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RiverSmart Homes: Seeking Success with Residential Stormwater BMPs

Results from Participant Surveys and Lessons Learned

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Agenda

- Acknowledgements
- About RiverSmart Homes
- Main Questions
- Our Research
- About RiverSmart Participants
- Top Five Findings
- Implications for other social marketing efforts

Acknowledgements



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The Chesapeake Bay Trust co-chairs the Social Marketing Technical Assistance Network Provider program with NFWF.

DC's "RiverSmart Homes"

311 Online Agency Directory Online Services Accessibility



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District Department of the Environment

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Environmental Services

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Resources

Laws & Regulations

About DDOE

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- ▶ Applications, Licenses & Permits
- ▶ Environmental Data & Maps
- ▶ For Businesses
- ▶ For Residents
 - ▶ Environmental Health & Safety
 - ▶ Eco-Friendly Living
 - ▶ Outdoor Activities
 - ▶ Get RiverSmart
 - RiverSmart Homes
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 - ▶ Stormwater and Flooding
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RiverSmart Homes

<< Get RiverSmart main page

The RiverSmart Homes program offers incentives to District of Columbia homeowners interested in reducing stormwater pollution from their properties.

Stormwater Pollution in the District

Stormwater is simply rainwater that, rather than remaining on the land where it falls, flows off of the site. Rainwater becomes stormwater when it falls on impervious surfaces such as rooftops, driveways, roads, sidewalks and even lawns. As stormwater moves from our yards to our streams it picks up pollutants such as oil and grease from our roadways and driveways, nutrients from fertilizers on our lawns, and bacteria from pet waste and other animal excrement. Once in the stream, the fast-moving surges of water associated with storms cause erosion and destroy habitat for fish and other wildlife. Thankfully, new development and large renovations of properties in the District are now required to install items that reduce stormwater pollution.



Skip the Bag - Save the River



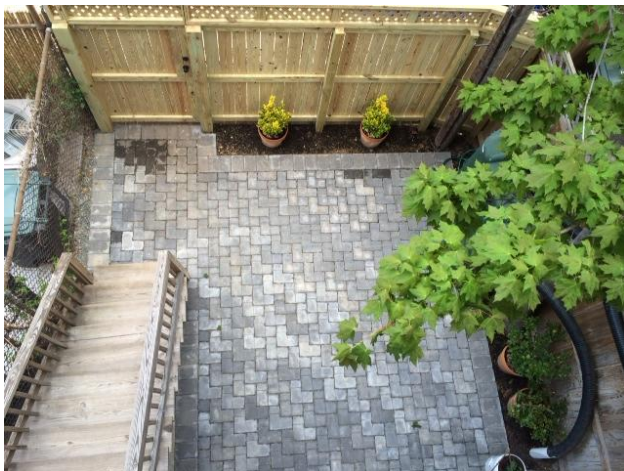
District businesses selling food or alcohol are required to charge \$.05 for each disposable paper or plastic carryout bag. Find out about DC's Bag Law.

EnergySmart DC



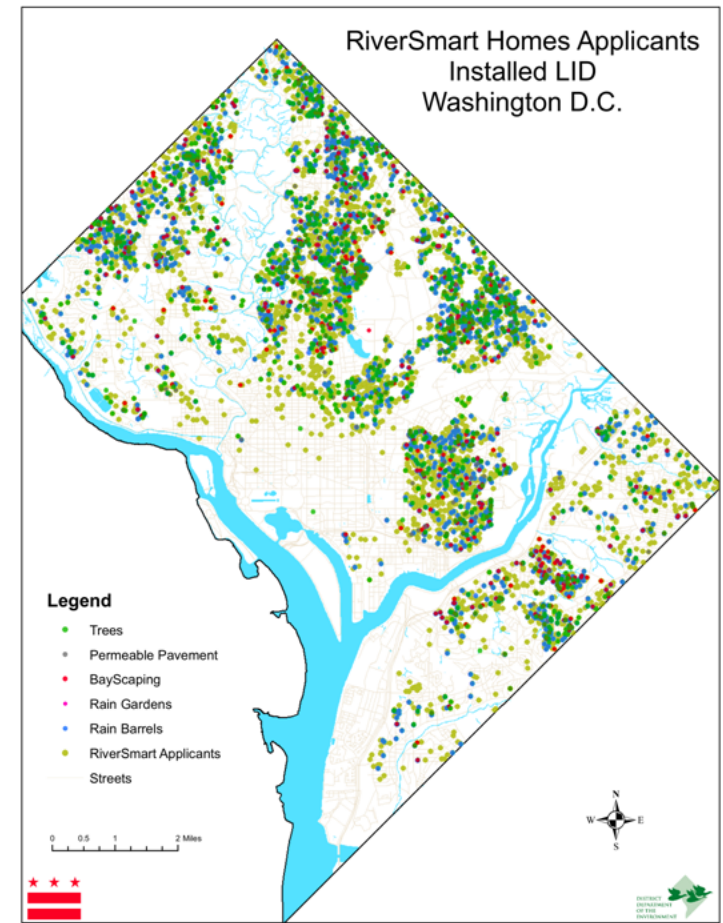
The RiverSmart Homes program offers incentives to District of Columbia homeowners interested in reducing stormwater pollution from their properties.

