Orientation to USSF Communications Tools

This introduction is to help you find the information you may need about the US Social Forum organizing work. Because we are committed to democratic participation and transparency, we make extensive efforts to document our meetings and make notes available to NPC members and people who are interested in supporting the USSF process. The Communications and Technology working group is guided by technology principles which we encourage USSF activists to review.

Three key communication tools for the US Social Forum are the website, the regular newsletter and the wiki page.

1) **The website** is the face of the US Social Forum and a tool to help people understand the USSF process, learn about the latest organizational developments, sign up for regular communication, and to learn how to get involved. The site is also developed as needed to enable registration for activities such as polycentric social forums.

2) **The newsletter** is produced by volunteers who are members of the Communications and Technology (Comms-Tech) working group, who are often supported by people from other USSF working groups. The purpose of the newsletter is to provide regular (ideally every 4-6 weeks) reports on what is happening in the US and World Social Forum process. The audience for the newsletter is both active USSF participants and working group members *and* the larger public, including other social movements and international allies.
      Each issue includes the latest news on developments in USSF planning-- such as the announcements of sites for USSF meetings, reports on NPC face to face meetings, etc. We also include pieces that help people better understand how the USSF process contributes to organizations' strategic interests and activities. So, for instance, we have included profiles of new NPC members about how they see the USSF contributing to their organizations' work, reports on Peoples Movement Assemblies, and interviews with USSF organizers. Finally, we include a section on "Happenings Around the World" to keep people informed on World Social Forum and related events outside this country as well as information on how people can get involved in the USSF.
      The newsletter can be accessed from the main USSF website: http://ussocialforum.net/ From the main home page, one can find a link to all the past issues of the newsletter: http://www.ussocialforum.net/newsletters. This archive is a great place to send new participants in the USSF to help them learn more about where we've been, what we've learned and where we're going with the USSF.
      The production of the newsletter involves three steps: writing, translation, and layout/production, each of which takes time to complete. This necessitates advance planning about the timing of topics and issues.

3) **The Wiki page** is mainly designed to facilitate collaboration *within the USSF process*. It contains documentation that organizers in working groups will need to access, documentation on the NPC and working group meetings, discussion drafts of proposals, etc. The wiki can be used by people seeking to find information without any login or registration. It works like a regular web site in that way. To edit the wiki, however, users need to register and have that registration approved. This process is simple, so most people with minimal computer skills can figure out how to do it. The Comms-Tech working group will organize trainings as needed/as feasible to help people learn to edit the wiki pages.

4) **Email lists:** Mass newsletter list, Database of participants can be searched and selected; NPC member list and working group lists.

5) **Social Media:** Policies being developed. Need to consider how to name and coordinate multiple centers and PMAs.

6) **Ether Pad**: This is an Open Source software libre web application that allows for real-time group collaboration, enabling us to take notes collaboratively and to enable remote participants to follow meetings and provide input. We have been using the service hosted by Riseup. Pads are automatically destroyed after 30 days of inactivity, so users must copy or download notes following meetings. This tool can be found at https://pad.riseup.net/