

PUBLIC
SECTOR
INNOVATION

Nadia Owusu
Elizabeth Vargas

With Special Thanks to Elizabeth Barth
and Threespot Media

Pilot #1: The City Accelerator Guide

Report on Analytics, Impact and Learning

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Overview

In an effort to test our hypotheses around open-sourcing social change, Living Cities launched a series of three Pilot Projects in early 2015 with an overall goal of continuous improvement. We designed each Pilot around three to five key hypotheses, and applied a broad array of measurement and analysis tools and strategies to understand “what works.” The first Pilot was our [City Accelerator Guide for Embedding Innovation in Local Government](#).

The City Accelerator builds on the Project on Municipal Innovation (PMI), a collaboration between Living Cities and the Harvard Kennedy School’s Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation. PMI convenes mayoral chiefs of staff and policy directors from 35 cities across the United States to discuss challenges facing their municipalities and their low-income residents. In partnership with the Citi Foundation, the City Accelerator helps translate dialogue into action by helping smaller cohorts of cities to adopt many of the ideas discussed during the PMI sessions.

The City Accelerator Guide was published on January 12, 2015 as a downloadable guidebook that was aimed to reach practitioners like those participating in the City Accelerator...

The City Accelerator’s first cohort, led by Nigel Jacob, Urban Technologist-in-Residence at Living Cities, is focused on embedding a culture and practice of innovation in local government. In that cohort, Louisville, Philadelphia and Nashville are working to develop processes, approaches and relationships to innovate on tough problems like access to taxpayer benefits, vacant and abandoned properties and homelessness. The City Accelerator also has a microsite on [Governing.com](#), and the existence of this platform, a potential tool to amplify the reach of City Accelerator content, contributed to our choice of the City Accelerator Guide as our first Pilot Project.

The City Accelerator Guide (the Guide) was published on January 12, 2015 as a downloadable guidebook that was aimed to reach practitioners like those participating in the City Accelerator, influence the practice of local government innovation and help advance local government innovation and urban transformation more broadly.

Target Audiences

As Identified by Living Cities and our partners prior to launching the Guide.

- Practitioners in local government
- People in philanthropy who care about cities and low-income people
- Others in the field of municipal innovation

Description and Timeline

This pilot focused on measuring engagement with a beta version of a guidebook for local leaders in government. To publicize the guide, Living Cities partnered with Governing.com. The recommendation to partner with Governing was driven by the prior partnership and partners at the Citi Foundation, who helped identify the media platform as a place where existing audiences were already interested in urban innovation.

In January, a print ad in Governing Magazine and also display advertising on Governing.com publicized the Guide. The guide was also included in a weekly Governing email newsletter for eight weeks during the pilot measurement period. The guide was collectively promoted on social media by all the partners on the project (Citi, Governing, Living Cities), who developed aligned messaging and marketing strategies to give it an additional push across various social media channels. Each of the partner organizations also designated two to three staff members to participate on a 'taskforce' that worked to brainstorm and coordinate around ideas to promote and share the Guide. The teams invested about two months of dedicated campaign planning, not documented in this report, before the guide was published to the website. Living Cities staff also handed out approximately 150 copies of the guide to participants in the Governing Summit on Performance and Innovation in Louisville.

