

CASE STUDY

ENGAGEMENT TECHNOLOGIES



A number of emerging community engagement programs use technology to empower local organizations with data, tools and fundraising resources to connect with communities, attract funders and inspire behavior change.

Online forums, web services and social media are used to connect groups working on environmental and community enhancement projects to interested volunteers and donors. Investors use online micro-philanthropy to fund the project they care about. People with project ideas can post it on the online forum. The organization distributes these funds to projects fully funded by donors. Technology and new “civic media” such as smart phone apps provide a forum for community and environmental groups, who lead projects like community gardens or “friends of” parks, to petition individuals directly for support.

BENEFITS

PERFORMANCE

- Increases quality of life in communities by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing acres of open space, and removing pollutants from the air, water and land
- Increases productivity by avoiding face-to-face petitioning and by providing information access to billions of Internet users
- Increases the number of new collaborative projects, cross-community exchanges and replicated projects

EQUITY AND COMMUNITY

- Supports accessible action in communities with a larger share of environmental problems and fewer resources to confront them
- Collects funds directly through online micro-philanthropy from interested donors in the community and throughout the world to decentralized, community-based environmental projects
- Lets donors know exactly when, where and how their gifts will be used, because they are contributing to a project rather than to a large organization
- Encourages people to understand and value their local environment, and inspires direct engagement and volunteering within their communities

ECONOMIC

- Enables project groups to communicate faster and directly with donors, including international donors
- Saves petitioning costs for project groups, as their petitions are always accessible online
- Makes resources and volunteers easier to find and less costly

BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION

INSTITUTIONAL

Residents in lower-income neighborhoods may have difficulty accessing the web. Because organizations like ioby use social media as a catalyst for environmental engagement, Internet access is crucial to engaging in these programs.

COMMUNITY

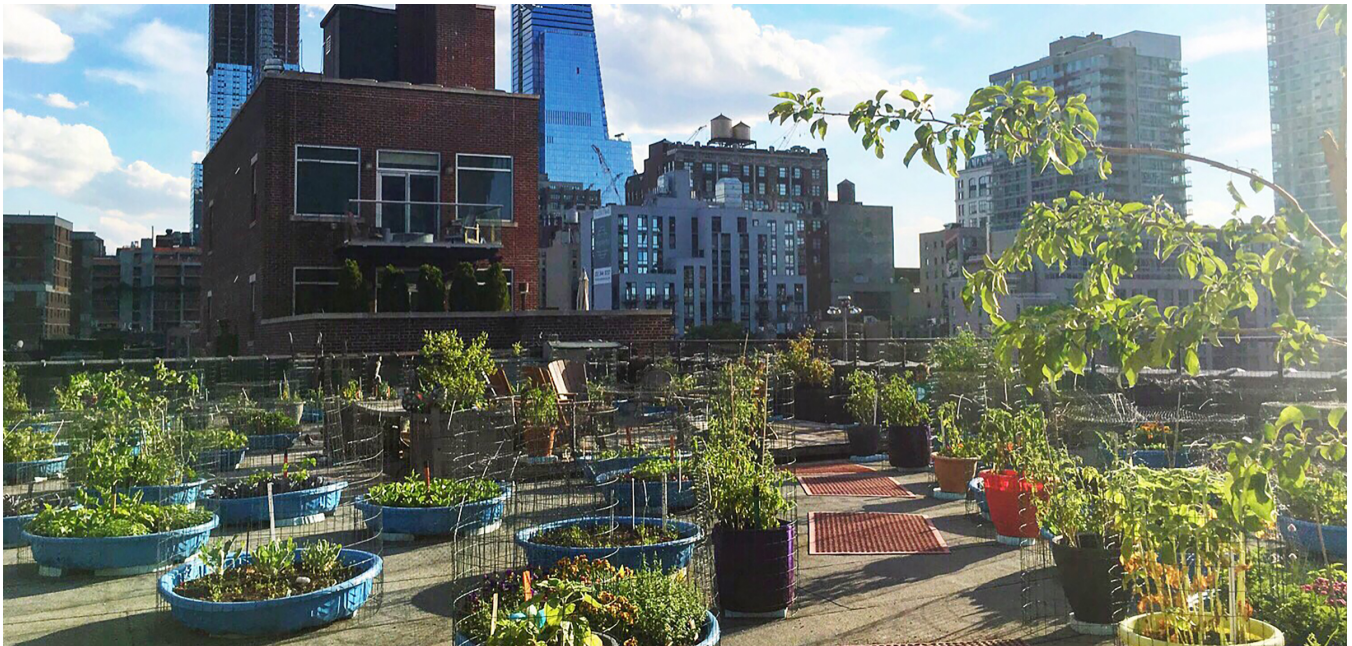
Community outreach programs are critical in garnering support for projects. ioby relied on brainstorming sessions with some of its best donors, committed volunteers and successful project leaders to share what ioby meant to them at a personal level and why they felt connected to their work. These sessions encouraged community involvement.

