2018 LAND TRUST COMMUNICATION GUIDE

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APRIL 27, 2018

Masters project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Environmental Management degree in the Nicholas School of the Environment at Duke University
Executive Summary

Communication is a critical component of a land trust’s success. Since land trusts are mainly private, non-profit organizations, they depend heavily on donors and volunteers. A strong communications strategy will attract new donors and volunteers while retaining old ones.

This project for the Land Conservancy of West Michigan (LCWM) evaluates different communications platforms and strategies and provides a list of recommendations for an effective communications plan. For the purpose of this project, an “effective communications plan” is defined as a plan that engages the community and inspires members to donate money or volunteer for the organization.

This project asks two specific research questions:
1. What kinds of content/programming inspire people to donate/volunteer?
2. What kinds of communications platforms are best suited to deliver this content/programming?

Research was conducted via a literature review, informational interviews with other environmental organizations, and a survey disseminated to LCWM members. The literature review encompassed 37 peer-reviewed papers. Informational interviews were conducted with 6 other environmental organizations, 5 of which were land trusts, to inform communications strategy and platform goals for the LCWM. These organizations were chosen due to their similarity to the LCWM, their strong reputations as conservation organizations, and their renowned communications work. Finally, the survey evaluated the client’s current communications work, and the results informed my recommendations for change or improvement.

All the organizations advocate that Facebook and Instagram are the most important social media platforms, with three organizations also recommending Twitter as an important tool for political advocacy. Facebook is best for disseminating news about the organization and promoting events, and Instagram is important for engaging the community and showcasing the organization’s work.

All the organizations also championed print materials, specifically annual or biannual publications that celebrate their work over the past several months. While the number of print materials is minimized, their existence is still highly popular and engaging with the community.

Video is also a critical part of communication today. All the organizations either currently use video or are prioritizing its development. Video can be especially compelling for donors and volunteers.

Events are an important part of outreach. Fundraising events that target corporate sponsorships can be successful in making money, but member appreciation events that often lose money can be even more important. Member appreciation events keep members engaged and foster interpersonal relationships that encourage people to stay involved. Therefore, they are an important strategy and future investment.
Finally, events allow for interpersonal, on-the-ground interaction that is crucial for engagement with disenfranchised and marginalized communities. Partnering with other organizations, including non-environmentally-centric organizations, helps establish trust in the communities the organization is trying to reach. Partnership events with schools, YMCAs, and health organizations help broaden the organization’s reach and attract a wider audience.

Final recommendations for the LCWM include:

- Prioritize Facebook, Instagram, and Youtube/Vimeo over other forms of social media
- Invest in an annual (or five-year) professional paper magazine product
- Strengthen partnerships with local organizations
- Hold more events for outreach

While these recommendations were tailored specifically to the LCWM, they may be applicable to many environmental organizations, especially other land trusts. Ultimately, technology offers additional avenues to engage and interact with community members. A diverse communications strategy will reach more people and serve to strengthen the organization overall.
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Introduction

Over 10,000 acres of Michigan’s white sandy beaches, towering pine forests, and endangered oak barren ecosystems are protected by the Land Conservancy of West Michigan (LCWM). The LCWM is a land trust – an organization that buys and protects land for conservation purposes (Pennsylvania Land Trust Association 2017).

Most land trusts, including the LCWM, are small, private, non-profit organizations (Pennsylvania Land Trust Association 2017). Therefore, volunteers and donors are essential components for a land trust to fulfill its mission. Volunteers greatly assist land trusts in conducting their stewardship and outreach work, and donors keep land trusts financially stable, even in times of national economic uncertainty. Environmental organizations that depend less on federal sources of funds and more on donors are less susceptible to political upheaval.

Additionally, land trusts also protect land via conservation easements. A conservation easement is a legal agreement where the landowner maintains ownership of the land but surrenders certain rights, including the right to subdivide or do additional development on the property. When the land is sold to new owners, the conservation easement remains in effect, ensuring protection of the land for many generations (The Nature Conservancy 2018). A successful community engagement strategy is therefore important to encourage people to become an easement donor.

Strong community engagement depends on a successful communications strategy (Bubela et al 2009). In order to support an organization, one must first be aware of the organization. They must understand why that organization is worth supporting. They then need to know how they may go about supporting that organization – where do they volunteer? How do they donate?

A communications strategy should advertise to new people, celebrate the organization’s accomplishments, and provide important logistical information. However, a truly effective communications strategy must prioritize the promotion of civic engagement and active dialog with the public (Kheerajit & Flor 2013; Nisbet & Scheufele 2009; Spoel et al 2009). Communication based on one-way conversation from experts is less effective for encouraging action (Brulle 2010). People need to believe in their own personal agency to effect change.

Yet what an effective communications strategy looks like is variable. Different communities can respond to different types of content. Additionally, different people may react in different ways to the same content (Hansen & Machin 2013). Moreover, technology continues to change the way we consume information, particularly in increasing the number of communications platforms available.

Finding a balance for different communications platforms can prove challenging. Crafting a brief Facebook message takes less time and effort than creating a short Youtube video, yet both may prove worthwhile investments. Additionally, message content can vary greatly. Is the post educational? Creative? Donor-centric? Facts do not speak for themselves, especially in science (Barker 2006). Therefore, a message’s framing can be as important as its platform (Bubela et al 2009; Lakoff 2010).
Frames guide the consumer on how to interpret an issue, especially why an issue is important and what solution strategies should be implemented (Gamson & Modigliani 1989). An effective frame will not hype or misrepresent the facts, but it will convey an impactful story about the topic’s importance to the individual (Bubela et al 2009).

In addition, trust can determine a source’s influence on an individual (Sturgis & Allum 2004). People will be more likely to support conservation efforts in general if they are consuming information about the benefits of conservation from an organization they trust. However, organizations or individuals who have an opinion on an environmental issue, but are not necessarily informed authorities, can also be influential and encourage people to act contrary to an organization’s mission or goals (Nisbet & Mooney 2007).

Citizens learn about science and politics through news media more than any other source (Olausson 2011). While people can reject what they see in media – e.g., climate change denial – ultimately, news media influences their opinions on issues (Caulfield et al 2007; Bubela et al 2009; Olausson 2011; Scharl et al 2017). In addition, when individuals lack motivation to thoroughly research a topic, they’ll make judgements – such as whether or not logging is a healthy part of ecosystem management – based on mental shortcuts, their values, and their emotions, instead of vetted science (Popkin 1991). Therefore, how we communicate science is as important as what we communicate.

Environmental communication can be particularly challenging, for it often directly impacts the health, safety, and lifestyles of the public (Seiler et al 2015). Miscommunication can cause anger, distrust, and resentment if people believe they are being negatively harmed by the work an environmental organization performs. Additionally, social factors like education, race, and income can influence the degree to which people are alienated and can affect their motivation to be proactive (Ryan & Deci 2000).

Jarreau et al (2015) consulted both environmental psychologists and environmental communicators to evaluate best practices for environmental communication. They found that people respond strongest to issues when a personal connection is made. People are more likely to care when they learn how an issue impacts their backyard. In particular, if people perceive an environmental issue to be a direct threat to something they value, they are more likely to take pro-environmental action (Hansla et al 2008). However, it’s important to frame the issue positively by offering solutions that individuals themselves can practice (Jarreau et al 2015). The more environmental communicators emphasize place-based stories and local communities, the more effective they will be.

However, different types of written and visual content will resonate with different types of people. As such, a diverse communications portfolio will attract a wider audience. For example, Krause (2017) evaluated the scientific journal, Nature. Nature strives to reach a varied audience, and as such it publishes many types of scientific content.

In addition to peer-reviewed papers, Nature publishes content written for non-experts, including journalism and opinion pieces. It also features a variety of visual content. Some pieces contain complex graphs and figures that represent data, and other pieces include artistic drawings and
This strategy allows *Nature* to engage with many different types of readers by tailoring content specifically for the audience (Krause 2017). While this sounds practical, it is often not feasible to invest the same amount of time and energy into every type of communications platform or content.

Additionally, technology has entirely changed the landscape of how people consume information and engage with organizations. The Pew Research Center found that in 2017, 67% of U.S. adults reported “social media” as their primary source for news. Almost half of Americans reported getting their news from Facebook alone. The other most popular social media platforms were Youtube (58% of American adults), Instagram (26% of American adults), and Snapchat (18% of American adults). Only 15% of American adults reported having a Twitter account (Pew Research Center 2017).

New technology and media platforms have made it easier to tailor messages to specific groups of people, engage in two-way conversation, and influence social behavior and attitudes (Willoughby & Smith 2016). Social media is used by all races and ethnicities, as well as people from all education levels (Chou et al 2009). Such, social media has allowed organizations to become interactive with a much greater proportion of the public.

The health industry, for example, has found success in using social media – especially mobile apps – to educate and engage the public (Norman et al 2008; Thackeray et al 2008; Vance et al 2009; Willoughby & Smith 2016). The environmental industry can benefit equally from such strategies that are already employed for other fields of science, health, and risk communication (Besley 2015).

However, while the younger generation embraces new technologies, in general, older demographics prefer paper correspondence (Chou et al 2009; Seiler et al 2015). Additionally, in-person events are another way organizations can engage with the community to promote their work. By diversifying the communications tactics and emphasizing how the work is personally relevant to the audience, an organization can engage with more people and have greater campaign success (Nisbet & Mooney 2007; Nisbet & Scheufele 2007).

Since land trusts generally have small staffs, they need to maximize the effectiveness of their strategies in the most efficient way possible. This means prioritizing certain platforms and strategies for each goal the organization sets.

This project looks at a variety of communications strategies and platforms land trusts use to increase their donor and volunteer base, as well as improve their outreach to marginalized communities. Specifically, this project evaluates:

1. What kinds of content/programming inspire people to donate/volunteer?
2. What kinds of communications platforms are best suited to deliver this content/programming?

Goals for communications strategies and platforms were established based on the information attained through the pursuit of these research questions. I then offer recommendations to the
client, the LCWM, for how to achieve these goals by altering/improving their current use of communications strategies/platforms.

Since every land trust will have its own unique situation (geography, communities, ecosystems, legal policies), the recommendations in this project are tailored specifically for the LCWM. However, the information provided should prove useful to a variety of land trusts, as well as similar environmental organizations.

Project Design

The Client
The LCWM protects land in eight counties and is the only fully accredited land trust in Western Michigan. It is located in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Its permanent staff consists of nine people, including Colin Hoogerwerf, the Director of Communications and a Nicholas School of the Environment Master of Environmental Management alumnus.

