



2015-2 Grant Report

Final Report for G-2013-42911

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.

All project activities have been successfully completed.

We have successfully re-architected LocalWiki as a hosted solution, and have successfully re-branded LocalWiki as the universal platform for local knowledge sharing. The new LocalWiki platform officially launched on January 26th, 2015. A live preview version of the new LocalWiki was available for much of the past year prior to this official launch.

LocalWiki has grown to over 104,000 pages across 543 geographic communities, and receives over 400,000 unique visitors a month.

Significant, essential work remains on the LocalWiki platform – e.g. improved internationalization, general structured data support, native mobile support, etc – but is outside the scope of this grant.

Please see midterm grant report for more details on previous activities.

Development of the hosted LocalWiki instance

We have successfully developed and launched the new, hosted LocalWiki platform, which is available at <https://localwiki.org>. The new LocalWiki platform was officially launched on January 26th, 2015. A live preview version of the new LocalWiki was available for much of the past year prior to this official launch. The new LocalWiki platform has been in active, ongoing use for a year now (*metrics listed below in outcomes section*).

Throughout the grant period, we worked directly with nearly 100 individual communities running the old, self-hosted LocalWiki software to migrate their data and community to the new LocalWiki platform. To make this migration period as smooth as possible, we developed a set of importer tools to quickly pull data from older LocalWiki instances as well as from platforms used by other locally-oriented *wiki* projects (such as our old *wikispot.org* service, as well as the *MediaWiki* software used by Wikipedia). This migration period also required substantial community outreach support.

Significant work remains on the LocalWiki platform, but is outside the scope of this grant.

Outreach and community management

Outreach and community management tasks within the scope of this grant have been successfully completed, with the exception of a currently-being-planned “Day of LocalWiki” global edit-a-thon.

For the majority of the grant period, Marina Kukso was working as our Managing Director, with a focus on outreach and community management. Currently, Vicky Knox is working as our Volunteer Community Coordinator.

A significant portion of our outreach consisted of working directly with existing LocalWiki communities to migrate their data – and their community – to the new LocalWiki platform. We used this migration process as an opportunity to connect with community members and to fold them in to the wider LocalWiki peer network (mailing lists, our guide site, GitHub, online LocalWiki events).

Throughout the grant period we held regular online Google hangouts with the global LocalWiki community; provided ongoing email and phone support to LocalWiki community members; occasionally travelled to and met with LocalWiki stakeholders in their communities – including Tokyo, Japan; and developed and refined “how to” materials on our LocalWiki Guide site.

As mentioned in our midterm grant report, our long-term focus for community management is on expanding our peer learning network. Our goal is to allow for LocalWiki community knowledge-sharing to scale independent of paid resources we, as an organization, may have.

Framework for LocalDB, database of place information

As discussed in conversations, we made the decision to not rebrand the new LocalWiki platform as a separate, new product called *LocalDB*. Instead, we continued to use the familiar *LocalWiki* name for the project. The disadvantage of not spinning off a product with a new name (*LocalDB*) is that we had to work hard, in some cases, to change peoples' perception of what LocalWiki is.

With the new LocalWiki platform, we have successfully demonstrated a prototype for an open, read-write database of place-based information.

API

We developed an entirely new, geospatially-aware, read-write API for the new LocalWiki platform (<https://localwiki.org/api>). We've fully documented our API, and several LocalWiki volunteers have written tools to make working with the new LocalWiki API easier in various programming languages.

The API is designed to be flexible and powerful enough to serve as the basis for a wide number of future civic and locally-oriented applications. For instance, the API allows someone to get answers to fairly advanced geospatial questions like “show me all pages that lay inside of Golden Gate Park and are tagged 'landmark'”.

Marketing

The new platform's homepage and marketing materials highlight LocalWiki's ability to serve as a read-write API for local, geographic knowledge. LocalWiki-related hackathons have taken place in an ad-hoc basis at many local hackathons and open data events.

