An Open-Source, Hyperlocal News Tech Stack to Serve Communities

Faye Teng & Kelly Brennan

Thank you and welcome!

The Lenfest Local Lab @ The Inquirer

We're a news product innovation team within The Philadelphia Inquirer experimenting openly with ways to reinvent the daily user experience for local news.

To learn more about our work, please visit our Medium page.

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Our Team

Kelly Brennan,
Newsletter
Editor

Faye Teng,
UX Designer

Sarah
Schmalbach,
Product
Manager

Ana Méndez,
Special
Projects Editor

Ajay Chainani,
Engineer

Brent
Hargrave,
Engineer

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Today we'll discuss

- Designing and developing an open-source, custom CMS through person-first research
- Maneuvering the challenges of hyperlocal monetization
- Scaling hyperlocal products across communities
- Integrating additional hyperlocal products in one CMS

Later..

- Join us for a live demo of our CMS

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Creating scalable, hyperlocal newsletters

- In 2019, we received funding from the Google News Initiative to explore how to create a series of local newsletters that are tailored to communities.
- The project aims to test collaboration, automation and monetization.

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The Hook: A hyperlocal newsletter for Fishtown

The Hook

An outdoor dance class, a zoning meeting and some rain this week.

May 3, 2021

Good morning, Fishtown

Harriett's Bookshop has **raised $115,000 of its $300,000 goal to buy a building** in the neighborhood. Read more about the fundraiser below.

Star News wrote about how the **Fishtown Neighbors Association crowd-funded a college scholarship** for a graduating senior at Penn Treaty School.

Ron Gallo, who moved from Nashville to Fishtown earlier this year, is performing his new album at Sunflower Philly, a local venue and community space, this week. Read more below.

Also, keep scrolling to **find nearby local pools and spraygrounds**, which the city plans to reopen this summer.

Have a good week,

— Kelly Brennan (kbrennan@inquirer.com, @_kellybrennan)

Upcoming Community Meetings

📅 **FISHTOWN NEIGHBORS ASSOCIATION EVENTS COMMITTEE MEETING**
Tuesday, March 23 @ 7:00 PM
Where: Register for Zoom meeting
What: The Fishtown Neighbors Association's Events Committee will hold its monthly virtual meeting to discuss Earth Day activities, a summer garden series and more.
More Details: Click here

📅 Add to calendar >>

🌷 **FISHTOWN NEIGHBORS ASSOCIATION BEAUTIFICATION COMMITTEE MEETING**
Thursday, March 25 @ 6:30 PM
Where: Register for Zoom meeting
What: The Fishtown Neighbors Association's Beautification Committee will hold its monthly virtual meeting to discuss upcoming trash clean-ups, public art projects and more. **If weather permits, this meeting will be outdoors and socially distanced. Masks will be required!**
More Details: Click here

📅 Add to calendar >>

View more meetings >>

📅 *Add our shared community meetings calendar to your Google Calendar.*

Answer from the Editor

Q: Johnny Meyers, a University City resident, looking to move to Fishtown, asked The Hook:

"One issue that's important to me is good bicycle infrastructure and safe bike lanes. I'm wondering if Fishtown has had conversations around building better bike infrastructure & bike lanes?"
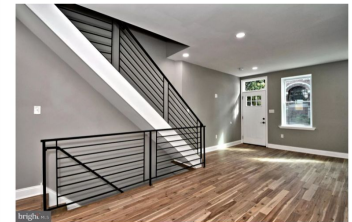
Answer from the Editor: Bicycling Infrastructure in Fishtown
SEPTEMBER 7, 2020
Fishtown residents and bike-safety advocates discuss Fishtown's bicycling infrastructure.
Medium

