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## **New campaign will connect St. Paul's diverse communities online**

*Knight Foundation awards E-Democracy \$625,000 for community-engagement effort to bring together 10,000 culturally diverse people across St. Paul neighborhoods*

**February 15, 2012 (St. Paul, Minn.)** --- A new campaign aims to bring together St. Paul's diverse communities through online forums where neighbors can stay informed, get connected, and build community.

[BeNeighbors.org](http://BeNeighbors.org), launched by E-Democracy, is setting out to reach 10,000 neighborhood forum participants in St. Paul over the next three years, bringing the total percentage of households engaging with E-Democracy's many online forums to 10 percent citywide. The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation is providing \$625,000 in support.

"You can 'like' anything on Facebook, but if you 'love' St. Paul come to [BeNeighbors.org](http://BeNeighbors.org)," said Steven Clift, founder of [E-Democracy](http://E-Democracy.org). "Join us if you'd like your neighborhood to be safer, stronger, and cleaner and more informed, connected, and neighborly."

The new Be Neighbors campaign will include special efforts to boost participation from St. Paul's lower-income areas, communities of color and recent immigrant communities. A volunteer and paid outreach team will connect with St. Paul's growing Southeast Asian, Latino, East African and African-American communities through community events and partnerships with local organizations.

"Technology offers unlimited possibilities for people to connect. We need projects like [BeNeighbors.org](http://BeNeighbors.org) to ensure that everyone has a spot at the virtual table, and a chance to engage and take action to strengthen our communities," said Polly Talen, Knight's St. Paul program director.

Be Neighbors will strive to reflect online the diversity of the city, which is now 16 percent African-American (including newer East African immigrants and refugees), 15 percent Asian (including the large Hmong population and newly arriving Karen refugees from Burma), and 10 percent Latino.

In addition to providing an inclusive, common gathering space for diverse communities, E-Democracy's neighborhood forums help neighbors stay informed about and respond to crime, ease the way for newcomers to settle into new surroundings, connect local families through community events and provide access to service recommendations from neighbors.

While the typical Facebook user averages fewer than five neighbors as "friends" on Facebook,

E-Democracy's neighborhood forums are closing a digital divide, connecting neighbors and promoting community engagement. In some areas of South Minneapolis, for example, more than 20 percent of households are active participants in E-Democracy neighborhood forums.

"The City of St. Paul welcomes this creative online opportunity to connect diverse neighbors across our great city," said St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman. "We look forward to how we and other community institutions can build partnerships that support community solutions."

"This audacious online initiative will bridge the rich diversity of St. Paul, which will become the most inclusively connected community for neighbor-led two-way exchange online anywhere," Clift said. "Knight Foundation's support can help position St. Paul as a national leader in the next generation of digital inclusion efforts that raise community voices and promote local problem-solving."

### **About E-Democracy**

Originally launched in 1994 as the world's first public election information website, E-Democracy now hosts more than 50 local Issues Forums in 16 communities across three countries (New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States). Through engagement and inclusion efforts, E-Democracy strives to harness the power and potential of the Internet to engage people of all kinds.

With its BeNeighbors.org campaign, E-Democracy aims to give less represented communities such as low-income families, immigrants, and people of color an effective community-wide forum for addressing issues that are critical to their daily lives.

### **About E-Democracy founder Steven Clift**

Steven Clift, 42, is an online strategist focused on the role of Internet technology in democracy, governance, and community. A public speaker across 30 countries, he is recognized globally as an Ashoka Fellow for social entrepreneurship. Locally, he was recently added to St. Paul's Neighborhood Honor Roll for E-Democracy's work in St. Paul's Highland Park as well as given the "Good Neighbor" award in the Standish and Ericsson neighborhoods of Minneapolis.

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### **About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation**

Knight Foundation supports transformational ideas that promote quality journalism, advance media innovation, engage communities and foster the arts. We believe that democracy thrives when people and communities are informed and engaged.

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### **More information**

For more information about Be Neighbors and to join E-Democracy's online Neighbors forums: <http://beneighbors.org>

For details about the "Inclusive Community Engagement Online" grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation: <http://e-democracy.org/inclusion>

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