



GLOBAL WELLNESS
INSTITUTE™

ON OUR MINDS

The latest topics fueling the work and conversations of GWI's Wellness Communities Initiative

For the last several years, the members of our initiative have been discussing what defines a wellness community. And as it turns out, the greater question is this: *how does one create a sense of community?*

In other words, aside from common interests, hopes and desires to live healthier, longer and more fulfilling lives, what is it that connect us? And how do we foster that connection among communities, whether older or purpose built from the start?

After some thoughtful discussion regarding the pros and cons of technology, we've squarely landed on the power of the internet and web-based technologies that help to connect - not overwhelm - us. A place where we can go to connect with people at the level and frequency which we want, regardless if it's via our own phones, iPads, computers and electronic devices or even borrowed time at an internet cafe, business center, or perhaps even a neighbor's house.

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Community ***Intranets*** serve the needs of residents while ***internet*** sites typically serve the needs of the public for more information about your community. A community intranet can contribute more to building and creating community than almost any other program you can launch, and it also turns out that it is one of the least expensive offerings to create with a huge payoff to the entire fabric of the community.

Here are the basics that we've witnessed after working alongside existing and developing communities:

- **You need at least 350 residents to optimize a community intranet.** The tool works best when there are a wide range of interests within the community, especially interests that are specialized and personal. For example, you may have a handful of people who are interested in the Tibetan Book of the Dead or the Course of Miracles, a fairly narrow niche by any standards. The simple act of them finding others who share their interests goes a long way to create a vibrant community. On the other hand, mothers with infants can find others to organize a "yoga mom s" outing.

- **You need a dedicated person to manage the site** since the information content is time-dependent and residents will log in only if new and valuable information they need is there. It is not a full-time job but it does require daily focus. This person is also responsible for making sure everyone uses the site for something. Encouraging people to try it is a good start and giving them a relevant reason to use it, cements the deal.
- **A well-designed site will seed community interaction** and will take on a life of its own once residents start creating their own uses (which means that currently available social media sites, in our opinion, could never fill this role).
- **A well-built site will give you the ability to monitor what is being used** and then adjustments can be made to programming. A skilled intranet manager can see emerging issues within the community and respond accordingly.

The broad areas that you should cover on a community intranet include:

- **Daily Community Functions:** People want information that helps them become “good community members”. Things like:
 - Recycling programs,
 - School information like daily meals, children programs, sports leagues, after school programs, tutoring, day care, etc.
 - Construction schedules that may disrupt their commutes
 - Community rules like guest parking, etc.
 - Weather alerts
 - Other city/community services like garbage, police log, etc.
 - And much more depending on the culture and location
- **Community Events & Feedback:** People want to stay informed about things that are taking place including:
 - Programs and events at community centers - e.g., stroller brigade for moms and toddlers, yoga in the park, holiday events like a New Year Parade, block parties, movies in the park, pet park (“bark park”) gatherings, etc.
 - Feedback on development plans. Some of the feedback you get will be “noise”, especially early on as the channel is opened, however, over time, if you listen to your residents, you build trust and great word-of-mouth. Active listening by developers, however begrudging it may be at the start, will actually increase the sense of belonging in the community and it goes a long way to encourage positive word-of-mouth.
- **Wellness Offerings:** The goal should be to offer information people want while making sure that you are not lecturing them on what they “should” do. Examples include:
 - Daily aphorisms - many people like having positive information that helps them live a good life. They might be spiritual like in the Book of Miracles or practical like how to practice gratitude.

- Yoga and other movement opportunities
 - Community health screening
 - Spa services like yoga, Qigong or Tai Chi
 - Tips of healthy foods, exercise ideas, and much more
 - Programs at a “wisdom institute” that helps people enhance their psychological growth
 - Update on a community garden and/or farm-to-table offerings
- **Ways to Share with Others:** Most people have things like tools, cleaning appliances, rarely used tables and chairs, and lots more. Sharing these items not only helps others it creates a sense of community and often introduces people to others who share their interest. Ride sharing is often a popular use.
- **Way to Connect with Others:** An intranet provides an excellent way to connect people with common interest. Examples include: book clubs, art and creative classes, historical and political groups, kids classes and activities, sports and dance leagues, and even social movement tasks and clubs that inspire connections via common social and philanthropic causes. The sky is the limit!

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Until next time, we will be building well to live well. Cheers!