

Public Technologies and Local Issue Involvement

Session presented at 2007 Grassroots Use of Technology Conference, Lowell, MA, June 23, 2007.

Session facilitators:

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(Note: This summary was made from an audio recording of the session. Results of three-question survey are attached below as Appendix.)

Part 1: Overview, Introduction to Questions, Facilitator Statements

The focus here will be on local applications of technologies that are becoming more publicly available. Our hope is that this session will provide a good start in helping us to absorb the many ideas and solutions that we will be experiencing throughout the conference today, aiming toward the best experience possible. We will be sharing ideas and experience from the projects we are committed to. Everyone here is already committed to some level of change activism; let's take this to the next level.

Overview of session: introductions, the [three-question survey](#) as basis for discussion after sharing our experiences.

Personal introduction of Paul Schroeder, Orono, Maine. Library background before PhD studies in spatial information science, longtime involvement in local and state issues. Technology came along with professional commitments as librarian. The ethic of librarians is to have high value on information sharing, and this also motivates other involvements. There is a huge imbalance of power among sectors of society, especially in terms of access to information, and we are trying to balance the public ethic of lying and secrecy with an ethic of openness and transparency.

The topic of "public technologies" reflects the focus of the day yesterday at [Penguin Day](#): software and web-based utilities that are open source, free, relatively easy to use, relatively accessible, open for the general public to use, as well as non-profits and small groups, the focus of our session today. Outcomes from today including tracking the conversation of this session on the flip chart, collating the responses to the surveys, and making this available via the conference web.

Personal introduction of Michele Masucci, professor in Geography and Urban Studies department at Temple University, and director of research center called [Information Technology and Society Research Group](#), a project that has been underway for 7 years. We work with marginalized groups that have even less access to technology than do grassroots groups in the sense we often think about them. We work with patients in the inner city, with the [Institute on Disabilities](#), and on learning the use geospatial technologies to depict communities where these groups live.

We have been collaborating for 10 years, through a series of meetings we have attended and

presented together. This began with meetings sponsored by the National Center for Geographic Information and Analysis, [Project Varenius](#), that had foresight to focus attention on [social impacts of geographic information systems](#). Other meetings included one at Temple organized around information use among folks involved in economic, human rights, environmental justice organizations. We're trying to think about and describe information practices of these groups.

Three-question survey was distributed:

1. Name a 'surprisingly successful' application or new opportunity for action that you have experienced through technologies.
2. Name a particular disappointment, something that you thought should have worked but didn't, or that has not lived up to your expectations.
3. What online strategy or unique application has been effective for you, and makes you want to say: Hey, try this! Or: What's missing today that we really need?

Attendees were invited to write short responses to one or more of these (all question responses, both from the online survey and at session, are presented below in Appendix).

The survey is posted via [SurveyMonkey](#), which is a good example of the "public technologies" that we want to focus on: it's free, easy to post, and though the free version has limitations, it's a useful facility.

Paul Schroeder's summary statement: Current activities and concerns, personal commitment for past 3 years, working as member of a local grassroots groups working on solid waste issues in central Maine. The issue arose when the State of Maine imposed a giant new landfill on the town next to where I live. My interest was raised due to the process by which this came about: not only totally unknown to the public, but actively kept secret from the public. The governmental process, involving the Legislature, relations between a large trash company and the state government, the buyoff of a local municipality, "led me to be offended that this cancerous landfill was going to be sited in our beautiful region with no public understanding and no input of the public."

Other people in this small group, calling itself [We The People](#) – you can tell from their name they were mad right from the beginning – eight to ten people really active and committed. Others have come and gone – with informal grassroots groups, who becomes a member is a big issue. Who do you communicate with when you don't have a formal structure? The group organized itself, it was reactive and very local, started with people who were the immediate neighbors of this proposed landfill. Over these three years we've had to fight many battles in many directions. It now involves a polluting boiler that's being installed, it involves the importation of trash from out of state to feed this landfill and boiler, involves issues of green energy credits, lots of issues that people didn't think would be part of the mix.

