Northeast D.C. We hope to see you there!
Photo: flyer explaining the event
10. **9/16/14:** GWARDC (Groundwork Anacostia River DC): We need your help to clean up our waterways! Come out to volunteer this Saturday, Sept 20th from 9am-12:30pm to the Clean Waterways Cleanup at Kenilworth Recreation Park in Northeast D.C. We hope to see you there!
Photo: same as previous
11. **9/12/14:** GWARDC (Groundwork Anacostia River DC): Yesterday was the first Green Team outing with our new green teamers from Washington Math Science (WMST) Public Charter at the Washington Youth Garden in the National Arboretum. They were able to plant radishes and beets, pick vegetables, and help make a dish in just one visit. What a great way to start off the year.
Photos: 37 photos

- 12. 9/9/14:** GWARDC (Groundwork Anacostia River DC): Green Team Kickoff Event this past Sunday with art, poetry, and music with women of Ecohermana! What better way to start the school year off than with some fun near the Anacostia River. [#GreenTeam2014/2015](#) is ready for an amazing year.
Photos: 20 photos
- 13. 9/9/14:** GWARDC (Groundwork Anacostia River DC): George Washington University Freshman Day of Service with Groundwork Anacostia River DC on September 6th. These GW freshman students did an amazing job cleaning trash from the Bandalong Litter trap in Watts Branch Stream and the Anacostia River. Thanks for the great work GW [The George Washington University](#)
Photos: 26 photos
- 14. 8/28/14:** GWARDC (Groundwork Anacostia River DC): Green Team Camping and Working in Photo Album Title: Shenandoah National Park 2014
Trail Maintenance and AT hiking
Photos: 29 photos
- 15. 8/28/14:** GWARDC (Groundwork Anacostia River DC): Groundwork USA and Anacostia in Yellowstone 2014
Photo Album Title: Groundwork's Green Teamers Ground Workin' it in Yellowstone National Park
Photos: 20 photos

Groundwork's Twitter – August 8 2014 - November 8 2014

Posts

1. **11/7/14:** @GWARDC: Engaging the east side <http://wapo.st/1tJlrsr> DC, we can do this! Our elected leaders need the will and the residents deserve to have this.
2. **11/7/14:** @GWARDC: I'm going to "The Washington Post 2015 Award Application Information Session MD". See you there? <http://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-washington-post-2015-award-application-information-session-md-tickets-14049567635?aff=estw> ... via [@eventbrite](#)
Link: Registration for event
3. **11/3/14:** @GWARDC: On Tues. Nov. 11 at 6:30pm You're Invited to a Life Changing Business Opportunity Reception at 3939 Benning Rd. NE. Limited seating! BYOB!
4. **11/3/14:** @GWARDC: VOTE November 4th, 2014! Your Vote Counts! <http://lnkd.in/dRRCXk8>
Link: California Greenworks Inc., Your Vote Counts
5. **11/3/14:** @GWARDC: VOTE November 4th 2014!
6. **11/2/14:** @GWARDC: eepurl.com/6-B-L The Community Foundation Announces Second Round Recipients of the City Fund Grant. Groundwork Anacostia awarded.
Link: The City Fund article about the grant recipients
7. **11/2/14:** @GWARDC: Help Groundwork Anacostia River DC score sponsorship support on Pear <https://www.pearup.com/groundworkdc/rally> ... via [@Pear_says](#)
Link: PearUp Groundwork Anacostia River DC + Johnsonville Sponsorship
8. **10/31/14:** @GWARDC: Twitter Buttons <https://about.twitter.com/resources/buttons> ... via [@twitter](#)
9. **10/31/14:** @GWARDC: Help Groundwork Anacostia River DC score sponsorship support on Pear <https://www.pearup.com/groundworkdc> via [@Pear_says](#)
Link: Same as before
10. **10/29/14:** @GWARDC: Thanks [@MaryCheh](#) & [@CMDGrosso](#) for leading the charge to secure safe & affordable transportation options for DC riders! [@Uber_DC](#) [#UberDCLove](#)
11. **10/27/14:** @GWARDC: Video <http://blog.childrenandnature.org/video/Ask> yourself, What is nature deficit-disorder? I wonder why?
Link: Children and Nature website

