



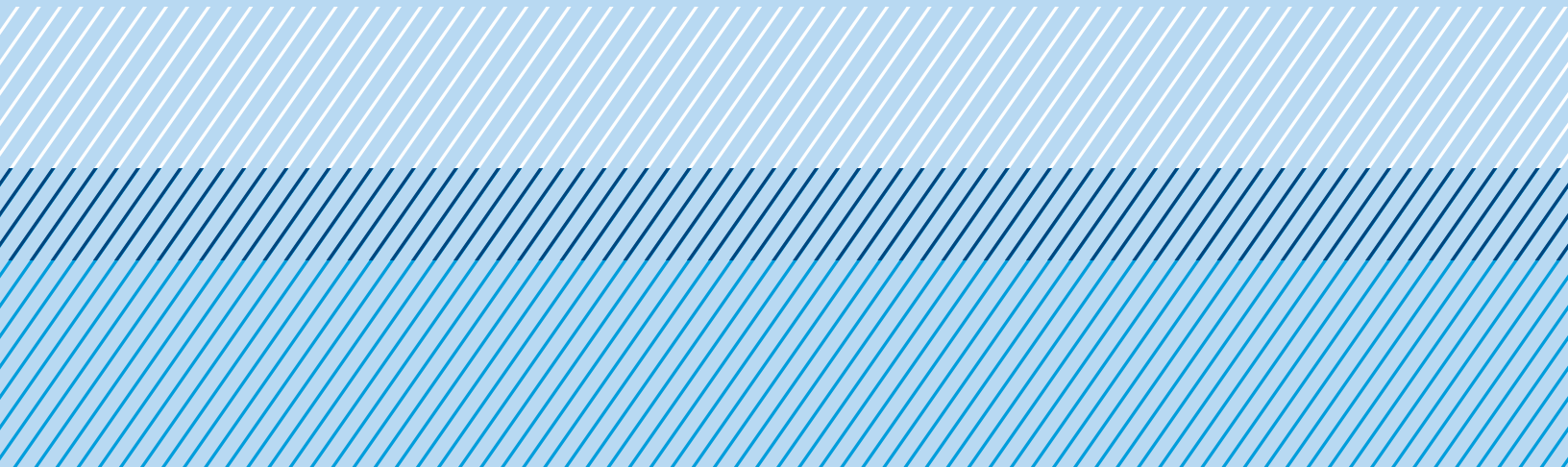
Dubuque2.0:

How the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque Used Environmental Information to Spark Citizen Action

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Prepared by FSG and Network Impact
for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation





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Dubuque2.0: How the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque Used Environmental Information to Spark Citizen Action



If you care about climate change, it's easy to tune in to breaking news from remote places like Doha, Qatar, where the latest carbon emissions deals were cut at the 2012 U.N. climate talks. What's hard is to find usable information about pollution in your hometown, or to unearth the best ways to conserve resources in your own locale.

The Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque (CFGD) in Iowa recognized this disconnect in the "think global, act local" mantra. The foundation seized an opportunity to gather local environmental information and share it with residents of this Midwestern community in ways that inspired Dubuquers to conserve energy, use less water and adopt other environmentally friendly practices. But rather than launch a static "green" website that few people were likely to visit (even if they knew about it), the foundation took a more creative approach. It developed an interactive online information hub featuring games, contests and other ways for community members to get involved, and coupled the site with real-world outreach at places like farmers markets and cultural events. The approach was also highly leveraged: The foundation tapped into the Sustainable Dubuque campaign launched by City Hall and joined with sustainability efforts of companies such as IBM. To these campaigns, the foundation brought a critical missing link – the awareness and participation of individual residents. In so doing, the foundation experienced the value of successful community leadership and witnessed the impact that can be achieved when local residents can access and engage with the right information, at the right time, in the right form.