The main communication goals of the LCWM are to encourage people to donate or volunteer. Additionally, The LCWM has a large variety of nature preserves/natural areas open to the public. The LCWM aims to promote their preserves to the public. The more people know about the preserves, the more likely they are to visit the preserves, and the more likely they are to then attend volunteer workday events at these preserves. Moreover, visiting preserves helps foster an emotional connection to the land and may encourage people to donate money as well.

The LCWM uses a variety of platforms to communicate with its members and to the general public:

- Webpage (including blog featuring creative and educational content)
- Facebook (~2,000 followers)
- Twitter (~900 followers)
- Instagram (~450 followers)
- Paper mail (goes out to 300-10,000 people, depending on the campaign)

Project structure
To provide helpful and informed recommendations, this project encompasses three phases:

1. Science communication and outreach strategy research. This includes a thorough literature review of 37 papers, most published in the last 15 years, from 26 different journals.
2. Informational interviews with other land trusts and a non-land trust organization dedicated to environmental conservation.
3. Collaboration with the LCWM to design a survey that the LCWM then distributed to its members and followers asking for feedback on their communications products. This survey also evaluated donor and volunteer behavior.
Methods

Phase 1: Research

I conducted a literature review to establish a comprehensive baseline for general communication platforms and strategies used today. I used the Duke University libraries to find peer-reviewed papers that explore science communication and current communication tactics and platforms, and most papers were published in the last 15 years. I also researched papers exploring outreach strategies for marginalized communities.

Phase 2: Informational Interviews

While Phase 1 helped establish a big-picture understanding of communication strategies, in Phase 2, I conducted informational interviews with specific environmental organizations to provide practical input relevant to my client.

The research I conducted in Phase 1 helped me to develop a list of topics/issues for inquiry. I then worked with the LCWM to create specific interview questions that would be most helpful/relevant to my client (Appendix A).

I applied for and received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct my interviews. A copy of my IRB application and approval can be found in Appendix B. Each interview lasted 30 minutes to an hour.

Six environmental organizations similar to my client were chosen to be interviewed. These organizations were selected based on input from my client, my advisor, and personal consultants who have worked for the Land Trust Alliance or a specific Land Trust that my client admired. These organizations are renowned both for their conservation and their communications work, making them important and relevant role models for my client.

Some of the organizations are in the same geographic region as my client, whereas others are spread across the country. All are land trusts except Ottawa County Parks.

Informational Interviewees:

- Bluegrass Land Conservancy (Lexington, KY)
  - Communications & Events Manager: Laura Miller
- Columbia Land Trust (Vancouver, WA)
  - Communications Manager: Jay Kosa
- Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy (Traverse City, MI)
  - Director of Communications and Engagement: Jennifer Jay
- Openlands (Chicago, IL)
  - Director of Communications: Brandon Hayes
- Ottawa County Parks (West Olive, MI)
  - Communication Specialist: Jessica VanGinhoven
- Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (Asheville, NC)
  - Communications Director: Angela Sheperd
Due to a recommendation by Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy’s (SAHC) communications director (Sheperd), I also spoke with SAHC’s philanthropy director (Heyne) for additional information concerning donor asks.

I added Ottawa County Parks as a source, for they manage many spectacular environmental regions of West Michigan where my client is based. Ottawa County Parks’ reputation for conservation efforts and stewardship is highly esteemed, and they partner with the LCWM on several projects. Due to their close relationship with the LCWM and their similar community base, I concluded that they may offer valuable insight despite not being a land trust.

I took notes during each interview. After all the interviews were completed, I compiled my notes and arranged the information according to question and response. I then coded the responses for platform use (did they use it? yes/no) and category (how did they use it?). I did the same for communications strategy questions.

**Phase 3: Survey**

I synthesized the information from Phases 1 and 2 to develop expectations and goals for my client’s communications strategies. However, I needed to evaluate the current state of my client’s communications work so that I could offer specific recommendations for how to achieve these goals. Therefore, in Phase 3, I wrote and disseminated an electronic survey to LCWM members about their communications strategies and content.

From August – September 2017, the LCWM and I designed the survey questions. I worked with Professor Randall Kramer, the Deputy Director of the Duke Global Health Institute and professor of Social Science Surveys, to refine the survey design and wording.

The LCWM contacted specific members and asked them to pretest the survey. I contacted a few of my classmates who were trained in survey design to offer additional comments. We had ten pretesters total.

Once we refined the survey by taking pretest comments into account, I created two identical versions of the survey (Appendix C). One version was to be distributed only through the LCWM’s e-newsletter. The other version was distributed via Facebook. This was done to improve response rate estimation, for we expected it would be easier to calculate from the e-newsletter metrics than the outreach metrics on Facebook. Facebook posts continue to accrue views, even when a new post is made, making the outreach statistics more variable. Additionally, there is no way to tell how many of the same people are being reached by different posts. However, the e-newsletter is sent to the same pool of people each time.

There were no paper versions of the survey. We used Qualtrics software, made available to me through Duke University, to house and distribute the survey and pretest.

The LCWM distributed the survey via its monthly newsletter and a Facebook post on October 3rd, 2017. The survey closed on December 2nd, 2017. We had a total of three Facebook posts
promoting the survey. In addition to the October e-newsletter, the LCWM promoted the survey in their November e-newsletter. No e-mails (including follow-up reminders) exclusively featuring the survey were sent to the LCWM subscribers on request of the client.

I used R software to run statistical tests on several results of the survey. Since the main goal of this survey was to learn what types of platforms are more likely encourage people to donate or volunteer, I used a generalized linear model (glm) to determine if there is any statistical significance to the LCWM platform people follow and their donor or volunteer status.

Results

Informational Interviews

In this section, I summarize the most relevant talking points of each informational interview, organized by topic. I specifically note where there wasn’t consensus, or if only some of the organizations commented on the issue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BLC</td>
<td>Bluegrass Land Conservancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLT</td>
<td>Columbia Land Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GTRLC</td>
<td>Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCP</td>
<td>Ottawa County Parks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Openlands</td>
<td>Openlands</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAHC</td>
<td>Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy</td>
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Content & Strategies

All the organizations mentioned the importance of concise, narrative storytelling. The CLT claims that, in addition to being more interesting, narrative pieces are a great way to keep stories about the same land more relevant. The GTRLC believes that narrative pieces help people understand their role in the bigger picture, which can convert people into long-term donors.

Messaging

Every organization aims to keep their messaging as mission-centric and bipartisan as possible. They focus on what makes their region unique, for the importance of conservation has to make a personal connection, and they all emphasize how their organization is successful and trustworthy.

The GTRLC strives to ensure that their relationship with donors is mission-based and not project-specific. This helps convert people into long-term donors. Additionally, they often rely on partnerships to help emphasize their reputation.

Similarly, to ensure people can feel confident that their donation matters and that the organization can be trusted, the SAHC relies on their reputation that they’re not a “land-grab”
organization. They emphasize that as a non-profit, they are only trying to conserve land with the highest conservation value. The SAHC often uses the tagline, “You are protecting globally significant land,” to emphasize that the land they protect is globally unique. They focus on the importance of the region’s rare species and rare habitats. This strategy helps connect donors to the bigger picture. That way, donors who gave to a project in their backyard are more likely to give to other projects as well.

Similarly, the Bluegrass region is strongly tied to farmland, so the main mission and framing of the BLC centers around the importance of preserving prime land for farming. This includes highlighting how the excellent limestone in the grass makes horses’ bones stronger. They emphasize the historical importance of their work and how land conservation supports Kentucky’s identity in their messaging.

The SAHC emphasizes the human connection in their storytelling and how people specifically benefit from conservation. When they are trying to raise money for the protection of private land, they focus on how that land is important for ecological connectivity – especially wildlife corridors – and watershed quality. If the private land is a high point on the landscape, they’ll emphasize the benefit of having a pristine view. In this way, they celebrate how protecting private land will benefit the protected public land people can frequent.

OCP targets people’s interests (e.g., the benefit of conservation for monarch butterflies), and always keep the messaging positive. They believe that there’s a story in everything, especially activities that the staff may find routine or boring. Stories about the operations team putting in kayaks and fun facts about how many doggie poop bags people use in the parks are popular and entertaining.

OCP also emphasizes how they are using their money, as well as how people use their services. Their goal is for people to know about the opportunities the parks offer, with the belief that if people know about their organization, they will be pleased about the work that they do.

The CLT uses a diversity of frames, such as human interest, science-based, and donor-centric, to engage with the widest audience possible. They promote their staff as relatable and approachable. One of their main slogans is that they are “Scientists who you’d want to have a beer with.”

**Donor framing**
Since the SAHC donors care most about the land they protect, the majority of SAHC’s stories focus on actual land protection. They target new donors when they do campaigns, because those are the people they need to convince to donate. To do this, they make sure new donors understand what their gift is doing and how they’re benefiting the organization.

When OCP specifically targets donors, they emphasize the importance of private donations. They illustrate that private donations are what allow an organization to go from doing the bare minimum to achieving excellent progress. One of their slogans is, “Foundations provide the
foundation of excellence.” They also highlight how their organization adds value to people’s lives.

When the CLT targets donors, they don’t always strive for a donor-centric frame. They focus on demonstrating why the land trust and the work is important. They believe that donors already care about the organization – they just need reassurance that the organization is continuing to do good work.

The BLC highlights their accomplishments, but they also emphasize that they are private, and because they don’t get federal funds, donor money goes directly to the projects. They feature “Did you know?” campaigns to educate donors about how expensive land conservation is, and they emphasize that conservation is ongoing. They strongly emphasize the importance of the contribution of community members alongside a reminder about the tax write-off and instructions on where and how to give. This strategy has also reclaimed a lot of fringe donors who had stopped giving.

In addition, for ask campaigns, the BLC starts with one generalized ask that goes out to everyone on first-run. They personalize the message for long-term donors, first-time donors, and fringe donors on the reminder. These reminder notices include personal messages from board members.

Photos
Visual content was crucial for all the organizations. OCP has found that people love seeing what their everyday routines and work look like.

Openlands partners with local art organizations, and they create beautiful visual products that showcase their work, which are then featured in several galleries. They also partner with local theaters, which sponsor them. These partnerships have also helped them greatly expand their outreach.

Videos
Both the GTRLC and OCP strive to make their videos as professional-looking as possible. This means that they don’t use videos as frequently as other organizations. Therefore, the GTRLC uses video to complement their communications strategy, and they are very selective about which projects would do well with video. Often, they will use video to showcase their overall work for donors to enjoy.