Wildey Street Home Sold

$388,000
527 E Wildey St, Philadelphia, PA 19125
3 bedroom, 3 bath
Sold on 03/19/21
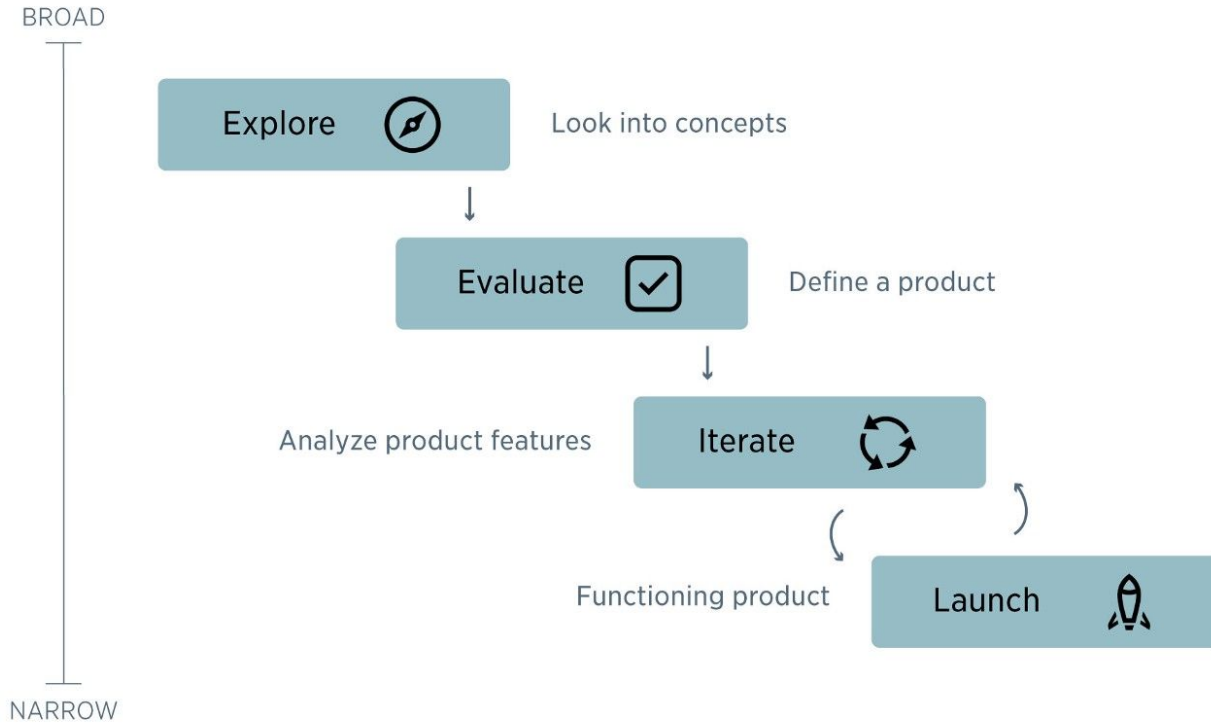This 1,500-square-foot home is renovated and a finished basement.

PROVIDED BY
Zillow

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View The Hook's archive here.

Research Process

BROAD

Explore — Look into concepts

Evaluate — Define a product

Analyze product features — Iterate

Functioning product — Launch

NARROW

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Interviews / Surveys

- Try to find out the general habits of our audience:
  - How they spend their time
  - How they access news and information
  - How they feel about news and information

Result is typically a 10-15 question survey, shared in-person (pre-COVID-19) & online.

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What types of questions do we ask?

- About demographics (age, profession, location)
- About their habits (news readership, lifestyle)
- About their general satisfaction with news
- About areas for improvement
- Anything else we're curious about

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Competitive Analysis

- Look at similar products to understand best practices and how to differentiate the product

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Newsletter Persona

- The survey results allowed us to build a profile of an ideal reader of our newsletter.
- This profile helped our team stay focused on the reader' needs as we continue to iterate on the newsletter.
- Link to view it in full.

Post-it Notes Exercise

- The goal for doing competitive analysis was to map elements that commonly appear in other popular neighborhood news and information products.
- This landscape analysis would help us refine our strategy and expand our thinking.
- We made sure that we only consider additions that would be valuable to our audience.

