

**Development of Niagara Answers Website  
Proposal**

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### **The Vision**

The **Niagara Answers** website, through modern technology, promotes resident awareness and involvement, ensures equal opportunity of services, to provide an easy approach for residents and visitors to find city information and services. This website also encourages residents to participate, increases the community engagement, and enriches the quality of life for all in the City of Niagara Falls.

### **Introduction**

Lack of awareness of available services is creating a disconnection within the City of Niagara Falls and is the cause for missed opportunities. For example, there was a resident receiving unemployment. Before his benefits were exhausted, he had hopes of taking advantage of free job training to become a carpenter. The source that he was in contact with was unaware of any carpenter trainings in the area. Three months later a relative told him that they had received information about a local carpenter training program. When this resident finally learned of this program, he was no longer receiving unemployment and no longer had the free time he once had to attend these classes. This missed opportunity to develop this skill was disappointing to this resident.

There are many residents and local agencies that share the desire of rising Niagara Falls, but often there is a breakdown in effective publishing of this kind of information. Guidance to local services, volunteer opportunities, and training programs are just a few examples of why we need to begin developing a unified platform of information. "Roughly three-quarters of Americans (77%) now own a Smartphone, including lower-income Americans and those ages 50 and older are exhibiting a sharp uptick in ownership over the past year", according a Pew Research Center survey conducted in November 2016. Using technology to our advantage we are partnering with local agencies to create an alpha-directory of local services. This directory has the potential to be at the thumb of each city resident.

This **Niagara Answers** website will be designed to offer an easy approach for residents and visitors to search and answer city information and services and well connect the City of Niagara Falls. In order for our City to progress, we need to create an efficient channel to available services and this website will do just that. All the questions and requests are generated by residents and visitors, and all the answers are offered by authorized residents. Once a question or request is posted, the authorized residents will post an answer at the earliest time. Residents and visitors will have access to frequent requested information regarding government service, parking, public health, social services, legal advice, employment & training programs and so much more (Figure 1).

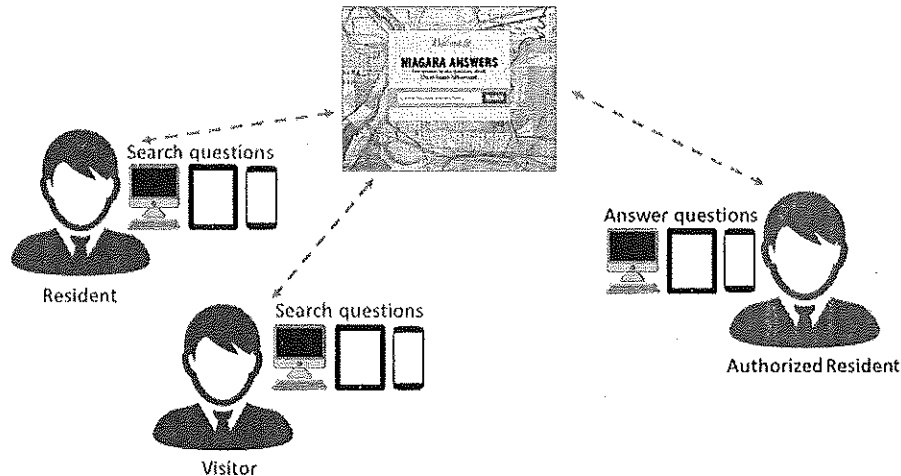


Figure 1. Diagram for Niagara Answers website

### **The Objective**

The **Niagara Answers** website solves the issue of resident's lack of awareness of local agencies, services and programs that are available to improve the quality of life of residents and the experience of visitors. This also reduces the duplication of many services and creates a unified platform of services. This creates an efficient form of communication for residents and visitors.

The **Niagara Answers** is a partnership between The City of Niagara Falls and Niagara University. Dr. Yonghong Tong and his students' team will be working with Mr. Ezra P. Scott Jr. and the City of Niagara Falls Management Information Services (MIS) Department to accomplish this work.

This website is a user-friendly design works well on variety of devices and window or screen sizes, such as desk top computers, tablets, smartphones.

### **Benefits / Impacts**

- Find information about City of Niagara Falls quickly.
- Increase residents involvement in supporting community.
- Complementarity of services.
- Strengthen /support the existing coalition of human services providers
- Drive citizen engagement with limited resources and budget.
- Improve your services and customer experience.
- Become more authentic and transparent.
- Greater opportunities for human connections, increasing resident follow through who are seeking services.