12. **10/26/14:** @GWARDC: Growth is good! Smart growth is better! Be a part of the growth.
13. **10/26/14:** @GWARDC: The "green" movement has moved a a level far beyond its infancy days. Now, billions of dollars are being invested. Get on board!
14. **10/25/14:** @GWARDC: @PotomacPiranhas: Thank you all for coming to hackathon 1.0 !!
[@AlexandriaETC](#) [@LivabilityProj](#) <http://www.pggreen.org/>
 Link: Prince George's Green
 Photo: Group photograph
15. **10/21/14:** @GWARDC: The little-known tool Republicans will use if they win the Senate | <http://MoveOn.Org> | Democracy In Action
<http://front.moveon.org/reconciliation/#.VEZG8Tu33jg.twitter> ...
 Link: Video about "reconciliation," MoveOn.org
16. **10/19/14:** @GWARDC: I'm attending Celebrating the Future... –
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/celebrating-the-future-of-the-anacostia-tickets-13525865227?ref=estwenivtefor001> ...
 Link: Celebrating the Future of the Anacostia, Eventbrite
17. **10/19/14:** @GWARDC: The most tremendous opportunity to change the course of your family's future for generations. Make the decision, check out ACN!
18. **10/15/14:** @GWARDC: This cause is close to my heart, please sign:
<http://action.groundswell-mvmt.org/petitions/deadline-soon-tell-the-epa-to-cut-carbon-pollution-now?bucket=&source=twitter-share-button> ... via [@groundswellmvmt](#)
 Link: Groundswell: Tell the EPA to cut carbon pollution now petition
19. **10/7/14:** @GWARDC: Study: Bay cleanup would bring \$22B boon to states DC, MD, VA all connected by the water http://www.heraldmillmedia.com/news/local/study-bay-cleanup-would-bring-b-boon-to-states/article_fdbb0b4c-856e-50c6-aafa-cff69bf853ad.html#.VDPoYJVyNKM.twitter ... via [@heraldmailnews](#)
 Link: Study: Bay cleanup would bring \$22B boon to states; Herald-Mail Media
20. **10/5/14:** @GWARDC: I'm attending Coalition International Regional Event
<http://conta.cc/1nuUogi> [#constantcontact](#) Are you looking for an opportunity? Here it is!
 Link: event Registration

Learning through Social Media: How a Nonprofit's Use of Facebook and Twitter Turned into Research

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During my freshman year of college I enrolled in a service learning-based, first-year writing course. All first-years at my university, The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., are required to take this course. The program, called University Writing (UW), focuses on teaching students how to write academic research papers to prepare them for their futures in academic learning. Each UW has its own topic about which the students write; however, the format for the classes is similar across the different sections.

My UW professor, Dr. Phyllis Ryder, is a published scholar in her field of study—academic writing about service learning, specifically how service can be used to teach students writing skills and where exactly writing and service intersect. Her UW course, titled *Writing for Social Change: Writing with DC Community Organizations*, teaches students how to conduct research and present their findings in conjunction with volunteering at a local community organization. At the beginning of the course students select an organization with which to work; they then begin volunteering while at the same time beginning to learn how to write academically.

I decided to work with an environmental nonprofit called Groundwork Anacostia River, DC (GWARDC) for the duration of the semester. Groundwork focuses on environmental education and recreation for high school students in the D.C. area, specifically in Ward 7. Students are usually involved with Groundwork for a year or two. The Executive Director and Volunteer and Events Coordinator construct a curriculum each semester that they then teach the students each week. Their goal is to teach the students about the environmental problems facing their communities as well as how to combat those problems. Once the students complete the academic portion of each module, they go out into the communities and practice what they learned. This can be anything from cleaning out a litter trap in the Anacostia River, to creating a vegetable garden at one of the schools. While at Groundwork, I worked in an office setting, coordinating volunteers and helping to create the curriculum. I was also in charge of the social media accounts of the organization.

When the time came for us to write our research papers, we were instructed to find a topic to research that was interesting to us and that was also applicable to our community organization. The research topic selected did not need to affect or influence the organization or its work in any way; however, it was required that there was some connection between the two. At that point I had worked with Groundwork for about a month, and had recently begun work on its social media accounts. The Volunteer Coordinator asked me to “revamp” the Twitter account and Facebook page for the organization; however, I did not know how to go about doing that since I wasn’t sure exactly where the problems were. It was clear to both of us that the accounts needed reforming; however, the next steps in how to do that were unclear.

I wanted to help Groundwork move forward in any way that I could. When told I needed to choose my research paper topic, I decided almost immediately to focus on social media and whether it was an effective method of communicating information. As I began the research process and realized that there was more literature on the subject than I had initially anticipated, I narrowed my focus to just Facebook and Twitter. I wanted to know if Groundwork was using its

Facebook and Twitter accounts in the most efficient way to communicate with its audience members and to spark interaction with them.

Fairly early on into my research process I discovered Kristen Lovejoy and Gregory Saxton's research, which became essential to my research and paper. Lovejoy and Saxton are professors in New York whose research focuses specifically on the use of social media by nonprofit organizations. They created a framework to use when analyzing an organization's social media that can help determine whether or not the social media platforms are being used as effectively as possible. They based the design of the framework on Twitter; however, in my research I also applied it to Facebook. Lovejoy and Saxton's framework lays out three types of tweets that an organization can use. Each type of tweet is associated with a level of interaction that the organization is engaging its audience in by posting that tweet.