Key Hypotheses and Practices Tested

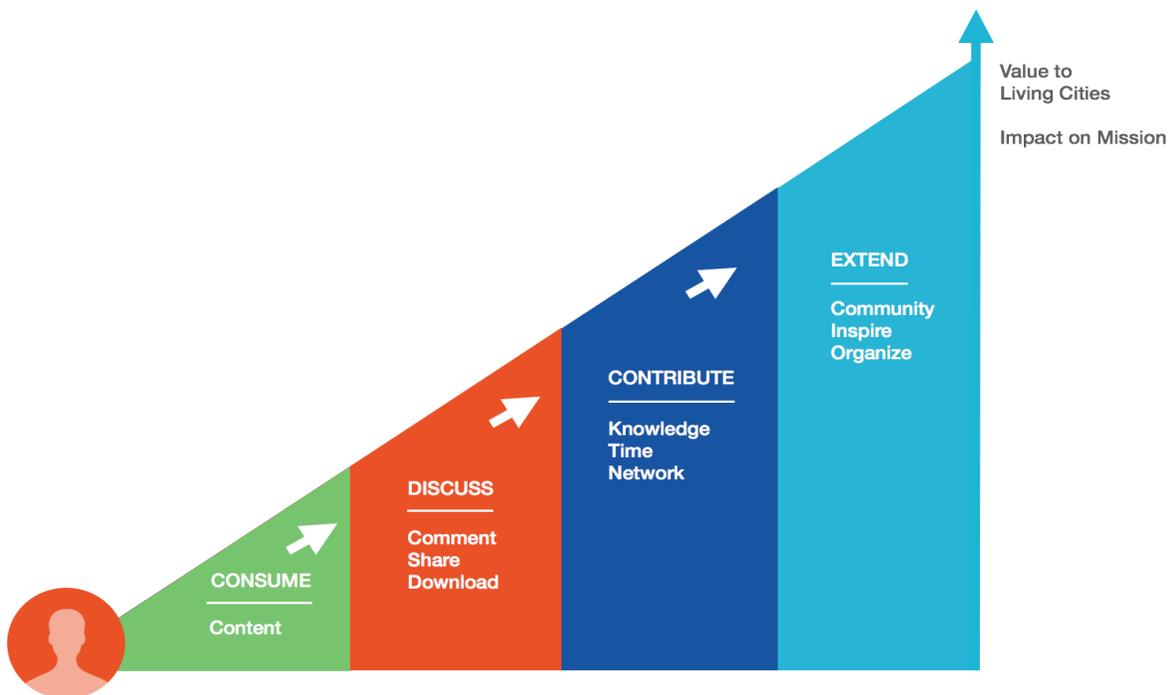
We tested a number hypotheses and hunches to see “what worked” about open-sourcing social change as we launched the Guide. These included:

- **Developing actionable resources for practitioners in local government:** We have seen that there is a hunger in the field for content, tools and resources that inspire change and fill unmet needs. Packaging the learning from Nigel Jacob’s experience as a public sector innovator in a digestible format was aimed at meeting a need among folks like those participating in the City Accelerator for accessible frameworks and examples from other cities.
- **Working with key partners to amplify promotion efforts across platforms:** Based on past research and analysis of our communications strategies, including the work that we did with Atlantic Media Strategies, Living Cities believes that content distribution and branded partnerships with key allies can help up expand content dissemination, increase reach and strengthen brand affinity.

- Using display and print advertising on partners' platforms:** We hypothesized that targeted advertising on platforms and in print publications consumed by target audiences would help direct those folks to our content, including folks who might not otherwise have heard of us.
- Leveraging an existing Micro-Site on Governing.com:** Our prior research tells us that having a hub, like a micro-site, for information and resources in a specific industry or topical area provides audiences more depth around those topics as well as an easy way to discover more content. We believe that creating and featuring our content on these hubs can support our goal of being viewed as a trusted platform by those audiences on issues that we care about. We know that we do not always have to build these hubs ourselves, rather we can harness existing hubs such as the City Accelerator microsite on Governing.com. Folks who care about the work of the City Accelerator already engaged with the microsite, making it an ideal platform on which to promote the Guide.

What We Measured

We tracked user behavior along a “ladder of engagement.” The ladder (below) shows how we mapped different types of user interactions to different levels of engagement on the Living Cities website and other digital platforms. It is also a guide to help Living Cities understand and categorize patterns in audience behavior, analyze trends and grow engagement.