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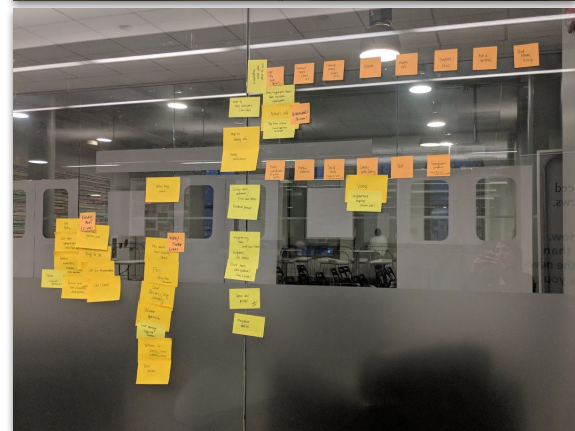
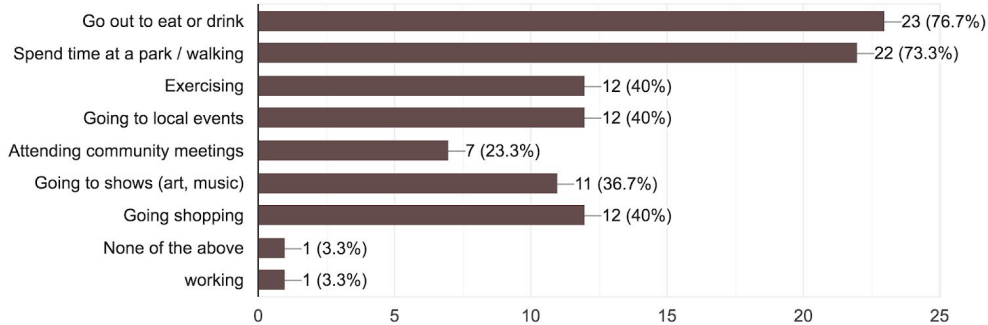# Feedback informed wireframes

4/15. What do you normally do when you spend time in the neighborhood each week? (Choose all that apply)
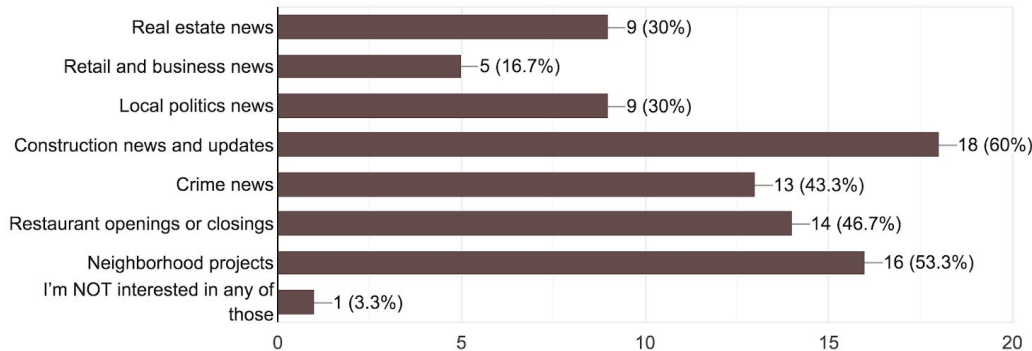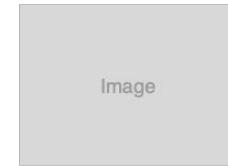
30 responses

Fishtown Events

Event Title	Event Title	Event Title
Date/Time	Date/Time	Date/Time
About	About	About

View More Events >>

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Feedback informed wireframes

6/15. What Fishtown news is most interesting to you? (Pick up to three)
30 responses

News category	Responses
Real estate news	9 (30%)
Retail and business news	5 (16.7%)
Local politics news	9 (30%)
Construction news and updates	18 (60%)
Crime news	13 (43.3%)
Restaurant openings or closings	14 (46.7%)
Neighborhood projects	16 (53.3%)
I'm NOT interested in any of those	1 (3.3%)

New Construction & Demolition

Image
Address | Type (Construction or Demolition)
Permit issue date.
Description of work. Property Owner. Contractor Name.
Application & Construction Plans
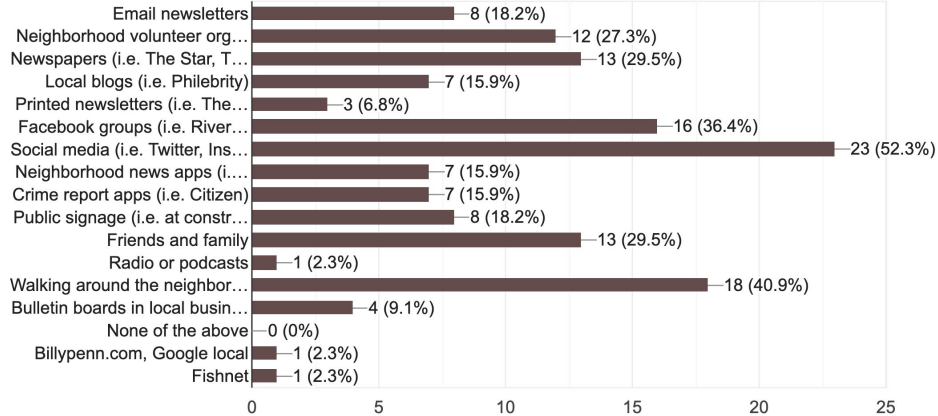
Image
Address | Type (Construction or Demolition)
Permit issue date.
Description of work. Property Owner. Contractor Name.
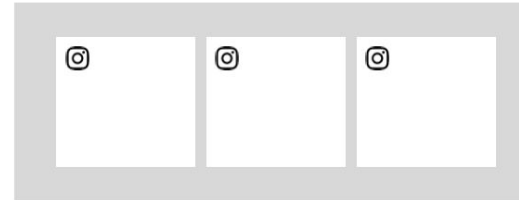Application & Construction Plans

