

USSF Comms Tech Working Group meeting
Thursday May 29, 2014

Introductions and interests: Philly-Comms-tech team: Alex Kaplan/ Software
Jeremy-web design, databases; John Roberts- Computer science student/social media
Angela- PR, Communications; Galen Tyler-PPEHRC, various communications; Alex Whiting-
tech-communications/ org. tech; Rachel- (in Michigan) will be in Philly in fall.; John James-
writing/software; Jamie –MF/PL-tech; Spence-Outreach and PMA working
group/communications; Anna- Outreach/PMA and editorial task force (had trouble getting on
call); Mark L. /Tech database; Jackie- writing; working group coordination; editorial task force

- 1) **Report on NPC meeting in Jackson, MS**—The National Planning Committee meeting in Jackson brought delegates together to make some important decisions about how the polycentric social forum will be implemented and to build shared understandings of our work together. Jackie reported some of the highlights of the meeting, which also were summarized in the report sent to the working group list:

*The meeting drew attention to what is being learned from conversations with Indigenous peoples organizations, particularly those in the Idle no More movement. The importance of the terms we use and their implications in light of the different perspectives and cultural traditions was clarified. For instance, for Indigenous peoples the idea of a “United States Social Forum” reinforces illegitimate territorial claims that are imperialist. Our working group will need to be informed about these discussions and help with communicating these ideas to people with different backgrounds and cultural understandings.

*Comms-tech working group was able to share its thinking about [what it means to hold a Polycentric Social Forum](#). Because we are charged with carrying out the communications work, we’ve been thinking in more depth about the practical implications of the decision to hold this type of social forum.

One thing that has been challenging for people to grasp is the idea that a forum can be distributed *across both space and time*. This can contribute to the movement-building aims of the social forum, by giving people time to encounter new ideas and reflect on them before the actual convergences in particular sites. Thus, we are considering ways of using webstreaming to do national dialogues that can prepare for the convergence meetings and lift up ideas that are emerging from movements and Peoples Movement Assemblies (see the [polycentric social forum document](#))

At the NPC meeting, it was clear that we want to have the multiple centers meeting at the same time or overlapping for some of the time. This will enable communication across the sites.

Mark-noted how complicated this will be to organize. We will need strong support at each site to make this possible. Philly seems to be setting a good example with a strong team in place.

Angela: notes difficulty of allowing autonomy for locals to choose imagery/logos and slogans while creating image of unity. WE'll have to continue discussing this as we move forward.

*Sites—Jackson, San Jose- The meeting discussed the realities in the different sites, including San Jose, which was recently approved as a site. Alfredo noted that work is happening to also create a border social forum, which may be a PMA, since we don't have the organization in place for a full-fledged site. But politically it is important to bring in the issues surrounding the border.

Philly organizers asked for and received tentative approval for the proposed date of June 25-28 2015. NOTE there is still flexibility on that in Philly, since there is still work to mobilize additional anchors locally and we're still working with the other sites to find mutually agreeable time frames.

*[Comms tech report](#)- We were able to use time in this face to face meeting to help people understand how our communications work is organized, and how our work connects with that of all the other working groups. To assist those who are new to the USSF organizing, we developed this [Map of USSF Communications tools](#), which is available on the main wiki page (www.wiki.ussf.org). [Working group members should familiarize yourselves with these!]

A very important decision that was made in Jackson was the adoption of our [Technology Principles](#) for the organizing of this USSF. Jamie discussed the importance of having these principles in place to facilitate our work together. We didn't have these in place in 2007 and that made the work difficult. This is an important achievement to help all USSF participants appreciate the importance of developing our own autonomous communications infrastructure that is not threatened by commercial enterprises and surveillance. We need to develop and rely on free and open source software as much as possible, and need to help cultivate among all of those involved in the USSF an awareness of online security concerns that tech activists see as central to their work.

2) Overview of Task Forces and needs for volunteers

1) Website/ Registration (Jamie)

This task force is charged with building and maintaining the main USSF website and helping support each of the polycentric sites and PMAs in their work to link their local work with the national website. Also in this task force is a sub-group that will work on registration and database management.

Jamie-notes that we've learned a lot from the first two social forums that will make our work easier; even though the polycentric forum will raise some new challenges. Questions will come up as we go that we'll need to address, or bring to the NPC to consider.

Alfredo: polycentric forum will look very different. In past workshops were the main thing; this time the PMAs will be the main spaces of work; the focus will be on three questions about democracy, economy, relationships with Mother Earth. Online technology will be used mainly for bringing the synthesis across sites. Some streaming of activities, but we need to develop other communications strategies. This affects how we set up registration. Right now we're being asked just to identify which center people want

to participate in. No details on workshop/content will be collected on our registration form.

Funds will all go to one central account and then be dispersed to polycentric sites.

Philly has proposal for registration system and will work to help try it out.

Spence –offered to survey working groups, local center and NPC member organizers about their website needs.

Volunteer needs: a coordinator for this working group; Mark offered to help lead with the registration piece. Jamie can help with overall and website coordination, and Spence will work with him on that.

- 2) **Editorial Collective**-produces and conceptualizes newsletter & other content-including social media, press releases, etc.

Spence- Asks about using email list database and organizing/cleaning it. Mainly web-database and editorial task forces will be involved in this issue.

Angela –offers to help clean up contact list so that they can identify regional groups on the list.

- 3) **Skills sharing**

- a. This task force was added after realizing the need for it at the Jackson NPC meeting.
- b. Role is to help share skills—network people with skills to connect them with the organizing spaces where skills are needed.
- c. National training sessions on wiki and other tech. skills

Need volunteer to coordinate this working group

IN PHILLY- the comms-tech working group spends the first part of alternate meetings to do skills sharing.

- 4) **Language Justice**

This work right now is mainly translating documents for newsletter and announcements, and for website content. It will be expanded as we need interpretation for other types of meetings, and to include more languages. Now we are mainly doing English-Spanish translation.

Two Spanish translators available in Philly.

- 3) **Report from Philly**

Has talked about outreach plans and worked on content development—decentralized approach
Website mock-up is now up and they are getting feedback on that site

Group wants better understanding of how money will be handled and how decisions regarding resources are being made. Concerns about fairness in allocations.

Google apps is proposed host ; Seeks help from MF/PL with hosting JAMIE: May First will host site related to USSF. We should NOT use Google as a host/ this violates our [tech principles](#).

Jamie will help with moving the site.

Alex Kaplan - Fund Development –is hoping to work independently of national grant writing.

Note: this needs to be worked out with ACT and fiscal sponsorship issues addressed.

Next meeting : In task forces