During the period of the pilot, we were able to track engagement along three rungs of the Ladder. We've organized this report along those lines, examining the following metrics:

- **Consume** (Engagement Level 1)
 - Site Traffic: Sessions; Users
 - Content Consumption: Pageviews; Referral Traffic; Behavior Flows

- **Discuss and Use** (Engagement Level 2)
 - Comment: Site Comments; Social Media Mentions; Hashtag Usage
 - Share: Social Sharing; Retweets; Trackbacks
 - Download: Unique Downloads

- **Contribute** (Engagement Level 3)
 - Knowledge: Sharing research or contacting Living Cities staff via email or otherwise.
 - Time: Volunteering to produce a blog post, to promote something on another network, to join in a Twitter chat, or offering to help contribute to a Living Cities event.
 - Network: Individuals offering to partner in the future for any type of activity.

We then measured the impact of leveraging external networks to promote content. We measured impact using the following metrics:

- Top referral traffic and top landing pages to all of LivingCities.org.
- Top referral traffic to the Guide's dedicated resource page.
- New referrals (new networks) and returning visitors.

Lastly, we compared the engagement with this Guide relative to two other report-style resources previously published by Living Cities.

Comparison Resources:

- TII Evaluation: Nov 10 – Nov 18, 2014
- Shared Mobility Report: Dec 8 – Dec 16, 2014
- City Accelerator Guide: Jan 12 - Feb 11, 2015

We selected the resources with which to compare the Guide because they similarly packaged learnings around a particular topic or initiative, but unlike with the Guide, we did not build a wraparound strategy to promote them.

How We Measured

Tools: Google Analytics and Events Tracking; Sprout Social Reporting; Facebook Analytics, LinkedIn Analytics, TweetReach

Special Thanks to Elizabeth Bath and our partners at Threespot for their work, guidance and support in the design of the Pilot and development of the report.

What We Learned

The City Accelerator Guide generated a high volume and quality of traffic along all three rungs of our engagement ladder.

Our concerted efforts around marketing the guide were successful. We demonstrated a high return-on-investment across the key practices we tested and discovered new insight.

Top 5 Takeaways

- 1) By intentionally aligning our promotion efforts with those of partners whose audiences already turned to them as reliable sources of information on public sector innovation, we were better able to reach our key targets and stakeholders in the field.
- 2) While our key goal was to get the Guide in the hands of practitioners, our strategic efforts to disseminate and promote the Guide to new audiences, especially on social media, had the added benefit of driving traffic and conversation more broadly across the Living Cities website.
- 3) By targeting our promotion efforts on platforms where we could “meet people where they were”, we saw an increase in sharing and cross-posting behavior, suggesting audiences liked what they found and/or felt it would be valuable to their broader network.
- 4) The Guide was widely shared on social media, especially LinkedIn, where it outperformed all prior resources created and distributed by Living Cities on that platform. By the end of the pilot, we’d discovered a hunger among LinkedIn users for practical, actionable content.
- 5) During the Pilot period, “events,” or individual actions that users took on a page, accounted for 16% of all actions taken by users across the Living Cities site. This suggests that we smartly promoted, packaged and produced the Guide so that users were getting the content they expected.

Engagement: Audiences

We had limited time to prepare and set-up Google Analytics advanced tracking before launching this pilot, which limited our ability to fully understand the audience profile of users who visited the Guide online. However, by layering data from other tools, like Sprout Social and MailChimp, we were able to see when – and how – we were reaching certain members of our targeted audiences.

