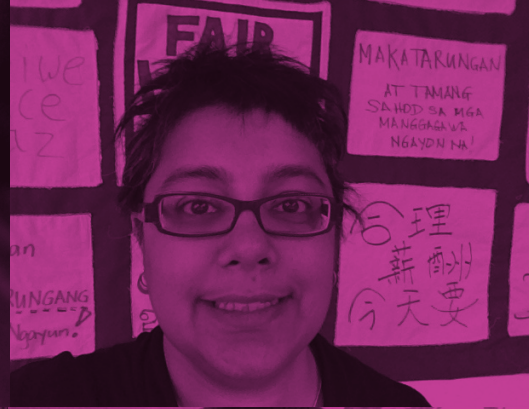


# **CIVIC TECH FOR CIVIC VOICE:** A DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT PRIMER

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**“Getting people in a room to solve a problem.**

**The more diverse the group, the better.”**

Fifteen community organizers and “civic tech” practitioners came up with this definition of a hackathon on a bitterly cold night earlier this year. It didn’t take long for someone to point out the obvious: “THIS meeting could be a hackathon!”

This particular group didn’t attempt to solve a single problem, but we “hacked” away at several questions and pooled our knowledge about social movements and civic tech. We shared what’s inspiring us and what’s needed. A few weeks later, we met again and talked about storytelling, digital divides, privacy and safety concerns as well as the adaptive challenges that come with new technology.

Insights from these two sessions, combined with offline interviews with five movement builders and online research, are the substance of this primer. We’re indebted to the following people for their contributions:

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Maya Bhullar

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Wanda Nanibush

## ARE YOU AN AGENT OF CHANGE, GEEK OR HYBRID?

My Atkinson Foundation colleagues and I didn't have an answer to this question six months ago. We do now. Back then, all we knew was that something called "civic technology" might help us build stronger movements for decent work.



Jennifer Hollett and Colette Murphy

We had been hearing many stories from around the world about its role in making government more open and facilitating community action. We had met tech-savvy community organizers and technology wizards who are more at home at City Hall than in the Silicon Valley. They invited us into a growing network of digital strategists, developers, data geeks, designers, artists, nonprofit executives, citizens, policy makers, and public servants. They introduced us to open – online and offline spaces where technology is used to increase civic participation, improve communities and social problems.

At the same time, we had been taking stock of our own digital assets, activities and competencies. We had a website, Facebook page, Twitter handle as well as YouTube, LinkedIn and a small collection of other accounts. We weren't, however, using our digital tools to listen and learn, or form and deepen relationships. Instead, we treated them as online bulletin boards. When it came to civic technology and its strategic uses, we were beginners. Like anyone who is learning a new language or skill, we needed a primer. We also needed teachers.

Our first call was to Jennifer Hollett, a leading light in this field and in Toronto. As our first Atkinson Associate, she became our advisor. We commissioned her to write this primer, including conducting research and co-convening people who work at the intersection of community and technology.

Shortly thereafter, Nil Sendil joined our staff as our first Atkinson Intern. Nil focused her graduate work on #OccupyGezi as a lens for studying effective online engagement strategies. We asked her to coach us – and goad us if necessary –

through the transition to a new way of thinking and acting in digital space. Thanks to an internal blog, one-on-one support and report cards at regular intervals, we've started to use digital tools differently and with more confidence.

Our hunch is we're not alone. We're seeing signs that many of us who work for social and economic justice in this province are moving into the wider world of civic technology. If you're one, then this primer is for you too. Reading, sharing and wrestling with its implications are three necessary steps in seizing what some are calling the "movement moment."<sup>1</sup>

This moment is calling us to step back from old organizational identities and to invest in collective action. At Atkinson, this means a disciplined focus on engagement. If we want decent work within a transformed economy, then we know we have to think and act – online and offline – differently. This difference has more to do with engaging increasingly more people to reach a shared goal than advancing a single issue, cause or organization. It has to do with using our collective civic voice more strategically.

What does this moment mean for you? We'd like to know. We hope this primer will provide a starting point for a conversation about what you're doing and how we can help. It includes a glossary of terms, case studies and related information to support your efforts. Digital organizing is not going to replace more traditional community organizing, but it can make it more effective. If this primer helps you talk with others who make up your community about the power and potential of digital engagement, it will have served its purpose.

So, are you an agent of change, geek or hybrid? Whoever you are and whatever you bring to the table, we're looking forward to working with you in this new space for civic collaboration.

Colette Murphy

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ATKINSON FOUNDATION

October 2014

<sup>1</sup> Beth Zemsky and David Mann. Building Organizations in a Movement Moment. *Social Policy*, August 2008

## CIVIL SOCIETY GOES DIGITAL

There was a day when civic engagement meant helping people exercise their rights as citizens and voters. It also meant tapping everyone on the shoulder and inviting them to contribute their time, talent and resources to community improvement. It involved running off newsletters and pouring over mailing lists, knocking on doors, holding meetings, canvassing for money, and organizing parades or rallies. The space where all this happened was called civil society — where people associate freely, experience a sense of belonging, and build trust, norms and networks.

