

City of Boulder Nextdoor Pilot Project

I. Purpose

The City of Boulder plans to pilot the use of Nextdoor, a social network for neighborhoods, as a tool to reach and engage residents through communication targeted to specific parts of the city.

The Boulder community is already active on Nextdoor. According to the company, there are currently more than 60 neighborhoods in Boulder in its system. These neighborhoods have about 7,200 participants. As a point of comparison, the city's Facebook account, which does very well compared to other government pages, has about 6,000 followers. Nextdoor, unlike other social networks currently used by the city, allows messages to be sent to one or many neighborhoods or services areas. All Nextdoor members are verified residents of their communities.

The primary purpose of Nextdoor is for neighbors to communicate with one another. Nextdoor recently decided to give local governments and public agencies the opportunity to share information with Nextdoor participants. Residents do have the choice to "mute" these types of posts, and city staff will not have access to neighbor-to-neighbor communication unless this communication occurs as a response to a city post (or if a city staff member happens to live in that neighborhood and is a Nextdoor participant).

II. Project Scope

The City of Boulder will start a six-month pilot of agency use on Nextdoor in early 2016. The pilot will focus on information from four city departments, which will use the social network as follows.

Neighborhood Services

- The neighborhood liaison will post information about neighborhood programs: neighborhood grants or additional programs/resources related to neighborhood-level engagement across the city.
- Departments not directly involved in the pilot may utilize the neighborhood liaison (or the city Media Relations/Communication manager, to post information specific to place—such as impacts from street or trail closures, special events or city-sponsored events.

Police

- The public safety public information officer will post community events related to the Police Department such Coffee with a Cop, community forums and toy drives.

- Crime information: The public information office will make a determination as to scope of posts. Some messages may be localized because of limited impacts to specific neighborhoods and adjacent areas, while others may be shared citywide.
- Crime prevention tips
- Periodic promotion of value-added services offered by the department, such as bike/laptop registration or car seat inspections.
- Urgent messaging will be utilized for urgent issues related to public safety. Examples: Evacuations and instances where a dangerous suspect(s) is on the loose that poses an immediate public threat. This will not replace other notification channels in these cases.

Public Works/Planning, Housing + Sustainability (PW/PH+S)

- All posts for these departments will be made by a PW/PH+S communications specialist.
- Types of content could include invitations to community events and other engagement opportunities, customer information related to services offered by the Planning and Development Services Center, and notices about construction projects or other neighborhood-based work that could impact residents or business owners.
- Discussion is ongoing about whether to use this tool to drive residents to existing means of offering feedback on land-use and zoning proposals.
- Roll-out of these uses will likely be conservative than the other departments as resource needs are better understood and evaluated

III. Guidelines and Expectations

City of Boulder staff is expected to use Nextdoor in accordance with the city's Interim Social Media Policy. Staff members who use the City of Boulder account are speaking as city representatives and should represent the city accordingly.

Staff is strongly encouraged to use Nextdoor for place-based communication. Postings directed to the entire Boulder community on Nextdoor should be used sparingly, and should be timely, important and broadly applicable to all residents. If there is an emergency situation, Nextdoor can be used in addition to, but not as a replacement for, the delivery of critical information.

As a general rule, Nextdoor recommends that public agencies limit their postings to each neighborhood to once or twice a week. City of Boulder Nextdoor account administrators should review prior postings and coordinate internally to avoid excessive posting. During the course of the pilot, each participating city department will be assigned one administrator. Departments that wish to share information but do not currently have an administrator should contact Amanda Nagl for assistance.

IV. Postings, Comments and Private Messages

All posts, comments and private messages from the City of Boulder Nextdoor account should adhere to city policies on external communication. For consistency, all communication should adhere to City of Boulder and Associated Press (AP) style.

Administrators of the city's Nextdoor account are encouraged to promptly respond to comments and private messages, whenever possible and appropriate. If a question is asked that requires additional research and response time, staff should acknowledge the initial comment or message and inform the resident that a response will come once information is gathered.

The City of Boulder encourages residents to use Nextdoor to share comments, concerns and questions, but, as consistent with the city's social media commenting policy, the city reserves the right to remove the following types of comments on city posts:

- Off-topic comments
- Comments that include commercial advertisements and spam or promote services or products
- Comments that incite illegal activity
- Obscene comments
- Comments fostering, promoting or perpetuating illegal discrimination as defined in the Boulder Revised Code, 1981.
- Libelous or defamatory comments
- Comments containing specific or imminent threats
- Comments infringing on copyrighted or trademarked material

Only the author of the post and agency administrators have the ability to remove a post or replies on a post. Authors have the option to delete their own posts and replies. Administrators have the option to delete their own content as well as remove any post or reply on the agency website. Any comments or posts that are removed must be archived in accordance with the city's record retention policy.

V. Measuring Success

Staff will evaluate the City of Boulder's Nextdoor pilot using a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures. In the fifth month of the six-month pilot, the city will ask Nextdoor users to complete a web-based survey. The survey will ask residents about the city's use of Nextdoor, including topics such as: post frequency; value and variety of content shared; and interest in seeing the city continue to use Nextdoor.

Following completion of the pilot, data also will be used to evaluate its success. Items to be examined include: number of Nextdoor posts; growth in Nextdoor usage in Boulder; engagement with the City of Boulder Nextdoor account; number of private messages received; and referral traffic from Nextdoor to the city website.

Each department will weigh its experience with Nextdoor against the return on investment of time and resources to support the platform. Next steps will be determined based on survey feedback, data and input from departments participating in the pilot.

VI. Nextdoor Implementation

The City of Boulder plans to launch its Nextdoor pilot on Jan. 25, 2016. Prior to that date, departments participating in the pilot will be responsible for designating Nextdoor admins, populating Nextdoor profiles and developing strategies for generating Nextdoor posts and responding to questions and comments on the platform. The city's first post on Nextdoor will go out to every neighborhood and announce how the city plans to use the platform, what residents can expect, details about the pilot and information about how residents can opt out of city communication on Nextdoor. The City of Boulder will also post information on its website about its Nextdoor pilot for the general public. Following the launch of the pilot, the city's Nextdoor admins will work closely to coordinate posts and post timing, particularly for any citywide posts.

The following actions will be taken to promote the launch of the city's Nextdoor pilot: a news release the week of Jan. 25, 2016; a series of staggered posts on other city social media accounts, including Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and LinkedIn; coverage on Channel 8; messages in relevant department-specific external newsletters; and an announcement in the internal citywide newsletter.

VII. Definitions

Place-based Communication - Place-based communication is an increasingly popular form of reaching people where they already are. This strategy allows local governments to share information with, and tailor it to, specific communities. In the residential context, these communities are usually organized around neighborhoods.

Nextdoor - Nextdoor.com is a free, private social network used by one in three U.S. neighborhoods. Residents get to know each other, ask questions, share recommendations and discuss safety.

Nextdoor for Public Agencies – Nextdoor provides local public agencies with a custom interface that allows them to share important updates and request information and action from residents. More than 1,300 agencies use Nextdoor today.

Neighborhood Leads – A Nextdoor resident with specific responsibilities for their digital neighborhood, including verifying members, adjusting neighborhood boundaries and reviewing inappropriate messages. The founding member of a neighborhood website is automatically given Lead status once his or her neighborhood launches with 10 verified members.