Engagement: Level 1 (Visit and Consume)

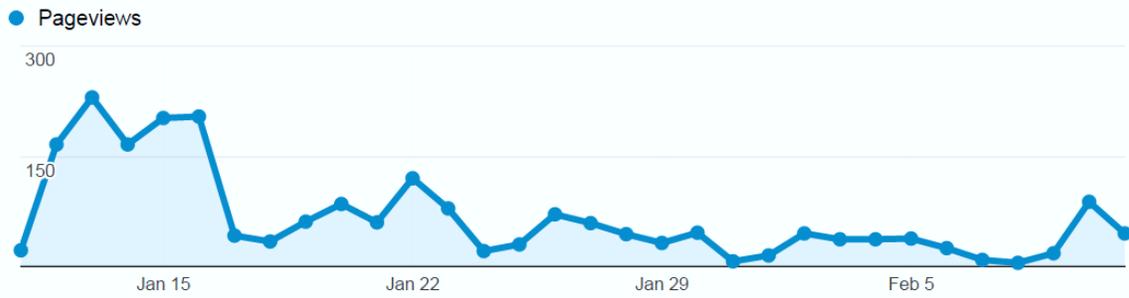
We found that our concerted marketing efforts around launch successfully drove users to the guide, and branded partnerships with key allies during this period helped to expand the possible reach of those dissemination strategies.

Traffic: Pageviews and Sessions

From Launch on January 12, 2015 to the end of the Pilot measurement period on February 11, 2015 (one month), the City Accelerator Guide received 2,143 Pageviews (table 1.1) and 1,851 Unique Pageviews. The Guide accrued more than 55% of its total traffic within the first week of launch, and 95% of its total traffic by the end of the second week; this was the period of time in which the “Taskforce” of Citi Foundation, Governing and Living Cities staff convened to align dissemination efforts.

1.1 Pageviews | January 12 – February 11, 2015

The City Accelerator Guide accrued 95% of its total traffic in the first two-weeks after launch.



Furthermore, the Guide generated much more traffic overall during its launch period than the two comparison resources (table 1.2). In a comparable “launch” period, we found that the Guide garnered 75% to 95% more traffic than the other two resources, by pageviews and unique pageviews.

1.2 Resource Specific Metrics | Pageviews and Unique Pageviews (PV)

The City Accelerator Guide garnered up to 95% more traffic than other resources in a comparable “launch” period.

	Nov 10 – Nov 18, 2014 Pageviews/Unique PVs	Dec 8 – Dec 16, 2014 Pageviews/Unique PVs	Jan 12 – Jan 20, 2015 Pageviews/Unique PVs	Jan 19 - Jan 27, 2015 Pageviews/Unique PVs	Feb 2 – Feb 11, 2015 *Sessions/ New Users
TII Three Year Evaluation	187 / 161	49 / 40	32 / 31	--	
Shared Mobility Report	---	266 / 62	62 / 58	--	

City Accelerator Guide	---	---	1,190 / 1,159	863 / 512	347 / 276
All-Site (Users)	3,066	2,836	3,071	2,496	4,222
All-Site (Pageviews)	11,845	11,037	11,313	8,912	13,167

During this time, the Guide was also featured prominently across the Living Cities homepage and landing pages. The Living Cities Homepage rose to the top as the LivingCities.Org landing page that drove the most traffic to the Guide outside of direct traffic. This has led us to believe that, even with partners cross-promoting content, featuring that content on the homepage can still drive a significant amount of traffic.

The Guide was also featured prominently on the City Accelerator Governing.com microsite homepage.

During its launch time period, the Guide resource page was the third most visited page on all of LivingCities.org. Given our goal of continuous improvement, this has led us to believe that the combination of partnership with Governing and the Citi Foundation, along with strategic placement of the guide on our homepage, helped to drive traffic to the Guide.

Traffic: Referrals and Partnerships

Our strategic, branded partnerships with key allies, like Governing.com, yielded significant returns on our investment of time and resources, both in terms of driving target audiences to the guide, and also in-terms of depth of engagement.

From launch until the end of our measurement period, Governing.com remained the second largest driver of traffic to the Living Cities website, accounting for 13% of all referral traffic – with most users landing first on the Guide Resource page. (Typically the highest referral traffic to Living Cities’ website comes from Twitter). By comparison, on Sept 12, 2014, Governing.com only accounted for 3.9% of referral traffic.