Part of it involves trying to pry information out of state government. That was my first main motivation in this, the freedom of access interest. Every person in the group has a different personal interest. We all are opposed to the process, but there is a great diversity of interests. Where I started was, let's see how this happened, let's get a [history](#) of this thing, let's get [documents](#) out of the state. Using freedom of access laws, which are really

important. A lot of information may not be easily available, but a lot of it is in digital form if you can pry it loose from the state agencies.

This group was behind the 8-ball from the beginning. The process was already in place, the legislation had snuck through the legislature at the last hour of the last day of the session, no one knew what was going on until six months later, and then everyone was blamed for not knowing what was happening. The group has never been out of that position, very reactive. Because it's such a large, amorphous issue, and people with lack of skills working on it, how do you organize such a diverse group of people when the issue keeps changing, when the people keep changing, when the project keeps morphing itself? We had to keep morphing our skills.

We certainly didn't have time to spend working on a technology strategy. However, it was known from the beginning there should be a website, so somebody who knew somebody created a website, but that person never was responsive getting it updated, so for a year nothing happened, and it became a liability to the organization. It turned out that the person who had it really wanted to make money out of it rather than just to offer it for free, so wouldn't give us our name back, so we went and got our own name and we got our own site.

Getting and maintaining the website sort of fell to me, though this was not my major interest. No one else had the time or interest to learn how to do it, to make it happen. After about a year I just said, Hey everybody, you have six weeks, this thing is shutting down except for the basic informational page, and if anyone wants to know how to do it, I'll tell you how.

We also tried a wiki. The University of Maine made a MediaWiki site (currently closed) available to us, and that was a great opportunity to link with a person in Massachusetts who was initiating a *Waste Not Alliance* – how do we really reduce our waste? We made this a regional waste wiki, called it *Northeast Waste Concerns*, creating spaces for all the states and towns with this issue in the region. Again, very few people contributed, even the person from Massachusetts who initiated the idea. It doesn't help that the other wikis maintained on the University's site have had spam attacks, so with no notice the university just shut the whole thing down, even though the problems had nothing to do with us.

Here we are again, we tried a technology, we thought it would work, and all of these forces shut us down. Another thing we tried was to use [Organizers' Database](#), and other databases. Some people are keeping databases in Excel or Access of local property owners, local people who are interested in the issue. The databases never have been used well, the “membership committee” never got it together. When you have a bunch of people together with different interests, they aren't structured enough to keep up on databases, to keep up on technology. We're all fighting these separate battles together.

Those were some of the disappointments. What has worked out well technologically for this group? Email has worked out really well, though the lists keep changing. That's ok, we get the message out. Someone in New Hampshire sends links to newspaper articles on waste issues every week or so – those get distributed by a person in our group by email. We sort of know what is going on out there.

What else has gone well? I think the government is more open to information gathering by

the public. They have webcasts of the legislative committees which is great – we don't always have time to go to Augusta and to be in the committee room every day, and give testimony, though we are there whenever we can. Some of our members have broadband, but in the rural setting many members don't have broadband. I don't have broadband at home. So the webcasts only work for a few.

We also do video and audio documentation of all of our meetings, just as I am taping this now. Keeping good documentation has been really important to us.

In summary, the group is reactive, has great diversity of interests, a bunch of individuals working together, constantly changing membership, very determined. Everyone is very committed, but sometimes committed in slightly different directions. In an organization like this there is no coercion. Our opponents have coercive authority in their organization. Someone in their organization can say, this has to be done, this application or appeal has to be filed, you have to do the work. They have the money, they can get it done. We don't have coercion, we always have to be persuading, making people feel good, inviting, kind of making things easy to do and inviting people to get them done.

There is always also the problem of “difficult people.” In any kind of organization you're going to have people who don't quite mesh with each other, and yet you have to get the work done. I've come up with a theory called the “*Theory of Proximity and Conflict*” which says that you actually work better with people who are farther away from you than the people who are near to you. People who are around you all the time give you plenty of reasons to be irritated, and not to like them. So technologies allow us, in a sense, to become friendly and co-workers with people who are far away. We can bypass the people we don't work that well with, and hope that we can work with people who can work with those I can't work with! So it all will work out.

