



## 2013-11 Grant Progress Report

### **Project Activities (per Grant Agreement):**

- Development of the hosted LocalWiki instance
  - Modifying existing code and importing existing LocalWiki instances into a centralized site
  - Creating user accounts and other new features
- Outreach and community management
  - Hire an outreach director to build user base
  - Work with existing LocalWiki communities to increase completeness and reliability of pages and data
- Framework for LocalDB, database of place information
  - Develop a plan for building LocalDB, an open database of place-based information.

### **Current Status of Project Activities:**

*To support the expansion of LocalWiki, a collaboratively edited local encyclopedia, into a hosted solution that can grow and experiment with new use cases.*

We have made significant headway toward re-architecting LocalWiki as a hosted solution with the aim of creating a singular, universal platform for local knowledge sharing. Our work thus far has focused on developing a rough prototype of the LocalWiki *hub*, which can currently be found at <http://localwiki.net>

The *localwiki.net* site is a rough – though fully-functional – prototype, and significant user experience and design work has yet to be done. We aim to launch a beta of the new platform in the next 1-2 months, pending the completion of a design refresh and the first draft of the new platform API. We plan to transition the *localwiki.net* site to *localwiki.org* once the project is fully launched.

Non-technically, we are making progress on re-imagining LocalWiki as a collective, cohesive project made up of distributed communities tied together by their commitment to a global, local knowledge production project.

Significant marketing, design, user experience and API/platform work remains and will occur during the next phase of the project.

### **Anticipated Outcomes (per Grant Agreement):**

- Rapid growth in the number of communities using LocalWiki, number of individual contributors, and amount of content on LocalWiki.
- Increased use of LocalWiki records by applications, journalists, civic projects, and others.
- A framework for the creation of an open database of place information that could be built from the LocalWiki project.

### **Results Achieved To Date:**

#### **Development of the hosted LocalWiki instance**

- We have modified the underlying LocalWiki code to support arbitrary, subdivided geographic *regions*, e.g. */sf*, */chico*. A given *region* contains a set of pages, maps, tags, etc. Users can easily create new regions and draw desired geographic boundaries. This region-containing-pages approach is necessary because, unlike location-specific projects (FourSquare, Yelp), not every LocalWiki page has a concrete location (e.g. “City Council,” “Social Movements”).

- We have developed a set of importer tools to quickly pull in content from existing LocalWiki instances as well as from platforms used by other locally-oriented wiki projects (such as our old *wikispot.org* site and the *MediaWiki* software used by Wikipedia). More details in the *results* section below.
- We have opened up the prototype *localwiki.net* site to a small but increasing set of invited communities and are using the platform to support a number of imported LocalWiki projects.
- We have begun developing a more elastic, scalable server architecture.
- We have finished work on our initial responsive design, which makes mobile and tablet usage much nicer.
- We have begun experimenting with a new auto-generated “Front Page,” along with a Facebook / Medium.com-style “cover photo” system, e.g. <http://localwiki.net/yuba-sutter>, <http://localwiki.net/sac>. We want to do a lot more with this.

### **Significant work remaining:**

- **Imports of remaining, major LocalWiki instances.** We have developed the technical tools needed, but this is an ongoing process with social and community implications, and will happen in phases.
- **Regional connections.** Right now the different LocalWiki regions are effectively siloed and disconnected. We want to make it easy for people to find what they’re looking for, no matter what *region* they may be looking at. This is especially important in large, highly-subdivided urban areas. We plan to test out these developments in the Bay Area of California, where we have a number of active projects.
- **Administrative tools.** We have done some work on tools for administration of LocalWiki regions (e.g. locking pages, banning users), but work remains here.
- **General UX and design work.** Significant user experience and design work remains. Most importantly, we are still figuring out how users will flow through the site. We still have to figure out *regions* work (e.g. should people first create a *region*, or should

they be able to simply add a page first?); what the global LocalWiki home page will look like, and how individual regions' "Front Pages" will work.

## **Outreach and community management**

We've hired Marina Kukso as our Managing Director to develop an outreach and community management program.

In the first half of the grant period we've been focusing on building the new platform and importing existing projects, so our community engagement activities have mostly consisted of providing continuing support for our existing communities and limited outreach to new communities to help test the new platform.

We've invited 30 communities that had previously indicated interest in starting LocalWiki projects to participate in testing the new platform. Almost every invited group has started a new project successfully. We are now working with volunteers to help them build content and generate interest in the new projects while also getting feedback that helps us with future development. We've also invited lead volunteers on the 30 pre-existing projects that were imported into the new platform to participate in alpha testing.