Significant work, outside the scope of this grant, remains in the following areas:

- **Marketing LocalWiki specifically to developer / hacker communities.** We believe that modest resources directed toward marketing LocalWiki to developer communities could lead to tremendous growth via imported and machine-cleaned data as well as external apps that tie in to and expand LocalWiki (e.g. a 'local tour' app¹ that allows individuals to add a new local block-by-block tour which is then pushed into LocalWiki).
- **Development of data import / export tools.** While our team and volunteer community has developed several data import and export tools (*Google's KML* → *LocalWiki*; *MediaWiki* →

1 <https://github.com/bschoenfeld/hrva-wiki-walking-tour>

LocalWiki; wikispot.org → LocalWiki; Socrata Open Data Portal → LocalWiki; OpenStreetMap basic geometry → LocalWiki), many essential open data import and export tools remain to be built.

- **Wide-scale importing of civic and locally-oriented data sources.** We believe that building import / export tools and importing relevant civic and locally-oriented data could have a major impact on the amount of useful content in LocalWiki. For instance, a set of tools to import open point-of-interest (POI) information from various data sources coupled with a set of tools to import well-known regional boundaries (primarily city boundaries) and Creative Commons-licensed imagery could add potentially millions of useful pages to LocalWiki, if done properly.

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:

Since beginning the first public preview of the new LocalWiki platform, we have seen a steady growth in the number of communities served by LocalWiki, the number of pages comprising LocalWiki, and the number of contributors to LocalWiki.

Below are a few of our tracked metrics.

Traffic to LocalWiki.org during the grant period:



The above graph displays overall traffic (*sessions on Google Analytics*) to localwiki.org for the

grant period. Since beginning work on the new LocalWiki platform, we have seen a steady increase in visitors to LocalWiki.

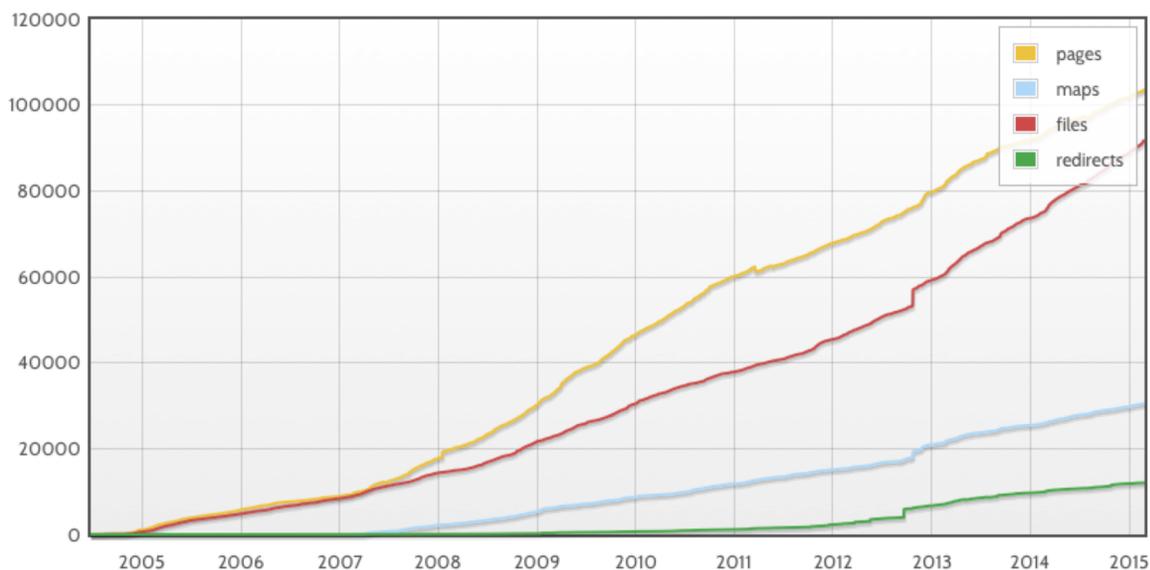
Detailed traffic metrics:

During the grant period, localwiki.org saw **2,659,677** unique visitors, served **7,543,838** page views, and the average user viewed **2.22** pages when visiting. (Source: *Google Analytics*)



On average, LocalWiki sees approximately *400,000 unique visitors a month* and serves approximately *1.1 million page views a month*.

