



Participation 3.0

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E-Democracy.org currently hosts 25 real name-based, civil and agenda-setting online "Issues Forums" across 15 communities in three countries. Based in Minnesota since 1994, recent expansion at the neighborhood level, including grant-funded efforts in low income/ high immigrant areas as well as rural communities, is opening up new opportunities for innovation and a depth of unparalleled daily local online civic engagement.

This discussion draft outlines the amazing things we could do with a comprehensive multi-year, multi-funder online civic engagement project by extending our 10% household participation level in our largest neighborhood forum across the central cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul (and then beyond) to an equivalent 30,000 daily participants. See the related overview slides for illustrations providing a quick overview.

Why E-Democracy.org? The participant recruitment challenge for civic-based new entrants hoping to start locally focused online civic engagement efforts may be so high, that to cost-effectively test new ideas cost-effectively with a critical mass of local participants is virtually impossible without significant outreach resources. In short - we have the people, a diverse mix of local people - because we've made our outreach investments over 15 years. Now we want to open our participatory audience up for the next generation of online civic engagement.

See the "More" links at the bottom of this draft to recent blog posts that bring the story our current Issues Forum experience alive. This draft builds on the world's most experienced online civic engagement project and many of the best e-democracy ideas gathered from around the world through Steven Clift's speaking visits to over 25 countries as well as those highlighted via his Democracies Online - DoWire.Org network with members from 100+ nations. It is time for what's next and the best of what works to be taken to the next level.

Imagine: Unparalleled local online civic engagement and participation.

Imagine the world's best and most comprehensive local online network for effective civic engagement where you can:

- Get to know and connect with your neighbors to keep your block safe and provide mutual support
- Learn about community issues, trends, and developments and lend your voice, experience, and knowledge
- Use online tools to solve problems and effectively share your time to meet public challenges
- Inclusively engage a great diversity of people, viewpoints, and interests
- Connect with your elected officials and democratic processes "anytime, anywhere" in new and innovative ways

- Reach out to a deeply interactive citizenry from government, the media, and community organizations via cost-effective social media
- Generate models, lessons, and technology for use or adaptation by local communities and democracies around the nation

Goal: Next generation online citizen engagement and participation project.

Generate in-depth critical mass online local civic participation and engagement using innovative approaches taking us at least five years ahead of where we are today. Create knowledge and share lessons widely. Develop cutting edge technology, strategies, and sustainable business models involving e-democracy experts around the world to foster the spread of our successes and lessons to many more communities.

Participate in: Local public life.

Participation and engagement in public life with their neighbors, the broader community, diverse communities (not just the "usual suspects"), government, local non-profits, and the local media. This includes community agenda-setting, sharing of local information and news, diversity of voices, input into government decision-making, and community problem-solving with direct citizen action and voluntarism.

Approach: "Local everywhere" with deep and sustainable use demonstrated.

Use "local everywhere" technology and open standards for scalability. Leverage individualized social media private life experiences into **public life** via online engagement. Demonstrate in Minnesota, but design for national extendability. Key focus on volunteer role development for sustainability along with local revenue research and development to cover minimal per participant costs over the long-term.

Features: Many. Uniquely allow people to choose their technology - e-mail, web, blog feeds, Facebook, iPhone, etc. - and be part of the same virtual exchange.

Develop core features and tools while leveraging open source and/or free-to-use commercial social media tools where possible. Technology choice (including e-mail publishing) is why our Issues Forums double or even triple the typical percentage of user-generated contributions to so-called Web 2.0 sites. We will build on that success and avoid throwing out the good for the new blindly. It is important to emphasize our "build a critical mass participant approach" is open to using and leveraging online content and services provided by others.

Possible core **Phase One** features:

1. **Social networking style registration built from geographic location** - Each participant will have a "public life" profile page and tools they can use to encourage others to join them (people will be able to participate directly online or connect via interfaces like Facebook or their iPhone). Based on personal distance preferences people will choose to be displayed in a private Neighbors Directory accessible to their verified neighbors (~automatic "Friending" in social networking speak based on proximity) where the technology is designed to build new connections and social capital among neighbors.

