



The LocalWiki.org Project

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<b>Organization or Business Name</b>	Davis Wiki / Wiki Spot – a 501(c)3 non-profit
<b>Annual Operating Budget</b>	\$30,000
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<b>Project title</b>	LocalWiki.org
<b>Requested amount from Knight News Challenge</b>	\$1,014,500
<b>Expected amount of time to complete project</b>	2 years
<b>Total cost of project including all sources of funding</b>	\$1,114,500

## Describe your project

LocalWiki.org is an effort to create a new form of local media built on the premise that mass collaboration can radically improve the way our communities get and exchange news and information.

And we've proven it in Davis, California: in 2004 we started the world's first, and now biggest, local community wiki—the Davis Wiki ([daviswiki.org](http://daviswiki.org)). What began as an experiment in community collaboration has developed into a staple of local media: nearly every resident uses the wiki during the course of a month,

and 1 in 7 contributes to the wiki at some point during the year. More Davisites visit the wiki on a daily basis than read the local papers.

Residents use their wiki to find out and share information on nearly every aspect of life in the city: from bicycle repair and vegan cooking tips to intricate details of neighborhood political issues. News is often shared hours before other sources and, unlike many other media, the information remains freely accessible indefinitely. The Davis Wiki gives everyone in the community a way to share their personal knowledge of their community with their community.

With LocalWiki.org we will take the knowledge and experiences we gained with Davis Wiki and create a new kind of wiki software purpose-built for the needs of a local community, create a sustainable model for developing a successful local wiki, and build a network of groups experienced in growing local community wikis. We will ingrain the idea of a community-supported local wiki into the public consciousness as a vital component of the local news and information ecosystem.

Our development will be open-source and our content will be licensed under open licenses. To test our new model for a local community wiki, LocalWiki.org will be targeted at an initial set of 5 cities.

## **How will your project improve the way news and information are delivered to geographic communities?**

A local wiki can be thought of a collaborative extension of a locally-relevant blog—but instead of a small set of individuals writing, a local wiki channels the knowledge and experiences of the entire city to create a cohesive resource on what the community feels is most important. And on the local level, everyone's an expert.

The tremendous success of the Davis Wiki best illustrates how a community-driven local wiki can radically change how people get and exchange information—and even define a new form of local media. Indeed, in 2007 the Davis City Council awarded the Davis Wiki a Thong H. Huynh award for Excellence Community Involvement, given in past years to conventional media such as local television and radio stations.

## **How is your idea innovative? (new or different from what already exists)**

A local wiki is an innovation: it's a cohesive, collaborative form of local media that anyone in the community can contribute to. Despite the success and impact our Davis Wiki has had, the idea is still very much in its infancy.

We will propel this idea of a local wiki into the public consciousness, develop a new sort of wiki software built around the needs of a local community, and experiment with new models for sustaining and developing a local wiki.

Our development will focus on the shortcomings we've seen with Davis Wiki and the needs of a local community wiki: things like collaborative community mapping, time-based annotation for viewing new and past events, and making the wiki accessible to and usable by everyone in the community.

## **What experience do you or your organization have to successfully develop this project?**

Philip Neustrom and Mike Ivanov started the first and the largest local wiki project, the Davis Wiki, in 2004. We've successfully grown the Davis Wiki into a new form of local media that has transformed the way people in Davis get and exchange information.

We developed the open-source software powering Davis Wiki ourselves with particular attention to the needs of our community. We coordinated community outreach, managed thousands of volunteers, ran fundraisers, worked with media outlets, purchased and colocated servers, incorporated as a 501(c)3 non-profit, and provided help to people in other communities. The Davis Wiki has been entirely community-funded to date. This has been truly a labor of love for us: we did all this as students in our spare time.

Through our years of work with the Davis Wiki and our efforts in other local communities, we have the experience to tackle the considerable non-technical challenges of community building, the ability to coordinate with local project leaders, manage outreach and the knowledge of how to gather a critical mass of active, dedicated contributors.

Most importantly, we have the knowledge and experience to know what works and what doesn't. As Software Engineers, we have the technical know-how to develop a new kind of wiki software just for local communities.