Today, civic engagement means this and much more. New technology has extended the boundaries of civil society to the digital world. “Each time individuals take civic action with digital tools — texting donations, sharing videos, mapping information on open source platforms for others to use, snapping and sharing photos of protests or movements — we invent digital civil society,” says Lucy Bernholz, a self-described American philanthropy wonk and author of *Philanthropy and the Social Economy: Blueprint 2014*.

Technology is not only a tool, it’s part of our culture. It helps shape the way we do and see things. More and more, from the rise of Idle No More to open data policies, technology is used in political organizing, grassroots campaigning and other civic engagement efforts throughout the country – and delivering on its promise. It’s offering new and accessible ways to bring people together, build community, and solve problems.

Civic tech is a relatively new mainstream term to describe all of this activity. At its most basic, civic tech describes the intersection of technology and civic engagement. This convergence of fields includes, but is not limited to, community organizing, social media, government data, crowdfunding, and collaborative consumption.

Usually connected with open data and gov 2.0, civic tech is an umbrella term for a large group of people. The emerging field brings together collaborators from different sectors including media, technology, nonprofit and public policy along with citizens, artists and geeks. It also claims public and private spaces where technology is used to address social issues and improve communities. As is with the culture of open source technology, this informal community is open to everyone who shares an interest in its development and application.

Canadians may spend more time online than anyone else in the world (an average of 45 hours/month) but Americans are leading the way in this field.<sup>2</sup> Most of the trends and case studies available online originate in the United States – the home of Silicon Valley and the groundbreaking 2008 and 2012 Obama campaigns. The popularity

### ***Philanthropy and the Social Economy: Blueprint 2014***

The 5th edition of the annual industry forecast analyses the transformative potential of civic technology for both philanthropic actors and governments. Take a look to find more about the growing edges of the civic tech movement.

<http://www.grantcraft.org/guides/philanthropy-and-the-social-economy-blueprint-2014>

<sup>2</sup> Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA), Factbook 2013

and viewership of viral videos and flashmobs, the rise of \$5 donations, and groups like MoveOn, MomsRising, and Tech LadyMafia testify to American ingenuity in this space.

Digital tools and platforms, once reserved for industries and professionals, are becoming more accessible. Journalists are no longer the only ones who can report and publish stories. Blogs and social media have given voice to many who would have not been heard or even noticed in the past. While a digital divide persists, civic technology is helping break down traditional barriers and even larger, more detrimental divides created by disparities in income and education.

The evidence is mounting that technology can help us crack the code of seemingly intractable social problems. *Field Scan of Civic Technology*, a 2012 study commissioned by an American collaborative of foundations and financial institutions, credits hackathons, fellowships and open civic data initiatives as the source of innovative approaches and promising ideas.<sup>3</sup>

These are encouraging signals. They steer us toward opportunities and challenges, starting with exploring this dynamic culture, learning new terminology, and developing the skills to use new tools for collective action.

<sup>3</sup> Prepared for Living Cities by OpenPlans.  
*Field Scan of Civic Technology*, November  
2012

# THE ABCs OF CIVIC TECHNOLOGY

New technology often comes with new, sometimes confusing terminology — at times, it widens existing divides created by education, income, age and access. Here are the more popular terms and notable trends you'll likely hear in civic tech conversations.



## Apps

Commonly associated with smartphones, app is short for application. These are essentially programs designed to perform various tasks. An app can be developed to collect data on a tablet while canvassing, or can be a fun game to engage citizens on a social issue.



## BuzzFeed

BuzzFeed.com is a popular website with younger audiences, known for its listicles (simple image driven lists of everything from cats to politicians). The website produces lists/viral content, paid content, as well as original journalism, proving that silly and serious can share a page online.



## Change.org

Billed “the world’s platform for change,” Change.org is the largest petition platform online. There are more than 40 million Change.org users in 196 countries. On top of providing templates for petitions that can be used on any website, Change.org offers ease of use, a strong brand, and a built-in community of engaged citizens. They are a social enterprise with a business model driven by advertising that takes the shape of “sponsored petitions.”



## Crowdsourcing

Crowdsourcing means looking to a group of people (the crowd) to find (source) information or ideas for a project, or perform a task. It is “the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent (usually an employee) and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call.”<sup>4</sup> Crowdsourcing, in its most basic form, can involve asking Twitter followers for advice or suggestions. Crowdfunding, is a type of crowdsourcing, best known through websites like Kickstarter and Indiegogo.

<sup>4</sup> Jeff Howe. The Rise of Crowdsourcing. *Wired*, June 2006



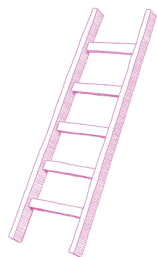
## Data

Data has become a popular buzzword as of late. In civic tech, it is often referred to as big data (extremely large amounts of information) and open data (free data made open to the public). When mined and analysed, data can offer new insights into human behaviour, address inefficiencies (and save money), as well as inspire new products, services, and innovation. GPS and billions of tweets are both examples of big data.



