

International Collaborative Online Networks

Lessons Identified from the Public, Private, and
Nonprofit Sectors

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INTRODUCTION

From transnational terrorism to avian flu, the contemporary challenges faced by the global community are growing increasingly complex and difficult to manage. This trend has been driven by several factors, with globalization and the proliferation of technology and information playing important roles. Globalization has increased the number of actors involved in the creation and resolution of international crises while simultaneously reducing the resiliency once afforded by geographic separation. At the same time, the proliferation of technology has accelerated decision-making cycles, reducing the time available for policymakers, business leaders, and humanitarian aid workers to craft responses to these problems.

Globalization and technology proliferation have also created new opportunities to address these same challenges. By leveraging these twin phenomena, actors from different sectors—public, private, and nonprofit—can more easily collaborate during complex emergencies that transcend national, bureaucratic, cultural, and vocational boundaries.

As two organizations active in promoting international outreach for problem solving, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Central Intelligence Agency's Global Futures Partnership (GFP) convened a workshop that included leaders from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations (IOs), private companies, and governments. Representatives from each sector shared lessons learned from their respective outreach efforts and those of other organizations conducting similar activities. The workshop, which was held March 28, 2008, focused specifically on the use of international collaborative online networks (ICONs) as affordable and viable tools for connecting organizations across sectors and borders.¹ Previous work by CSIS has highlighted the benefits of such networks,² and the principles that they described remain the same: a large group of digitally connected individuals will usually be smarter than a small group of individuals collected in one place; unofficial online environments such as wikis tend to be faster at uploading new information than official Web sites; and blogs and online discussion groups are likely to spot new trends before the mainstream literature does.

This report is based primarily on the insights captured during this workshop and on the discussions that it generated.

1. The agenda for this workshop can be found in the Appendix to this report.

2. See: Rebecca Linder, *Wikis, Webs, and Networks: Creating Connections for Conflict-Prone Settings* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, 2006); and Arnaud de Borchgrave, Thomas Sanderson, and Jacqueline Harned, *Force Multiplier for Intelligence: Collaborative Open Source Networks* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, 2007).

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CHALLENGES

Although the concept of an ICON is simple in principle—an online community of interest that exchanges knowledge among its members—its execution is fraught with difficulties. As several experts have pointed out,¹ most online communities of interest fail. This, in turn, may undermine similar efforts as members of unsuccessful ICONs are tainted by their negative experiences. However, as pointed out by journalist Suw Charman-Anderson: “There is a lot of failure in the use of social software in business, on the Web, in civic society, but we need to see this as a part of the cycle, a step along on the learning curve. We can’t afford to stop experimenting, just because something failed once, or because it didn’t work out for someone else.”²

More ICONs fail because of an inability to successfully engage individuals in a collaborative effort than inferior technology or a lack of funds. Charman-Anderson writes: “In a business culture where rewards and punishments are focused on the individual, the teamwork and collaboration required to make a social software project a success can become too much of a risk.” As a result, many ICONs never reach a critical mass of relevant contributors, lose their target audience, and fade away. From the business and technology standpoint, however, ICONs are resilient to failure because they can be built relatively cheaply using technology that is already very good and constantly improving.

In line with this analysis, the five key challenges highlighted in this report are all related to the “people side” of ICONs. These challenges are:

1. Building and maintaining trust among members;
2. Crafting incentives strong enough to attract and sustain members;
3. Effectively moderating the network so as to ensure it accomplishes its intended goal;
4. Finding the right partner(s);
5. Measuring how effectively these issues are overcome and the overall utility of the network.

This section will elaborate on these challenges and explore some of the techniques that have been used—with varying degrees of success—to address them.

1. See, for example: Clay Shirky, comment on “Gin, Television, and Social Surplus,” Here Comes Everybody, comment posted April 26, 2008, <http://herecomeseverybody.org>; and Clive Thompson, “Open-Source Spying,” *New York Times*, December 3, 2006.

2. Suw Charman-Anderson, comment on “The Importance of Pigheadedness,” The Strange Attractor Blog in Corante, comment posted April 29, 2008, <http://strange.corante.com/2008/04/29/the-importance-of-pigheadedness>.

Building Trust

Without trust, any collaborative network will fail to meet its full potential or, in many cases, to generate content that is meaningful to its members. Establishing trust in a collaborative network is often a slow and fragile process. An in-depth understanding of the organizations and personalities participating in a network is crucial when building trust. Trust building must also take into account the specific goals and organizational structure of the network. An open, decentralized network, for instance, requires a vastly different trust-building regime than a closed, centralized network.

In an online environment, the issue of trust is critical. Though Web sites like YouTube and Wikipedia, which provide open access to the intellectual property of the masses, enjoy a huge following, others such as about.com and bigthink.com are becoming increasingly popular because they offer content that is created and vetted by professionals. Concepts such as the “wisdom of the crowds”³ and the “democratic Web”⁴ are increasingly being undermined by the inaccuracies that entirely open networks generate. Meanwhile, the phenomenon that *Newsweek* termed “revenge of the expert,” the public’s disillusionment with content generated by amateur users and a shift back to expert opinion, is leading to more and more trusted online environments.⁵

Trust and Organizational Culture

Organizational cultures that do not engender trust with outsiders are commonplace. Such cultures can create several hurdles when building or participating in ICONs. Overcoming these obstacles requires organizations to be mindful of how their culture impedes trust building and to think critically about which aspects of their culture must remain fixed and which are flexible.

Such obstacles can result from the difference between an organization’s high operational tempo and the time and patience required to achieve the trust necessary for successful collaboration. This holds particularly true for organizations whose high-speed culture leads them to focus primarily on short-term results. Such organizations must recognize this discrepancy and accept the fact that building trusting and productive partnerships can be an exercise in patience, with dividends measured primarily in the long term. Organizations that operate under the assumption that outreach is only good if it adds value in the short term will never embrace ICONs in a meaningful way.

Another challenge encountered by many organizations seeking to establish trust within an ICON is striking a balance between transparency and confidentiality. On the one hand, organizations involved in ICONs are trying to contribute to a trust-based network, which demands

3. The “wisdom of the crowds” concept holds that large groups of people are collectively smarter and “better at solving problems, fostering innovation, coming to wise decisions, and even predicting the future” than an elite few—no matter how brilliant these few are. See James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

4. The concept of the “democratic Web” refers to the fact that although the more traditional media outlets, such as television, newspapers, and radio, are accessible only to those with considerable financial means, anyone with a computer and a modem can reach out to a potential audience of billions via the Internet. See, for example, Adam Cohen, “Why the Democratic Ethic of the World Wide Web May Be about to End,” *New York Times*, May 28, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/28/opinion/28sun3.html?_r=2&oref=slogin&oref=slogin.

5. Tony Dokoupil, “Revenge of the Expert,” *Newsweek*, March 6, 2008, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/119091>.

transparency. On the other hand, the success of these same organizations may depend on secret or proprietary information, creating incentives to make their interactions opaque. Intelligence agencies within the U.S. government, for example, classify information by default. Many organizations also forbid employees from using nonsecure lines of communication or open Web sites. This issue has not only been extremely challenging for militaries and intelligence agencies but also for private companies and NGOs/IOs. In order to address this problem, organizations tend to gravitate toward unclassified information sharing and online environments that allow usernames to be anonymous and avoid “cookies” to trace user identities, visit histories, and contributions. This solution, however, limits the ability of a network’s members to take into account the bias and background of anonymous contributors, ultimately eroding the utility of the network.

Interestingly, some cases have illustrated that information provided on ICONs, personal blogs, and large Web 2.0 platforms such as YouTube and Wikipedia are far less likely to pose security threats to organizations than their own official Web sites. For example, an audit by the U.S. Army Web Risk Assessment Cell of 878 official U.S. military Web sites, undertaken between January 2006 and January 2007, discovered 1,813 violations of operational security. By comparison, the same audit found only 28 such breaches on 594 individual blogs. Some experts believe that this is due to the fact that individuals writing about or discussing issues that may place lives at risk are either directly involved or know someone who is. Thus, they “self-police” much more rigorously than others.⁶

The emergence of misconceptions is another issue that arises when the transparency of an ICON is limited. In extreme cases, these misconceptions may result in patently negative views about the organization operating the ICON or in false impressions about its motivations for establishing the network in the first place. Certain communities, for example, may question the motives behind an intelligence agency’s participation in an ICON and hold suspicions that such an agency is using the network as an open source collection device. Obviously, individuals and organizations that harbor such misconceptions are unlikely to trust certain members of the network and, by extension, fail to fully engage with it.

The Difficulties of Trust Building: Two Examples

Civil-Military Relations

One area where the challenges of trust building are very prevalent is that of civil-military collaboration. For the past decade, military operations have been increasingly focused on noncombat missions. In the United States, for example, Department of Defense Directive 3000.05, signed in November 2005, states that stability, security, transition, and reconstruction operations are “a core U.S. military mission that the Department of Defense shall be prepared to conduct and support” and “shall be given priority comparable to combat operations.”⁷ This development has increased the number of instances in which the military finds itself operating alongside NGOs and IOs—in many cases complimenting one another. One example of this is Afghanistan, where cooperation among military forces, civilian government agencies, and NGOs/IOs (including local NGOs) is

6. Noah Shachtman, “Army Reports Brass, Not Bloggers, Breach Security,” *Wired*, August 17, 2007, <http://www.wired.com/politics/onlinerights/news/2007/08/milbloggers>.

7. Department of Defense, *Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations*, Directive 3000.5, November 28, 2008, <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/300005p.pdf>.

enabling access to communities and services that would not have been possible had every organization worked independently.

Despite this, some NGOs refuse to work with the military in any capacity, believing that such cooperation will harm their reputation among donors and the populations that they seek to serve. These NGOs fear, for example, that if they are seen interacting with the military, they may be viewed as extensions of foreign governments that are being used for the collection of information and the implementation of foreign and security policy. Other organizations have come to accept the military as part of their operational environment and, although not directly working with armed forces, will at least coordinate with them so as to avoid conflict and the duplication of efforts. A smaller group has concluded that working with the military can actually increase their efficacy on the ground and is taking steps to promote greater dialogue between the two sides.

The military has been ambivalent about its own desire to collaborate with NGOs. On one hand, it has acknowledged the value of NGOs to certain aspects of its mission. The *U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, for example, recognizes that “NGOs play important roles in resolving insurgencies” and that these organizations “can support lasting stability.” As such, it encourages commanders to “complement” the capabilities of NGOs to the “greatest extent possible.” The manual also states that “building a complementary, trust-based relationship” with NGOs “is vital.”⁸ Yet, many officers are wary of sharing information, especially what they consider to be classified information, with individuals who are not cleared to receive it. Others lack confidence in the ability of NGOs/IOs to add value to the often hazardous tasks that the military is asked to perform.