What we did in Davis was just an experiment, but it's proven a basic hypothesis: that a simple, community-owned wiki can fundamentally improve the way a local community gets and exchanges information. LocalWiki.org will nurture this seed of an idea to thriving fruition.

## **What unmet need does your proposal answer?**

Unless you follow local news sources every day for years, it's exceedingly difficult to understand the full context behind the events, places and people who shape our communities. A local wiki provides this much needed context and serves as form of institutional memory for the whole community.

Being entirely community-directed, a local wiki can also fill the voids left by conventional media, especially in areas without a healthy public information network. For instance, in Davis, we saw the Davis Wiki not only flourish as a vast network of institutional knowledge about every aspect of the community, but also used as a platform for exchanging information relating to a variety of otherwise unmet community information needs.

## **What tasks/benchmarks need to be accomplished to develop your project and by when will you complete them?**

The first 3 months will be focused on software development. We will hire developers and begin creating a new kind of wiki software designed to address our vision. Initially, it will support functionality necessary for content development in pilot communities, including creating articles, displaying changes, and integrated community mapping.

By the 6-month mark, we will research and select 5-7 potential pilot communities and find individuals and organizations who are interested in and qualified to lead a pilot wiki and hire outreach staff to coordinate with and empower the communities to begin seeding their wikis with local content. We

will improve the software with feedback from the communities, focused on expanding the ability of wiki editors to build engaging content.

By 9 months, we will launch 2-3 pilot wikis that have grown into useful local resources by opening them for use to their respective communities.

Development will focus on enhancing the browsing experience, including mobile viewing and accessibility.

By 12 months, we will open 1-2 new pilot wikis to their communities, providing guidance to help them meet the criteria for launch. We will fix defects found by users of pilot wikis, and at this time we will have the first major open source release of our software and companion site for developers.

In the second year, we will focus on the long-term sustainability of the community wikis and the LocalWiki.org organization. By 15 months, we will open an additional 1-2 pilot wikis and experiment with new models for funding and governance on the local level. By 18 months, we will launch 1-2 more pilot wikis, using them to validate our replicability and sustainability models.

During the last 6 months of the grant period, we will launch remaining pilots and collect measurements of the project's successes and shortcomings. By 24 months, we will adjust our evolving models for long-term sustainability and solidify the future form of the organization.

## **What will you have changed by the end of your project?**

We will demonstrate to the world that a new model for local community media, premised upon mass collaboration and complete community control, is not only possible but hugely beneficial.

We will firmly establish a successful, sustainable, and replicable model for a local community wiki in a diverse and experimental set of pilot communities. We will dramatically improve the way people in these pilot communities get and exchange information.

We will develop entirely new software built around the specific needs of a local

community. Needs like collective community mapping (built on Open Street Map, GeoDjango); semantic tagging of pages, so structured community data can be more easily accessed, especially by third parties; and a timeline viewing mode so community members can more easily read the wiki for current news as well as historical information.

With Davis Wiki, one in seven residents contribute to the wiki in the course of a year. Our software will be dramatically more accessible than what currently exists, because ensuring the resource is accessible and easy to contribute to is paramount to our goal of improving communities' access to information.

Throughout our experiments with groups in pilot communities, we will document and refine our software, our outreach, and our educational materials to ensure our approach is replicable and refined to meet potentially unpredictable informational needs of communities. We will have developed and experimented with models for community-directed funding and cooperative governance at the local wiki level.

And we'll ensure that the world's communities not only are able to use and adapt everything we've done, but also have the educational and organizational guidance to truly succeed in transforming their own communities.

## **How will you measure progress and ultimately success?**

Within the individual pilot communities, we will measure the health and growth of their wiki and, more importantly, how well it meets the informational needs of the community. As outsiders, it's difficult for us to know these needs, so we will be working with local groups to figure out what works and what doesn't.

Within a pilot community, another important factor to measure is self-sustainability. Does the project have a strong core group of people involved, outside of the individuals and groups we're directly working with? How widely used is the project outside of this core group and within the whole community?

