Communications and Technology vision of Polycentric USSF

Members of the USSF Communications and Technology Working Group met to discuss our visions of what a polycentric social forum could look like and what technological and organizational/social constraints we will face in attempting to implement this new type of social forum. We agreed on the following:

- Polycentric forum is **distributed over time**—to allow people to hear new perspectives, ideas and visions and have space to reflect, discuss, and integrate these ideas into their own analyses and visions.
- Polycentric forum is **distributed over space**—to maximize participation-particularly from those most marginalized by capitalism; and to incorporate and connect conversations across differences in place, experience, and perspectives.
- Each site of a polycentric forum is selected with intentionality. Each site should contribute something to our process of developing our collective analysis of the struggles we face and/or building unity/synthesis in our movements.
- Polycentric forum requires that we step up dramatically both our technological and political/organizing capabilities.

The key goals that Communications and Technology organizers bring to this discussion include:
- Expand participation in USSF process
- Build and decenter tech skill and capacity
- Better connect PMA s to USSF process in the process of movement-building
- Advance Language justice

The key challenge we identified are both technological and organizational/social. Technologically, there are limits to the number of sites we can connect in two-way audio-visual communication. We expect that up to four sites can be effectively linked in this way. Adequate time and preparation needs to be given to allow for trouble-shooting and testing sites prior to any planned event. For webcasts, the number of sites that can tune into our programming is limited by the available bandwidth. Capacity for receiving input from viewers is not limited by the technology, but we will need to ensure adequate human support in processing incoming messages.

Organizationally, we need to prepare sites and audiences to use technology for effective two-way communication. Repeated encounters with one another through webcast and online interchanges can help activists participating in the USSF and national PMA process become more skilled and effective at using this medium of exchange. Also, organizers of the USSF should provide adequate advance information and tools to help local activists and groups plug into the online content we're providing. Discussion guides and detailed program information can encourage participation and maximize the impacts of the webcasts and online exchange. In addition, we must ensure that language justice principle is consistently advanced in all of our work, and this requires attention early in the planning process.

Proposed Structure for a Polycentric Forum

1) National Dialogue Webcasts (Pre-USSF)
- USSF should sponsor 2-4 of these over 2014 leading to USSF in 2015.
    - May emerge from or be held during Southern PMA/ NW PMA/ Appalachia PMA
    - May be politically/strategically defined according to outcomes of PMAs or NPC defined priorities, e.g., Rights of Mother Earth; Defining the current global political/economic realities; Educating US population on world movements/WSF…
    - Follow model we used in Philly 2013 meeting (webcast, chat space, online organizing kit/discussion questions, post video recording)

2) National Plenary sessions (At USSF)
- At the national convergence --webcasts from sites of USSF3. Opening/closing & other strategically defined sessions. Accompanied by online chat/Response opportunities online (in real time and outside real time)
    - USSF Should consist of 2-4 sites selected on the basis of the PMA and organizing process. Sites with organizing capacity and potential to build movements in region and sites that have political/strategic significance such as the U.S.-Mexico border and Indian territory should be included.

3) Webcast Sharing Periods from National USSF [Also can be used from PMAs as appropriate]
- Sharers provide report backs to national at set times. E.g., 1 hr. Twice per day. Address *What's been discussed so far/ what are key issues/ what's happening next.*
    - This is not a report-back. This helps do some of the synthesis/summary work we need to integrate conversations.
    - Space is allowed for questions and response
    - This recognizes that web broadcasts not effective with many meetings/discussions. Most people won't watch 10 hours/day of webcast, and won't know when important stuff happens. We need limited spaces where we ask people to tune in. So plenary-style events and these reporting sessions should be how we use webcast technology.
    - There needs to be advance notice of the times of these reports so that organizing can be done to ensure the widest audience for these.

Technology can help convey information, but the quality of the discussion requires political work and advance planning. Specifying the needs of political work can help clarify how we need to develop technology.