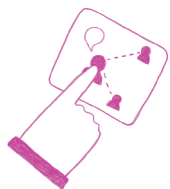
## Database

Databases are systems for managing data. In issues-driven campaigns, this includes everything from the contact details of supporters, donors, and volunteers to information collected from email, Facebook, and Twitter. One such example of civic database is **NationBuilder**, a software platform that allows campaigns and organizations, even films, to build their own movements (or nations) online. The platform offers website templates, email list software, social media integration as well as an interface to manage volunteers, supporters, and donors.



## Digital ladder of engagement

Ladders of engagement or engagement pyramids have been used in community organizing for a long time.<sup>5</sup> They help us develop strategies to move people from simply following a movement or campaign to higher levels of involvement, such as signing a petition, making a donation, taking on a leadership position. Similarly, a digital ladder of engagement is a tool for mapping the route from liking a page on Facebook to creating and sharing content online to a face-to-face meeting or event. This journey need not be conceived as a linear one. When building a relationship with a campaign, “an individual could enter from multiple starting points and move iteratively through the process.”<sup>6</sup>



## Digital media

Digital media is an umbrella term for digitized content (text, images, audio, and video). It also refers to the technology used to create or support such content. Former terms like “new media” and “online media” and “web” proved problematic, as digital media is not limited to online and has become a new normal. It’s here to stay.



## Gamification

Gamification uses features of game design and incorporates it into other arenas (civics, organizing, learning, marketing). Examples include ratings (hot/not), virtual badges (rewards for taking action), or prizes (virtual currency, or a physical prize). Gamification is used to increase user engagement and to make it fun. The end product is not always a game, but rather incorporates competition, achievement and status into the user experience.

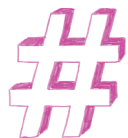
<sup>5</sup> Sherry R. Arnstein. A Ladder of Citizen Participation. *Journal of American Planning Association*, Vol 35 (4), July 1969

<sup>6</sup> Activating Online Communities to Maximize Impact – Future Challenges: 2017. TakingITGlobal, June 2014



### **Hackathons**

A mashup of the word hack and marathon, hackathons are gatherings of developers, programmers, and other techies to tackle a project or challenge for a set period of time (usually a day or weekend). These collaborative events often lead to the creation of software, apps and platforms, and ideas worth exploring further.



### **Hashtags**

Words preceded by a hash or pound sign (#) are used to tag search topics and follow activity on social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Popularized by Twitter, hashtags have provided a voice and online community for historically disenfranchised communities. “IdleNoMore” (a hashtag used by First Nations activists) and the rise of trending topics like #IfTheyGunnedMeDown and #lifeofamuslimfeminist highlight current events and perspectives often overlooked by mainstream media and popular movements. They spark much needed discussion and debate, as well as help build networks across traditional boundaries and borders.



### **Infographics**

Infographics are fun and memorable images that help make sense of statistics. Think pie charts or graphs with personality – less Excel and more cartoon. Infographics turn numbers that can be hard to digest or remember in text form into something that sticks and informs civic conversations.



### **Meetups**

Sometimes people who meet online decide to meet offline IRL (“in real life”). When this happens it’s called a meetup. This term was popularized by Meetup.org. Tweetups are face-to-face meetings for Twitter users with a shared interest.



### **Open Source**

Open source means open to all. The term is often used to refer to software and the availability of original source code to the general public. This code may also be modified and redistributed. Think of a chef sharing a recipe for free online. Open source promotes public collaboration and learning, and reduces high costs associated with developing programs and tools. WordPress and Drupal are content management systems that are also open source projects.



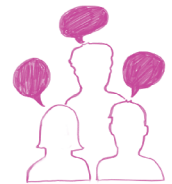
### **Podcast**

A podcast is like an audio blog. It’s similar to a radio program but available as a downloadable audio file produced in episodes. Podcasts can be found through iTunes or on websites. The word takes “pod” from iPod and “cast” from broadcasting. An iPod is not required to listen to a podcast, just a computer device that can play an audio file.



## Social Media

Social media is most often associated with Facebook and Twitter, but there are many platforms and apps that fit the definition such as Pinterest and Instagram. Social media is usually defined by a community and driven by sharing content, but at its core is a dialogue. When people share photos and “status updates” on Facebook, it’s a new form of conversation. It allows the user to stay connected to others in his or her network of friends and acquaintances.



## Storytelling

Storytelling is something humans have done throughout history in every culture around the world. We are our stories. We love hearing stories, telling stories, and retelling stories. Stories communicate our values. Storytelling is something so natural that it’s often overlooked in strategy and as an act of leadership. Digital media offers new forms of storytelling, both telling and sharing stories, through audio, video, photos, graphics, blogs, tweets, and wikis.



## Upworthy

“Awesome, fun, interesting videos and graphics about stuff that matters” proclaims Upworthy. Who doesn’t like awesome, fun, and interesting? Created by the former executive director of MoveOn and the former managing editor of *The Onion*, Upworthy delivers viral content (hence worthy of “up” for social sharing) for progressives primarily on Facebook. Their quick rise and popularity has inspired copycat websites (like ViralNova). Many non-profits are now studying their success.