About “RiverSmart Homes”



About “RiverSmart Homes”

- Since 2009, more than 6,500 households have installed rain gardens, rain barrels, native plant landscaping, pervious pavement, or planted trees
- *The program is about more than a cost-share -- they offer onsite technical assistance to homeowners*
- There is a two-to-three month waiting period for prospective homeowners who wish to participate.



Main Questions

- What motivates people to participate?
- Once they've participated, are they using/maintaining the project they had installed?
- Once they've participated, are they installing additional projects on their own, how often?
- Once they've participated, have they learned more about stormwater and its effects on local streams and the community?

Our Research

- A detailed demographic analysis of past participants
- In-depth interviews with a selection of past participants
- An online survey of past participants



We started the project by “data mining”
the participant list of 6,500 homes



About RiverSmart Participants

- We acquired information about the patterns of demographics, financial status, spending habits, hobbies, and more
- We used this information to acquire addresses for 50,000 DC households that most closely resemble the 6,500 that already participated
- *Note: We did not acquire sensitive information about any individual*



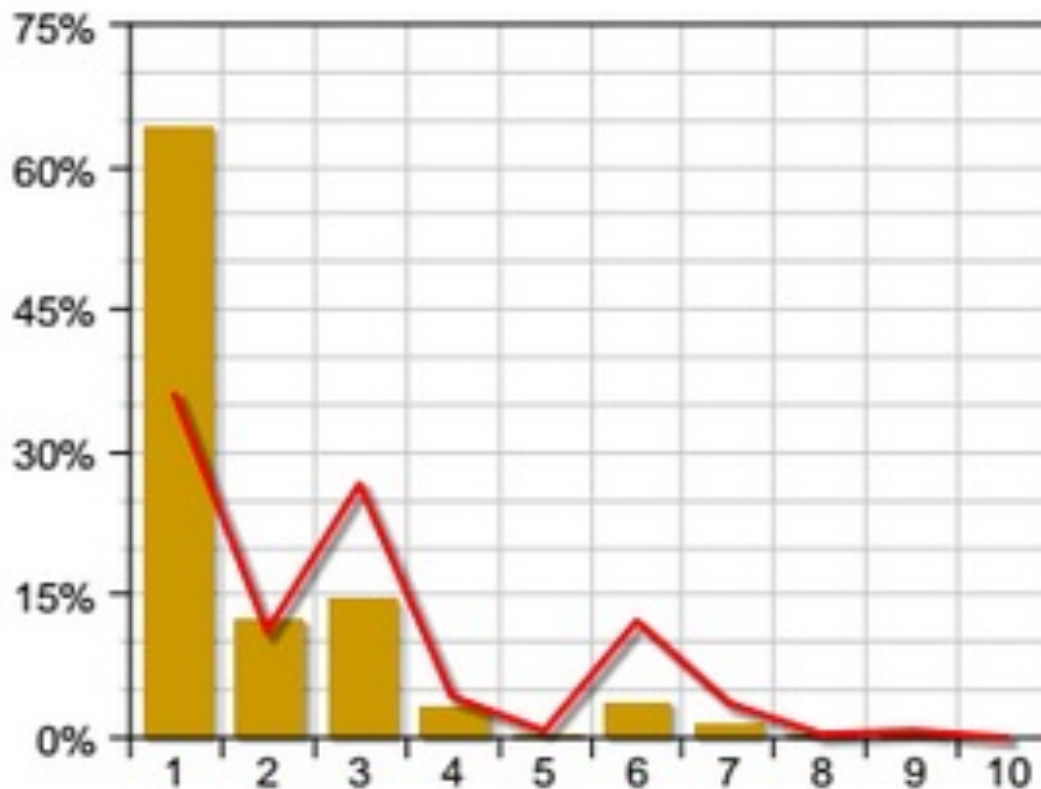
About RiverSmart Participants

Participating homeowners belong to a fairly narrow demographic and lifestyle group. Typical participants:

- Are middle-aged professionals
- Own a single family home, neither mansion nor shack
- Have a small household -- one or two adults, one or no kids
- Are financially responsible, secure, and generous to charities
- Are interested in environment, likely to enjoy cooking and fishing

About RiverSmart Participants

Semcasting Charitable Contribution Decile (Red: State Average)



RiverSmart participation has a very strong correlation with charitable giving. More than $\frac{2}{3}$ are among the most generous 10% of DC residents.

Participant Surveys

In-Depth Phone Interviews

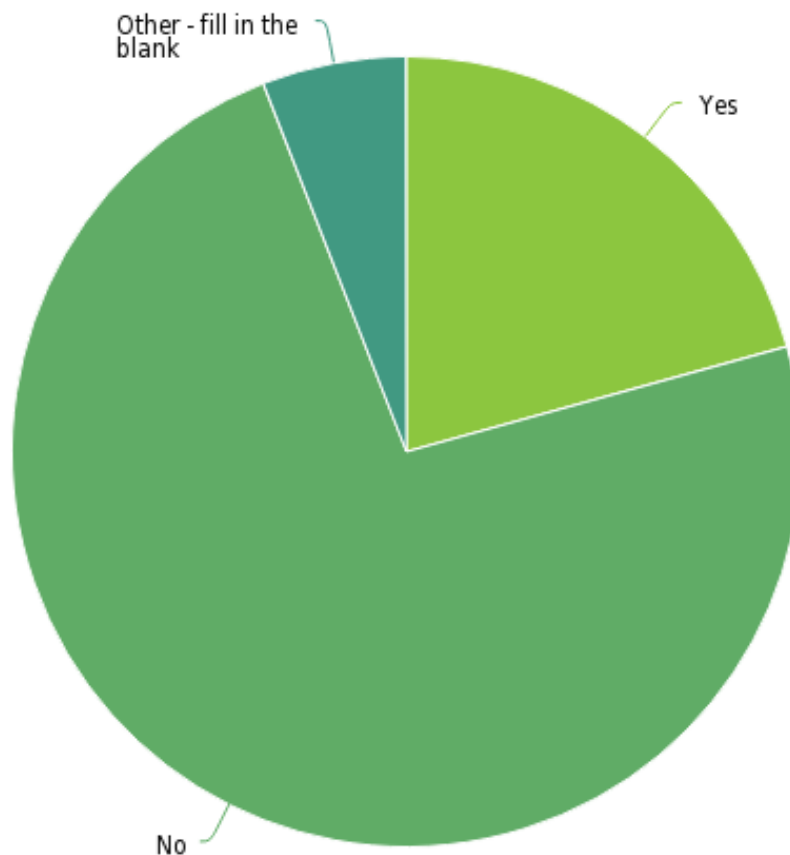
- Sorted the list of participants into groups by BMP
- Began with 10 pre-testing interviews to test our questionnaire
- Conducted 12 phone interviews per BMP (5 BMPs x 12 participants = 60 interviews) over the course of 9 weeks November 2014-January 2015

Online Survey

- Developed online survey and tested with DDOE staff
- Sent out survey to entire participant with emails (~ 5,000) and received 888 responses