Page, map and photo growth over time:

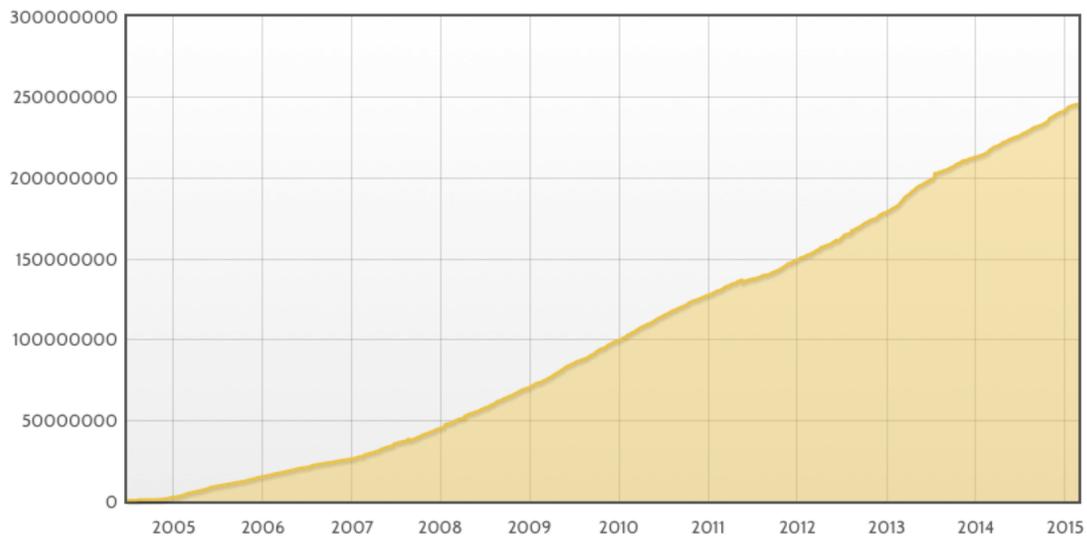


The above is a graph of the number of pages, maps and photographs on LocalWiki over time. Because a good deal of our migrated / imported data is from older, pre-LocalWiki projects that were started between 2005 and 2012, this graph extends back into 2005.

As of the time of writing, LocalWiki contains **104,586 pages**, **100,424 files**, and **29,514 maps**.

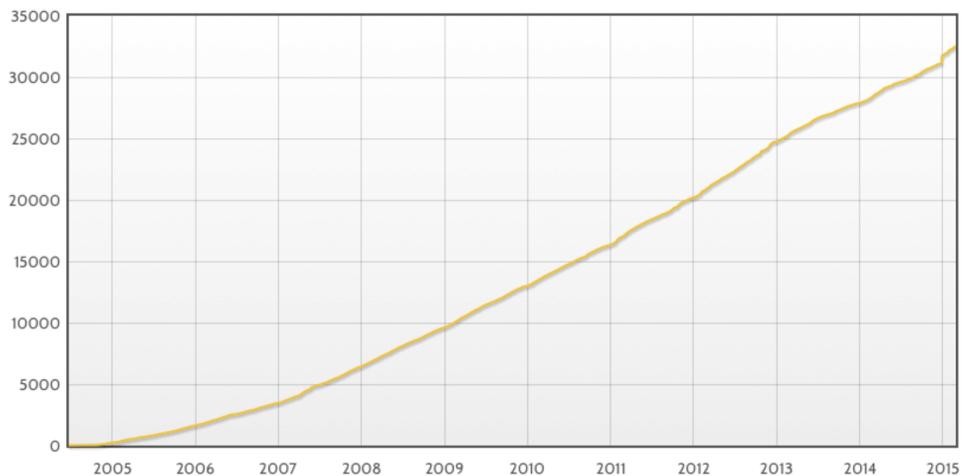
(Source: *LocalWiki integrated dashboard system*)

Content growth over time:



The above is a graph of the aggregate page *content length over time*. The y-axis is the number of characters on every single page, and a larger number means more page text. The graph shows us that textual content on LocalWiki has been increasing at a steady pace.

