Regional Electric Vehicle Owners Forum concept; Case MNEVO

This paper explains the Minnesota Electric Vehicle Owners' structure. This structure has proven successful, since we have grown over the last nine years to become one of the largest and most active regional PEV owners groups. As of February 2021 we have over 2,000 members, with 50-70 attendees at each of our meetings. At the same time, this structure might not be ideal in other regions with different stakeholders and coordinators. This is meant to be an example how you can start and run a regional electric vehicle owners' group, but please make yours even better.

Jukka Kukkonen
MNEVO founder

This document contains following:

- Background of EV Forum
- Communications
- Meetings, topics, locations
- Events & Coordination
- Materials
- Basic building blocks of successful PEV Owners Forum (1-page quick read)

Background

Minnesota has had the National Electric Auto Association affiliated MN Electric Auto Association since 2007. This used to be a fairly active group of people interested in electric vehicles when PEVs were not produced by big manufacturers. Members were trying to figure out how to push manufacturers to make PEVs and at the same time build their own electric vehicle conversions. Over the years, Minnesota chapter members focused more and more on conversions and the conversion technologies. As president of the MNEAA in 2009-10 I tried to steer the chapter more towards mass manufactured PEVs, since it was becoming clear that OEMs were moving towards PEVs. I also saw that EV conversions had proven to be technically too complicated to ever become a mass market solution, but more as a fun hobby for those interested in the technology. In recent years the national president has done a great job in rebuilding EAA to a modern EV advocacy organization that is increasingly working to help their members educate the general public about EVs. June 2020 MNEVO became a EAA chapter. MN EV Owners could strengthen the national organization. In the short- to mid-term this doesn't change how we operate. I recommend that our MNEVO members consider membership, which allows Minnesota EV drivers to be better connected at a national level.

In 2011 I started to do public EV advocacy work and was also actively involved in the public-private partnership Drive Electric Minnesota, which was working to make Minnesota EV ready. At the same time National EAA, Plug-in America and Sierra Club had started to organize National Plug-in Days (currently known as National Drive Electric Week), so I organized Minnesota's first Plug-in Day in 2012 with the help of DEMN members. This event was very successful in gathering Minnesota's plug-in vehicle owners together. They had such a good time meeting others and sharing their experiences that I decided to start a MN Electric Vehicle Owners. We had gathered Plug-in Day attendees' contact information, so I used these contacts to invite people to our first meeting two months after that. Since then, we have met bimonthly. Today we have attended and/or organized over 75 educational car displays, PEV owners' panel presentations, and various other events each year. Some of these events are very small, where we just have a couple of our members attend with their cars, while others are much larger, for example the Minnesota State Fair where we staff the center display for 12 days in a row. You can find a list of all bigger events we have attended by visiting our website at https://www.shift2electric.com/evowners

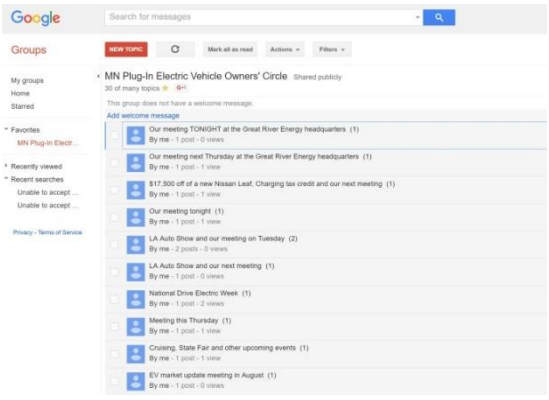
Organizational structure

I decided from the beginning to keep the MNEVO organizational structure very simple. This requires a bit more effort from me to organize things, but it also cuts off a lot of extra bureaucracy that comes with running a non-profit organization. Officially MNEVO does not exist. We have never filed any status, we don't have a board and we don't have budget. We don't collect any membership dues and don't handle any money. If we have some small expenses like printing business cards or some promotional materials, we rely on our partner organizations which have budgets for such expenses. We also don't pay to participate in any events and don't expect anyone to pay us for our time or bringing our cars to the events. This is a grassroots volunteer organization in its purest form.