## Video

Increasingly, users would prefer to watch a video than read a blurb of text. With 100 hours of video uploaded to YouTube every minute, the rise of web video is changing the way we watch video and even define TV. According to Nielsen, YouTube reaches more American adults ages 18-34 than any cable network.<sup>7</sup> Another popular web channel for video is Vimeo, which has a community of film fans. Web videos are known for the potential of going viral: the ability to easily share the content with a friend, and their friends, possibly attracting millions of viewers. In such a dynamic space, it is just about impossible to predict or guarantee a viral video.



## Wiki

Probably best to use the definition created and edited by users of Wikipedia: “A wiki is usually a web application which allows people to add, modify, or delete content in collaboration with others.”

<sup>7</sup> Follow the audience... The official YouTube Blog. May 1, 2013. Retrieved from <http://youtube-global.blogspot.ca/2013/05/yt-brandcast-2013.html>

## CASE STUDY:

# IDLE NO MORE

[idlenomore.ca](http://idlenomore.ca)

It started as a Twitter hashtag – #idlenomore. It was a phrase that captured the all encompassing feeling of First Nation frustration and became a call to action, bringing together activists and actions in communities across Canada.<sup>8</sup>

Sitting in her home in Edmonton, Tanya Kappo typed #idlenomore on her Twitter account on November 30, 2012 to promote teach-ins of the same name happening in Alberta, in response to Bill-C-45. This act changes legislation contained in the Indian Act, Navigation Protection Act (former Navigable Waters Protection Act), and the Environmental Assessment Act. The teach-ins were organized to educate First Nation peoples on the issues.

This then led to a rally in Saskatoon, with around 100 people. Erica Lee was at that rally, and became the Facebook administrator for the Idle No More Facebook page which now has over 130,000 supporters. Lee told the *Toronto Star* that social media helped connect people in the movement. “It gives (people), especially in northern communities and rural First Nations communities, a chance to be connected with events and be inspired by other peoples’ events that they might not have access to, that they aren’t seeing on TV and in newspapers.”<sup>9</sup>

Through social media networks, the movement was able to quickly unite First Nations communities across the country fighting for Indigenous sovereignty, and water and land protection, and turn them into a much larger national and now international movement under the name Idle No More, pressuring traditional media to give these issues significant airtime.

Idlenomore.ca, built on the community organizing NationBuilder platform, provides historical and contemporary context of colonialism and oppression. One of the biggest outcomes of the movement was the request for more information about Idle No More, history, land treaties, etc. The idlenomore.ca website and the Facebook and Twitter communities also highlighted the stories and struggles of Indigenous Canadians in a new, collaborative way.

Social media not only shared information, but was used to organize on-the-ground demonstrations, including flash mob round dances, teach-ins, and blockades. The volunteer form on the website included many ways to get involved from organizing events to cooking to donating supplies to offering videography or design skills. During Idle No More events, support was wide-spread, including Occupy activists offering live-streaming services and support. The movement was funded by donations, but activists were unpaid and often overworked.

The Idle No More digital platforms remain active, and those involved with the movement have been flooded with speaking/education requests, a sign of success for the goal of greater awareness. The next challenge, we’re told, is archiving the project online to be preserved for years to come.

## FOR REFLECTION

Does your movement or campaign have a narrative or call to action that unites people in different communities?

How does social media drive your actions on the ground?

Do you use social media to create digital entry points for those who can’t participate in your events?

How does mainstream media cover the issue you’re working on vs. digital or social media?

8 Kenneth Jackson. The Tweet that Sparked a Movement. APTN National News, December 11, 2012

9 Karissa Donkin. Social media helps drive Idle No More movement. *Toronto Star*, January 11, 2013

## A NEW KIND OF CIVIC COLLABORATION

An interdisciplinary group of practitioners and professionals are working together in the civic tech space, including people from the nonprofit sector and those who work in the tech field. Unfortunately, too often these groups don't mix. To identify the players, here are some playful terms to get a sense of who's who.

### **Agents of Change**

This is a broad term for people, organizations and networks that are working for social change. They are nonprofits, charities, activists, campaigns, unions, politicians, and active citizens. They're likely already using technology in their work to advance their causes, but not as strategically or intentionally as they'd like.

### **Geeks**

Geek is not an offensive term for this group. This crew of geeks represents anyone with a passion for technology, including developers, strategists, bloggers, hackers, IT professionals, designers, technologists or even a teenager in her parents' basement who is building an app. Motivated to solve problems, make new tools, and work with code and data, this group is often formally disconnected from social justice work but is interested in connecting tech to the world around them.

### **Hybrid**

These are people who are using technology for social change, in a strategic or full time capacity. cStreet is a prime example (a Toronto based digital agency focused on building progressive campaigns) as is anyone who has organized a hackathon to bring together geeks and agents of change. Hybrids are part geek, part agent of change, and often bring the two groups together.

These three groups intersect in the civic tech space although not necessarily directly. They also speak different languages at times. While the differences between change agents, hybrids, and geeks present challenges, each holds a piece of the puzzle that is necessary to see an issue or solution in its entirety. Creating more opportunities for roundtables, meetups, hackathons, and spaces to communicate will help share experiences, pool resources, and facilitate future collaboration.