We also saw an above average amount of referral traffic to all of LivingCities.Org from two other key organizations during the pilot period:

- **GovTech Magazine** (govtech.com) referred 4x more traffic than average;
- **NYU Wagner’s GovLab** (thegovtlab.org) - referred 3x more traffic than average;

Increased traffic from GovTech and the GovLab, two platforms explicitly focused on an audience that is interested in public sector innovation, suggests that our outreach efforts were indeed reaching our target audiences, especially local government practitioners and people interested in

cities. The emergence of NYU Wagner's GovLab as a top referrer also suggested that our promotion efforts had also reached a new, and broader, audience of academics, researchers and thought-leaders in the urban policy space, that we hadn't previously targeted. We have identified these platforms as potential future partners, and are beginning to more deeply understand their audiences, what information they're most interested in and how they consume that information.

The Guide itself received more diverse referral traffic during the Pilot than web resource pages typically receive during the same amount of time. These top sources of referral traffic include:

- **New Implementation Guide for Local Innovation | NYU Wagner's GovLab**
<http://thegovlab.org/new-implementation-guide-for-local-government-innovation/>
- **Urban Acceleration | UrbiCity.ca**
<http://ubicity.ca/2015/01/16/urban-acceleration/>
- **This Week in Data | Data Smart City Solutions Blog, Harvard**
<http://datasmart.ash.harvard.edu/news/article/thisweekindata>
- **Comment Intégrer l'Innovation dans l'Administration Locale | Forum des Politiques Publiques d'Innovation**
<http://politiques-innovation.org/comment-integrer-linnovation-dans-ladministration-locale/>

All four of these top referring sites are geared toward audiences interested in public sector innovation, a good sign that our outreach and promotion efforts were reaching our target audiences, specifically key intermediaries in the municipal innovation field, and possibly the practitioners who follow their work.

In addition, we know that at least three of the above platforms picked up the Guide from our Press Release, confirming our hunch that the press releases is a valuable tool to reach audiences beyond our traditional "friends and neighbors," both in media and outside. We were pleasantly surprised to see the global uptake of the Guide. This information has helped us identify yet another line of audiences. It's also helped us more intentionally think through adjacent topics and networks where we might plug in going forward.

User Time on Page

We were also pleased to find that the quality of content consumption on this resource, in addition to the volume, far exceeded other resources and pages on LivingCities.Org. The average time on page for the City Accelerator Guide is 03:25 minutes, while the Average Time on Site (Avg) across all content during the period of the pilot was only 01:09 minutes. Visitors spent nearly double the amount of time on the City Accelerator Resource page in comparison to any of the top 10 highly trafficked pages (pages with the most visitors).

While we were not able to track metrics that would help us identify more specific pieces of the content that audiences found interesting, the high average time on page suggests that the content was both accessible to and resonant with our target audiences, and resulted in visitors who were more engaged with this content than other content on the website. No other resources have comparable quantities of traffic for such a long average time spent on page during that period.

In the future we're looking at implementing heat map tracking and measuring page scroll lengths

to help us identify which specific pieces of content drew-in our audiences.

Engagement: Level 2 (Discuss and Use)

In order to understand how deeply audiences were interacting, discussing and using the Guide, we tracked a series of *Events – or specific actions taken by users that indicate engagement beyond passive consumption of content. At the outset, we indicated a series of events that were most indicative of engagement on Level 2 of the Ladder, Discuss and Use. These events included, but were not limited to:

- Unique Downloads
- Clicks on External Links
- Clicks on Related Sidebar Content
- Clicks on Related Footer Content
- Page Comments

*(*Note: The events tracking code that we used wasn't able to be implemented until the third week of the pilot.)*

Although we began measuring after the Guide had reached its peak traffic, we still found that visitors to the Guide took significantly more follow-up actions than visitors to other resources or pages on LivingCities.Org. Most interestingly, we found a clear link between referral source and events completed. After analyzing the data, it is clear that partnering with Governing.com significantly bolstered our efforts. Audiences who originated from Governing.com not only spent higher than average time on the page, but also took more follow up actions.