The Intelligence Community and Outreach

Another area where trust building is vital to success is cooperation between government intelligence agencies and experts outside of government. In the United States, for example, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) issued a directive on July 16, 2008, concerning collaboration with outside experts. Referred to as “Intelligence Community Directive 205: Analytic Outreach,” it states, among other things, that engaging nongovernmental and non-American communities of experts will “allow the IC to expand its knowledge base, share burdens, challenge assumptions and cultural biases, and encourage innovative thinking.”⁹

This directive, issued in response to aspects of the 2005 *Report of the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction and the National Intelligence Strategy*, is not the intelligence community’s first effort to embrace collaboration as a means of accomplishing its mission. Earlier, the U.S. intelligence community had created several online networking tools intended to help distribute knowledge. These tools include A-Space (a MySpace for intelligence analysts), Intellipedia (a Wikipedia for the intelligence community), and an online social bookmarking site along the lines of Delicious and Digg.

There has been a mixed response within the intelligence community to these initiatives. As described by Mike Wertheimer, then the senior DNI official for analytic transformation and technology, “The negative, risks for people undercover ... is drawn out so starkly, even though it

8. *U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army, 2006), <http://usacac.army.mil/cac/repository/materials/coin-fm3-24.pdf>.

9. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “Intelligence Community Directive 205: Analytic Outreach,” July 16, 2008, http://www.dni.gov/electronic_reading_room/ICD%20205.pdf.

is speculative, that they tend to carry the day.” Similarly, foreign partners invited to participate in A-Space and other information-sharing initiatives have also resisted once it became apparent that they could not merely access the information but would also have to actively participate.¹⁰ Given that predominantly internally facing collaborative efforts such as A-Space and Intellipedia have not been universally embraced by the intelligence community, the nongovernmental outreach called for in the July 16, 2008, directive will require a dramatic cultural change.

If members of a multisector ICON established to enable the exchange of intelligence do not trust each other, they are far less likely to post relevant work or to provide candid commentary and novel ideas. In such a situation, the quality of the discussion in the network would decline and the overall utility of the effort would diminish.

Compounding these challenges is the tendency within the intelligence world to believe that “if it is not secret, it is not valuable.” Such a bias for classified material leaves out highly valuable open source information and is self-defeating in the context of ICONs focusing on unclassified intelligence.

Trust-Building Mechanisms

The following six mechanisms were identified as key to building trust in ICONs:

1. Organizations must be sensitive to the fact that overt collaboration may sometimes be a complicated matter. As mentioned above, NGOs, for example, may view collaboration with the military as problematic. As a result, militaries should respect the impartiality and independence of such organizations, especially during ongoing operations. Acknowledging the concerns raised by organizations during the opening phases of a collaborative process will go a long way in building trust, ultimately allowing for more meaningful information sharing.
2. Enabling a two-way exchange of information and being transparent about how information will ultimately be used is critical. All too often, information sharing among different organizations is a one-way street, with certain organizations providing information and getting none in return. Furthermore, contributing organizations often do not know who uses their information once they pass it along to others. Establishing a give-and-take relationship for information sharing and explaining how any information received will be used is extremely important when building trust across different sectors.
3. Face-to-face meetings among individuals from collaborating organizations are an effective way of establishing trust for an online network. Success on this level can be measured by the candidness of exchanges and the degree to which information provided during these meetings is kept within the group. As these frank, in-person exchanges become more frequent and information remains protected, the level of trust within the online network will rise, elevating the network’s value. Time should be set aside at these meetings for social networking.

For example, a 2007 workshop sponsored by CSIS to discuss the creation of an ICON for members of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Iraq and Afghanistan highlighted the value that face-to-face interaction can provide to an online network. During the workshop,

10. Demetri Sevastopulo, “U.S. Launches ‘MySpace for Spies,’” *Financial Times*, August 21, 2007, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/6e2648ea-5014-11dc-a6b0-0000779fd2ac.html>.

- it became clear that the frequent face-to-face meetings attended by members of PRTs (even those who had left the PRTs but continued to work on related issues) would jumpstart trust building within the ICON because participants in the network would already be familiar with one another.
4. Regular assessments, exercises, or meetings, such as the “Emerald Express” events held in Quantico, Virginia, or the “Strong Angel” series of exercises cosponsored by various organizations across sectors, can accelerate trust building. During Emerald Express, for example, representatives of organizations from different sectors and countries were asked to list 20 things that they wish were different during crisis response operations. When the responses were collected, it became clear that 16 of the 20 items on all lists were identical. Such activities help break down barriers and establish commonalities that form the foundations of a trusting relationship.
 5. Identifying the members of an ICON increases the level of trust among them. This can be done using names (as opposed to usernames and nicknames), identifying the organization to which they belong, and providing a network of “friends” (ideally ones who are already members of the network) that can vouch for the credibility of a new member. Associating the information posted to an ICON with its contributor encourages greater discipline and accuracy as personal reputations are put on the line.
 6. Any outreach effort must be tailored to the culture, expectations, expertise, and goals of its members. Some ICONs will not generate the required level of trust unless all members are clearly identified and the network is a secure one. Others will have participants that are quite content to share knowledge within an open network populated by anonymous members.

Incentivizing

For any collaborative network to be successful, members must feel sufficiently incentivized to engage. Incentives vary depending on the type of network, its goals, and the characteristics of its members. Incentives used for a decentralized, open network will be far different than those employed by a centralized, closed network.

Incentives can be divided into three categories: transaction costs, direct incentives, and indirect incentives.

Transaction costs: These can also be described as disincentives that must be limited if the outreach effort is to succeed. The more difficult it is for members to participate in an ICON, the less likely they are to become involved. Potential transaction costs that could undermine member participation include technology that is burdensome to learn, access, and operate; meetings scheduled at inconvenient locations; and excessive time demands on participation. For government experts, security reporting requirements act as an additional transaction cost that deters them from engaging in ICONs.¹¹

Direct incentives: Such incentives are common and tend to be tangible. Examples of direct incentives include a requirement in terms of reference to share information in an online environment, honoraria, travel to conferences in attractive or useful locations, recognition from managers

11. Intelligence officers need to report all contact with outside experts, both U.S. and foreign. Having to get preapproval for attending a conference or meeting with an expert will wear on intelligence officers over time and erode their eagerness to reach out.

or an entire organization, and attribution in a publication. In addition, there are direct incentives for ICONs that may be significant only within the virtual community but are nevertheless quite effective. These include recognition by peers and awards along the lines of “employee of the month” (e.g., featured contribution or most active member). Other direct incentives induce competition—and therefore greater participation. They can include a “star rating” for the best contributors (much like the book reviewer rating system on Amazon and eBay’s “power seller” status). Each of these mechanisms can go a long way toward incentivizing members and driving performance.

Indirect incentives: These incentives are usually harder to measure but can often be the most compelling. Such incentives could include networking opportunities, making an impact on policy-makers, an opportunity to exchange ideas and hypothesis with colleagues, or an affiliation with a prestigious organization. In some cases, the only necessary incentive is the opportunity to provide input to what would otherwise be a very one-sided view. The U.S. State Department’s Bureau of International Information Programs, for example, now routinely participates in Arabic-language ICONs in order to provide a U.S. perspective where it has traditionally been absent.¹²

The moderator(s) of an ICON will ideally be explicit about all incentives before collaboration begins and leverage them as much as possible to boost participation. When formulating the incentive package, it is important to consider ways to incentivize the desired behavior. Providing a bonus for the first participant who posts a dozen responses on a discussion board, for instance, will incentivize quantity but not necessarily quality. Knowledge of a network’s intended goal, therefore, is a prerequisite for crafting effective incentives.

Regardless of what combination of incentives are ultimately employed, it is important to remember the “1 percent rule” coined to describe the experience of online communities. According to this rule, 1 percent of a community’s members contribute the majority of its content while 99 percent merely “lurk” and consume information. The same rule holds true for online outreach and information-sharing efforts.¹³ The actual percentage is, of course, subject to variation based on the type of community and the content provided. If, for example, entry into the community is contingent on content submissions, the share of participating members will rise. The concept of participation inequality, which states that a few users will contribute the majority of relevant activity while most users will very rarely, if at all, be active, has been observed in the online world from a very early stage and continues to hold true.¹⁴

Moderating

Finding the ideal degree of moderating in an ICON is often a crucial component in determining the network’s ultimate success. If a moderator is too hands off, the network runs the risk of deviating from its intended objective and becoming irrelevant. On the other hand, a moderator that is too engaged could inject personal bias into the network, stifling alternative views. An effective

12. Ben Bain, “Chat Room Diplomacy,” *Federal Computer Week*, September 3, 2007, http://www.fcw.com/print/13_31/features/103633-1.html.

13. Ben McConnell, comment on “The 1% Rule: Charting Citizen Participation,” Church of the Customer Blog, comment posted May 4, 2006, http://customerevangelists.typepad.com/blog/2006/05/charting_wiki_p.html.

14. Jakob Nielsen, “Community is Dead; Long Live Mega-Collaboration,” Alertbox: Current Issues in Web Usability, August 15, 1997, <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9708b.html>.

moderator, therefore, should be attuned to developments within the network and be judicious when exercising authority.

Being an effective moderator requires far more than exercising restraint. A successful moderator must be pragmatic. This demands that they know why they are conducting outreach and are clear about their objectives. They should also possess a degree of command over social sciences and the substantive issues that they want the network to explore. Though rare, this combination of expertise is critical.

When establishing a network, there are several important things a moderator must keep in mind: the desired level of controversy, continuity, mainstreaming, and diversity of input.

Level of controversy: A moderator must be careful to choose the appropriate level of controversy and strike an appropriate balance between being too bold and too boring. A moderator must also ensure that the warm ups—the initial steps that shape the group—do not last too long. These initial steps cannot be too diplomatic, and a good moderator needs to get to the point of an exercise quickly before interest wanes.

Continuity: Another important goal of a moderator should be to build continuity into the project. In order to achieve this, a moderator must be part of the conversation, preserve it, strategize a way forward, and sustain it. Following through on promises also reinforces continuity while simultaneously building trust and incentivizing members.

Mainstreaming: A good moderator must also be aware of the inevitable mainstreaming that emerges in any network. As a consensus emerges on a given topic, people become less likely to challenge it. Because outreach is about challenging assumptions, widely held views should be confronted as much as possible. An example that illustrates the emergence of a false assumption that became widely accepted occurred in a Global Futures Forum (GFF) community of interest on radicalization started by the government of Canada. This community took for granted that poverty was a trigger for violence without challenging the hypothesis.

Diversity of input: In order to prevent consensus from emerging, a moderator should encourage different perspectives and strive to create conditions that are conducive to open dialogue. While active moderating can help accomplish these goals, preventing homogeneity in a network's membership is far more important. A good moderator should deliberately reach beyond their linguistic, cultural, and professional comfort zone to broaden their catchment area and get different views. This may seem like a bit of a gamble, but it has proven to pay off handsomely on many occasions.