Moving Dubuque Toward a Greener and More Sustainable Future

To understand why the CFGD took on the challenge of environmental sustainability, consider the community's history of economic struggle. In the wake of the 1980s Midwest farm crisis and the collapse of local manufacturing nationwide, unemployment rates in Dubuque had reached 23 percent.¹ Meanwhile, the region was hemorrhaging young workers. "There was a saying, 'Would the last person out of Dubuque please turn out the lights,'" said Michelle Rios, a former recruiter at the Greater Dubuque Development Corporation.²

"We had a lot of great resources in the community that people didn't know about. There was no landing place for all of these pieces to come together. We were missing a lot of opportunities."

City of Dubuque Staff Member

Given this context, Dubuque made a remarkable transformation. The city today has well-developed health care, education, tourism, publishing and financial service sectors. Companies such as IBM are now major employers. The turnaround even sparked a campaign by local business and civic leaders – "Come back to your future, come home to Dubuque" – to meet the new demand for skilled workers.³

Dubuque had rebranded itself as a forward-looking city embracing new ideas. By 2005, the Dubuque City Council had chosen environmental sustainability as a top priority and launched initiatives designed to encourage recycling, create more green space and improve water quality, as well as upgrade public transit and revitalize parts of downtown. "Cities that get out in front on sustainability will have competitive economic advantages in the future," said Mayor Ron Buol.⁴

The activities coalesced into Sustainable Dubuque, a City Council-adopted initiative that today encompasses dozens of environmental, economic and social efforts, from methane capture and tree planting, to investments in museums and more accessible transit stops for the disabled.

The citywide Sustainable Dubuque initiative was developed through a two-year process that included community input. A core component of the initial vision was for local citizens to lead and participate in sustainability practices. Early on, Sustainable Dubuque had the support of policymakers and business and civic leaders, but the initiative initially struggled to connect deeply with the broader community. For instance, an early version of the Sustainable Dubuque website was designed to be an interactive information hub for environmental issues, but its success was limited. Some users couldn't find the information that they required to change their behavior (such as how to reduce energy or water consumption) so they emailed the program coordinator for advice, creating

Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque

Established: 2001

Location: Dubuque, Iowa

Asset size: \$34 million

Staff: 13

Mission: The Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque, as the primary philanthropic organization in the region, connects people, ideas and resources to improve lives in northeast Iowa.

¹ Iowa Association of Business and Industry. http://www.iowaabi.org/documents/filelibrary/presentations/Dubuque_Economic_Development_Panel_028D22F8D878A.pdf. Accessed Nov. 19, 2012.

² Johnson, Dirk. "Dubuque Journal; Hear Ye! 'Come Back to Your Future.'" The New York Times, July 16, 1998.

³ Ibid

⁴ "About Sustainable Dubuque", <http://ia-dubuque.civicplus.com/index.aspx?NID=1257>. Accessed Oct. 18, 2012.

substantial inefficiencies. Other residents faced different challenges: They lacked strong Internet skills, or didn't know how to connect with sustainability training and discussions in the community, while others were simply unaware of the initiative. For example, the nonprofit Green Dubuque held weekly "green drinks" events at local bars where residents could discuss sustainability issues. But the events were not well-publicized and few people outside Dubuque's environmental inner circle attended.

The Missing Link: Citizen Engagement

Eric Dregne, vice president of programs at the CFGD, recognized this missing component, and he believed the foundation could provide the link to engaging residents in green action. The timing was perfect: The foundation's board had recently earmarked resources for developing the CFGD's role as a community leader. And the board had asked foundation staff to convene community groups and educate citizens about critical local issues.⁵ With clear momentum for sustainability at the citywide policy level, and the missing piece of community involvement, the opportunity was a natural fit for the foundation.

With a strong mandate from the board and a clear need in the community, Dregne and his team began to develop a strategy for community engagement around local environment issues, dubbed Dubuque2.0. Foundation staff first spent several months building their understanding of how CFGD could transform Dubuque's existing environmental sustainability initiatives into resident-driven efforts, and studying how improved information sharing could contribute to success. They assembled a steering committee of leaders from businesses, city government, nonprofits, colleges and other grassroots organizations to guide their work. CFGD also forged partnerships with nearly two dozen local organizations; the partners included several groups that had never worked together or exchanged information before (see sidebar). And in order to engage grassroots Dubuque residents, the foundation held a series of "community café" forums at which residents shared their priorities and needs related to environmental change.