Where do we think we can go with this? We want to establish a [trash trackers network](#). We're interested in the session this afternoon where they are tracking polluting energy plants. We are doing monitoring of the truck routes, where is the trash coming from, where is it going. Who is involved in this industry?

Finally, the biggest question for me is, *how do you get people to just take that little step?* For instance, someone said to me, “If you could just put how to edit the wiki page on one little 3x5 card, then I could do it.” So I did that, but they didn't do it. It's not really the 3x5 card that's critical, there is some missing piece in getting people to participate. Some of the technologies we heard about yesterday, the “content management systems” approach to web development, and social networking technologies, are going to make this easier in the future.

So that's about the group I've been part of, what I've been doing, what our goals are, and what some of the positives and negatives are.

Michele Masucci's summary statement: I got involved in looking at low technology solutions to big geographic problems about 10-15 years ago starting with a group [SOS Mata Atlântica](#) in Brazil. That group initiated a campaign for massive grassroots public education programs. They utilized low technology programs to facilitate high impact campaigns.

When I came to Philadelphia I was struck by the lack of connection between environmental

organizing and other types of human rights issues like education, poverty, healthcare and environment.

I became involved in health issues, which are closely related to environmental quality, and with technology literacy concerns. I've been involved in a number of technology literacy projects, very localized, working at the extreme margins. Beginning with a poor peoples organization of homeless and formerly homeless folks, then moved to computer technology set up in a public housing development to provide after school training for kids.

More recently we have leveraged the network of organizations, as well as the training we have put together through [ITEST](#) funding. We've done youth training, 90 kids a year, using geospatial technologies. The other big project I'm involved in is training with people who have risk factors for cardiovascular diseases, using telemedicine applications.

I can summarize the entire group of folks we work with as coming from the economic margins in Philadelphia. For the most part we have worked with African-American and Latino families in neighborhoods that are poor and extremely segregated, working first in terms of what access they have to the city's services.

I want to share three comments on trends in technology frameworks that are not often brought to the surface. The keynote talk today was very inspiring in terms of how we can mobilize public technologies to serve the purpose of organizing folks and getting information out, but at the same time really disagree with the comment that the digital divide is somehow irrelevant or closing. My experience working on the ground in Philadelphia could not be farther from her perspective.

We don't conceptualize the digital divide very well. People focus on the cyber infrastructure, but not really on the skills people need to access that infrastructure.

So we shifted early away from worrying about technology to focus on training as a means of addressing this problem. My three points are informed by the stories of the people we work with in using technologies.

First, we have been recently collaborating with the [Institute on Disabilities](#) at Temple University. A colleague who is a geographer started the disabilities education program. He has unique insight on how healthy landscapes and enabling spaces are created, and how much of the everyday landscape is disabling and disconnecting for folks. We've been working with two people in that group, looking at the issue of the proxy use of technology. This is one digital divide strategy: collaborating with people, so people can be proxys, learning to use technologies on behalf of other groups who may not have access or be aware of how to do it in the way it was designed.

A second thing we have been doing is trying to understand the emergence of cyber infrastructure. There is lack of transparency in the way in which communications technologies come to us, as part of the environment where we work. You are using a cell phone, you don't know how that technology works, you don't understand what data is being transmitted or stored, you don't know if your GPS tracking device is on or off. It's seamlessly integrated, so people don't have the ability to differentiate what the different elements of the technology are.

We find that it is very problematic in terms of training, because without discrete understanding of the technologies and how they work together, it can be kind of difficult to figure out a strategy for effectively using them, and also how to connect people with the technologies. In particular, when we do training using telemedicine systems, with people who have never used computers before, we find ourselves with a challenge in getting started explaining how the Internet works, why it matters to them, and why they should be transmitting private data about their health status to a system they really don't understand. They don't understand how some physician somewhere will look at this information. It's a quite scary endeavor for a lot of folks to get started on.