Our efforts to expand existing LocalWiki projects are ongoing. With limited resources, the only way to scale our community program is through peer education between LocalWiki volunteers. As such, we're focused on training and connecting project spearheaders in ways that maximize peer education – e.g. mailing lists for organizers, documenting best practices on our LocalWiki guide wiki, and group Google hangouts.

Additionally, we've started an internship program and brought on our first intern, who we taught about web development. We plan to expand our internship program in the second half of the grant period with a focus on recruiting interns in software development, community management, and design/marketing.

## **Significant work remaining:**

We still have a lot of work to do to build a community engagement program appropriate for the new LocalWiki model.

Remaining work includes:

- Further engaging volunteers from existing projects in testing and migration to the new LocalWiki platform.
- Developing a new growth framework for projects on the new LocalWiki platform.
- Figuring out identity for volunteers on specific LocalWiki projects (will volunteers want to affiliate themselves with local chapters/regions or just consider themselves “LocalWikians”? Will chapters have unique branding? How will we engage with LocalWiki chapters/regions and how will chapters/regions engage with each other?)
- Developing documentation & programming to assist volunteer leads in building new projects.
- Expanding our open source developer community.
- Developing a plan for future marketing efforts.
- Developing partnerships with libraries, “innovation hubs” (hackerspaces, etc.), local historical societies, open knowledge groups, open data groups, and open gov groups.

## **Framework for LocalDB, database of place information**

- We have done some work on our structured form / data system, which will allow people to much more easily input and use structured data with LocalWiki, e.g. hours of operation, dates established, locations. Much user experience work remains here.
- We are in the process of reworking our API. Our previous API was difficult to extend (internally) and a bit too complex for end-users.
- We have created and integrated an Open StreetMap data importer into our map editing interface. We’ve been using map tiles based on Open StreetMap since

beginning the LocalWiki project, but it was previously not possible to pull in vector shapes represented in OpenStreetMap directly into LocalWiki. This meant that people had to manually trace parks, rivers, streets, etc that were often already recorded in OpenStreetMap.

- Based on conversations with individuals in the Open StreetMap community, we don't think it will be useful to develop an automatic import system for the other direction (from LocalWiki into OpenStreetMap), as Open StreetMap prefers all imports to happen manually, after review. We will be developing tools to make this process easier, though. We will be proposing a 'localwiki' annotation for OpenStreetMap (the 'wikipedia' annotation being somewhat popular (<http://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/Key:wikipedia>) after the new LocalWiki is launched, which will allow for deeper integration.

### **Significant work remaining:**

- Much of the work on the **API and structured data system** will happen in the next phase of the project.
- **Wikipedia integration.** After the LocalWiki beta is launched we'll propose a 'localwiki' Wikipedia annotation to allow LocalWiki pages to be associated with Wikipedia pages. By default, external links on Wikipedia are marked in such a way that search engines ignore them, but we will apply for an exemption.
- **Logistics of importing data.** We need to figure out the community logistics around allowing potentially massive data imports across locally-controlled LocalWiki regions.
- **Regional subdivisions** present some technical and community challenges, as discussed earlier and below. From an API perspective, we need to figure out how imported data is attached to regions and whether or not to pre-populate our database with regional boundaries.
- **Outreach to open data and civic hackers** will happen once the beta is launched the new API is released.
- **Pre-population of data.** We need to investigate pre-populating our database with copyright-free local place data, e.g. from SimpleGeo's old CC0 database and Open

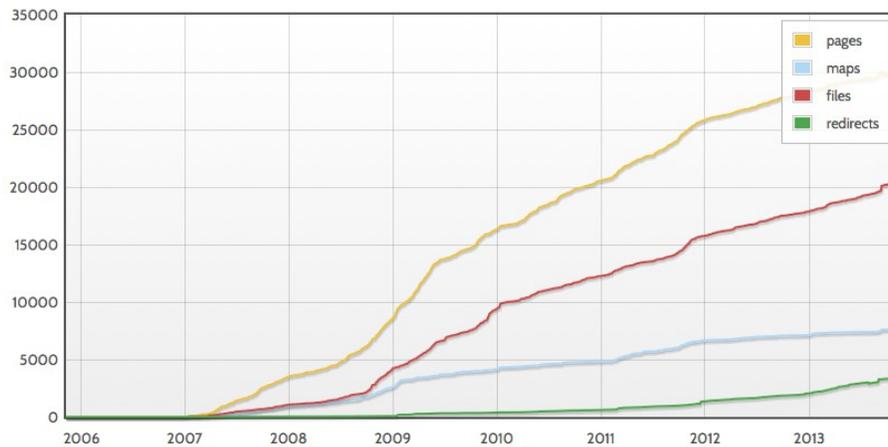
StreetMap's database of Points of Interest. This will happen after our structured data system and new API is released.