LANGUAGE

Since community engagement is essential to the success to this strategy, language barriers could potentially hinder its spread in certain communities.

FINANCIAL

Community engagement programs need initial funding to help them set up projects (ioby started out as a fiscally sponsored group by the Open Space Institute) and build their social media interaction with donors and the community. For example, FuseIQ helped ioby build and design a stellar website on a shoestring budget that met the needs of projects and donors.



CASE STUDY: IOBY (IN OUR BACKYARD)

ioby (in our backyard) is a pioneering program founded in July 2008. A nonprofit organization based in Brooklyn, New York, ioby connects New Yorkers to environmental projects in their own neighborhoods by promoting donation and volunteer opportunities through its crowd-resourcing website, ioby.org.

Over the past 8 years, 756 community-improvement projects have been funded through ioby, with a 87 percent success rate for projects achieving their funding goals. Projects budget on an average total of approximately \$4000, with an average donation of \$30. The myriad projects funded include multiple urban farms, beach or river cleanups and community recycling programs. There are now more than 150 cities with an ioby leader present. In 2011, 50 projects funded through ioby took place on an aggregate 1,080 acres in New York City, an area 20 percent larger than Central Park.

One successful project is The Green Map System, which raised \$452 on ioby to help fund several events over the summer. These creative, hands-on events encouraged participants to create maps that easily identified green spots in their neighborhoods. Another example is Compost for Brooklyn, where residents

donated \$2,030 for materials to build new composts bins, a lumber shed and a rainwater harvesting system on Newkirk Avenue and East 8th Street, drop-off locations for scrap composting.

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

ioby developed a partnership with Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation, which will match donations made to ioby for all projects led by Community Development Corporations in New York City.

FINANCING

ioby.org is an online micro-philanthropic initiative that connects groups working on environmental projects to people who care about their neighborhoods. People with project ideas can post them on ioby.org, where interested individuals can invest in the projects. Funding can come from a single person or a group of people who care about the issue. ioby distributes funds to a project only after it is fully funded. Unfunded projects expire after seven months.

IMPLEMENTATION

ioby lists five steps for volunteers and donors on how to get involved:

- Pick a project.
- Nurture it.
- Follow the results.
- Get your hands dirty and inspire others.
- Prepare for great things.

People interested in posting new projects fill out an online application, then ioby connects the project to a community of New Yorkers. Projects are posted on the site, so that people can choose which project they want to volunteer for or help to fund. ioby offers an opportunity for donors to walk down the street and actually see the results of their contribution. Projects have project profile pages where people can post photos and videos and write about the progress of their projects. ioby encourages the building of long lasting community partnerships among volunteers and donors.

LESSONS LEARNED

- People are more willing to donate resources to organizations that deserve their trust. ioby stands for a smartly managed group with transparent financials, efficient spending, and a track record of on-the-ground success. Community engagement takes a more transparent form if information about a project's progress and the people involved are published online.
- The web interface for communication needs to be capable of supporting eCommerce, collaborative social community solutions, and a high volume of visitors. For instance, ioby worked with New Signature to develop the new Drupal based website. The website serves as both an online bulletin board and shopping cart. Some examples of other organizations who rely on their websites for donations are donorschoose.org which supports school teachers and kiva.org, a slightly different model because it uses micro-loans that are paid back to the donor (unlike micro-grants, which are not) to support micro-enterprises in developing countries.

- To be successful, ioby learned that it had to combine crowdsourcing and crowd-funding, since the need for local volunteers is as necessary as the need for financial support.

OTHER PROJECTS

- NEW YORK, NY Change by Us
- NEW YORK, NY Open Plans
- PHILADELPHIA, PA Change by Us

REFERENCES

- ioby: <https://ioby.org>
- Change by Us NYC: <http://newyork.thecityatlas.org/change/>
- Change by Us Philadelphia: <http://technical.ly/project/change-by-us/>
- Open Plans (NY): <http://openplans.org/>