Communications

Googlegroups mailing list:

After our first event we collected emails from our sign in sheets and formed a Gmail based mailing list on mnpevowners@googlegroups.com. We don't use this list as a discussion forum, but instead it is only used to send out information about upcoming events.



We collect email addresses for our mailing list in two ways:

1. At our meetings we have a sign-in sheet and new members who provide their email addresses will be added to the list.

2. We also have a form on our webpage https://www.shift2electric.com/evowners that people can use to add themselves to our mailing list.

Here is the welcome message that we send to all new members when we add them to the mailing list:

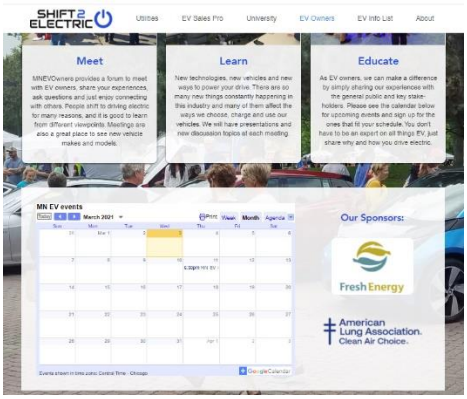
Welcome to the Minnesota EV Owners' mailing list.

This list is not an open list so it will not be used as a discussion forum but will only be used to send out information about events.
The MNEVO webpage https://www.shift2electric.com/evowners *has a full schedule of our upcoming events and you can stay connected with the group on our Facebook page* *https://www.facebook.com/groups/mnevowners/about*

Thank you,

Jukka Kukkonen
MN Electric Vehicle Owners' coordinator
(Phone number) |(Email address)

I keep the master list on an Excel spreadsheet. We only ask people to provide their name, email, ZIP code and PEV they own (if any). Again, the basic approach is to keep it simple. We ask for the ZIP code so that we can match the owners to congressional districts in case we would need to support or oppose any bills in legislation. We have done very few political activities, but this is still useful option to have.



Facebook page

Our Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/groups/mnevowners is our discussion forum. That is where everyone can post their questions, news or experiences, and this is invaluable for our group. We also post invitations to events and use it to ask for volunteers if we have an event coming up soon or, for example, if we get an interview request from the media. We have had very little need to control the discussions or delete inappropriate posts. All in all this forum has worked very well.

Webpage

Our webpage is at https://www.shift2electric.com/evowners On this page, we list basic information about MNEVO, upcoming and past events, provide more details about our next bigger event or meeting and provide a form that people can use to sign up for our mailing list.

Meetings

Usually we meet on the third Thursday of January, March, May, August and either October or November. Our meetings provide a forum for Minnesota electric vehicle and plug-in hybrid owners to connect, share their experiences and learn more about PEV related topics. These meetings are also very valuable in building the community. People have a structured way to meet others who are interested in the same topic. We always have pre-announced meeting topics and most of the time the discussion is led by presenters. We also have some time for general sharing. Every once in a while, we have meetings where the whole meeting time is used by meeting attendees sharing their experiences and asking

questions from each other. Naturally, these meetings are free and open to anyone who owns or is interested in purchasing or leasing a PEV. Our normal attendance is between 50-70 people.

Here is an example meeting of a meeting agenda:

MNPEVOC Meeting agenda, *Tuesday, November 22:*
6:00-6:30 Social hour. See the vehicles and charging infrastructure outside and chat with owners.
6:30-7:00 Introductions
7:00-8:30 LA Auto Show, Midwest EVOLVE and MNCharging.org, Jukka Kukkonen and Lisa Thurstin
8:30-9:00 Program and event updates from everyone.
Place: American Lung Association/Twin Cities Clean Cities, 490 Concordia Avenue, Saint Paul, MN 55103

We typically have 30 minutes of unstructured time for people to arrive and talk with each other. In the summer, people usually spend this time outside in the parking lot where they can look at the cars and talk about different features or options.