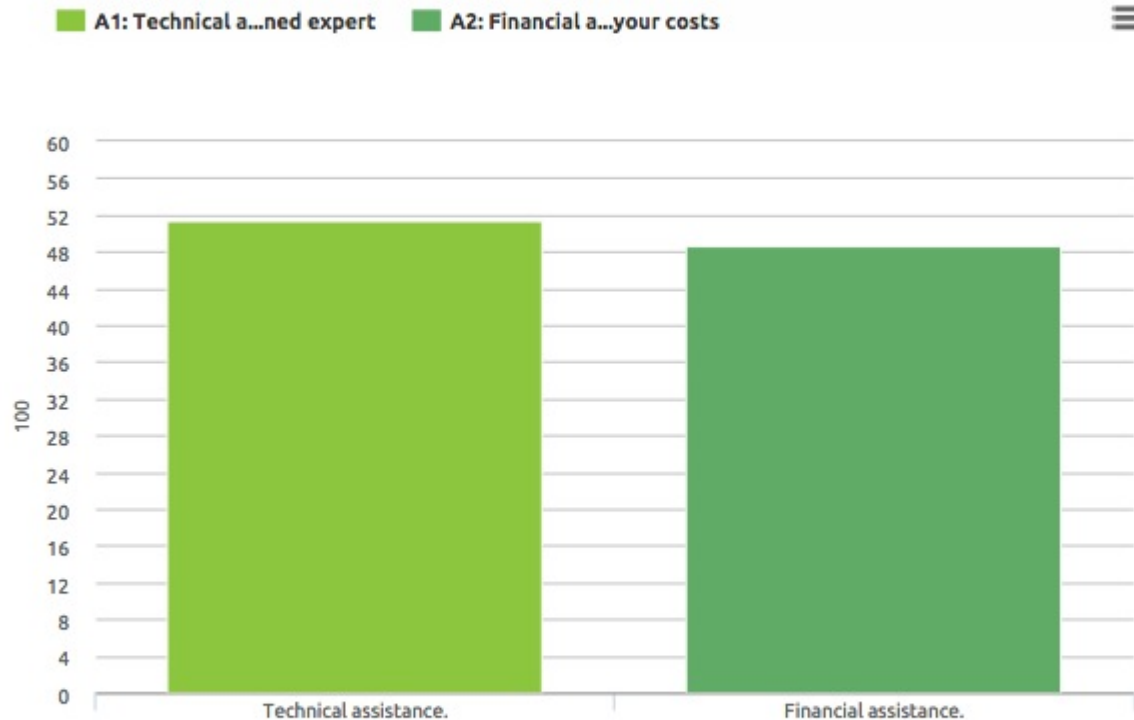
Finding #1: The program's success is due to the combination of technical and financial assistance to help homeowners. Offering a cost-share is just not enough.

Question #14: AFTER participating in RiverSmart, have you installed any other stormwater management projects on your own?



Finding #1

Q17 : Thinking about future stormwater management projects, how important are the following relative to each other?



Answer (average)

(based on 888 responses)

1: Technical assistance on your property from a trained expert

51

2: Financial assistance to help cover your costs

49

Even after going through the entire process once before, these veteran stormwater stoppers value technical assistance slightly more than financial assistance!

Finding #1

- “I’d also like to learn more from RiverSmart of what else I can do. Now that I have a rain barrel, where do I go next? Is there something else I can do in my yard? Is there some other way to get involved in the community? Guidance on what the next steps are would be helpful.”
- “I would love to be able to participate in the cost share again, but if that’s not available then the technical expertise is really valuable to me. Just to have someone come tell me “you could put this type of rain barrel here and this is how you would do it” would be valuable. Even if I have to pay for it all just having the right person give me direction is very important.”

Finding #2: Word of mouth is the main way households hear about the program.

Answer	Responses (743 total)
A2: Friend or family member	26.5% (197)
A1: Past RiverSmart Homes participant	22.4% (167)
A5: DDOE website	19.2% (143)
A9: Other - fill in the blank	16.0% (119)
A4: Internet search	13.8% (103)
A7: Email listserve	13.1% (98)
A3: Print media (newspaper, magazine)	9.0% (67)
A6: Flyer	8.6% (64)
A8: Seminar or class	3.4% (26)

Finding #2

- “I tell friends and neighbors about it. I told my neighbor and they are doing some work for her next spring. Sometimes it takes a minute for neighbors to get it and my neighbors are not as focused as me to try something new.”
- “I think getting the rain barrel was a start to make me feel better about myself, that I’m making a difference, along with recycling my trash, and taking cloth bags to the supermarket. I tell people about what I’m doing and I’m an ambassador. My children are homeowners and I hope they will participate too. Start with your immediate circle and tell them about it, and they tell friends, and they tell friends, and it goes on from there.”