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Feedback informed wireframes

10/15. How do you most often get news and information about Fishtown? (Pick up to three)

44 responses

Response	Count
Email newsletters	8 (18.2%)
Neighborhood volunteer org…	12 (27.3%)
Newspapers (i.e. The Star, T…	13 (29.5%)
Local blogs (i.e. Philebrity)	7 (15.9%)
Printed newsletters (i.e. The…	3 (6.8%)
Facebook groups (i.e. River…	16 (36.4%)
Social media (i.e. Twitter, Ins…	23 (52.3%)
Neighborhood news apps (i….	7 (15.9%)
Crime report apps (i.e. Citizen)	7 (15.9%)
Public signage (i.e. at constr…	8 (18.2%)
Friends and family	13 (29.5%)
Radio or podcasts	1 (2.3%)
Walking around the neighbor…	18 (40.9%)
Bulletin boards in local busin…	4 (9.1%)
None of the above	0 (0%)
Billypenn.com, Google local	1 (2.3%)
Fishnet	1 (2.3%)

Instagram photos from Local Business

Tweets from Local Officials

Top Facebook Post from Neighborhood Group

Facebook post of the Week

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Results - CMS

Results - Newsletter edition

What's Happening in the Neighborhood

NEIGHBORHOOD-WIDE SIDEWALK SALE
Saturday, May 22 @ 8:00 AM

Where: Around Fishtown
What: Neighbors and local businesses are welcome to join a Fishtown-area sidewalk sale for you to get rid of some of your old household items, clothes or more.
Hosted by: Fishtown Neighbors Association
More details: Click here

Add to calendar >>

View more events >>

Add our shared neighborhood events calendar to your Google Calendar.

Fishtown New Construction

1649 N 5TH ST

1649 N 5TH ST | New construction
Date issued: August 14, 2020
A four story structure for use as four family dwelling with a private roof deck accessed by two pilot houses. Building required to be fully sprinklered and standpipes to be provided in exit stairways. A covered walkway or sidewalk closure is required within 10 feet of the building facade. Accessible units on site are located in building #21, 23, and 25.
Property owner: L & M TURNER COURT LLC
Property owner: URBAN RENEWAL BUILDERS LLC

Want to know more? Check out the property's records here.

Girard Station opened 99 Years Ago

The SEPTA station at Front Street and Girard Avenue was originally built in 1922 and rebuilt in 1992, according to SEPTA.

ISEPTAPHILLY
@SEPTAPHILLY

Girard Station on the Market-Frankford Line opened 99 years ago! It's located in the center of our #DestinationoftheWeek - @fishtown: iseptaphilly.com/destination/fi...! #ISEPTAPHILLY #waytogo

7:00 PM · Apr 9, 2021

9   1   Copy link to Tweet

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Monetizing Hyperlocal Newsletters

Designing for hyperlocal advertisements

- Hyperlocal advertising is *content that can help residents participate in their neighborhood.*
- Traditionally, advertising disrupts flow of information.
- Our design intentionally allows content to flow seamlessly into local advertisements, while providing a different visual cue.

Building local ads in a custom CMS

Supporting a community before making money

- Building capacity for selling local advertisements during the COVID-19 pandemic was challenging.
- Instead, we spent time finding ways to support community organizations and local businesses.

📢 **The Hook wants to feature your local business.**

Contact kelly@lenfestinstitute.org and have your businesses featured here for free.

EAT LOCAL: CHEU FISHTOWN
As the weather gets colder, get some warm ramen and other delicious dishes at Cheu Fishtown.

Cheu Fishtown
EAT LOCAL
1416 Frankford Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19125

Advertisement

Craft Foundry
February 5 ·

This is a great place to get local news for Fishtown, whether you are looking for the latest weather, restaurant report or for Covid related information. 👍 📧 Sign up for The Hook here: bit.ly/TheHookSignUp"
#craftfoundry #fishtownphiladelphia #finditinfishtown

The Hook

Get your neighborhood news in one place.