We start the actual meeting with short introductions by going around the room and having everyone say their name, the car that they drive and how many electric miles they have driven. If we have more time available and want to extend this portion, we ask people to share anything PEV related that they think would interest the group or ask any questions they think other attendees could help with. This can easily take hours so be prepared.

Then we start presentations and discussions about the topics of the day. We have found that knowledgeable presenters and timely topics always draw a crowd, so a little bit of planning pays well in this area. We normally end the meeting with discussions on upcoming events and other announcements from members.

Here is a list of the meeting topics we have covered over the years:

- *Electric Room at the Twin Cities Auto Show*
- *Utility PEV programs*
- *CES trends*
- *Upcoming models*
- *Dealership outreach efforts*
- *LA Auto Show*
- *Midwest EVOLVE*
- *MNCharging.org*
- *Bulk Buy programs*
- *National Drive Electric Week*
- *State Fair Eco Experience*
- *Electric Cruising Nights*
- *Electric vehicle market update*
- *Event volunteer training*

- *2015 events debrief*
- *New or used PEV? Pros and cons on different models*
- *Strategies for dealership activation*
- *EV Sales Savvy program*
- *Upcoming legislative session*
- *Revolt program*
- *DC Fast Charging infrastructure*
- *Renewable Energy, energy management and energy storage*
- *Tax credit and other incentives*
- *Workplace Charging*
- *Multi Housing Charging*
- *Legislator education*
- *Hospitality and other destination charging*
- *EV utility rates*
- *MISO control room tour*
- *PEV test drives at a closed track*
- *How to power your car with renewable energy*
- *Electric Road Trip*
- *How to add PEVs to fleets*
- *PEV sales numbers*
- *Winter charging and driving tips*
- *Zero Emission Charging Challenge for cities and counties*
- *Public charging infrastructure*

Meeting locations:

We have met in variety of locations. Our home base is the large meeting room at the American Lung Association/Twin Cities Clean Cities Coalition office. They have a nice private parking lot and Lisa Thurstin from ALAMN/TC4 has been very generous with her time accommodating our late meeting times. In addition to ALAMN/TC4 we have met at several utility company headquarters, a local county facility, and Minneapolis convention center during the auto show, a regional grid operator facility, the Element vehicle innovation center with a test track and the Bakken museum. An ideal meeting location has a parking lot close to the meeting room and some charging infrastructure available. A parking lot near the meeting room provides an opportunity for the attendees to see different vehicles before the meeting and chat with owners by their cars.

Twin Cities Auto Show

http://twincitiesautoshow.com/show-info/show-features/electric-room

The Twin Cities Auto Show is in March and lasts eight days. We have had a presence at the Twin Cities Auto show since 2014. The first two years we only had one or two cars and some charging infrastructure in a room full of other traditional vehicles. This provided us some opportunities to talk with people who were most interested in new technologies, but we were not reaching most of the show visitors. 2015 the MN Auto Dealers Association provided us a full room. Local utility company Great River Energy sponsored the room and worked with us to organize the display. We had a dozen PEVs in our Electric Room including million dollar Porsche 918 Spyder. In addition to the cars we had Level 2 and DC Fast Charging units, an interactive display showing the public charging locations in Minnesota and a big video screen where we were showing the best PEV commercials. The Electric Room was a huge success. We were able to reach a big portion of the show goers and 60% of all media stories from the show included the Electric Room, some of them covering only the Electric Room. MNEVO always had at least two members in the room talking with attendees. Shifts were 3.5-4 hours long. Every year we have about 25-35 members provide over 120 volunteer hours in almost 50 shifts at the Auto Show.