2. **Electronic block clubs** - Actively support private group communication among those who live very near one another - key features will support the ability of a block captain or motivated person to organize their block online and use this tool to solve the number one challenge of block leaders: communication This and item 3 below will be the initial engine for public interest and participation. Phase two features might include integration of telephone-based options to reach across the digital divide to ensure the most important alerts get to all.
3. **Neighbor forums and exchange** - These public online spaces support a broad range of hyper-local exchange building on E-Democracy.Org's 15 years of Issues Forum experience - from discussions of local public issues to community problem-solving to neighborly exchange on local service providers, this is the first level of "public" or visible to all exchange. In terms of revenue generation, sponsorship and online advertising options may have the greatest potential at this level based on current E-Democracy.org trends.
4. **Issues Forums - Community-wide, Multiple languages** - Enhance the classic E-Democracy.Org online townhall with additional social media approaches and citizen journalism/media. Options for regional/state-wide Hmong, Somali, and Spanish-language (e.g. Minnesota Somali Civic Forum) Issues Forum are being discussed with potential partners to create a place for local and state public issues discussions that complement efforts for inclusive outreach to those constituencies for neighbor forums in diverse areas as well. The real name, civility-based Issues Forum model stands in stark contrast to anonymous online news commenting that are designed to bring out the worst in people and promote unaccountable conflict and divisiveness in local communities. A Phase Two extension could syndicate forum hosting (including cost-effective volunteer facilitation and community self-governance) for branded use by smaller media organizations looking to host higher quality exchange with far reduced staff burdens or new technology costs.
5. **Community Solutions Tool** - The ability to "do something" using integrated tools for small groups to take a discussion and get organized to act. The key approach to promote is direct public service and voluntarism, rather than typical NIMBY e-advocacy which is well supported across the Internet. These tools will be useful in both the civic "input" and collaborative "output" use among stakeholders working to jointly address a public challenge (e.g. affordable housing, greening the neighborhood, graffiti removal, etc.). This may be a prime example for coordinated use of a third-party tool. We bring the participatory audience and we leverage free to use commercially provided tools.
6. **Community Survey and Consultation Platform** - An innovative "open sourcing" of online surveys weighted for greater representative value based on broad participation and securely held demographic information volunteered by survey participants (building on the successful Issy, France online citizen panel model). Government and community organizations will be able to field surveys in a cost-effective manner. The public themselves will have the opportunity nominate and vet questions for public surveys with access to thousands of respondents. In addition to the survey tool, the technology used for "Issues Forums" will be adapted to encourage organizationally sponsored and structure online consultation sessions on key issues, draft reports, yearly "town hall" special events, etc. Online "participatory budgeting" exercises outside the U.S. in particular offer insight into the structuring and hosting of online consultations.

Phase Two - Additional opportunities with specific budget resources/funder interest:

1. **Who Represents Me Look-up and How to Get Involved Wiki Guide** - A layer of objective citizen-centric advice on how to effectively participate. This will include a dynamic directory of **all** elected officials and appointed members of area local government committees, commissions, and task forces, etc. with advice on how to effectively participate. Despite all of the web sites providing details on state legislators on up, we are aware of no such site that covers the smaller local offices in an integrated manner. Our directory will include links into "Web 2.0" options including Wikipedia entries, FaceBook profiles/fan pages, and other places where community leaders are meeting the people outside of their official online "office." This idea would be intensively piloted within a specific community
2. **Community Task Force Engagement** - An online toolkit for "transparent" use by government, neighborhood associations, and other community-based task forces that provides deep public access to all documents, links to webcasts, and support for completely public and transparent information exchange among members with options for public input. The system would be designed to tackle concerns about private e-mail exchange among members of public bodies and open meeting laws by creating a fundamentally accessible and transparent system that takes the spirit of such laws to a new level of openness.
3. **PublicMeetings.Org - A community meeting notices, agendas, and webcasts directory** system that leverages government meeting calendars and integrates neighborhood associations and others into a comprehensive meeting awareness and participation tool. The system will provide e-notification options for tracking, asking questions about, and commenting on agenda items at public meetings. In addition to on-demand webcast links, low cost audio webcasting leveraging incumbent conference room teleconferencing equipment will be explored to make it economically feasible to webcast/digitally record any or every public meeting (particularly those that don't justify the cost of video staffing). A prototype system for gathering (customized "scraping") public meeting information enhanced with geographic/jurisdiction details would be tested in Minneapolis (and potentially St. Paul) based on the resources available. Ideally, local governments would share this information automatically in a standardized XML format with would be aggregated and used by many web sites including local media sites. This local prototype is required to demonstrate the value of making that happen nationwide. The reuse of U.S. Congressional data is far less complex because it comes from fewer sources than the thousands of local government websites presenting public meeting information in dramatically different ways. Gathering data from at least 20 websites in Minneapolis would be required to present a solid citizen-centric directory of public/civic meetings.
4. **Community Views Dashboard** - A special online aggregator tool/collection specifically designed to help elected officials and community leaders follow "feeds" from across the local "Web 2.0" environment so they can better understand the pulse of the community being expressed publicly across the Internet.
5. **Elected/appointed community leader profiles with e-news and input options** - While all elected and appointed officials (in our geographic launch area) will be recruited to participate in these efforts, in this phase, next generation tools that help them "lead" and "listen" will be integrated into the initiative.
6. **Other** - With a local Issues Forums also in the UK and New Zealand and organizational leaders with vast international connections, E-Democracy.org has