*Downloads

During the course of the Pilot, resource downloads totalled 356 sitewide for all content. We were able to measure downloads of the Guide beginning January 29, 2015, and found that Guide downloads accounted for 52% of the sitewide downloads until the measurement period ended on February 20, 2015. No other resource produced by Living Cities even approaches this amount of download traffic.

Top referrals for downloads are the following:

- Direct links accounted for 72 of the downloads
- Governing.com accounted for 44 of the downloads
- Google organic search accounted for 17 of the downloads
- Engagingcities.com accounted for 6 of the downloads
- Twitter referrals accounted for 4 of the downloads
- Living Cities Newsletter accounted for 3 downloads.

*(*Note: The download tracking code that we used wasn't able to be implemented until the third week of the pilot.)*

Events

In order to understand what kinds of content generate event actions for us, and how content on other pages could be used to support our strategies around priority content like the Guide, we examined other, relevant pages with high events counts during this period and considered a few ways that we could create alignment and opportunities for discovery of the priority content:

[#BensTake: Are We Finally on the Road to a New Urban Practice that Ensures High Speed Broadband is available for All.](#) (29 events). We know that content shared under Ben's byline generally generates traffic. In future, we should consider better aligning Ben's content to resources that we are strategically promoting. The #BensTake series also explores topics and issues that are timely (around current events or recently released news stories), so there is an opportunity to link those conversations to the priority content where appropriate/relevant.

[The Integration Initiative's Three Year Evaluation Report](#) (28 events). The Integration Initiative is our signature initiative. It is therefore not surprising to see a high number of events on this report. We are actively considering ways to look across our whole portfolio, including TII, PMI, and the City Accelerator and to share learnings that might be relevant to all of the different audiences that are engaged with/interested in the specific bodies of work.

[Blog: Leverage Equity Data for Inclusive Growth](#) (27 events) There is a big audience for content around racial equity and inclusion as it is a cross-cutting topic. This might be a topic/lens through which we might explore lessons emerging from across our portfolio as described above.

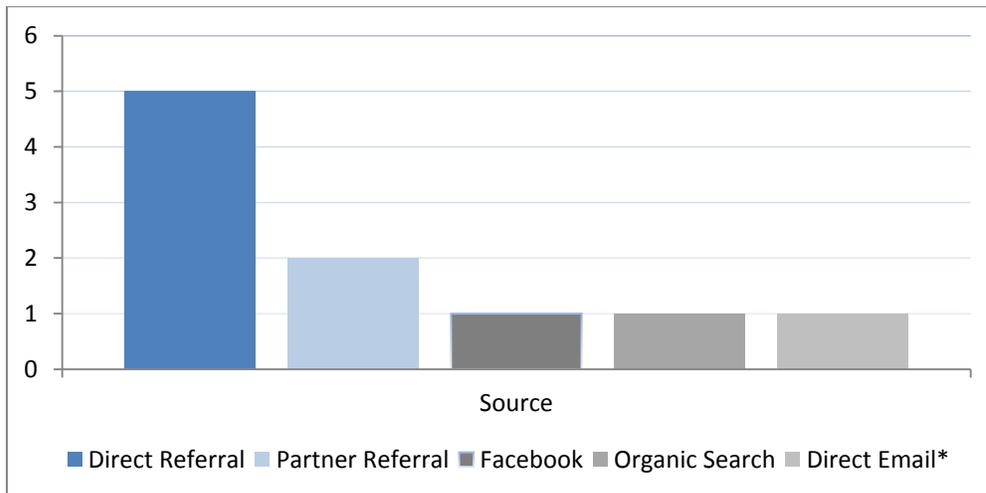
Engagement: Level 3 (Contribute)

On the Guide's landing page, we included a email newsletter sign-up as an explicit call-to-action for visitors. We chose email as a call-to-action, because we believe it is a measurement of deeper engagement, one that demonstrates audiences' willingness to offer their time to receive regular updates from Living Cities.