Dubuque2.0 Partnerships

Partner	Type
Green Dubuque	Nonprofit
Dubuque Main Street	Nonprofit
City of Dubuque	Government
Iowa Office of Energy Independence	Government
Loras College	Educational Institution
Clarke University	Educational Institution
University of Dubuque	Educational Institution
Northeast Iowa Community College	Educational Institution
Iowa State Extension	Educational Institution
Dubuque Public Schools	Educational Institution
Sustainable City Network	Corporation
Alliant Energy	Corporation
Dubuque Area Chamber of Commerce	Corporation
Dubuque Fighting Saints	Corporation
Premier Bank	Corporation
Mystique Casino	Corporation
Telegraph Herald	Media

⁵ Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque, Initial Application for Funding from the Knight Community Information Challenge.

Connecting Citizens with the Issues

The strategy for Dubuque2.0 complemented the citywide work already under way through Sustainable Dubuque, and focused first on connecting with residents and equipping and motivating them to reduce their carbon and water footprints. The approach included both online and offline components. These elements included live community conversations and distribution of online and offline surveys to residents to understand their environmental priorities and needs. Dubuque2.0 also included a robust and interactive Web portal designed to complement the earlier city-sponsored Sustainable Dubuque site (which had proved too static) through Twitter feeds, a Facebook page, as well as community events, games and contests.

The Web-based information hub formed the center of Dubuque2.0's strategy, and the site evolved as the foundation learned more about how to effectively engage citizens in environmental action. For instance, the hub included links to a "green asset map" – a website tagged with local resources for sustainable living such as bike paths, farmers markets and green businesses. It also contained a carbon calculator for users to estimate their carbon footprints, along with a "sustainability tool kit" with advice on how to conserve energy and reduce waste. The idea was that as the site gained traction, community members would add their own tags and refresh the site with ideas for green activities, but the green asset map never took off. The tool did not generate external user input and was mainly managed and tagged by the Dubuque2.0 team.

Other initiatives were better suited to active community participation – particularly games and prize competitions with both online and offline ways to play. In one partnership with Sustainable Dubuque, Dubuque2.0 organized the Sustainability Challenge game, which featured practices to reduce carbon and water footprints. Participants could sign up for the 11-week game through the Dubuque2.0 web portal; received points by attending offline demonstrations of new energy and water-saving technologies, attending community events and accessing website pages with practical tips on how to reduce energy usage.

For example, participants could gain points by employing energy-saving practices at home such as line-drying clothes or helping to clean up a river. The more than 1,000 registered participants in the contest were incentivized by weekly prizes such as park season passes and gift cards, and a grand prize of \$5,000 presented during the final celebration.

Another winning initiative was conducted in partnership with the IBM-sponsored Smarter Cities pilot program. Three hundred Dubuque residents had received free IBM "smart" water meters to monitor usage in their homes. Users of the meters could log on to the IBM portal through the Dubuque2.0 website to view historical trends and real-time data on their water usage, coupled with information about how their choices affected their water costs and the environment. Users received personalized recommendations about how to reduce their water use, and they could connect with others online to share ideas and tips. An important aspect of program was a feature which allowed users to anonymously

Funding for Change

The Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque provided office and staff support to Dubuque2.0's staff and volunteers, and facilitated dialogue among key actors. It committed \$50,000 of its unrestricted funds to the effort. Another \$75,000 from Alliant Energy and a joint contribution of \$75,000 from Mystique Casino and the Dubuque Racing Association provided adequate seed funding to get the initiative started. This funding was matched by a \$205,000 grant from the Knight Foundation Community Information Challenge (KCIC), which then inspired \$50,000 in additional funding from a local paper, the Telegraph Herald. Later, an additional \$50,000 was leveraged from the Iowa Office of Energy Independence to support engagement efforts around Smarter Water/Electricity efforts.

compare their water use with neighbors participating in the pilot. The entire program proved addictive: Some smart water meter users reported checking their usage statistics often, sometimes almost obsessively. "Looking at the Web portal is one of the things I did at noon every day, in order to check my daily use," said one resident. Trainings provided by Dubuque2.0 were

critical for ensuring that residents could effectively access and use the smart meter data on the Web portal.