State Fair Eco Experience building

Since 2013 MNEVO has participated in the Minnesota State Fair by setting up a PEV display in the middle of the Eco Experience building. We usually have two vehicles and some charging infrastructure on display. The following report is from 2013, but the numbers have remained similar every year. In 2013, 28 MN PEV owners volunteered at the State Fair Eco Experience during the 12 days of the Fair providing 220 volunteer hours. We also did a MN PEV Owners panel at the event. The Eco Experience won the people's choice award for Best Attraction at the Fair that year. Over 200,000 people visited the Eco Experience building. We estimate that about 60% of the visitors saw our display (Tesla Model S and Nissan Leaf) and we were able to speak with 5% of people who saw the vehicles. That means that we had discussions with over 6,000 people. The State Fair is by far our best outreach effort every year. We have also participated in State Fair parades.

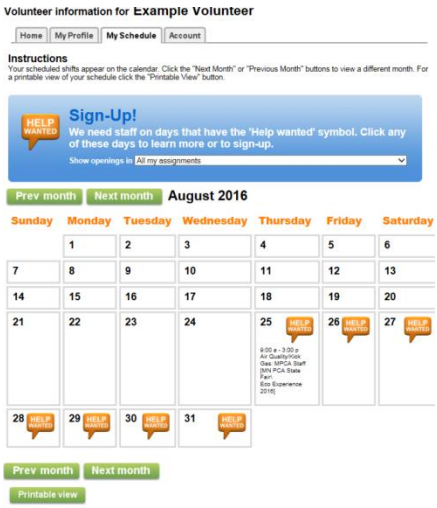
Electric Cruising Nights

We have organized Electric Cruising nights on the first Fridays of the summer months around the lakes in Twin Cities. These are very casual events for people to celebrate the summer by enjoying silent and emission free cruising around the lakes and neighborhoods.

Event coordination

For smaller events (a couple of hours, fewer than five volunteers needed) we just post the volunteer request to our Facebook page and coordinate the event details through email. If the event is longer than

four hours we normally split it into two or more shifts. Our basic wish is to have 3-4 cars at any static display that we attend. If more people are interested in the event we are happy to have more, but 3-4 usually provides enough vehicle options to show and members to talk with attendees. We have had some bigger events where we have had over 10 vehicles on display, but that is not the norm.



For our biggest volunteering events, the Auto Show and the State Fair, we use web-based volunteer management solutions to coordinate the shifts. The Auto Show is eight days and requires 2-3 shifts per day with two volunteers for each shift. I have done this coordination using SignUp.com www.signup.com. It has been easy to use and provides the basic features that we need to coordinate our event volunteer efforts. For the State Fair we use Volgistics www.volgistics.com, which is set up by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, so I don't know it as well, but it seems to work well from user perspective.

We have not had any challenges getting people to sign up for these shifts. Usually most of the shifts are reserved within days because people really like doing these events and talking with people about PEVs. Those who have volunteered at the specific event before will get a VIP sign up opportunity. We will send them a sign up link a couple of days before the rest of the group will get it. This allows them to choose the shifts that fit best to their schedule. This approach fills up the schedule faster and people who have stepped up before getting at least some preferential treatment to thank them for their efforts.

For these larger events we do a volunteer training meeting where we go through the event logistics and provide information about the vehicles on display, materials available, and our role at the event and have a Q&A about details. These are often helpful especially for new members who don't have too much experience on volunteering at these events yet. We now have dozens of members who are very experienced in working at these events, but they still appreciate an opportunity to get together and prepare for the event.

Approach and messaging

My basic message to volunteers is always that they don't have to know everything about all PEVs and charging infrastructure. They are there to mainly share their own experiences on driving, owning, and charging their PEVs. I do encourage them to bring a couple of photos of their car and their home charging setup to make it even more personal. People love real life personal stories, and this is the strength of owner volunteers.

