



Nonprofit Technology Network

No Strings Attached -

Wireless Internet's Potential for Nonprofits

An NTEN Report
February 25, 2007

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About NTEN

Where the Nonprofit Technology Community Meets

NTEN aspires to a world where all nonprofit organizations skillfully and confidently use technology to meet community needs and fulfill their missions.

We are a membership organization of nonprofit technology and program staff and technology providers. Our members share a common goal of helping nonprofits use all aspects of technology more effectively.

We believe that technology allows nonprofits to work with greater social impact. Our goal is to enable our members to do their jobs better, and to help their organizations strategically use technology so that they, in turn, will make the world a better, just, and equitable place.

NTEN facilitates the exchange of knowledge and information within our community. We connect our members to each other, provide professional development opportunities, educate our constituency on issues of technology use in nonprofits, and spearhead research, advocacy, and education on technology issues affecting our entire community.

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This report and NTEN programs on Municipal Wireless are supported by a grant from the Community Technology Foundation of California.



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Introduction

What if nonprofits, their clients, and stakeholders had free or low cost access to city-wide wireless Internet networks? What if digital inclusion plans were a part of all municipal wireless projects, bringing hardware, training and online access to city residents, regardless of socioeconomic status?

As municipal wireless programs are springing up around the country, nonprofits are bound to benefit from these efforts: They will be better able to reach new audiences in need of services, save time and money by reducing overhead and redundant data entry, and take their work out into the field without sacrificing access to the information they need.

No matter what mission a nonprofit serves, municipal wireless initiatives and the digital inclusion programs that are frequently a part of these programs, will help nonprofits to extend their reach and expand their program offerings. Whether the goal is to provide crucial social services, legal aid, or protect the environment, city-wide wireless Internet access can help organizations communicate in real time from wherever they are, and help clients stay in touch to get their needs met online, on their own schedules.

Nonprofit program services frequently take place outside the office, yet Internet access is generally restricted to the office, or to intermittent hotspots scattered through coffee shops and the occasional public building. Municipal wireless programs will change this,

providing city-wide networks so that nonprofit staff and clients can get online and access the information they need.

There are many ways to use wireless Internet service to improve programs. And as municipal wireless projects gather momentum around the country, providing wide-spread and low-cost access, more and more nonprofits are looking at new and interesting ways to use wireless Internet service to improve their service delivery.

We will describe a few programs here that are already taking advantage of wireless technology, and illustrate how those programs can be expanded with municipal wireless and digital inclusion efforts in place. In the end, we simply hope to inspire new and creative uses of wireless Internet access for community change.

For more information:

For more information on how nonprofits are getting involved in advocating for municipal wireless plans all over the country see our companion report “No Strings Attached - Nonprofits’ Role in Municipal Wireless Programs”.

Join **NTEN** and become a part of the Wireless Technology affinity group at www.nten.org

Health and Human Services: the STOP AIDS Project

Can wireless online access help stop the spread of AIDS? The STOP AIDS project in San Francisco has integrated hand held wireless devices into its field work to halt the spread of AIDS and other STDs.

STOP AIDS outreach programs work double duty, acting not only as a catalyst for life changing conversations, but also gathering crucial information in the fight to prevent AIDS for the San Francisco Department of Public Health.

Volunteers at STOP AIDS head out into the field armed with wireless enabled Palm Pilots containing a survey on sexual practices. At bars, parks, street fairs, gyms, and other places, these volunteers engage men in a conversation about their sexual practices.

In the course of taking the survey, participants are encouraged to take an honest look at their behavior, and the ways they could practice safer sex. The information gathered by the survey is sent to the

SF Department of Public Health to inform their efforts to stop the spread of HIV. Before the program went wireless, paper surveys were collected by field staff, manually entered into a database back at the office and sent to the relevant government agency. Given the limited nature of human and technological resources, this took months.

The STOP AIDS project was able to reduce the turn-around time for processing this public health information to just two weeks. Improving efficiency requires the right tools. The STOP AIDS project deploys Palm Pilots and the software ReForm, a web based survey design tool that is simple to use.

A small Palm software client is downloaded via the web or synced with a desktop computer to WiFi-enabled Palms. The ReForm Palm client is then used to download the survey forms to the Palms. Surveys are conducted on the Palms and immediately uploaded back to the ReForm website, or uploaded later when back in range of a WiFi connection. Reports are generated via the web or data is exported in a variety of standard formats. According to STOP AIDS staff, the ReForm software is easy to use, has immediate reporting and exporting capabilities and relatively low-cost monthly service fees.