With both the Sustainability Challenge game and the IBM Smarter Water program, CFGD's Dubuque2.0 provided that critical missing link of citizen involvement.

What Worked Well?

It turns out that the Dubuque2.0 Web portal proved to be a useful organizing platform for the many online and offline events associated with the program. The site provided links to a range of information, including newly published research on sustainability topics and policy issues relevant to Dubuque, such as the city's recycling protocols and the use of smart meters to track energy use. And although the Web hub was a major piece of Dubuque2.0's work, the strategy also emphasized reaching people where they were. As Eric Dregne said, "We were keen to link online and offline activities, and to develop versions of our materials for people without Internet access."

Three pieces of the Dubuque2.0 strategy emerged as particularly successful ways to use information to engage residents and compel them to take action.

1) Community cafés and resident surveys drive understanding about sustainability priorities and needs.

Before finalizing its approach, Dubuque2.0 had hosted more than a dozen community cafes and forums for residents (generally 30-50 people attended each event) to come together and talk about sustainability issues. Ongoing community conversations also gave residents a platform to talk about such environmental policy issues as plastic bag regulations, water meter improvements and carbon emission targets. This led to greater understanding and support for regulations in some cases. Also, a community survey helped discover community priorities and inform plans to address gaps in resources and services.

2) Personalized data about resource use and neighbor benchmarks inspire action.

The IBM-sponsored Smarter Cities pilot program was a success because users could also compare their water use with that of neighbors, and they received information *specifically tailored* to their homes. IBM also launched a weekly competition with prizes to encourage users to reduce water use and inspire other environmentally friendly behavior. The Smarter Water pilot was followed by the Smarter Electricity pilot; both are currently being expanded. Training provided by Dubuque2.0 was critical for ensuring that residents could effectively access and use the smart meter data in the Web portal; Dubuque2.0 ultimately became the community engagement arm of the Smarter Cities program.

3) Online and offline community games generate action and friendly competition around sustainability.

The Sustainability Challenge game organized by Dubuque2.0 and Sustainable Dubuque encouraged residents to attend sustainability-themed training events and begin practices to reduce their carbon and water footprints. The online and offline components facilitated action rather than passive observation, and the cash prizes and point system provided incentives for behavior changes.

Through these activities, Dubuque2.0 played a critical role in ensuring that residents could take advantage of the city's many sustainability resources and that resident engagement infused and influenced many elements of the city's overarching sustainability efforts, both online and offline.

Some components of the Dubuque2.0 strategy proved to be less effective. These included:

- An online discussion board about sustainability, which was embedded in the Dubuque2.0 website. It was hard to encourage visitors to comment on the discussion board, partially because the technology was cumbersome (messages needed to be approved by the foundation's communications intern), and partially because it never had enough activity to become a destination in its own right. This meant that the majority of messages were posted by the Dubuque2.0 team, and the level of community engagement was limited.
- Use of Twitter to spread messages to new audiences. This was ineffective since the few Twitter followers that the project attracted were already highly informed and engaged.
- The "green asset" map. As mentioned above, this tool did not generate user and community input and was mainly managed and tagged by the Dubuque2.0 team.