OCP uses video mainly for education. These videos are short, extremely popular, and widely shared. OCP makes sure to always have captions, because people often watch videos with the sound off (this is particularly effective if you’re posting on social media). They will often pick specific moments or projects, or they’ll partner with organizations to make the video process quicker and easier.

On the contrary, Openlands relies frequently on video, but they produce their videos in-house. They don’t invest a lot of time, money, or effort into video creation. Instead, Openlands focuses on creating short, fun videos that connect with people. Their educational and inspirational videos are used for recruitment and are often shown in schools.
Additionally, when talking to an affluent population, Openlands relies on beautiful visuals accompanying a speaker who’s doing the actual stewardship work. They’ve found that a video preceding the in-person talk highlighting the projects and partners is very successful in engaging and inspiring the audience to support them.

The SAHC doesn’t currently employ video in their communications work, however, their goal is to increase their video production and use. They recommend using Vimeo as a video hosting site over Youtube, for they believe that Vimeo is more popular for the type of videos land conservancies put out.

Outreach
Each organization emphasized that effective outreach relies on diverse framing and one-on-one interpersonal interaction.

The SAHC’s program, “Everybody’s Environment,” is designed to reach out to disenfranchised and lower-income communities. In order to ensure mindful engagement, this program includes staff training for diversity and inclusion outreach focusing on the history of the area. They also partner with local schools for events, including hikes and gardening.

Similarly, the CLT has a company-wide strategy for outreach to marginalized communities. They established a committee, which includes someone from every department in the organization, to encourage advocacy and action. For communications, advertising is crucial. They strive to make sure both the language and the visuals of their products are as inclusive as possible. This includes photos of diverse groups of people, however they emphasize that it is important that the materials provide representation without stigmatization.

Additionally, the CLT would like to encourage more racial diversity on their board, but asking a person of color to join a mostly white board can feel like token representation. They therefore believe it is crucial that their company policies support the goals of increasing diversity.

The GTRLC strives to be as one-on-one as possible, especially for members of marginalized communities. This tactic is intentionally relationship-based, where they tailor the message to each specific constituent group. They do this by listening and learning from the people who actually reside around a specific property. In that way, both the message and the stewardship become strongly personal.

Openlands grew out of a welfare council, so they weren’t originally “nature-centric.” As such, they’ve always focused their story-framing on people and their connection with nature. They say this is especially important when speaking to marginalized groups. They offer translation services, so their publications go out in many different languages including Chinese and Spanish.

Additionally, they offer many different entries into the Openlands experience, for they believe that a diverse set of opportunities is key for engagement. In addition to other stewardship projects, they help manage school and community gardens. They care most about on-the-ground
personal experiences, especially for underserved neighbors. Events are crucial for this kind of outreach. They work with many different partners to develop the best events possible. These partners include schools, advocates, a paddling program, and other land conservation organizations.

One of Openlands’ most popular programs is “Tree Keepers,” where local people get certified to prune and manage urban trees. People are brought into the program mainly through their community network (neighbors telling neighbors), and the certification class is held three times a year. It inspires people to take ownership over the natural areas of their communities. Each tree keeper gets a designation, and it is a point of pride to wear their keeper badge.

Like Openlands, OCP believes that partnerships and non-nature-centric framing are key. They’ve found that a huge barrier to entry for many people is a fear of not belonging. As such, they partner with local organizations that already have diverse bases to build trust in the community.

The OCP’s partnership with the YMCA helps brings kids to park events, which gets kids who have little to no access to nature outside with knowledgeable park staff, building relationships. They also partner with schools where they bring kids out for workdays, including invasive species removal and other fieldwork.

OCP states that marketing is also crucial. Often times, environmental organizations will advertise events using the framework that appeals most to environmental-minded individuals. By diversifying the marketing message, an organization will appeal to a larger audience. OCP does this through the Step-It-Up program. This program is part of a partnership with local health organizations, and it’s marketed as a community exercise program. Since the event is just walking, people’s socio-economic statuses are not important factors. This helps people feel secure, for no one would be able to identify another’s situation.

Once people join the Step-It-Up program and get to the park, a park staff member will casually give out environmental facts. This way, people can get to know the organization at their leisure without pressure to support its mission or work. However, once they become comfortable with the organization, it is more likely that they will become interested in more environmentally-centric programs offered.

Platforms
All the organizations use multiple platforms and cross-channel strategies. For example, OCP diversifies their framing as much as possible, for they believe that people need to see the same message more than once, but in different ways.

Facebook
All the organizations listed Facebook as a main means of disseminating news about their work to the public. The CLT have some of their best reach and impact on Facebook. People are more visual, so photo posts get the most engagement. As such, the CLT works with local photographers, who let the conservancy share their photos.
On Facebook, the CLT do posts similar to “Humans of New York,” where they post a photo and then tell a story about it in the text. When it’s a photo of a person enjoying a preserve, they describe what the person was doing there, why it’s cool or important, and how that story fits into the bigger picture of their work. Usually, they’ll only put links in Facebook posts that lead to a story on their blog, but otherwise they try to keep their posts link-free. They include more links on their Instagram posts.

The OCP finds that Facebook is most useful for promoting events. This is because events appear in a person’s newsfeed more often than posts. It’s also easy to expand outreach. People who click “interested” will see more updates about the event, which increases their overall exposure to the organization.

In addition, “boosting” posts by paying Facebook to promote them is inexpensive and reaches far outside of the organization’s main network. The OCP believes that putting money toward Facebook ads is the best use of advertising, especially when you make it a point to target a non-following audience.

**Instagram**

All the organizations listed Instagram as an important platform. The CLT says their two most important social media platforms are Facebook and Instagram due to how well visuals engage the public, and Openlands considers Instagram its main audience-builder.

Both OCP and Openlands specifically mentioned campaigns similar to the National Parks Service Instagram campaign, “Find Your Park.” This encourages people to get out and explore the preserves and share their experiences.

Openlands specifically asks people to submit photos that show their favorite nature areas in the region. They found it to be a successful way to celebrate local, easy-access areas. They also use Instagram to advertise the location of their preserves, as a lot of people who are nature lovers or hikers aren’t even aware that they exist.

OCP also uses Instagram to gauge how people are using their parks. If they find that people particularly enjoy a specific activity in one such park, for instance walking their dog, they may consider adding trails or amenities in that park (e.g., more poop bag stations) to tailor to that activity.

**Twitter**

The organizations were divided over the use of Twitter. Four have Twitter; two (GTRLC and OCP) do not.

The SAHC, the CLT, and Openlands all mentioned doing occasional political advocacy work, for which Twitter is a useful tool. Openlands specifically follows writers on Twitter who cover issues that they care about, and they use Twitter to advertise their campaigns and promises. They promote what policies they support and what issues they care about for that specific region. They always tie their advocacy back to how policy affects local Chicago-area conservation issues.
Similarly, the CLT advocates for both conservation and some environmental/social justice issues. The SAHC advocates occasionally for specific conservation policies.

Those who do not have Twitter generally stay out of politics and advocacy entirely. The BLC also stays out of politics despite having a Twitter account. As such, the BLC does not prioritize Twitter as a communications tool.

Regardless of Twitter use, all the organizations strived to remain as bipartisan as possible in their messaging. Generally, land conservation has bipartisan appeal, so any land conservation policies they promote are often supported by both political parties.

**Print**

All the organizations listed print as an integral part of their work. High quality print products (newsletters, annual reports, magazines) have a lot of engagement and were one of the most popular products for all of the organizations.

To minimize the high cost and time-consuming nature of creating print products, every organization had chosen to downsize the number of major print publications to three times a year or less. These publications are full-color with many photographs and a variety of written content to appeal to the largest audience.

Additionally, print was listed as a continually productive conduit for donations. The print version of the SAHC’s annual donation appeal is more successful than the electronic version.

The BLC considers print to be especially effective for re-engaging “fringe” donors (donors who haven’t gifted in a while). Additionally, most of their donations come in the form of paper checks.

**E-newsletter**

All the organizations have an e-newsletter designed to inform and inspire members. It’s an effective medium for delivering the most popular content directly to members. The SAHC has found that the e-newsletter and the print newsletter are the most effective platforms for disseminating their most popular stories about land conservation. Additionally, they’ve found that social media posts that share the links to these stories tend to do better as well, and it’s especially effective when a local newspaper also publishes the story.

OCP has found that asking people to submit their photos for publication in the organization’s newsletters have been another great way to engage with the community.

**Events**

All the organizations said events were important, especially member-appreciation events that tend to lose money. Appreciation events foster important interpersonal relationships between staff and members that encourage people to volunteer or donate. Events are also a great way to advertise the organization in a way that inspires people to stay active and involved.
The CLT’s main engagement event is an annual picnic that often loses more money than it makes. However, it’s goal is not to fundraise, but rather to support the donors and show appreciation. As such, this event is considered a long-term investment, for it’s great for keeping the base engaged.

The SAHC claims that events help retain donors, even if they are not donating on the day. The SAHC believes that anytime the organization is able to get in front of people and tell their story, it’s a success. As such, they do not focus as much on metrics, for they believe there is a benefit no matter what.

Most SAHC events are free admission (hikes, picnics, volunteer days, etc.), and they do a variety of activities. Their annual membership event is open to everyone and features music and food. The SAHC also sells raffle tickets. The event offers appreciation for current members and encouragement for non-members to join.

The SAHC June Jamboree hiking event is very popular. They offer 6 different hikes in one day showcasing protected areas. Other similar events include tours of their protected land lead by Americorps’ staff. These tours show people what the organization has accomplished and are very impactful.

Finally, the SAHC offers “porch parties.” These are intimate, non-ask parties at a board member’s house. The campaign ask happens after the event is over. These parties are designed as “first date” events with potential donors. People often have many philanthropic interests, but if they meet the staff and learn more about the organization, they are more likely to donate or become a member.

The SAHC also run their own farm. They partner with an international exchange program where they bring in students from overseas to work on this farm. In that way, it’s a kind of American version of the Work On an Organic Farm (WOOF) program popular in Europe. The SAHC uses this program to showcase stream restoration and mitigation work that is done on the property. They’re funded through a USDA partnership grant.

The SAHC also use the farm as an “incubator program.” This program allows farmers to rent or lease some of the land. The land trust supports them for a few years until they’re stable enough to start their own farm.