From Jan 12 - Feb 20, 2015 there were 10 email signups from the City Accelerator guide resource page. We were encouraged to see some, albeit limited, traction around this "level 3" engagement behavior early on into the pilot, as it has been a challenge to attract sign-ups in the past. To our surprise, Direct Referral accounted for half of those email sign-ups (chart 2.1), suggesting that audiences engaging with the Guide at the 'Contribute' level were actively looking for this type of content.

2.1 Email Sign-Ups by Source | January 12 – February 20, 2015

Direct Referrals accounted for half of email sign-ups.



*(*Note: Direct Email does not include the Living Cities Newsletter.)*

Two of the remaining eight users who provided their emails were referred by organizations we'd actively engaged and partnered with to promote the Guide, Governing.com and Engaging Cities, the latter which had published a profile on their blog. Although the number of users who provided their emails is still relatively low, including this call to action was a first test. The top sources of sign-ups indicate to us that word-of-mouth is still a powerful tool in driving deeper engagement with our content, and something to experiment with more intentionally in the future.

Social Networks

Another way that we measured engagement at this level was by tracking contributions to social networks. Social sharing is an important measure of whether users outside of Living Cities want to share resources more broadly with their networks, and a way to identify brand advocates. The taskforce of partners from Citi, Governing and Living Cities aligned our messaging and focused on promoting the Guide with the hashtag #CityAccelerator across three main social platforms: 1) Twitter, 2) Facebook and 3) LinkedIn.

The Accelerator guide resource page url was shared on social media 614times (Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter) from Jan 12 - Feb 20, 2014 and it was most widely shared on Twitter. Living Cities has an active presence on Twitter and the public sector audience was one of the first we we been engaging in an intentional way on the platform, starting in January of 2012. While it was not surprising that Twitter emerged as the platform where most sharing occurred, the volume of Tweets still far surpassed the comparative Living Cities resources (table 2.2).

We know, from our ongoing on audience segmentation work with partners like Atlantic Media Strategies, and Threespot, that an important subset of our public sector innovation audiences (particularly in the 'civic tech' space) are digital natives who are active on social media and the blogosphere. The data appears to support our hypothesis that heavily focusing the Taskforce's

social media promotion efforts on Twitter an effective use of the partners' collective resources to reach this audience.

The resource was also shared 20 times on Facebook and shared 58 times on LinkedIn. The rate of sharing on LinkedIn was an interesting finding and we are interested in exploring how to better leverage this platform for future content sharing around public sector innovation.

2.2 All Time Social Shares | Comparison Resources

A majority of the social sharing occurred on Twitter, followed by LinkedIn.

	Comments on site	Shares on Twitter	Shares on Facebook	Shares on LinkedIn
TII Evaluation	0	12	2 shares / 2 likes	19
Shared Mobility	2	41	10 shares / 27 likes	0
City Accelerator Guide	0	536	20 shares / 13 likes	58

During the period of the pilot, Twitter generated 2,220 total referrals to LivingCities.org. As a result of the relatively high volume of social sharing, approximately 342 of those referrals were direct links to the City Accelerator Guide. Facebook generated 479 total referrals and 28 of those referrals were direct links to the City Accelerator Guide. LinkedIn generated 271 total referrals to LivingCities.org and 32 of those referrals were direct to the City Accelerator Guide.

Interestingly, social media referrals did not generate as high quality of traffic as other platforms. Users referred from social media were less likely to download the Guide or take follow-up actions outside of sharing on their social networks. This is a trend in which we're focused on exploring further in future analysis.