We have made it clear from the very beginning that we are for all plug-in vehicles and people with different needs require different vehicles. Because of this we have never seen any kind of PHEV vs. BEV tensions that can sometimes be seen, for example, in the single vehicle model Facebook page discussions. MN members understand that they drive what they drive because they like that particular car and it fits their driving needs. It might even be that some people have driving needs that can't be easily met with the present PEV choices and that is fine too. Our job is to bring forward the advantages

of driving electric and people will get to make their own decisions. For example, when talking with the public, I explain why I chose the car that I did, but then I ask about their driving needs, and based on their responses I usually recommend that they test drive and consider vehicles that seem to fit well to their needs. I also need to be okay with the fact that people might like certain cars for the same exact reasons that I don't like those vehicles.

Materials

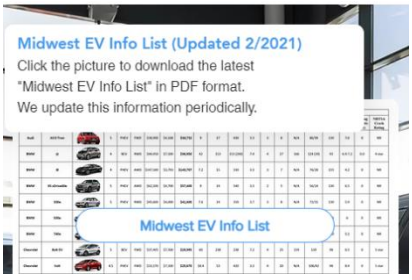
We don't have many materials because most our value is provided by our members discussing with event attendees during the outreach events.

Business cards:
We do give out our business cards to people that we speak with inviting them to our events and meetings. We also encourage members to keep a couple of these cards in their cars and to leave them on the windows of PEVs they see parked somewhere. This way other PEV owners can learn about our group and if the card receiver happens to be a member already, they can just take the card and reuse it.

PEV Owner buttons:
Again keeping things very simple and showing that our members are just individual owners we don't usually use any coordinated outfit (e.g. t-shirts). Instead we wear buttons that indicate that we are PEV owners. Our button design is shown here.

Banners & Car Flags:
We use general EV banners by the cars when we set up a static display to draw attention to our display. We also use small car flags to show that our cars are for display. We have used these also in parades and during our cruising nights.

Level 2 charger and post
We have one Level 2 unit attached to a display post so that we can show the charging infrastructure and demonstrate how easy it is to install and use.



EV Info List:
Midwest EV Info List is updated periodically and is a very valuable handout at events (both virtual and in-person). List includes vehicle make and model details including battery size, range, charging rates and crash ratings as well as current federal task credit.

Basic building blocks of successful PEV Owners Forum:

1. Gather the core group: Host a kick-off event or by starting a Facebook page. Use the methods that work well for you.

2. Communicate and let others communicate, too: Facebook provides the best platform for online discussions. Don't use email based discussion lists. They used to be popular, but nowadays they simply clog email systems. Because some people are not on Facebook, you do need a way to reach everyone with key information, so use an events emailing list to send out important updates and event announcements.

3. Provide opportunities to meet and discuss face to face: One of the most powerful aspects of forums like these is that when you bring people together to meet and discuss they will form new alliances and build great new ideas together. They also function as social gatherings for people with similar interests.

4. Design meetings with timely topics and knowledgeable presenters:
Meetings with presenters are great way to learn more and educate members so they are even better equipped to advance the cause. Good topics and interesting locations increase the turnout.

5. Get your members involved: Attend events to showcase cars and talk with people. Make connections to your utility companies and provide support to them. Talk to your auto dealers and let them know that you can help. Let your legislators know that you drive electric and many others do, too. Overall, let everyone know that if they have an event where they would like to see electric cars and hear from the owners, your members are happy to be there.

6. Be inclusive, but be clear: "No plug, No deal.": This group works to advance electrification of transportation through vehicles that can be at least partially powered by plugging them in. As simple as that.

Quick answers list
We also put together a quick answer link list to provide easy access to information:

- Which EVs are available in Minnesota? www.EVInfolist.com
- I could consider an EV but I need more information: www.MNEVBuyer.com
- I'm ready to buy an EV, who should I talk to? www.EVSalesSavvy.com
- I would like to talk with existing owners: MNEVOwners.org
- How can my utility company help? www.MNCharging.org
- I live in an apartment building or a condominium: www.MUDCharging.com
- How could I get charging at my workplace? www.WorkplaceCharging.com
- How can I find public charging? www.PlugShare.com