In addition, the SAHC hosts workshops about farming. Several of the workshops are specifically geared toward empowering specific populations. This includes a workshop for women who are interested in farming.

The farm, and all its programs, is extremely popular and supported by the community.

The GTRLC finds that if publicity and outreach is good and an event is well-run, then it’s beneficial for fundraising and volunteering. They target backyard fundraising for events, where they contact neighborhoods to promote a specific property. After the event is over, they make a point of sending updates and follow-ups for that property to keep people engaged in their work.
The OCP offers a variety of nature-centric programs. These include bird-watching hikes, which are very popular, and guided hikes. Due to a small staff size, they generally only do big events when there’s a park dedication or the completion of a major project.

In addition to member-appreciation events, the BLC and the CLT host formal, fancy fundraising events that are quite successful. These two organizations make it a point to target corporate sponsorships – not individual donors.

For example, the BLC offers a variety of fancy events, including a farm-to-table intimate dinner, where sponsorships increase their take from $50,000 to $70,000. That way, profit is secured before anyone walks in the door. The event ticket sales cover the cost of food and bar alone. They also host a raffle where the raffle items are donated. The live auction brings in more money than the tickets.

However, the BLC warns that such successful events take a while to develop. There wasn’t much turn-around when they first initiated these events, for they had to build their audience before achieving success. They believe that each event should also be tailored to an audience. People like to give in a specific platform (only at the auction, etc.), so it’s important not try to break those habits.

The CLT’s main fundraising event is a traditional, fancy gala, with plated dinners and a beautiful venue. For this event, they target companies who want to align themselves with an environmental organization. They make a lot of money, but the CLT strives to avoid “greenwashers,” or companies that want the good press of supporting an environmental organization despite their practices that severely harm the environment.

The CLT also emphasizes that events are extremely important for equity. Most events are for wealthy white people, so the CLT makes it a point to invite and seek out women and minority-owned businesses to increase visibility and engagement.

3rd party news
While all the organizations strive to facilitate relationships with local journalists, the GTRLC also recruits journalists who may live far away but engage with the land conservancy’s base. Since Traverse City is a summer home to many people who live as far away as California in the winter, the GTRLC strives to connect with journalists who work in those cities. This way, even when their members are living in another state for half the year, they are still receiving news about the organization from additional sources.

Department Integration
All the organizations spoke to the difficulty of trying to differentiate responsibilities among communications, development, and donor relations staff. Ultimately, everyone agreed that it’s a teamwork effort regardless of the content. However, both the GTRLC and the CLT have communications play an editor’s role – all written and visual content passes through communications for review and suggestions.
Communications in the GTRLC doesn’t dictate how the organization asks for money, but they do provide input and suggestions to make sure everything is consistent. Communications is also responsible for organizing events, whereas the Executive Director (ED) is responsible for the majority of the fundraising. The ED is also involved in every project and does a lot of face-to-face interaction.

At the SAHC, communications is considered a part of both the donor relations and development departments. However, communications is responsible for internal and external information, including contacting external media about events. Communications is also responsible for writing and disseminating information about all the other departments.

Donor relations at the SAHC, on the contrary, is responsible for inputting information into campaigns and sending out all their own thank yous and letters. They also provide input for the newsletter and monthly news pieces.

The SAHC development director writes the campaigns, which communications sends out. Membership and donor relations staff are the main event planners, and communications provides assistance. The ED is more involved in land management, whereas the Assistant Director is more involved in logistics for operations and events.

While overall Openlands is integrated, the communications and development departments are more separate than they used to be. Therefore, they have regular strategy meetings about looks and goals for products. Communications is responsible for producing copy and writing the annual report.

BLC has a special structure, for in a way, they are brand new. Bluegrass Conservancy was founded 1995, but they merged with Limestone Land Trust in 2016. This expanded their service area, and increased their staff size and budget. However, it also shifted everything in terms of department roles.

Before, development and communications at the Bluegrass Conservancy were done by the same person with fundraising as the priority. Now, as the BLC, communications is more focused on public relations. However, there is still significant overlap among development, fundraising, and land protection outreach. Ultimately, communications decides the target audience and focuses on big picture messaging. Development groups people more specifically, and donor management stays strictly in the donor lane.

**Survey**
There were 57 total respondents. 14 respondents used the link distributed via the e-newsletter, and 43 respondents used the link distributed via Facebook.

E-newsletter stats:
October - 2540 recipients, 683 opens, 5 link clicks
November - 2540 recipients, 782 opens, 17 link clicks
Facebook Stats:
10/03/17 FB post - 746 reach, 5 likes, 1 share, 23 link clicks
10/12/17 FB post – 423 reach, 3 likes, 4 link clicks
10/31/17 FB post (boosted) - 2491 reach, 13 likes, 3 shares, 20 links clicks

Most respondents had been aware of the LCWM for at least a year, with only 10% of respondents reporting that they had learned of the LCWM within the past year (Figure 1). This does not necessarily mean that the LCWM is not recruiting new members consistently – newer members may simply be less likely to fill out a survey.

![Figure 1](image)

*Figure 1. How long respondents report being aware of the LCWM.*

There are 7 main platforms for people to get information about the LCWM (Figure 2). Despite its popularity, no one reported Instagram as their primary news source about the LCWM.
The glm statistical test evaluated whether donor/volunteers were more likely to follow a specific platform. The analysis did not show any statistically significant results for respondents who follow Facebook ($p > 0.05$).

However, the analysis did reveal statistically significant correlations between e-newsletter subscription and donation and volunteer behaviors. People who subscribed to the e-newsletter were nearly 7 times as likely to be a donor ($AIC = 70.459; p < 0.001$). In terms of volunteering, respondents were 16 times as likely to be a volunteer if they subscribed to the e-newsletter ($AIC = 58.301; p < 0$).

The other platforms (such as Instagram and paper mail) did not have enough respondents to allow for statistical analysis.

Over 83% of respondents were aware of the e-newsletter. Of those who were aware of the e-newsletter, 67% were subscribed, 20% were not subscribed, and 12% were not currently subscribed, but reported that they had been subscribed in the past.

Reasons for unsubscribing included: “The stories weren’t interesting/important to me” (2 respondents); “I received too many e-mails” (1 respondent); “I changed my e-mail, and it never caught up” (1 respondent).

Facebook was the most popular social media platform for the LCWM (Figure 3). Over half of respondents reported that their main source of information about the LCWM came from Facebook (Figure 2).
Media platforms the LCWM is considering/developing include Snapchat, Youtube, or a Podcast channel. Despite its general popularity with the younger generation, no one reported that they would follow a Snapchat account, including younger respondents. 67% of respondents stated they would not follow other accounts (such as Youtube, Snapchat, or a Podcast channel).

20% of respondents reported that they would follow a Youtube account, and 9% would subscribe to a LCWM Podcast. The remaining respondents reported that they would follow a different type of platform, with one respondent specifying that they would prefer newspapers.

The LCWM offers 8 main types of content/programming (Figure 4). Respondents preferred photos and educational stories the most. A few respondents reported that they loved all content/programming, and one respondent said they hadn’t participated in a workday yet, but they hoped to soon.
People can engage with the LCWM by reading content from LCWM, volunteering, donating, attending their non-workday events (e.g., Harvest Moon, Preserved! gallery shows), partnering with them on projects (e.g., Preserved!), being a conservation easement owner, or visiting their nature preserves and/or natural areas. While most respondents engaged through reading content from LCWM sources, visiting preserves/natural areas was also very popular (Figure 5).

Figure 4. LCWM content/programming that respondents most enjoy.

Figure 5. How respondents engage with the LCWM.
56% of the respondents who reported that they had volunteered for the LCWM between April and August 2017 had only volunteered 1 or 2 times, and the other half had volunteered 5 or more times. No one reported only volunteering 3 or 4 times between April and August 2017.

43% of respondents reported seeing LCWM content/programming that inspired them to volunteer. The remaining 57% of respondents said content/programming did not alter the amount they volunteer, and no one reported seeing LCWM content/programming that discouraged them from volunteering.

Half of respondents reported that they had donated to the LCWM at one point, and the other half had never donated.

The top three types of content/programming that inspired respondents to volunteer were educational stories, workday events, and photos or videos, whereas the top three types of content/programming that inspired people to donate were educational stories, human interest stories, and photos or videos (Figure 6).

![Figure 6](image)

Figure 6. LCWM content/programming that inspired respondents to volunteer (purple) or donate (yellow).

Despite the popularity of Facebook, none of the respondents who had donated to the LCWM had responded to a donation prompt on social media. Most donations were prompted by a paper mail appeal (Figure 7). The reasons given for “other” prompts/inspiration were:

1. “All donation to LCWM are prompted by my value of Mother Nature, not by any event or LCWM activity.”
3. “Highlands project.”
4. “Finding protected area.”
5. “I am an annual donor, and contribute in memory of Doris Griffith.”

Figure 7. Reason that prompted a respondent to donate.

The main reason respondents gave for not donating is not being able to afford to do so (Figure 8). None of the respondents who haven’t donated reported being discouraged from donating by seeing LCWM content/programming that offended them. Moreover, no one reported that the mission of the LCWM wasn’t important to them. Additional comments respondents gave for not donating were:

1. “Already donate to the SWMLC. BUT appreciate all efforts.”
2. “Haven't gotten around to it.” (2 respondents)
3. “I live out of state, but enjoy visiting when I am in Michigan.”
Most respondents reported that the LCWM donation process doesn’t need to change (Figure 9). However, one respondent suggested that the LCWM needs to “Create more opportunities to engage with the organization,” to gain more donors.
The LCWM strives to promote its public preserves (Figure 10) to help attract and inspire more donors and volunteers. Overall, the most well-known preserves/natural areas were also the most popular (Figure 11).

Figure 10. A map of LCWM’s nature preserves/natural areas open to the public.
Figure 11. Respondents’ awareness of the LCWM’s preserve/natural area (purple). Respondents who visited the LCWM preserve/natural area between October 2016 and October 2017 (yellow).

Over half of the respondents reported frequenting a LCWM preserve/natural area two times or fewer from April to August in 2017 (Figure 12). The remaining 44% of respondents reported visiting a preserve three times or more.
The LCWM is interested in providing additional materials for people to enjoy their preserves/natural areas (Figure 13). It is unlikely that the LCWM would be able to commit to making all of these products, especially for all of the preserves/natural areas. However, respondents showed interest in most of the products. Additional recommendations given by the respondents were:

1. “Signs on site.”
2. “Clearly marked trails and interpretive signs.”
3. “Information regarding invasive species.”
4. “Interpretive signs.”
5. “Geocaches!”
6. “Seasonal birding guide would be great to have.”
82% of respondents rated the quality of LCWM communications as good, and the remaining respondents rated it as “neither good nor bad.” 83% of respondents rated the quantity of LCWM communications as the right amount, 15% of respondents rated the quantity of LCWM communications as “too little,” and one respondent reported that there was too much.