In this space, we also find professionals and consultants who are digital strategists, developers and data scientists. Too few of us, however, can financially afford to tap their experience. Several IT-focused organizations are forging relationships between digital talent and government and/or nonprofits to make this expertise more accessible. This approach offers IT and digital strategy support for groups that lack it internally.

### ***The Emergence of Civic Tech: Investments in a Growing Field***

A map can be helpful when navigating vast terrains. Enjoy this bird's-eye-view of the civic tech space and learn more about the evolution of its respective cross sections.

[http://www.knightfoundation.org/media/uploads/publication\\_pdfs/knight-civic-tech.pdf](http://www.knightfoundation.org/media/uploads/publication_pdfs/knight-civic-tech.pdf)

Imagine, if you will, public service through coding. **Code for America** does exactly that as a non-partisan nonprofit that enlists digital talent to use their skills in public service to solve core problems facing communities in the United States.

The organization offers a one-year fellowship that places developers, designers, and researchers in local governments. During this placement, “fellows and government partners build apps, inspire new thinking amongst public servants, and tackle some of our country’s toughest problems” according to [codeforamerica.org](http://codeforamerica.org). The organization’s programs also include a civic startup program with funding and mentorship, local “brigades” made up of volunteers who organize hackathons and discussions, and a peer network of trainings and events.

**DataKind** is another American nonprofit uniting tech and community organizations. They operate on the belief that improving the understanding and use of data in the nonprofit sector will lead to better decision-making and greater impact. They do this through weekend DataDive events (their version of hackathons), DataCorps (picture a pro-bono super hero team of data experts available for short term projects), and local chapters.

In a profile on DataKind, *The Economist* highlights how businesses mine data to improve efficiency while nonprofits have the data to do the same but not the budget.<sup>10</sup> Programs like Code for America and DataKind help remove financial barriers to working with new technology while addressing problems and improving efficiency in the process.

**Random Hacks of Kindness (RHOK)** is building an international network of civic tech activists focused on the similar ends. Canadian chapters have already been organized in Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Hamilton, and Vancouver. Open to anyone, RHOK aims to create open technology solutions for local and global social challenges through collaboration and capacity building.

<sup>10</sup> Geek Philanthropy: Data Huggers.  
*The Economist*, October 29, 2012

## CASE STUDY:

# AVAAZ

avaaz.org

If you're active in the fight for social change, you have likely received an email or signed a petition connected to Avaaz.org. Avaaz (which means "voice" in European, Middle Eastern, and Asian languages) describes their work as "a global web movement to bring people-powered politics to decision-making everywhere."

The Avaaz community is a good point-to example of civic tech in action. Founded by Canadian Ricken Patel, Avaaz.org features campaigns in 15 languages, petitions, direct actions, email lists, lobbying, plus traditional "offline" protests and actions. With over 33 million members worldwide, Avaaz breaks the traditional activist model of starting local or with one issue and building up. Each year, Avaaz sets overall priorities through member polls with its online community all around the world, and on a weekly basis tests campaign ideas. Avaaz is member-funded, with an annual budget of \$12 million. As *the Guardian* describes, "It's a new kind of activism that isn't issue-led, it's issues-led."<sup>11</sup> The organization's growth is exponential. They started with just nine employees in 2007, and now have over 100 on staff, with a head office in New York and team members throughout the world.

Avaaz also partners with local organizations in the communities and countries they work in. There has been criticism from some groups of Avaaz with respect to accountability, transparency and resource/data sharing.<sup>12</sup>

In the fight for decent work, Avaaz has campaigned for:

- Asylum for Afghan Translators (May 2013)
- Protection for Bangladesh Garment Factory Workers (May 2013)
- Freedom for trapped Migrant Workers (July 2012)

## FOR REFLECTION

How can you leverage your online networks and connect them to your campaigns?

Do you poll your members or supporters for ideas?

What type of feedback can your members provide and how can you best gather and build off this data?

How can you test campaign messages, images, and call to actions with your online community?

<sup>11</sup> Carole Cadwalladr. Inside Avaaz – can online activism really change the world? *The Guardian*, November 17, 2013

<sup>12</sup> Jillian C. York. On Avaaz. May 29, 2012. Retrieved from <http://jilliancyork.com/2012/05/29/on-avaaz/>

## GETTING INTO THE DIGITAL CONVERSATION

To find its way into digital engagement work, the Atkinson Foundation reached out to a diverse mix of self-described geeks, agents of change and hybrids. In addition to two meetups, one-on-one meetings were held with key leaders in five organizations — People for Education, Workers' Action Centre, Manifesto, ACORN, and Citizen Bridge. These conversations uncovered three areas of particular interest for individuals and organizations.

### Strategy

Harvard Kennedy School Professor Marshall Ganz defines strategy as turning “what you have” into “what you need” to get “what you want.”<sup>13</sup> It's figuring out how to use resources you have to achieve your goals in relationship to constraints and opportunities. Strategy involves acting mindfully, with intentionality with respect to one's goals. Sometimes deciding not to use a specific digital tool is a strategy in itself.

