

DARE Forum members' use of engagement technology Survey Outcome

Background

All participants of the DARE Forum meeting in Riga, Latvia on 6th May 2015 filled in a form to analyze their organizations' use of and attitude towards technology as a means to communicate, collaborate and engage target groups.

Findings

During the course of the project, we studied the adoption of technology by various civil society organization actors to learn more how technology was being adopted, customized, or even avoided within the civil society space. The contents of these findings are included in the appendix. However, there were a few primary findings that are worth highlighting.

- A great majority of CSOs utilize social media and e-mail lists as primary communications tools for interacting with constituents.
- It appears that many CSOs utilize e-mail lists and in-house websites to communicate to colleagues. Yet, there is common concern for over-communication ("too much noise") and disparate platforms, tools, and groups.
- Of those surveyed, most CSOs utilize technology with their community because they want to communicate, share news, share opportunities, and be present. Only half used technology to provide virtual engagement opportunities, organize for action, create space for discussions, or support community networking. This suggests that there is a utilization gap in terms of technology's potential to help civil society organizations achieve their goals, leverage public pressure, and support local democratic participation. Only a handful used technology for fundraising, which reflects the government-sourced European funding structure, or joint decision-making.
- Overwhelmingly, the largest challenge for using existing technologies is getting people to participate, suggesting that organizations must enact creative recruitment/engagement tactics as well as utilize technology that encourages or even incentivizes further participation and helps sustain engagement for the long-term. Interestingly, training was not considered to be a challenge for utilizing existing technologies.
- CSOs were asked to identify the most important functionality for community technology. The results varied wildly suggesting that any standard infrastructure intended for utilization by many types of CSOs must be able to address several concurrent and sometimes competing needs in order to be a commonly-used technology. Overwhelmingly, however, a common theme around easy, effective, and meaningful sharing emerged across these responses. Regrettably, the survey did not investigate the contents of what was 'shared' although it is clear that actual content delivery was important.
- In utilizing newer technologies, most CSOs identified staff time for research as a barrier to due to the level of effort regarding both the research and the selection of new technologies. This indicates a powerful opportunity for umbrella organizations and networks to help drive new technology adoption across the sector simply through utilizing it with their own network

members (e.g. GLEN interacting with its own members helps spread the technology to each member with its constituents, etc.).

Overall, it seems that technology is valued by civil society organizations. However, it is clear to us that many organizations are “backing in” to technologies that were not designed for their needs. As a result, the opportunity for innovation is clear, but any solutions that emerge in this space must address the issues of effective sharing, ease of use, ease of adoption, and sustained, multipurpose engagement.

To that last point, it is also clear that more experimentation needs to occur within civil society with emerging technologies that can help broaden the level of participation in the online space to more advanced, virtual engagement methods (e.g. learning exchanges, networking, online organizing, etc.) beyond basic information dissemination, brand recognition, and sharing. It is surprising that that the level of utility for democratic participation was so low, especially given how useful technology can be in that particular area. The opportunity to expand the civil society space, build greater trust with communities, and enable more powerful collaboration between civil society partners and actors is extraordinary, and, with the right technology, could be a game-changer for the sector.

Survey form

Survey form questions and the participants’ answers: both quantitative (like check-box) and hand-written answers are gathered in *DARE Forum responses.xls*, added to the list of documents attached to the project’s final report.