

**NRDC New York Web and Communications Strategy**  
**A Proposal to the Flora Family Foundation**  
**October 2011**

I. Introduction

For four decades, NRDC has successfully used its legal and policy expertise to tackle the New York region's most complex and pressing environmental issues. The results include large-scale changes in how we handle our garbage, protect our water supply, and manage our transportation system. Our goal has been not only to protect public health and the environment in the nation's largest metropolitan area, but also to create cutting-edge models of sustainable living that have been embraced in other cities around the nation.

In the last few years, the NRDC New York team has recognized a critical need to develop better web-based communication tools to help us wage our regional advocacy campaigns. In short, we now realize that we must find new online strategies to: (a) showcase our top regional campaigns and expertise; (b) regularly communicate with our more than 190,000 members and web-based activists in the greater New York area – and get those supporters to take action on key advocacy campaigns; (c) strengthen our engagement with a younger and more diverse citizen base; (d) aggregate and disseminate daily news on the region's most pressing environmental issues to the public, policy makers and the press; and (e) raise new monies through the nascent field of Internet giving.

II. Initial Web and Social Media Launch

To achieve these objectives, with the generous support of the Flora Family Foundation, NRDC NY launched three new web-based communication tools at the end of 2010. First, we have a new website dedicated exclusively to our New York-based work: [www.nrdc.org/newyork](http://www.nrdc.org/newyork). This site, housed within the institutional NRDC web pages, consists of a home page where we can feature our leading campaigns and issues, and a series of sub-pages where the public can learn in greater detail about our work. Second, we launched a new Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/nrdcnewyork](http://www.facebook.com/nrdcnewyork). As the Foundation is well aware, Facebook is one of the most important current social media platforms for non-profit organizations to communicate with supporters. And third, we have begun a Twitter feed to provide daily information and web links related to our work in the New York region. More and more, people are using Twitter as a way to absorb short, specific pieces of information. The *New York Times*' public editor wrote recently that *Times* reporters were using Twitter as a default news feed.

Consistent with our overall advocacy strategy, our goal in launching these sites is not only to help us support our New York regional campaigns, but also to create a model of local “advocacy communication” that could be replicated in NRDC’s other offices including Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco and Beijing. We also believe our new communications model – when fully designed and implemented – will be exportable to other environmental advocacy groups. Indeed, when we were designing our new web strategy, we found very few other sites that we thought offered the type of online advocacy tools necessary to win the big environmental fights in today’s political climate.

Since our initial launch, we have secured some big successes and also discovered some areas for improvement. On the plus side, the overall initial design of our main NRDC NY web page has been extremely well received by our colleagues and key supporters, especially our ability to “stream” blog and Twitter posts on NY issues. Our web page – which the NRDC NY team can (if necessary) update on daily basis – has also been able to feature some important videos, including two different short clips with actor Mark Ruffalo discussing the controversial issues of natural gas “fracking.” Additionally, our Facebook fan base, in a little more than seven months, has soared to over 3,300 individuals – more than any other environmental group in New York. And we also have close to 1000 Twitter followers, including key politicians, reporters, news organizations, and local activists.

At the same time, we have seen less much traffic to our NRDC NY web page than we might have expected. We are still investigation why this is. But some of this is likely due to the complex issue of “search engine optimization” – or how easily people searching on the Internet can find our site and the information stored on its sub-pages. Some of this also likely relates to the current inability of the NRDC NY team to post short, punchy new items and blogs on the web site that would better engage our target audiences. Some of this is related to the lack of a link to our New York page from the primary NRDC home page and navigation bar. And some of this problem concerns how well we are advertising or marketing our site on Facebook, Google and other Internet outlets.

Accordingly, we are now mapping out a plan to redesign our websites in the next few years in a way that can make our overall New York regional communications plan a full success – and, again, potentially a model web/social media approach for other NRDC offices and even others environmental advocacy groups. At this time, we respectfully request the Flora Family Foundation’s continued support, to help us to put this advocacy communication model fully in place. We envision this support as finite and focused exclusively on the design and implementation of our model approach – as opposed to simply providing funding for on-going operational costs. If successful, we believe that our

pilot strategy could be ready for broader integration into NRDC's broader communication strategy. We are also optimistic that our new web approach will allow us to raise funds via the Internet to support our overall NRDC NY work, including the managing of our web and social media sites.