**Demographics**

The majority of respondents identified as outdoorsy (Figure 14). Additional ways respondents identified are:

2. “Retired from conservation field.”
3. “Believe conservation is critical, want to preserve for future generations.”
Figure 14. Characterization of respondents.

The majority of respondents were female (Figure 15). A little less than half were 44 or younger (Figure 16). While it was an option, no one reported being 85 or older. Most respondents identified as either independent or democrat (Figure 17). Only 22% of respondents reported an annual household income of $35,000 or less (Figure 18). All the respondents were white, except one who reported that they identified with “all races.” While this is a possibility, it is unlikely due to the extremely homogenous makeup of the rest of the respondents.
Figure 15. Gender demographics of survey respondents.

Figure 16. Age demographics of survey respondents.
Finally, the majority of respondents hailed from Kent County (Figure 19).
DISCUSSION

Land trusts, like many other organizations, depend heavily on their communications department to succeed in their mission. A good communications strategy will engage the public and inspire action to help the organization. A strong donor base, along with successful donation campaigns, can keep the organization stable regardless of the country’s political or economic situation. An active and engaged volunteer base can improve the organization’s work output while saving the organization a significant amount of money.

This project examined the many different strategies and platforms available to communications specialists to determine an efficient communications strategy for the Land Conservancy of West Michigan (LCWM). In this section, I evaluate each type of platform and strategy and provide recommendations for their use.

Content & Strategies

Social Media

Social media is inescapable for any organization today. Over 65% of Americans use Facebook and 60% use Youtube (Pew Research Center 2017). Social media has become critical to ensuring that an organization remains visible in the public eye. It is a valuable tool for reputation-building, especially due to its interactive and two-way communication nature (Mosley 2012). Since land trusts rely heavily on their reputations to accrue donors and volunteers, having a strong social media presence is especially important.

The most successful social media strategies for building positive reputations are (Floreddu & Cabiddu 2016):
1. Selective and conversational strategies where the organization actively engages with the public to influence perceptions. This involves two-way communication and active listening.

2. Openness. The organization strives to be as transparent as possible to establish and maintain trust.

3. Support. The organization commits to resolving customer complaints by creating an active support structure to solve problems.

However, not all social media platforms are equal. While nearly half of Americans report using Facebook as a main source of news, only 18% use Snapchat, and only 15% use Twitter (Pew Research Center 2017). A land trust must carefully consider what are the strengths of each platform, and therefore which platforms are best suited to meet specific goals. As such, platforms like Tumblr, Reddit, and Snapchat are either too specialized or not popular enough to warrant consideration for land trusts.

*Electronic communication (e-newsletter, mailchimp, etc.):* Younger generations tend to prefer electronic communication. It’s a convenient way to receive news and give money. Additionally, products like e-newsletters are a convenient way to combine several of the most popular and engaging types of content: photos and educational stories. As such, e-newsletters are a great way to keep the membership informed and inspired. It’s also a successful platform for recruiting volunteers for projects.

*Paper communication:* While many environmental organizations would want to eliminate paper correspondence due to cost and sustainability issues, paper is still too important. Older demographics prefer paper correspondence, and a significant proportion of donations come in the form of paper checks, usually mailed due to a paper ask campaign. Additionally, products like glossy magazines and print newsletters are extremely popular. While all the organizations I spoke with have downsized the number of print newsletter issues (usually to about two/year), they have invested far more in the look and feel of these issues, which has resulted in strong returns. While the majority of correspondence should remain electronic, pairing important donation campaigns with paper and investing in impressive biannual paper newsletters or magazines is a major benefit to land trusts.

*Video:* Video has become a popular and powerful medium for land trusts. In addition to showcasing the land trust’s preserves and work, video is another way for the staff of the land trust to engage the public. Members of land trusts are often interested in learning about the science behind the work, and they like hearing from actual experts.

Peninsula Open Space Trust does a “Minute with Matt” video series where one of their employees films a minute-long video about a fun wildlife or plant fact. The series is popular and informative. However, it may be advisable to brand such a series to an organization instead of a person (personal communication, Jennifer Jay, 2018). That way, the video series could feature a variety of people (depending on their expertise and the topic), and it wouldn’t be reliant on one person. After all, what happens to the series if Matt were to leave the organization?
An important feature for video today is captions. Many people no longer watch video with the sound on, especially when they’re scrolling through social media (personal communication, Dr. Lynn Owens, 2017). While video should still have some sort of soundtrack, captions are crucial for capturing people’s attention, including for video that features interview clips.

An organization also should decide how much effort they wish to put into the look of a video. Contracting out a professionally-made video can be very costly. Video done in-house can be good quality, especially if one has access to editing programs like Adobe Premier (~$34/month). While an organization may find that purchasing a nice video camera, tripod, and microphone is imperative, there are cheaper alternatives. For instance, video stabilizers for iPhones cost around $200. The benefit to a stabilizer is that it allows anyone to shoot a smooth-looking video with their iPhone, and they do not need to borrow a far more expensive and complicated video camera. A stabilizer and iPhone are also much easier gear to carry, which is helpful for location shoots.

At the time of the survey, the LCWM had yet to develop much video content. The few videos they had were released infrequently and were usually created by a third party. However, despite that, nearly 40% of survey respondents listed video as some of their favorite content, and 20% of respondents said they would follow a Youtube account for the LCWM. This suggests that video could be a powerful and popular tool for the LCWM.

Photos: Photos are extremely popular among the public. The LCWM survey found that photos were the favorite content of respondents overall. Additionally, photos were one of the top three incentives for people to donate and to volunteer. Photos can better represent complex issues than descriptive text and can be more impactful for individuals (Smith & Joffe 2009). It’s no surprise that products that include photos generally perform better than pure text.

Asking people to submit their photos for publication in newsletters and annual reports is a great way to engage members. People get excited about seeing their photo in print, and they are especially proud if they believe it is helping the land trust. It’s also a great incentive for people to get out and enjoy the preserves.

Additionally, several land trusts have found great success by partnering with local professional photographers who allow the land trust to share their work for free. The LCWM has an excellent relationship with local artists due to their Preserved! program, and photographer Jeff Blumberg specifically stressed his interest in participating in the same sort of arrangement with the LCWM. It is likely that other photographers would be equally willing to donate their photos for LCWM materials.

Written Content: Land trusts create a wide variety of written content on a daily basis. While writing can be time-consuming, it is a crucial component for outreach and engagement. A diverse writing portfolio will reach a wider audience. This includes featuring different types of stories – for example, the LCWM survey found that educational stories were the most influential type of content for inspiring people to donate and to volunteer. Human interest stories were not as influential for getting people to volunteer, but they were the second most influential type of content for getting people to donate.
**Framing:** Regardless of platform, land trusts need to have an assortment of story framing to promote the same message. For visual content, this means a diversity of subjects as well as a diversity of perspectives, compositions, and points of view (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006). Long distance and high-angle views can be impersonal but empowering (Peeples 2011). Low-angle and macro views can be intimate and educational (Hansen & Machin 2013). Above all, it is imperative to understand that different populations will respond to different kinds of stories.

Carbaugh & Cerulli (2013) explored how people have very different emotional connections to the land or to wildlife. They argue that effective environmental communicators also have to be effective listeners, for people may form a connection for different reasons. Place-based communication is important, but it is necessary to frame place-based communication in different ways. Otherwise, you risk narrowing the frame so only certain populations of society will be engaged.

Additionally, Ivakhiv (2010) posits that environmentalists must understand that the frame that works best on them (nature or place-based) is not the only productive frame for engaging the community. Other productive approaches may include religious or spiritual frames that speak more toward value-based activism, for that can connect deeply with certain community types.

Diverse framing is also important to engage non-white communities. It is common for environmental communication frames to be constructed through the lens of privileged demographics at the expense of erasing the perspectives of non-privileged, particularly indigenous, communities (Berger 2003; DeLuca & Demo 2000; Remillard 2011). This can alienate marginalized communities from participating in environmental work.

This is especially relevant to the LCWM, for every respondent of the survey was white. While it is possible that there are many people of color who are members of the LCWM who simply chose not to answer the survey, it does suggest that the people who are the most active with the land trust are white. As such, the LCWM’s framing and messaging may be failing to engage with communities of color. This could be due to a variety of factors, including a need to recognize how environmental messages can resonate differently with some people of color.

For example, Thomas Easley, an African American and current Director of Community for Diversity in Natural Resources at NC State University, grew up in the deep south (personal communication, Thomas Easley, 2016). He became interested in nature and conservation because his grandparents were gardeners, and he’d help them manage their plants. However, when he’d ask his mom if he could go camping or join outdoor organizations, she’d refuse. She saw the outdoors as a place where “black boys get lynched.” Easley explains that for many black people, the outdoors has always been a white person’s space. We cannot hope to improve outreach into communities of color by using the same framing and tactics used for white communities – the context is different.

Additionally, Alberto Alzamora, staff accountant for the Conservation Trust for North Carolina, spoke about how often the events and programs designed to engage with children are framed around “field work” and “gardening” (personal communication, Alberto Alzamora, 2016). For
many Latinx, their parents were migrant workers or farmers who spent their entire lives working to ensure their children would never have to do similar work. “Field days” and “gardening” events are what many Latinx parents wanted to protect their children from.

While these examples are from people who reside in the South, it is important to recognize that racial politics is not confined to the South. Michigan may have been a Union state, but it struggles with institutionalized racism, just like everywhere else in America. Such barriers are harmful not only on the general large scale, but they can specifically impact the success of a land trust.

Monani (2011) posits that the only way to truly support a sustainability goal is to incorporate social justice into an environmental organization’s mission. Engaging marginalized communities who live on or near the land that a land trust protects is the best way to ensure that land stays healthy and maintained.

**Outreach:** Chen et al (2012) offers some suggestions for incorporating environmental justice into a land trust’s work. First, to effectively engage with underserved or alienated communities who do not see environmental work as aligning with their values, it is important to partner with advocacy leaders and scholars. These leaders and scholars often have an established relationship with the community, and therefore can help establish trust.