Additional Lessons

We felt that the guide looked like a final draft of a knowledge product when in fact it was meant as a first version. It would have been interesting to understand what engagement would have looked like had we presented the Guide in more of a 'beta' form.

We have a hypothesis; based on our experience with producing and promotion another resource in 2012, our [Field Scan of Civic Technology](#), that engaging a similar audience to the target audience for the City Accelerator Guide; that engaging this audience in earlier stages of development of ideas/content can increase engagement. The Field Scan of Civic Technology set out to gather opinions on the current state of practice in the field of civic technology from the perspective of twenty five local and national leaders in civic tech, in local government, and in nonprofits working to address social equity issues. The scan was intended to inform the work of Living Cities and its members, as well as others interested in harnessing technology to advance transformational change in cities and communities.

As we continue to develop our point of view around public sector innovation, soliciting input from other thought leaders can help us to pressure test our thinking and also move audiences up the ladder of engagements as they become contributors and partners.

Adjustments

- From an implementation standpoint, the tracking code wasn't added to be able to count downloads from the outset of this pilot which made it difficult to measure overall downloads.
- The guide was released on a Monday. We initially felt this was a good target date, however we found that a) Media partners are often busy meeting deadlines on Mondays, and thus were less able to shift their attention to our content, and b) our own site sees lower levels of engagement on Mondays. In the future, we will keep these, and other, additional factors in mind, and coordinate launch timing to optimize initial traffic and traction.
- The planning process for promoting the Guide began about eight weeks prior to launch. We originally thought this would be enough time. However, we realized closer to the date that it would be beneficial to convene a task-force of communications partners from each organization, Citi, Governing, and Living Cities, to focus specifically on communications and social media promotion. We realize now that it would have been beneficial to convene the taskforce of staff from each institution earlier in the planning process. And to jump-start conversations about goals and target audiences during this process as well.

We generated many dissemination ideas through these conversation that we were unable to prepare for in advance of the launch of the Guide.

- We learned a lot about “what works” and were able to develop a baseline. We were not able to track and measure against all of our goals from the outset of the pilot. However, continuous improvement was one of the reasons we did this work in the first place ,to build the practice of measurement and analysis against goals into how we work. This was the first pilot. We were still figuring out how to do the goal setting, we learned a lot of things that will bring to the work going forward.

Recommendations

- Marketing a resource or other knowledge product on the Living Cities website drives traffic to other content on the Living Cities website, so anytime we choose to promote or market a resource, we’re be exposing audiences to content more broadly. In addition, when you want to drive traffic to a resource, posting it on the homepage increases traffic.
- Based on the data captured during this pilot, we can say that some Living Cities audiences have an appetite for spending time consuming content on our website and are apt to click on related content. It is recommended that Living Cities makes an effort to always connect blog posts and resources to other content. Provide audiences with opportunities to move more deeply into content.
- Partnering with other organizations to help promote content drives new visitors. In the future look for other ways to partner with organizations and engage them as early as possible in the planning process for development, sharing, and dissemination of the content. We also recommend engaging in other dialogues in different digital spaces, commenting on blog posts on other forums is free and a good way to expose new visitors to your website.
- Audiences, like the one that is interested in public sector innovation, that are active on social and digital media appreciate the opportunity to contribute and share their feedback, ideas, and experiences. In the future, we recommend looking for opportunities to engage these audiences in an ongoing way, whether that be asking questions about the content/ideas on social media, sharing a content or tool that is not ‘fully baked’ and beta testing it with them, or asking them to contribute a blog or other content on a related idea or example from their work that supports or offers a different perspective on the ideas that we shared. There will certainly be times when our ideas are more fully baked and we will want to share a more ‘finished’ product or tool, but engaging others on the path to that stage can be extremely beneficial as not only does it allow us to pressure test our ideas, but it also grows our audience and likely the demand for our content offerings.