NOVAGOB

Creating a community of Spanish speaking public employees across national and institutional borders

COLLABORATION

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GOVLAB

SMART CITIZENS SMARTER STATE

BASIC INFORMATION

BASICS

Owner

Novagob

Project Owner

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Sector

Public Administration

Audience

public employees at all levels of government in spanish speaking countries, academics, consultants, students and others interested in public sector improvement.

Problem that Novagob is Trying to Solve

It is time consuming and difficult to connect with professionals in the public sector across national and institutional borders.

Project Summary

A social network for Spanish speaking public sector professionals.

Platform

Open source software Elgg.

Design Basics

The platform's structure aims to build community with several features: Professional profiles, groups, debates, blogs, calendar of events, wikis and tweet streams.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

What's new?

There are networks that attempt to connect employees within a particular agency or country, but this is the first effort to link employees across Spanish speaking countries.

Incentives for Participation

Connect with a community of public sector professionals interested in collaborating, socializing and developing their knowledge and skills. Access resources and information on public innovation.

Challenges

The greatest challenge for the network is economic sustainability. This has required them to constantly reinvent themselves, and add collaboration spaces, such as an annual conference. They are also creating a training platform.

Anticipated impact/Metrics

Novagob is constantly monitoring the social network's analytics to drive improvement. They look at visits, users, time spent on the page, location of users. They have an expert in web analytics and they provide analytics services to other organizations in the public sector.

Why is this project interesting?

This is an autonomous network that crosses country and institutional borders and provides a space for collaboration among all Spanish speaking professionals in the public sector. It's highly personalized approach that includes vetting members and a dedicated team that cultivates a close relationship with members.

How can civil servants collaborate across countries in order to share and learn from one another? That was the idea in mind when a group of academics from the Autonomous University of Madrid set out to create a social network for professionals inside and around government. According to the co-founders J. Ignacio Criado, Francisco Rojas and David Barrero, professional networks "permit public servants connect helping to overcome the traditional barriers of cost and time."[1] Launched in October 2013, the Novagob (www.novagob.org) aims to provide an informal space to "connect, exchange, share and learn from best practices in public administration."[2] NovaGob took its inspiration from GovLoop, a private, US-based social network for civil servants. The university has since spun out the project in which it maintains an equity position.

BUILDING A NETWORK

One of Novagob's distinctive features is a careful vetting of each new applicant to the network by its managers, to make sure that they are either civil servants or public sector related professionals such as consultants, academics, and students. It has volunteer country directors in Argentina, Chile, Mexico, El Salvador, Colombia and Peru, whose role it is to help with this vetting, recruiting and retaining members and generating content for the site.

To grow membership, Novagob has an active presence on other social networks such as Twitter, Linkedin and Facebook. The team of eight staff, which includes both scholars and public servants, some fulltime and other part time, also attend events related to public innovation and target spanish speaking thought leaders and influencers in public innovation. It has also formed strategic alliances with over convening organizations such as the Latin American Center of Administration for Development, CLAD;[3] and the Organization of American States. This has helped membership rise slowly up to over 5,100 users. 40% are from Spain and the rest from Latin America, with Mexico, Argentina, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela contributing the most users.

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1   Criado, J. Ignacio y Rojas-Martín, Francisco (eds) (2015). Casos de éxito en redes sociales digitales de las administraciones públicas. Barcelona: Escola d'Administració Pública de Catalunya. p.156 http://eapc.gencat.cat/ca/publicacions/col_leccio_obres_digitals/20-casos-de-exito-en-redes-sociales-digitales-de-las-administraciones-publicas/

