NEW MEDIA, NEW VOICES:
Supporting Civic Engagement in Low-Income Communities of Color

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Abstract

Within the past few years, large-scale events such as Obama's successful 2008 campaign and democratic mobilizations in the Middle East have increased mainstream buzz about the democratic potential of new media. With the spectrum of digital access shifting, particularly with increasing mobile phones access, new possibilities are emerging for marginalized communities to increase their say in public processes. Many across governmental, private and nonprofit sectors are starting to experiment with using new media tools as a means for civic engagement. However, will building new platforms be enough to increase civic engagement in marginalized communities, particularly low-income communities of color?

This thesis analyzes the experience of the North End Organizing Network (NEON), based in Springfield, Massachusetts, as it pilots a mobile technology tool to engage residents. It focuses on community-based organizations as key actors in increasing digital access. The research begins by examining the literature, finding a gap in scholarship on new media technology and civic engagement in low-income communities of color. The thesis then analyzes five supporting cases for salient themes as an analytical framework: Louisiana Bucket Brigade, Institute for Popular Education of Southern California (IDEPSCA), Voices of Community Activists and Leaders (VOCAL), DREAM Team Los Angeles and Families for Freedom. The analysis reveals that some keys to success include a flexible approach, playing to the strengths of multiple co-existing platforms and involving community members in technology decision-making.

NEON, the primary case, underwent a five-month pilot process to design and test a mobile technology tool for residents to submit text messages and voicemails its Question Campaign. The research suggests that when the rubber hits the road, deeply engaging residents using new media tools is not easy. It requires significant time investment up front, particularly in the context of multiple co-existing communication channels. The research argues that institutions should create thoughtful strategies that intentionally target and involve users on the margin to tap the massive potential of new media for low-income residents.

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Dedication

To Loni Ding, the mother of Asian American film, who inspired me and numerous others to dedicate our lives to social justice and media

And to those who dare to tell their stories so that people will listen

Acknowledgements

Thank you…

NEON Question Ad
Source: Paul Somers, Engage the Power (2011)

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"Everyone wants a connected life where they struggle not only for themselves, but for others with whom they are kin. And that kinship can cross many lines. It's not always a kinship of blood or village. It's more than that. It can be a kinship of identification with others' struggles. That can always happen. And it has always happened."

Loni Ding, Documentary Filmmaker

During my last semester at the University of California at Berkeley, I stumbled serendipitously into a class in the Ethnic Studies Department, where I met Professor Loni Ding. A passionate and opinionated documentary filmmaker, she won students over with her insistence and laughter, putting cameras into our hands and urging us to tell our stories. As students, we watched hours of films by filmmakers of color, taking in the pain, heartbreak, and triumph of their stories. Through dissecting scenes, we gained a new way to see the world, understanding the choices each filmmaker made, shot by shot. To craft our own films, we stayed up late nights together, taking shifts to watch our footage, transcribing, cutting, and extending clips. We battled with the software, booting and rebooting the computers in the lab, and ultimately screened our first films in front of an audience of over 200 people. Making media transformed me. Growing up as a mixed race woman in a diverse city, I rarely saw my experience or the experiences of those around me represented on TV or in films. It was powerful to learn that rather than waiting for someone else to tell my story, I could tell it myself.

Rather than through engineering, computer programming or web design, storytelling was my entrée into the world of new media and technology. With my creative spark ignited and the will to learn, I began to collaborate with community-based organizations to shoot films to illustrate compelling aspects of their work. My filmmaking evolved from a side project to full-time consulting with community-based organizations in the Los Angeles area incorporating video-based multimedia production and training into their programs.

While working with these groups, I witnessed an incredible range of stories: Laotian community members banding together to confront Chevron's role in polluting their urban gardens and supply of fish from the bay; Asian and Latino parents finding common ground in their stories of migration and organizing to improve their children's educations; Black families persevering in the face of foreclosure and eviction; Bangladeshi young women recounting

the struggle of affordable housing in their neighborhoods; and Japanese Buddhist temple members sharing oral histories from the internment camps.

Through media, I understood the rewards of overcoming a fear of technology, and used these tools to tell stories that would not otherwise be heard. Not only did technology provide an opportunity for community members to share their own experiences, it took people beyond a particular moment, allowing them to share their experiences with other people in other places. Sometimes it even enabled people do something to change the problems they faced.

I also observed that many groups housed remarkable stories and models of civic engagement, but often lacked the time, capacity and funding to dedicate to broadcasting these stories beyond their immediate circles. With the channels of communication multiplying by the day, it seemed like new media was constantly challenging mass media's rules, giving way to new possibilities for groups to broadcast their stories. New media was a blank canvas. Through blogging, photo and video sharing, networking, repurposing images, and mashing up content, the possibilities for seemed to multiply.

Through these experiences, I wondered how organized residents could harness new technologies in the face of limited time and resources, broadening their impact. I returned to school seeking to understand this. I asked myself, what role could new media play to support diverse communities engaging in public processes? This thesis is my attempt to answer this question.

Chapter One: Introduction

"Media justice is not rhetoric. It's not a sexy synonym for diversity. It's about structural change… In the end of it all, I want racial justice. In the end of it all I want to see some policy change that has nothing to do with media."

Malkia Cyril, Director, Center for Media Justice (PowerOnPTP 2008)

What does it take to amplify the voices of marginalized communities? In the struggle for recognition, what role does technology play?

These questions ricochet off the walls of an upstairs room in the North End of Springfield, MA, where a group of residents sit together. Listening intently as each tells a story, they laugh between pauses. Fluorescent lights flicker behind the rafters, and an intercom intermittently projects loud and convoluted announcements. If you were to zoom out, you would find this room situated in the middle of a neighborhood that has been forgotten, in a city whose statistics slide to the bottom of a number of statewide lists, including the poorest census tract and three of the lowest performing schools (MIT 2009). However, in this room and in this moment, those numbers fade into the background. One older woman, a resident leader just beginning her involvement with the North End Organizing Network (NEON), spoke up. "This has motivated me to raise consciousness in the community… we have to create motivation and unity for everyone, putting positivity into what we do and continuing to move forward" (Resident leader, Focus Group, Mar 2011).

It is the start of one group of North End residents beginning to claim their agency in the struggle to create positive change in their lives. Undoubtedly their journey will be difficult, full of twists, turns, exhaustion and hurdles. However, along the way, each person connected to this journey has the potential to transform, grow, and send ripples through the neighborhood. Together they wonder what it will take for policymakers to hear their concerns.

An hour and a half to the east, the City of Boston has recently released new technologies to solicit feedback from residents. This is one of an increasing number of city governments across the country catching on to the innovative spirit of new media and developing strategies to broaden their reach. Whereas traditional public meetings tend to attract a small number of people who have the time to attend, online platforms provide an opportunity to

involve residents who would not typically seek out this engagement. The vision of these initiatives is open exchange, allowing residents to provide thoughtful input to city government, which in turn can create better, stronger policies.

Still farther away, on the other side of the Charles River, MIT students and practitioners develop new technologies that they hope will spur greater citizen participation. Young minds collaborate to design new ways for people to communicate, exchange ideas and collectively pool knowledge.

All of these groups may have a common purpose, but in reality, they often do not speak to one another. Across these multiple sectors, decision-makers neglect the fact that many marginalized communities, particularly low-income communities of color, are active on a completely different set of platforms than their "average user." At this critical moment, if social media practitioners and community development leaders recognize that sound new media strategies begin by designing for the margins, these tools present massive potential for low-income residents to create positive change.

Research Question & Focus

This thesis emanates from this juncture of creative possibility. My central research question is the following: *How can new media tools support community-based organizations to increase civic engagement in low-income communities of color?*

My research focuses on North End Organizing Network (NEON), a community-based organization in the North End of Springfield, Massachusetts, to analyze its development and testing of mobile technology for the organization's entrée into civic engagement work. With strong ties to the low-income community of color where it works, but low staff time and resources, NEON is typical of many community-based organizations (CBOs) beginning to use new media technology to engage its constituents.

I examine my larger research question through three sub-questions:

- *To what extent does the literature provide a useful framework for NEON and other CBOs to for civic engagement in low-income communities of color?*
- *What lessons can NEON learn from the landscape of community-based organizations projects that use new media technologies with low-income constituents of color?*
- *What challenges and opportunities does NEON's mobile technology pilot project present for its Question Campaign and future civic engagement work?*

Though NEON's original mission included a system of community outreach workers that would organize residents to become civically involved in the neighborhood, throughout the years its funding sources directed its work toward service delivery. With the support of its Board of Directors and new funding sources, NEON is now returning to its original mission of civic engagement. In April of this year, NEON launched a "Question Campaign," a public art/engagement campaign with the dual goals of increasing resident involvement and shaping the organization's strategic direction. With a prompt of "What is your question for the North End?" they began to collect a wide range of questions from North End residents from education to health to philosophical questions. Displaying these questions prominently around the neighborhood, the questions appeared in storefronts and on billboards, paired with compelling images. In July NEON will group these questions by theme and form resident-led working groups, with the ultimate goal to influence neighborhood institutions to address these concerns.

NEON's civic engagement work also coincides with an increase in NEON's use of a wide range of media channels as it publicizes the Question Campaign. I worked with the organization to collaboratively design and pilot a mobile tool to collect questions by voicemail and text message. Using literature and lessons learned from a handful of pioneering community-based organizations, this thesis will analyze the results of NEON's new media technology pilot. Though NEON faces context-specific challenges and opportunities, its experience can provide insight to community-based organizations, governmental organizations and technology developers who seek to make new media tools relevant for low-income communities of color.

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Context

Challenges Across Sectors

Without attention to technology access in low-income communities of color, multiple sectors face challenges increasing engagement through new media tools. In universities and the private sector, most technology developers are building technology toward users who are already highly active online. Their target users have broadband access and smart phones, and thus many of the tools they develop reflect this, in web and smart phone applications.

This results in a disconnect when public institutions attempt to use technology to increase public participation. The general approach is that increasing participation channels will increase engagement, and many local governments are experimenting with new methods, firing up Twitter accounts and adopting mobile apps that allow residents to report on potholes and broken light fixtures. However, Robert Goodspeed's study of the comprehensive planning process in Austin, Texas shows that increasing platforms for engagement allowed highly motivated citizens to duplicate their input across all platforms (Goodspeed 2010). In other words, the city intended to encourage a more demographically representative group of residents to participate in the process; however, the same small number of residents gave their input into all the channels. The implication is that in order to reach new populations, particularly low-income communities of color, it is not as easy as building a new platform and hoping that people will use it. Instead, as this thesis argues, institutions must create thoughtful strategies that intentionally target and involve these groups.

In the nonprofit sector, which tends to have stronger relationships with low-income communities of color, there is a prevalent sense of ambivalence about technology. Within the past few years, large-scale events such as Obama's successful 2008 campaign and the high use of social media tools in democratic mobilizations in the Middle East have increased mainstream buzz about the democratic potential of new media tools. However, many community-based groups view these tools with some hesitance, seeing their

own constituencies not using many of them. This is a missed opportunity, leaving many opinions and ideas completely off the radar. Despite this general trend, some pioneering groups are seizing the moment to experiment with a wide range of platforms, including mainstream social media tools as well as mobile phones. These groups learn as they go and continue to search for strong models, particularly for civic engagement work.

With the new media landscape rapidly developing, it's important to ensure that government, nonprofit and private sectors use new media tools to accomplish their central goal—to increase engagement. This is a critical moment to dramatically shape the way that low-income communities of color participate civically.

Access to Technology
Shifting technology access presents a challenge for new media tools to reach many urban populations. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, though the gap has narrowed over time, there are still significant differences in Internet usage between demographic groups. Between 2000 and 2010, the proportion of Internet users who are black or Latino has nearly doubled—from 11% to 21% (Smith 2010b). However, a major gap still exists. In 2010 67% of whites and 56% of African-Americans are broadband users (an 11-point gap) (Smith 2010a). Within Latino communities, there is a division in technology use between foreign-born and native-born Latinos (Figure 1). While 85% of native-born Latinos ages 16 and older go online, only about half (51%) of foreign-born Latinos do so (Livingston 2010). Income levels present the most striking differences in access. The most recent survey by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration found that just 29.2% of people in households making less than $15,000 annually and 35.2% of households between $15,000 and $24,999 annually have broadband access, as compared to 84.9% of households making between $100,000-$149,000 annually and 88.7% of households making above $150,000 annually (NTIA 2010, 5).

Figure 1

Latino Internet Use

Source: Livingston 2010

Figure 2

Persons Using Broadband in the Home by Family Income

Source: NTIA 2010
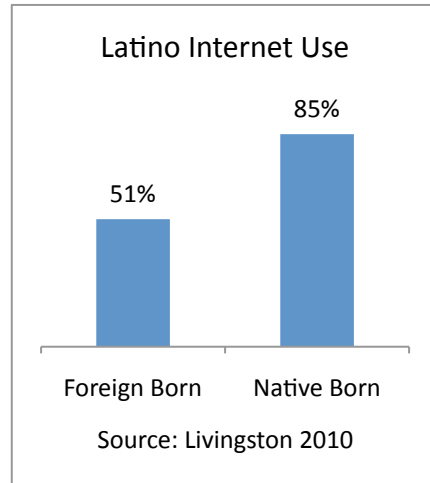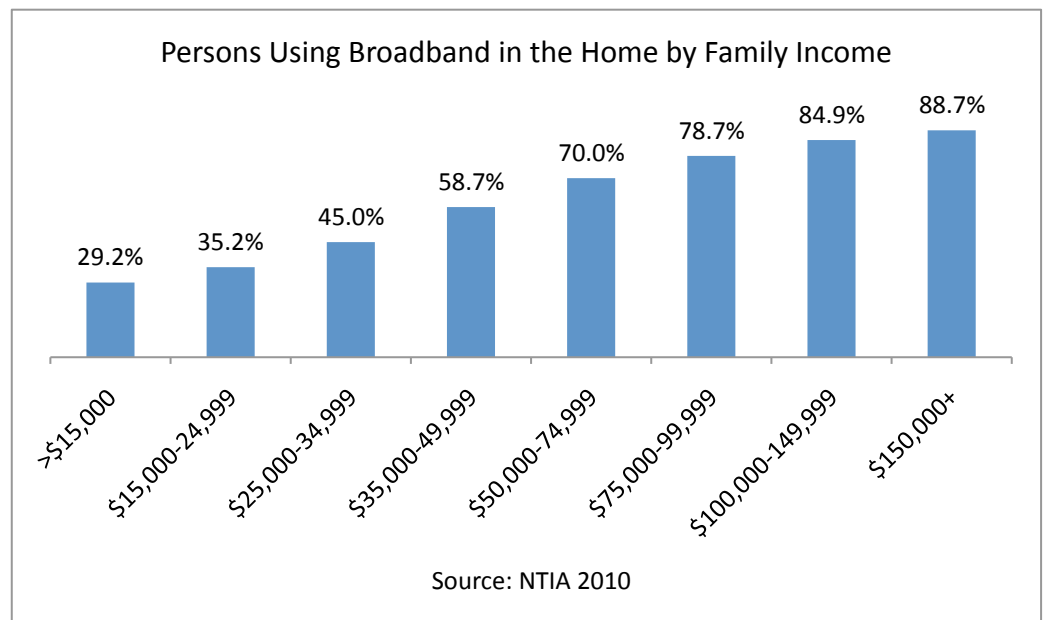
Though prominent literature covers the "digital divide," the reality is less of a clear-cut divide than a spectrum of technology access. A closer look at the data reveals that rather than the simple analysis that low-income communities of color lack technology access, many communities are using completely different platforms than mainstream groups. In fact, the picture of technology access flips when examining mobile phone usage, as blacks and Latinos are more likely to use mobile phones than their white counterparts,

and many use more features on their phones than whites (Figure 3). 70% of *all* African-Americans and English-speaking Latinos use text messaging, vs. just over half of whites [emphasis in original] (Smith 2010b). Therefore, when low-income communities of color use the Internet, many do so on their phones, even if they are simple feature phones rather than smartphones. 47% of Latinos and 41% of blacks use their phones for e- mail, compared with just 30% of whites (Washington 2011).

Figure 3

Source: Smith 2010
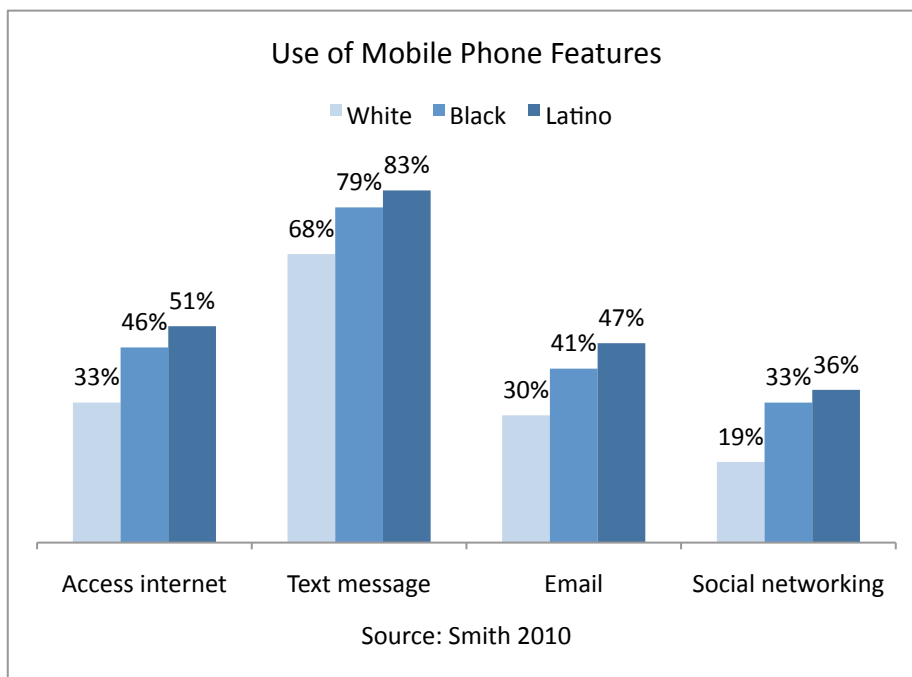
According to Pew, "minority adults also outpace whites in their use of social technologies. Among Internet users, seven in ten blacks and English-speaking Latinos use social networking sites—significantly higher than the six in ten whites who do so. Indeed, nearly half of black Internet users go to a social networking site on a typical day. Just one third of white Internet users do so on a daily basis" (Smith 2010b). A quarter of online African-Americans use status update services like Twitter, significantly higher than the 15% of white Internet users who do so.