User accounts over time:

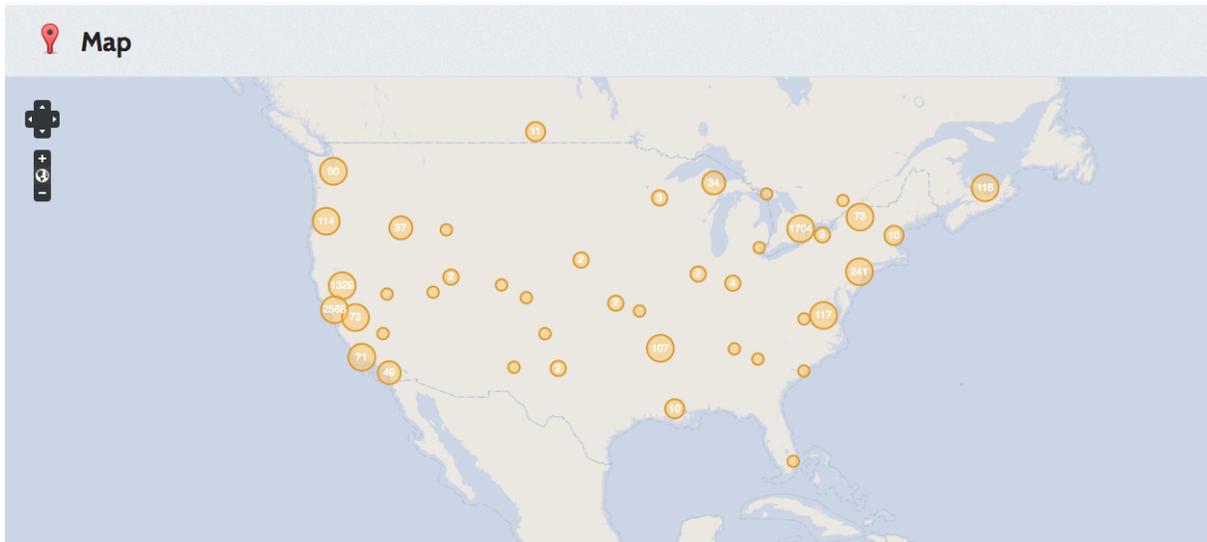


The above is a graph of the number registered user accounts on LocalWiki over time. In total, there are **33,061** registered user accounts on LocalWiki at the time of writing. However, this figure is a bit misleading, as anyone can edit LocalWiki without first creating a user account (and many

do). Including non-registered editors, a total of **52,839** editors have contributed material to LocalWiki.

Geographic visualization:

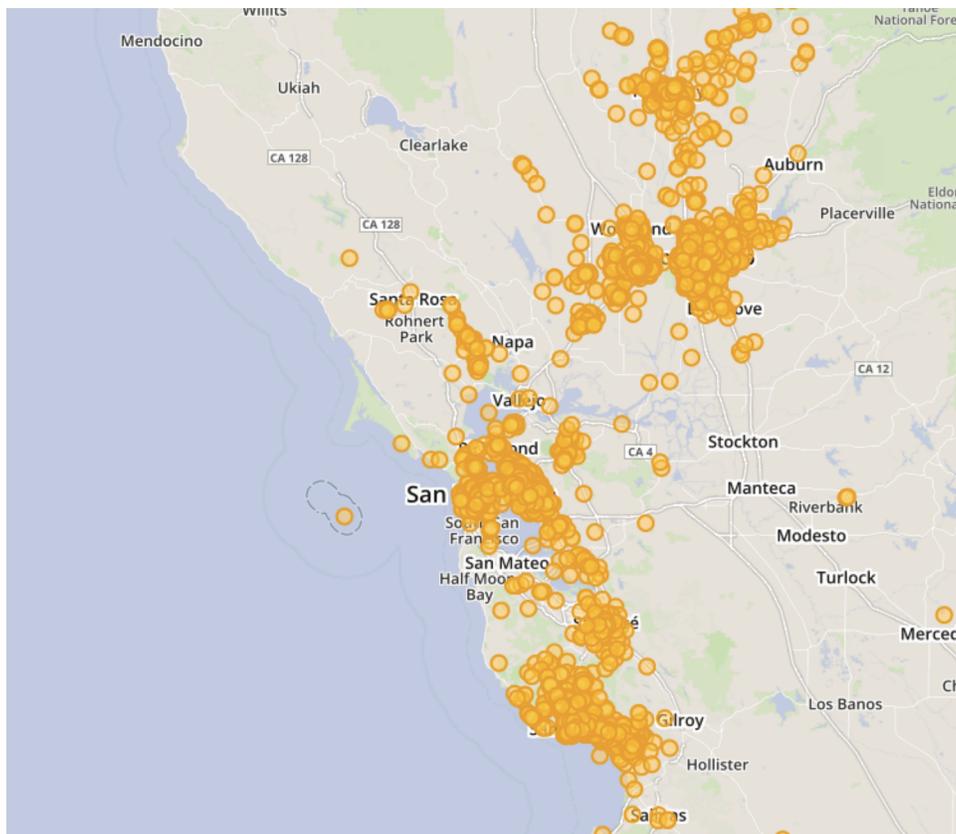
All mapped LocalWiki pages across the United States, from our *midterm* grant report:



And all mapped LocalWiki pages across the United States, **current**:



And mapped pages in the Bay Area, California, *current*:



International growth:

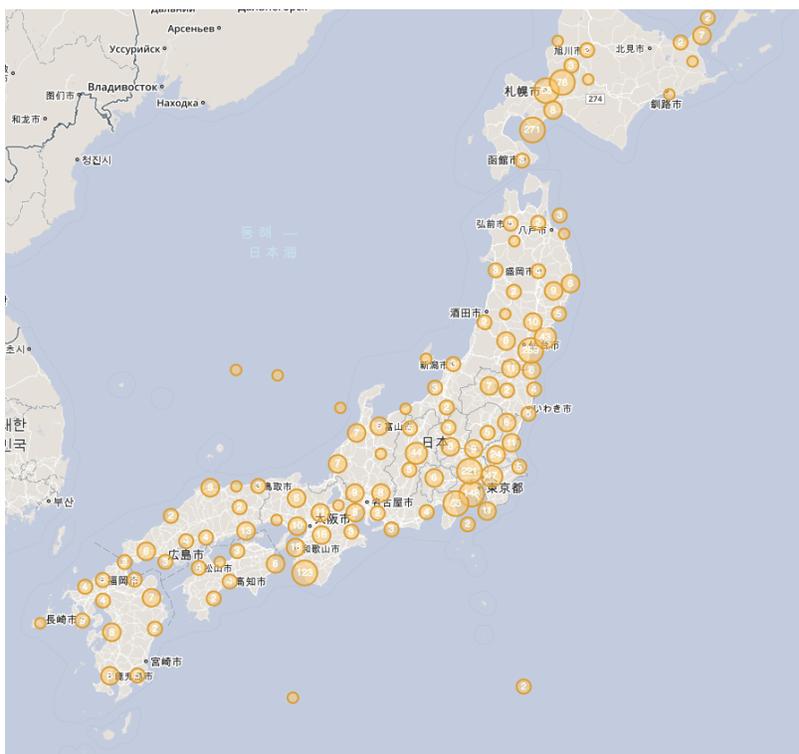
We have seen substantial growth outside of the United States and in non-English languages during the grant period, and without any resources for international work.

The new LocalWiki platform is fully *internationalized*, meaning the user interface can be translated into any language. LocalWiki has been fully translated into English, Japanese, French, Spanish, German, Dutch, Ukrainian by our volunteer community, and we have established a community-driven process by which any language community can update and add translations to LocalWiki.