Third, I've been involved in the roll-out of Philadelphia's municipal wireless program. It was originally designed to be free. It's now no-cost if you earn \$10,000 per year or less – it is difficult to see what this threshold means in terms of peoples' actual resources. Also, if you are in that no-cost version it is hard to see where you would have access to a computer to access the network. Hopefully it is possible. Then there is a low-cost version, which is most folks. Then there is regular cost which is \$20 per month. An [article just came out](#) in the *Inquirer* about the quality of the wireless service, published May 23, 2007.

I am using it, working with the school district on policies for parents to access the records of their kids through an IMS system where all records are available online. This is a context where half of the teachers don't have a computer at home, and I'm guessing the same for the school kids. The issue of access is a big one. Our group, the Wireless Philadelphia group, and other smaller nonprofits are working together to see what combination of education and training needs to be put in place to utilize this technology. All of the families with kids in the school system of Philadelphia are part of [FamilyNet](#), which is 177,000 families. There is also an Internet campaign to organize all of the families online.

If you are not familiar with the technologies, they are not easy to use. There are online forums for exchange, but people don't necessarily engage in them. In the schools where people are engaged it is making a difference.

This leads to questions of how the cyber infrastructure we have put in place can simultaneously serve as a context for organizing, but also presents new challenges of inclusion, and preventing the problem of double, triple and quadruple marginalization as these new capabilities roll out. In the schools' IMS system, we did focus groups with parents at technology workshops, and not one of the parents we talked to knew that the system was online, none knew that they could get Wireless Philadelphia ISP at home for low or no cost. The kids in the focus groups said “Oh yeah, you can access the records and I can show you how.” This is going to put an upside down structure in place to be advocates for their own education.

We encounter this a lot. We burden the kids with a lot of responsibility to become technologically savvy on behalf of their families. Whatever technologies we impart to them are the ones that are going to be utilized by the families. The kids have an incredible stake in learning the technologies and to serve as that conduit.

Part 2: Participant Introductions, Responses to Questions, General

Discussion

Question sheets that had been distributed were picked up – and then redistributed randomly. Each person introduced himself or herself, where they are from, one sentence on their interest here. Each person then read one response from another person's sheet, as a way to help frame this discussion.

Among the organizations and activities represented among participants were: [CTC Vista](#), [Grassroots.org](#) (Chicago), [Democracy in Action](#) (Denver), [Venice Arts](#), [Community Technology Centers Network](#), [Energy Justice Network](#), [New England Grassroots Environmental Fund](#), [Education Development Center](#), [UMass Amherst Community Health Education](#), [Sustainable Connecticut](#), [Collaboration for a Better Work Environment](#) (Lowell), [YES: Young Entrepreneurs Society](#) Tech Access, a free-lance writer, a radio host, and the director of a community-based technology center for youth (Boston).

Survey results are compiled in the Appendix, see end of this summary.

(Numbers in parentheses refer to the three questions listed above)

- email lists for grassroots networks (1)
- mobile technologies, becoming ubiquitous but are costly (2 and 3)
- wiki to communicate, no one participated (2)
- SurveyMonkey and [SharePoint](#) (3)
- using digital story-telling to begin conversations (1)
- [OneBrick](#), telling people about volunteerism, signing up people and socializing (1)
- GoogleDocs (1)
- word of mouth promotion of web sites vs. strictly digital (3)
- Yahoo and Google applications such as email, calendars and groups (1 and 3)
- potentials of Facebook, (3)
- missing but needed: non-tech and tech people speaking a common language, concepts and vocabulary (3)
- technology not compatible across commonly used platforms (2)
- podcasting (1)
- inability to work with schools for access for youth in lower income communities (2)

Discussion: (Speakers are identified here as M = Michele, P = Paul, or R = participant respondent)

M: What was most surprising from first responses that we have been getting to this is the lack of replication among the responses. We are finding this here also. In terms of public use of technology, there is the question of how to stay ahead of the curve in technology choices, along with the fact that people use multiple technologies and have their own preferred systems. This is a pretty complex landscape for people to be working in in an organizing, education, advocacy standpoint.

