



The Communications Continuum

Open House Discussion

Thursday, December 14, 2023





Local Government 2030

- 51 delegates from 23 states
- National Association of Public Administration (NAPA) Grand Challenges
- November 2022 Convening in Omaha

Our Team

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Kevin Fitzgerald, ARPA Coordinator, Groton, CT

Krystal Lindberg, Deputy Finance Director, Providence, RI

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Taylor Galusha, Assistant to Town Manager – Communications Coordinator, Shrewsbury, MA

Trevor Hogan, Fire Captain, Rockford, IL

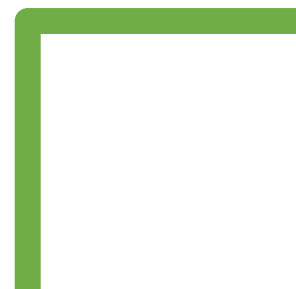
Aaron Deslatte, Assistant Professor, Indiana University Bloomington, IN

Craig Owens, City Manager, Lawrence, KS

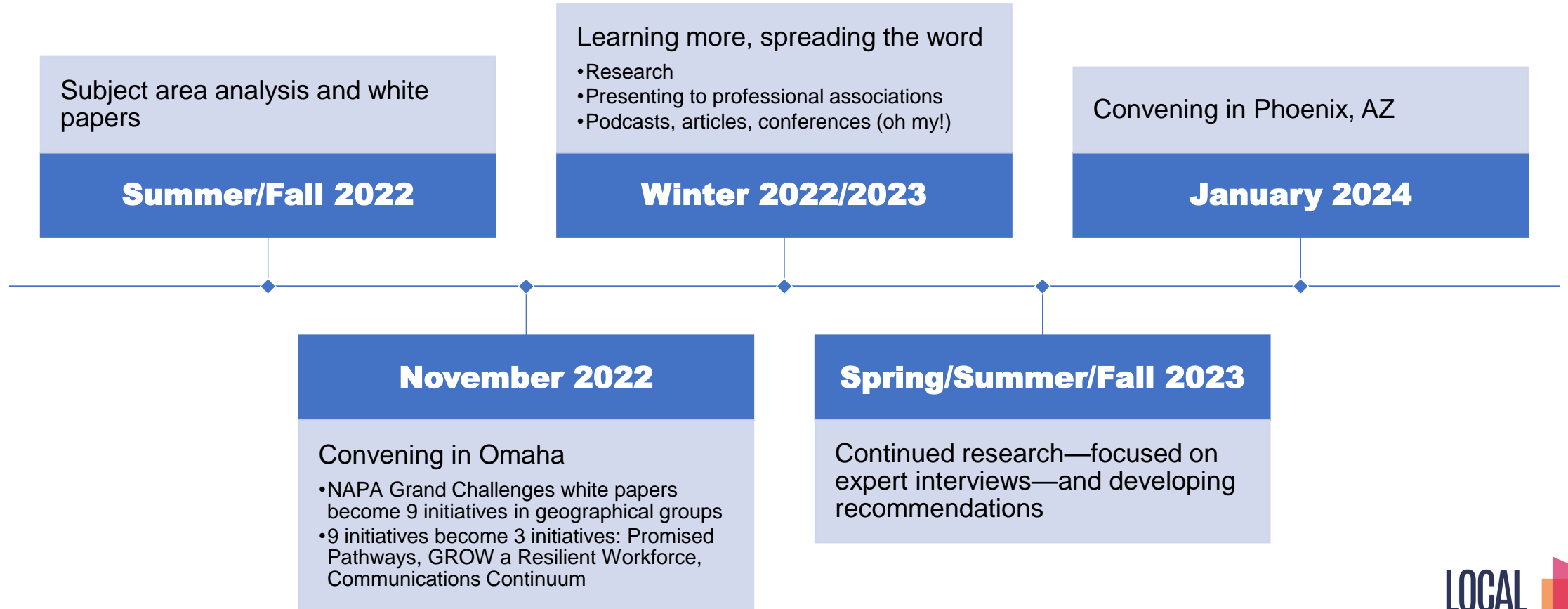
Sue Schwartz, Director of Planning, Greensboro, SC

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT 2030



Local Gov 2030 So Far



The Problem

Local governments have and continue to struggle to:

- Connect authentically with residents
- Pivot from traditional administration practices to address modern problems
- Address burnout, fatigue, and rapid turnover among public service professionals



Initiative 3: The Communications Continuum

- Orientation towards communication – both internally and externally
 - Often transactional
 - Lacks emotional intelligence and/or social-emotional skill
 - Tends towards technical or bureaucratic rather than accessible
 - Fails to bridge generational differences
 - Has not kept up with public expectations

