



## Fellowship Application Fact Finding Questionnaire

### **I. How does your idea relate to technology, knowledge and learning?**

#### **Technology:**

My aim is to create a new form of local media built around the idea of an entire city coming together to collaborate on a single, cohesive information resource for their community -- and build something that is ultimately more open and more responsive to the needs of the community itself. In the past, such an aim would be impossible, but with the advent of the web and modern, collaborative technology this is within our reach.

When we began the project, ease of use was quickly established as our over-riding technology goal. Without our primary focus being ease of use, we would have no hope of serving non-technically literate communities. For instance, when we began the project no 100% rich text open-source "wiki" engine existed, so we built one, including a completely visual HTML "what's changed" system. (See [http://localwiki.org/first\\_year/](http://localwiki.org/first_year/) for technology details from our first year)

#### **Knowledge & Learning:**

So much of what we know and learn about our communities happens through personal experience and word of mouth. And only a small fraction -- mostly basic business information -- of knowledge about our local communities exists online in a cohesive, free and open format.

With LocalWiki, I want to create a way for people to learn, share and collaborate with their local community -- a way to unlock all the knowledge that's locked up in everyone's heads. And whether it's the park down the street or the school board election, on the local level everyone's an expert about something.

### **2. Does your idea relate to openness?**

One way we describe the LocalWiki project's mission is as *the open-content, open-source effort to share the world's local knowledge*. Openness isn't just an afterthought -- it's part of the core mission of the project.

Many projects have attempted to 'tap' into the local information market, or have success in one area but no success in scaling outside of that area. I believe that the fundamental reason for this lack of this success is because previous efforts were neither open nor empowering in any meaningful way.

Local information projects that aim collect a community's knowledge must find a way to motivate that community to contribute. In the past, many commercial, closed efforts have tried to find ways to fund specific individuals or organizations to maintain locally-relevant community information, but



these efforts quickly hit a wall: the depth and scale of local communities' varied information needs means that an extraordinary sum of money would be needed, and still only a fraction of communities' needs could be served. For instance, Patch.com (an AOL property), which provides newspaper-like hyperlocal coverage in a few hundred areas throughout the United States, costs AOL approximately \$100 Million a year to operate, at a tremendous loss.

I believe that openness is the answer. Openness is fundamentally more efficient, because with an open approach individuals themselves are empowered to create, maintain, and own their local information resources. Open-source software powering LocalWiki means that communities can set it up directly and customize it to their own needs, and open-content licensing means that contributors know their time and effort will have maximum impact and remain valuable long into the future. I believe this open approach can provide the motivation, energy and empowerment to needed overcome scaling barriers of conventional, closed approaches.

### **3. What support do you have for this idea?**

Currently, there are major LocalWiki projects in 9 countries, in 7 languages, and reaching over 380,000 individuals each month. The LocalWiki software platform (<http://localwiki.org/software/>) has been installed over 800 times. Since starting the DavisWiki in 2004 we have interest from thousands of individuals and communities throughout the world.

### **4. How do you support yourself at the moment?**

Currently, I am doing contract software engineering work to support myself.

### **5. Have you started implementation of the idea?**

Yes, as seen at <http://localwiki.org>. The first iteration of the project was focused on developing easy-to-use open-source software designed specifically for the needs of local communities (<http://localwiki.org/software/>).

For more information, see <http://localwiki.org/blog/> and [http://localwiki.org/first\\_year/](http://localwiki.org/first_year/) (specific figures now outdated)

### **6. Who are your current key partners?**

- **Existing LocalWiki projects:** Our existing network of LocalWiki projects and interested individuals, going back many years (since 2004), and reaching hundreds of thousands of individuals represents a set of essential current partners.
- **Code for America** (<http://codeforamerica.org>): We have a close partnership with Code for America and have been closely collaborating with them on their *Brigade* initiative (<http://brigade.codeforamerica.org/>), which aims to empower groups across the US to



set up and hack on civic, open-source technology. We've also been working with them in some of their fellowship cities, many of which have existing LocalWiki projects.

- **CityCamps** (<http://citycamp.govfresh.com/>) & **Civic Hackathons**: LocalWiki is increasingly being used during civic hackathons, both as a tool to hack on and a way for non-developers to contribute to a local, free culture project.
- **Public libraries**: We have enthusiastic interest from a number public libraries, and some are already spearheading LocalWiki projects for their communities. For instance, ArborWiki.org is run by the Ann Arbor District Library, CantonWiki.org is run by the Canton Public Library, and TulsaWiki.org is run by the Tulsa City-County Library.