P: Invites elaboration on some of the technologies we all may not be familiar with.

R: [SharePoint](#): an online collaboration system that allows sharing documents, mapping discussions, things like that. Our organization started using it recently, internally, would like to use it with a larger community, but the licensing is complex and expensive. We have not been able to expand this to a larger community.

M: Someone mentioned [Google Docs](#).

R: We've used it as a collaborative workspace, so we could put a document in, many people could edit it, or could add to it. We also used it for fundraising, it became a database that anyone could add to from anywhere. You have to have a password, so it is secure, important when you are putting up people who you would want to approach for money.

M: We make use of Google tools in our project areas. Our experience is that use of proprietary tools are not replicable by lower resource organizations, and if you do that it automatically excludes the groups that are getting started, if you use something that you have to pay for. Other than training, we try to not use anything that has a cost involved with it.

R: I just set up a Google spreadsheet for a community group we organized, and had to go through the pain of figuring out problems with access to it (suggested solution: Firefox).

M: I ran into the same problem ... more stable, less bugs, fewer crashes [I didn't quite follow the problem / solution here]

R: A couple of resources. For a voting system, we are big advocates of [instant runoff voting](#), where you can make your choices 1, 2, and 3 etc, and there is a website where you can do your own instant runoff, [DemoChoice](#). Another, related to open records law information, if you want to find out about state, county or local government rights and practices for open records and open meetings, best resource is on the website of Reporters Committee on Freedom of the Press [Open Government Guide](#).

The third thing is strategies for getting higher rankings in Google searches. We are #1 on several terms, so the mainstream media find us. I hate reaching out to them, so we do the work so they find us.

M: How do you do that?

R: Google is a popularity engine, so the more folks that link to you, the higher ranking you get – it's also the page rank of the pages that link to you, and the keyword that they link to you with. So, if you're trying to get a higher ranking – we're #1 for dioxin – linking from other websites to your site with the term that you want. It also looks for things in the URL and the title tags, if the title tag has just the word you want or at least starts with that. Also, instead of your directories, instead of cryptic terms, name them with the keywords that you want, and because Google doesn't use grammar, you can use adjacency and proximity. We have used this in a director string that uses both “waste coal” and “coal waste,” so we come out #1 for both.

P: There must be a place where this strategy is explained.

R: I think this is proprietary. Has learned this mostly word of mouth and one to one.

P: This is a bit like the comment on word of mouth promotion. I like it.

R: Trying to understand a little better, what is a wiki?

P: Does anyone want to give a stab at that?

M: A wiki is a page that can be mutually edited by more than one party. A technical way of thinking about it would be a distributed work environment. Basically you have a common set of content, that can be accessed by people from their own computers. The idea is that you can have multiple users of the same document page. This is different from blogs, where you can comment to a fixed set of comments or content. With the wiki, the content itself is being edited as a collaborative activity.

Google Docs does some of the same things, but the difference is that you actually have to log onto the system, and the document is shared only by the people who have access to the system. The whole concept of the wiki is that anyone can have access to the content openly.

We use [Wikimapia](#), a map version of Wikipedia, where you can tag a map with things of interest. For environmental organizing this is underutilized. You can then link places to other places or other web resources. There are limited map functions and limits to precision of locations, but you can definitely tag sites and link to all sorts of information.

Another program out of the University of Minnesota is a shareware map utility that allows you to create your own map project file, if you work with GIS. You can take project files developed on more other systems like ArcGIS, and you can load the whole file on a server site where other people can edit the map from their own Arc files. It's the only multi-user distributed GIS that I know about. It's called [MapServer](#).