## Metrics tracked

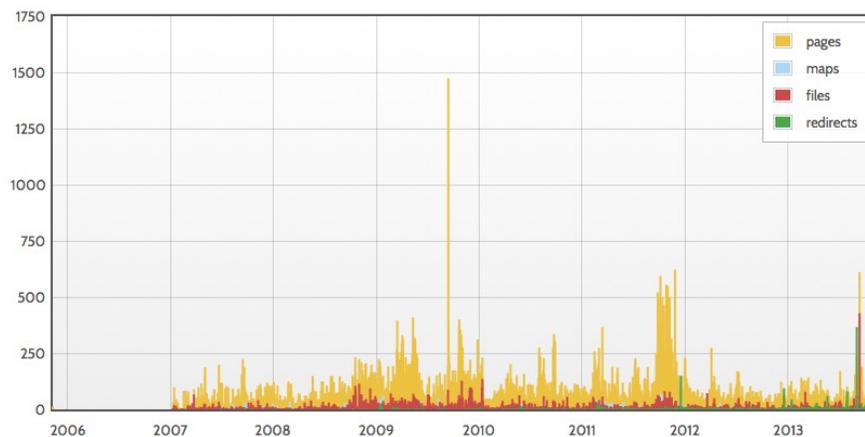
We've built a global LocalWiki dashboard to track growth over time in pages, aggregate page content, images, maps and users on the new platform:

<b>27,601</b> Pages	<b>22,337</b> Files	<b>7,090</b> Maps	<b>3,350</b> Redirects
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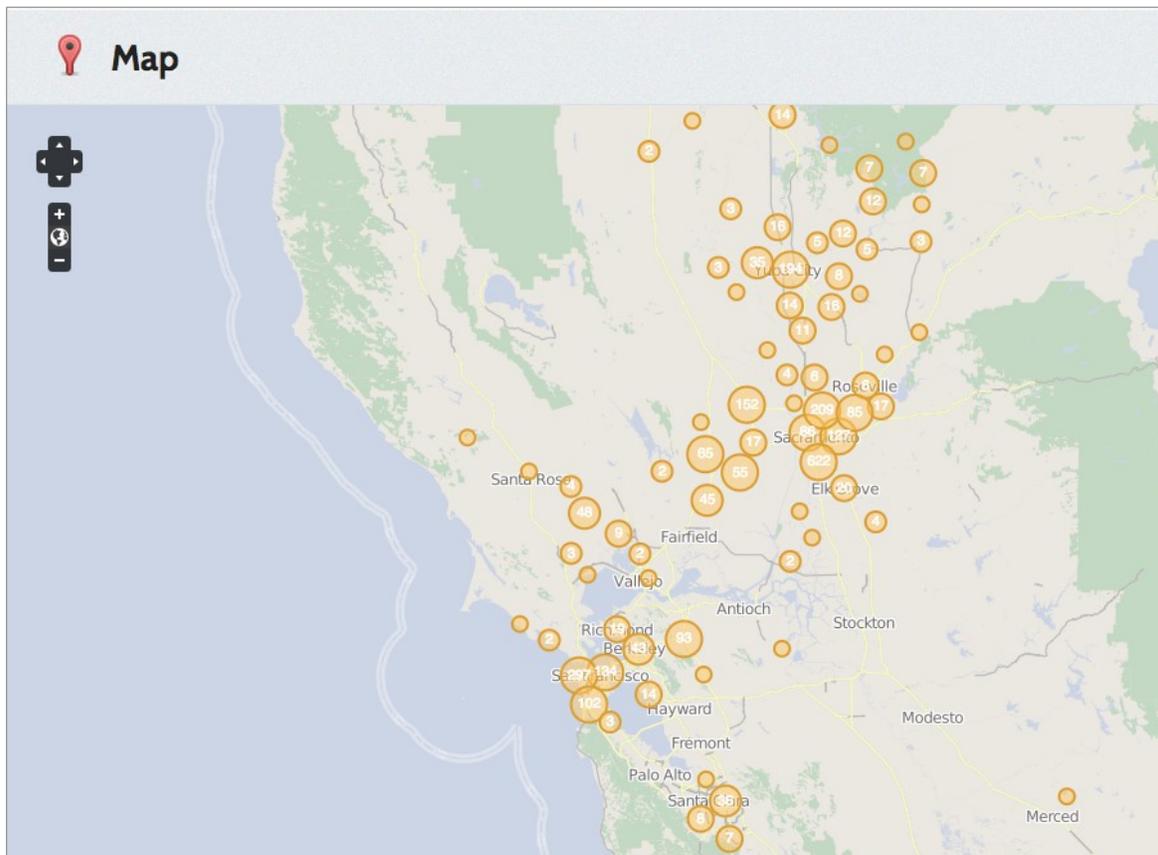
Growth over time