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However, to add complexity to this picture, mobile phone access does not solve all problems of access. Though low-income communities of color may be increasing their access to Internet through mobile phones, slower connections and less advanced hardware present other barriers. Slow-loading, small format websites mean that people access information slowly and in low-resolution format. It is also difficult to accomplish many tasks on mobile phones, such as updating resumes. Additionally, though smart phones are on the rise in the US, just over a quarter (28%) of US mobile phone users have smart phones (Nielsen Company 2010). Anecdotally, several interviewees for this research observed that their constituents have very basic cell phones, or if anything, access Internet through feature phones, which are low-end mobile phones with slightly higher capabilities than basic mobile phones, often running applications based on Java Micro Edition (Java ME) or Binary Runtime Environment for Wireless (BREW). Several commented that they have observed community members using smart phones without data plans, but most commonly witness that community members frequently changing phone numbers when their minutes eexpire and they switch pre-paid phones.

For many low-income communities of color, the sum of these factors means that community members access a wide range of co-existing platforms, which range from radio and television, to basic mobile phones and more complex smart phones. With technology trends shifting on a month-to-month basis, community practitioners face the challenge of deciding where to focus their technology efforts, since a silver bullet approach will not work.

Why New Media?
Given the uncertainties of technology access in low-income communities of color, it is worthwhile to address why it is important to harness new media technologies in the first place. These technologies offer important advantages for residents who are often excluded from public processes.

With reach beyond the immediate neighborhood, they allow for organized residents to cheaply and easily communicate their concerns to a wider

audience that they can galvanize for media attention, political support and financial contributions. In a context where community leaders and community-based nonprofit staff have very limited time, new technologies can free up time for staff to reach more people.

Supporting case studies (Chapter Three) illustrate that face-to-face contact is indispensable to the success of new media tools. Therefore, perhaps even more useful than reaching new audiences, these channels have the potential to reinforce initial relationships.

Finally, perhaps the most compelling draw is that the rules of communication on these platforms are still in formation. Relative to other broadcast media such as television and radio, the norms of interactive communication media still represent uncharted territory. Rather than playing a passive role, the audience actively comments, shares, remixes and repurposes content. This gives way to great potential for people to actively engage with each other.

At its core, excitement over new media tools generates from the potential for communities at the margins to increase their say in public debate. From a leadership development perspective, many groups hope that greater technology savvy among low-income communities will help to build stronger, more skillful leaders. As simultaneously creative, social and public, new media offers new ways to create common ground through information and stories. This is an opportunity that multiple sectors cannot afford to let pass by, as these few years are critical for different actors to shape how low-income communities will access and influence the new media landscape.

The Role of Community-Based Organizations
Community-based organizations (CBOs) are one set of institutions that play a central role in increasing civic participation in low-income communities of color and are therefore the focus of this research. Whether or not they are fully aware of this role, community-based organizations are at the forefront of bridging the "digital divide." In their report on technology in community-based organizations, the Progressive Technology Project underlined the fact

that "community-led organizations play a critical role in providing technological training, access and equipment to marginalized communities that effectively move people from digital exclusion to inclusion" (Roessler 2004). Though these organizations often have low staff capacity and financial support for technology, they have been quite successful in helping marginalized communities overcome barriers to technology access, most likely because they work so closely with these groups.

This paper recognizes that significant drawbacks exist to relying solely on nonprofit organizations to increase engagement in low-income communities of color, particularly given that their funding streams are often unreliable and targeted toward very specific programmatic uses. However, given that these groups have strong relationships with low-income residents of color, they are well positioned to use technology to support public participation. Though this research focuses primarily on nonprofit organizations, other sectors such as government, university or technology development can learn from the hurdles that community-based organizations must overcome to adopt new technologies.

Many grassroots community-based organizations are constantly innovating techniques to increase the engagement of their constituents, under the premise that the most impacted should be leading the struggle for equitable policies. However, these groups have tenuous relationships to new technologies, particularly since they see strong differences in the way that low-income communities use technology as compared to the mainstream. With the need to increase mainstream awareness of their issues, many groups are slowly starting to adopt new media tools, particularly to spread videos that highlight their issues and to encourage people to take a specific action such donating funds or signing a petition. However, community-based organizations are still exploring how to use technology to support the reflective and transformational work that they do to develop strong community leaders. CBO staff often lack the time and capacity to focus on incorporating this into their work, and there are typically few staff members

who have the technical knowledge to initiate these responsibilities. Chapter Three lessons from a handful of innovative groups set the context for this paper.

Methodology

Given the participatory nature of new media, I selected an unconventional methodology that is equally as interactive. I worked with the North End Organizing Network (NEON) as my client and primary case, guiding them through a pilot process to test mobile technology for their upcoming Question Campaign. This qualitative approach uncovers broad themes that address my central research question: *How can new media tools support community-based organizations to increase civic engagement in low-income communities of color?*

Terminology

I use the term "new media" to describe communication technologies that facilitate interactivity and participation through Internet, mobile or other two-way communication devices. Television, print and radio typically fall under the definition of "traditional media," though the line quickly blurs with video sharing sites such as YouTube that allow users to comment on decades old content and highly interactive radio shows that function allow listeners to call in to buy and sell used furniture. In some places I use "new media" interchangeably with the term "social media," though the subtle difference is that "social media" evokes the ability to share content with networks of friends and acquaintances. In reality there isn't one term that is adequate, with "new" connoting a novelty to communications channels that have existed for close to two decades, and "social media" evoking social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter rather than mobile technology.

By "civic engagement," I refer to both political and non-political actions that individuals or groups take to address issues affecting their neighborhoods, cities or regions. In the context of this thesis, I emphasize civic engagement efforts that prioritize developing the leadership of the most impacted residents. My unit of level for this research is community-based

organizations, since these groups are well positioned to develop strong relationships on the ground with community members. The civic engagement approaches of the community-based organizations that I examined include policy advocacy, mobilization, organizing, and community action research. I focused less on organizations that had service delivery as their main programming, although a number of supporting case organizations performed both service delivery and civic engagement functions.

Research Design

For analytical support, I adapted the *N of One Plus Some* methodology from Vinit Mukhija's article published in 2010 in the *Journal of Planning Education and Research* (Mukhija 2010). Mukhija provides a case study framework that uses themes from multiple supporting cases to assist in interpreting the primary case. While researchers typically call upon academic literature to unravel the complexities of one case, Mukija suggests that in order to analyze cases where "the literature might be less developed or uncritical for new and unprecedented cases… researchers may find the *N of One Plus Some* approach particularly helpful" (Mukhija 2010). Because new media and civic engagement is an emerging area of scholarship, I found this approach to be particularly useful for interpreting my case.

I scanned the field using a snowball method to find cases that matched my particular criteria, as projects within community-based organizations whose primary mission was civic engagement. See Chapter Three for detailed criteria.

The cases I examine include:

1. Oil Spill Crisis Map, Louisiana Bucket Brigade, New Orleans, Louisiana
2. Mobile Voices/Voces Móviles, Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA), Los Angeles, California
3. Grassroots mobilizations, Voices Of Community Activists and Leaders (VOCAL), New York City, New York
4. DREAM Act Movement, DREAM Team Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California
5. The War on Immigrants Report, Families for Freedom, New York City, New York

I then conducted semi-structured interviews with program directors to understand how they used a particular technology or combination of technologies to meet their goals. In particular, I was interested in understanding their audiences, time and capacity requirements, challenges and lessons learned.

The bulk of my research focused the North End Organizing Network's (NEON) pilot of a call-in/SMS system. In working closely with NEON as my client, guiding the organization through a hands-on technology pilot process, my data collection was ethnographic in nature, including fieldwork, testing groups with residents, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews. It was critically important to include this hands-on component in my research because it would have otherwise been difficult for the organization to conceptualize the different technology possibilities without trying them out. Through this process I gathered information about NEON's challenges and opportunities of using the mobile functionalities of calling in and texting with particular constituencies. This pilot process lasted five months and included three phases of design and user testing: (1) Strategizing and Design, (2) Testing sessions with residents, and (3) Pilot Evaluation.

We conducted testing sessions of the tool with a wide range of demographic groups in a focus group setting to get a sense of how it would work with NEON's varied constituents:

1. Nonprofit partners: North End Campus Coalition members and Gandara (Drug abuse services) staff
2. Youth: Youth on spring break at a youth summit
3. Adults: Students in a GED class and NEON's core group of resident leaders
4. Seniors: Seniors at Riverview senior center and housing complex

In the first and third phases of the pilot, I conducted focus group discussions with NEON staff to share lessons learned from the case study, strategize the goals and platforms for the pilot, and debrief major themes from the testing sessions.

Limitations and Strengths

There are some limitations to this approach. It is difficult to determine attribution of technology on civic engagement within this single case, particularly since we did not use a control group. Instead, the findings qualitatively describe the challenges and successes of NEON's adoption of technology as it civically engages residents in Springfield.

In scope, this thesis focuses domestically on organizations that are currently working on civic engagement in a particular low-income community of color. I do not focus directly on informal technology use, of which there are several remarkable examples, such as immigrant peer networks sharing information about potential police raids. I also do not examine international examples (though many developing countries have embraced mobile technologies more than in the US) or the role of media and technology-focused intermediaries. These are both compelling areas for future research.

The pilot project took place in February of 2011, prior to the launch of the Campaign in April 2011. There is a rich data to collect through the use of the tool through the entire campaign, which I will not fully capture in this

study. I inserted some of this data as I accessed it in later stages of the research, but at end date of this study, the Campaign was still in progress.

However, the strength of this methodological approach was that I was able to garner a nuanced qualitative understanding of NEON's challenges and successes with mobile technology through developing a sustained relationship with the organization. Through testing a tangible tool that directly addressed an organizational need, I could move beyond abstraction and obtain a more realistic understanding of how the organization might use new technology to reach more community members. Analysis from supporting case studies across the country also added to this analysis, offering emerging new media strategies. Taken together, these pieces provide some framing and inspiration for impacted residents to increase their communication presence.

Thesis structure

Since the topic of new media is an emerging area of academic interest, I begin this study with a snapshot of the field. Chapter two provides an overview of the literature on new media and civic engagement.

Chapter three presents major themes from five supporting case studies, offering themes for success from the landscape of new media projects in community-based organizations. These case studies serve as analytical support for examining NEON's pilot project.

I then examine my primary case, NEON, in Chapter four. This chapter describes context for the Question Campaign in Springfield and then analyzes data from the pilot project. The chapter ends with recommendations for NEON moving forward.

Chapter five summarizes my findings and offers some concluding implications of these results for multiple sectors: technology developers, universities, community-based organizations, and governments. I conclude with recommendations and present directions for future research.

Chapter Two:
New Media and Civic Engagement Literature

"[It] is essential… to emphasize the role of technology in the process of social transformation, particularly… communication technology, which relates to the heart of the specificity of the human species: conscious, meaningful communication."

Manuel Castells (Castells 2009, 6)

Literature on new media and civic engagement focuses primarily on those who are currently very active online. This doesn't address low-income communities of color, whose technology access looks very different than mainstream users, with high mobile phone and social media usage. Overall, existing literature falls into two areas: informal engagement and formal engagement. Formal engagement includes the governmental and nonprofit sectors. This chapter breaks down this scholarship, detailing both areas of literature, and then discussing existing literature that emphasizes how low-income communities of color are using these tools to build leadership. See Figure 4 for a visual depiction of existing literature.

Figure 4: Literature on New Media and Civic Engagement

```
Civic Engagement &          People already          Informal
New Media                   highly active online    Subcultures
                            (Who is this?)
                                                    Government

                                                    Nonprofit

                            Low-income              Informal
                            communities of          Subcultures (Youth    ?
                            color                   focus)

                                                    Government            ?

                                                    Nonprofit             ?
                                                    (Emerging area)
```
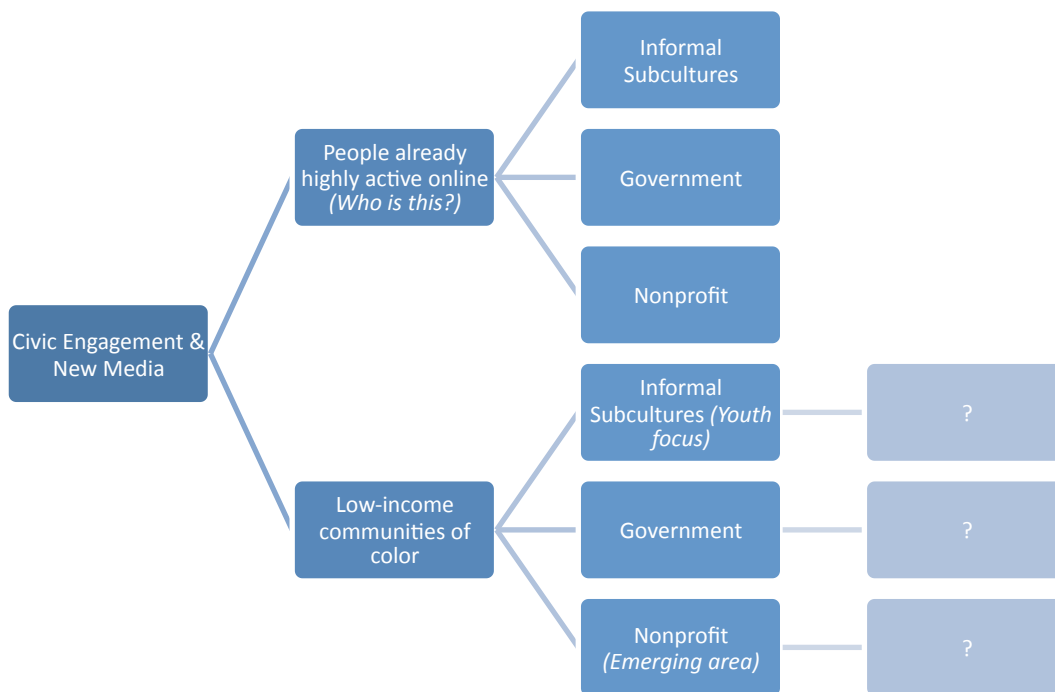
General New Media Literature

Informal Civic Engagement
In the informal realm, writers discuss the cultures and subcultures that form around new media tools, describing their impact on civic engagement. Henry Jenkins was the first to introduce the concept of "transmedia," which

emphasizes that as technology develops, rather than replacing existing tools, multiple platforms will coexist and multiply (Jenkins 2006). "Transmedia storytelling" takes advantage of these multiple platforms, telling a story "across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (Jenkins 2006, 96). Regarding civic engagement, Jenkins emphasizes informal groupings of people who pool their knowledge for a specific purpose. Examples include "the fan community going on location to find more information about *Survivor* boots and the blogging community pooling its money to send independent reporters to Baghdad," (Jenkins 2006, 215) and independent individuals interpreting the 2004 election through humorous photomontage mash-ups of election controversies, which spread virally (Jenkins 2006, 206-238). He suggests that making politics into popular culture makes it more accessible to those who find political processes intimidating (Jenkins 2006, 223-224).

Clay Shirky asserts that as new technologies change the way the people organize themselves, this challenges the way that organizations work. As a result, this will transform each sector of society in ways that we have yet to imagine. He proposes that new forms of "post-managerial" organizations are forming that are characterized by "action by loosely structured groups, operating without managerial direction and outside the profit motive" (Shirky 2008, 47). Manuel Castells also sees new media's impact on organizations, but from a movement building perspective. He argues that in an "information age," horizontal, distributed organizations that take advantage of the network nature of mass communication are stronger and more adaptable than top-down organizations (Castells 2009). He writes that his "hypothesis for the historical superiority of vertical-hierarchical organizations over networks is that the networked form of social organization had material limits to overcome… [Beyond] a certain threshold of size, complexity and volume of exchange, they become less efficient than vertically organized command and control structure, *under the conditions of pre-electronic communication*

technology" (Castells 2009, 5). Thus increasing access to advanced technologies allows horizontal organizations to move to scale.

Formal Civic Engagement

Within the formal realm, the literature describes how governmental and nonprofit sectors incorporate new media tools to strengthen the democratic process.

Governmental Sector

Several authors discuss the impacts that social media tools will have on open governance. Beth Noveck introduces "wiki-governance," which posits that "legitimate democracy and effective governance in the twenty-first century require collaboration" (Noveck 2009). An example is the Peer-to-Patent project, which opened the formerly convoluted patenting process to citizen expertise and resulted in more effective outcomes. With knowledge distributed across the country and the globe, online platforms allow public officials to tap into this knowledge and "improve outcomes by soliciting expertise (in which expertise is defined broadly to include both scientific knowledge and popular experience) from self-selected peers working together in groups in open networks" (Noveck 2009).

In urban planning, Donald Schön, Bish Sanyal and William Mitchell compile scholarly discussions about technology following an MIT colloquium called "Advanced Information Technology, Low-Income Communities and the City" (Schön, Sanyal, and Mitchell 1999). The book offers various perspectives on how cities can use technology to address social, political and economic challenges in low-income communities. Lawrence Susskind discusses how since the 1980s, "teledemocracy," or interactive processes using cable television and the Internet have enhanced democratic processes by diffusing information and increasing direct access to decision-makers (Susskind and Zion 2002, 7-11).

New media tools are also increasing public participation in electoral campaigns. Obama's successful 2008 campaign has spurred increased

scholarship on using new media to win elections. David Plouffe, Obama's campaign manager describes how the Obama Campaign included a social media team whose director reported directly to the Campaign Manager. The Campaign recognized the utmost importance of new media to activate new and younger voters (Plouffe 2009). Others detail the nuts and bolts of the Obama Campaign's new media implementation strategy, from technical innovation to communication norms for each tool (Harfoush 2009).

However, simply increasing online platforms does not imply increased engagement from marginalized communities. PhD student Rob Goodspeed examines a planning process in the city of Austin, Texas and encounters the dilemma that increasing platforms "allow highly motivated citizens to more easily participate, giving them a disproportionately loud voice in the process." The tools cannot do the work on their own, but instead require a deeper engagement strategy.

Nonprofit Sector
The nonprofit sector is also grappling with integrating new media technology into their organizations, particularly its effects on organizational culture. Beth Kanter's describes how social media tools help nonprofits become "networked nonprofits," which are "simple and transparent organizations… that are easy for outsiders to get in and insiders to get out" (Kanter, Fine, and Zuckerberg 2010) She provides a framework for organizations to incorporate social media tools into their work "to build relationships that spread their work throughout the network" (Kanter, Fine, and Zuckerberg 2010). Danielle Martin's reflective master's thesis describes the balancing act that a nonprofit media consultant confronts to make a long-term impact on organizational culture (Martin 2010). With the rising prominence of social networking, many nonprofits are interested in how to adopt these tools for their own work, particularly to garner fundraising and mass media attention.

New Media in Low-Income Communities of Color
However, there is little discussion in the literature of opportunities for low-income communities of color to use new media technologies for civic

engagement in either informal or formal channels. Aside from literature on the "digital divide" or technology access more generally, this continues to be a gap in scholarship.