Second, researchers can serve as consultants or collaborators, but the community members must be the initiators (Chen et al 2012). By empowering individuals, especially members of marginalized communities, to actively participate in creating and implanting programs and solutions, the work is far more successful (Harris 2017). These strategies have enjoyed great success with the environmental organizations I interviewed.

For instance, Ottawa County Parks partners with the YMCA and local schools, which has significantly boosted their visibility and interaction with communities that had previously lower rates of engagement. They also partner with local health organizations for a program called “Step It Up.” Step It Up is a guided nature hike, but it is not marketed that way. In fact, it hardly mentions nature at all. Instead, it is billed as a health program, designed to get people exercising. Once they are on the hike, the guide will casually mention environmental facts or facts about the park. This way, many people who would not have been interested in a “nature hike,” get exposed to nature and the organization, and they may end up embracing the nature/wildlife aspect of the program. Step It Up is one of OCP’s most popular programs.

Openlands had great success with Chen et al’s (2012) second strategy. Openlands’ neighborhood program, “Tree Keepers,” certifies local residents to prune and care for urban trees. People are encouraged to join the program by their neighbors, and it allows people to take ownership over their own communities. Each Tree Keeper receives a specific designation, and it is a point of pride for many to be able to boast that they are “Tree Keeper number 765!”
Platforms

Instagram: 26% of Americans have Instagram, though most don’t use it as a news source (Pew Research Center 2017). However, Instagram can be an excellent way for land trusts to engage the public. Not only can beautiful photos of preserves show off the good work a land trust is doing, campaigns that ask people to share their personal photos of such locations (via use of a hashtag) are very popular.

The highly successful “Find Your Park” campaign by the National Park Service challenged people to get out to a park and share their images of their experiences. Openlands did a smaller-scale version of this campaign, asking people in the Chicago area to share photos on Instagram of their favorite Chicago natural areas. Openlands found this campaign to be a great incentive for people to get out and enjoy their work. The more people who get out and discover the work of a land trust, the more possible donors and volunteers you accrue.

Events: The value of events is constantly debated for land trusts. Most events don’t make money, some even lose money, and they take a lot of time, effort, and headaches to put together. Are they even worth it?

Yes, they are. Events are one of the best ways to engage a member base. Showing appreciation to members via picnics, game nights, cocktail parties, or something else helps retain donors and volunteers. It’s also a great way to keep the organization’s work visible. As the SAHC states, anytime you can get your message out in front of people, that’s a success.

Members especially like hearing about the work from the people who actually design the conservation strategy, and events are a great way to connect members to the staff. Conservation messages are most effective when they’re personal, and events make personal connection easy.

In addition, events are crucial for outreach. Members of low socio-economic status are not going to be donors, so events allow them to engage with the conservancy in other ways. The LCWM survey found that workday events were not only popular, but they were a major influence in encouraging people to volunteer.

Events, like story framing, should be diverse. While guided hikes are popular and enjoyable, educational commentary is not always necessary or beneficial. Milstein (2008), for example, studied how people connect with nature, specifically wildlife. He found that people really connect with nature when other people (e.g., guides or staff) are silent. Often, the more meaningful an experience with nature was, the more difficult it was for someone to express themselves verbally.

Finally, certain events can be moneymakers, especially if targeted to securing sponsorships with major companies. The BLC found great success with fancy events where the ticket prices alone covered the cost of food and drink. However, “greenwashing” – where a non-sustainable organization supports an environmental organization for the good publicity – can happen. Each organization needs to decide whether or not they’re willing to help a company’s image if that company’s practices are especially harmful to the environment, and therefore contradictory to a land trust’s mission.
Facebook: Of all social media, Facebook is the most important platform for a land trust to use. Over 65% of Americans use Facebook, and almost half of Americans use it as a main source of news (Pew Research Center 2017). Additionally, over 55% of respondents to the LCWM survey reported Facebook as their main source of information about the conservancy. Therefore, stories, news, and general information about a land trust has a much better chance of being seen if it is posted on an organization’s Facebook page.

Facebook is also best for event advertisement, particularly if the land trust pays Facebook to promote the event. Promotion is cheap and reaches people far outside the organization’s followers. Additionally, people who respond that they are “interested” in an event will see it more often in their newsfeed than a “liked” post.

What Facebook is not good at is donation campaigns. None of the organizations I interviewed saw Facebook as a source of donations, and this was reflected in the LCWM survey as well. Absolutely none of the donors on the LCWM survey reported that they had ever responded to a donation ask on Facebook. Therefore, while Facebook is still useful for disseminating news about the organization, its main utility should be for event promotion and advertisement.

Unfortunately, Facebook is not constant. Recent algorithm changes now threaten the visibility of an organization’s posts. However, until the consequences of such changes manifest, Facebook should continue to be a main platform priority. However, it is advisable for organizations to additionally invest in other means of communicating their news and stories, especially to new members.

Twitter: Twitter can be a powerful tool for advocacy. If the goal of your organization is to engage with political stakeholders and communicate publicly with representatives, a strong Twitter presence is important. However, most land trusts (including the LCWM) strive to be as bipartisan and neutral as possible. Republicans and Democrats value land protection, so remaining bipartisan crucially benefits most land trusts. Since most Americans don’t have Twitter, and those who do are unlikely to use it for accessing stories or blogs about a land conservancy, the LCWM should not prioritize this platform.

Youtube vs Vimeo: Youtube is more famous, but Vimeo may be more popular for educational and news videos. Youtube is free for video hosting, but Vimeo charges depending on how much video you wish to upload. However, it could be beneficial to double-host. An organization could post all its videos on their Youtube channel, and then post their most important ones to a Vimeo channel (few videos mean you can host on Vimeo for free). It is also important to note that Facebook no longer autoplays video if you link it to an external site. In order to ensure that people can watch a video in their Facebook timeline without going to an external link (which is far more effective), you need to upload the video separately to Facebook.
Recommendations for the LCWM:

I present three main recommendations for the LCWM future communications plan:

1. Prioritize Facebook, Instagram, Youtube/Vimeo over other forms of social media.
2. Invest in an annual (or five-year) paper magazine product, professional look, with a variety of stories and features. It could also include input from the community – op-eds, children’s drawings, photographs submitted by community members.
3. Beef up partnerships!

The LCWM should use Facebook to disseminate news/stories, and they should rely on it heavily for event advertisement. They can do this by paying Facebook to promote their event pages.

The LCWM should consider more general photography campaigns for Instagram. While the current LCWM photo stations used for people to track the changes in the landscape are engaging and fun, a general campaign that encourages people to photograph what they connect with most may have more mass-appeal.

The LCWM should consider adding more videos to their repertoire. The use of videos to engage the general public and to inspire donors is highly valuable. While the LCWM can outsource the most important videos to a professional video-editing/creating company, smaller, cheap, in-house videos can be very impactful in telling popular educational stories with appealing visuals.

The majority of these shorter, cheaper videos should be “social media stories:” short, with captions, uploaded specifically to Facebook, as well as a Youtube/Vimeo channel. They should consider doing a specific series where a stewardship staff member films a quick informational video about the reality of preserve maintenance.

It is especially important that the LCWM cultivate community partnerships with YMCAs, schools, health organizations, and other organizations with a more diverse base. Partnerships with non-nature specific organizations can have tremendous positive impact on the LCWM to achieve nature-centric goals. By introducing the organization slowly in some scenarios, they’ll attract a wider base. As the LCWM diversifies, its impact will increase and support for its conservation projects will rise.
References


Easley, Thomas, the Director of Community for Diversity in Natural Resources at NC State University. 2016. Showcasing diversity in environmental professions: a panel discussion.


Owens, Lynn, professor of video journalism at Sanford School of Public Policy. 2017. News on Social Media. Lecture.


Appendix A: Informational Interview Questions

- What types of communication are your main priorities? (e.g., what do you invest the most time/effort into?)
- Have you found that people generally respond better to narrative, creative pieces, or do people prefer shorter pieces with an impersonal tone?
- What kind of frames do you employ in your messaging? How do you use them?
  - When speaking specifically to donors, are you always donor-centric, or do you use a variety of frames?
- Do you think having paper products is still a worthwhile component of your outreach?
- Do you employ video? If so, how important is it to your strategy?
- What platforms/strategies have you found to be not worth the time and effort to employ?
- What strategies do you employ when you’re trying to expand your outreach?
- What purpose do events serve?
  - Are they worthwhile for fundraising?
  - How do you measure the value of non-fundraising events?
  - What events are most successful and what kinds of feedback do you get about their marketing?
  - Do you have events not specifically related to your mission to reach a wider swatch of people?
- Do you have any recommendations for types of content/events that encourage people to donate to an organization?
- Can you give some examples of challenges you’ve encountered when asking for donations and how you solved them?
  - People like to donate to projects that benefit their own backyard, so how do you convert these people into long-term donors?
- Integrating Departments
  - How do other you differentiate responsibility between the communications and development departments?
    - Who writes appeals?
    - Who does events?
    - What role does the Executive Director play in fundraising?
- Annual Operational fundraising
  - How do you track/analyze what’s successful?
    - What methods do you use?
    - How do you achieve a large enough sample size?
    - How do you manage it with a small staff?
Appendix B: IRB

NOTE: the “appendixes” in my IRB application included informational interview questions (provided previously in Appendix A) and the survey questions (provided here in Appendix C).

Duke University
CAMPUS INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Request for Protocol Approval

This form effective October 10, 2016

If you are collaborating with investigators at another institution, contact an IRB staff member before completing this form.

Do not use this form if:
- you are an undergraduate; instead, go to our forms page for undergraduate research, or
- your research activities are limited to analysis of data collected by someone else; instead, go to Secondary Analysis of Existing Data form.

Submit this form and any attachments as a single Word file to campusirb@duke.edu.

We do not need an original, hardcopy of the signed assurances, Part B. Faxed, scanned, and electronic signatures are acceptable. We cannot accept typed names.