Finding the Right Partner(s)

Partnering with organizations can add value to international outreach efforts. Such a partnership can be a force multiplier that augments the reputation, contacts, and breadth of a collaborative network. Choosing the correct partner for international outreach is important.

One characteristic to consider when choosing a partner for international outreach is the culture of the organization. In doing so, it is also vital to be aware of one's own values and assumptions. In some countries, for instance, risk taking is encouraged, or at least accepted, making processes that drive change less controversial. Other cultures take a less tolerant view of risk and will seek to minimize it whenever possible. Other key issues regarding culture that need to be

considered include: How does that organization fit in with the culture of its home country? How well do members of that organization collaborate internally? Does the organization consider collaboration with outside partners advantageous to its objectives?

It is also important to determine if a potential partner harbors reservations in working with particular actors, such as governments, NGOs, IOs, military forces, or the intelligence community. Also, if an organization plans to engage multiple partners, it is important to be frank with each of them. This is especially critical in smaller countries where information travels fast.

Inevitably, political conflicts will arise with any partner. There are several techniques for containing these conflicts before they damage a partnership. First, one should provide assurances and support to potential partners in order to establish trust as early as possible. Demonstrating a solid track record to potential partners can also help reinforce this trust. Second, one should point out *confluences of interest* to potential partners. Although certain mutual interests might seem self-evident, they are not always obvious, and it helps to be explicit about them. Finally, it is important to identify and work through potential *conflicts of interest*. One important aspect of this is to predetermine who gets credit, who pays, and how content generated during the partnership will be disseminated.

The third characteristic that should be considered when selecting an organization to partner with is personality. Big personalities are everywhere, and it is important to recognize and accommodate them to a certain degree. Though big egos can often spoil a network, a certain amount of recognition and respect can satisfy most individuals.

Measuring Effectiveness

Any organization concerned with self-improvement critically examines its processes and outputs. Organizations that run ICONs or participate in them are no different. Unlike a factory manufacturing widgets or a military unit seizing an objective, measuring the utility and efficacy of a collaborative network is a difficult task. Organizations that promote a results-based culture find it particularly hard to view intangible benefits as acceptable. Many participants in ICONs, however, consider the intangible benefits to be equally if not more valuable than the network's substantive outputs.

Unless the objectives for a collaborative network are clear, it is impossible to measure effectiveness. The precondition to sound metrics, therefore, is explicit objectives. The purpose of collaboration could be to discover new information, identify expertise, validate trust, disseminate information, make analysis quicker and cheaper, or merely spur creativity. In each case, the metrics used to evaluate success will be different. In order to craft sound metrics for successful collaboration, one needs to ask why they are creating such a network and what they are trying to get out of it.

One interesting mechanism to assess an ICON is to measure it in terms of the emergence and novelty of ideas. An example of an organization that does this is the Highlands Forum, which was founded to bring together key people from a wide range of disciplines to discuss a variety of security-related issues. Secretary of Defense William Perry, who supported the creation of the Highlands Forum, told its founder: "I don't want to know what is in my inbox; I want to know what I don't know." This speaks directly to the new ideas that the Highlands Forum strives to catalyze. In order to accomplish its objective, the forum assembles a wide variety of perspectives that allows

issues to be viewed in entirely new ways. A corollary benefit of such an approach is that it provides policymakers access to new networks of expertise from which to draw.

Another important consideration to take into account when measuring a network's effectiveness is the level of trust it has achieved among its participants. Unfortunately, gauging trust within a network is no less difficult than establishing and maintaining it. Compounding this difficulty is the fact that there is no absolute way to measure it. Organizations such as the GFP, however, have developed indirect metrics to properly determine whether its trust-building techniques are successful. One metric used is the frequency of open disagreement among a network's participants. When members feel safe providing negative feedback on an online forum or at a meeting, such reactions are seen as honest and subsequently are indicative of greater openness and trust.

3

UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIVE ONLINE NETWORKS

FOUR CASE STUDIES

While every ICON's approach to overcoming the challenges described in section two of this report are unique, five key elements were identified. Understanding these elements provides the creator of a new ICON guidance on how to develop goals, identify obstacles, and create mechanisms to surmount these obstacles.

This section describes these five key attributes and uses a matrix to analyze four different ICONs, each of which were individually tailored to accomplish their given objective. An in-depth description of each ICON is provided at the end of this section.

Degree of openness: Is the network open to the public or limited by invitation? Restricting network membership to vetted individuals builds trust among participants, who must pass a certain threshold for entry. However, limiting the ICON membership may reduce the quality and breadth of available knowledge while also allowing for greater bias from the moderator. Few collaborative networks are completely open. This criterion has a direct impact on the challenges of building trust and finding the right partners described in Chapter 2 of this report.

For example, when CompanyCommand.com, the online community created in 2000 by U.S. Army officers as a virtual space to conduct informal knowledge sharing, went from an open Web site to one that required its members to have an army.mil e-mail address, the site lost 60 percent of its visitors almost instantly. However, the quality of the content increased considerably, reflecting a greater degree of trust that users developed and a drop in the share of “flames”—content items designed to insult or provoke other members—posted on the site.¹

Level of moderating: This element describes the degree to which the network is subject to moderation or management and how well it addresses the challenges to moderating. Some ICONs enable any participant to post content as they wish. Other networks may allow content to be edited or deleted by the moderator. Although light moderating is often accepted and necessary, excessive moderating may deter those community members who are interested in expressing or being informed by views that may be considered nontraditional. At the opposite extreme, some users may resist participating in a network that is entirely open and provides a minimal level of monitoring.

The level of moderating within an ICON also plays a role in determining the extent to which a network will be centralized or decentralized. A heavily moderated network will concentrate decisionmaking power in the hands of the moderator, creating a de facto centralization that will profoundly influence the dynamics of the network and its output. Centralized and decentralized networks each have distinct advantages and disadvantages. Table 1 highlights some of the key benefits and shortfalls of each type of network.²

1. David Axe, “Internet Connects Future Army Leaders with Virtual ‘Front Porch,’” *World Politics Review*, May 6, 2008, www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articlePrint.aspx?ID=2068.

2. Adapted from Francis Fukayama and Abram N. Shulsky, *The “Virtual Corporation” and Army Organization* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1997); and James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

Table 1. Advantages and Disadvantages to Moderating in ICONs

High Level of Moderating	
Advantages:	Disadvantages:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fast• Efficient• Good at mobilizing people to solve discrete problems• Higher likelihood of success• Lower “signal to noise” ratio	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inflexible• More likely to generate mainstream insights• More likely to lead to groupthink• Requires some form of moderating• Participation likely to require direct incentives
Low Level of Moderating	
Advantages:	Disadvantages:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourages independence and input from range of sources• More adaptive in the long term• More likely to generate unique insights• Good at mobilizing people to solve a complex, multifaceted problem• Participation is more likely to be voluntary	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Slow• Inefficient• Less likely that valuable information will be highlighted or aggregated in a meaningful way• Higher risk of failure• Higher “signal to noise” ratio

Context for interaction: Do network members interact exclusively online or are there additional methods and venues in which to interact? Enabling face-to-face meetings builds trust and deepens relationships among individuals. These meetings may, however, remove the anonymity afforded in an online environment, a feature that some members may hold to be very important (see below). This criterion can therefore serve as a measure of the network’s ability to address the trust-building and partner-finding challenges from Chapter 2.

Even networks that are exclusively online offer a spectrum of interactive opportunities ranging from stagnant to dynamic. On the stagnant side are wikis, list serves, and discussion boards, while the dynamic side includes chats, voice-over Internet protocol (VoIP), and even full video, audio, and application-sharing portals such as VSee. Each of these different means of virtual interaction create unique collaborative environments, ultimately producing different outputs. Careful consideration must therefore be given to what tools, or combination of tools, are deployed in an online network. Resources, the technical proficiency of members, scheduling difficulties, and the likely degree of member engagement, among other factors, should be taken into account when making this decision.

Content posted: Is member content posted anonymously or for attribution? Content that is posted anonymously—either without a name or using a pseudonym—has the advantage of allow-

ing members to be candid. The downside of anonymity for some consumers is that it loses value if it can't be traced to a specific source. Identifying the source of information posted to an ICON will usually raise the level of confidence that members have in the content but risks distancing those members who cannot, for any number of reasons, disclose their identity. This criterion reflects the network's ability to address the issue of trust building and moderating.

Incentives: Does the ICON rely exclusively on indirect incentives or does it provide direct incentives as well?

These five elements are by no means conclusive, and others could be used to analyze ICONs from additional perspectives.

Table 2 breaks down various ICON models implemented by workshop participants using the attributes described above.

Table 2. ICON Models by Attribute

	Degree of openness	Level of moderating	Context for interaction	Content posted	Incentives
GFF	Closed	High level of moderating	Online and face-to-face interaction	Anonymously	Only indirect
TIN-2	Closed	Medium level of moderating	Online and face-to-face interaction	Attributed	Direct and indirect
dgCommunities	Open	Low level of moderating	Only online interaction	Attributed	Only indirect
ReliefWeb	Open	Medium level of moderating	Only online interaction	Attributed	Only indirect

Global Futures Forum

Goal

The goal of the Global Futures Forum is to create a continuous dialogue among experts from both government and nongovernment sectors who bring different perspectives and insights to understanding the growing list of complex and dynamic transnational challenges facing governments and societies. The principal value of this enterprise will be in deepening the understanding of intelligence and security professionals in the United States and other participating governments about issues like global terrorism, radicalization, illicit trafficking, proliferation, disease, etc.; however, a related benefit will be in bringing government experts in closer contact with many nongovernment experts in think tanks, universities, businesses, nonprofit institutions, and other centers

of excellence. From a U.S. perspective, it is particularly useful to reach out to non-American partners. Many studies have documented that U.S. and other allied intelligence experts are often too insular in their thinking, prone to rigid mindsets and conventional wisdom, and not adept at leveraging open source knowledge well enough. Some measures of success will be the GFF's ability to increase governments' access to a broader set of perspectives than would have been possible without it.

Users

The GFF is not a closed system but rather seeks to grow an ever-increasing set of contacts among academic, business, and other nonpublic sector experts who are interested in collaborating with American and foreign government experts on global security issues. The key stakeholders are the government agencies and experts for whom this forum is being operated. The other stakeholders, however, include the invited nongovernment experts, with whom the GFF will create a dialogue and hold face-to-face meetings.

The Global Futures Partnership, which is a small outreach unit in the Central Intelligence Agency's Directorate of Intelligence, has operated as support staff for the Global Futures Forum and had been initially responsible for developing the membership and participant list. As other governments and their agencies have become more involved in the project, the GFP has increasingly shared the responsibility for expanding the list of participating organizations and Web site users. Government organizations in North America and Europe have dominated the activity to date, but recent efforts have expanded the membership into Asia and Oceania. More than 28 face-to-face meetings were held in 2007 as part of 10 communities of interest (COIs) formed as part of the GFF. These topically focused COIs develop their own sets of priorities and projects, with guidance and funding from the GFP and other cosponsoring organizations. The Web site now has more than 1,100 registered users.

