Inclusive Community Engagement Online - BeNeighbors.org Campaign

A three year partnership led by E-Democracy launched in 2012 with funding from the Knight Foundation
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Who: **10,000+ St. Paul residents** - representing the dynamic diversity of the community engaged as "neighbors" online across the city. That's roughly 10% of households participating ~**daily**.

What: Neighbors Forums are **two-way online public spaces** that build, engage, and inform the community. Volunteer resident-led, our Neighbors Forums are fun and dynamic. From sharing recommendations on local babysitters to engaging our local officials on an upcoming decision, these forums deliver useful community engagement that matters. Two of our well established Minneapolis neighbors forums are approaching 1,000 members each, reaching over 20% of households.

When: The Knight grant runs from **2012 through all of 2014**. St. Paul project partners are being sought now. Our outreach team will fan out across the city in mid-2012. In 2013, we will explore additional "electronic block club" technology as well as generate and share lessons with many other communities. E-Democracy, based in Minnesota, opened its first online civic engagement forum in 1994. Our neighborhood-level work started in 2007 in our United Kingdom communities before being brought back home to Minnesota for further innovation.

Where: Online. Join our "campaign" to connect 10,000 St. Paulites: **http://BeNeighbors.org** Choose among the online "Neighbors Forum" based on the 17 St. Paul District Council boundaries. Our open source forum technology combines e-mail, web, Facebook, Twitter, etc. in a **unified community-building experience**. The future BeNeighbors.org directory will promote online neighbor spaces, including those we do not host, across St. Paul, Minneapolis, and beyond.

Why Inclusion?: **Digital bridge building works**, but our success is embryonic. You must go beyond numbers in the "virtual room" and foster relevant exchange that builds trust. Nationally, the digital divide with online neighbor connecting is a real problem. According to PewInternet.org, 10.5% of adult Internet users are members of an online neighborhood e-mail lists, forums, or social networks. However, households making over $75,000 a year are 5 times more likely to be members than those in Internet households making under $30,000 an year (19% versus 4%). While whites and blacks participate nearly equally, Latinos participate at 3% (and likely other communities of color and recent immigrant communities.) This divide must be closed so that all communities may benefit. Help us create the largest and most inclusive urban public network of online neighbor connections in the world. Get involved today: http://e-democracy.org/inclusion