Contents:
A. Investigator and Project Information
B. Investigator Assurances
C. Instructions for Preparing Research Description and Appendices

A. Investigator and Project Information

Project Title: Hayley Hanway’s Master’s Project – Environmental Communication for The Land Conservancy of West Michigan

Research by Faculty or Administrators

Investigator(s):
☐ Faculty ☐ Administrator ☐ Other Research Staff: ______
Department/School: ______ E-mail: ______ Phone: ______

(Add more lines if needed)

Research by Graduate Students, Post-Doctoral Researchers, and Their Advisors

Student/Fellow Investigator(s) Hayley Hanway
☒ Graduate Student ☐ Postdoctoral Fellow
Department/School: Nicholas School of the Environment E-mail: hmh23@duke.edu Phone: (269)274-9843
Faculty Advisor(s) Rebecca Vidra
Department/School: Nicholas School of the Environment E-mail: rebecca.vidra@duke.edu Phone: (919) 613-8199
Project Information:
1. Source of Funding: **N/A**
   (If externally funded, submit a copy of the application or the award.)

2. If Federally Funded, Proposal/Grant Number: **N/A**

3. Research Site: **Remote research (phone, e-mail, online survey)**

4. Will the research take place in public elementary or secondary schools? **Yes**
   
   If yes, identify the school(s)/school district(s): ______

5. Potentially Vulnerable Subject Populations: Please check all that apply (if any).
   - Minors, as defined at research site (under 18 years old in NC)
   - Psychology and Neuroscience Undergraduate Subject Pool
   - Other Duke research subject pool. Please specify: ______
   - Students or employees of the researcher
   - Prisoners

6. If any of the investigators or personnel listed on this research protocol have a financial conflict of interest that must be reported, check this box: ☐
B. Assurances
(Signatures are required for final approval.)

Section 1: All researchers.
Section 2: Faculty advisors.

We do not need an original, hardcopy of the signed assurances. Faxed, scanned, and electronic signatures are acceptable. We cannot accept typed names.

Section 1: Investigator(s) Assurance
(Required for all researchers listed in Part A, Investigator and Project Information)

I affirm the following:

a. The research will not be initiated until official approval is secured from the IRB. (Note: Approval will not be provided unless certification to conduct research with human subjects is current for the investigator[s], and if the investigator is a student, the advisor’s certification is also current.)

b. I will conduct this study as described in the approved protocol. If any changes are anticipated, I will submit a Request to Amend an Approved Protocol, and I will not implement the changes until I receive approval from the IRB. I will contact the IRB staff immediately if any of the following events occur: unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects, protocol deviations, and findings during the study that would affect the risks of participation in the study.

Investigator: __________________________
Date: 8/31/17

Section 2: Faculty Advisor(s) Assurance
(Required for all research conducted by students and fellows)

I affirm that I have read and approved the protocol, and I assume responsibility (1) for ensuring that student researchers are aware of their responsibilities as investigators, and (2) that the IRB will be immediately informed in the event of research-related unanticipated risks, protocol deviations, or findings during the study that would affect the risks of participation in the study.

Faculty Advisor: __________________________
Date: 9/1/2017

PROTOCOL APPROVAL
Official use by IRB only.

REVIEW CATEGORY: □ Exempt □ Expedited or □ Full
C. Research Description

1. Research Design

In this age of popularized pseudoscience and devaluation of actual science, science communication has become more important than ever. Misinformation can harm both support for and implementation of crucial management programs. Lack of effective communication channels and strategies can slow projects and impede progress. Science communication can greatly influence – positively or negatively – policy, research, and public engagement in science.

Traditional modes of science communication – such as print media like newspapers and magazines – have declined significantly. New challenges, like funding cuts to and the silencing of the EPA and other environmental organizations, threaten to further degrade crucial scientific communication. Organizations like the Land Conservancy of West Michigan (LCWM) have become critical in educating and engaging the public in important scientific efforts. Additionally, land conservancies contribute greatly to conservation and research.

The LCWM is a nationally accredited Land Trust. It was established in 1976 and currently protects over 10,000 acres of land in Michigan. As a non-profit, it depends on grants and donations to fund its important work, and volunteers help maintain the quality and health of the expansive preserves. A key goal of the LCWM is to make natural areas accessible to people living in urban environments. The more people in urban environments who can connect to natural environments, the more likely it is they will feel inspired to protect natural areas.

Everything about the LCWM goals and success is built on the success of its communications program. The more people who know about the work the LCWM does, and the more that work is presented as important, the more likely it is that people will support the LCWM. A strong communications program helps secure volunteers and donations, which makes it easier for the LCWM to fulfill its professional goal of protecting and preserving important West Michigan habitats. Due to the small staff of the LCWM, it is imperative that they employ effective communication methods that convey accurate information in an easily accessible manner.

The research goal of this Master’s Project is to determine what are the most efficient and effective ways for the Land Conservancy of West Michigan (LCWM) to inspire, educate, and engage West Michigan communities in local conservation efforts. It will involve informational interviews and an online survey. This project aims to learn what informational platforms the subjects most utilize (e.g. Facebook or an e-newsletter), what types of content best connects with the subjects (e.g. educational stories about the science behind the work or human centered narratives), and what types of activities the subjects are most likely to engage in (e.g. workdays or guided nature hikes). Additional lines of inquiry include how the LCWM may improve upon existing tools and content. The online survey will be sent directly to members of the LCWM and those who follow the social media accounts of the LCWM. The survey length should be 5-15 minutes.
The informational interviews will be conducted with similar environmental organizations to learn about what strategies they have found to be most successful. The informational interviews are merely for guidance on programs and methods – they are not invasive nor personal. The theme of informational interviews mainly deals with, “Did you find having a Youtube channel was beneficial? What strategies did you employ to reach a broader audience and was that successful?” The interview should last approximately a half-hour or less.

This project’s evaluation of communications programs and strategies at both the LCWM and similar organizations will then offer suggestions for improvement, which will greatly benefit the overall function and success of the LCWM.

Around nine active and trusted members of the LCWM will be approached by my client, Communications Director Colin Hoogerwerf, to provide feedback on a survey draft. Should the members consent, they will pre-test the survey for us. Their identities will remain confidential in the final report.

2. Subject Selection
Pretest: 8-10 select members of the LCWM network who consent to providing us feedback on a survey draft.

Survey: Those subscribed to the LCWM e-mail list (2,500 subscribers, 800 of whom regularly open the e-mail), or who follow the LCWM on Facebook (~1,857 followers). Members are mainly West Michigan residents and do not necessarily have a background in science.

Information Interviews: These are representatives of similar environmental organizations who agree to provide insight and suggestions based on their organization’s communications strategies. Such organizations may include: the Triangle Land Conservancy, Frederick Meijer Gardens, the National Parks Conservation Association, and about four others.

3. Risks and Benefits
There are no anticipated risks to the research subjects due to the nature of this topic.

There are many possible benefits to the subjects of this research project. The LCWM aims to serve local residents and engage the community in conservation events. This research project gives the subjects an opportunity to provide valuable feedback on how the LCWM can better serve them. The information obtained from this project will help shape the future structure of the LCWM’s communication strategy and events to better fit the preferences of the research subjects.

The consenting environmental organizations who choose to share their experiences to aide this project will have the benefit of professional networking. The LCWM may be able to help them with advice or suggestions on their own projects, now or in the future.

4. Confidentiality
Any representative of an organization with whom I talk about communications methods will have the opportunity to request anonymity. Only I will know the identity of these representatives.
My talking with them is to simply request advice and suggestions for successful communications strategies that the LCWM is not currently using.

For the survey, it unlikely that the identity of any respondent can be discerned by their responses. The final report will look at overall trends. No subject names or addresses will be linked to any responses, data, or notes.

I will utilize Qualtrics for the survey implementation and data storage.

5. Compensation
No compensation will be offered at any point in this project.

No subjects are members of the Duke Department of Psychology and Neuroscience Subject Pool.

6. Informed Consent
It will not be necessary to translate the survey.

Informational Interview (Recruitment)
Hello _____
I am a representative of the Land Conservancy of West Michigan’s (LCWM) communications department, and we are very impressed with your communications work. We are conducting an evaluation of our program and were hoping to speak to you about your programs and strategies. Would you be willing to grant me an informational interview in the near future? You may choose to remain anonymous if you so wish, but it would greatly aide me to be able to summarize your advice and suggestions to inform the LCWM.

Thank you!

Informational Interview (Consent if necessary)
Thank you for agreeing to give input on this project. The purpose of this discussion is to obtain your insights and opinions regarding the communications’ methods and strategies used by your organization in comparison to the Land Conservancy of West Michigan (LCWM). Your feedback will help inform an evaluation of the LCWM’s own communications methods.

Your organization will be identified in the final report only if you consent. You may choose to keep your answers confidential and your identity anonymous. Your participation in this discussion is entirely voluntary. You may decline to answer any question and you may end the discussion at any time. Please feel free to ask questions at any time. Thank you!

I consent to the LCWM using my responses in their final report_______
Date_______

Pretest
Thank you for agreeing to give input on this project. The purpose of this inquiry is to obtain your insights and opinions regarding the communications’ methods and strategies used by the Land Conservancy of West Michigan (LCWM). Your feedback will help inform a survey
questionnaire that will be sent to the entire membership, as well as social media followers, in early October. The results of the survey will help inform future LCWM policies and programs.

In order to ensure your privacy, your identity will be kept confidential. None of your comments will be made public. There are no right or wrong answers.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may comment as much or as little as you please. Please feel free to ask questions at any time. Thank you!

Survey (written)
To better serve you by providing more relevant information in a more convenient manner, the Land Conservancy of West Michigan (LCWM) is asking for feedback on their communication efforts. In this survey, you will be asked to evaluate the LCWM’s communications content and method of delivery. Results from this survey will inform future LCWM programs and projects.

This is NOT a solicitation for donations. We are asking for information only.

Participation in the survey is completely voluntary. No identifying information will be connected to your responses. This survey will take approximately between 5 and 15 minutes to complete, and you may skip questions as you wish.

The survey is developed and managed by Duke University Environmental Management graduate student, Hayley Hanway, on behalf of the LCWM. By proceeding, you agree to participate in this survey and to allow the LCWM and Hayley Hanway to use the results in their final reports.

We thank you for your participation!

7. Deception
Deception will not be used in this research project.

8. Debriefing
Since there will be no deception in this project, there will be no debriefing.
APPROVAL 9/20/2017:

From: Campus IRB campusirb@duke.edu
Subject: Campus IRB: (2018-0110) - [Screening for Exemption Approval]
Date: September 20, 2017 at 1:00 PM
To: Hayley Hanway hnh23@duke.edu

Protocol: 2018-0110
Environmental Communication for The Land Conservancy of West Michigan

Researcher(s):
Hanway, Hayley - Graduate student researcher
Vidra, Rebecca - Advisor

Anniversary Date: 09/19/2018

Researchers listed on this protocol agree to:

1. Conduct the research in accordance with the approved protocol.
2. Secure approval before making changes to the protocol, such as adding a new source of funding, adding a subject population, revising procedures, modifying the informed consent process, or replacing or adding investigators.