## Design:

Inspired by “Oakland Answers”, the Niagara Answers website is designed as shown in Figure 2. An old map of City of Niagara Falls shown as the background depict the old and rich history of City of Niagara Falls. In addition, the picture shows the beautiful world wonder of Niagara Falls,

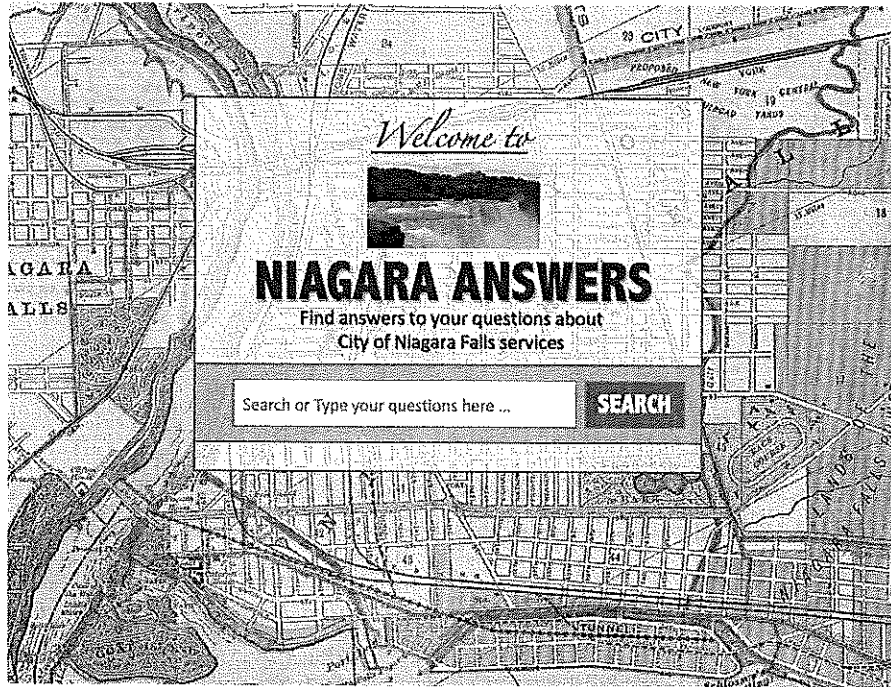


Figure 2. The main interface for Niagara Answers

## Development Plan: (2/1/2019-12/31/2019)

In this project, the **Niagara Answers** website will be designed and developed. The main functionalities include:

- 1) Find answers about City of Niagara Falls services
- 2) Display related address on map
- 3) Type questions
- 4) Authorized residents can post answers

## Main work:

- 1) Planning
- 2) Design information categories
- 3) Design database
- 4) Development
- 5) Test and improvement
- 6) Submit to City of Niagara Falls

### **Dissemination Plans and the Impact**

In order to develop the **Niagara Answers** website, it is critical to get a collaboration from various local service agency in the region, particularly in the public domain. We will approach the leadership of City of Niagara Falls and other related organizations in order to discuss possible ways to the operationalization of the website.

We plan to submit this unique project to a national conference for a presentation opportunity. Once receiving some feedbacks from the conference attendees and other colleagues, further development would be conducted to achieve the best to serve the Niagara Falls region, and further to the Western New York. We would like to develop a Smart City model for City of Niagara Falls.

We believe the product of this project have dual contribution onto the resident's life and the economy of the Niagara Falls region, the other on the academia. First, we hope this project will be a great contribution from Niagara University to the city of Niagara Falls and Western New York in general, by helping Niagara Falls to make a solid first step to a 'smart city' in near future. This innovative approach will enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of utilizing the emerging technologies in community. This study will also provide meaningful implications and encouragement to the interested scholars.

### **Student Research Assistant**

Several undergraduate students will be expected to be involved in this research project. They will work together as a team and focus on 1) Responsive website design and coding, 2) Database design, 3) testing, and 4) improvement. All these students should have background in mobile and website development. Most important ability for them is the creativity.

### **Budget:**

For complete this project, total \$2500 is requested for hiring students and covering some expenses related to this project and undergraduate research.