### III. New Strategy

This project will entail three primary components:

1) Web Writer, Editor and Online Marketing Manager: The central NRDC Communications Department currently does not have the resources to provide the NRDC NY team with staff or money to run our three web sites. Thus, last year, we retained a web writer and editor, Dianna Parker, as a private consultant to help us develop initial content for our sites and manage their day-to-day operation. Over the last six months, Dianna has been working for NRDC NY roughly 15-20 hours per week at a very reasonable hourly rate (\$40/hour). For personal reasons, Dianna has recently left NRDC. But we are in the process of hiring a new web editor and should have that person in place in November, and we believe that we can hire someone with the same level of skills Dianna brought to the job. Accordingly, as set forth in the attached budget, we plan to continue relying on a web editor for approximately the same number of hours over the next year, and then increase his or her time to roughly 25 hours per week in the two subsequent years. This will allow him or her to develop compelling content that will draw users to our website as well help us with online marketing on a regular basis.

2) Revisions of Web Design and Features: As noted above, there are design changes that we need to make to our initial pages to ensure their success. The overall aesthetic design of the website has received a great deal of positive feedback. But we believe some redesign is necessary to better achieve our goals. We have already had initial discussions with NRDC Communication's staff – including a newly appointed web editor – to map a strategy for making these changes.

One change we would like to make is to make our home page contain timelier, more easily accessible content about regional environmental issues. To accomplish this, we would like to consider creating new a NRDC NY “blog” or news feed on our home page. As currently structured, the only daily news we provide on our home page are links to expert blogs or short Twitter posts. We believe that to better engage regional activists and supporters, we need to provide a regular supply of short, daily environmental news on our website – and then broadcast this content via our Facebook and Twitter feeds. We also want to “convert” visitors to our page to “take action” and/or donate to support our key campaigns; merely directly a visitor to our website is not our goal.

In addition, we will also strengthen our online capability to have citizens join our affiliate, professional networks. One key group, called the “New York Council,” is composed of well-connected individuals we believe can play a big role in engaging younger audiences in our top advocacy fights, linking us up with important partners, and raising money. Our hope is that we draw a steady stream of new members to this important Council through our revamped website.

One recent web design update since our initial draft proposal to the Foundation is the inclusion of a “donate button” that would allow citizens to specifically support our New York regional campaigns – such as fighting unregulated natural gas drilling or boosting the supply of local, sustainable food – and help sustain our ongoing NRDC NY communications campaign. We believe we are the first program at NRDC to have such an on-line donate option, and thus it can serve as a pilot for the rest of the organization. The bottom line is that we strongly believe that NRDC – and other environmental organizations – needs to develop a much more robust approach to online giving to replace the declining, traditional approach of solicitations through regular mail. And so the NRDC NY site – in concert with our social media outlets – provides a perfect opportunity to test different online donate opportunities and then use the “lessons learned” for designing a broader NRDC-wide approach.

### 3) Web and Social Media Advertising

Mark Twain once said: “Many a small thing has been made large by the right kind of advertising.” And, indeed, it would be a huge lost opportunity not to fully promote our new web pages as they are further refined and expanded. Drawing on some initial experience over the past seven months, we plan to undertake web advertising and marketing. First, we will use some small funds to run Facebook ads to increase the number of citizens following NRDC NY in that venue – and help direct them to our home web page. As noted, NRDC NY has amassed in just a short period of time more followers than any other environmental group in New York, and this is due in part to strategic Facebook ads that highlight our top campaigns. Second, we plan to spend a modest amount of money improving the visibility of our sites on Google, Yahoo, and other search engines. This technique of “search engine optimization” or “search engine marketing” is a critical part of any new web or social media plan. Lastly, we plan to work, in concert with our communications team, to experiment with cost-effective video ads on Google and YouTube to drive visitors to our web pages. In initial testing with Google, we have seen some strong traffic boosts from video ads related to our New York work.