Informal Civic Engagement

When discussing low-income communities of color in informal arenas, the focus tends to be on youth, who more readily use both online and mobile tools. Writers like danah boyd (boyd 2007), Ito (Itō, Baumer, and Bittanti 2009) and others examine how youth, particularly those who feel excluded from participation in broader civic outlets, take ownership over social media arenas. In this context, "popular culture and online communication provide a window onto examining youth practice in contexts where young people feel ownership over the social and cultural agenda" (Itō, Baumer, and Bittanti 2009, 9). In her master's thesis, Linda Kim (Kim 2004) discusses the extent to which media technology skills translate into community mobilization in youth programs.

Formal Civic Engagement

Regarding organizing and leadership development, sources are few. The Progressive Technology Project's (PTP) 2004 report examines the challenges and opportunities for community-led organizations of adopting new technologies. PTP discusses how community-based organizations often adopt technology incrementally, using simple (rather than showy) technology to achieve a greater scope and scale. When engaging constituents, organizations "engage in a delicate balancing act when using technology— their external use must be relatively sophisticated, while internally they must be careful technology does not create barriers to constituent participation." (Roessler 2004, 38) In an interview update with report author Christina Roessler, she described how the landscape has dramatically changed since this report, particularly with younger incoming staff taking the helm. "New media has changed the terrain largely because there are now low-cost, relatively easy tools to reach a much wider audience… [which] has hugely expanded the reach of organizations" (Christina Roessler, Interview, Mar

2011). Still, many similar challenges have persisted for organizations over the years, as groups still must determine how to use technologies in targeted ways and integrate them with offline approaches so that these two approaches reinforce and build on one another.

Sasha Constanza-Chock's dissertation provides a valuable examination of transmedia mobilization in the immigrant rights movement (Costanza-Chock 2010). Through his dissertation and a joint article, he discusses his participation on the Mobile Voices/Voces Móviles platform (Bar et al. 2009), which allows daylaborers to blog from their cell phones. He describes "transmedia mobilization" as a way to "[engage] both skilled media makers and the social base of the movement in the production and circulation of compelling movement narratives and media texts across all platforms and channels…allowing those involved with the movement to contribute simple elements like photos, texts, or short video clips that are later aggregated, remixed, combined, and circulated more broadly"(Costanza-Chock 2010, 255). Involvement an ownership by the most impacted is core to this work, "providing discrete opportunities for participants and supporters to produce and circulate movement frames and narratives" and also contributing to the "broader visibility of the movement to non-participants through distribution across multiple platforms" (Costanza-Chock 2010, 255).

Conclusion
The current literature on new media tends to address civic engagement through informal and formal channels. However, literature on civic engagement in low-income communities of color is still greatly lacking. This thesis hopes to contribute to this scholarship.

Chapter Three:
Current Landscape of New Media Projects

"Disenfranchised communities don't just want to be invited in. We don't just want a mic put in our hands. We want to own the mic and own the station. And we don't want a say in setting the rules, we want to call the game and play on our own court."

Deepa Fernandes, Radio Host, *Wakeup Call (NCMR 2007)*

Across the country, community-based organizations (CBOs) represent the cutting edge of civic engagement work with low-income communities of color, developing strong and active leaders who are engaging the issues in their neighborhoods head on. Among them, groups using new media tools are increasing, but still remain a minority. Despite growing excitement about these tools' possibilities, there is still some hesitance. This chapter provides a snapshot of the current landscape of projects that are forging this intersection, highlighting five community-based organizations that are pioneering this work. I first describe some of the challenges of adopting new media in grassroots CBOs and highlight a range of potential uses for technology for civic engagement in community-based organizations. I then detail key lessons learned from five cases from New York, New Orleans and Los Angeles and analyze shared challenges and opportunities.

This description is purposely impressionistic, intended to set a broad context for my central case, North End Organizing Network (NEON). Using my network as a starting point, I used a snowball sampling method to identify community-based organizations using new media tools for civic engagement. From there, I used a number of criteria to select key supporting cases for interviews. A combination of interviews with organization staff and my professional experience form the basis of the findings in this section. Themes from these supporting cases will provide an analytical framework for NEON's mobile technology pilot for the Question Campaign.

Challenges to Adopting New Media Tools

Why are so few civic organizations adopting new media tools? There are a number of internal and external reasons why these groups are often reluctant. Internally, CBO staff often do not see the immediate relevance of technology for their members given that many community members do not have the same technology access as the mainstream. Relationship building is central to deep civic engagement work, as many community members are venturing into the realm of formal public engagement for the first time. Given that Internet access has historically been low in low-income communities of

color, many in these groups see face-to-face activities as top priority and new media tools as a secondary concern.

Additionally, many CBOs lack the capacity and resources to adopt new technology. With limited funding and time, CBO staff must constantly make tradeoffs over their priorities. In these tradeoffs, more pressing concerns, such as relationship building, take priority over technology. In a typical grassroots CBO without tech savvy, adopting complicated technology does not have an obvious benefit to their work. In its 2004 report, the Progressive Technology Project observed that, "the integration of technology and organizing is primarily a story of incremental change…While technology used strategically can be transformative to an organization, flashy examples of success are limited" (Roessler 2004, 3).

Another barrier to grassroots CBOs adopting new media technology is a disconnect between nonprofit civic engagement and the world of technology development. Technology developers don't often have community-based organizations in mind as they are building new tools. Even among developers who aspire to create tools to benefit the public good, many do so without input from grassroots organizations. It is rare to find tools constructed with the particular needs of grassroots community-based organizations in mind. As a result, many new media tools lack functionalities that grassroots organizations need, are very expensive or difficult to set up, or require devices that are inaccessible to low-income communities of color.

Many community-based organizations with a strong focus on technology tend to be service delivery organizations rather than civic engagement organizations. Their programs generally focus on youth, since as "digital natives," youth often open-mindedly experiment with new technologies. A typical service-based youth program consists of a creative activity linked to technology, such as digital storytelling or video game design. Many of these programs have a leadership development aspect; however, it is less common for the new media components of a project to support civic engagement

efforts such as mobilization or policy advocacy.

Types of New Media Strategies for Civic Engagement

Despite these challenges, there are a number of pioneering community-based groups using technology for deep civic engagement. These cases offer a snapshot of the possibilities for using new media technology to deepen leadership development and amplify the voices of marginalized community members.

Based on a broad scan of the field, many of the new media strategies that support this work fall into the following categories (Figure 5):

- Citizen Journalism
- Reflection/Community building
- Data Collection
- Mobilization
- Fundraising
- Strategic Planning
- Future Possibilities

What follows are brief descriptions of these strategies.

Citizen Journalism

In order to attract mass media attention to their particular issue, some organizations are using a variety of platforms to broadcast news, community member opinion pieces and personal stories. In the absence of mainstream news coverage, the Internet provides a relatively open space where groups can build their own alternative information channels. Some examples include organizations using blogging to feature residents' stories, creating and spreading video accounts of stories, and creating community radio shows. The next section describes Families for Freedom and the Institute for Popular Education of Southern California (IDEPSCA) as two examples of this.

Reflection/Community building

New media tools paired with community-building activities can help people to connect their personal stories to broader civic themes and strengthen relationships. Digital storytelling is one example, as video classes that encourage community members to reflect on their own stories. Organizations are also using digital tools to document and enhance projects that use other art forms such as theater, music, dance, and photography.

These projects provide a creative outlet for residents, and help them to understand commonalities between their stories. Similarly, some groups are designing video games to engage youth in actively addressing an issue in their community through creating and playing games. In the case studies that follow the Institute for Popular Education of Southern California (IDEPSCA) not only uses citizen journalism, but also reflection/community building as overlapping strategies.

Data Collection

For some groups, new media tools help community members become more involved in collecting data for participatory action research projects, using mobile phones, mapping and GPS devices. Given high cell phone availability, some research projects take advantage of mobile phone features for this work. One platform currently in development will allow tenants to use their cell phones to photograph housing code violations and send them to a centralized system that uses the photos' GPS coordinates to overlay these images on an online map. Other groups are using simple forms on mobile phones to submit data to a centralized database. Another example in development will allow airport travelers to submit racial profiling incidents by mobile phone. These projects all embrace a "co-production model of expertise," allowing community members an accessible way to contribute local knowledge to technical studies (Corburn 2005, 8). Louisiana Bucket Brigade, detailed in the next section, illustrates this strategy.

Mobilization

Organizers are also using new media tools to mobilize a large number of community members for a specific civic action, such as signing a petition, attending a meeting or turning out to a rally. Where community members have consistent access to the Internet, some groups are using the range of social media networking, microblogging, and video sharing tools like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and UStream to help them distribute information about a particular event, facilitate conversations, and share compelling short stories on the issue. A number of nonprofit listserv and

web mobilization services like Democracy in Action or Salsa provide options that allow organizations to carefully track the responses to their listserv emails, documenting the number of opened emails, clicks, and forwards. Where computers are not present, a number of group shave begun to use mobile phones for mass texting, sharing messages in SMS (text message) groups, and creating SMS phone trees (similar to traditional phone tress, but using text messaging). In some cases, groups have sophisticated databases that track involvement of community members and enable organizers to contact targeted groups through emailing, text messaging and calling. Predictive dialing systems linked to these database support electoral campaigns. The next section describes the experiences of VOCAL and DREAM Team Los Angeles, which both use new media tools for mobilization.

Fundraising

Social networking and mobile technology enable organizations to raise money through their networks. Some groups are using social networking applications such as Facebook causes or Facebook games in order to attract donations through gameplay. Video games such as Second Life also include options for donations. Through nonprofit listserv services, organizations track reader behavior and outreach accordingly. Though the price point is rather steep, some large nonprofits collect donations to a mobile shortcode. Through a partnership with mobile phone carriers, individuals text a key word like "donate" to a fixed five or six-digit number, and they automatically receive a charge to their phone bill. The case study descriptions that follow do not describe this strategy in depth; however, this phenomenon is widespread in nonprofits. DREAM Team Los Angeles is one of many groups that organize through fundraising.

Strategic Planning
When seeking community input to create a common vision or project strategy, new media tools allow groups to quickly reach a wide range of people. Beyond online surveys, polls and blog comments, some groups are

using a wide range of creative tactics to gain input, some of which are mixed with advocacy. One group in Sacramento promoted community members to text their healthcare concerns to a central number, which they projected onto a large LCD billboard outside of Governor Swartzeneggar's office. This allowed them to collect healthcare concerns for their own work, as well as push the Governor to pass key legislation. NEON's Question Campaign falls into this category, and Chapter 4 will provide an in-depth account of its technology use for this strategy.

Future Possibilities
With the landscape of technology constantly shifting, these broad categories are just a springboard for new ideas. New technologies are constantly emerging, governments are opening new possibilities for citizen input and community-based organizations are designing new strategies to increase neighborhood visibility. These factors have the potential to change civic engagement in ways that we have yet to uncover.

Supporting Cases
To analyze the complex layers of new media projects, I examined five supporting case studies, which span a number of the aforementioned categories:

1. Oil Spill Crisis Map, Louisiana Bucket Brigade, New Orleans, Louisiana
   Strategy: Data Collection
2. Mobile Voices/Voces Móviles, Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA), Los Angeles, California
   Strategy: Citizen Journalism, Reflection/Community Building
3. Grassroots Organizing Campaigns, Voices of Community Activists and Leaders (VOCAL), New York City, New York
   Strategy: Mobilization
4. DREAM Act Movement, DREAM Team Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA
   Strategy: Mobilization

5. The War on Immigrants Report, Families for Freedom, New York City, New York

    Strategy: Citizen Journalism

In order to ensure that the cases were typical of grassroots community-based organizations with a focus on civic engagement, I selected these case studies based on the following criteria:

- They work closely with a particular low-income community of color and engage in some kind of civic engagement work, and are accountable to a base of impacted community members.
- They originate or are currently housed within a community-based organization that has civic engagement rather than media or technology as its principal focus.
- They are based within the United States, and have some kind of localized, face-to-face component. In other words, they do not exist as a purely online community.
- Their technology use supports the civic engagement that they do and employs technologies that are accessible to low-income communities of color.

Oil Spill Crisis Map, Louisiana Bucket Brigade
New Orleans, Louisiana

Strategy: Data Collection

When Shannon Dosemagen, Oil Spill Response Coordinator for the Louisiana Bucket Brigade, heard news of the BP Oil Spill, her work switched gears completely. She and other staff had been working with Professor Nathan Morrow's class at Tulane University to build a chemical accidents map for Louisiana Bucket Brigade, an environmental health and justice organization. The original intent was to use the map for Gulf Coast residents living near oil refineries and chemical plants to map health and environmental effects that they experienced after chemical accidents. Instead, when the BP Oil Spill occurred, this map became the Oil Spill Crisis Map. Because they had already completed most of the planning earlier in the year, she and one other Tulane student quickly launched the map after working on it from a Thursday to a Friday evening.

The Oil Spill Crisis Map was a web-based map, built on the Ushahidi platform, open source, web-based software originally developed in Kenya to collect information post-election violence. Through the map, citizens submitted health, economic, and environmental reports through a variety of platforms, including texting, emailing, Twitter, iPhone/Android application, or web form. For a period of six months, the Bucket Brigade had a team of volunteers who monitored incoming posts in three-hour shifts from 8:00 AM to 11:00 PM. With a total of five full time staff at the Bucket Brigade, Dosemagen became the one full-time staff dedicated to the project, with other staff stepping in on an as-needed basis.

The original intention was for government agencies to adopt the map as a response tool. With little consolidated reporting of health and environmental impacts of the spill, the Bucket Brigade hoped it would serve as a central resource. The Bucket Brigade also envisioned citizens of the Gulf Coast sharing and finding information on the site. They hoped that the most impacted citizens would make their concerns public.

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Screenshot of Louisiana Bucket Brigade's Oil Spill Crisis Map
Source: Louisiana Bucket Brigade (2010)

However, as the crisis unfolded and project evolved, a different set of audiences emerged. It became clear that the government was relying on BP for oil spill information and cleanup, rather than on governmental or non-governmental agencies. Without an incentive to spread information about the heath and environmental crises, government agencies did not incorporate Crisis Map into its relief work. Additionally, it was quite challenging for the Bucket Brigade to partner with other community groups who had deep ties with the most impacted communities during the crisis. The Bucket Brigade has long trained many community-based organizations in the region to collect and analyze air samples and therefore has strong relationships with many grassroots organizations in the area. However, after the spill, many of these organizations were focused on working with their own communities to address the immediate crisis and were unable to make the time to partner with the Bucket Brigade on its mapping project. Instead, the media quickly picked up on the crisis map, and word of its development spread quickly, with articles in the Huffington Post, New York Times and BBC. This drew national attention to the project and the effects of the oil spill. Additionally, a handful of government officials, including staff from the Environmental

Protection Agency (EPA), reported that they checked the site every morning for updates.

Key Lessons

1. **Outreach and education was far more difficult than the technical aspects of setting up the tool.** The in-person outreach and education helps residents understand how the tool is relevant to their lives and helps them to adopt it. This outreach was difficult to implement during the crisis, and should be part of disaster preparedness training, rather than launching during the crisis.

2. **Crisis mapping was very time-intensive.** Volunteer manpower was key to their success. Larger organizations might be able to more easily execute intensive around-the-clock monitoring.

3. **Technical expertise is helpful to save money.** Because of staff knowledge, Louisiana Bucket Brigade used the free Google Voice service instead of paying money to receive text messages through Frontline SMS.

4. **Using mainstream media to promote the issue and tool is key.** The tool had a farther reach because of press coverage, and ended up circulating among more users that they had originally expected.

Mobile Voices Project, Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA)
Los Angeles, California

Strategy: Citizen Journalism, Reflection/Community Building

Staff of the Institute for Popular Education of Southern California (IDEPSCA) discovered that when searching "daylaborer" online, the first site to appear was a hate site. The vigilante group, the Minutemen, created this site by yelling epithets while driving by daylaborer sites, snapping photos, and then posting these on its site. Program Co-founder, Amanda Garces, says, "I was following the minutemen online… and looking at the technology they had. The grassroots orgs I was working with did not use available

technology" (Amanda Garces, Interview, Nov 2010). This prompted IDEPSCA to initiate the Mobile Voices (Voces Móviles or VozMob) project.

Madelou, active Mobile Voices leader, with a camera.
Source: Francine Orr, Los Angeles Times/MCT (2010)

Collaborating with students from the University of Southern California (USC) to survey its worker centers, IDEPSCA discovered that the vast majority of its constituents did not have access to computers and Internet, but that 78% owned very basic mobile phones (Bar et al. 2009). From this information, IDEPSCA decided to integrate a mobile-based communications project with the worker-led Popular Communications Team, which already produced a hardcopy newspaper, *La Jornada*. The Popular Communications team began to meet weekly to plan the Mobile Voices project. They decided that the main goal project would be to empower low-wage workers to share their stories while simultaneously narrowing the digital divide within the community.

The project's primary target audience was the workers themselves. A two-year process led the Mobile Voices team to create a mobile blogging platform using Drupal (an open source programming language) that allows workers to submit voicemail and multimedia text messages to a central website

(vozmob.net). In conjunction with Popular Communications team leaders, Sasha Constanza-Chock, a long-time media activist, facilitated a participatory process to design the tool. Workers took the lead to decide the project goals as well as the site design and functionalities.

As a result, workers have become citizen journalists, reporting on different aspects of their lives, from commuting to work to participating in demonstrations. The group of staff, workers, and students meet every Tuesday, using a popular education format, where all members share and analyze what they have written, and plan future directions for the project. More recently, the Mobile Voices project has begun to direct part of its work toward an audience of allies who are interested in adopting this platform. Envisioning the VozMob platform as a space for low-income communities of color to share their stories, IDEPSCA has begun to collaborate with community-based organizations to start up new instances of VozMob. Their future target audience is the general public, though currently they have most actively engaged their base.

The outcome is evident in the stories of participants. Madelou, a household worker who previously did not own a cell phone, is now one of the project's most active bloggers, interviewing people that she meets during her bus rides to work. Others, such as Crisipin dedicate less time to the technology but continue to take an active role in weekly meetings, giving input to the design and debriefing the stories that the group creates on a weekly basis.

Key Lessons:

1. **The workers are the source of this project's success**. VozMob had strong community leaders whose voices make the content of the tool interesting and engaging. Specifically, it was important to begin with people who already had a commitment to the organization. Designing and testing the tool is a difficult and long process, so workers had to believe strongly in the project's end goal to commit to the project over the long haul.

2. **This tool must be connected to all of the work that the organization does.** By integrating VozMob into leadership development and other activities, all staff takes ownership and helps to keep the project going.

3. **Rather than prescribe technology, it is important to involve community members in the design process.** By having community members play a central role in these decisions, they take ownership of it and this makes the project more sustainable in the long run.

4. **Technical expertise is important—to design the tool, but even more importantly, to train community members how to use the tool.** Community members have a wide range of tech understanding and interest in this kind of journalism. It is important to have the capacity to outreach to workers to spark interest and introduce technical skills.