Currently, 3,069 pages on LocalWiki are in a non-English language – all of which were added during the grant period.

In particular, a large and extremely active LocalWiki community has emerged in Japan (<https://ja.localwiki.org>). Japan is now home to 50 LocalWiki regions, and the Japanese LocalWiki community holds regular meet ups across the country, gives presentations about LocalWiki at local Japanese technical meetups, is collaborating with OpenStreetMap Japan and Wikimedia Japan, are working to set up their own Japanese non-profit (<https://ja.localwiki.org/main-ja/about>). At least one person is working full-time on LocalWiki in Japan².



Mapped LocalWiki pages across Japan

We've never had resources dedicated to international work, and all growth has been ad-hoc and entirely due to the work of volunteers – including the process of making the LocalWiki backend code internationalization-ready. We believe that substantially more could be done with resources for international work.

² Mikio Sugiyama, a professor at Wakayama University, is more or less touring the country setting up LocalWiki presence in different areas. His research project at Wakayama University is deeply connected with LocalWiki in Japan.

What is the most important impact of your work?

We believe that **the more people learn about their communities, the more power they have to make meaningful choices about the future of those communities.** But outside of major events in large cities and well-known landmarks, it remains remarkably difficult to learn about our local communities. If someone wants to learn about, say, the history of a local park, and how the park changed as neighborhood dynamics shifted over the past several decades, and how those dynamics connect to neighborhood history, there is no other open space find or share this kind of information.

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.



The Oakland LocalWiki winning the Partners in Preservation Award from the Oakland Heritage Alliance for excellent in documenting Oakland's history.

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. This collaborative LocalWiki documentation

ultimately lead to the surveillance center being significantly scaled back. None of this would have been possible without an open, collaborative local knowledge platform in Oakland.

We have been collecting stories of how our open, interconnected approach leads to real world impact in local communities:

- [https://localwiki.org/main/LocalWiki for Civic Engagement](https://localwiki.org/main/LocalWiki%20for%20Civic%20Engagement)
- [https://localwiki.org/main/Best of LocalWiki](https://localwiki.org/main/Best%20of%20LocalWiki)

Today, over 500 local communities use LocalWiki to learn about and improve their community, and LocalWiki contains over 104,000 non-machine-generated pages. This makes the new version of LocalWiki – even in its early 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 many thousands of pages.

With this grant, we have started to lay the groundwork for a global, universal platform for local knowledge sharing. The new LocalWiki platform makes it dramatically easier to get started with LocalWiki, turning the process – which previously could take someone several days and cost hundreds of dollars – into a 5-second task.

What lessons have you learned, including keys to success?

One big thing we learned during this grant period is that, with minimal organizational resources, partnerships and self-directed community are really important for growth and sustainability.

Our partnerships have been essential for tapping into existing networks (e.g. the Code for America Brigade network, or the OpenStreetMap community in Japan), and the self-directed nature of our community organizing (a global “do-ocracy”) has allowed us to scale in ways that otherwise wouldn’t be possible with limited resources for staffing.

What lessons came from unexpected challenges you’ve faced?

With this grant, one of the biggest changes we made was within the LocalWiki community itself. Before we developed the new, unified LocalWiki platform that this grant funded, each LocalWiki project resided on an independent server somewhere. Our previous approach to LocalWiki presented a number of challenges for scaling and improving LocalWiki, which we’ve detailed elsewhere. But one of the biggest challenges we faced was working alongside each and every exiting LocalWiki community to get them on board with our vision for the future of the project.

We knew that there were logistical considerations we’d have to tackle -- migrating data to the new platform, for one. But the real impetus behind our one-on-one approach was to ensure that there was a single, unified idea of what LocalWiki “is”. Prior to our work here, people thought of

LocalWiki as a “piece of civic tech software you setup and use -- a tool,” rather than “a global, interconnected platform for local knowledge sharing.”

