

Part 2: Staying Connected

Now that you've created a group with goals, objectives, and a plan of action, it's important to keep everyone in contact. The Internet is one way to do this.

There are many online resources that allow you to do so much more than just email: You can create a forum to share ideas and photos and spread the word about your group and its work. Don't assume that everyone has access to the Internet, and be sure to ask group members what method of communication works best for them. If you do opt to add an online component to your group's communications, you'll have a virtual world of options available to you. Technology is changing constantly, but when this tool kit was written, online groups and social networking sites were two of the more popular and easy-to-use options.

Online Groups

You can set up an online group through many of the popular search engines, such as Google and Yahoo!:

- <http://groups.google.com>
- <http://groups.yahoo.com>

Online groups let you to email all members easily and engage in discussion "threads" right on your group's personal page. The group's webpage is not only a forum for discussion but also a place for members to gather in cyberspace and share documents, music, and photos.

Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites, such as Facebook or MySpace, continue to grow in popularity not only among young people but among adults as well:

- www.facebook.com
- www.myspace.com

Joining a social networking site can be a marketing tool in itself. All users of these sites create a profile page, and your group's profile will expose you to an entire network of online users. Other users can, in turn, show their support of and recruit users to your mission by linking to your group's profile within their individual profiles. Furthermore, these sites offer a "groups" function that allows interested users to connect with one another around a shared interest, cause, or organization. As a member of one of these sites, you can create your own group within Facebook or MySpace that other users can access and join. Much like an online group through one of the popular search engines, Facebook and MySpace groups make it easy for group members to engage in discussion threads on the group's page, send messages through the host site, and share pictures, music, and documents.

Twitter

Twitter (www.twitter.com) is part of the latest wave of Web 2.0 tools. It keeps members connected by having users answer the simple question, “What are you doing?” Via text messaging or Internet, Twitter users post short (no more than 140 characters) updates on what they’re up to; other Twitter members can follow their friends’ updates and, that way, stay in touch with their friends’ daily lives. Using Twitter with your group may be a fun way for members to stay connected between meetings.

TIPS: USING ONLINE FORUMS

In our experience with KLCC II and online communication, we’ve learned a few things along the way. Here are some tips to help your group’s foray into online forums go smoothly:

- If your organization has the capacity, create a group that’s separate from but linked to your website. Talk to your IT person for more information.
- For online forums, make sure to designate someone to serve as the administrator of the site or online group, so that new members are invited to join as soon as possible.
- Encourage members to post community events.
- Use the group as a way to continue discussions carried over from your meetings. You can create discussion threads or just post different topics.
- When you have social events, use the online site to post pictures.
- Most of all, create a forum that represents your group and can be useful in achieving your goals.

Online forums can be tools to build relationships within the group. As people share information about themselves and their interests, you’re likely to see more people attending community events together and spending time together outside the project. In this way, online forums strengthen trust – and your community-change efforts will reap the benefits.

Here at the Innovation Center, we’re experimenting with online forums. Check out the Online Communities section of our website for ideas for your online forum and for connections to others invested in positive community change:

www.theinnovationcenter.org/onlinecommunities