5. **Dedicated staff time is key, particularly in the beginning phases.** These projects require heavy coordination at the front end to increase participation.

Grassroots Organizing Campaigns, Voices Of Community Activists and Leaders (VOCAL)
New York, NY

Strategy: Mobilization

VOCAL, formerly known as New York City AIDS Housing Network, is a statewide grassroots membership organization building power among low-income people who are living with and affected by HIV/AIDS drug use and incarceration in order to create healthy and just communities. It is working on a number of simultaneous campaigns, the most recent of which is working to extend the "millionaire's tax," in response to extreme inequality in New York and the fact that schoolteachers are currently paying the same tax rate as Wall Street bankers.

VOCAL member on camera
Source: Sean Barry (2011)

Within the past few years, VOCAL has taken a leap to experiment more and more with a wide range of media tools to supplement its organizing work. Sean Barry, Director of VOCAL, explained the reasoning, "Our members don't have the power of organized money. We don't have a lobbyist. We're not seen as key stakeholders in the community. Our members are often stigmatized. So media is a major tool for us to amplify our message and put pressure on targets and insert our issues in political debates… [Also,] we want to scale up and the traditional forms of organizing are inherently limited by the amount of staff time or volunteer staff time you can put into it. I think part of the allure of using new technologies for organizing is that you can reach a lot more people all at once" (Sean Barry, Interview, Mar 2011). In the context of shifting technology access, VOCAL strategically complements its traditional organizing work with new technologies to build power and advance their campaigns.

VOCAL directs its use of new media tools toward its two major audience groups: (1) internal audiences, including membership leaders and general

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membership, and (2) external audiences, focusing on mainstream press outlets and Campaign targets. In terms of internal audiences, VOCAL has seen a recent shift in technology access among its members and has started to use email and text messaging to contact its members and mobilize people for specific actions. All of VOCAL's members are very low-income, receiving public assistance, federal disability income, or no income at all. However, an increasing number of members have specified email as their preferred method of contact, particularly since some cell phone plans offer limited calling minutes. Anecdotally, some places they access Internet include public libraries and social service center computer labs.

In the face of the dual challenges of constantly shifting technology terrain as well as the need to scale up its efforts, VOCAL has responded by using multiple methods of contact as well as systematically tracking the impact of its approaches to replicate what works. With the technical assistance of Progressive Technology Project, VOCAL adopted a high level database (Powerbase) to meticulously track all of its contacts with members from phone calls to meeting turnout. They found this to be a priority in order to keep in contact with members who, with housing and financial instability, frequently change addresses and phone numbers. They also use it to measure the effectiveness of different methods of communication as well as understand where to focus training and leadership development staff time. Through the database, VOCAL performs multiple communication tasks, from mail merge to targeted emails, to text blasting and predictive dialing (used for mass calling during electoral campaigns).

In terms of external audiences, within the past couple of years, VOCAL has waded into mainstream social media tools, including Facebook and Twitter, as well as photo, video and document sharing tools such as Flickr, Vimeo and Scrib. The organization strongly believes in the importance of focusing these communication efforts toward mainstream media outlets and its Campaign targets rather than on progressive audiences that already share their same values. They use these channels to follow and make contact with

elected officials and their staff as well as journalists and bloggers. These methods also reinforce their traditional methods of contacting members, as they see increasing numbers of their members on platforms like Facebook.

Though this strategy is relatively new, VOCAL has reported overwhelmingly positive outcomes to these internal and external strategies. They have seen bloggers feature their stories, some even including videos that they shot. Additionally, they have witnessed members turn out to events and meetings based on just text messaging and emailing.

As Sean Barry observed, "I think we've been humbled by the technology shift. We're trying to bring an open mind to our approach. We don't want to fall for any technologies that we haven't evaluated and continue to monitor, but we also don't want to be stuck in this orthodoxy that phone calls are the only way to turn people out or the only way to stay in touch with people" (Sean Barry, Interview, Mar 2011). Their next aspiration with technology is to encourage community leaders play a participatory role, shooting video and photos that VOCAL can use in its press outreach.

Key Lessons

1. **Don't abandon what is currently working; instead, add new media tools to complement what is working well.** Rather than replacing pieces of its outreach strategy, VOCAL began to integrate emailing and text messaging into its existing work incrementally. The purpose of adopting these tools was to eventually reduce the number of the group's phone calls, and therefore allow them more time to contact more people.

2. **Track the way that you are contacting people and how they are responding in order to decide which tools work best.** VOCAL uses its database to monitor every contact with its constituents and every meeting attendee. In the face of shifting technological access, the organization has responded by strategically deciding where to invest its time and resources.

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3. **Use new media tools to strategically gain the attention of mainstream media or Campaign targets.** Rather than focus its new media tools internally, VOCAL directs its efforts to change the minds of key decision makers. As a result, it has seen blogs pick up its stories and politicians respond.

4. **Understand what platforms work for specific community.** Every neighborhood has distinct, nuanced ways that it communicates, and tools that work in one place may not translate to another. VOCAL observed that email works for a percentage of its own constituents and directed its efforts accordingly. Analyzing these patterns in each community can determine which methods to try.

DREAM Act Movement, DREAM Team Los Angeles
Los Angeles, California

Strategy: Mobilization

Every year more than 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high school in the United States (Passel 2003, 1). Thousands of these students enter college without financial aid, a driver's license or opportunities to work after graduation. Since 2001, different legislators have introduced varying versions of the DREAM Act to Congress in a variety of forms, which grant provisional citizenship to youth who arrived in the US before they were fifteen, have no criminal record and have finished two years of college or military service. As the movement to pass this legislation has grown, so has a network of undocumented students, who have begun to "come out" about their undocumented status to put a human face to the issue. This network of students across the country found each other online through the Dream Act Portal (an online forum), and use a wide variety of new media tools to support their efforts. While the DREAM Act Movement is national, DREAM Team Los Angeles is a regional organization that organizes undocumented students.

The "Dreamers," as they call themselves, have a transmedia, multi-platform emphasis and segment their audiences broadly into a number of groups:

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internal (fellow Dreamers), allies, Spanish-speaking community, and the general public. They are well versed in and employ a wide variety of new media tools including: Dream Act Portal (website), Google docs, Facebook, Twitter, live video streaming, and mass texting. However, they face the challenge of reaching multiple audiences of varying tech savvy, each of which access very different platforms. They know that the majority of their Spanish-speaking relatives and neighbors are not online, and that conversely, fellow students regularly use the Internet for social activities, but do not read the newspaper. To tackle the dual needs of these audiences, Dreamers couple both new and traditional media to reach all of their audiences. A Dreamer will write a press release to attract a journalist to write an article, and then later post the link of the published article to Facebook. One of the newer technologies that they have adopted is uStream, which allows them to create a live video stream of demonstrations and sit-ins.

Diana Martinez, an undocumented student, arrested at sit in.
Source: Mark Abramson, Washington Post (2010)

Leading with their own personal stories is one of the keys to their success in attracting media attention, and through their continuous contact with traditional journalists, they have now developed a reputation as a reliable

source for press on the topic. To increase their capacity, they realize the importance of dispersing technical knowledge and train as many students they can to tell their own stories and use the various forms of technology.

As a result of their persistence to increase public awareness about the DREAM Act, in 2010 the DREAM Act secured a historic vote in the House, passing 216 to 198, and made its way to the Senate twice. The DREAM Act fell four votes short of the threshold to advance to the Senate floor; however, Dreamers galvanized the immigrant youth movement, gaining national media attention and widespread support and even managing to acquire a number of unlikely Republican votes. Additionally, through their outreach, thousands of undocumented students have overcome their fear of revealing their status and found refuge in a strong supportive network of students and allies.

Key Lessons:

1. **It's important to use new and traditional media together.** Playing to the strengths of the distinct platforms that their fellow students and families use respectively, Dreamers meet their audiences where they are and help them access new information.

2. **Once people know how to tell their own stories, the tools are easy to learn.** Dreamers slowly learn to feel comfortable telling their personal migration stories publically, understanding how their stories fit into broader policy and political trends. This is a slow, challenging journey and ultimately provides the content for social media tools, which in comparison require just quick instruction and changing computer habits.

3. **It is important to distribute knowledge and technical expertise.** Dreamers nationwide serve as a source of immigration policy through their individual social network platforms. Training each person how to create posts and communicate with the press allows

anyone to respond to inquiries at any time, and makes the organizational structure flexible if one person is busier than the other.

4. **Having affected people at the forefront is major strength to attracting media attention.** Press outlets constantly search for living examples of the issues they cover, and by leading with their stories, Dreamers have become a reliable press source for a spectrum of immigration issues.

The War on Immigrants Report, Families for Freedom
New York City, New York

Strategy: Citizen Journalism

After September 11, 2001, the public attitude toward immigrants became hostile, and the government began to specifically target formerly incarcerated individuals for deportation, even though they had already served their time and were re-integrated into society. Families for Freedom (FFF) arose out of this period of anti-immigrant sentiment, in order to connect people with services and empower formerly incarcerated immigrants to civically engage in policy that directly affects them.

One of the co-founders of Families for Freedom realized how important radio was to the communities they organized. Detained immigrants and their families outside prison relied on radio for a reminder of culture, through music from their home country, as well as news. There was already a practice in neighborhoods in Brooklyn and the Bronx of residents starting up pirate radio stations. With basic equipment, it was not uncommon for some residents broadcast music from their homes to a small radius in their neighborhoods. With this practice of radio consumption as a basis, Families for Freedom decided to create their own radio program, led by members.

They secured a monthly slot on WBAI, the local Pacifica affiliate, partnered with the Muslim Consultative Council, and titled their program, "The War on Immigrants Report," an allusion to Amy Goodman's "War and Peace Report," which aired right before them. Their primary audience was their

base of formerly incarcerated immigrants and their families, with a hopeful audience of policymakers. Now with four years under its belt, FFF has the production of the show down to a routine. When members join, involvement in the radio show is one of a number of ways for people to get involved. Each member who is interested can take a ten-week course through New York's People's Production House, a nonprofit intermediary that trains community members on the basics of reporting, storytelling and audio editing. They now produce the show in a series of three meetings— two planning phone calls and one recording session.

Janis Rosheuvel and Aminata at an immigration reform speak-out.
Source: Mizue Aizeki (2008)

Though it is difficult to measure the listenership of the show, a number of members have found out about FFF by listening to the program while in prison. Additionally, FFF has occasionally used the radio show as a platform for advocacy by bringing key legislators on the show. Members can then personally challenge legislators' policy positions in a public forum. Due to the show's success, FFF is currently considering producing the show on a bi-weekly basis.

Key Lessons:

1. **Media training intermediaries can help organizations to provide expertise and save time.** Whereas FFF didn't have staff capacity or particular production skills, People's Production House provided journalism training for interested members.

2. **Media can be one of many forms of leadership development.** Community members can get involved with FFF in a variety of ways, from know your rights trainings and support networks to fundraisers and journalism. Participating in the radio show is just one of many entry points for leaders.

3. **Recognize the priority of communications work to further big picture goals.** It's easy to prioritize membership and fundraising work, and then push back the communications work. However, good media strategies can set the groundwork to pass legislation and attract funding.

4. **Experimentation pays off and eventually becomes part of the routine.** Sometimes groups are apprehensive about starting these projects because they worry about the time commitment. However, after initial start up effort groups begin to streamline their work.

Common Themes

These cases vary in their goals, type of tools, and scope. However, together they illustrate several themes to consider in future projects.

Embrace spirit of experimentation and flexibility

All of these groups stepped outside of the status quo in their organizations and looked for creative solutions to the deep problems that their communities were facing. They approached their inclusion of media technology with a playful and open-minded spirit. They came across countless challenges, from the program structure, to training and engaging residents; however, rather than take these challenges as indications that the project or technology was a failure, they were agile and shifted strategies to meet their goals. For IDEPSCA, the decision to develop the Drupal-based

Mobile Voices platform emerged after other less successful attempts. Students developed mobile applications that had advanced functionalities but worked on smart phones or were complicated for workers to operate. Rather than see this as evidence that technology was not useful at all, IDEPSCA included workers in the development process and created technology that was simpler and more relevant to their needs.

Play to the strengths of multiple co-existing platforms
Rather than relying on one tool or platform, these groups communicate across multiple platforms, using the strengths of each to their advantage. Each platform reaches a different audience segment and they tailor their messaging strategies accordingly. DREAM Act students use traditional media to reach their Spanish-speaking parents, and online platforms to push students to traditional sources. IDEPSCA sees the Mobile Voices project as one of multiple communications strategies, and simultaneously continues to publish the paper version of its newspaper, *La Jornada,* perform popular theater, produce short videos and create music. In this way, these groups reach their audiences where they are, then offer connections to new outlets.

Involve community members in decisions, design, and/or content production
Each project used technology in a way that advanced an existing community desire and need. Rather than showy technology, the key to the sustainability and adoption of technology is committed community members, who take ownership of the technology and then begin to promote the tools through their networks. Developing strong leaders, distributing technical expertise and incorporating community member feedback allowed more residents to adopt and spread the tools. Additionally, the horizontal organizational structure of these groups complements the structure of new media communication more generally, which tends to have a network structure.

Maintain balance of techies and non-techies
It may be self-evident that creating connections to people and resources with strong technical skills in technology in the project is important, to build web

platforms, edit video, and help the organization save money through a better understanding of the full range of technological options. However, non-techies are key to making the tools relevant and usable in the community. Some organization staff who are less tech-savvy might be reluctant to get involved because they lack expertise, but in fact, these staff may have a better sense of how to overcome the barriers to using the technology that community members have. Louisiana Bucket Brigade tapped into staff and student volunteer expertise to set up a complex system to map oil spill reports in a matter of days. However, without assistance from other connected groups, they found it much more challenging to encourage the most impacted community residents to submit reports.

Appoint "tech visionary" to catalyze technology adoption
At least one staff member in each case embraced a role to forge the organization's use of new media tools. With a multilayered understanding of the organization and the community, these "tech visionaries," as the Progressive Technology Project terms them, build bridges between outside multimedia consultants and the organization. These staff members dedicate work time to the project, generate excitement, and make sure to distribute expertise throughout the organization. In turn, staff members of the organization support each other to think creatively and allow designated staff time for technology work. In Families for Freedom, one of the co-founders of the organization was impassioned to bring members voices into mainstream media channels, and this catalyzed the organization's adoption of citizen journalism as one area of leadership development. At VOCAL, the Executive Director, Sean Barry, took it upon himself to jumpstart VOCAL's use of a multitude of technology tools and this inertia has spread through the organization.

Track what works to invest time and resources strategically
In the face of shifting technological access, organizations can respond by strategically deciding where to invest its time and resources. This requires methodical documentation of contact methods and results, through

quantitative tracking or qualitative evaluations. VOCAL's ability to rigorously track in its database how its members respond to different methods of contact allow organizers to expand the most successful techniques and pull back less efficient techniques. This allows VOCAL to invest its time wisely and reach more people.

Conclusion

Therefore, though they are few in number, some civic engagement groups offer exciting models for using new media tools. When thoughtfully orchestrated with in-depth community input, these tools have the potential to open up new two-way channels of communication between the organization and community members. This allows the organizational structure to adjust, becoming "simple and transparent organizations…easy for outsiders to get in and insiders to get out," easily accommodating the most impacted residents to provide direction and input (Kanter, Fine, and Zuckerberg 2010, 3). At the core these projects' success is strong infrastructure to develop leadership from the most marginalized communities in the neighborhood, actively involve community members in shaping and learning the technology, and shift and adapt platforms when necessary.

Chapter Four:
North End Organizing Network (NEON)

"Technology is going to be incorporated into our chart paper and markers."

Jelisa Difo, NEON Organizer (Focus Group, Mar 2011)

Any group can learn about the previous cases and, inspired by these possibilities, decide to embark on its own journey to use new media tools. As these cases illustrate, in the best-case scenario, technology has the allure of taking civic engagement to scale and increasing democratic input from a broad base of people. However, what happens when the rubber hits the road? What real barriers does one particular group meet as it engages its constituents using new media for the first time? The implementation stage is much more challenging, and this chapter details the experience of one organization, the North End Organizing Network (NEON), venturing into its use of mobile technology for the Question Campaign.

As an organization with a long history of engagement within Springfield's North End, NEON shares similar experiences with many community-based organizations with limited time and resources. Over the course of five months, I worked with NEON to develop and pilot a text message and calling system. Together, we used the case studies from Chapter Three as a baseline to strategize and develop a tool that would meet the organization's needs. Moved by other groups' experiences, NEON hoped that this technology would increase its reach.

In this chapter, I begin by providing historic, demographic and organizational context, describing how the Question Campaign emerged. I then explore major findings from our pilot project using mobile technology, examining major challenges and opportunities. Taking a step back, I then align NEON's experience with the case study themes from the previous chapter to analyze how NEON can approach future technology projects. I close with next steps for NEON and overall thoughts.

Context of Springfield & the North End

The North End, situated in the former mill town of Springfield, along the Connecticut River in Western Massachusetts, struggles economically but draws from a rich history. As a gateway community, it is home to a strong and growing immigrant population. While Springfield as a whole is 30% Latino, the North End is 75.9% Latino. Its primary immigrant population

Puerto Rican, but it is also home to small but increasing numbers of other immigrant populations such as Mexicans, Central Americans and Somalians (MIT 2009).

The once dominant manufacturing base in munitions (Smith & Wesson) and later eye care products (Bausch & Lomb) has now long subsided. Without many employment opportunities, Springfield contains the poorest census tract in the Commonwealth, with the poverty rate in the North End's two areas of Memorial Square and Brightwood reaching nearly 40% (MIT 2009). The North End also has the second highest rate of teen pregnancy, second to the neighboring city of Holyoke. Nearly three quarters of the city's children qualify for free lunch (Banks 2008). However, in the face of its dire economic situation, Springfield's North End wields a unique set of opportunities.

The dominant presence of Baystate Health, a major healthcare provider and research institution, characterizes the city and presents many opportunities. Baystate Health currently drives the city and region's economy and is one of western Massachusetts' largest employers, with 10,000 employees, of which 1,600 are physicians (Baystate 2009). As it continues to expand, many opportunities may surface to connect unemployed residents to health care industry employment. Also, Baystate's strong presence in Springfield brought health to the forefront of residents' consciousness. The North End is home to a host of community service organizations, many of which address health concerns directly or indirectly, espousing the holistic UN definition of public health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity"(WHO 1946).

Additionally, the high level of commitment to cross collaboration and information sharing in the North End is a particular strength of the neighborhood. A large cross section of North End community development practitioners from multiple levels of jurisdiction and program areas meet together regularly as part of the North End Campus Coalition, and have moved forward several neighborhood-wide collaborative initiatives. This

combination of community assets presents the North End with a promising platform to increase civic engagement and generate economic opportunities for residents.

MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning (DUSP) has collaborated with Springfield's North End neighborhood since 2002. MIT's Center for Reflective Community Practice (CRCP), headed by Professor Ceasar McDowell, launched this partnership to create joint learning opportunities for DUSP students and North End community development practitioners (MIT 2009). Through the Springfield Practicum class, offered in 2004, 2005, 2008 and 2009, DUSP has worked closely with the North End Campus Coalition, of which the North End Organizing Network (NEON) is a core program.

NEON's Changing Civic Engagement Mission: From "Outreach" to "Organizing"
NEON has a long history of civic engagement in the North End. In 1996, a group of organizations, The New North Citizens Council, Gandara Center, the Spanish American Union, and Brightwood Health Clinic, came together to create the North End Outreach Network (NEON) (Banks 2008). Despite the presence of numerous health service providers, many residents still did not feel comfortable seeking services. Language was a major barrier, as many service providers did not have Spanish-speaking staff. Dr. Jeffrey Scavron, founder of the Brightwood Health Clinic, first proposed the idea of NEON. The program drew inspiration from the Cuban healthcare system, where community health workers built strong relationships with residents to gather input, inform community members about public health issues, and ensure that healthcare services reached all who needed them (Banks 2008).

NEON divided the North End into ten "zones," with the vision that ten community health workers could serve the then 10,000 residents of the North End by each overseeing one of these zones. Each worker's responsibility was to "connect to every person, advocate for them, connect them to services, collect information from them, help organize residents

66

around community issues, connect people to educational and healthcare resources, and generally help to improve the lives of people living in the North End" (Banks 2008). Thus, embedded in the original mission was a role for community outreach workers to organize residents to become neighborhood leaders and work to solve complex issues.

In practice, NEON has focused much more heavily on service delivery than civic engagement. The number of health outreach workers peaked at seven when the Waits Family Foundation funded the work, and subsequently declined to three in later years. Additionally, though the vision for the original scope of the NEON workers' responsibilites included building leadership among residents, their grant requirements obligated them to focus on other service-based activities, including "enrolling people in the Mass Health Plan, searching for substance abusers, and activities related to the local schools" (Banks 2008). Throughout their years, NEON workers have collected important data about North End residents, making great strides to gain the residents' trust through outreach and case management.
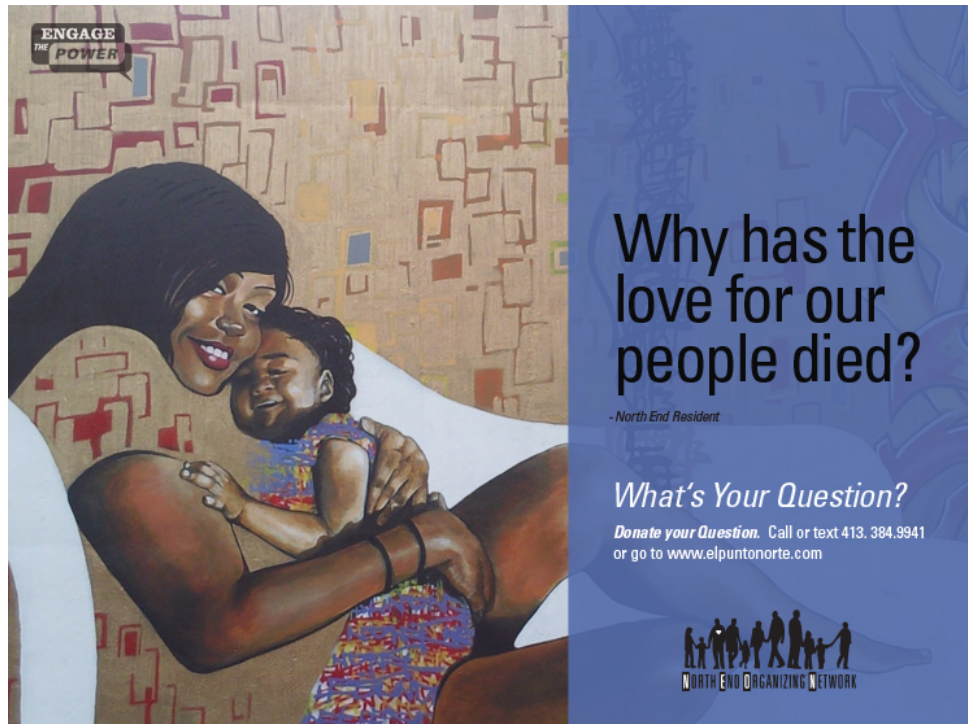
Within the past couple of years, NEON has undergone significant changes, enabling it to return to its original mission of civic engagement. NEON's new vision statement sees the organization as "a grassroots organizing network that builds the capacity of North End residents to identify and mobilize around social justice issues in their community. [NEON links its] local efforts to global social and economic justice" (Jasmín Torrejon, Interview, May 2011). Direction from the Board of Directors as well as new sources of financing, including a Community Benefits Agreement have supported NEON move forward with this goal. Their first step was to change their name from the North End "Outreach" Network to the North End "Organizing" Network and hire four new organizers.

NEON has also become a program of the North End Campus Coalition, giving partner organizations a stake in building resident leadership. The Campus Coalition is a collaboration of service providers and stakeholders

throughout the North End that cross program areas and levels of jurisdiction. It is an unincorporated organization, with the New North Citizens Council as its fiscal agent. As of Spring 2010, Vanessa Otero is the Director of the North End Campus Coalition. NEON's staff currently includes: Jelisa Difo, Moryn Mendoza, Joaquín Rodriguez, Destry Sibley, and Jasmín Torrejon.

The Question Campaign

To initiate its civic engagement work, in April 2011, NEON launched a "Question Campaign," a public art/engagement project with the goal of understanding residents' concerns. The Question Campaign is a tool that MIT Professor Ceasar McDowell's organization Engage the Power (eTp) developed, which begins with the premise that asking a question is the first step to inviting people to create lasting social change. A Question Campaign has several phases. First, organizers initiate a widespread marketing campaign to collect questions from community members, featuring sample questions on a wide range of media, including Question Ads (Figures 6 and 7), video ads, newspaper articles and large community events. The questions they collect are the questions that "keep people up at night," (Focus group, Dec 2011) pressing questions about how the world works, from education to health to philosophical questions. Then, a diverse team of Question editors, composed of staff and residents, groups questions by theme and selects particularly powerful questions to be featured on rotating Question Ads. Finally, organizers solicit working groups to gather around the question themes, which take action to address the problems that community members raise. Engage the Power has successfully implemented Question Campaigns in several other places domestically and internationally, including Chicago, Berlin and Tokyo.

Figure 6: Question Campaign Ad: Why has the love for our people died?
Source: Paul Somers, Engage the Power (2011)

Figure 7: Question Campaign Ad: Why can't parents walk their children to class at Gerena School?
Source: Paul Somers, Engage the Power (2011)

NEON selected the Question Campaign approach because it was a creative, eye-opening way to grab the attention of North End residents and inspire people to become involved. The Question Campaign is a continuation of the MIT-Springfield partnership, and the trusted track record of Professor Ceasar McDowell's work in Springfield also attracted NEON to this approach. NEON knew that this team would support them to execute this large-scale initiative.

The North End Question Campaign began with a prompt of "What is your question for the North End?" Through in-person presentations, weekly events and widespread marketing, they began to collect a wide range of questions from North End residents. Their ultimate goal was to use the Question Campaign to invigorate the neighborhood, shape the strategic direction of NEON and its partner organizations, and invite ordinary residents to take leadership to address common concerns.

Incidentally, NEON's move to develop its civic engagement capacity overlaps with its entrée into new media technology. NEON has a history of multiple technology-based projects, particularly through its engagement with MIT and DUSP. In partnership with CRCP, it initiated a digital storytelling project that spun off as its own organization, Telling Our Stories Digitally (TOLD), directed by Vanessa Pabón (Focus group, Dec 2011). NEON also initiated a GIS mapping project of community assets by neighborhood "zone" (Focus group, Dec 2011). However, as typical of many grassroots community-based organizations, NEON has not employed technology to connect with its constituents.

With the need to broadly extend awareness of the Campaign of the North End, NEON began to explore new technology to increase its scale. As Jasmín Torrejon, NEON organizer expressed, "The result that we want to see is unity in the community… But we want to try to use every method possible. So this includes flyers, talking person to person, but also phone calling, sending emails or making a radio announcement… North End is the

smallest community in Springfield. And there are 11,000 residents… if I go knocking door-to-door, but no one answers, then the message doesn't reach anyone" (Jasmín Torrejon, Focus group, Nov 2011). NEON hoped that technology would reach those who they could not contact through meetings and phone calls.

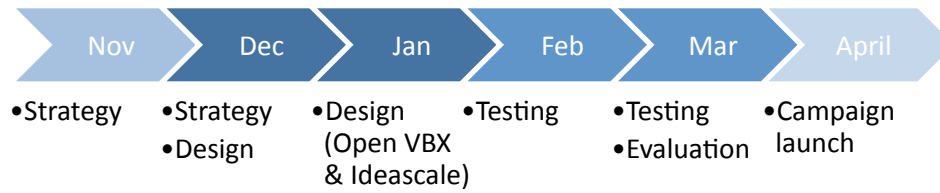## NEON Mobile Technology Pilot

Pilot Structure and Timeline
With the launch of its Question Campaign approaching within several months, we mapped a pilot process for new technology for the Campaign. NEON had multiple criteria for selecting this technology. They wanted something that would serve the Campaign's immediate goals, yet be flexible enough to use after the Campaign ended. Since they believed that the low-income, mostly Latino community of the North End had high cell phone usage, they were interested in exploring mobile technology. They also sought something that was low cost, easy to use and implementable within a short time frame.

The purpose of the pilot was to test usability of a mobile tool in advance of the Campaign to ensure a successful launch. Its goals were the following:

1. **Understand North End technology use**: Gauge technology use among North End residents and understand barriers and opportunities to using new media technology for communication;
2. **Share lessons:** Embrace lessons from other civic engagement groups that have used new media;
3. **Create a mobile tool**: Design and test a mobile phone call-in/SMS system that NEON can use for the Campaign and future work; and
4. **Discuss implications:** Discuss the broader implications of their experiment for other community-based organizations.

This pilot process lasted five months and included three phases of design and user testing: (1) Strategizing and Design, (2) Testing sessions with residents, and (3) Pilot Evaluation (Figure 8: Timeline for Pilot). To be inclusive of

Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	April
•Strategy	•Strategy •Design	•Design (Open VBX & Ideascale)	•Testing	•Testing •Evaluation	•Campaign launch

NEON's varied constituents, testing sessions included a wide range of demographic groups:

1. Nonprofit partners: North End Campus Coalition members (Focus group, Feb 2011) and Gandara (Drug abuse services) staff (Focus group, Mar 2011)

2. Youth: Youth on spring break at a youth summit (Focus group, Feb 2011)

3. Adults: Students in a GED class (Focus group, Feb 2011) and NEON's core group of resident leaders (Focus group, Feb 2011)

4. Seniors: Seniors at Riverview senior center and housing complex (Focus group, Feb 2011)

We used supporting case studies (Chapter Three) as a framework for the pilot's design. For example, we viewed the mobile tool as just one of a constellation of communication tools that would support NEON's work, including a blog, a physical newspaper, short videos produced by youth, radio and TV ads, and physical posters. Rather than test the tool independently from NEON's work, we linked each pilot session to a Campaign related site visit/presentation to use the technology as an opportunity to build relationships with NEON.

This said, given the short time frame before the launch of the Campaign, we did not fully embrace all the supporting case study lessons. Principally, we could not create as robust a community involvement process as would have been ideal. As the supporting cases illustrated, high community participation was a major factor in their successes. With NEON just initiating its

Moraima and Moryn Mendoza test the Open VBX System.
Source: Joaquín Rodriguez (2011)

Stefanie Ritoper and Jasmín Rodriguez facilitate test session at La Gerena School.
Source: Jelisa Difo (2011)

organizing work, the group decided that the pilot phase would allow NEON to wind up for its long term technology use and that staff would build deeper relationships with community members during the actual campaign.

Overall, during the five months that I worked with NEON, the mobile tool had mixed results. Although staff, community partners and community members expressed excitement about incorporating advanced technology, this has not yet translated into widespread outreach and adoption of the tool. Data from the first month of the Campaign (April) indicates that initial adoption of the tool in Springfield is low. While during the pilot phase users sent 30 text and voicemail questions to the system, the first month of the Campaign added only seven additional questions. In comparison, the Campaign has collected a total of 300 questions through postcards and other methods.

In what follows, I analyze the pilot's challenges and opportunities inform NEON's next steps. Themes from this section come from interviews and focus groups throughout the five-month pilot project. I detail my observations from the pilot phase under six themes:

1. Need for easy-to-use, adaptable technology
2. There is no single technology solution
3. Perceptions about technology are a hurdle
4. Relationship building increases technology adoption
5. New forms of engagement mean building leadership first

Need for simple and adaptable technology
During the design phase, one challenge was the low availability of simple tools for NEON to take off the shelf and use immediately. NEON staff identified mass texting as method that they wanted to test. Their ideal system would include a number of features. Residents could call or text in their question to a centralized website, which provide an interface to vote on questions. The system would also ideally send out mass texts or calls to residents and allow residents to RSVP for events. At the time, the most

prominent out-of-the-box solution was Frontline SMS, which is downloadable from the web and simple to set up with the presence of an SMS gateway (a service to send large numbers of text messages without using a mobile phone). However, NEON was interested in both receiving calls and also having a web component, which were both capacities that Frontline SMS lacked.

We therefore began a process to design technology to meet NEON's needs. Initially we thought that it might make sense to modify the tool that the Mobile Voices project used. Based on Drupal, a powerful, web-based open source platform gaining popularity among web programmers, this solution would allow us to build upon a relatively stable tool and take advantage of the support of a small, but growing network of community groups interested in technology. However, as we began to meet with Drupal consultants, we found that open source and low cost were not synonymous, with consultants offering rates from a few thousand dollars to up to $20,000. Many consultants considered our requested features to be quite complex, requiring many hours of programming. Given the intensity of the programming needed, these technology development rates were justifiable, but far above our budget range.

Luckily, NEON was able to capitalize on outside expertise. Elsa Zuniga, Project Manger for Engage the Power, guided the team toward a solution that combined several tools that prioritized mobile phone usage over a strong web interface. To customize the calling and text messaging system, we used Open VBX, an open-source application based on Twilio, an SMS (text messaging)/call gateway and API (Application Programming Interface). For our purposes, Open VBX allows users to either text or call a single number to contact NEON. When calling this number, users connect to a voicemail system that provides information on services or prompts them to leave their question. When texting, users who send a general message to the number receive a generic thank you text in response, and users who send specific keywords receive specific messages. On the administrator's side,

Open VBX allows NEON staff to customize SMS and call flows, view and export all incoming texts and voicemails, and send mass text messages or mass calls.

We then linked this to a web service called IdeaScale, a paid web service with a mechanism for users to post questions vote on their favorites. This solution required some compromise on initial brainstorm features, such as and advanced feature for users to RSVP to events through their phones. However, Open VBX is highly customizable, and NEON can adapt the tool to a multitude of uses. The process of installing Open VBX was also rapid. As relatively new software, its plug-ins were limited or sometimes required tweaking; however, Elsa took charge of making these adjustments.

Figure 9 depicts NEON's workflow using these tools. Residents can submit questions through multiple formats, including: text messages (SMS), phone calls, online web forms or in-person postcards and conversations. Green boxes represent places in the workflow where NEON staff members take a particular action. NEON staff create and customize text and voicemail flows, using a drag-and-drop interface. When receiving questions, they must manually edit and post them to their website. Through Open VBX, NEON can send text messages to individual or groups of residents. Residents can also vote online through IdeaScale, a paid online feedback service. See Appendix B: for more details on the mobile system.
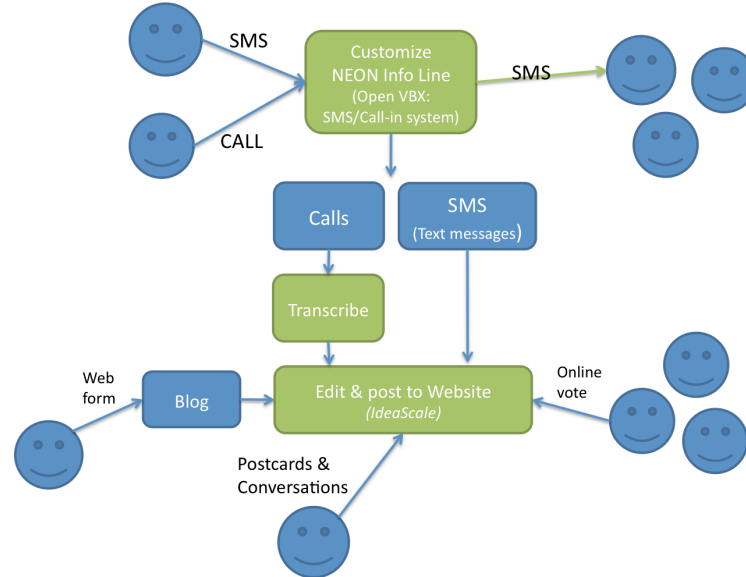
In the end, the design process required a level technological skill that was not available on the NEON team. This points to a need for readily accessible off-the-shelf mobile tools for grassroots nonprofits in the US. Though the use of mobile tools is widespread in developing countries (Castells et al. 2006), there is a paucity of options for the US market. Developing countries could provide potential new media models for low-income communities domestically; however, since many US residents access a wide range of technologies, many institutions overlook the numerous residents who still do not access broadband or cell phones (Castells et al. 2006). More broadly, this indicates that technology developers do not typically design toward end users like the residents of the North End. When they do, nonprofits like NEON face challenges when customizing these tools to their needs, lacking basic information about how to request needed features.

This is a relatively straightforward challenge to address. Given rapid advancement mobile technology development, with some focus on this niche market, new and effective tools could emerge quickly. Additionally technology developers could package technology with clear instructions on the type and number of technical assistance hours necessary to modify the

tool. Frontline SMS serves as a good model, with an extensive help guide that demonstrates how groups can adapt the software for specific needs, detailing the hours and skills needed (FrontlineSMS 2011). This way nonprofits without technical skills on staff can easily request their needs from a technical consultant.

North End technology access: Multiple co-existing platforms
Though the North End is a small community, its residents are using a wide range of co-existing platforms to access information. With the landscape of technology access shifting and traditional media platforms still very prominent, there is no silver bullet solution to reach the entire North End. In response, NEON uses multiple platforms for communication, from traditional outlets such as television and radio to less traditional channels such as blogging and text messaging. However, this multipronged strategy also brings challenges for NEON, as it must consolidate input from multiple channels with little time and few resources.