access to e-democracy innovations and ideas from around the world. With the United States just waking up to the potential of online engagement and transparency (unfortunately with most attention focused Federally at this time), much of the experimentation in governance has occurred outside the United States. Participation 3.0 will intentionally scan and monitor lessons, models, and tools that can be imported to the United States as well as national efforts that can be adapted to local use. One example that has developed considerably is e-petitioning hosted by government itself in the UK. E-petitioning in the U.S. is currently an advocacy activity designed to acquire e-mail addresses and donations from supporters and has never been incorporated by a government into a platform integrated with official public input. Reuse of software in this area for direct input into a local government (where they agree to address petitions reaching certain parameters as official meeting agenda items) could be explored.

Where: Minnesota first, then beyond.

Focus next generation activities within Minneapolis and St. Paul as well as leading rural communities in the E-Democracy.Org Issues Forum network including the Native American majority population area of Cass Lake Leech Lake. Efforts in low income, high immigrant, diverse neighborhoods will be central to the initiative.

Participation Strategy: Electronic block clubs and neighborhood forums/exchange as the engine of recruitment.

Enhance and leverage the more or less private, but common interest networking of neighbors (safety, back fence exchange) with broader rings of public life engagement and community problem-solving online. Attract people based on their core interests and needs, then provide opportunities for enhanced community-wide engagement. Key is to reach critical mass of participants. Nationally, if 10% of neighborhoods have local forums and perhaps 1% of blocks have private e-lists/cc: e-mail patterns currently (no one has measured this), this effort will discover the approaches and technology required to cover 75% of neighborhoods across Minneapolis and St. Paul with at least 50% of registered participants connected in an electronic block club with households near them.

Who: More people than ever before as a percentage engaged civically between elections. At least 30,000 people - with great diversity - across the core Twin Cities engaged online everyday.

Engage the highest percentage of local people/households who "participate" locally online on a sustained regular basis anywhere in the world. By combining "local everywhere" (where someone registers their exact location and chooses who and how to interact online with their neighbors based on distance from their home more or less "organically") with "declared" bounded online public spaces based on neighborhood boundaries or community-wide topics of interest, you can engage 10% or more of households everyday in local community life online. That will be 30,000 registered users across Minneapolis and St. Paul (assuming 1 participant per household, that's 10% of households). Example forum with close to 10% of its 4,000 households currently participating: <http://e-democracy.org/se>

Outreach: Aggressive, active, and in-person community organizing in the areas of greatest need.

Build on E-Democracy.Org's practical and pragmatic experience with in-person outreach (paper sign up forms for local online projects work) and provide the essential additional outreach required to engage diverse, low income, and high immigrant population neighborhoods and communities. This approach is working in the heavily East African Cedar Riverside neighborhood in Minneapolis and being deployed in the heavily Southeast Asian and African-American Frogtown neighborhood of St. Paul. Our "local everywhere" technology approach will allow areas with existing strong social capital to easily extend participation to local areas across the country. However, the key public interest deliverable is design of a system and outreach approach that brings in those neighborhoods of greatest need that are being left behind in the use of social media in local communities. Launching forums with special in-person deliberative conversations will be considered.

Partners: Many, particularly government and interested local media.