2   Ibid, p.157

3   http://www.clad.org/acerca-de/clad

"For us the key is creating a community, it is the 'Philosopher´s Stone' of the project. The most important thing is to achieve a sense of belonging," explains Professor Ignacio Criado, Director of Novagob. NovaGob wants members to value being a part of Novagob, and communicate that to others. As a professional network focused on the unique "vertical" of government civil servants, they use a personalized approach relying on word-of-mouth networking and cultivation of their members. For example, they send personal messages, promote individual members on the home page to elevate their profile, and offer editorial services to improve member blog posts in case there are grammatical errors or typos. It is a complex and time intensive work, they report. The members home page shows new profiles, the most popular ones (with higher number of connections) and those that are currently online, in order to create incentives for people to connect.
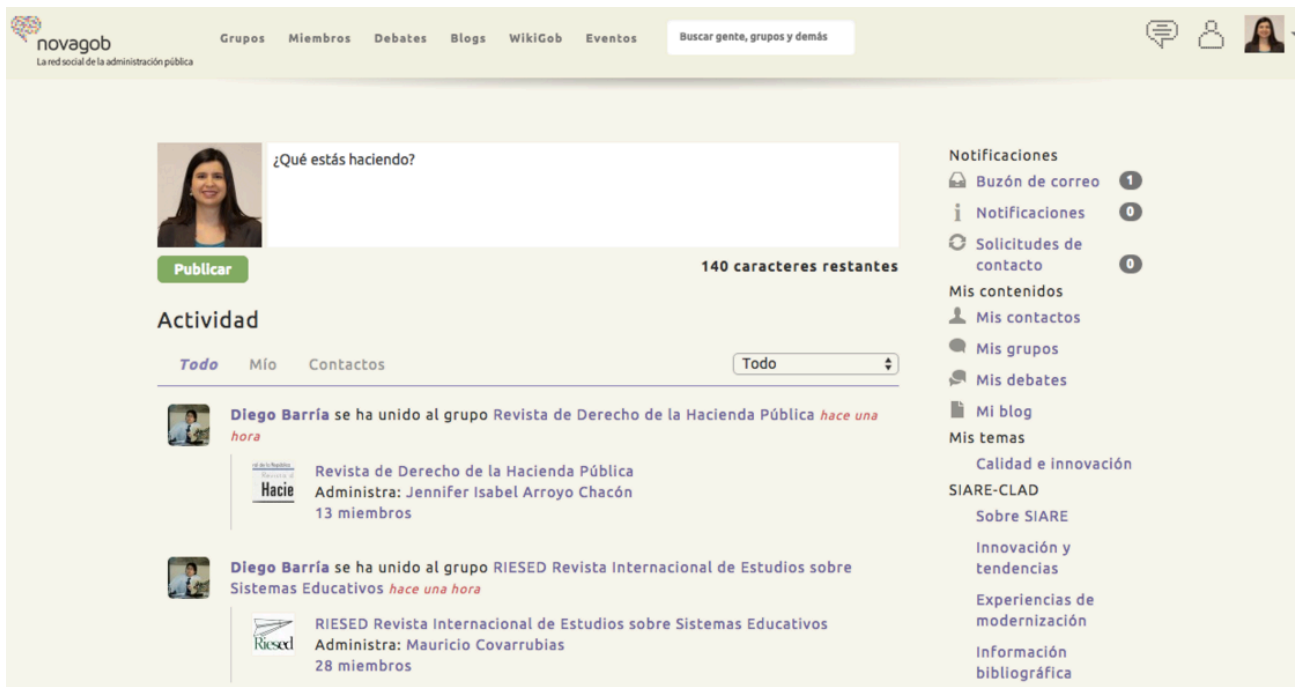
The personal profile homepage offers the chance to tweet" to the community, and the activity feed shows other members' activities.

FEATURES

One of the key features of Novagob is the ability for any member to create a group. Within a group members can debate, create surveys and upload files. Groups can be open or closed. A key feature of open groups is that their content is open for anyone to read in order to promote widespread sharing and knowledge exchange, but participation is limited to members to facilitate productive discussion.[4] Currently Novagob has 152 groups, most of them open and dedicated to a specific topic. There are only 15 closed groups and those belong mostly to public organizations, for example the Organization of American States and Spanish local governments. Members have also created 64 "Wikigobs" -- collaboratively authored pages on over 200 topics such as open source software implementation, public innovation and transparency.

Novagob evaluates group activity twice a year, analyzing the activities carried out, and the role of the administrators and how to improve the offering. They also have a closed group to provide support for administrators.

This is the public view of the "Intelligent Cities & Intelligent Administration" group. It features an activity feed, debates, files, wiki and events.

APPLICATIONS

Some additional examples of products that have resulted from collaboration on Novagob include:

- **Ten Principles for Plain Language Use** - A crowdsourced decalogue on the use of understandable language in public administration.[5]
- **A Local Innovation Political Platform** - For the municipal elections, they crowdsourced a program with 100 proposals on public administration. They sent it to all the political parties as an input for their programs.[6]
- **Leadership Challenges** - In a group of over 180 members, they are identifying challenges in public administration leadership. The first phase was a crowdsourced brainstorm. They are currently voting on over 110 proposals and will have an event around this topic in March. Finally, they will publish a report on the subject matter.[7]

PERMANENT BETA

Creators explain that the platform is in a "perpetual beta model". Their philosophy is to constantly adapt the platform and generate value by evolving from the basis of the needs of the community members. They have a specific group of users within the platform that are beta testers. Their input has led to an increasing variety of collaboration options that the community has requested, such as a shared calendar and wikis. They are currently in the 1.2 version of the platform and working on a 2.0 that is scheduled to launch in mid 2016. The latest iteration will facilitate interactions between network members, such as when they join groups. It will improve the visualization of content and user experience. They will also personalize the feed of content through algorithms so it reflects the interests of each member.

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5   http://www.novagob.org/pages/view/87921/decalogo-sobre-el-lenguaje-claro-para-las-administraciones-publicas

6   http://www.novagob.org/pages/view/163514/retos-en-la-gestion-publica-directiva-de-la-age-espana

7   http://www.novagob.org/groups/profile/156860/retos-en-la-gestion-publica-directiva-de-la-age

CHALLENGES

"The fact that it doesn't depend organically of any public institution facilitates Novagob's autonomy, as well as the free and informal exchange of information and knowledge" among public employees.[8] However, say the organizers, it also presents sustainability challenges. Currently, the network's funding comes from advertising on the platform and in email marketing to members as well as some grant funding. In order to generate income, organizers have added fee-based collaboration spaces such as an annual conference and are currently creating a training platform.

ABOUT THE GOVLAB

The GovLab's mission is to improve people's lives by changing how we govern. Our goal is to strengthen the ability of institutions – including but not limited to governments – and people to work more openly, collaboratively, effectively and legitimately to make better decisions and solve public problems. For more information, please visit: *www.thegovlab.org*.

ABOUT SMARTER STATE

New tools—what GovLab calls technologies of expertise— are making it possible to match the supply of citizen expertise to the demand for it in government. Smarter State is a GovLab initiative to design and test how public decision-making could improve if institutions knew how to use the technologies of expertise to tap the wisdom of citizens' and civil servants.

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8   Ibid, p.158

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