### 4) Metrics

As indicated above, we have set down concrete objectives for our New York web and communications initiative. And so we also intend to launch a “metrics” tracking project that will allow us to determine whether our strategy is a success and whether it is actually helping NRDC achieve real-world environmental gains.

As a **starting** point, and based on the advice of social media and web experts, we will track key metrics for our different web outlets. For the NRDC NY home page, we plan to measure, among other stats: the total number of page views; percent of traffic to our home page coming from other web sites; and number of visitors directed by Google or other online ads. With Facebook, the tracking metrics would likely include: the number of “likes” and “shares” for individual posts; the number of monthly active users; and the percent feedback we receive on our content. All of this and other information will be compiled on a regular basis and will allow us to fine-tune our advertising strategy constantly, as well as adjust the type of stories, videos, and other content that we are posting on our sites. Indeed, much of this information can provide regular focus group-type feedback on what is working and what is not working. It is critical base-line data.

**Additionally**, we will track donations to the NRDC NY work through the webpage button and in other ways that are attributable to our web-based outlets. If our communications strategy can significantly increase financial resources to our New York work – which is currently underfunded – that would be a huge measure of success. But, at the same time, we also know that on-line donations to NRDC in general – and at other environmental groups – are very low. So this will likely be only one of several metrics in measuring the success of our web-based tools over the next several years.

**Finally**, will also track how many visitors to our sites are prompted to take action on one of our campaigns (e.g., send letter to the Governor calling for a specific action). Getting large numbers of activists to send these electronic letters is an absolutely essential part of our work. Thus, if we can demonstrate a direct link between our new strategy and significantly increased on-line activism, that would also be an enormous contribution to solving real environmental problems.

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We are extremely appreciative of the initial Flora Family Foundation grant that we received last year to help launch the NRDC NY web page and our social media sites. We hope that you will continue to be our partners in this innovative web project in the final “start up” phase. Through this proposal, we respectfully request a new grant of \$30,000 from the Foundation. We believe that, with your support, we can successfully design a model approach of online advocacy communications for

other environmental organizations – including NRDC’s other regional offices. And we understand that this would be a final grant for this project. “The Internet is becoming the town square for the global village of tomorrow,” Bill Gates has said. And we want to make sure that citizens have the tools to fight the critical environmental battles that we are all facing.

**NRDC NEW YORK WEB AND COMMUNICATIONS INITIATIVE**  
**A Three-Year Project Budget**  
**November 1, 2011-October 31, 2014**

<b>A. Web Expenses</b>	<u>Year 1</u>	<u>Year 2</u>	<u>Year 3</u>
NRDC New York Web Editor (consultant)	\$ 30,000	\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000
Revisions to web design and features	1,500	3,000	3,000
Web and social media advertising	1,000	10,000	10,000
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<b>Subtotal A:</b>	<b>\$ 32,500</b>	<b>\$ 63,000</b>	<b>\$ 63,000</b>
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<b>B. Salaries and Benefits</b>			
<u>Program Staff Salaries</u>	\$ 17,465	\$ 18,338	\$ 19,255
Mark Izeman, Director, NRDC New York	10%		
Elizabeth Horvitz, Program Assistant	5%		
<u>Benefits</u>	28.00%	4,891	5,135
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<b>Subtotal B:</b>	<b>\$ 22,356</b>	<b>\$ 23,473</b>	<b>\$ 24,647</b>
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<b>C. Overhead and Administrative Costs</b>			
Rent, utilities, and insurance	\$ 4,311	\$ 4,526	\$ 4,753
Telephone	194	204	214
Computer and Online services	937	983	1,033
Office supplies and postage	151	158	166
Reproduction	30	32	33
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<b>Subtotal C:</b>	<b>\$ 5,623</b>	<b>\$ 5,903</b>	<b>\$ 6,199</b>
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<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$ 60,479</b>	<b>\$ 92,376</b>	<b>\$ 93,846</b>