Results: Heightened Awareness and Behavior Changes

Three years after the launch of Dubuque2.0, evidence shows that this citizen engagement effort (along with the broader Sustainable Dubuque initiative) has contributed to several major changes:

Greater access to and sharing of sustainability

information: More than 5,500 unique users – roughly 10 percent of the city's population – have visited Dubuque2.0 since its inception. The initiative has created a useful platform to ensure that sustainability messages reach their intended audiences. As a leader of the nonprofit Green Dubuque noted, "Before Dubuque2.0, important messages about this work weren't reaching people. Now when Green Dubuque calls people about policy initiatives, the community understands better what we're talking about. The channels have been created to get the information out there around issues like this." As another resident commented, "People have gotten much more used to hearing the sustainability vocabulary. It's a part of how we think now."

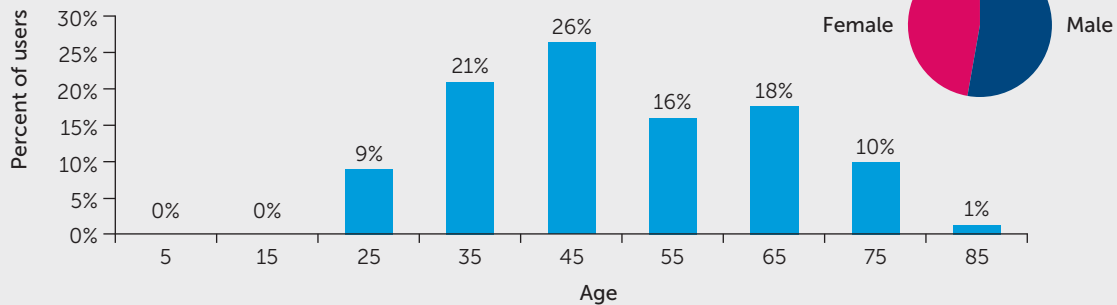
Personalized water and energy usage data provided through the IBM Smarter Cities pilots prompted lively discussion in the community about personal energy habits, and in some case, a compulsive tracking of personal energy consumption. It also prompted broader expansion of the idea: Loras College, a local

liberal arts college, used the Dubuque2.0 platform to launch a student competition, where dorms equipped with smart meters competed against one another to reduce their energy use.

Early signs of behavior change: Dubuque2.0 and related sustainability efforts in the community have also contributed to early signs of behavior change. In one survey, 69 percent of Dubuque2.0 website users indicated that they were doing more than in the past to promote sustainability in their homes and communities. "Because of my involvement in Dubuque2.0," noted one young resident, "I now grow a garden, participated in a cleanup of our main street and ride the bus more often." Residents involved in the IBM Smarter Cities pilot decreased their water use by 6.6 percent on average.

By focusing on engagement, Dubuque2.0 has strengthened community connections and helped create a sense of shared responsibility. Residents have started to realize the importance of engaging their neighbors and families, and that it takes many residents to make progress on an issue like sustainability. For example, a mother of two decided to talk to her neighbor about recycling after noting that he never put out any trash to be recycled. In her words: "Part of what Dubuque2.0 did was to help everyone take responsibility for sustainability."

Dubuque2.0 User Demographics



Note: Statistics are based on a survey of a sample of Dubuque2.0 users
N=114 (representing 2% of Dubuque2.0 users)

Increased focus on community engagement:

Finally, the community engagement strategy employed by Dubuque2.0 has begun to influence how the city of Dubuque approaches its work on other social issues. The city government recently hired a community engagement specialist and is developing a Web-based platform for increasing resident involvement in issues such as building strong neighborhoods and connecting citizens to volunteer opportunities. And CFGD reports that it has increased its own capacity to catalyze community engagement. The foundation plans to use these new community engagement skills to address local poverty concerns. And both board and staff report more alignment and a better appreciation for the role of an information-based community engagement strategy in driving progress on important issues.