A significant portion of focus group participants mentioned their preference for face-to-face and traditional communication channels such as radio and the newspaper. Radio is an important communication channel that the North End uses not just for broadcast information, but also for two-way communication. One radio show, for example, features residents calling in to buy and sell furniture and other goods. Local newspapers such as *The Republican* also have wide distribution. Additionally, focus group participants jokingly suggested the powerful gossip network within the North End as an important information source. While they raised this humorously, the small size and tight communication networks set the North End apart from other neighborhoods that are geographically expansive or where people do not know their neighbors at all.

Examining Internet and mobile access, the pilot process confirmed that North End residents frequently own and use mobile phones. Informally polling our focus groups, we found that, with the exception of the seniors, a majority of focus group participants had mobile phones. However, we were

surprised to discover that residents may be using more platforms than this. A high proportion of our focus group participants reported access to a computer with Internet at home. Though our sample does not statistically represent the North End, this points to higher Internet penetration than we initially assumed.

Many residents reported accessing the Internet and mainstream social networking platforms through their mobile phones. One GED class participant suggested that NEON use Facebook to communicate with residents: "I get [text messages] from Facebook, so if there was a Facebook page. So people that are part of NEON can add friends and expand that way. The page can let people know what you're all about and people can give feedback on there as well" (North End resident, Interview, Mar 2011). This resonates with Facebook's own data on user trends, which reports that its mobile phone users are twice as active on Facebook than non-mobile users, composing a total of 200 million active mobile users worldwide (Facebook 2011). With Facebook's recent acquisition of the Israeli company Snaptu, a company that develops apps for feature phones (rather than just smartphones), there is potential on the horizon for Facebook to reach communities like Springfield that have basic cell phones (Wauters 2011).

With the exception of the senior focus group, residents suggested text messaging as a preferred method of contact. The Springfield Police department's successful "Text-a-tip" program set an important precedent. As a service that solicits anonymous tips by text messaging, the police department reports that it receives several hundred text messages daily, many of which turn into useful leads for cases in drug related crimes(Johnson, Patrick 2009).

The pilot phase also uncovered physical, economic and demographic challenges for NEON's technology use. Physically, there is poor quality cell phone reception at La Gerena Elementary School, which is located underneath a freeway and serves as the primary community center for the

neighborhood. Though reception in the cafeteria worked well, reception in the library was poor. Economically, with low communications budgets, many residents have cell phones with limited minutes or changing numbers. The least expensive phones are prepaid phones, which many residents replace with new phones and new numbers once the minutes run out. Additionally, some residents have government-subsidized phones with limited minutes through the federal Lifeline Assistance program. [1] Limited minutes make it difficult for NEON to outreach to community members by phone.

Demographically, testing revealed that North End residents have varied levels of comfort with technology by age group. Youth were the most receptive to using the texting feature. During the Youth summit test group, many youth were highly comfortable with text messaging and responded with texts immediately after we gave the number and instructions. In our informal poll, many youth from the North End reported that they used their phones for text messaging. Adults under thirty also stated a preference for contact by text messaging rather than calling. However, on the other end of the spectrum, few seniors owned mobile phones. During the senior focus group, some had difficulty dialing the number and required NEON staff assistance as they made the call.

Taken together, these observations reveal the importance of a multiple platform approach. Only through multiple channels will NEON reach all demographics in the neighborhood since, despite its small geographic size, its residents communicate through many different channels. As Jelisa, NEON organizer observed, "it's not to say that technology is going to be the only means and the only direction that we're going to go. It's like, technology is

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[1] The 1996 Telecommunications Act "required the Federal Communications Commission to create the Universal Service Fund, a pool of money subsidized by small charges on our phone bills… and redistributed to the low-income service programs as well as programs that bring telecommunications services to rural areas and schools" (Richtel 2009; PolitiFact 2009). The Lifeline Assistance program is one piece of this, providing discounts on basic monthly phone service, including mobile phones, for individuals at 135% of the poverty line. (Richtel 2009; PolitiFact 2009).

going to be incorporated into our chart paper and markers organizing approach. Because that is the essence of our work, and then in addition, we want to use technology to enhance the work we do" (Jelisa Difo, Focus group, Mar 2011).

NEON has embraced a multipronged approach; however, this gives way to some significant challenges. With residents submitting questions and input through multiple distinct channels, staff must dedicate time to consolidating this information. At one point in the planning process, NEON decided the organization didn't have the internal capacity to transcribe voicemails. In a series of quick decisions, the organization came close to cutting voicemails from its workflow. Given low staff capacity and having to consolidate multiple platforms, staff have less desire to tend to "more complicated" input channels such as the mobile and voicemail interface. Though eventually these channels might yield increased participation or reinforce face-to-face relationships, they are not a high priority.

Perceptions about technology are a hurdle

In their 2004 report, Progressive Technology Project (PTP) highlighted that technology is "both an asset and also a problem" for community groups (Roessler 2004), and this sentiment resonates with NEON staff and North End residents. Technology ambivalence stems from perceptions about technology access, a concern about the impact on relationship building, and staff capacity/funding. As a result, staff members are less willing to promote the mobile tool. Previous case studies have shown that it takes motivated and inspirational staff members to plow through skepticism, experiment with new methods, and show results.

NEON's conversations revealed the perception that using technologies would compromise the in-person relationships that they are working so hard to develop. As Jasmín expressed during one initial pilot strategy meeting, "My only concern is, how much do you take away the human to human interaction? I think it's really important for building something sustainable because otherwise people become kind of hooked on the Internet and think,

oh, I'm going to send this and hope something happens, but then if nothing happens because people aren't meeting, it defeats the purpose of the technology" (Jasmín Torrejon, Focus group, Mar 2011). Joaquín Rodriguez, a long-time organizer in the North End, agreed that face-to-face communication was often much more genuine and direct. "I'm more, a one-to-one or face-to-face with folks. Technology, I rarely use it… You've got to wait for people to check their email. Most of our stuff is done here, so I just go down the block and meet with you and take care of it and get it done and that's it" (Joaquín Rodriguez, Focus group, Nov 2010). In his view, walking down the street was the most direct and sometimes quickest way to reach people. Building these relationships is at the core of NEON's civic engagement work, so this concern is very important.

Despite hesitance on a conceptual level, when NEON staff and residents practically mapped out their work, their actions and outcomes expressed a much more balanced and even optimistic outlook. In practice, NEON used multiple technologies, including video, blogging, print and mobile technology. Vanessa Otero, Executive Director, observed, "Most of our stuff is face to face, and so… [it] would be easy to say, well, the North End doesn't use technology, so let's try something else. But it's not right…. [It's] also the willingness to go past theory and really make it part of what you are doing." (Vanessa Otero, Focus Group, Mar 2011). Jasmín Torrejon seconded this sentiment. "Something that I gained from this is that it makes me feel like we have to try as many outlets as possible… we have to be using all these other things, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr and Twitter, because even though we don't like it, it's something that… has become very popular in a lot of communities, especially urban communities" (Jasmín Torrejon, Focus group, Mar 2011).

NEON resident leaders also expressed reservations, describing technology as a source of both positive and negative influences, but then eventually balanced this with the positive potential for their own work. Resident leaders described some of the dangers of technology, such as hackers and identity

theft schemes. After some discussion, however, one resident expressed the need to look beyond the challenges to brainstorm how to make it useful to NEON: "What we need to do is come to a unified decision about how we are going to use technology to reach the community. Because we always know that there are good things and bad things, but we can't change that. Regardless, the technology is there. So how can we use it positively?" (Resident Leader, Focus group, Mar 2011).

Additionally, hearing examples from other groups helped NEON consider creative technology solutions. As part of the pilot's technology strategy phase, I shared the themes and lessons learned from the supporting case studies (Chapter Three) with three NEON staff. I structured the discussions to include discussion before sharing the case studies and afterward. Prior to the case studies presentation, NEON staff members discussed their hesitance about technology and its usefulness to their work. They described many of the aforementioned concerns, such as technology's impact on relationship building. After the presentation, however, staff came away excited and interested to take on a new project. Vanessa Otero expressed her excitement. "My mind was just going and going and going as you were talking because all of it seems pretty relevant not only for the Campaign, but for beyond the Campaign… What happens to the action teams once they get formed? How are they going to be connected to a platform where they can be heard? Of course there is radio and other platforms, but this is amazing. This is, it's really amazing" (Vanessa, Focus group, 2010). Several months into the pilot, three new staff joined NEON without same background and inspiration of the case studies. Though they actively participated in facilitating test groups and debriefing, they did not start from the same basis of excitement and enthusiasm.

In reality, negative perceptions had less of an impact on the mobile tool results than limited staff time and resources. For a large initiative such as the Campaign, with many moving pieces, it is difficult to continuously integrate personal relationship building with promoting mobile technology. As

NEON focused on building a based of committed residents, it prioritized this relationship building over spreading the technology. However, the lack of enthusiasm compounds with this low capacity, discouraging staff from experimenting with new technological methods.

Relationship building increases technology adoption
During the pilot process, relationship building had a noticeable impact on increased technology use. New texts and voicemails nearly always followed a particular face–to-face action. This suggests that much as adopting new behaviors requires a supporting cast of friends and allies, adopting a new technology, particularly as it coincides with new civic behaviors, requires enabling relationships.

The first month of NEON's campaign employed an extensive marketing campaign, but this did not result in a high yield of text messages. NEON distributed numerous materials throughout the neighborhood with the text/call-in number prominently displayed, including posters, videos and newspaper ads. However, with just seven new questions, this did not yield the anticipated high volume of responses. Instead, the in-person meetings previous to the Campaign launch yielded the highest volume of text responses. This suggests that marketing can complement, but not substitute relationship building.

In the youth test group, which yielded the highest number of responses, NEON used personal relationship building techniques to accompany its technology outreach. Jelisa Difo, NEON Organizer, began the youth session with an icebreaker game where youth introduced themselves & had to run around to switch places in a circle. When the exercise ended, they returned to the cafeteria benches alert and ready to engage. After explaining the texting tool, those with cell phones quickly typed their questions and anticipated a response.

Observing the success of this personalized connection, after the session we conducted a mass texting trial to gauge how youth would respond. We sent a

mass text to solicit questions from the youth who entered the keyword "test," but hadn't written back with a question. I signed the text by name and added a note about the events that day. A third of the youth responded (4 out of 12). This short test indicates the potential for NEON to use the tool for interactive texting to reinforce its in-person relationship building.

We also observed that more interactive meetings, where participants shared their experiences and gained a more profound understanding of the Campaign yielded more thoughtful, personal questions. Perhaps through these interactive exercises, participants were able to better understand the larger impact of contributing their questions, and therefore approached them with more resolve. Several staff members attested to mastering the art of presenting the Campaign's content over the course of its presentations and described the positive impact of a good presentation on participant reactions.

As NEON continues its future work, understanding the importance of building relationships can inform its technology outreach. NEON can tap into the network nature of the North End to extend its reach. To increase the impact of its face-to-face meetings, NEON can encourage participants to pass the number to a friend to submit a question. Technology will therefore reinforce relationships that NEON builds, rather than initiate these relationships.

*New forms of engagement mean building leadership first*
Finally, the Campaign represents a new style of engagement in the North End, and this has consequences for NEON's technology use. The Campaign asks residents not only to reflect on their lives, but to then take action by asking a question and volunteering their time. Encouraging residents to shift their typical behavior is a massive task, requiring clear communication and marketing, but more importantly, building strong community leadership.

The Campaign was clearly a new approach for the North End. In meetings, NEON staff reported that their attempts to solicit questions often met confused reactions from community members. For some residents, the first

step of formulating a question was difficult, and they sometimes asked peers or even NEON staff to choose a question for them. Rather than asking how to get involved, some residents wondered which agency would be providing the services corresponding to their questions. As Vanessa Otero, North End Campus Coalition Director, put forth, "I think that is a theme in everything that we do... getting people to the point where they're thinking about things like that. No one here talks to anyone like that...to some extent we're pioneers" (Vanessa Otero, Focus group, Mar 2011).

The Campaign's complexity was therefore difficult to communicate in short format, through text and voicemail prompts. As Jeff Scavron, Director of Brightwood Medical Clinic points out, "There's a hurdle to overcome to get someone to be excited to respond…We have to have a presentation to our staff of 80 people and talk about it so that if someone says what's that all about, the staff can respond" (Jeff Scavron, Focus group, Feb 2011). Staff of Gandara clinic also asserted that that a strong "hook" was important for residents to understand that this initiative was different than others that had come before it (Focus group, Feb 2011).

Clear messaging through the Campaign's mobile technology platforms was a first step. As one example, NEON simplified its voicemail prompt. Though the original idea was to give listeners detailed background information, initial feedback revealed that these instructions were long and distracting. NEON re-wrote the voicemail prompt with streamlined instructions. Additionally, staff began to brainstorm successful methods of communication. Through community presentations, they discovered that interactive discussion and visuals of previous Campaign posters and videos quickly communicated the campaign's purpose. Learning the etiquette of communicating to large audiences through its various media platforms (newspapers to text messaging) is therefore an iterative process, with staff testing one method, evaluating and then shifting techniques. As Vanessa Otero expressed, "For me marketing keeps me up at night. Just the idea of how are we going to get all of this, at least even the number, how do we get the number out and get it
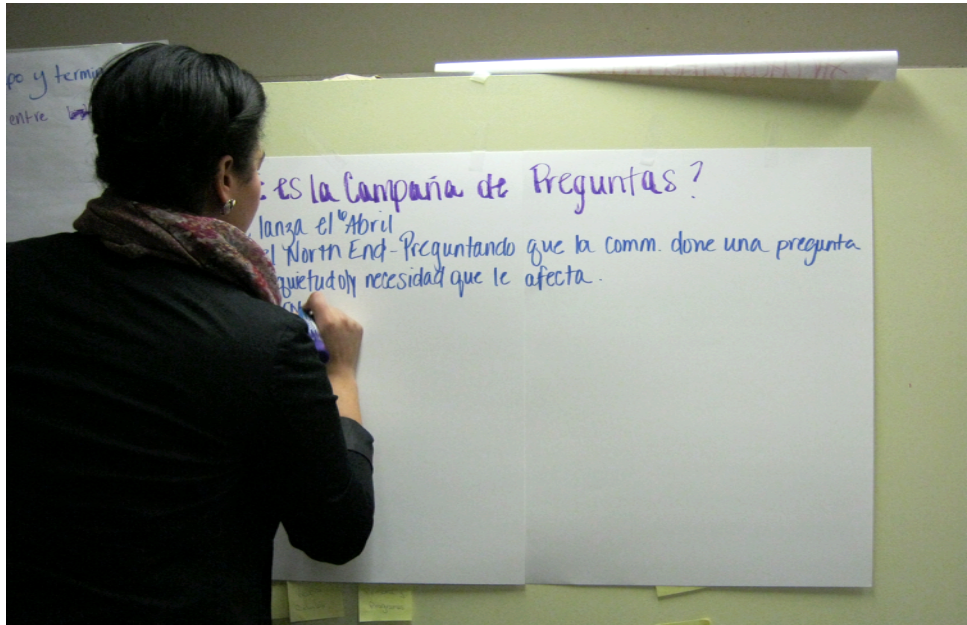
Jelisa Difo takes notes at resident leader meeting.
Source: Stefanie Ritoper (2011)

NEON resident leaders write their thoughts for a group exercise.
Source: Stefanie Ritoper (2011)

to start meaning something to folks" (Vanessa Otero, Focus group, Mar 2011).

However, NEON staff discovered that building a strong core of committed members was the most important way to bring people into the Campaign. Because the technology pilot coincided with NEON's transition from outreach to organizing, NEON had to build a membership base from scratch. Jasmín Torrejon described this context: "Because this is the first time in many years that NEON is doing community organizing, the community doesn't fully understand who we are and what we mean when we ask residents to "donate a question". Also, three out of the four organizers are not from the North End and have never worked in this community before, so we are simultaneously trying to do three things: get to know the community, implement the Campaign, and introduce other forms of technology to enhance our organizing efforts" (Jasmín Torrejon, Interview, May 2011).

With NEON's real priority to build strong relationships, technology became a secondary concern. As Jasmín Torrejon asserted, "For us, the meat of our work right now is to build a base by getting to know residents, involving them in the Question Campaign and in other leadership development opportunities. We feel that this is more important than focusing on the technology piece…. which will be more useful once we are known in the community" (Jasmín Torrejon, Focus group, May 2011). The pilot therefore suggests that a strong base of committed residents is a prerequisite to technology. Rather than a first point of contact, mobile technology might better serve the organization by reinforcing existing relationships.

Cross Analysis with Supporting Case Studies

Stepping back, supporting case studies (Chapter Three) offer a broader framework to analyze NEON's pilot experience. I ranked NEON's project by each of the case study themes on a scale of one to three, one representing the highest execution of this principle and three the lowest. NEON's organizational behavior and technology use will shift over time, so this is

meant as a snapshot of one moment in time rather than a rigid evaluation of its ability to incorporate new media technologies. Aligning NEON's experience with the themes from highly successful supporting case studies allows the organization to understand the necessary steps to gain to a higher level of technology adoption in Springfield (Figure 10).

NEON quickly embraced two case study principles from the beginning. As an organization in transition, it had a very open-minded approach to technology, embracing a spirit of experimentation and flexibility. The organization began by brainstorming big ideas, and proposed out-of-the-box ideas for technologies that would fit best with its Question Campaign. The philosophy was to embrace as many approaches as necessary to reach the entire neighborhood and then continuously evaluate and shift its strategies. The low performance of the mobile tool had an impact on the organization's perception of technology; however, staff members continue to be open to new media approaches. Knowing community members use many different platforms, NEON initiated its technology exploration knowing it would be important to use multiple co-existing platforms for the Question Campaign to have the greatest reach. In the Campaign, NEON uses mainstream print coverage, radio, blogging, paper flyers, call in system, texting system, and in-person postcards. One next step might be to gain a better understanding of the communication etiquette of each platform to improve its ability to play to each platform's particular strengths, advertising on one platform to drive traffic to another.