Edits over time







These statistics represent just a small amount of data. All of these pages, maps and files are human-created -- none are machine generated. Currently, most content on the new platform is from imported projects started long ago, as the graphs indicate. We expect that significant growth will happen in the next phase of the project, during our beta and after launch. Additionally, there are at least **50,000 pages** across the set of not-yet-imported LocalWiki instances that we expect to bring in to the new platform some time in the coming year.

### **What is the most important impact of your work?**

We've laid the basic groundwork for a global, universal platform for local knowledge sharing and begun experimenting with what a cohesive, collective version of LocalWiki will look like.

We've made it significantly easier to start new projects, a process which previously required

immense technical knowledge.

We've imported over 25,000 unique, non-machine generated pages into the prototype version of the LocalWiki hub. This makes the new version of LocalWiki – even in its prototype state – one of the largest English-language wikis in the world. This eclipses even the Wikimedia Foundation's second most active non-Wikipedia project – their travel guide, Wikivoyage – by several thousand pages.

Ultimately, **we are creating a open space for communities to come together, collaborate and build a shared memory and shared vision of their future.** And every day we see people do amazing things with LocalWiki.

For example, recently a [planned surveillance center in Oakland](#) hit national news due to the fact that it was documented on the [Oakland LocalWiki](#). The Center was added to the Oakland LocalWiki immediately after it was first discussed in the Oakland City Council. Community members documented every development, every news article, and every opportunity for residents to provide feedback to the city. A privacy activism group started in response to the planned center and members of the group began maintaining the entry and linking to it in their outreach materials. After circulating in local news over the summer, the issue hit national news when [The New York Times covered the Center in October](#). The Times linked to the entry to provide readers with background information about the issue, and it's almost certain that the entry was the first place that the reporter went to to learn about the issue. Even more incredibly, when a blogger at *The Atlantic Cities* ran [a story about the center with a bit of a positive spin](#), privacy advocates directed the reporter to the Oakland LocalWiki entry which resulted in his amending the story to include a link to the entry and admitting that “Privacy advocates were right to rip me for not mentioning these issues.” None of this would have been possible without an open, collaborative local knowledge platform in Oakland.

We expect the most important impact of our work to happen during the next phase of the project as we launch our beta and market the new platform.

## **What lessons have you learned, including keys to success?**

Since we're still very much in the middle of the development process and haven't yet answered a number of really thorny questions, it's difficult to say what lessons we've learned. If anything, we've learned that we're staking out new territory and that we have a lot of work to do. We've outlined the key challenges and the steps we're taking to resolve them below.

## **What lessons came from unexpected challenges you've faced?**

As indicated above, we're still very much in the middle of figuring out a number of issues that will need to be figured out in order for us to succeed at scaling LocalWiki. We're highlighting below a couple of the main issues we're dealing with right now and the approaches that we're taking to solve them.

### **Human Geography and User Experience**

In the current distributed LocalWiki model, regions are informally determined by those who start projects and as a result vary greatly in their scale. For instance, the Triangle LocalWiki covers a region of ~1mn people while the Izu Oshima LocalWiki covers an island of 8,500 people. In order to provide relevant local information, we are in the process of determining how to subdivide the content in a central LocalWiki project into geographic regions. This has been an unexpected challenge as the questions surrounding how people conceive of their neighborhoods and the areas that they consider "local" to where they live are still considered unresolved in the field of human geography. We are in the process of consulting with geographers and GIS experts to determine the best way to think about this problem as we develop the new platform.

Related to the question of geographic subdivisions, we are still in the process of determining a site structure that provides users with a way to move through the site that makes contribution as easy and intuitive as it is for sites like Facebook and Twitter. Although we feel confident that our approach to starting regions is extremely user-friendly (almost everyone that was invited to start a new LocalWiki region successfully did so), we think we can reduce friction a lot more.

## **Sustainability**

In addition to doing program work, we've been spending a significant amount of time exploring avenues to financial sustainability, both long-term and short-term. We've begun conversations with other foundations about support for our work, but are still in the middle of discussions with no clear sources of support yet finalized.