GFP participating countries have recently initiated a governance framework to allow collective involvement of all member governmental organizations in the operation and prioritization of the GFF's activities. A nine-member Steering Group works with the GFP on GFF strategic issues, and there are plans to add an advisory council made up of a diverse set of nongovernment experts who can help the GFF avoid the insular thinking that often occurs within government security organizations.

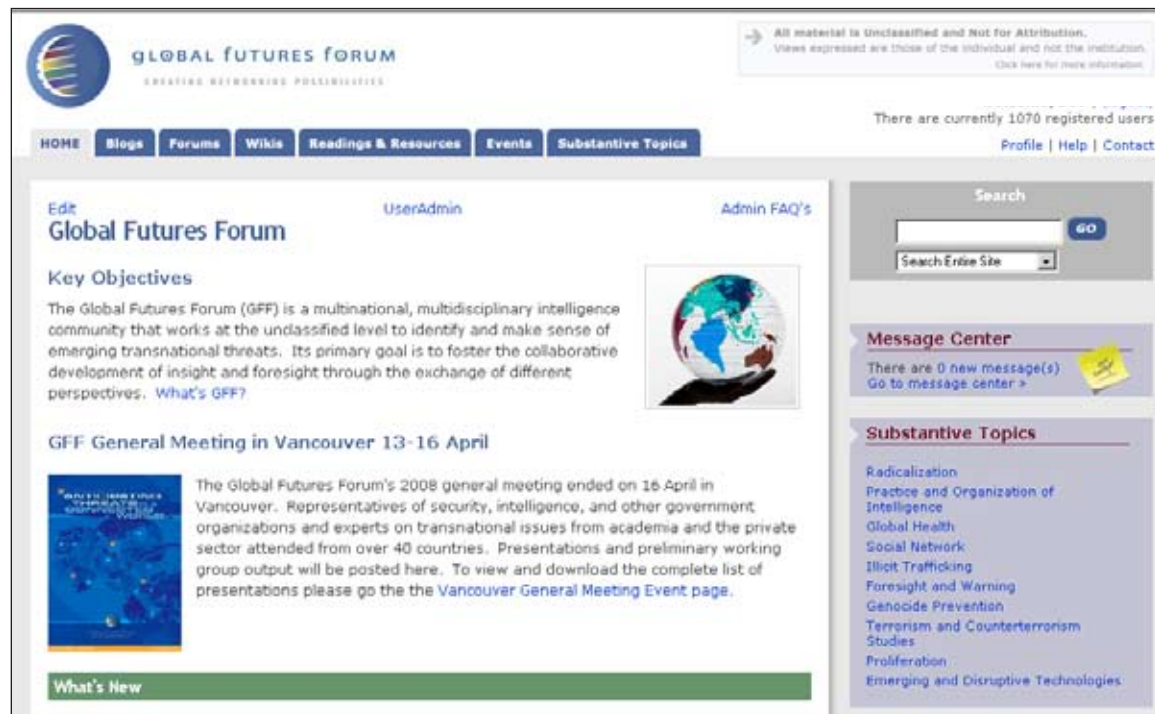
Technology

The GFF operates its own unclassified Web site that is available to a variety of government and nongovernment users. The GFP maintains this Web site through a commercial Web site developer. The Web site itself is password protected using commercially available technology.

The Web site contains a set of tabs that highlight the different topics on which the forum has an active COI. In addition, there are active bloggers who post ideas, insights, and the latest findings in their field. Users are assigned either a public or private account.

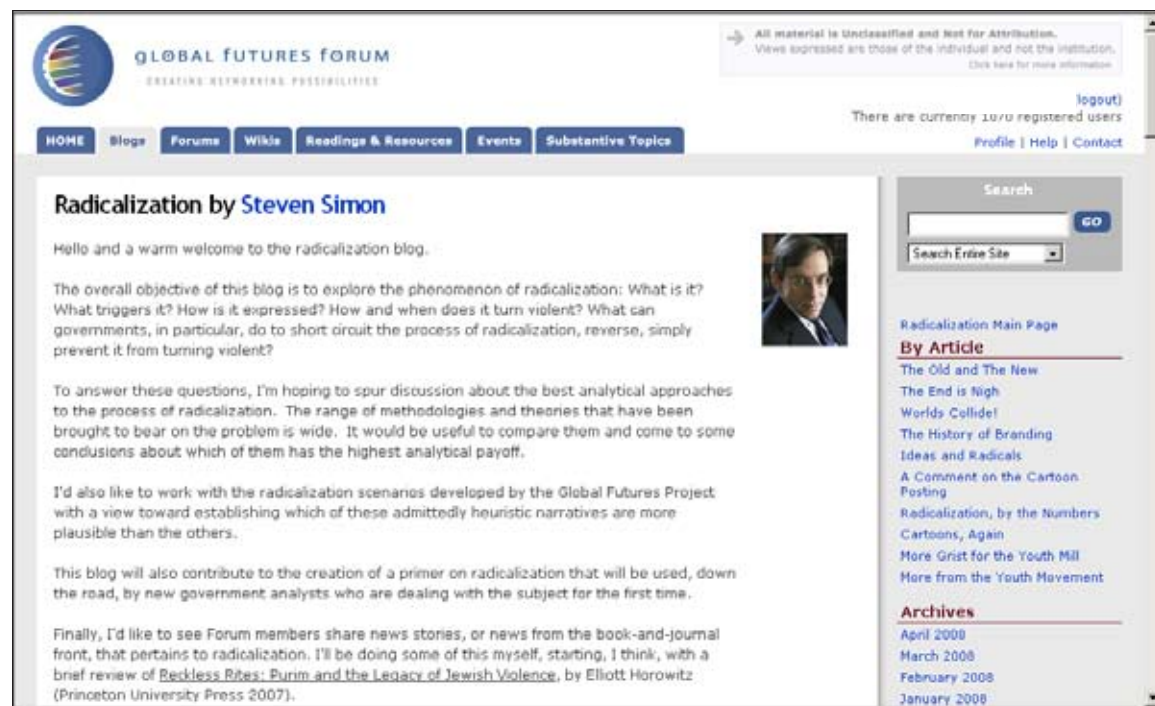
The site consists of a series of tabs to reach different parts of the Web site. The site's home page (Figure 1) displays the various parts of the site—blog, wikis, discussion forums, readings and resources, events, and substantive topics. All other pages of the Web site are accessed through this page.

Figure 1. Global Futures Forum Home Page



Source: Global Futures Forum, Home Page.

Figure 2. Global Futures Forum Blog



Source: Global Futures Forum, "Blogs."

Figure 3. Global Futures Forum Discussion Space

GLOBAL FUTURES FORUM
CREATING NETWORKING POSSIBILITIES

HOME Blogs Forums Wikis Readings & Resources Events Substantive Topics

There are currently 1070 registered users

Profile | Help | Contact

Forums Admin
Threads: 136, Posts: 616
If this is your first visit, please visit our FAQ section.

Search
GO
Search Entire Site

Forum	Last Post	Threads	Posts
Questions and Comments about the Website	Re: Any Problems ? by genero 01/21/2006 11:55 AM EST	12	53
Radicalization	Re: After Vancouver... by m.a. gris 04/27/2008 08:04 PM EST	12	111
Practice and Organization of Intelligence	Re: Conferences & Workshops by Joshua Sinai 04/03/2008 04:34 PM EST	5	41
Global Health	Re: Live Events of Interest by iceaxe5 10/23/2007 03:49 PM EST	6	31
Social Networks	Re: Emerging Tools for Social Networking by tony campbell	8	44

Source: Global Futures Forum, "Forums."

Users can tab to a variety of materials. For example, if a user wishes to visit one of the blog spaces, he or she might select one of the blogger spaces, such as the one shown in Figure 2. There the user finds a list of postings provided by the current radicalization community leader (Steve Simon of the Council on Foreign Relations). Users can read and post comments back to the blogger or participate in a dialogue that is occurring on one of the discussion threads begun by the original blog entry.

Another tab displays a list of discussion forums that are tied to the nine community of interest topics. Those topics include (as of May 2008): radicalization, terrorism studies, proliferation, illicit trafficking, global health, foresight and warning, social networks, emerging and disruptive technologies, and the practice of intelligence. Users can start discussions in this space on any subject related to the COI issue and enlist the comments of other users. The Web site allows users to post and edit their comments. COI leaders on a topic can review these posting and help to broaden, focus, or redirect the dialogue in ways that will engage more readers.

The GFF Web site has an internal messaging system that functions much like e-mail. This feature allows members to communicate in smaller groups and develop their ideas before they are ready to publicize them. Collaboration involves more than just one discussion space, and the mail system allows smaller, more intimate conversations to develop.

Modus Operandi

Launching the GFF

In November 2005, the GFP hosted an international conference at which 120 participants from more than 20 countries and 80 organizations brainstormed on the purpose and structure that a global intelligence network might take. The GFF concept was endorsed there, and nearly a dozen potential global security topics were identified as worthy of pursuing in the GFF. Government representatives from major European countries were invited to propose initiatives to begin building the forum. In March 2006, the government of Canada proposed the first meeting on the issue of radicalization, and thus began the first COI.

- The initial GFF Web site was also upgraded significantly in 2006 to issue accounts to both public and private users and to develop a “readings” section, which allowed users to add substantive materials to the site for the collective benefit of the GFF membership.
- GFP identified potential COI leaders, both inside and outside government, who would lead the discussion forums on the Web site, propose face-to-face meetings, and guide the development of the specific COIs in which they worked.
- The government of Canada also designated a full-time staff officer to be assigned to work with the GFP and other GFF members in order to promote the development of the initiative. Canada subsequently established its own government-wide advisory group of agencies to coordinate Canadian participation in the GFF activities.

Community of Interest Meetings, 2006

Throughout 2006, the GFF continued to develop new COIs and also conduct more face-to-face meetings. By the end of the year, a half dozen COIs and their community leaders were identified. They focused on radicalization, terrorism studies, illicit trafficking, global health, strategic foresight and warning, and the practice of intelligence. For each COI, at least one community leader and often two coleaders from different countries were working collaboratively to set up face-to-face meetings. For example:

- The radicalization COI was led by an official of the Canadian government, with assistance from the GFP. The COI so far has held meetings in Canada, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.
- The foresight and warning community sponsored a three-part conference series in Switzerland, and the COI leader from the U.S. National Intelligence Council (NIC) helped to forge a strong group of COI participants from within the U.S., Canadian, and several European governments.
- A global health COI was formed, led by a leading American epidemiologist. He and others from the U.S. and Canadian governments held a first face-to-face meeting in Washington to explore where this community of interest can contribute most in identifying future challenges.
- A genocide prevention COI met for the first time in Washington, which involved 50 or more participants, including foreign and justice ministry specialists in humanitarian issues from several countries and counterparts from academia and international nongovernmental organizations.