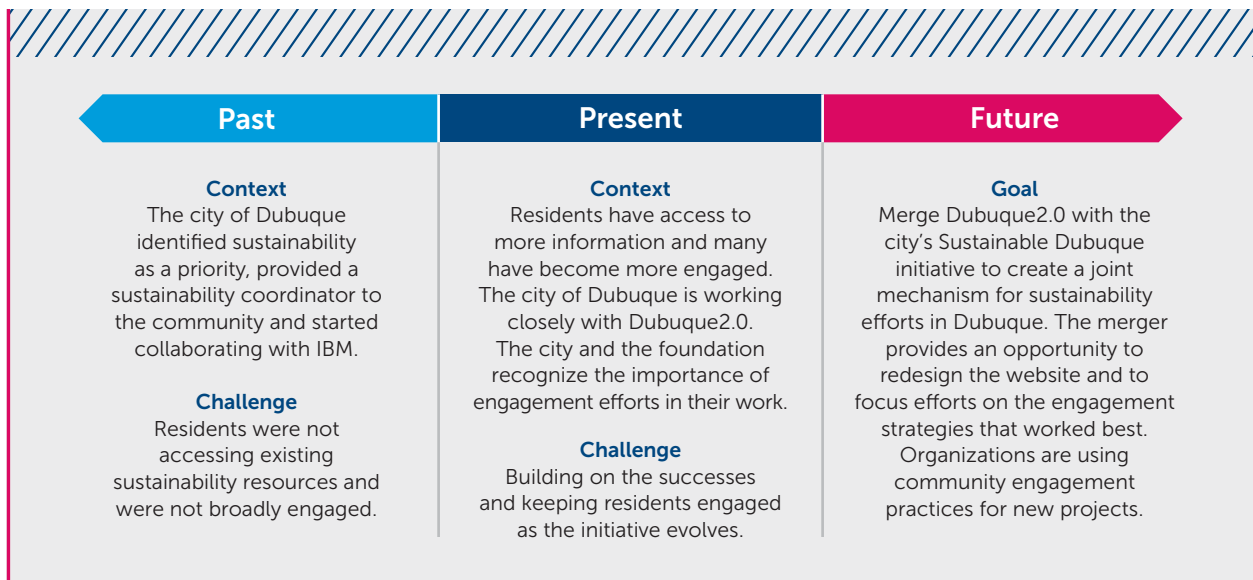
"I think because I was involved with 2.0 I got to know more people in the community for whom this was a passion and an interest. This allows you to start talking to each other and asking how can we do x y and z. It connected me with a lot of people and I am still in touch with some of them."

Local Nonprofit Leader

The Future of Dubuque2.0

The Dubuque2.0 platform is being integrated into Sustainable Dubuque, rather than remaining a separate entity. Program leaders believe this will make the initiative more financially viable by tying in to existing funding streams, and will ensure a long-term home for community engagement around sustainability and environmental issues. The joint venture will receive financial support from the city in the form of a full staff member for at least the first two years, and will gradually evolve into an independent community organization.

The foundation will continue to play a leading role on the new steering committee and has committed half of a staff member's time for the first year. This gradual transition fits well with the foundation's early focus on creating an effective exit strategy. The extended support from the foundation and the city is also intended to give the new entity an opportunity to develop and test its financial model. A possible membership model for some website tools is being evaluated, which could generate revenue to support the platform.



Lessons Learned

Lesson 1: Ensure that information leads to human engagement and offline action.

Live human interaction is needed to make things spark. The foundation focused on engagement from the start and never thought of Dubuque2.0 as “just a website.” It was a comprehensive community engagement tool, with many online and offline entry points. Several features on the Dubuque2.0 website, such as the Dubuque Sustainability Challenge game and the water- and energy-use dashboards, encouraged users to make short-term behavior changes or attend in-person events.

Lesson 2: Build on existing resources and be open to a wide range of partnerships.

Nearly every start-up Web-based initiative struggles to generate enough content to ensure wide and sustained appeal. To address this challenge, Dubuque2.0 was designed to serve as an organizing hub for content that already existed. The Web portal provided links to IBM’s Smarter Cities pilots, to relevant city websites, and to reports and events sponsored by other organizations. Additional material was developed where gaps were identified, such as a green asset map that showed the locations of parks, sustainable businesses and events.