Figure 10: Ranking by Case Study Themes

Theme	Description	NEON Ranking	Explanation
Embrace spirit of experimentation and flexibility	- Initiate projects with a playful open-minded spirit - Don't see challenges as indication to abandon efforts - Shift strategies where needed to meet goals	1	- NEON began by brainstorming big ideas, which led to the Question Campaign approach - NEON open-mindedly embraced a number of technologies simultaneously into the organization including video, blogging and mobile technology - It plans to evaluate its strategies in June and will shift approaches if necessary
Play to strengths of multiple co-existing platforms	- Rather one technology as the "silver bullet", use multiple technologies for different audiences - Play the strengths of each platform off of each other (Use one to drive traffic to the other)	1	- Knowing community members use many different platforms, NEON uses mainstream print coverage, radio, blogging, paper flyers, call in system, texting system, and in-person postcards. - One next step might be to advertise one platform on the others.
Involve community members in decisions, design, and/or content production	- Incorporate community members in decision-making - Train community members in using tools - Meet a pressing community need	3	- Through the pilot we asked for general opinions about technology from the resident leader group - Community artists also helped to design print flyers - This is the beginning of NEON's organizing, so there is more room for resident leaders to contribute to the multiple media channels it uses
Maintain balance of techies and non-techies	- Incorporate intermediaries/ consultants where there is a tech knowledge gap - Make sure tech development takes community input seriously	2	- NEON openly brought in assistance from partners such as Engage the Power, MIT, & independent blogger - NEON could use greater involvement from community members in the strategic direction of its technology work
Appoint "tech visionary" to catalyze technology adoption	- At least one staff member takes the lead on creative technology thinking - Staff support each other to think creatively and allow designated staff time for technology	2	- NEON staff focus on different aspects of its organizing work, and are less interested in technology work - NEON tentatively designated one staff member for technology, but there is room for excitement about this role and creative new ideas
Track what works to invest time and resources strategically	- Methodically document how members respond to each form of contact - Shift time and resources to what works	3	- Through the pilot NEON has qualitatively assessed mobile technology - Systematic documentation of contacts and meeting attendance could help staff make strategic decisions about effectiveness

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There were two themes that NEON began to work towards, but had not fully integrated. In terms of the balance between techies and non-techies, NEON openly brought in technical assistance from trusted partners, such as Engage the Power, Professor Ceasar McDowell's community engagement consulting firm, community blogger Natalia Muñoz and myself. Though each of us has an orientation toward community involvement and havereached out for some community input during parts of our processes, these few activities are just the beginning of the deeper community engagement needed to make the technology effective. Ideally community members would play a central role in decision-making about technology to improve its relevance and impact. Also, all supporting cases had at least one person on staff, a "tech visionary" excited about the potential of technology, who motivated other staff members to think creatively and adopt new strategies. Since the impetus for NEON to explore this area came from outside actors, it took NEON a while to absorb this enthusiasm within the organization. Recently NEON tentatively designated one staff member as the organization's "tech visionary" as a first step, but there is room for excitement about this role as a source of creative new ideas.

At the time of this research, NEON had yet to embrace the final two themes. As it was just beginning its organizing work, community members were not highly involved in the decisions, design or content production of NEON's new media tools. Toward the end of the pilot project, resident leaders expressed mixed thoughts on the potential of technology in Springfield. Engaging several of these leaders, even (or particularly) those who are less tech-savvy, would provide important insight to make technology efforts address critical needs. Additionally, NEON has not yet instituted a system to track what does and does not work. Though tracking would be tedious initially, it would yield valuable information that would ultimately save NEON time, guiding the organization to strategically invest its time and resources into efforts with the greatest impact.

Though the first month of NEON's pilot showed that the mobile technology did not deliver on its promise of increasing the scale of the Campaign, moving forward NEON has the potential to reverse this trend. With a greater understanding of the steps necessary to make mobile technology effective, NEON can build upon its lessons from this phase to harness new media's potential to increase its scale. NEON's next steps around technology fall into short and long-term steps under three major goals: (1) Continue to build organizational enthusiasm for new media through continued experimentation; (2) Improve & build on SMS/Call-in tool through involving residents; and (3) Track what is working/not working to invest time and resources wisely. See Figure 11.

Continue to build enthusiasm for new media through continued experimentation

Enthusiasm helps foster creative-thinking around technology. NEON can build upon its initial experimentation with new media technologies by adding to the momentum.

In the short-term, the first step for NEON is to appoint a "tech visionary," who is a staff member genuinely excited to experiment with new media. Rather than assuming the tedious responsibilities of technology, this person's role is to excite and inspire staff about new ways to use visual, storytelling and new media platforms to increase the organization's reach. This person helps to bring in new ideas from other organizations and think about creative ways to shift its technology projects into a positive direction when they are not working or lose support. All supporting cases from Chapter Three included someone on staff who unofficially played this role.

Additionally, NEON can increase its presence on mainstream platforms and start to use the voicemail audio from Open VBX to create some creative storytelling pieces.

In the long-term, NEON can experiment with a wide range of new media techniques to support future campaigns. Some examples include: data

visualization techniques, digital storytelling workshops, and participatory mapping projects. NEON should also find ways to connect with similar groups using new media and technology for organizing to share lessons and spark new ideas.

Improve & build on SMS/Call-in tool through involving residents

Through the pilot, we scratched just the service of the powerful capacities of NEON's mobile tool. As NEON moves forward, it should consider how residents can lead decision-making to make the tool respond directly to community needs.

In the short-term, the first step is to embrace the SMS/Call-in tool. All staff members can encourage participants to pass along the number to a friend to submit a question, multiplying the impact of its face-to-face contacts. NEON can also send compelling information through the text messaging system, such as sample questions or key facts, for community members to forward to others. Personalizing a response to all people who submit a question through the tool will also increase user interest in following NEON's texts. Knowing that a real person is listening on the other end increases the tool's credibility. Additionally, creating a regular meeting time for community members to discuss and evaluate the questions that they receive through the tool will help community members to take ownership of the technology and pass it along.

In the long-term, NEON can creatively brainstorm ways to adapt OpenVBX for future uses after the Campaign. There are many functionalities that we didn't explore during the pilot, which might be more useful in other contexts. Some initial ideas include featuring stories of members on the call-in system, polling list members about a particular topic (Eg. "Should the police have intervened when X happened? Text Yes (Y) or No (N)."), or collecting RSVPs for events. NEON should prioritize uses of the tool that allow residents to participate in shaping its uses, since this will ultimately increase North End technology adoption.

Track what is working/not working to invest time and resources wisely.
Since NEON is currently using many co-existing platforms, all of which could potentially drain organizers' time, it is important for NEON to document what does and does not work. Though tracking contacts is a painful process, it allows NEON to strategically make decisions about time and resource investments.

In the short-term, NEON can create a database that will help it to track the numbers of community members that respond to each of its platforms through responding to contacts or attending meetings. NEON can track how members prefer contact, most simply through its sign-in sheets, and us this to strategically allocate staff time. NEON can balance this quantitative approach with qualitative discussions with its members.

In the long-term, NEON can strengthen its multiple platform approach by traditional media sources to its new media sources and vice versa, using one to promote the other. To get a sense of the communications channels that residents use, NEON can add questions about technology use to any community-based research projects that it spearheads. Finally, NEON's next large technology purchase will probably be a more robust database that enables the organization to track member's leadership development, funder information, and press contacts. Many organizing groups report the central importance of having an effective database, through which they can mobilize members and galvanize press outlets.

Summary
In sum, through the pilot NEON's mobile platform has not yet gained significant traction. It is possible for NEON to reverse this trend and start to see its mobile tool bringing back positive gains in time saved and meaningful participation. However, this requires some important steps for NEON to make its outreach of the tool more effective.

During the pilot, we observed some challenges to high technology proliferation for the Campaign. Given the vast range of platforms that

residents access in the North End, particularly the dominance of traditional media tools, there is unfortunately no single communications or technology solution. Instead, NEON has wisely embraced a strategy of communicating across multiple platforms. However, it now faces the major challenge of the time-intensive process to consolidate input from multiple channels. Given low staff capacity and the need to focus on leadership development, staff have not seen marketing the mobile tool as a priority.

To increase adoption of the mobile tool, NEON will need to:

1. **Continue to build organizational enthusiasm for new media through continued experimentation.** Appointing a "tech visionary" is a first step in this process, to research new ideas and galvanize excitement in the organization.

2. **Improve & build on SMS/Call-in tool through involving residents**. Increasing ownership of the tool will cause the tool to address a pressing community need and help it to spread virally.

3. **Track what is working/not working to invest time and resources wisely**. Though it may be tedious, tracking each personal contact and meeting attendee will help NEON to strategically decide what methods work the best to organize the largest number of people.

Therefore, though new media tools have the allure of increased scale and democratic participation for grassroots organizations, in practice CBOs face significant challenges, especially during the startup phase. These projects require several important ingredients, particularly enthusiasm, community involvement and ownership, and tracking what works.

Figure 11: NEON Next Steps

Goal	Short Term	Long Term
	(This year)	*(Beyond the Campaign, within the next 5 years)*
1. Build enthusiasm and continue tech experimentation	Appoint a "tech visionary" in NEON to gather ideas & brainstorm	Experiment with mapping, storytelling, or other visualization techniques
	Create presence on mainstream platforms. (Facebook group, YouTube, Flickr & Twitter account)	Connect with similar groups to exchange lessons learned
	Use audio from call-in system to build on storytelling	
2. Improve & build on SMS/Call-in tool through involving residents	Embrace & use the system; promote it at meetings	Modify SMS/Call tool to adapt to new uses after the Campaign; Eg. Featured stories, poll list members, RSVP to events
	Create feedback loop & personalize contact through SMS call-in tool *(Track North End residents)*	
	Use in-person regular (monthly or weekly) discussion to strengthen relationships from tech	
3. Track what is working/not working to invest time and resources wisely	Continue multiple platform strategy and track how people use each platform: web voting system, radio, video, etc	Feed new media from engagement to traditional channels (radio, newspaper & TV) & vice versa
	Track technologies that residents use (on sign-in sheets, add box)	If NEON conducts any future community-based research initiatives, survey residents on Internet use & contact preferences
	Record resident preferences in database & contact residents as they request	Consider a more robust database for future organizing (Eg. VOCAL, NYC; PTP database)

Chapter Five: Collaborating Across Sectors

"[Media justice] is about everyday people having a way to easily tap into political and social change without gatekeepers."

James Rucker, Founder, *Color of Change*

Summary

The spectrum of digital access is shifting, giving way to a realm of possibility for marginalized communities to use new media tools to increase voice and visibility. With increased Internet access and high mobile phone usage, though significant technology divisions still persist, low-income communities of color now have access to a wide range of different platforms. Although governmental, private and nonprofit sectors are starting to experiment with using new media tools to support residents to engage civically in their neighborhoods and cities, many do not design their efforts toward users on the margin.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) are key actors in bridging community members to technology. Whether or not they recognize their role, because they build strong relationships with low-income communities of color, they have been quite successful at helping these communities overcome barriers to technology access. In the best-case scenario, new media tools offer CBOs the potential of increased scale and democratic involvement. This wide range of versatile tools has the potential to: strengthen and support existing relationships; save time, therefore increasing the number of people a group can reach; involve community members and increase organizational transparency; distribute communication horizontally, making the organization more agile and adaptable; and creatively attract the attention of mainstream outlets.

My research focused on the North End Organizing Network (NEON)'s journey to adopt mobile technology for its Question Campaign, to explore my central research question: *How can new media tools support community-based organizations to increase civic engagement in low-income communities of color?* Using literature and lessons from pioneering community-based organizations for analytical support, I examined NEON's challenges and opportunities to understand the complexities of implementing this project in a community-based organization with strong community ties, but low organizational capacity.

The scholarship on new media and civic engagement tends to focus is on people who already are very active online and not necessarily on more marginalized communities, especially low-income communities of color. Concentrating on informal, governmental and non-governmental civic engagement among communities that are highly active online, the literature discusses less the ways that marginalized groups are using these tools to gain visibility.

Though CBOs are generally hesitant to adopt new media technologies, some groups are breaking ground in this area. This thesis draws key lessons from five supporting cases of civic-engagement-oriented organizations. Through these projects, which spanned the range of citizen journalism, reflection/community building, data collection, mobilization, fundraising, and strategic planning, these organizations were able to strengthen community leaders, gain mainstream media support and garner widespread support for their issues.

These cases offer inspiration, however groups face practical challenges in technology implementation. NEON's mobile technology pilot demonstrated that there are significant challenges, particularly in the startup phase. In NEON's case, given that North End residents access a wide range of co-existing platforms, the organization collected input from many outlets, from radio to in-person meetings, text messages and phone calls. With low staff capacity, the challenge became consolidating information from these multiple information channels. This, compounded with mixed perceptions about technology and the need to develop a membership base from scratch, meant that staff dedicated less time to outreach about the mobile technology tool.

There is still potential for mobile technology to meet NEON's needs and extend its reach in the neighborhood. Moving forward, NEON can improve its mobile technology reach by continuing to build organizational enthusiasm for new media through continued experimentation; improving

and building on SMS/Call-in tool through involving residents; and tracking what is working or not working to invest time and resources wisely.

Core message

At its core, this thesis argues the need for institutions from multiple sectors to invite new voices into their civic engagement processes as they use new media tools. It will not be as simple as building a new media platform and expecting participation to follow. Instead, beginning with low-income communities of color as a starting point brings enormous potential for increasing the scale and democratic character of public engagement.

My primary case, the North End Organizing Network (NEON), illustrates that this work is not easy. NEON's experience reveals that deeply engaging residents using new media tools requires significant time investment, particularly in the startup phase. With multiple co-existing technologies, organizations must learn to navigate and consolidate input from multiple channels. With many residents engaging civically for the first time, there is no shortcut to relationship building, which is a key step for communities to adopt new technology.

Challenges to the Six Case Study Themes

Chapter Three revealed that the five supporting cases of community-based organizations shared several themes in common. In particular, these organizations:

- Embrace spirit of experimentation and flexibility;
- Play to strengths of multiple co-existing platforms;
- Involve community members in decisions, design, and/or content production;
- Maintain balance of techies and non-techies;
- Appoint "tech visionary" to catalyze technology adoption; and
- Track what works to invest time and resources strategically.

Though community-based organizations may aspire to embrace each of the six core case study themes, in practice some challenges intervene. Every

organization works within a different context, so their attempts to use technology will play out differently. However, taking NEON's experience together with supporting case studies reveals some common challenges. These include a lack of committed community members, differing organizational priorities, varied member interests, large scale, and reluctance to use quantitative measures.

Without a strong base of community members committed to the organization, it's difficult for community members to take the lead in decision-making, design or content production of technology. A lack of committed community members also means the decision-making of projects will be weighted towards "techies" rather than "non-techies," ultimately impacting the project outcomes. Louisiana Bucket Brigade's experience illustrates this, as they found that building the technology was much easier than encouraging people to use it. Even if an organization has a committed membership, members have a variety of interests, and may not opt to become involve in new media. Some may find mapping or reporting on the neighborhood inspiring, while others may prefer to participate in other ways. Families for Freedom recognizes this, and therefore offers a variety of ways for members to engage with the organization. For these time-intensive technology projects, a committed core team of community members sustains the energy of these projects.

Particularly if focused on building a base, organizations may prioritize relationship-building or other work over technology. NEON, just initiating its organizing in the North End, illustrates this. Stretched for time, these organizations are less likely to embrace a flexible and open-minded approach to technology. They are also less likely to have a "tech visionary" who will advocate for new media approaches. With llimited capacity to dedicate to the multiple co-existing platforms that community members access, organizations sometimes find that consolidating input from multiple channels brings more burdens than benefits.

Organizations may not align with these themes for other reasons. For some, the large geographic scope of their work means that they must balance far-reaching publicity with strong relationship building. To reach a large scale, these organizations sometimes dedicate less time to relationship building; however, strong dedication falters as a result. Additionally, many organizations value qualitative measurements much higher than quantitative measures, preferring nuanced analysis to more rigid measures. Though they also have the ability to collaboratively create their own quantitative measures, they shy away from these measures all together and do not strategically track how their actions result in increased involvement.

It is definitely possible to overcome these challenges and replicate the successes of the supporting case studies, embracing the flexible and participatory approach to new media. Naming these challenges is a first step to improving technology adoption. The ultimate benefits of overcoming these challenges are great. Organizations can use technology to cultivate a more engaged, connected base, which can quickly mobilize for a particular action. Technology can also help organizations to communicate their work broadly, influencing key decision-makers and the larger public.

Recommendations by Sector

NEON's experience illustrates that building technology that successfully engages low-income communities is not easy. Ultimately, creating relevant technology will require multiple sectors to work toward a thoughtful approach. To achieve this goal, I propose recommendations that fall broadly into four sectors: technology developers, universities, community-based organizations and governments.

Technology Developers

From startups, to large companies and university research centers, developers work in many different types of organizations. Through innovative design, they can influence the field to build inclusive new media tools that change the way that people participate in society.

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1. **Consider the user on the margin as part of technology design process.** Rather than beginning from the "average user," technology development can begin by designing for hard-to-reach users. Understanding which the platforms low-income communities of color access can increase usability not just for these populations, but for everyone along the spectrum.

2. **Package technology simply for nonprofits to adapt it to their needs.** Nonprofits often have difficulty adapting new software to work for their constituents because they do not know what skills or the number of consulting hours it will require. Technology developers can create clear instructions for less technology-savvy nonprofit staff to modify what they build.

Universities

As large institutions that straddle many sectors and often foster technology development, universities have the ability to leverage their position to convene different groups of people. Bringing together unlikely partnerships will help institutions to build responsive technology.

1. **Convene joint technology development sessions with community-based organizations.** These sessions can spur collective innovation to design technologies that directly respond to community needs. One model for this is the Sparks Summit, which the Center for Reflective Community Practice organized in 2002 (Ceasar McDowell, Interview, May 2011). Bringing together a group of over 50 students, community practitioners and technology developers, this summit inspired Tad Hirsh of the Media Lab to develop software called Speakeasy. Speakeasy is a telephone service that connects new immigrants with bilingual community members who can counsel on local resources and social services.

2. **Leverage university-community partnerships to foster mutual learning.** Because ensuring technology adoption requires building strong relationships, universities can foster mutual learning

opportunities with community-based organizations. Through these partnerships, students can learn from experienced practitioners, and community-based organizations can benefit from fresh ideas and student energy.

Community-Based Organizations

With strong ties to low-income communities of color, community-based organizations are well positioned to increase participation through new media. NEON and the supporting case study groups illustrate some of the difficulties that these groups face when implementing new media technologies, but also the tremendous potential. Community-based organizations have the opportunity to set the tone for how multiple sectors should use new media for meaningful engagement.

1. **Assume role in helping constituents become early adopters of technology.** As the rules of communication on new media platforms are still in formation, these few years are critical to shape how low-income communities will access and influence the new media landscape. An important first step is for nonprofits to recognize and embrace their role to increase technology access. Though they may not currently recognize this role, they have a track record of increasing technology adoption.

2. **Bring community members to the forefront of decision-making, design and content creation.** To ensure that the chosen platform directly meets community needs and therefore receives wide support, it is important that community members play an active role in deciding what works. This ownership will help spark widespread adoption of the technology and support meaningful engagement.

Governments

With the rising trend of using new media to promote open government, governments currently have an opportunity to use these platforms to increase and diversify citizen engagement. If governments carefully consider

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the design and implementation of their new media efforts, they can reach more people and in a more profound way.