Our Approach

Literature Review

Expert Interviews

Develop recommendations and tools

Beta test tools/materials

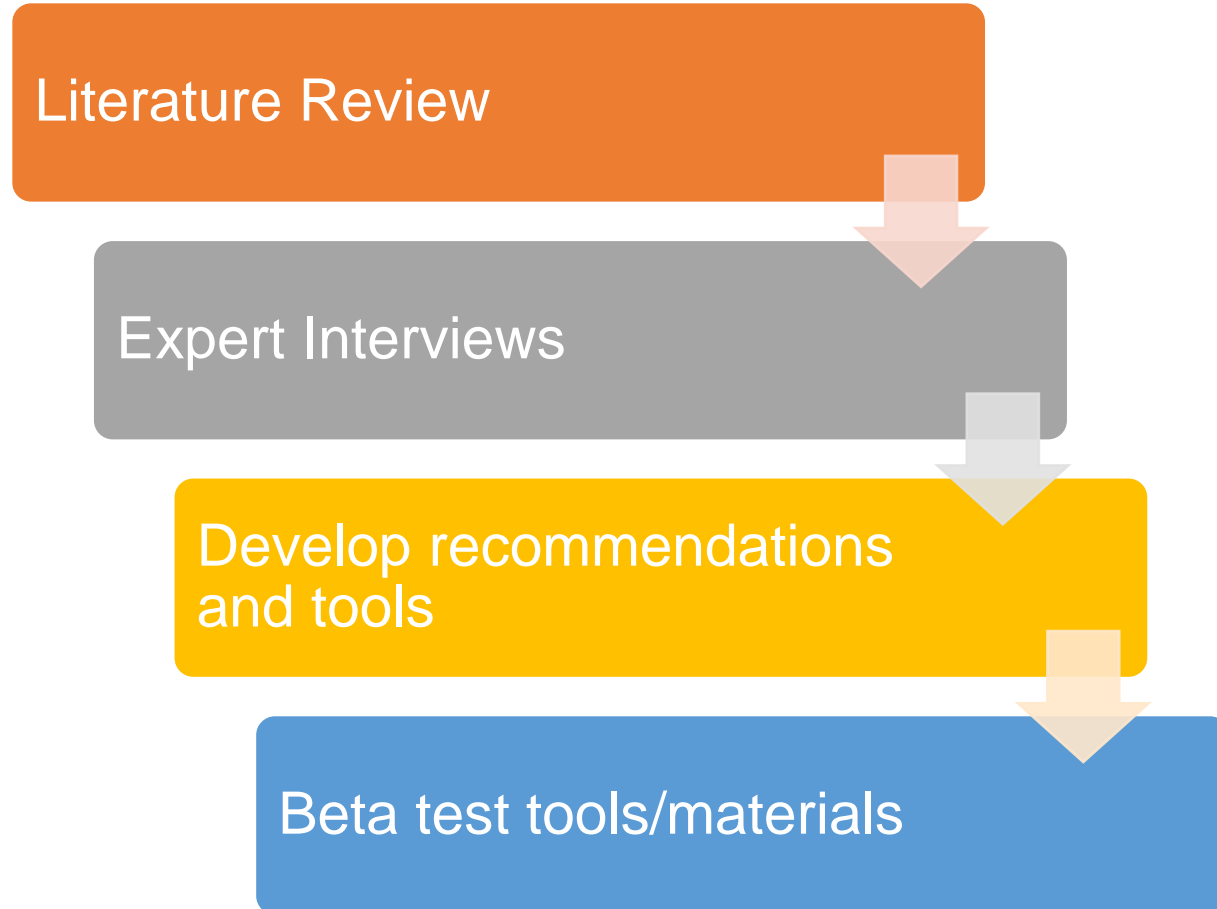


Our Approach



- Paywalls
- Canned content – what to do, but not about the underlying orientation and skills
- Few local government professional associations or schools translating theory and research to practice and/or training
- Expertise from outside local government

Our Approach



- Conducted expert interviews
- Connected with cities that are
 - Running internal emotional intelligence training for all staff
 - Explicitly moving away from transactional engagement
 - Evolving successful citizens academies
- Need to determine the most effective product for scaling successes

What We've Learned

- At our best when authentic, simple, digestible, values-aligned, and regular/ongoing.
- We continue to lean heavily on traditional/existing structures—regular public meetings—or are project-specific. Both fail to engage a wide audience.
- Existing literature on communications and engagement focuses on what to do (often in listicle format) but misses the how and why of engagement.
- The role of communications and engagement is often ill-defined and responsibilities are unclear.

Our Recommendations

1. Revisit Arnstein's Ladder – think about engagement through this lens.
2. Train employees at all levels and in all departments to be ambassadors
3. Build a comprehensive, scalable approach to continuous engagement beyond the traditional public meeting.
4. Planning for communication should be done through the lens of equity.

Recommendation #1: Revisit Arnstein's Ladder

- Employee empowerment & retention
- *Genuine* two-way communication
- Who comes to city hall?
- When is it acceptable to inform?

Recommendation #2: Empower and develop all staff to be communicators

- Workforce is the best asset we have for communication and engagement.
- Develop a vision for communications aligned with organizational core values and vision.
- Build communications skills—how to be translators of our work to the public, how to ground our actions in rationale and evidence/data.
- Build emotional intelligence – develop staff in their ability to de-escalate situations, understand diverse perspectives, and communicate in ways that build connection and understanding.

Recommendation #3: Develop a scalable and ongoing non-public meeting approach to engagement

- Find new ways to engage the public in ongoing dialogue
- Going beyond the hyperlocal need-based approach.

Recommendation #4: Plan for engagement and communication through an equity lens

- A transition from transactional to relational engagement
 - Build relationships with community-based organizations to identify their priorities and anticipate engagement needs and opportunities.
 - Consider the language we use (i.e. stakeholders) and the history it holds. Who might we be alienating from engagement through unintentional harms.
 - Language accessibility (non-English speakers)
 - Other accessibility—screen readers, hybrid meetings



Any thoughts?

Does this resonate?

**Do you have any initial
reactions?**



Discussion:

What would you need to start implementing any these recommendations?

Thank you!

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