Prague General Meeting, December 2006

Roughly a year after the initial general meeting of the GFF in Washington, D.C., the forum held its second general meeting in Prague, Czech Republic. The meeting was used to review the progress made since 2005 and to broaden the participation with governments in Europe. At that meeting, the Web site was demonstrated and participants were encouraged to sign up. Separate breakout meetings of the then-half dozen COIs were held, during which participants brainstormed on what future activities were needed to energize the communities. Topics for additional COIs were also collected. Ideas for improving the GFF Web site were also solicited.

Subsequent to the Prague meeting, significant Web site improvements were made, adding functionality and increasing the amount of materials available on the Web site. Additional COIs on proliferation and emerging and disruptive technologies (EDT) were formally announced. Plans for the 2008 general meeting in Vancouver, Canada, began, with the expectation that the expanded list of COI activities would be profiled at that meeting to demonstrate that global intelligence collaboration can add value to what governments are doing individually.

Vancouver General Meeting, 2008

In April 2008, the GFF held its third general meeting, which focused on the interconnected challenges facing intelligence and security organizations around the world. This meeting was organized jointly by Canada's security and intelligence community and the GFF. It brought together 300 representatives from more than 40 countries and 100 government and nongovernment organizations to review the work of what had become 10 separate communities of interest.

These COIs now address radicalization, terrorism studies, illicit trafficking, proliferation, global health, strategic foresight and warning, genocide prevention, social networks, emerging disruptive technologies, and the practice of intelligence. The meeting reported the findings of more than 28 face-to-face meetings held by the COI. The Web site now had more than 1,100 users, up from fewer than 200 prior to the Prague meeting. The Web site averaged almost 300 hits per week immediately prior to and after the Vancouver meeting, marking a new high. Among the forum's accomplishments were: the publication of bibliographies on terrorism, intelligence analysis, and illicit trafficking; a primer on intelligence analysis; a computer-based concept map on illicit trafficking; three major reports on radicalization; and a comprehensive three-part report on foresight and warning.

The meeting also promised to expand the membership into Asia, as there were a larger percentage of Asian experts represented in Vancouver and some support for holding the next general meeting in Asia. Moreover, the NIC's Global 2025 project will be using the GFF Web site to solicit inputs and reactions to its forthcoming report.

Trusted Information Network for Counterterrorism-Southeast Asia (TIN-2)

Goal

The long-term goal of TIN-2 is to demonstrate to governments how the coordinated exploitation of open source, nongovernmental expertise can supplement their internal analysis of complex security issues. TIN-2 pursues this goal by generating new knowledge about the characteristics

and modalities of extremist and transnational criminal threats in Southeast Asia. In so doing, it illustrates the inherent value and utility of tapping the know-how of its members. This expertise has been cultivated over their collective decades of scholarship and fieldwork, ultimately serving the project's long-term goal.

Users

As a closed, password-protected network, access to TIN-2 is only extended to carefully selected individuals. Tom Sanderson, TIN-2 moderator, handpicked the members based on extensive research and recommendations from trusted contacts in government, academia, and the private sector. In addition to their strong reputations, nationality, profession, ethnicity, religion, and gender were all considered so as to avoid group think and to facilitate a broad spectrum of views and debates. TIN-2 members include Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Christians, and Agnostics; Indonesians, Israelis, Australians, Filipinos, Malaysians, Thais, and Americans; as well as lawyers, professors, researchers, journalists, and former members of government. These scholars and specialists have performed and are currently undertaking extensive field work in each of the trouble spots covered in the project. Each of the 15 members has full access to the TIN-2 Web site and is expected to contribute regularly.

In addition to its full-time members, TIN-2 also has a committee of seven senior advisers who can all contribute to the TIN-2 discussion if desired. Their primary function is to guide the project with their insights and suggestions and to serve as a sounding board for the TIN-2 moderator.

Technology

At the heart of TIN-2 is a collaboration software program called Clearspace, which is hosted on a password-protected server. The site was set up and customized by Mind Alliance LLC, a start-up specializing in information-sharing technologies. With the help of Mind Alliance programmers, TIN-2 moderator Tom Sanderson was able to tailor the site according to his specifications.

The site consists of six active pages. The first is the site's home page (Figure 4), which immediately appears after logging in successfully. All other pages of the Web site are accessed through this page.

The second page is the discussion space (Figure 5). This page is at the heart of TIN-2. It contains both the free discussion space and the monthly questions. In this page, each new question posted by the moderator will be displayed as a separate item. An example of the monthly question is provided below (Figure 6).

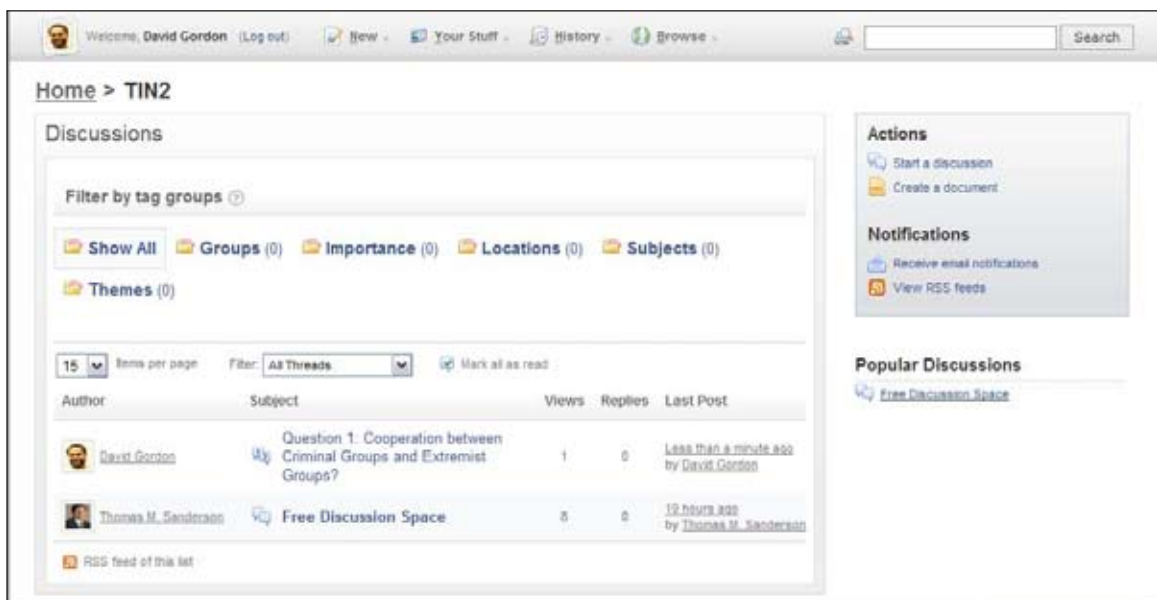
The primary way that TIN-2 members participate is through this discussion space. Although their principle task is responding to the monthly question, a "free discussion" space allows member to develop any topic.

Figure 4. TIN-2 Home Page



Source: CSIS TIN-2, Home Page.

Figure 5. TIN-2 Discussion Page



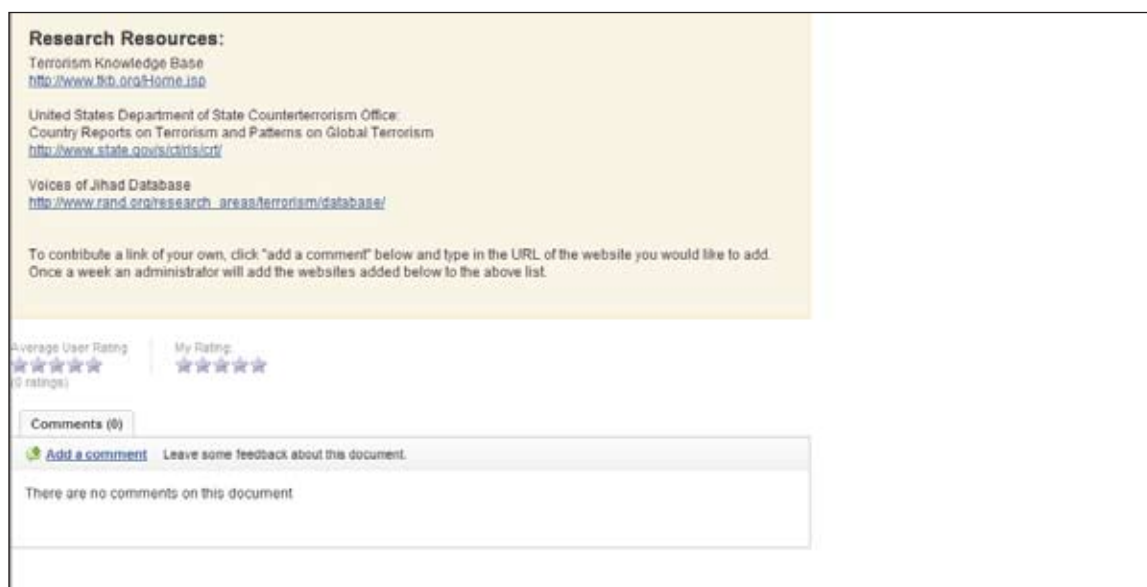
Source: CSIS TIN-2, "Discussions."

Figure 6. TIN-2 Monthly Question



Source: CSIS TIN-2, "Monthly Question."

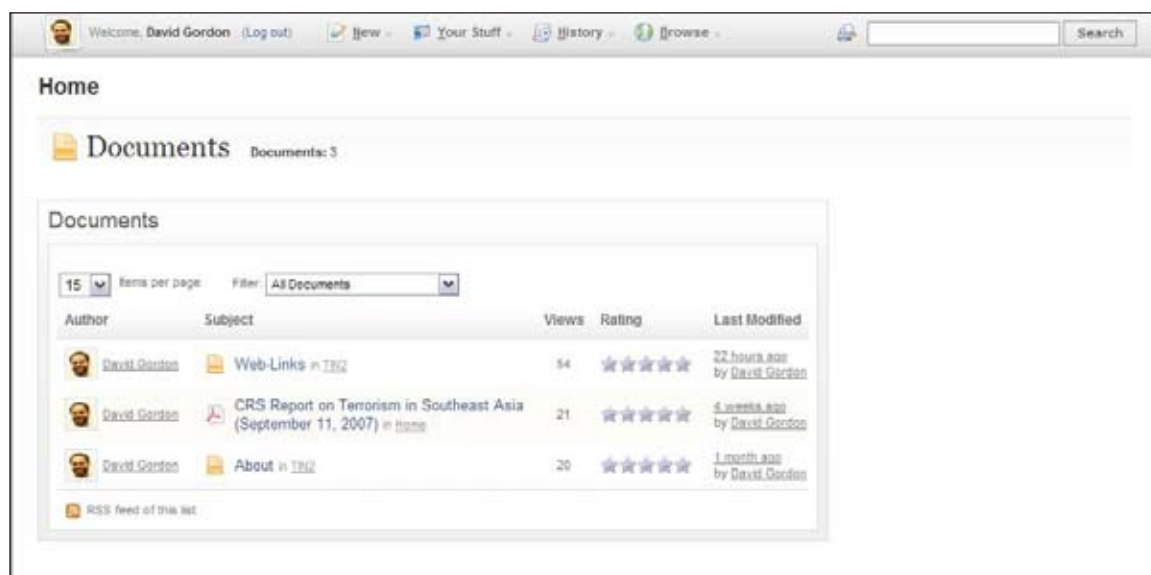
Figure 7. TIN-2 Web Links



Source: CSIS TIN-2, "Research Resources."