Conveying this shift in vision was incredibly important. After all, people don’t think of Wikipedia as a “piece of *software* you use to do X,Y,Z,” but rather “a free, collaborative encyclopedia – a *project*.” Increasing our scope and vision was essential to the future of the project.

What we learned from this one-on-one migration process was that trust was really, really important. It was the trust we fostered through the past several years of working with hundreds of LocalWiki communities that allowed us to get every existing LocalWiki community on board with our new, shared vision for the future.

Have you collaborated with other organizations?

LocalWiki operates 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 has been one of the most popular activities of the *Brigade* program, with nearly every volunteer Code for America group participating in some way. LocalWiki gives people who are interested in civic hacking a valuable and long-lasting way open their local knowledge without having to write any code, which is one reason we’ve found such strong adoption among the Code for America volunteer groups.

While developing the LocalWiki platform, we often contribute to various open source software projects and open data projects. For instance, the new LocalWiki platform includes interoperability with OpenStreetMap (<https://openstreetmap.org/>). We developed features that make use of the OSM API and plan to increase our involvement with the OpenStreetMap community in the future. 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.org/hsl> is a massive collection of easy-to-read archival material put together by a historical society in Saranac Lake, NY.

We’ve had conversations with the Digital Public Library of America about a future collaboration and hope to build on this in the future. We see libraries as a key partner group in helping us scale. See [https://localwiki.org/main/LocalWiki and Libraries](https://localwiki.org/main/LocalWiki_and_Libraries) and <http://mooc.hyperlib.sjsu.edu/mullarkea/archives/149> for some information on how these programs could work.

Additionally, we've worked with:

- The Ann Arbor District Library, on a grant proposal (<https://www.newschallenge.org/challenge/libraries/feedback/civic-ticker-libraries-mobilizing-citizens-to-inform-and-be-informed>)
- We collaborated with the Ann Arbor District Library, Tulsa City-County Library, Skokie Public Library, Arlington Heights Memorial Library, Belvedere-Tiburon Library and the Belvedere-Tiburon Landmarks Society on another grant proposal (<https://www.newschallenge.org/challenge/libraries/feedback/local-knowledge-fellowships-a-residency-program-that-puts-the-library-at-the-heart-of-open-local-community-knowledge>)
- We have deepened our collaboration with LocalWiki organizers in Japan, who have now begun the process for forming their own non-profit organization, LocalWiki Organization Japan (<http://ja.localwiki.org/main-ja/about>). LocalWiki Executive Director Philip Neustrom was able to visit with several of the LocalWiki Japan organizers while in Tokyo in October.
- We worked with the Smart Chicago Collaborative to help seed the beginnings of LocalWiki in Chicago: <http://www.knightfoundation.org/blogs/knightblog/2014/11/25/smart-chicago-collaborative-launches-three-civic-innovation-projects/>

Finally, we continue to collaborate with volunteer LocalWiki chapters around the world. Just to share one example, one of our most active volunteer groups is based in Japan (<https://ja.localwiki.org/>). The group there is very active in a number of open knowledge communities including LocalWiki (organizing events, recruiting volunteers, etc.), OpenStreetMap, 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.

How could Knight help increase the effectiveness of your work?

We need help with introductions to like-minded foundations, and we need help connecting to relevant program officers at foundations that would be interested in our work.

Confidential Feedback:

None.

Budget Adjustments:

Previously, all of our hosting and telecommunications-related expenses were marked as being part of the Capital expenses budget category, because there was no appropriate budget category in place. We've moved all of these expenses into a new "Other" category called "Hosting / telecommunication services."

Additionally, due to the extended timeframe of the grant, several budgeted categories were completed by LocalWiki staff and volunteers, rather than by consultants. For instance, "Software engineering," "System administration," "Design," and "Fundraising"-related tasks were all completed by LocalWiki staff, which meant more money was spent in the "Program Salaries and wages" budget category over the increased timeframe. Other expenses, such as "Legal fees," and "Accounting fees" we were able to find inexpensive or pro-bono help for, and allowed us to fund an extended amount of LocalWiki core staff time.