For example, as more and more people use Instagram, many are wondering if they should be using this photo sharing app. A strategy would involve setting or reviewing goals for the organization and seeing if Instagram could help meet those goals. Deciding not to use Instagram and focusing instead on an engaged Facebook community for sharing photos and stories might be, in fact, a better strategic decision. Digital strategy isn't much different from other forms of strategy. It's about making choices and implementing them with discipline across an organization.

### Storytelling

Ever since there's been someone to listen, we have told stories. As Ganz outlines in his public narrative framework, stories communicate how we understand our individual selves, the collective, and the moment. Sharing stories of self, us and now is an act of leadership. Traditionally we think of stories as verbal, around the campfire, or one person to another. In a digital era, stories come in all shapes and file formats. Stories are told through infographics, videos, podcasts, animated GIFs (Graphic Interchange Formats), tweets, curated social media feeds, live chats, text message, Tumblr, emojis (and this list just skims the surface).

Storytelling has moved from a traditional broadcast medium (one way) to an interactive one (two way, multiple conversations). Organizations are often rich in stories to tell, but lack a formal plan (or strategy) to actually tell such stories and connect them to their work. Agency campaigns are good for creating a splash in the short-term but long-term campaigns may require a deeper understanding of the issues and movement. Storytelling in a digital age has to do with crafting inspiring stories with the potential to challenge dominant narratives, and that people are moved to share with their social network.

### ***Digital Storytelling for Social Impact***

How can digital storytelling enter the water stream of nonprofit organizational practice? Here are five key areas that you might want to consider before taking the leap.

<http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/blog/digital-storytelling-social-impact>

<sup>13</sup> Marshall Ganz. How We Organize: Resources, Strategy and Power. Lecture Notes, Harvard University. Retrieved from <http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k2139&pageid=icb.page60815>

## Data

Big data and open data are often referred to as a revolution. It is not the quantity of data, however, that is revolutionary. “The big data revolution is that now we can do something with the data,” explains Dr. Gary King at Weatherhead University.<sup>14</sup> For example, King and his students recently developed a new tool for analyzing social media messages. With a billion social-media posts every two days and some statistical methods, the students looked at Chinese-language posts and uncovered Chinese government censorship practices.

There is a growing interest in big data in Canada and in a smaller number of data sets — but also a lack of understanding of what’s possible. Many Canadian organizations think they need better databases or a better way of amalgamating the data they do have so they can do something with the data. With workers’ rights groups, there are also concerns around collecting data via websites or petitions from vulnerable groups (e.g. undocumented workers).

<sup>14</sup> Garry King. Why “Big Data” is a Big Deal. *Harvard Magazine*, March-April 2014

## CASE STUDY:

# OPEN DATA DAY TORONTO

[opendataday.ca/Toronto](http://opendataday.ca/Toronto)

The Open Data movement is looking “to break the barriers that currently exist between public servants, citizens, community leaders, students, industry, and technologists.”<sup>15</sup>

February 22nd is International Open Data Day. This day is marked by citizens around the world coming together in their cities to write applications, free data, create visualizations, and publish analyses using open public data. The idea is to support and encourage the adoption of open data policies by the world’s local, regional, and national governments. The open data movement has led to many governments posting civic data online, as well as departments, teams, and positions being created in government to explore how data can improve the lives of citizens.

Events can be organized by anyone and are open to all. Experienced hackers have said “our movement is stronger when it is broader.”<sup>16</sup> Ideas can also be shared with other cities, be it by video stream, chat, etc.

Event goals include:

- Learning more about open data
- Finding out how local and national governments could release more open data
- Engaging local nonprofits and companies in the uses of open data for the products and campaigns
- Networking
- Having fun!

The Toronto organizers took the day a few steps further in 2014 with an OpenData 101, Hackathon, and HackGoesOn follow-up events.<sup>17</sup>

## FOR REFLECTION

How do you use data in your work?

Are there data sets you can make public?

What government data would be useful for projects you’re working on?

How can you broaden your movement through open collaboration?

- 15 Open Data Day Canada, Toronto  
Retrieved from <http://opendataday.ca/toronto/>
- 16 The International Open Data Day Hackathon, <http://www.opendataday.org>
- 17 David Eaves. Open Data Day: Lessons for Hacktivists. Tech President, March 14, 2013

## CIVIC TECHNOLOGY FOR DECENT WORK

In recent years, digital tools and platforms have been used effectively to organize workers in the U.S. on the issue of income and wealth inequality. Here are three campaigns that highlight how retail, fast food and domestic workers are improving their wages and working conditions with the help of digital strategy.

### OUR Walmart Campaign Offers a Voice

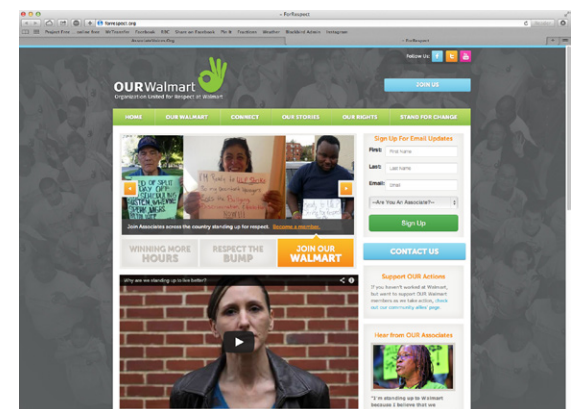
As part of the ongoing fight for increased hours, wages and health care at Wal-Mart, the union-backed OUR Walmart campaign launched [associatevoices.org](http://associatevoices.org) in 2013.