1. **Begin new media strategy by understanding constituent platforms.** Though smartphones are on the rise, they still constitute just a quarter of all cell phones in the United States. Internet access is also rising, yet there is still a significant gap in access, depending on the demographic. It is important for governments to understand how their constituents communicate and receive information to develop technologies that reach residents where they are. Every neighborhood is very different, and it is worthwhile to survey and collect data to make these decisions based on strong data.

2. **Work with community-base organizations to play a strong role in adopting technology.** Because government officials and staffers typically do not have time to do the intensive on-the-ground relationship building needed to engage new constituencies, they can instead partner with organizations that focus primarily on this. These collaborations might help local governments to develop relevant tools that are mutually beneficial to both sectors.

Future Research

This thesis contributes just one small piece to a larger puzzle. As an emerging area of scholarship, there is a great deal more to explore. Future research could include:

- **Informal networks.** Shifting technology access has led to many informal uses of technology in low-income communities of color. Researchers are just beginning to examine this, with youth as a starting point, but there is a lot more to learn. Several examples arose during the course of this research, such as networks that share information on immigration raids through text messaging and workers who communicate with each other in the early stages of organizing through online forums.

- **Models from developing countries.** Developing countries use simple text messaging and feature phone applications for numerous uses, including mapping, banking, and health services. Though there is some discussion of why developing countries are farther along in mobile technology use, it would be interesting to examine how some of these approaches could translate to a United States context.

- **Increasing new media reach through strong messaging and etiquette**. Though many social media bloggers and writers discuss proper messaging and etiquette for popular platforms such as Twitter or Facebook, it would be worthwhile to explore this for mobile technology and the environment of multiple co-existing platforms within low-income communities.

- **Movement building.** Looking at new media from a movement building perspective, studying the multi-platform communications models of different movements could provide insight into how to bring community voice to scale. Sasha Constanza-Chock began this work through his transmedia analysis of the Los Angeles immigrant rights movement. Examining other movements could build on this to provide a repository of shared lessons to support groups as they build upon the work of others.

Final Thoughts

Laying the groundwork to make new media relevant is not easy. For technology developers, it requires shifting the design process to accommodate a broader range of users. For governments, it means that there is no shortcut to building strong relationships with low-income communities of color. For community-based organizations, it means designating time and resources to tedious tasks and untested outreach methods.

However, if these sectors take up the challenge, the rewards are great. With a network of connected constituents, organizations can disseminate critical information at the drop of a hat. Community members can share their

stories not just with friends and neighbors, but also with the decision-makers they hope to influence. Technology can also foster the formation of unlikely friendships, with people from dissimilar backgrounds somehow finding common ground. At this critical juncture, the rules of new media are still in flux. Working together across sectors allows great potential for communities on the margin to shape the new media landscape, amplifying community members' voices and bringing the possibility of a more just neighborhood, city and world a little more within reach.

Appendix A: Case Study Matrix

Project	Location	Motivation	Media Strategy	Primary Platform(s)	Software/Web Tool(s)	Time Commitment	Cost (Approx)	Key Lessons	Major Takeaway
DREAM Act Movement	DREAM Team Los Angeles (Los Angeles, CA)	To pass the DREAM Act, undocumented students need national media attention	Mobilization, reflection/ community building	Web, basic mobile phone, TV, radio	Facebook, Twitter, Blogging, Online DREAM Act portal, uStream, Radio, TV, Newspaper	2-3 hours daily per person for social media posts	Free online tools; cost of cell phones for video streaming; national SMS blasting system and shortcode; # part-time student staff	1. It's important to use new and traditional media together. 2. Once people know how to tell their own stories, the tools are easy to learn. 3. It is important to distribute knowledge. Everyone should be trained on all the tools. 4. Having affected people at the forefront is major strength to attracting media attention.	It's important to use both traditional and new media together to reach different audiences.
Mobile Voices/Voces Móviles (VozMob)	Institute for Popular Education of Southern California (IDEPSCA), (Los Angeles, CA)	When you google "daylaborer" the first site that appears is a hate site.	Citizen journalism, reflection/ community building	Basic mobile phone, web	Created Vozmob platform on Drupal (open source language) - SMS, MMS, Email to website	4-5 regular volunteers at startup; currently full time coordinating staff	2 part-time staff at startup, now 1 full time staff, grant $ for Drupal (web platform) development, Nokia phones donated, web hosting	1. The workers are the source of the project's success. 2. This tool must be connected to all of the work that the organization does. 3. Rather than prescribe technology, it is important to involve community members in the design process. 4. Technical expertise is important—to design the tool, but even more importantly, to train community members how to use the tool. 5. Dedicated staff time is key, particularly in the beginning phases.	Involving community members to take an active role in the design process of a new tool enables ownership of the tool, deeper engagement and sustainaiblity of the tool over time.
Oil Spill Crisis Map	Louisiana Bucket Brigade (New Orleans, LA)	There is no consolidated reporting of health and environmental incidents in aftermath of BP Oil Spill	Data collection	Web, smart phone	Ushahidi platform – Citizens send reports by web, sms, phone, iphone/android app	A couple of months to develop kml (map) layers, 2 days to launch site, volunteer monitoring shifts in three hour blocks from 8a-11p during crisis	Database: $1000/year; SMS vendor $200/year; Flip cameras under $200; high quality digital camera $300-400; Online tools - free	1. Outreach and education was far more difficult than the technical aspects of setting up the tool. 2. Crisis mapping was very time-intensive. 3. Technical expertise is helpful to save money. 4. Using mainstream media to promote the issue and tool is key.	Outreach and education was far more difficult than the technical aspects of setting up the tool.
War on Immigrants Report	Families for Freedom (FFF) (New York, NY)	People inside detention and in the community listen to radio.	Citizen journalism	Radio	WBAI Radio show, Once a month	Initial startup time to get slot, develop partnership; currently 3 meetings (two planning phone calls & one recording session)	People's production house provides recording and editing equipment; Staff time to coordinate	1. Media training intermediaries can help organizations to provide expertise and save time. 2. Media can be one of many forms of leadership development. 3. Recognize the priority of communications work as moving big picture goals. 4. Experimentation pays off and eventually becomes part of the routine.	Larger media intermediaries provide technical expertise where there is low staff capacity.
Grassroots Organizing Campaigns	Voices Of Community Activists & Leaders (VOCAL) (New York, NY)	Without the power of organized money or a lobbyist, media is a tool for decisionmakers to listen to very low-income citizens.	Mobilization	Web, basic mobile phone	Flickr, Vimeo, Email, Text message blasts, database	2-3 hours after events; Time for entering contacts into database	Web host, SMS Gateway (free workaround), 1 full-time staff	1. Don't abandon what is currently working; instead, add new media tools to complement what is working well. 2. Track the way that you are contacting people and how they are responding in order to decide which tools work best. 3. Use new media tools to strategically gain the attention of mainstream media or Campaign targets. 4. Understand what platforms work for specific community.	Tracking the results helps understand where staff should invest their time, and which tools to add to existing methods that work well.

Appendix B: NEON's Mobile System

NEON's mobile system is a combination of an open source application, Open VBX and a fee for service online feedback system, IdeaScale.
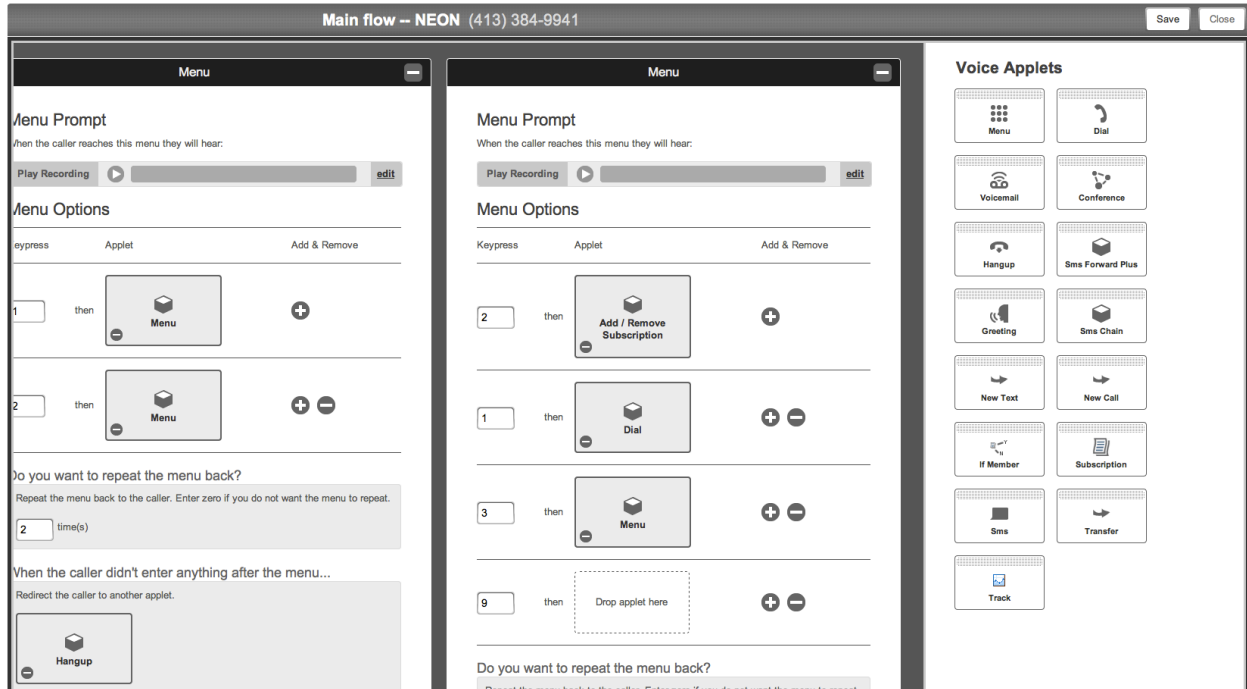
Open VBX

OpenVBX is an open source PHP/MySQL application that helps developers build Internet phone and SMS applications. It provides a modern user interface for end-users and a complete API for developers. OpenVBX is an open source project started by Twilio that is powered by Twilio's hosted phone and SMS service. In order to make and receive phone calls using OpenVBX, you must have a Twilio.com account. OpenVBX extends Twilio's API by providing a user interface and other primitives like voicemail that build upon Twilio's core API stack. OpenVBX is designed to be extensible by developers, and ease to use by end users.
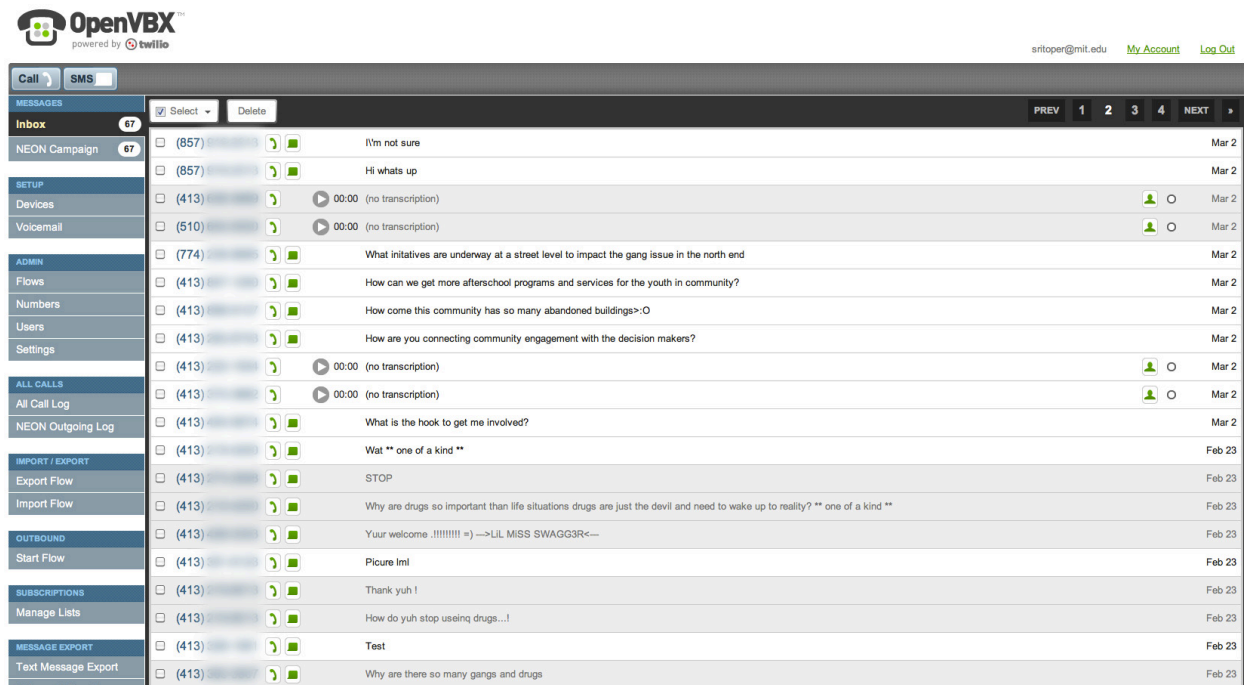
Open VBX Inbox displays received text messages and voicemails and allows administrators to respond by texting or calling.
Source: OpenVBX (2011)

Open VBX allows drag and drop customization of call and text message flows
Source: Open VBX (2011)
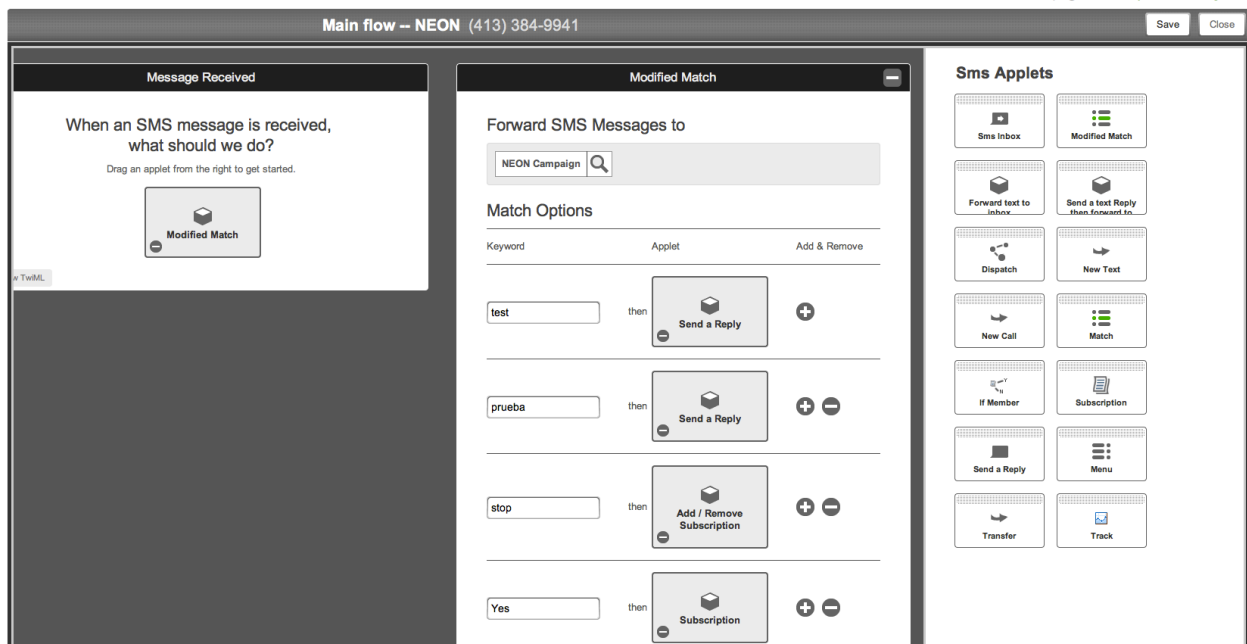
Screenshot of text message flow and applets
Source Open VBX (2011)

IdeaScale

IdeaScale emerges from a for-profit company focused on online market research tools. It was built to channel discussions to both increase engagement and provide focused, effective feedback for organizations. IdeaScale is used by organizations ranging from government agencies to non-profits to companies of all sizes. Organzations such as Xerox, RedHat, Microsoft, the Veterans Administration, and The White House has used IdeaScale as their crowdsourcing platform (IdeaScale 2011).

IdeaScale interface allows users to submit questions and vote/comment on favorites.
Source: Engage the Power website (2011)

Appendix C: Focus Group Questionnaire

North End Organizing Network (NEON) – Help us connect with you!

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Phone number: _____

Email: _____

Are you a North End resident? ☐ Yes   ☐ No

What is your age? (Roughly)
☐ Under 25 years old
☐ 25 to 35 years old
☐ 35 to 60 years old
☐ Above 60 years old

Can we contact you if we have more questions?
☐ Yes   ☐ No

1. **Do you have any of the following?**
   (Check all that apply):
   ☐ Computer with internet access
   ☐ Mobile phone
2. **If you have a mobile phone, what do you use it for?**
   ☐ Work - To conduct business
   ☐ Personal/Recreation - To call family and friends
   ☐ To find out about services and/or meetings
   ☐ To tell others about services and/or meetings
   ☐ Other (Explain):

3. **If you have a mobile phone, which of the following features do you use?**
   (Check all that apply):
   ☐ Call
   ☐ Send/receive text messages
   ☐ Send/receive pictures
4. **How can NEON use mobile phones or the internet to stay in touch with you and/or North End residents? What suggestions do you have to improve our phone/text hotline?**

North End Organizing Network (NEON) – ¡Ayudenos a seguir en contacto con Ud!

Nombre: _____

Dirección: _____

_____

Número de Teléfono: _____

Email: _____

¿Ud. es residente del North End? ☐ Sí   ☐ No

¿Cuántos años tiene? (Aproximadamente)
☐ Menos de 25 años
☐ 25 a 35 años
☐ 35 to 60 años
☐ Más de 60 años

¿Podemos contactarle si tengamos más preguntas? ☐ Sí   ☐ No

1. **¿Tiene Ud. alguno de los siguentes?**
   (Por favor, marque todos los que le aplique):
   ☐ Computadora con aceso a internet
   ☐ Teléfono móvil
2. **¿Si tiene teléfono móvil, para que lo usa?**
   ☐ Trabajo - Conducir negocios
   ☐ Personal/Recreación - Llamar a la familia y a los amigos
   ☐ Saber de servicios o reuniones
   ☐ Informarles a otros sobre servicios o reuniones
   ☐ Otro *(Explique, por favor):*

3. **¿Si tiene teléfono móvil, cuáles de las siguientes funciones usa Ud.?**
   (Por favor, marque todas las que le aplique):
   ☐ Llamar
   ☐ Mandar/recibir mensajes de texto
   ☐ Mandar/recibir fotos
4. **¿Como puede NEON usar teléfono móviles o internet para seguir en contacto con Ud. y/o los residents del North End? ¿Qué sugerencias tiene para mejorar nuestro sistema de llamadas/textos?**

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