P: Thinking of the problems of just the past week with the security breaches of the wiki we have been maintaining, and that it was taken off line by other people that we were not responsible to, I heard about tools yesterday called "content management systems." I'm really looking forward to that, because we'll be able to manage sites with the same interactivity now available to a wiki, but with one less level of complication. One of the problems with wiki is that when you want to edit a page, you have to do it with a simple HTML tagging. Though it is simple, it is one step too much to expect most people to absorb. So I'm looking forward to the next generation that leaves wiki behind.

Until we have another question, I wanted to comment on one point that was raised, "common language, tech and non-tech." That's come up often. One thing we ran into with our grassroots group effort is that this is not the only "speaking a different language" issue that we've run into. The most important one that we've run into is that the bureaucracy speaks a different language than the public. Some of the same words that we thought would mean the same thing, like "expansion" what does it mean to "expand" a dump, it turns out that the definitions of these words are in the rules and laws. And because none of us are necessarily either bureaucrats or lawyers, we don't always know about the language that is being used. Often the public is manipulated by use of a specialist language that is used in a way to

mislead us to think that one thing is happening, whereas something else is happening. So I think the bridging between technical and non-technical is important, but the bridging for instance between the general public and the people who govern the general public is really a problem, also.

There probably is a way to share a more universal common understanding of how all this works, in the next generation where we are talking about these things.

M: I was wondering if people have put thought into how to leverage the networks people are already involved in to address some of the issues around how to communicate about using technology. Do you have tools on your website, for instance, or descriptions of tools, that people can use, or training resources that people have created.

R: We've done some of that, and we've found that frequent reminders to our online community about how to use things. We send these out with our regular email updates, so it is kind of "in your face."

If it is something that is complicated with a lot of steps, that might not apply, but reminding of what the link is and how to get in is helpful.

M: For you who do online podcasting as well as broadcasting, what is the relationship between these resources?

R: We have an online community around the country connecting people with community based technologies and science projects, and are responsible for acting as a resource center to that group. A large part of our activity is finding out from people what expertise they have, and what interest they have, and connecting people through conference calls – which is one of the best methods. From the feedback we've received, even though our people are extremely technical, they say I just want to call in to a conference call. We take notes, and we send out the notes. If it's a question of sharing challenges and strategies, this works out very well.

If it's something that requires a more demonstrational showing of technology, we'll use webcasting with a conference call component, and then we'll archive that. We're always reminding people of what is coming up, what has just happened, where you can get the information you need. And this speaks to the point of email really being the way. This does not mean other mechanisms are not useful or don't work.

R: Could you elaborate on webcasting, and the call-in component?

R: Sure. We've worked with several companies that provide webcasting services. The way it works, people participating have to have a web connection and a phone connection – either two lines, or high speed Internet. On a webcast you can do a variety of things. You can show a PowerPoint presentation, and then have people talking; you can show videos; you can demonstrate software and show others how to use it, as well. The service we use, you can connect through the Internet, thought voice over IP, you don't need a separate phone line, but we've had people who have had a lot of problems with that. If people can't get on the Internet, at least it can be on the phone.

It can be kind of pricey, but there are services that are out there that are less expensive and I can give a list for those who are interested. Learningtimes.net: these are former educators as well as technology people. NetMeeting is the MicroSoft one.

P: Someone I know who does a weekly environmental interview show, called [Virtual Concerts](#), is on TalkShoe. Apparently that is a free service, because she said "I have 200 users a month and I get \$5," so apparently this does not cost her. But she also complained – they use Skype as the online telephone, and it doesn't work very dependably. But they archive the interviews so you can get back to the interview and listen to the webcast. It seems like one of the things, we are on the verge but not quite there yet.

M: A good strategy is for an organization to find the collaborator who can help sponsor those types of events, and provide the capacity.

P: Summary and wrap-up. We will try to link some of the sites mentioned here through the conference site. Opening to concluding questions and concerns. Hearing no comment, thanks for coming, hoping you have a great day and that you'll stay in touch via the website.