   The form, Request to Amend an Approved Protocol, can be accessed from our website.

   If proposed amendments are such that research no longer qualifies for exemption, will be asked to submit a Request for Protocol Approval: Expedited Review or Full.

3. Report any unanticipated risks to the research subjects to the IRB Staff as soon as they are identified.
4. Notify the IRB Staff when the research is completed.
5. Respond to annual inquiries about extending the protocol approval.
6. Retain your original research data and signed consent forms for at least five years, in accordance with Duke’s Policy on Research Records, Sharing, Retention, and Ownership. (Faculty Handbook, Appendix P)
Appendix C: Survey

To better serve you by providing more relevant information in a more convenient manner, the Land Conservancy of West Michigan (LCWM) is asking for feedback on their communication efforts. This is being done as part of a research project conducted by Duke University master’s student, Hayley Hanway, who developed this survey and will be analyzing the results on behalf of the LCWM.

In this survey, you will be asked to evaluate the LCWM’s communications content and method of delivery. You will also be asked about ways you may engage with the LCWM (e.g., volunteering). Results from this survey will be incorporated into Hayley’s recommendations to the LCWM for informing future LCWM programs and projects.

This is NOT a solicitation for donations. We are asking for information only.

Participation in the survey is completely voluntary. No identifying information will be connected to your responses. This survey will likely take less than 15 minutes to complete, and you may skip questions as you wish.

By proceeding, you agree to participate in this survey and to allow the LCWM and Hayley Hanway to use the results in their final reports.

You may contact Hayley at hmh23@duke.edu or Colin Hoogerwerf at colin@naturenearby.org if you have questions.

We thank you for your participation!
Q1 How long have you been aware of the Land Conservancy of West Michigan (LCWM)?

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months - 1 year
- 1 - 5 years
- 5+ years

Q2 Are you aware of the LCWM's e-newsletter?

- Yes
- No

Display This Question:
If Q2 = Yes

Q2.1 Are you subscribed?

- Yes
- No
- Not currently, but I was in the past

Display This Question:
If Q2.1 = Not currently, but I was in the past
Q2.11 Why did you stop subscribing? Check all that apply.

☐ The stories weren't interesting/important to me

☐ I received too many e-mails

☐ I moved out of the area

☐ Other ________________________________

Q3 Which social media accounts for the LCWM do you currently follow? Check all that apply.

☐ Facebook

☐ Twitter

☐ Instagram

Q4 What other media accounts would you like the LCWM to use? Check all that apply.

☐ Snapchat

☐ Youtube

☐ Podcast

☐ Other ________________________________

☐ ✗ I wouldn't follow other accounts
Q5 What is your main source of information about the LCWM?

- E-newsletter
- Print newsletter and other mail
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- LCWM website
- 3rd party sites (e.g. Wood TV 8, Grand Rapids Press, etc.)
Q6 What types of content/programming about the LCWM do you most enjoy? Check all that apply.

☐ Photos

☐ Videos (interviews, work, landscapes, etc.)

☐ Educational stories explaining the science behind the LCWM's work

☐ Creative narrative stories about the experience of being in nature

☐ Human interest stories exploring the connection people have to nature

☐ A guided nature walk

☐ Workday events

☐ Non-workday events (e.g. Harvest Moon, Preserved! gallery shows)

☐ Other ________________________________
Q7 In which ways have you engaged with the LCWM at least once? Check all that apply.

- [ ] I read their content from LCWM sources (website, e-newsletter, etc.)
- [ ] I volunteer (e.g. workday events)
- [ ] I donate
- [ ] I attend their non-workday events (e.g. Harvest Moon, Preserved! gallery shows)
- [ ] I partner with them on projects (e.g. Preserved!)
- [ ] I own land protected with a conservation easement
- [ ] I visit their nature preserves and/or natural areas
- [ ] Other ________________________________

Display This Question:
If Q7 = I volunteer (e.g. workday events)

Q7.1 In your best estimate, how many times did you volunteer in the past 6 months for the LCWM?

- [ ] 1
- [ ] 2
- [ ] 3
- [ ] 4
- [ ] 5
- [ ] 6
- [ ] More than 6
Q8 Have you ever seen LCWM content/programming that inspired you to volunteer?

- Yes
- No - content/programming has discouraged me from volunteering
- Content/programming did not change the amount I volunteer

Display This Question:
If Q8 = Yes

Q8.1 What kind of content/programming inspired you to volunteer? Check all that apply.

- A photo or video
- An educational story about the science of the LCWM's work
- A human interest story about a person's connection to nature
- A creative narrative story about nature
- A guided nature walk
- A workday event
- A non-workday event
Q8.2 Please explain what discouraged you from volunteering.

_________________________________________________________________
Q9 Have you ever donated to the LCWM?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Display This Question:
If Q9 = Yes

Q9.1 What kind of content/programming inspired you to donate? Check all that apply.

☐ A photo or video

☐ An educational story about the science of the LCWM's work

☐ A human interest story about a person's connection to nature

☐ A creative narrative story about nature

☐ A guided nature walk

☐ A workday event

☐ A non-workday event

Display This Question:
If Q9 = Yes
Q9.2 What prompted your last donation to the LCWM?

- I responded to a paper mail appeal
- I responded to an e-mail appeal
- I responded to an appeal I saw on LCWM social media
- I attended a fundraising event
- I attended a workday event
- I wanted to support the mission of the LCWM
- Other ____________________________
Display This Question:
If Q9 = No

Q9.3 What has discouraged you from donating? Check all that apply.

☐ I prefer to give to other organizations/causes

☐ I do not know enough about the LCWM to donate at this time

☐ The LCWM's mission is not highly important to me

☐ The LCWM has not asked me to donate

☐ I am not comfortable with the options for suggested donation amounts

☐ The donation process is too confusing

☐ I can't afford to make donations at this time

☐ I saw LCWM content/programming that offended me (please specify)

_________________________________________________________________________

☐ Other ____________________________

Page Break


Q10 How might we improve the donation process? Check all that apply.

☐ More payment options (Paypal, e-check, etc.)

☐ Donate via text

☐ More opportunities to give via paper mail

☐ More fundraising events

☐ More suggested donation amounts (Please Specify)

__________________________________________________________________________

☐ Other ________________________________________________________________

☐ ☒ The donation process doesn't need to change
Q11 Which preserves and natural areas do you currently know about? Check all that apply.

☐ Anderson Woods
☐ Barrier Dunes Sanctuary
☐ Bradford Dickinson White
☐ Brower Lake
☐ Cascade Peace Park
☐ DePersia South Highlands
☐ Dune Pines
☐ Flower Creek Dunes
☐ Huysers Farm Park
☐ Kuker-Van Til
☐ Lake Breeze
☐ Lamberton Lake Fen
☐ Lost Lake: Muskegon State Park
☐ Maas Family Nature
☐ Meinert County Park
☐ Minnie Skwarek
☐ North Ottawa Dunes County Park
☐ Palomita
☐ Richmond Woods
☐ Roselle Park
☐ Saugatuck Dunes State Park
☐ Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area
☐ Saul Lake Bog
☐ The Highlands
☐ Upper Macatawa Natural Area
☐ Wege Foundation Natural Area
☐ Whitey’s Woods: Lake Harbor Park
Q12 Which preserves and natural areas have you visited in the past year? Check all that apply.

☐ Anderson Woods
☐ Barrier Dunes Sanctuary
☐ Bradford Dickinson White
☐ Brower Lake
☐ Cascade Peace Park
☐ DePersia South Highlands
☐ Dune Pines
☐ Flower Creek Dunes
☐ Huysen Farm Park
☐ Kuker-Van Til
☐ Lake Breeze
☐ Lamberton Lake Fen
☐ Lost Lake: Muskegon State Park
☐ Maas Family Nature
☐ Meinert County Park
☐ Minnie Skwarek
☐ North Ottawa Dunes County Park
☐ Palomita
☐ Richmond Woods
Roselle Park
Saugatuck Dunes State Park
Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area
Saul Lake Bog
The Highlands
Upper Macatawa Natural Area
Wege Foundation Natural Area
Whitey's Woods: Lake Harbor Park
Q13 In the past 6 months, how many times per month on average did you visit preserves or natural areas?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3-5
- 6-10
- 11+

Q14 What products would you find most useful for enjoying a preserve? Check all that apply.

- Paper maps of the preserve
- Interactive digital maps of the preserve
- Digital recreation guide
- Digital wildflower guide
- Digital tree guide
- Digital wildlife guide
- Other ________________________________
Q15 Overall, how would you rate the content QUALITY of the LCWM communications?

- Good
- Neither good nor bad
- Bad

Q16 Overall, how would you rate the QUANTITY of LCWM communications?

- Too much
- The right amount
- Too little

End of Block: Main survey

Start of Block: Demographics

Q17 Select the options that best described you. Check all that apply.

- I'm an avid reader of scientific topics
- My career is in the sciences
- I studied science in college but have chosen to pursue a different career
- I enjoy the outdoors and engaging with nature
- I don't spend much time in nature, but I want my kids to value it
- I don't spend much time in nature, but I believe conservation is important
- Other ________________________________________________
Q18 What's your gender?
   ○ Female
   ○ Male
   ○ Other __________________________________________

Q19 What's your age?
   ○ 18 - 24
   ○ 25 - 34
   ○ 35 - 44
   ○ 45 - 54
   ○ 55 - 64
   ○ 65 - 74
   ○ 75 - 84
   ○ 85 or older
Q20 With what race do you most identify?

- [ ] Black or African American
- [ ] White or Caucasian
- [ ] Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- [ ] Native American or Alaska Native
- [ ] Asian
- [ ] Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- [ ] Other ________________________________________________
Q21 In general, how would you describe your political affiliation?

- Republican
- Democrat
- Independent
- Other ________________________________________________

Q22 What's your annual household income?

- $10,000 or less
- $10,001 - $20,000
- $20,001 - $35,000
- $35,001 - $50,000
- $50,001 - $75,000
- $75,001 - $100,000
- $100,001 - $125,000
- $125,001 - $150,000
- $150,001 - $175,000
- $175,001 - $200,000
- $200,001 +

Q23 What's your COUNTY of residence? (e.g. Ottawa)

________________________________________________________________
Q24 If there is anything else you'd like to share, please comment below.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

End of Block: Block 1