The site allows employees to anonymously request protests at their store. An interactive Google Map on the homepage lets users click on various locations to hear the stories of associates and why they'd like a Black Friday protest at their Wal-Mart location. This offers workers an outlet if they are afraid to go public for fear of employer retaliation. Here's an example of a post:

"From Wal-Mart Supercenter 1924: What would you like to see changed at your store? More hours for all associates. I'm part time. Will be 2 years this month. Work 32-40 hours a week, then this week ask for more hours and get cut down to 14 hours. The big wigs get their hours and pay. What about temps, part time and full time associates? More pay. Give all associates an incentive to stay working. Not firing people all the time. The CEO is getting a 14% pay raise for 2014. \$20.6 million. That's about 8500% more than us associates."

The OUR Walmart campaign, closely tied to the United Food & Commercial Workers union, has made extensive use of digital tools and training. The strategy is to target Wal-Mart's brand online and to identify and engage potential supporters among the company's 1.3 million employees in the U.S. The OUR Walmart staff and activists have set up several Facebook pages and groups (both closed and public) including pages for fired workers, LGBT employees, and pregnant workers ("Respect the Bump").

Cory Parker, a Wal-Mart employee in Tupelo, Mississippi, told *Salon.com* he first learned about the OUR Walmart campaign when a co-worker sent him a message on Facebook.<sup>18</sup> He was inspired to join a national conference call. This action led to a one-on-one phone call and support for organizing a "Black Friday" strike in his store. Cory's story shows us how the digital ladder of engagement works, moving a Wal-Mart Associate from Facebook up many rungs to the leadership role in a "Black Friday" strike.



<sup>18</sup> Josh Eidelson. Anonymous Wal-Mart workers unload and urge protests on new website. *Salon*, November 7, 2013

## Fast Food Forward and Upworthy Change the Narrative

Customers tend not to think much about the employees serving us at McDonald's or KFC beyond a typical upsell supersize exchange ("would you like fries with that") or the standard "have a nice day." Fast Food Forward is changing that. Backed by Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and New York Communities for Change (NYCC, formerly ACORN), Fast Food Forward is a movement of New York City fast food workers fighting to raise wages and gain rights at work. Infographics at [fastfoodforward.org](http://fastfoodforward.org) highlight the wage gap, contrasting the \$200 billion generated by the fast food industry every year with the \$11,000 average salary of a fast food employee in New York City — one of the most expensive cities to live in, in the world.

Earlier this year, *Businessweek* featured photos of ten workers living on minimum wage.<sup>19</sup> With art direction inspired by Tumblr and the social media culture of hand-written signs, employees in McCafe and Dominos uniforms were photographed with statements like "I work to support my family, its not enough" and "I live in Brooklyn and I make pizza, 8 dollars an hour doesn't do much for me." *The New York Times* ran a similar photo essay of the people behind the counter at the end of 2013.<sup>20</sup> While no laughing matter, KFC worker Nequasia LeGrand was featured on the Colbert Report to talk about the campaign in January 2014.

This campaign and social media offers fast food workers a place to gather. Social media is also used to share narratives, organize petitions and promote protests in addition to traditional union organizing. In China, where unions are illegal, social media apps like Weibo and WeChat, combined with affordable no-name smartphones are helping factory workers organize similar protests and strikes.<sup>21</sup>

The larger shift in the income inequality narrative is building on the 99/1 % refrain of the Occupy movement. One of Upworthy's most popular videos (15,817,757 views and counting) states: "9 Out Of 10 Americans Are Completely Wrong About This Mind-Blowing Fact."<sup>22</sup> The video explores wealth inequality in America through a study by a Harvard economist. It compares what Americans think is ideal wealth distribution to what they think it actually is to what it actually is — "one per cent of America has 40 per cent of all the nation's wealth." The video of infographics is easy to watch and understand.

Under the title Workonomics, Upworthy is currently featuring sponsored content on their website, by the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations. The series is about work and the economy, and features sharable content on topics like the middle class, tax breaks, and gender equality. Online videos like these create a shared understanding what decent work is and what it isn't, thus paving the way for broader offline community organizing.