Finding #3: Participating homeowners belong to a fairly narrow demographic and lifestyle group. Relying on word-of-mouth contributes to this. Diversifying the audience will require active promotion.

Question #21: What would help others in your community to learn about the RiverSmart Homes program?

Answer	# Answering	% Answer
Notices in neighborhood listservs and Internet forums	624	70.2%
Signage at RiverSmart Homes to identify and inform the public about the project(s) install	494	55.6%
Mailers or door hangers	459	51.6%
Tours of homes with installed projects	449	50.5%
More press in the newspaper or on the news	404	45.4%
Neighborhood meetings	393	44.2%
Flyers or posters at local stores and restaurants	279	31.4%
Advertisements on Facebook and other websites	198	22.2%
Other - fill in the blank (See responses in Appendix A)	59	6.6%

Finding #3

- “Getting the word out to people, especially on my side of town. I live on the Southeast side, and me and my neighbor had no idea. I just happened to get lucky and hear from someone that lives in the Northwest. Pretty much everyone in my area owns their homes and don’t know about these programs. The upper northwest gets a lot more notifications, **so it would be a good idea to branch out and further the area and demographics that can apply for the program.**”
- “More direct neighborhood wide involvement/ outreach. **Especially in lower income areas.** Many of my neighbors have no idea what RiverSmart Homes is. Many don't go online to seek this information out so more community based meetings or mailers.”
- “Great program and I would like to see more done in schools to "raise up" the next generation and **help ensure that all communities are able to participate in the program regardless of socio-economic status.** I don't see too many rain barrels in the 'hood. I know you are working on this, but I see that the need may be greater than the resources.”

Finding #4: Homeowners are diligent about maintaining their BMPs -- but are confounded by selection, care, and replacement of native plants.

1: Empty your rain barrel.

Answer	Responses (743 total)
A4: 6 or more times	30.0% (223)
A5: Not applicable	25.0% (186)
A2: 1 or 2 times	22.3% (166)
A3: 3 or 5 times	16.6% (124)
A1: Rarely or never	5.9% (44)

2: Water your plants or trees with rain water from rain barrel(s).

Answer	Responses (743 total)
A4: 6 or more times	54.3% (404)
A5: Not applicable	25.3% (188)
A3: 3 or 5 times	9.6% (72)
A2: 1 or 2 times	5.5% (41)
A1: Rarely or never	5.1% (38)

Finding #4

- “After install I had questions on plants and pruning. Still do--harder to get advice on native plants that aren't widely sold.”
- “I thought waiting and watering it according to instructions would be enough but in that time it seems like everything has pretty much died.”
- “What I would like to see is tips and suggestions on how to continue nurturing the trees, rain gardens, etc... as soon as Spring arrives, there should be tips as to what to do with the trees, shrubs.”

Finding #5: Participating homeowners want some ability to receive assistance with plant care post-installation.

Question #11: What resources would help you to maintain your project? Please reorder from most helpful to least helpful.

Answer	Average Score (Lower score = higher priority)
Annual home visit from contractor, RiverSmart staff, or other professional trained person.	3.13
"How to" □ manual left at your home.	3.43
Maintenance reminders sent to you via email, text or phone call.	3.74
Online educational videos.	3.91
Plant lists with care instructions specific to local conditions.	3.97
Community seminars or classes.	4.66
Annual maintenance service for a set cost (someone comes to your house).	5.16


Finding #5

- “I like the idea of **someone coming back to help check on the rain garden** and spruce it up and give advice on how to take care of it.”
- “What needs to happen is to have at least one return visit at minimum within a year. **It would be helpful to provide advice to the homeowner as needed if things aren't looking as good as they should.**”
- “Having someone follow up with people is important, so people know that someone is going to call to check in about your project, or someone is going to be calling about pruning. **Its one thing to plant a tree in the first place, but having someone follow up adds value.**”

Top Five Findings

1. The program's success is due to the combination of technical and financial assistance to help homeowners. **Offering a cost-share is just not enough.**
2. **Word of mouth** is the main way households hear about the program.
3. Participating homeowners belong to a fairly narrow demographic and lifestyle group. Relying on word-of-mouth contributes to this. **Diversifying the audience will require active promotion.**
4. Homeowners are diligent about maintaining their BMPs -- **but are confounded by selection, care, and replacement of native plants.**
5. Participating homeowners **want some ability to receive assistance with plant care** post-installation.