From a technical perspective, measuring progress is something that we, as software developers, are very familiar with. The most important measure of our

technical success is: does what we develop meet the informational needs of these communities? We will constantly interact with groups in our pilot communities to refine and improve our technical practices.

Replicability is a major measure of our overall success. By staggering the rollout of pilot communities we will test and refine our ideas about replicability again and again.

On a whole-project level, a critical measure of success is how well we demonstrate a model for a local wiki as a new form of community media. We'll measure this by looking at interest outside of our pilot communities—do outside groups understand the core principles of the project? Have we identified, through our pilots, what these core principles are?

## **Do you see any risk in the development of your project?**

Although innovative, we see the project's technical goals as being well defined and achievable. As software engineers we have extensive experience seeing development projects from conception to completion.

Ensuring that our new local wiki model is replicable and successful independent of our pilot communities is central to our mission. By staggering our rollout in pilot communities, we can ensure that our educational materials, outreach techniques, network of groups experienced in growing local wikis, and technical tools make it increasingly easy to replicate our successes without undue overhead.

As outsiders, it will be difficult to identify the best suited individuals in our pilot communities to drive the local project. We have to ensure that these groups not only have the right information, guidance and education to build a resource that meets their community's needs, but also make certain that these people have the characteristics that will help the local project be successful—that they're well-connected, have passion, and represent a reasonable demographic within their community, among other things.

We have years of experience running quite possibly the most active and engaged local online community in the world. Not only do we understand



what made the Davis Wiki a success, but we understand the fundamentals of successful community building. Additionally, we have thousands of connections in interested communities around the world due to interest in our work in Davis.

## **What is your marketing plan? How will people learn about what you are doing?**

In our experiences with the Davis Wiki, every element of marketing and outreach has been community driven. Flyers, stickers, fundraisers, t-shirts, community outreach and other efforts all happened with little or no formal organizational structure. People who thought Davis Wiki was important took it upon themselves to get other people in the community involved.

In the pilot communities, we won't be running the show. We won't create a wiki for them, tell them what their community needs are, or tell them exactly how to promote their project. Rather, we will identify a group that we think will do this successfully and steward them through the process of creation.

Each community will understand best how to promote their own local wiki. The difficult question isn't how to promote the wiki once it's already useful to some contingent of the pilot community, it's how to get people involved initially. Although marketing strategies will differ heavily between communities, the fundamental principles of building a successful community are universal.

Outside the pilot communities, we will promote the model of a local wiki as a new form of community media. We will engage in active outreach such as holding conferences, giving talks and meeting with relevant and interested groups.

At some point, we expect a certain amount of outside attention based on the innovative nature of what we're going to do. Even so, we believe the only long-term way to promote our new model for local community media is by demonstrating it successfully in a diverse and experimental set of pilot communities. By ensuring that these communities have a resource that meets their community's information needs, we expect attention to spread.

## **Is this a one-time experiment or do you think it will continue after the grant? If it is to be self-sustainable, what's the plan for making that happen?**

This project will be self-sustaining, both on the local and organizational levels.

After a certain critical mass, the Davis Wiki became entirely community-maintained. This began to happen after it contained a certain amount of institutional information relevant to some segment of the community and after the project attracted a diverse set of engaged community members. We expect to achieve a similar community sustainability elsewhere.

While work in Davis indicates a tremendous potential for fundraising at the local level, we're not sure what the ultimate relationship between the LocalWiki.org organization and the individual local wikis will be—and this relationship will dictate how we structure our fundraising. Right now, we see two distinct forms this relationship could take.

One possibility is a parent organization that is closely coupled with local wikis. In this case, we could provide hosting, technical, and other services to the communities in exchange for membership dues and voting rights. We would provide a certain amount of fundraising assistance, but each community would ultimately be responsible for fundraising at the local level.

Another is a completely decoupled relationship where there is little or no formal connection between the local wikis and the parent organization. We would provide the open-source software, support, educational materials, training and outreach assistance.

We will take the closely-coupled approach initially to facilitate early collaboration, but we may end up with a hybrid of the two models.

We will likely pursue a cooperative-based model akin to that of the National Association of Housing Cooperatives. The NAHC is a non-profit cooperative that has voting members who are, themselves, housing cooperatives.