The third page is the Web links page (Figure 7), a repository where relevant Internet resources are listed. The Web links page has been pre-seeded with Web links, but TIN-2 members are encouraged to contribute Web links of their own as well as provide descriptions or comments. The main list of Web links is updated by the moderator weekly, incorporating members' contributions.

Figure 8. TIN-2 Open Source Information Repository



Source: CSIS TIN-2, "Documents."

Figure 9. TIN-2 E-mail



Source: CSIS TIN-2, "Private Messages."

Similar in function to the Web links page is the library, which serves as a document repository (Figure 8). By virtue of their extensive research, TIN-2 members frequently have access to numerous sources of relevant information, as well as documents that they themselves have crafted. These documents allow for members to access premier sources that are often hard to find independently. As well, the library provides for concise reading, which all members can easily partake in, giving them shared background information and increasing their ability to collaborate.

Figure 10. TIN-2 Member Profile Page

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z											Show details Hide details	
Name		Username		Email		Registered		Status Level				
	Abraham Kanter	akanter		(Hidden)		Jan 26, 2008						
	Administrator	admin		(Hidden)		Dec 11, 2007						
	Anthony Bubalo	Abubalo		abubalo@rockwellmfg.org		Jan 4, 2008						
	Arnaud de Borchgrave	AdeBorchgrave		adeborchgrave@cbs.org		Jan 4, 2008						
	Aruna Gopinath	agopinath		(Hidden)		Jan 28, 2008						
	Christopher (Kit) Collier	ccollier		(Hidden)		Jan 26, 2008						
	David Gordon	dgordon		dgordon@cbs.org		Dec 27, 2007						
	Dick O'Neill	DO'Neill		don@highlandgroup.net		Jan 4, 2008						
	Giora Eliraz	geliraz		(Hidden)		Jan 28, 2008						
	Greg Fealy	gfealy		(Hidden)		Jan 28, 2008						
1 2 3 < Previous Next >												

You can also browse for people in a variety of ways: alphabetically by username, most recently created, by status level and by who's online now.

Source: CSIS TIN-2, "Profiles."

TIN-2 possesses an internal messaging system (Figure 9), which functions much like e-mail. This feature allows members to communicate in smaller groups and develop their ideas before they are ready to publicize them. Collaboration involves more than just one discussion space, and the mail system provides for smaller, more intimate conversations to develop.

The profile page displays background information for each member and senior adviser of TIN-2 (Figure 10). The profiles include an e-mail address, a brief bio, and a picture. This profile is useful for allowing TIN-2 members to identify the regional and topical expertise of other members, making their conversations and questions more finely targeted.

Modus Operandi for TIN-2

Prelaunch Phase

The TIN-2 operation can be broken down into the prelaunch phase and the sharing phase. Each of these phases is concluded by a conference. During the prelaunch phase, the network's moderator performs the following tasks:

- Select TIN-2 membership
- Develop questions for the TIN
- Review questions with outside experts
- Select and test technology
- Develop user instructions
- Consult with senior advisers

Kickoff Conference

Following the completion of the prelaunch phase, all TIN-2 members attended a kickoff conference in Sydney, Australia. This day-long conference consisted of three sessions. The first session consisted of an introduction to CSIS and the TIN project, an explanation of what was expected of TIN-2 members, and a delineation of the basic guidelines on conduct (“rules of the road”) within the TIN.

In the second session, members discussed their current research; gave their assessment of trends in extremism and the criminal aspects of terrorism in Southeast Asia; and generated relevant discussion topics for the TIN. The third session consisted of a tutorial on the TIN-2 Web site. That evening, all TIN-2 members met over dinner, which helped build further rapport and trust in a more informal, social setting. The next morning, those TIN members who had not already left convened for an informal “final thoughts” breakfast to discuss their impressions of the project and their thoughts on the region.

Sharing Phase

The day after the kickoff conference, the moderator posted the first question on the discussion space of the Web site. Over the course of the next month, TIN-2 members posted their responses and insights. Throughout this period, the moderator pruned the discussion, adding substantive input where appropriate. Once a discussion question has been posted for a month, or when the conversation has significantly slowed, the next question is submitted. At this point, the discourse for the first question was distilled into a four-page summary and submitted to TIN-2 members for review.

While TIN-2 members debated the discussion questions, they also posted tangentially related thoughts and their own questions in a free discussion space. In addition, they responded to specific inquiries via the site’s internal messaging system. Six months into the sharing phase, the insights from the free discussion space and internal messaging system will be compiled and analyzed in the same manner as the discussion question responses.

Midterm Visit

Halfway through the sharing phase, CSIS staff traveled to Southeast Asia to work alongside TIN-2 members and conducted 35 interviews with current and former extremists and insurgents as well as local religious, political, and academic leaders. The visit enhanced the moderator’s knowledge and sense of the various conflicts in the region and also served to invigorate TIN-2 member online activity.

Final Conference

On the conclusion of the sharing phase, TIN-2 members and senior advisers will convene for a final conference in Singapore. Three topics will be discussed at this conference. First, TIN-2 members and senior advisers will discuss what new knowledge they gleaned from their participation in TIN-2 and how, if at all, the exercise changed their understanding of the region. Second, the conference will provide TIN-2 participants with an opportunity to articulate which techniques employed by the moderator were successful and which could be improved. Third, a comprehensive regional assessment, which will be drafted by TIN-2 members and published in the final report, shall be discussed.

Development Gateway (dgCommunities)

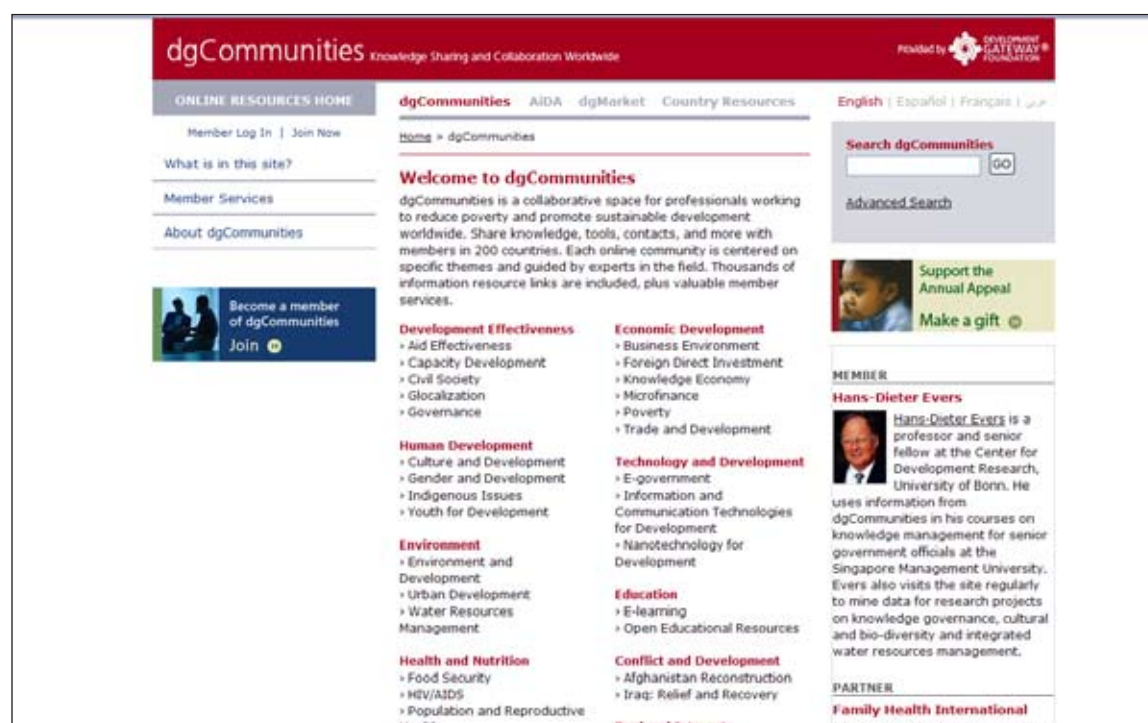
Goal

The dgCommunities are a collection of 30 online communities of interest maintained by the Development Gateway Foundation, an international nonprofit organization that provides Web-based platforms to make aid and development efforts more effective around the world. Launched in 2001, the dgCommunities enable global information sharing on topics such as poverty reduction, environmental policy, preservation of cultural heritage, e-learning, development aid effectiveness, and microfinance. In 2008, two new dgCommunities were launched, covering disaster prevention and response and stabilization and reconstruction.

Each dgCommunity is a virtual center for knowledge sharing, networking, and collaboration with peers in a specific domain. Content on the Web portals is managed primarily by a group of more than 700 key partner organizations and individuals. Partnerships with organizations such as China Development Gateway and Egypt's Bibliotheca Alexandrina ensure that the portals appear in other languages and include high-quality country- and region-focused content.

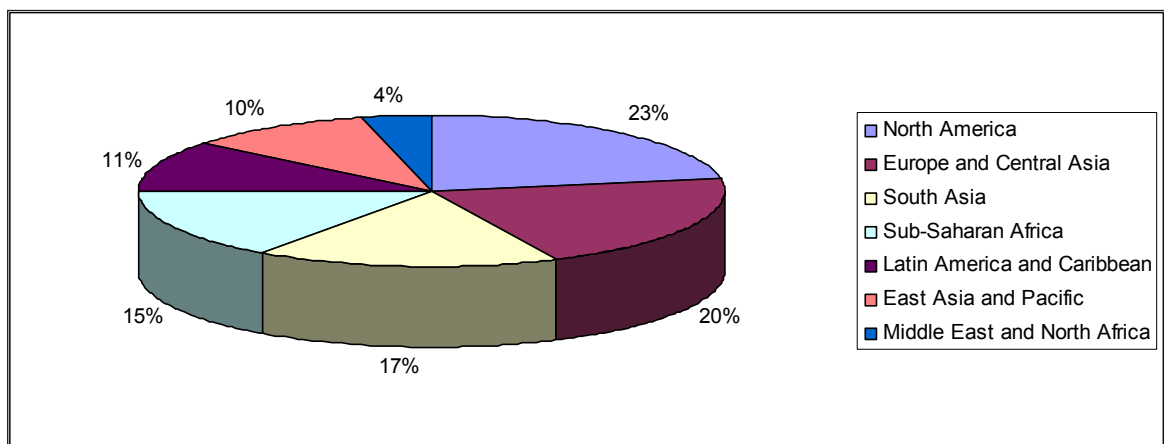
Ultimately, the goal of the dgCommunities effort is to help development professionals work more effectively to improve lives in developing countries by connecting these professionals to the information and contacts that they need.