Sign up for The Hook, a weekly digital newsletter for Fishtown.

→ http://bit.ly/TheHookSignUp

The Hook, a weekly newsletter for Fishtown, helped support this tree care event. You can sign up for The Hook here. https://nabeletter.lenfestlab.org/signup?newsletter_id=1...

+9

51   3 Comments 7 Shares

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ↪ Share

Most Relevant ▼

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Continuing to show up leads to ongoing support
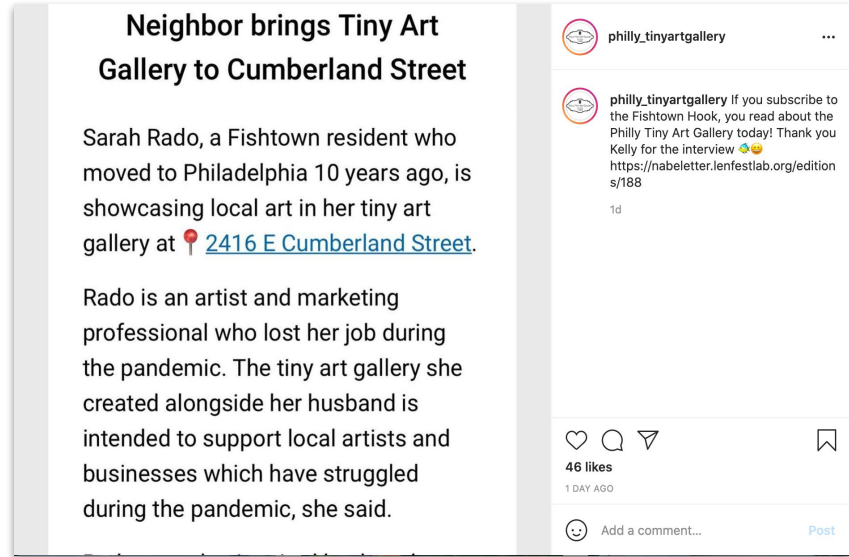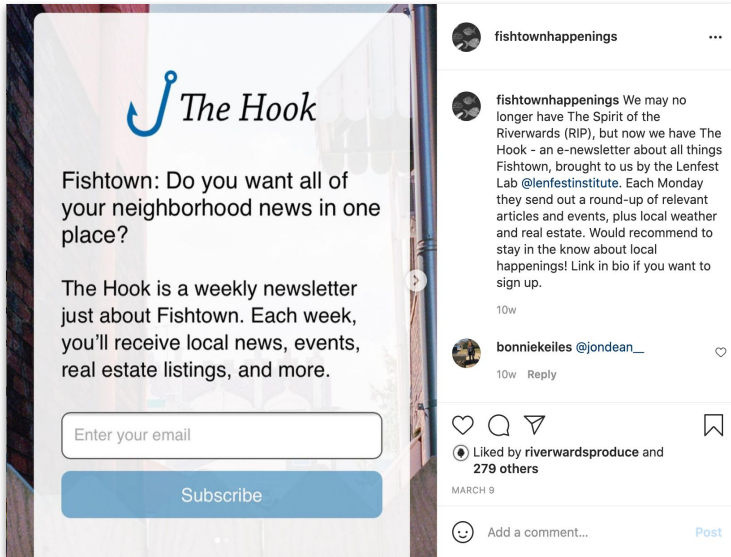
Scaling within the newsletter project