Implications for Future Efforts: Perceived Barriers



What should I plant?

Where should I plant them?

How should I take care of them?

How can I tell what's a weed and what's not?

Native plants are daunting!

Implications for Future Efforts: Perceived Benefits

- Positive feelings about doing something for the environment
- Conversation piece



Implications for Future Efforts: Service

- **Service** is the key to success
- To replicate RiverSmart Homes' success, future programs need to emphasize **service** before, during, and after installation
- Do-it-yourself educational resources are second best
- Providing service remotely -- using the smartphone apps -- is an untested and promising area

Implications for Future Efforts: Incentives

- Technical support is somewhat more important than financial support, but financial support remains important
- Helping pay for it up front is better than a rebate later
- Participants want their stormwater fee credit, even though the credit is small



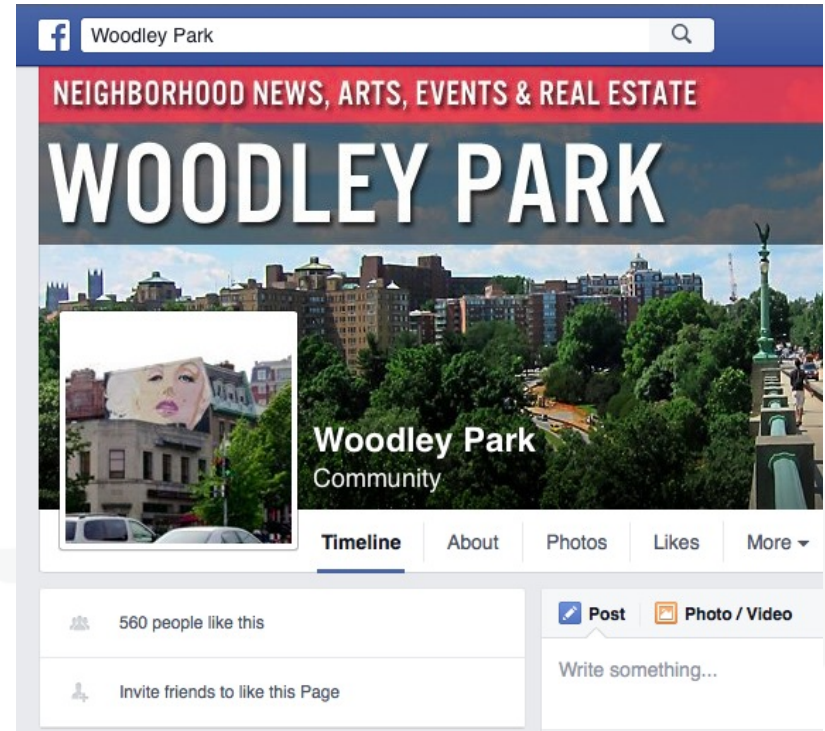
Implications for Future Efforts: Promotion

- No surprise here, past participants are highly credible messengers
- Many participants are willing to help recruit future participants and answer their questions
- Those creating new programs should expect that initial success comes slowly but builds steadily as participants spread the word