Our goal is to expand our runway and obtain more resources. We see our project as a multi-year investment into building a movement around collaboratively-produced open, local knowledge and as such, are focused on ensuring that we can not only continue to do our work past the current grant period, but also expand the amount of resources that we can devote to scaling our organization in order to attain mainstream adoption.

As outlined in our original grant proposal, we believe that the unified model we are now pursuing will make community-driven fundraising dramatically easier in the long run. We believe it's possible for us to achieve financial sustainability independent of foundation subsidy, but we need more resources before we can get there.

## **Have you collaborated with other organizations?**

We operate at the intersection of a number of communities including civic tech, geospatial tech, and open knowledge/free culture. As such, collaborative work is crucial to our success.

Code for America is one of our strongest partners, and we've collaborated extensively on their *Brigade* program. LocalWiki is by far the most popular activity of the Code for America Brigade program, with nearly every volunteer Code for America group participating in some way (see <http://brigade.codeforamerica.org/applications/11>). LocalWiki gives people who are interested in *civic hacking* a valuable and long-lasting way to open their local knowledge without having to write any code, which is one reason we've found such strong adoption among the brigades.

As we develop the LocalWiki platform, we contribute to various open source software

projects and open data projects. The new LocalWiki platform will include increased interoperability with Open StreetMap. We've already begun developing features that make better use of the OSM API and plan to increase our involvement with the OSM community in the second half of the grant period. We also look forward to deeper collaborations, both technically and socially, with the Wikipedia community.

We've been pursuing collaborations with the library and archiving communities. A number of LocalWiki projects involve ongoing collaborations with public and university libraries (Oakland, CA; Arlington Heights, IL; Tulsa, OK; Champaign-Urbana, IL; Historic Saranac Lake, NY). For instance, <http://localwiki.net/hsl> is a massive collection of easy-to-read archival material put together by a historical society in Saranac Lake, NY.

Additionally, we've started conversations with the Digital Public Library of America about a possible collaboration and hope to build on this in the second half of the grant period. We see libraries as a key partner group in helping us scale. See [http://guide.localwiki.org/LocalWiki and Libraries](http://guide.localwiki.org/LocalWiki_and_Libraries) and <http://mooc.hyperlib.sjsu.edu/mullarkea/archives/149> for some information on how these programs could work.

Finally, we continue to collaborate with groups of volunteer LocalWiki chapters around the world. Just to share one example, one of our most active volunteer groups is based in Japan ([localwiki.jp](http://localwiki.jp)). The group there is very active in a number of open knowledge communities including LocalWiki (organizing events, recruiting volunteers, etc.), Open StreetMap, and Open Government programs. They organize OSM/LocalWiki editing parties, develop cool hacks using the LocalWiki and OSM APIs, and provide additional perspectives on some of the questions around geography, licensing, etc., that we're dealing with as we determine the future of the LocalWiki project.

## **Future Collaborations**

Our current plan is to shift to a greater focus on outreach once we have a solid, actionable product in production. We plan to step up collaboration with other groups and communities once we make this shift.

Specifically we plan to pursue additional collaboration with Open StreetMap (greater interoperability between our projects), Wikimedia Foundation (interwiki linking and developing 'LocalWiki' as a Wikipedia annotation to boost content visibility in search rankings; strategies for bringing our communities closer together), Digital Public Library of America, open data groups (OKFN, etc.), and public and university libraries. Additionally, we plan to continue and expand our work with volunteers on specific LocalWiki projects.

## **How could Knight help increase the effectiveness of your work?**

We need help with:

- **Introductions to like-minded foundations.** We need help connecting to relevant program officers at foundations that would be interested in our work.
- **Help spreading the word** about our work to the wider Knight community, particularly once we enter our beta period.

## **Confidential Feedback:**

n/a

## **Budget Adjustments:**

Please see our expenses-tracked budget, attached.

As of Nov. 1, we are under budget (< 50% spent) in most categories. The Managing Director ("Outreach Coordinator" in the budget) hiring process took longer than expected and Managing Director Marina Kukso didn't end up joining the team until the beginning of July.

Additionally, a number of planned expenses are scheduled for the second half of the grant period. The marketing, travel, outreach, contracted software development, design, and fundraising categories will all begin to be spent as we finalize software and web development and begin to market and promote the new platform.

We've spent \$3,360 on rent thus far, which was not a categorized expense. We would like to

move \$3,700 from "Supplies and Materials," \$2,000 from "Accounting Fees," and \$1,000 from "Legal Fees" to the "Rent" category (+ \$6,700)