- Feedback from subscribers and residents led us to build and integrate more custom, hyperlocal products into our CMS, such as custom resource pages
- Next up, we're working to create a user-submission local events calendar
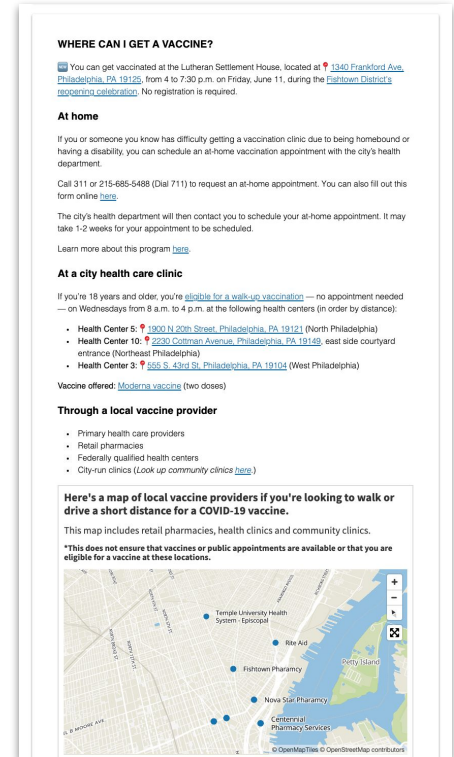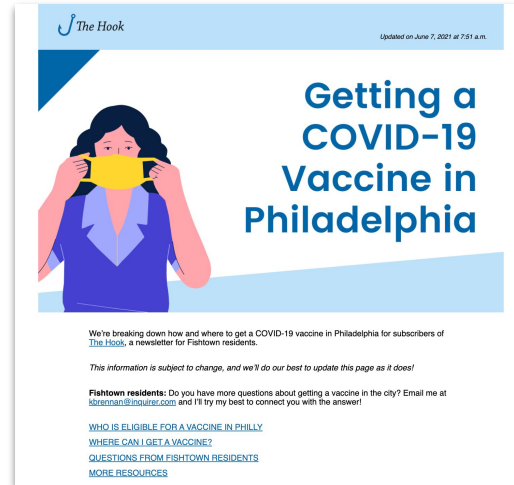
Scaling across and serving communities

- Be additive to a community
- Connect with community stakeholders
- Adjust the research process based on the needs of your audience (acknowledge the challenges and find solutions)

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Providing services while understanding scaling

- While we took time to understand how to scale our research process across communities, we launched a bilingual texting service for West Kensington and Fairhill residents that provided updates about a local mass vaccination clinic in North Philadelphia.

👋 Welcome, and thanks for signing up to get updates about the Esperanza mass vaccination clinic. To continue, select your language.

👋 Bienvenido/a, y gracias por suscribirse para recibir actualizaciones sobre la clínica de vacunación masiva Esperanza. Para continuar, seleccione su idioma.

Text HELLO for English
Escriba HOLA para español

⏰ Horas de la clínica:

Lunes y martes: 7 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Miércoles: 12 p.m. - 6 p.m.
Jueves y viernes: Cerrada
Sábado y domingo: 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

⏰ Clinic hours:

Monday & Tuesday: 7 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Wednesday: 12 p.m. - 6 p.m.
Thursday & Friday: Closed
Saturday & Sunday: 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

The Esperanza mass vaccination clinic will be closed today. The clinic will reopen tomorrow and start administering the two-dose Pfizer vaccine. http://gsl.ink/i/LK1Y6/563925/

Why it's happening:

The FDA recommended pausing the administration of the J&J vaccine for a few days.

During the pause:

The FDA will be studying reports of rare blood clots in six people out of the 7 million who have received the vaccine so far. Currently no link between the vaccine and blood clots has been made. http://gsl.ink/i/AZJD1/563925/

La clínica de vacunación masiva Esperanza estará cerrada hoy. La clínica volverá a abrir mañana y empezará a proveer la vacuna de dos dosis Pfizer. En inglés: http://gsl.ink/i/TKWUG/563925/

Por qué está pasando:

El FDA recomendó la pausa en la administración de la vacuna J&J por unos días.

Durante la pausa:

El FDA estudiará reportes de coágulos de sangre raros en seis de las más de 6.8 millones personas que han recibido la vacuna hasta ahora. Hasta el momento no han hecho un vínculo entre la vacuna y los coágulos. En inglés: http://gsl.ink/i/VT20Q/563925/

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What we've learned (so far..)

- Use research to guide every aspect of your work + be flexible with your process!
- Acknowledge and support the existing networks of information sharing within communities. Ask yourself if your product is additive to these networks.
- If possible, find ways to financially support community organizations, events, local business, etc.
- Keep an eye out for ways to provide additional services for your audience.

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Join us for a live demo of our CMS!

We'll show the ins and outs of the platform that was:

- Built in open-source software
- Developed by our engineer Brent Hargrave intermittently over eight months
- Uses developer-friendly SaaS products, including our ESP Mailgun.

You can explore the CMS' source code on Github here.

Thank you for listening!

If you have any questions, please contact us!

Faye Teng: fteng@inquirer.com

Kelly Brennan: kbrennan@inquirer.com

Live Demo:

meet.google.com/zjm-scvh-tmo

(US)+1 662-481-2239

PIN: 112 596 121#