Officially partner with city government, neighborhood associations, grass roots community and cultural organizations, interested local media and others in Minneapolis and St. Paul to take the participation platform to the whole community. The electronic block club system needs to be well promoted as an element of crime prevention while open for many civic uses. Initial meetings with the City of Minneapolis have taken place and our connections in St. Paul city government are strong. Adjusting government internal approaches and resources or update laws may be required to take advantage of Participation 3.0. A broad national/global advisory committee, engaging the some of the best e-democracy/social media/online news experts would aide eventual spread of the model. The target communities themselves will be consulted to help shape deployment and priorities. Working with the public to articulate a vision and express a demand for e-engagement is essential.

Future Technology - Open Specifications: Leverage base, open specifications and competition for national expansion.

By building select Participation 3.0 features on the existing open source GroupServer technology base we use (which is the only open source tool that allows essential "equitable" e-mail participation at its core while integrating advancing social networking features), core features 1 through 5 can be developed in a rapid and relatively cost-effective manner. However, with the resources and proper timeline of engagement, we prefer to engage e-democracy experts everywhere in a collaborative open specification process. By funding detailed specification/software requirements processes, we can then provide a competitive opportunity to select state-of-the-art technology (which could still be GroupServer, but might be something else) before a rolling out as a national "local everywhere" service. We prefer open source technology and would like to see detailed features developed for use with multiple content management systems. If done right, that vast majority of Americans will experience "Participation 3.0" without ever visiting E-Democracy.org. Whether it is inspiring a public meeting transparency module for the open source Drupal content management system used by a non-profit neighborhood association or adding competitive pressure for a government-focused web technology solutions provider to add better notification services, an open and transparency Participation 3.0 process will have a rapid impact

on places beyond where we experiment first. Foundation funding for this level of collaboration will be highly strategic.

Revenue: Required for expansion and sustainability beyond expansion funding.

E-Democracy.org will test a mix of participant donations, online sponsorship and advertising, government/partner service fees (particularly related to e-block clubs, engagement in government), media partner syndication revenue sharing, and other methods to generate at least \$10 in revenue per participant per year. Our volunteer centric approach and use of low cost open source technology covers 90% of the current "cost" to run our network on an ongoing basis. An infusion of capitol to deepen the experience must be combined with an acute attention on the revenue model such that one can estimate the ongoing income generated through expansion. It is our experience that outreach in low income/diverse communities requires a significant up front investment (effective start-up outreach costs are far higher than ongoing hosting and support). The social equity aspects will require dedicated resources from foundations (including community foundations supporting specific inclusion efforts in their area), major donors, and potentially government.

Expansion: Local everywhere without "virtual ghost towns."

The crux of this in-depth research and development project is to determine the proper level of ongoing staff and technology support required to provide real value to local communities on a sustained basis. Most "local everywhere" sites provide zipcode-based coverage with low quality anonymous comments or simply aggregate local static content with little interactivity. One question to explore is how E-Democracy.org can open up our local start up process to support more communities and help motivated individuals connect their neighbors **without** requiring full start-up committees and a certain number of initial participants before exchange is opened. While our model "works," its spread will likely become more organic and rapid if we infuse our democratic ideals and quality civic experiences into self-start technology that integrates outreach tools and allows neighborly exchange well before our current 100 members per neighborhood Issues Forum requirement.

More:

The E-Democracy.org Issues Forum model is well documented in informative blog posts, videos, in-depth webinars, guidebooks and more from: <http://e-democracy.org/if>

Select blog posts include:

- Cass Lake Leech Lake - Issues Forum experience in a majority Native American community: <http://blog.e-democracy.org/posts/189>
- Outreach in Cedar Riverside - In-person outreach to East African and other low income communities: <http://blog.e-democracy.org/posts/172>
- Government Holds "Public Input Session" on Neighborhood Forum: <http://blog.e-democracy.org/posts/224>
- Crime Spurs Community Voice and Government Response: <http://blog.e-democracy.org/posts/355>

- E-Democracy.org helps host Minnesota Voices "Unconference" and shares highlights: <http://blog.e-democracy.org/posts/265>
- E-Democracy.Org featured in Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement's "Funding and Fostering Local Democracy" guide: <http://blog.e-democracy.org/posts/280>