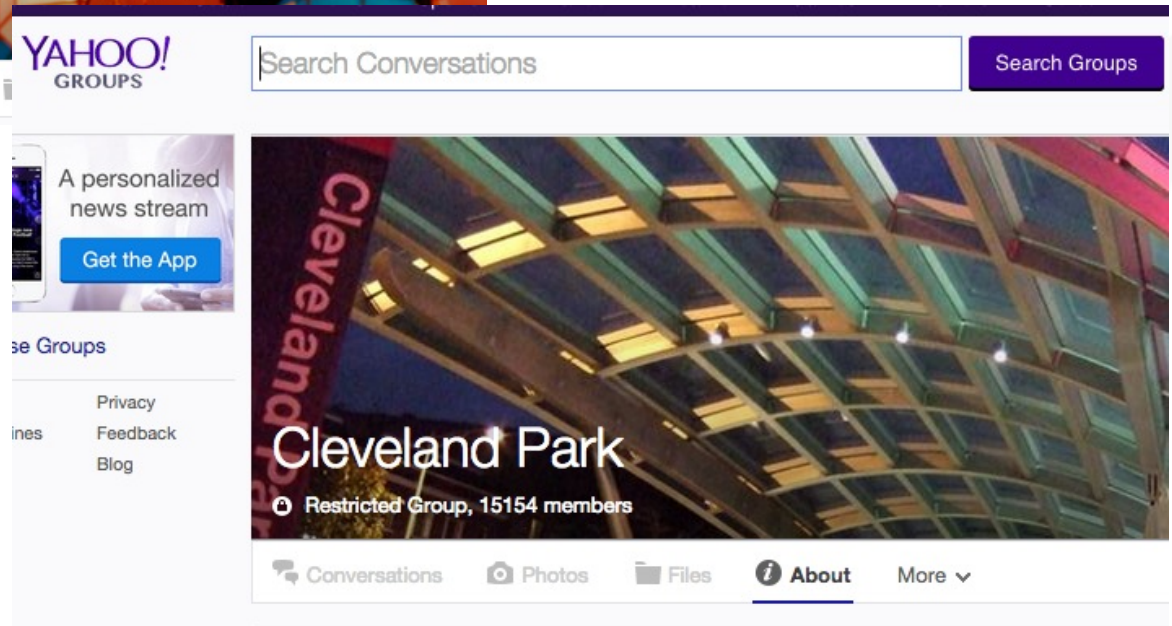
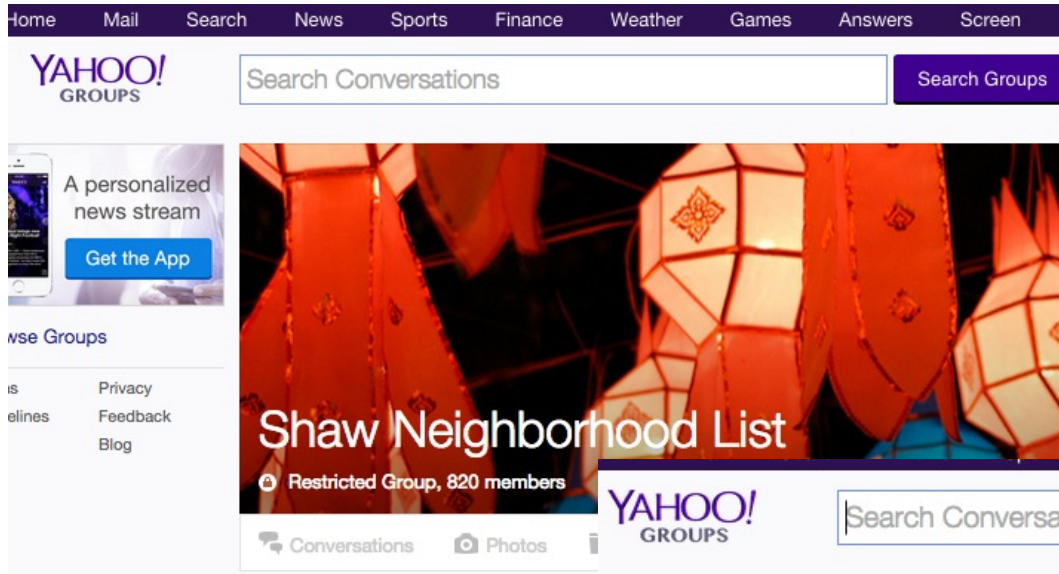


Implications for Future Efforts: Promotion

Our participants believe that neighborhood listservs, Facebook groups, and other online forums are better than newspaper/tv/radio for promoting the program



Implications for Future Efforts: Promotion



Q&A

Press *6 to “raise your hand.” We will take questions on first-come first-served basis.

Please identify yourself (name and organization) when asking questions.



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