Lesson 3: Plan to reach audiences with limited Internet access for true community engagement.

At well-attended community events, such as the farmer’s market, community service days and festivals, the foundation set up information booths informing people about the website and providing paper copies of Web materials for people without Internet access. Citizens could also play a paper version of the Dubuque Sustainability Challenge. One retired teacher became involved with Dubuque2.0 by using the print version of the sustainability tool kit, manually filling in a journal every day with notes about her water and energy consumption. This offline approach ensured that a broader swath of the community was engaged in sustainability efforts. SMS texts could have been another way to reach audiences without regular Internet access.

Lesson 4: Design a multifaceted and adaptable strategy for community engagement.

The foundation and the steering committee adopted an experimental mindset in the work, trying many more approaches than the handful that really stuck. This led to a wider variety of touch points for residents to become engaged. The multipronged approach enabled Dubuque2.0 to reach as many people as possible and remain open to and flexible about the ways residents were excited to engage. As a result, the program’s components were never “complete” or “finished” but evolved as the community foundation and partners better understood the needs of the community and the strengths of different engagement strategies.

About

John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

Knight Foundation supports transformational ideas that promote quality journalism, advance media innovation, engage communities and foster the arts. We believe that democracy thrives when people and communities are informed and engaged.

More at knightfoundation.org.

The Knight Community Information Challenge engages community and place-based foundations in meeting local information needs, helping them increase their impact on issues they care about.

More at informationneeds.org.

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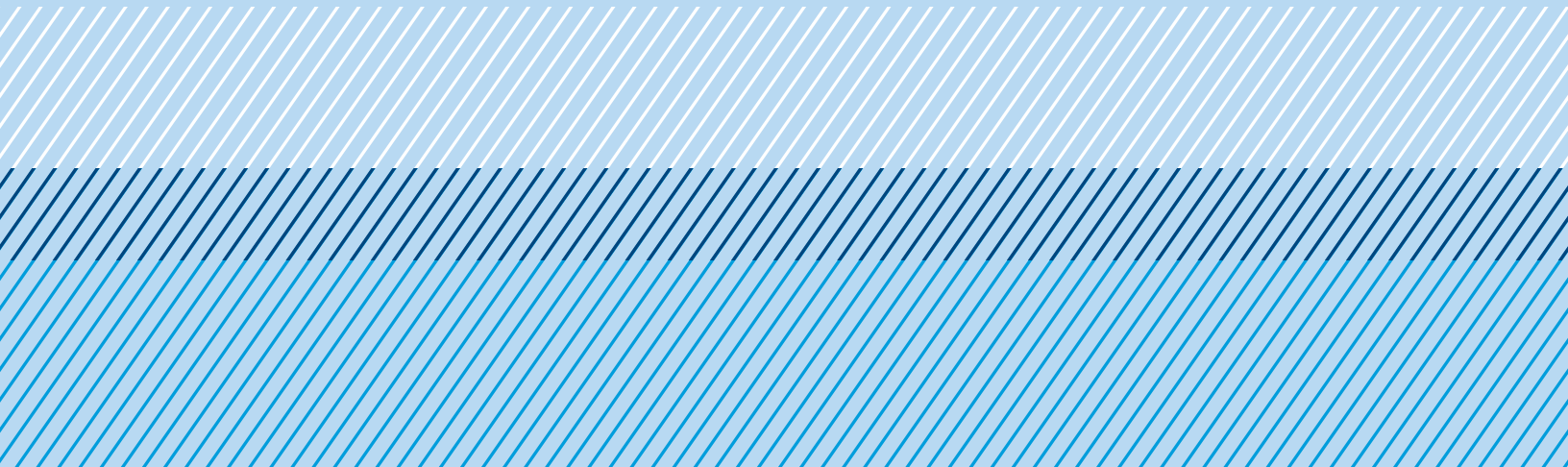
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