The first level is *Information*, which is the most basic type of tweet and the organization interacts with its audience the least by using this type of post. An organization will send out *Information* posts to communicate some sort of information with its audience. These often describe the details of the organization's work and provide updates on progress it is making with projects. This type of post does not engage the audience and doesn't lead to any type of conversation between the organization and the people with whom it is communicating.

Community is the second level of tweet an organization can post as a way of communicating with its audience. *Community* posts will engage the audience in a way that requires little effort on the part of the participants. Some examples of this type of post are asking followers to sign an online petition that the organization is related to, or asking them to watch videos and make comments or suggestions afterwards. This is an important step in the organization's communication process with its audience because it initiates the audience to take physical action.

The final type of tweet in the framework is *Action*. These tweets are a sort of call to those that follow the organization to come and actively take part in working towards its cause. *Action* tweets almost always ask followers to participate at a particular event, usually some sort of volunteering day or activity with the organization. Followers have the option to make a personal connection with organization members and speak with them about the work being done in the organization's day-to-day practices. These tweets are the highest level of engagement the organization can partake in on a social media platform with its audience.

One of the key elements of Lovejoy and Saxton's framework is that they explain *how* to use these different types of tweets, not just what they are. When used incorrectly, the three types of tweets are not as effective as they are when used properly. Lovejoy and Saxton explain that all three types of tweets must be used, and in a varying order. An organization should not post one type of tweet a few times in a row, then another type, then another type. The framework does not work best when used strictly in the *Information, Community, Action* order. Instead, tweets should be posted in no particular order. The three types of tweets engage audience members at differing levels of involvement with the organization. An audience member who is just beginning to learn about the organization will need to see a few *Information* posts while deciding if he/she wants to become more involved or not. However, someone that has worked with the organization for a few years will be more inclined towards *Action* posts, as those outline how the participant could be more involved. Since the three types of tweets target different audience members, it is essential for an organization to use all three types regularly. Otherwise, it will only target a few members of its follower base rather than as many as possible.

When I conducted my research, I found that Groundwork's Twitter account was being used correctly according to the framework, but its Facebook account was not. It was posting almost exclusively *Information* posts that were not engaging its audience at all. I met with the Executive Director and Volunteer Coordinator of Groundwork and explained this to them, while laying out a potential course of action for how to change Groundwork's social media habits to make them more effective.

Combining my service at Groundwork with my research paper made me much more inclined to complete the research and find a solution to the organization's social media problems. Since I had an active stake in the organization I was researching, I was even more driven to find the answers I wanted because I knew that they would be directly benefitting Groundwork. I realized that by performing this research and finding a way for the organization to interact with its audience more effectively, I had performed a service that otherwise it would not have received.

Going to Groundwork each week while I completed my research and updating the organization on the progress I was making fueled my passion for completing the project even more. The Volunteer Coordinator and I began to make some adjustments to the social media websites while I was still completing the research. I was able to see the changes made in real-time and how the application of the framework really affected the levels of engagement received from its followers. This was a crucial step in the process as it showed me that the work I was doing was important and was directly impacting the difference Groundwork was making in its community.

Groundwork's Twitter use has continued to improve almost a year after I proposed my changes. It posts even more frequently and is adjusting the types of posts in the way suggested by the Lovejoy and Saxton framework. There is increased engagement from the community through retweets and favorites as well. Its Facebook use has also changed and improved. It is engaging its followers more, by creating events for people to RSVP to as well as posting links to websites people can visit to get involved and donate to the organization. Groundwork is also posting different things on its Facebook and Twitter pages, which was a change I proposed when I presented my research.

Groundwork is clearly evolving its use of social media tools to work in its favor. It seemed that at the beginning of its Twitter and Facebook use, Groundwork had accounts on these websites because all other nonprofits like it did and in order to be competitive and current it needed to have them as well. Now, it seems that it is moving to the next step of social media use; it is beginning to use these platforms to create a space for engagement and evolution of its organization.

Before beginning this research for Groundwork I used all social media platforms for enjoyment. While I knew that these platforms – Twitter especially – are used for activism, I didn't realize that this activism could take place at different levels of platform engagement. I use Twitter minimally, checking it once or twice a day and rarely posting or actively engaging. I believed that the only times Twitter and Facebook could be used for activism were during rare occasions, such as the Arab Spring or inner-city riots and protests. In reality, social media platforms can be used for activism every day in various circumstances. They can be used for bigger movements involving more people, but they can also be used to inspire and engage members of the local community to rally behind a cause, as they do with Groundwork.

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References

Lovejoy, Kristen and Gregory D. Saxton. 2012. "Information, Community, and Action: How Nonprofit Organizations Use Social Media." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 17 (3): 337-353.