Appendix: Survey Question Results

A three-question survey was distributed before and during the session ([online version](#) is hosted by SurveyMonkey's free basic service,). The questions are:

4. Name a 'surprisingly successful' application or new opportunity for action that you have experienced through technologies.
5. Name a particular disappointment, something that you thought should have worked but didn't, or that has not lived up to your expectations.
6. What online strategy or unique application has been effective for you, and makes you want to say: Hey, try this! Or: What's missing today that we really need?

Responses collected before the session and during the session, by question number:

Name a 'surprisingly successful' application or new opportunity for action that you have experienced through technologies:

The social bookmarking site Del.icio.us , "an underfunded, simple, but good idea can deftly attract eyeballs and loyalty in a way that corporate behemoths like AOL can never hope to accomplish."

Using digital storytelling to begin conversations of concern in communities

GIS mapping of toxic industries

TalkShoe plus webcam, pen tablets and desktop sharing and recording software to enable international collaborations

Linking to other groups fighting the same issues, finding out about bills being heard in the Legislature

Email lists for grassroots networks

Using online community portals within schools

Capacities of online survey tools such as this

Online job and college applications

Membership in MoveOn.org, “which channelled the feeling of powerlessness into positive action following the election”

[OneBrick](#), a site for volunteerism and social networking

Acta – an outliner for Macs – allowed non-linear composition and allowed completion of writing tasks – MS outliner is a step backwards

Instant runoff voting website, [Demochoice.org](#)

[Crowdsourced](#) journalism via Drupal

Podcasting

Firefox

Free exchange of ideas via blogs

MySpace bulletin board posts

Yahoo Groups and Google Groups, email accounts

Strategies to gain high Google rankings for our websites

Wireless Philadelphia's day pass to augment research tasks, allow wireless access for visitors

Timed discussions via listserv – a way to focus group thinking

Communication!

Name a particular disappointment, something that you thought should have worked but didn't, or that has not lived up to your expectations.

Donor button links are not being used

Difficulties working on creating websites using Dreamweaver

Technology not compatible with other commonly used software

Skype is erratic and frustrating – poor quality, intermittent service

Maintaining email contacts for different levels of involvement so as not to bombard folks with too much information (alienation) or keep some information in more confidential circles.

Wiki – seems too complicated for most people to understand

Another: Using a wiki to communicate, no one participated

Office 2007 “Outlook”

Down servers / unsaved information

Email – tremendous time sink: “Email should help me manage my life, and it doesn't.”

[Teachers Toolbox](#) Boston Public Schools

Again: email messages

Again: email discussion list

User-unfriendly ArcMap application, “difficult to navigate and too sensitive to minor errors”

Erratic support for Philadelphia wireless

Lack of comments on blog

“Several times I have helped to get something going that others say they want to do ... but the could not get anyone to help in keeping it going.”

What online strategy or unique application has been effective for you, and makes you want to say: Hey, try this! Or: What's missing today that we really need?

Still hoping to move beyond email for regional organizing and sharing

Support groups, chat, messenger, email

Using sites such as MySpace or Facebook to advertise a project for participation, to connect with other people

Another: I haven't started work, but I know Facebook has played and will continue to play a

huge role in my daily life. Its new applications have a lot of potential and it is a key tool for organizing groups of young people.

Getting tech and non-tech people speaking a common language (understanding the same concepts and vocabulary)

Google applications

Again: Shared Google calendars for events, meetings, etc

Word of mouth promotion of websites vs. strictly digital

Low cost whiteboard for individuals and groups – now cobbling pieces together

Better access to wireless or broadband in rural areas.

At least in terms of cooperative work, the ability to share google documents is a great boon for those with internet access

SurveyMonkey, [Sharepoint](#)

Workshops to help people come up to speed

Involving younger people

What's needed: direct action email tools that allow communication with Congress “using a zipcode sort”

Missing: Tools that reflect simplicity – publicly available training tools. “Many are concerned about screwing up, and viruses and spyware amplify this”

Blogging

Again: Blogging

Easy to use geo-technologies

Adapting resources such as Wikimapia to disseminate geographic resources on the web

Axon Idea Processor

[Meetingwizard.com](#)