This toolset in the field has helped STOP AIDS improve its efficiency in getting information into the hands of people who need it -- both individuals who can alter their personal behavior to reduce the spread of HIV, and government agencies that collect public health data and determine public policy.

The STOP AIDS Toolkit

Palm Treo Smartphone: \$299 each

A phone, email, messaging, web, organizer and digital camera. STOP AIDS uses the Palm to have respondents complete a survey and the staff use it to send the responses directly to a database.

ReForm Software: \$125/month for up to 200 survey responses, plus \$975 for custom logic branching development.

How a Municipal Wireless Network Will Help

When San Francisco's municipal wireless program goes live, STOP AIDS's outreach program will become even more effective. The Palm's have a web browser built in, so volunteers and staff can look up referral information to give to respondents on the spot. Right now, referrals are limited to whatever information the Outreach worker has pre-loaded on the Palm or knows off the top of their head.

Municipal wireless service will also allow STOP AIDS to engage respondents in different aspects of their work. Field staff can show people taking the survey different online initiatives, and get their feedback on new programs.

Legal Services – I Can! Program

The Legal Aid Society of Orange County and Community Legal Services provides low-cost legal services to low-income residents and seniors in Orange and southeast Los Angeles Counties. The Society was able to reach only 20% of the people who are eligible to use their services and needed a way to expand the reach with limited resources.

Many legal procedures rely on the filling out the right forms in the right way – not an easy task for anyone. In order to maximize the number of clients who are able to navigate the legal bureaucracy, the Legal Aid Society extended the reach of its programs past the traditional model of clients working one-on-one with a Legal Aid (or Legal Aid-referred) attorney by working with software developers to create the I Can! Legal Information and I Can! e-file websites.

These programs offer free web-based assistance to low-income residents and seniors to ensure that a wide variety of legal documents and tax returns can be prepared by the client. I Can! can be used to

file for divorce, request a domestic violence restraining order or file a tax return, for example. I Can! programs are designed to be very easy to use for clients. Information is available in a number of languages, all written in simple to understand, non-legalese language. Instructions can also be viewed via video.

Clients use the I Can! website to answer a series of questions relevant to the forms they need to fill out. The information is then organized into the proper format and completed forms, along with instructions and next steps, can be printed out for use in court or to file with the relevant agencies. The program also allows clients to e-file a tax return in a number of states, which allows clients to receive their tax return faster than filing through traditional means.

Because the target populations for Legal Services are not likely to have access to computers, the Society has placed I Can! kiosks in Orange County courthouses. Through the use of the I Can! websites and community kiosks, the Legal Aid society has greatly extend its reach by ensuring that important legal information is available to clients when and where it is most needed.

More than 50,000 people have taken advantage of the I-Can! website to get assistance with their legal issues. The Legal Aid society knew it had put technology to work in a meaningful way when a staff person overhead one I Can! user recommend the service to someone struggling to properly fill out forms to submit in court.

How a Municipal Wireless Network Will Help

With municipal wireless, kiosks can be placed in more places even if those are not hardwired for Internet access – such as day care centers, post offices, and other public places. Additionally, a digital inclusion program that in many cities provides low-cost laptop computers and affordable access would benefit the people that need Legal Aid or other services access these online, especially when they are designed with a particular target community in mind.

Community Space – ParkScan

San Francisco is dotted with local parks and community playgrounds. These are places where everyone is welcome to relax and step away from the hustle of the city.

Until recently, reporting a problem in a park or playground was an excessively difficult process. Whether the problem was decrepit equipment on the playground or broken sidewalks, navigating the various government programs and departments responsible for upkeep and repair of community spaces was a bewildering undertaking.

Oversight for the parks and playgrounds is shared between seven agencies, and certain stewardship programs were created to address

particular problems, such as graffiti, or maintenance of public art, separately. Finding the right agency or program to contact about a problem in a local park or playground could be daunting to even the most concerned citizens.



The ParkScan project of the Neighborhood Parks Council of San Francisco is using web-based technology to cut through the maze of agencies and programs responsible for park upkeep and improve the maintenance and usability of San Francisco's many community parks and playgrounds.