Figure 11: dgCommunities Home Page



Source: Development Gateway Foundation, "dgCommunities," <http://topics.developmentgateway.org/>.

Figure 12. dgCommunities Membership by Region

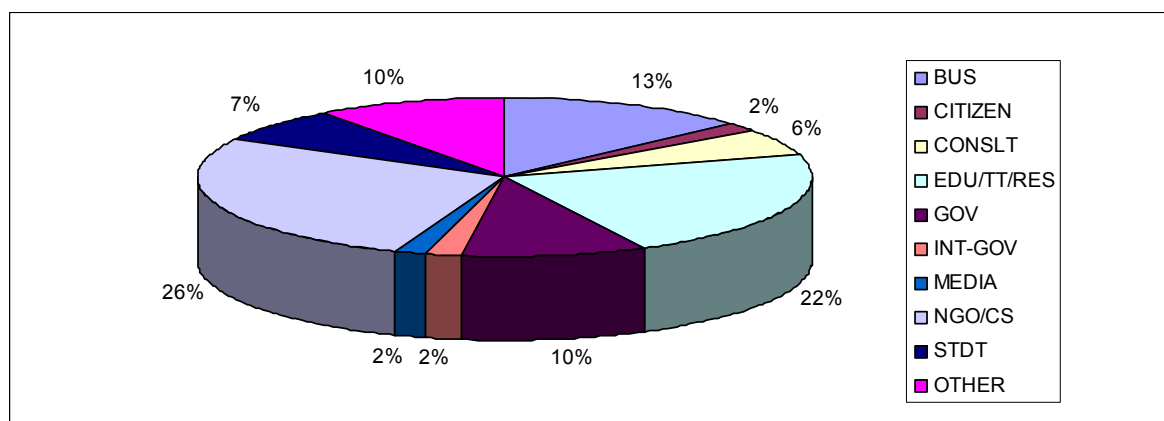


Source: Adapted from Development Gateway Foundation, "Members," <http://topics.developmentgateway.org/Members.62.0.html?&L=0>.

Users

As of mid-2008, there are close to 45,000 registered users in the dgCommunities. The majority of users are mid- to senior-level program managers and other professionals working in nonprofit and civil society organizations. More than half are from developing countries. The portals receive some 100,000 visitors per month.

Figure 13. dgCommunities Membership by Organization Type



Source: Adapted from Development Gateway Foundation, "Members," dgCommunities, <http://topics.developmentgateway.org/Members.62.0.html?&L=0>.

Though any visitor may browse content on the dgCommunities, only registered users have access to the full range of online capabilities offered (see below). The registration process is simple, but requires users to identify their country of residence, profession, organizational affiliation, and other personal details. This information allows for more effective peer-to-peer interaction as well as for constant evaluation of the community of interest by the dgCommunities management.

Figure 14. dgCommunity Member Registration Screen

The screenshot shows the 'dgCommunities' Member Directory page. At the top, there's a red banner with the logo and tagline. Below it, navigation links include 'ONLINE RESOURCES HOME', 'Member Log In', and 'Join Now'. The main heading is 'Member Directory'. A message welcomes visitors and states there are 40544 members from 224 countries. It prompts users to log in or sign up. Below this is a search section titled 'Search directory by:' with various input fields: 'First name:', 'Last name:', 'Interest:' (dropdown), 'Expertise (first select an interest):' (dropdown), 'Organization name:', 'Country:' (dropdown), 'Organization type:' (dropdown), and 'Occupation:' (dropdown). There's also a 'Search Member Bio:' field. At the bottom of the search section, it says 'Show 50 results per page' and has a 'Search' button. The page ends with a 'SEARCH RESULTS' link.

Source: Development Gateway Foundation, "Member Directory," <http://topics.developmentgateway.org/um/showMemberDirectory.do>.

Technology

The dgCommunities platform offers the following tools to its registered users:

Adding content: Members can upload knowledge resources to share with the rest of the community. These resources can be labeled and classified based on existing categories and key words. Members may also post comments and remarks to content added by others.

Member directories: Each dgCommunity has its own unique directory of members. Registered members can search for contacts, filtering by name, country, area of interest, or expertise, and contact each other directly via e-mail. Members can also create personalized contact lists.

Member forum: Each dgCommunity can host multiple discussions on topics of interest to the community. Members can choose to receive alerts each time a new comment is posted by a fellow member.

Content alerts and newsletters: Members can opt to receive, through e-mail, alerts of new content that has been uploaded on all topics as predefined by them. Members may also choose to receive periodic e-newsletters with updates on recent developments in the dgCommunity.

RSS feeds: Members can implement an automated RSS feed of dgCommunity content to their personal computer.

Special reports: dgCommunity members regularly author special reports. These exclusive reports are heavily marketed by the dgCommunity portal, mapped to key events, and generate significant traffic.

Resource database: All resources uploaded to the dgCommunity are archived and made available to members through online search using key words, preset categories, etc.

In addition, the dgCommunities platform enables the portals' administrators (termed "content coordinators") to conduct the following processes:

Edit content: All content is scanned by the content coordinators, who can edit or remove content that is deemed irrelevant or inappropriate.

Track usage: Monitor site visits and report key indicators such as page views, unique visits, time spent online, geosegmentation of users, referring sites, etc.

Conduct surveys: Reach out to members with specific questions in order to gather critical feedback via online survey tools.

Online marketing: Leverage Google "AdWords" service.

Off-line marketing: The Development Gateway Foundation partners with key organizations and participates in their events. Examples include the UN Global Alliance and the World Summit on the Information Society.

During the first half of 2008, the dgCommunities went through a major upgrade to add Web 2.0 tools to the online portals. A new content management system (CMS) put in place now enables the following new features:

- Tag clouds (user-defined metadata)
- User rating of content
- Content popularity metrics
- Creation of a "user business card" to allow sharing of contact information and résumés
- Improved search indexing
- Improved visualization tools (to enable customizing content in e-mail alerts, adding multiple images to key sections of the online portals, and better use of languages other than English)

Modus Operandi

The two new dgCommunities serve as a good example of the way in which the Development Gateway Foundation has built its information-sharing portals. Established in 2008, these communities of interest cover the increasingly relevant topics of stabilization and reconstruction and disaster prevention and response. Launch of the dgCommunities was conducted in the following phases:

Identifying and Convening of Relevant Stakeholders

During the first phase, key stakeholders in the stabilization and reconstruction and the disaster prevention and response communities were identified with the intent of gathering their input on user requirements and information gaps.

A workshop was convened with the goal of getting the key stakeholders' imprimatur on the labels chosen for the content file drawers on the two online communities. The input of advisers in helping define the key issues associated with disaster prevention and response and stabilization and reconstruction was deemed necessary to guide the content development strategy. Advisers also had the opportunity to express needs as practitioners and key stakeholders and suggest how information and communication technology (ICT) platforms such as dgCommunities can make a difference in their work. The meeting also offered a good opportunity to open useful channels for peer-to-peer exchange and trust building among stakeholders, some of which represented communities that had not interacted much in the past (e.g., the Department of Defense and NGOs).

The approach to organizing the workshop was to have a small, representative group, with a well-balanced number of participants from the major stakeholder categories: U.S. government, U.S. military, NGOs, IOs, and think tanks/academia. In this sense, less is more. The risk of having an imbalance in terms of representation is that one group could come away from the meeting feeling like the project is geared primarily for this or that stakeholder. The input from 25 people or so, duly transcribed, analyzed, and implemented, to kick things off was deemed best.

Following the workshop, two content coordinators and several content advisers were selected to manage the new dgCommunities.

Choosing the Relevant Technology Platform

The TYPO3 content management system (CMS) was selected for the new dgCommunities (existing dgCommunities were also upgraded to use TYPO3). TYPO3 was selected because it is a free open source CMS for enterprise purposes on the Web and in intranets. It offers full flexibility and extendability while featuring an accomplished set of ready-made interfaces, functions, and modules. TYPO3 was also selected for its ability to ensure key features, including tag clouds, user rating of content, content popularity metrics, and user business cards.

A user's manual was developed to train the dgCommunities' content coordinators in using the new CMS.

Initial Content Uploading and Testing by Key Stakeholders

A beta version of the dgCommunities was released to the advisers and stakeholders about one month before the official rollout. The intent was for key individuals to begin uploading content to the portals, populating the members' database, and creating contact lists, and point out any deficiencies in the user interface.

Launch

Having uploaded the initial content, registered the first members, and resolved several minor technical issues, the new dgCommunities portals were launched at a public event held at CSIS. Invitees included all relevant stakeholder organizations whose participation could enrich the portals. Thus, the portals start out as the work of a small group of key individuals but are quickly broadened to encompass a much wider community of interest. This approach has worked in the past because it doesn't take a significant effort to identify a plausible starting roster of key issues. And once identified, the system makes it easy to add to the roster, so that further additions can be constantly be made.