## 7. Who are your potential key partners?

In addition to existing partners:

- **Wikimedia Foundation**: We've worked with the Wikimedia Foundation on planning around certain shared technical and community problems. But there are opportunities for deeper collaboration between our projects.
- **OpenPlans** (<http://openplans.org>): We have worked with OpenPlans on shared technical infrastructure, most notably the OpenBlock team (<http://openblockproject.org>). Further collaboration on technical infrastructure would benefit us both.
- **OpenStreetMap & Open Source Geospatial Foundation**: A number of OpenStreetMappers and members of the Open Source Geospatial Foundation are involved with the LocalWiki project, and we hope to work closely with the OSM and OSGeo communities as the project grows. As a concrete example of possible collaboration, we want to create a set of standardized annotations for OpenStreetMap to facilitate pushing/pulling data between our projects.
- **The Open Knowledge Foundation** supports a number of projects that could lead to collaboration. For instance, there has been interest in integrating their *annotator* project into LocalWiki. There are also possible opportunities for collaboration around their CKAN project, as a number of local communities are setting up open data hubs using CKAN and would like to explore integration with their LocalWiki projects (e.g. <http://data.openoakland.org> and <http://oaklandwiki.org>). There are also possible technical collaborations around versioning structured data and data protocols.
- **Free culture enthusiasts, data geeks, and API/platform consumers**: We want to find ways to make LocalWiki more of a unified platform for pushing and



pulling of freely-licensed data, and through that amplify the free culture movement in the same way Wikipedia and OpenStreetMap have.

- **Social service organizations:** There is interest in using LocalWiki as a platform for compiling and querying social service directory information, which is often hidden away in antiquated, disconnected databases. We've been working with social service organizations in Richmond, CA (Building Blocks for Kids Collaborative); Washington, DC (Bread for the City); and Oakland, CA (Urban Strategies Council and other groups) on ways we can make LocalWiki a better platform for resource directory applications.

## **8. How have you funded your initiative in the past?**

We've funded the project, in its various incarnations, through community-based fundraising, including a Kickstarter.com project that had \$26k pledged by over 420 backers. Additionally, we received a Knight Foundation grant to support the initial software development of the LocalWiki software platform.

## **9. Is this initiative implemented through a registered organisation?**

Yes. The LocalWiki project is an initiative of the Wiki Spot organization. We may change the name of the organization to simply "LocalWiki."

## **10. If so, is the organisation a for-profit or not for-profit structure?**

The organization is a 501(c)3 US non-profit organization.

## **11. Who owns this structure?**

The organization does not have owners, as 501(c)3 organizations are forbidden from having shareholders. It has a board of directors and I am the Executive Director.

## **12. Do you intend to implement the idea as a for-profit or not-for-profit initiative in future?**

As a non-profit initiative.

## **13. Who else is doing something similar and how is your idea different?**

On the similarity spectrum:

**Wikipedia** is an obvious point of comparison. Wikipedia focuses on strongly-verifiable, notable, neutral and encyclopedia-worthy content, but local community knowledge is usually weakly-



verifiable, not globally-notable, and often usefulness and objectivity trumps the "neutral point of view" ethos of Wikipedia. LocalWiki aims to be something very different and much more specialized than what exists on Wikipedia. We envision local resources that serve purposes besides being an encyclopedia: listing historical and interesting information on local organizations, discussing local political issues and events, helping community members connect--serving many ad-hoc information needs the community has. In fact, the non-"encyclopedic" content is what makes it such a unique resource--sort of a giant, collaborative community bulletin board.

Wikipedia's technical and community infrastructure isn't designed for local community usage, either. We view Wikipedia as a collaborator in the shared goal of advancing the free culture movement.

**Commercial "business directory"-style services**, such as Yelp.com or Google "Places" are similar in that they provide some of the same information that LocalWiki projects may. But these commercial efforts are almost entirely focused on easily-monetizable aspects of community life, such as restaurant and business information, and ignore the vast majority of community information needs. Additionally, none of these commercial services are community-run in any meaningful way, none are open-source, and none have freely-licensed content.

**Commercial "hyperlocal" news services and local blogs** often provide some of the same information that LocalWiki aims to collect. Blog or news-style services provide knowledge in time-based, news-update style increments, whereas LocalWiki projects provide cohesive *pages* that can continually be updated by community members to provide context about a particular topic. Local blogs are updated by at most a handful of people, whereas LocalWiki projects are massively collaborative. Existing "hyperlocal" efforts are not open in any meaningful way, as I mention in the *openness* section. That said, local blogs play an important and complimentary role in communities' information ecosystem.

#### **14. Where will you be based during a potential fellowship?**

I will be based in San Francisco, California, US, with travel to communities with significant or promising LocalWiki initiatives.

#### **15. Do you have an online presence? Please provide links**

- **Personal site:** <http://mathburritos.org> (Currently re-building the site)
- **Twitter:** <http://twitter.com/philipn>
- **GitHub:** <http://github.com/philipn>
- **User pages on LocalWiki projects:** e.g. <http://daviswiki.org/Users/PhilipNeustrom>, <https://scrzwiki.org/Users/PhilipNeustrom>

#### **16. Does the idea/project have an online presence? Please provide links**



- **Main site:** <http://localwiki.org>
- **Blog:** <http://localwiki.org/blog/>
- **Twitter:** <http://twitter.com/localwiki>
- **GitHub:** <http://github.com/localwiki/localwiki>
- **Community sites:** <https://guide.localwiki.org>, <https://dev.localwiki.org>, organizers list - <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/localwiki-organizers>

### **17. How did you hear about the Shuttleworth Foundation Fellowship Programme?**

I had been following the work of Rufus Pollock and the Open Knowledge Foundation for some time, and had seen the Shuttleworth logo at the bottom of the various projects. Over the past several months a number of friends encouraged me to apply and forwarded me the fellowship site and a blog post by Philipp Schmidt.