The ParkScan project was created to ensure that community members could quickly and easily get information about the condition of local parks to the right government agency. By creating the ParkScan website, the Council has provided a one-stop shopping experience. By simply selecting the park or playground a citizen is reporting on, as well as the nature of the problem, community concerns and complaints are routed to the correct agency.

The website allows members of the public to follow the progress of their complaint as it is correctly routed and addressed. In 2006 over 1600 issues with public parks and spaces were reported by ParkScan users; 90% of these issues were responded to and 60% were fully resolved, resulting in better maintained parks and allowing the general public to take an active role in bettering the conditions of their shared public spaces.

Before ParkScan there was no method to systematically gather, analyze and send information about park conditions. Now the web makes it possible for the public to easily report problems and get action on park maintenance. The ability to organize individual complaints into comprehensive reports means that each citizen action contributes to the overall safety of San Francisco's local parks and playgrounds.

ParkScan was a groundbreaking program for the Neighborhood Parks Council of San Francisco, and with a \$1 million budget, a major investment in improving the reach and scope of their work to improve San Francisco's parks and encourage community involvement. Because ParkScan is web-based, it can be easily replicated at significantly lower cost in other communities.

How a Municipal Wireless Network Will Help

Once San Francisco's municipal wireless network is up and running people will be able to report from any of the hundreds of community parks and playgrounds right when they notice a problem. This may result in higher user rates, as people will no longer have to remember to go online to report an issue when they return home, or get to a hotspot.

A municipal wireless network would also make it feasible for the city to provide access to ParkScan in the existing recreation centers and clubhouses found in many parks. While wiring each existing building would be prohibitively expensive, a wireless network and kiosk in a rec center would allow people to report

problems right from the park even without a personal laptop, wifi-enabled cell phone or PDA.

Youth Services

Through its youth programs, the San Francisco-based Bay Area Video Coalition (BVAC) offers teenagers in low-income communities training and support they need to find their creative voices, explore career options, and contribute to their communities. The agency's programs are helping to build the next generation of social activists by using a teenager's natural interest in and affinity for technology.

BAVC has forged an innovative partnership with the San Francisco city government and the private company Nokia to engage teenagers through the WiFiAnywhere initiative. Building on the strengths of all three partners, the WiFiAnywhere program combines the latest technology with San Francisco's planned wireless network and BAVC's skill in nurturing creative and technical skills in low-income high school students to empower the students as activists and as individuals.

Starting in early 2007 as part of the WiFiAnywhere Initiative, BVAC will work with students at two local high schools, technology teachers, and youth artists to create content and educational applications for Nokia's N93 and hand-held Internet Tablets.

BVAC's Toolkit



Nokia 770 Internet Tablet provides instant wireless access to the Web, enabling students to chat with friends using instant message and Internet calling (VoIP), browse sites, stream files, use email, play videos and more—anywhere within the reach of a WiFi network.



Nokia N90 and N93 phones, featuring high-quality video and compatibility with the Internet Tablets, giving students the ability to record their lives, then immediately upload the results to their tablets and the Web.

Municipal Wireless Service: San Francisco's TechConnect project to bring low cost internet access to the city will play an important role by helping students communicate their stories via the internet.

Students will learn to use these tools to tell a variety of stories that are relevant to their lives. Planned activities include creating candid portraits of people who have made a difference in student's lives by showing how they have helped the student to achieve their goals and dreams. Students will also create video blogs to share with San Francisco's sister cities around the world, bringing global youth communities together around common issues and allowing the teenagers to use their imagination and innovation to discover their own creative ways to use wireless technology and video production to tell their stories. The video, audio, photo, and web capabilities of Nokia's devices will be used to engage students in improving their schools by documenting and reporting on environmental, physical, and safety conditions. Student projects will be featured on Nokia's website StoryTag showcasing the creative and educational ways to deploy hand-held media devices.

Students and teachers will work together through the course of the initiative to create a comprehensive list of ways to integrate devices into schools and as tools for community change. The WiFiAnywhere initiative gives young people a chance to learn communications and technology skills, find their voice and share their experiences with others. By documenting the process the initiative allows other schools and community groups with limited access to empower their students and members in the same way.

How a Municipal Wireless Network Will Help

BAVC's programs with low-income school will benefit from the San Francisco municipal wireless network by providing Internet access to classrooms currently without or only limited access. As part of a digital inclusion program, the Nokia tools will give students who can not afford their own hardware a chance to participate and learn new skills. One of the goals of this program is to put these tools into the hands of students so that they have a chance to creatively innovate for their own uses.