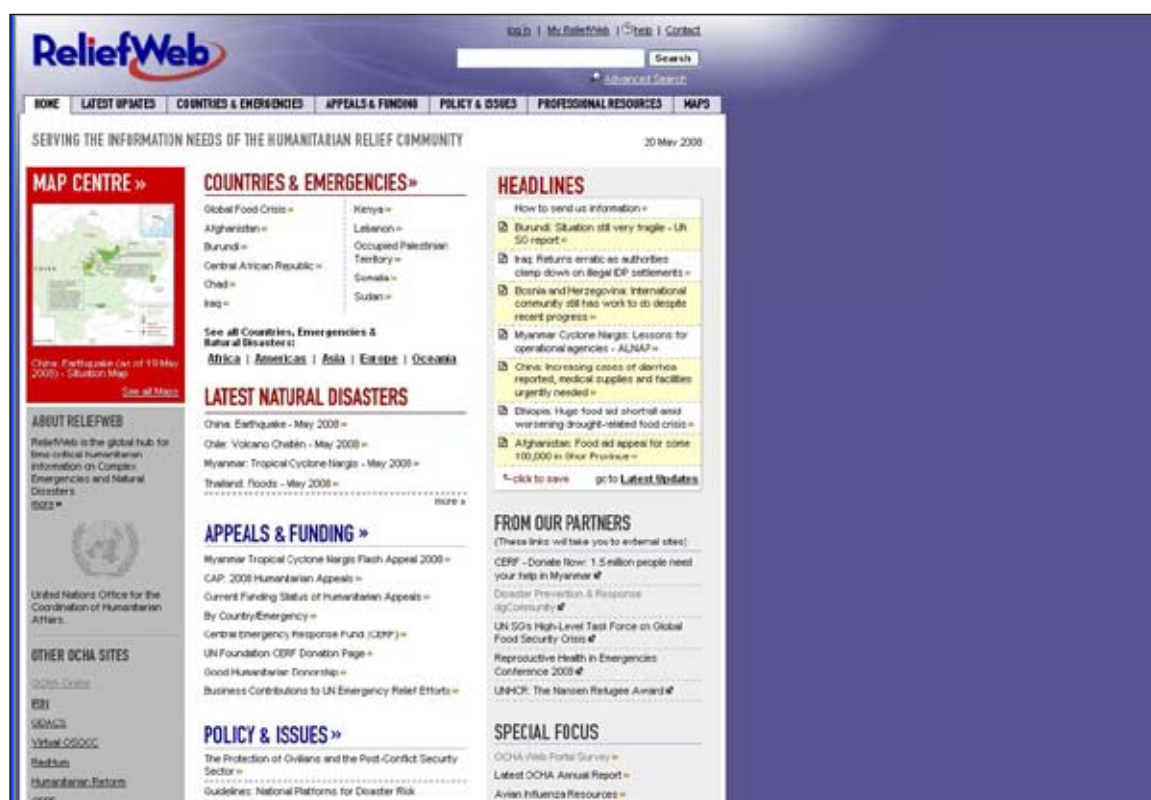
ReliefWeb

Goal

ReliefWeb is an online professional resource for humanitarian workers. It was created in 1996 by a UN General Assembly mandate as a “lesson learned” from the Great Lakes crisis of that year in order to strengthen global response capacity through information sharing. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) administers ReliefWeb. The site provides timely, reliable, and relevant information as events unfold, while emphasizing the coverage of “forgotten emergencies.” Three offices in three different time zones (Kobe, Geneva, and New York) update the Web site with situation reports by humanitarian agencies, reference and emergency maps, policy documents, and professional resources such as vacancy and training announcements. ReliefWeb reaches more than 70,000 subscribers through its e-mail subscription services, allowing those who have low bandwidth Internet connections to receive information reliably.

The majority of ReliefWeb’s funding is from voluntary contributions from the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, Denmark, Austria, Canada, Italy, and Switzerland and the European Commission. During the last 10 years, its annual income has grown from just under \$500,000 to approximately \$2 million.

Figure 15. ReliefWeb Home Page

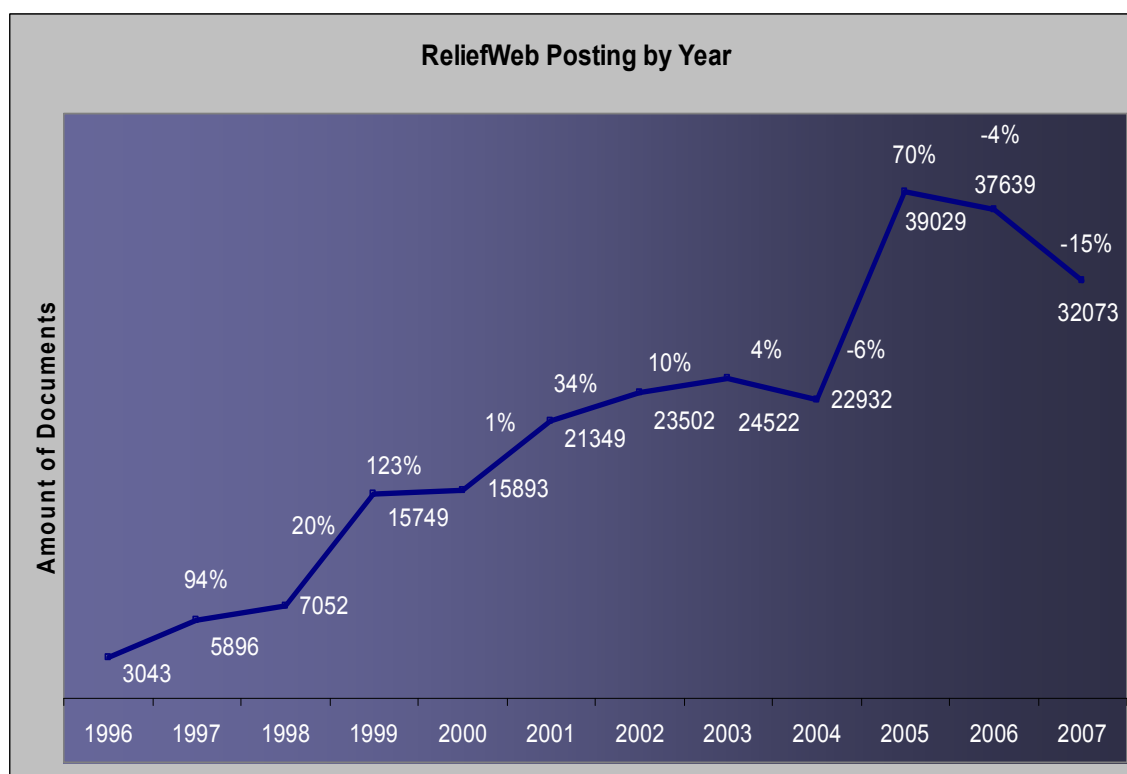


Source: ReliefWeb, Home Page, <http://www.reliefweb.int/>.

Users

Between 1996 and 2001, the number of ReliefWeb information partners grew from 250 to more than 800, comprising the United Nations and other international organizations, governments, NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent, news agencies, and academic research institutes. Following the system redesign in 2005, ReliefWeb manages between 35,000 and 40,000 documents and maps, with a small cartographic team creating between 100 and 200 maps per year. Information is now provided by more than 2,500 organizations, with half that number contributing to the job vacancies section, which serves to ensure ready capacity for humanitarian action.

Figure 16. ReliefWeb User Growth



Source: Helga Leifsdottir, "ReliefWeb—A Tool for Knowledge Sharing" (presentation, Forum for Democratic Governance and Economic Growth, February 28, 2008), 10, http://www.usaid.gov/about_usaid/acvfa/022808_reliefweb.pdf.

The total number of site visits in 2007 was 8 million, of which more than half were returning visitors. Daily page views range between 200,000 and 400,000, depending on the number and scale of disasters. The top five countries of origin for visitors were the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Kenya, and France.

Technology³

The ReliefWeb system offers users the following tools:

Adding content: ReliefWeb posts some 150 maps and documents daily from more than 2,000 sources, including various UN offices, government agencies, NGOs, academia, and the media. The ReliefWeb map center also creates original ReliefWeb maps. Updates can be searched by timeline, country, region, or specific emergency.

Document indexing and archiving: All documents posted on the site are classified and archived in the ReliefWeb document database, allowing advanced searching of documents from past emergency responses. The database contains nearly 300,000 maps and documents dating back to 1981.

Content alerts: ReliefWeb reaches more than 70,000 subscribers through its e-mail and RSS subscription services, allowing those who have low bandwidth Internet connections to receive information reliably.

Professional resources: Information of practical use for relief professionals, including a thematic listing of relevant “communities of practice,” listings of job vacancies and training opportunities, and a directory of information providers.

Content delivery to partner Web sites: ReliefWeb offers a “Web feed” service to deliver customized content to the Web sites of partner organizations. The service allows users to further utilize the ReliefWeb’s content, thereby avoiding duplication of efforts.

Appeals and funding: Funding appeals can be made via the Web site for complex emergencies and natural disasters. Furthermore, the system enables financial tracking of responses to funding requirements through the global humanitarian aid database.

Modus Operandi

Early years: 1996–2002

Initially, nine information managers in OCHA’s Geneva and New York offices monitored partner outputs, processing information in the two time zones using hierarchical-style databases in Lotus Notes, the United Nations’ standard platform and one of the few online collaboration tools at the time. After receiving information through e-mail submission and Web site scans, information managers selected relevant material according to detailed information management guidelines, created a Lotus Notes record, entered and formatted the text or map graphic, and applied comprehensive metadata. The record was then proofed and saved locally before being replicated to the Geneva-based Web server. However, the increased volume of information managed through the system 14 hours per day (from 40,000 to 200,000 records between 1996 and 2001), combined with escalating use (from 7,000 to 300,000 user hits per day) and demand for time-critical updates, led OCHA to expand ReliefWeb. With the support of the government of Japan, a two-member team was established in Kobe during 2001. The 24-hour operation and enhanced capacity increased the information load by approximately 25 percent in the following year.

3. For an in-depth description of the ReliefWeb design and redesign processes, see: Sebastian Naidoo, “Redesigning the ReliefWeb,” *Information Management Journal* (September/October 2007): 52–58, [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/TBRL-77ENDF/\\$file/IMJ-redesigningreliefweb-sep_oct2007.pdf?openelement](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/TBRL-77ENDF/$file/IMJ-redesigningreliefweb-sep_oct2007.pdf?openelement).

2002–2005

A survey in 2002 of some 200 users and 30 focus groups showed a demand for improved retrieval of site records. In response to this, the system was redesigned to revolve directly around users' needs. Profiles of key users were created, which showed three groups of daily users: humanitarian affairs desk officers, government officials, and field officers. Representatives from each group were brought together for usability testing sessions during which the redesign team observed their behavior, confidence levels, and success rates in carrying out specified tasks. In parallel, ReliefWeb teams reviewed the records held in the system to assess content assets that would later be rebuilt around user needs. By 2005, ReliefWeb included new tools such as “my ReliefWeb,” allowing greater customization of views. Page layouts were updated for improved usability, as were font types, font sizes, and color palettes.

2005–Present Day

In 2006, a three-year strategic plan was developed to again upgrade ReliefWeb to take advantage of new collaborative and networking technologies, such as wikis. Other goals of this upgrade are expanding the system's reach closer to the centers of humanitarian action, increasing the amount of content in French and Spanish, and fostering stronger relations with local and national NGOs.



APPENDIX

LESSONS LEARNED WORKSHOP

AGENDA

Sponsored jointly by the Global Futures Forum, the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies

March 28, 2008

Meridian International Conference Center, Washington, D.C.

Purpose: To explore different government and nongovernmental efforts to build international outreach efforts to exploit the global knowledge available on major international security issues. The panels examined a number of challenges faced by all outreach efforts and developed insights on what works and has not worked.

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 8:30–9:15 | Panel I: Trust Building in Collaborative Efforts
Themes: How do different countries and cultures bridge/manage the risks of sharing information that might be sensitive? |
| 9:15–10:00 | Panel II: Working with Governments: The Outsiders' View
Themes: What is the most difficult challenge for NGOs to work with governments? Is it the politics, process, culture, and/or publicity? |
| 10:30–11:15 | Panel III: Utility and Measures of Effectiveness
Themes: How do we measure the value of the outreach activity? Is it simply products and meetings, or are there other intangibles? |
| 12:30–1:15 | Panel IV: Management Challenges
Themes: How do government agencies operationalize and manage outreach to foreign partners? How do NGOs manage their relations with government organizations? |
| 1:15–2:00 | Panel V: Technology Demonstrations
Themes: What are the different technologies and technological approaches one can take to network with foreign partners? |
| 2:00–2:45 | Wrap-up |

