Community Engagement and Online Deliberation

Todd Davies, Michael Levin, Laura O’Laughlin
Partnership for Internet Equity and Community Engagement

National Conference on Dialogue and Deliberation
August 6, 2006
“Online deliberation”

A common theme:
The challenge of using electronic media in a way that deepens thinking and improves mutual understanding.

See also:
http://www.online-deliberation.net
Partnership for
- Internet Equity
and
- Community Engagement

between...
- the East Palo Alto Community Network
and
- the Symbolic Systems Program at Stanford
Ideals of the PIECE approach

- Community-based
- Participant-observation
- Problem-driven
A Problem-Driven Design Process

- Problems Identified
- Other Observations and Assumptions
- Available Approaches
- Principles
- Consequences
- Initial design and feedback
- Re-design
East Palo Altans
vote 1,778-1,766
for incorporation

On July 1, 2003, at 7:00PM, the City of East Palo Alto voters residents, neighbors and friends turned out to celebrate 20 years of progress and prosperity. The City, now without an official, was incorporated July 1, 1983. In the last 20 years, growth and development have made it possible. The City is constantly evolving into an area that is more and more socially diverse and multi-cultural. The City continues to strive, our citizens, and use of responsible economic development activities that address the

EPAenet

July 16, 2003

East Palo Alto Celebrates 20 Years

EPAenet
July 16, 2003

East Palo Altans vote 1,778-1,766 for incorporation

By Mark Reutter

Bay Area News Group

East Palo Alto celebrates 20 Years

In 1983, East Palo Alto was incorporated

On July 1, 2003, the City of East Palo Alto held its 20th anniversary celebration. The city was incorporated on July 1, 1983, after its residents voted in favor of incorporation. The city has grown significantly since then, with a population of over 30,000 residents. The city is known for its diverse population and strong sense of community. East Palo Alto is located in Santa Clara County and is part of the greater San Francisco Bay Area.
Research Results for the East Palo Alto Community Network / Plugged In

Adapted from a 2005 report written by Brandi Thompson
Four Goals for the Community Network

1) Increased Participation of Residents in Online Information and Idea Exchange,
2) Increased Technology Skills and Use of Technology by Staff of Community Based Organizations
3) Increased Access to Relevant Information for Community Residents,
4) Increased Technology Skills for Community Residents
1. Increased Participation of Residents in Online Information and Idea Exchange

With the purpose of leading to an increased sense of commitment to the community

-The site averaged 236 users per day in fall 2003. In early 2005, this was up to an average of 2,082 users per day.

-Residents described using EPA.net to gain “information about community events” as well as “access to community news.”
2. Increased Technology Skills and Use of Technology by Staff of Community Based Organizations (CBOs)

*With the purpose of attaining increased efficiency and effectiveness*

-Free At Last, commented that the TAPs had a “tremendous impact” on the organization and that they were able to “stream line business operations.”

-There is now DSL access for offices, with direct connection to the county, which makes the transfer of data much more efficient.
3. Increased Access to Relevant Information for Community Residents

Increasing Ease of Utilizing Community Resources

-One EPA.net Community Advisory Board member noted that “she realized that her community possessed a number of community organizations working in many areas to make East Palo Alto a stronger and better community” as she became involved with the site.

- Though they may be coming in specifically to use the TAP, residents may also inadvertently discover other resources the host organization has to offer.
4. Increased Technology Skills for Community Residents

Leading to greater educational and employment opportunities

-As a representative from the Ecumenical Hunger Project noted, the TAP “enables clients to put together a resume and look for jobs.”

-EPA.net provides opportunities for residents to learn and apply new skills.
The East Palo Alto Community Network has achieved all its goals since its programs began in 2002, and continues to work to improve the skills, computer access and online participation of EPA residents.
Participant observations in East Palo Alto (2002-2003)

Problems posed by reliance on face-to-face meetings for community decision making:

- Low attendance and representation
- Insufficient meeting duration and frequency
- Not enough communication between meetings
- Not enough information available during meetings
- Not enough communication between groups
- Insufficient (access to) group records
- Streamlined decision procedures
- Lack of transparency for those unable to attend
- Present in all communities, but of amplified importance in underserved communities
Other Observations and Assumptions

- Email use universal in some, technology-oriented groups (e.g. TechCollab)
- Other tools being used: Yahoo! Groups, Zoomerang
- Many residents in non-tech oriented groups did not use email
- Community Network making Internet access nearly universal, with training opportunities
- Language and literacy barriers can be overcome through representation
- Decision making thought to require face-to-face meetings
Available Approaches

- Making more effective use of existing asynchronous tools for threaded text conversation (email, message boards, blogs, wikis)
- Synchronous tools (e.g. voice chat software used by Fishkin/Luskin), combined with email
- Better publicity for and public records of f2f meetings
- New asynchronous tool for deliberation tailored to target groups
Deme: a platform for online deliberation (2003- )

Principles:

- **Supportiveness**. The platform should support the group overall, so that there is either an improvement or no decline in the ability of the group to meet the needs of its members or stakeholders.
Deme: a platform for online deliberation (2003- )

Principles:
- **Supportiveness**
- **Comprehensiveness.** The platform should allow the group to accomplish, in an online environment, all of the usual deliberative tasks associated with face-to-face meetings.
Deme: a platform for online deliberation (2003- )

Principles:

- **Supportiveness**
- **Comprehensiveness**
- **Participation.** The platform should maximize the number of desired participants in the group's deliberations, and minimize barriers to their participation.
**Deme: a platform for online deliberation (2003-)**

Principles:

- **Supportiveness**
- **Comprehensiveness**
- **Participation**
- **Quality.** The platform should facilitate a subjective quality of interaction and decision making that meets or exceeds what the group achieves in face-to-face meetings.
Demo Group

This is the description of the group, which can be edited by anyone with access to the group. In this case, you are in the Demo Group, which is meant as an interactive introduction to Dime and its features.

[Edit this summary]

Welcome, todd ::::my settings ::::logout ::::my groups

Meeting Areas
- Learn Dime Here
- Sandbox
- Dime Discussion
- mymeetingname
- RM Players
- testi testi
- Discussion
- Members assembly
- Eureka!
- Puppu
- The Cybermatics of on-line deliberation

Create new meeting area...

Announcements
- Jan-14: test
- Dec-29: Tesi2
- Nov-29: This is a short announcement.
- Sep-17: Test
- Mar-15: Welcome to the Demo Group! Click the "Learn Dime Here" meeting area link on the left to get an introduction to meeting area features.

View all announcements
Add new announcement

General Options
- My profile
- Member List
- Calendar
- Links
- Library
- FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)
- Search
- Chat
- Leave this group

This site uses DIME software.
### 3. Example: Document

**Preface:**
This is an example of a document, and you are reading the "preface" of the document. Read the document below for more information about documents and, if you like, you can post a comment on this document.

Document posted by: andrew, Feb 02, 17:21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General comments on this document</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New document announcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example of a general comment on a document</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**A document can be anything that contains text you want people to read. It is possible to post and view documents other than plain text ones (e.g. pictures, Word documents, video clips), but currently only plain text documents support in-text commenting (explanation of in-text commenting will follow shortly). But there are many possible documents that can be posted in a meeting area even now. A document could be the proposed bylaws of your group, a press release you are drafting together, an interesting article you want everyone to read, or something else, as long as it is in text form.**

*Deme was designed to support document collaboration, document-centered discussion, and decision making about documents. "Document collaboration" means that two or more people work together to draft and/or revise a document. In the action menu (the pulldown menu filled in light blue) you can always select "New document" to post a document from scratch. When you are currently viewing a document in the folio viewer's item display, the action menu will also contain an option for*
Example: Decision [Decision]

Question: Let's try to make a decision. The decision concerns whether the text of 'Example: Document' is sufficient as an overview of how documents function in a meeting area. Click 'Vote now' to make your choice known, and note that you can annotate your vote with a comment. I have selected 'consensus' as the decision rule, meaning that everyone has to agree for this proposal to pass.

Decision called for by: andrew, Feb 02, 17:31

Voting has closed. Closing message

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Total votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approve &quot;Example: Document&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Approve &quot;Example: Document&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Member choices/comments:

- **andrew**
  - Approve "Example: Document"
    - Feb-02, 17:32
    - I agree with the current state of "Example: Document"

- **guest**
  - Don't Approve "Example: Document"
    - Jul-05, 07:05
    - Just to see what happens.

**Did not vote:**
- todd, brendan, bbhatt, melodee, salt, mirage

Comment: New Poll: "Example: Decision" - andrew - Feb 02, 17:31

Respond to this comment

Let's try to make a decision. The decision concerns whether the text of 'Example: Document' is sufficient as an overview of how documents function in a meeting area. Click 'Vote now' to make your choice known, and note that you can annotate your vote with a comment. I have selected 'consensus' as the decision rule, meaning that everyone has to agree for this proposal to pass.
Meeting Areas

Create new meeting area

1. General
   (15 posts since 09/25) | Info

2. New Meeting Area
   (7 posts in last 2 hours) | Info

3. Testing New Name
   (9 posts in last 3 days) | Info

4. New Marea
   (2 posts in last 23 min) | Info

[Group image file here]

Announcements

[Add Announcement]

[06/24/05 12:05PM] by aarontam
Action: [Edit] [Delete]
This is a test announcement. There will be many more announcements in the future.

[more]
Groups that could benefit...

- Volunteer advisory boards
- Neighborhood associations
- Consortia of nonprofits
- Grassroots activist groups
- Labor union chapters and caucuses
- Clubs and religious congregations
- University-based groups
- Ad-hoc citizen groups (e.g. for community planning)
PIECE Contributors (2002- )

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