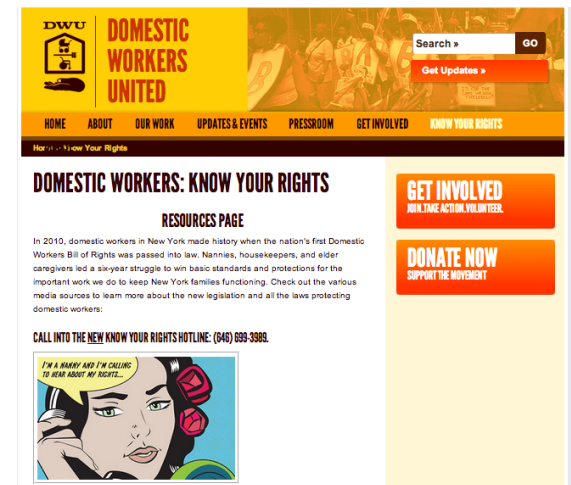


- <sup>19</sup> Karen Weise. Ten Workers on Living on the Minimum Wage. *Bloomberg Businessweek*, February 12, 2014
- <sup>20</sup> Alan Feuer. The Faces Behind the Counter. *The New York Times*, December 27, 2013
- <sup>21</sup> Rebecca Chao. Absent a Labor Union, Chinese Workers Organize with Social Media and Cheap Smartphones. *Tech President*, February 21, 2014
- <sup>22</sup> Adam Mordecai. 9 Out of 10 Americans Are Completely Wrong About This Mind-blowing Fact. Upworthy

## Know Your Rights, Domestic Workers United Cross-Platform Approach

Embracing technology in a campaign or organization doesn't always mean an app. Domestic Workers United launched a cross-platform Know Your Rights campaign to educate domestic workers about their rights under the newly passed Domestic Workers Bill of Rights — one of the organization's victories. This campaign included printed materials, a Know Your Rights website at [knowyourrightsny.org](http://knowyourrightsny.org) in English and Spanish, and fun pre-recorded audio clips designed to sound like a call-in talk show, accessible via the website and a telephone hotline. To reach and educate the broader public, large banners featuring positive images of domestic workers travelled throughout key neighborhoods in New York City.

This campaign strategically utilizes a variety of tactics, to reach a diverse audience of domestic workers and the general public. The use of a hotline is a perfect example of how technology doesn't have to be new and shiny. A phone line, and one that feels like a call-in talk show, is a very creative and accessible example of civic tech.

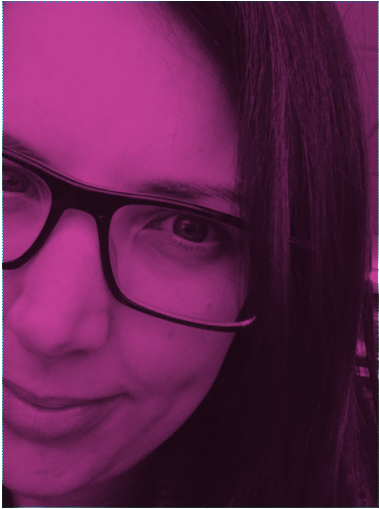


## TAKING THE NEXT STEP

Technology, even for geeks, can feel overwhelming at times. As soon as we “get it” the “it” changes. Digital is dynamic, ever evolving. For this reason, we’re interested in staying connected with others who are ready to experiment and learn together. If you’re really new to this conversation, we hope you’ll use this primer to convene your own version of a hackathon to get started.

If you’re further ahead than we are and have something to add to this primer, please let us know. As good ideas and comments come in, we’ll update it to reflect our shared experience. A second primer is already on the drawing board, exploring how to map out a digital engagement strategy and to become better organizers. Finally, if you haven’t already, please subscribe to our e-mail list at [www.atkinsonfoundation.ca](http://www.atkinsonfoundation.ca). We look forward to the continuation of this conversation.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



### **Jennifer Hollett**

An award winning broadcast journalist, Jenn uses social media to increase participation and mobilization in politics and social issues. She recently gave a TEDxTalk on “How To Hate Politics” that outlined how technology is offering new ways to see and create social change.

As a television host and reporter, Jenn has worked for the CBC, CTV, and is a former MuchMusic VJ. In 2002, Jenn travelled to Kabul to host A MuchMusic Special: Afghanistan, a Gemini nominated documentary. She hosted the CBC’s G20 Street Level blog during the 2010 G20 Summit in Toronto which won a Canadian Online Publishing Award. She was also recognized by Amnesty International Canada with a 2009 Media Award for her CBC radio reporting from Israel/Palestine. It was her work in the media that inspired her recent leap into politics, looking to move from asking questions to finding answers.

A leading digital expert and visionary, Jenn developed the critically acclaimed ‘Super PAC App’ at the MIT Media Lab, which helped make television campaign ads more transparent to viewers during the 2012 U.S. election. Technologically savvy, Jenn has worked in digital communications since the late ‘90s, when she became the youngest manager ever at Sony Music Canada, and developed new media strategies for the label’s top artists.

Human rights and social justice have been a consistent focus in Jenn’s work. She previously managed e-communications for Plan Canada, worked with Journalists for Human Rights to train journalists in Sierra Leone, and volunteered to create YouthCARE, a youth engagement program with CARE Canada. She is a strong advocate for women’s and girls’ rights, and has been proud to moderate the G(irls)20 Summit in Toronto (2010), Paris (2011), Mexico City (2012), Moscow (2013), and Sydney (2014).

Jenn has a Bachelor of Arts with Distinction in Journalism and Communications from Concordia University in Montreal, and a Master in Public Administration from Harvard University. As a candidate in the NDP nomination race for the 2013 by-election in Toronto Centre, Jenn believes politics is what we make it. She currently consults on a variety of digital projects.

Design: Studio:Blackwell  
Illustration: Flavia Lopez



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