UTILE

# BEYOND FACEBOOK

## TECHNOLOGICAL NETWORKS FOR OUR COMMUNITIES

Roundtable at NASCO Institute 2014

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In this roundtable, co-op managers and staff are invited to reflect around the use of the Web and mobile technology to facilitate community living and co-op management. A number of for-profit software tools already exist for student housing management. However they offer little benefit to residents and the community. This roundtable will be organized around three questions; here are some leads for each.

### WHAT TOOLS DO YOUR CO-OPS ALREADY USE TO FOSTER COMMUNITY AND/OR SIMPLIFY MANAGEMENT?

Here are some software tools that have been discussed in the past at NASCO Institute. This is adapted from *Doing it Online : Resources and Links*, by Charlie DeTar.

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Original presentation slides : **http://tirl.org/r/doingitonline**

**Recommended tools**

- General purpose voting / decision making: **http://loomio.org**, **https://intertwinkles.org**
- Scheduling: **http://www.doodle.com**
- Shared docs: **https://drive.google.com**, Etherpad: **https://pad.riseup.net** (and others)
- Brainstorming: **https://intertwinkles.org/dotstorm/**, shared docs
- Project management: **https://trello.com**, or **http://redmine.org** (requires web expert to set up).

**Best practices**

- Use active facilitation.
- Develop policy for how you make decisions online.
- Train every member of the group with a new tool before using it for official business. Pay attention to dynamics of who participates and who doesn't.
- Favor open source, community driven tools (Loomio, InterTwinkles, Etherpad) over closed/commercial alternatives (Doodle, Google Docs) when you have a choice. You don't always have a choice.

## WHAT DO YOU FEEL IS MISSING, WHAT WOULD THE IDEAL TOOL OR TOOLS LOOK LIKE?

UTILE is interested in starting a discussion on this subject in the upcoming months. If you are interested in the results of the discussion at the roundtable on this subject and/or would like to be part of the discussion about a new tool, please reach out to us at **software@utile.org**.

## HOW CAN WE DEVELOP NEW TOOLS IN A WAY CONSISTENT WITH OUR VALUES?

Outside of the very visible for-profit startup model, there are many co-operative models for software development. Here are a few models that could be applied to a software project for housing co-ops.

**Free & open source software (FOSS)**
"Free software" means software that respects users' freedom and community. Roughly, it means that the users have the freedom to run, copy, distribute, study, change and improve the software. Thus, "free software" is a matter of liberty, not price. To understand the concept, you should think of "free" as in "free speech," not as in "free beer".
A program is free software if the program's users have the four essential freedoms:

- The freedom to run the program as you wish, for any purpose (freedom 0).
- The freedom to study how the program works, and change it so it does your computing as you wish (freedom 1). Access to the source code [open source code] is a precondition for this.
- The freedom to redistribute copies so you can help your neighbor (freedom 2).
- The freedom to distribute copies of your modified versions to others (freedom 3). By doing this you can give the whole community a chance to benefit from your changes. Access to the source code is a precondition for this.[1]

FOSS can be developed in multiple ways. It is often supported by non-profit foundations, such as Mozilla Firefox. Due to the advantages of open source software, it can even be developed by for-profits, such as Oracle Corporation with OpenOffice.org until 2011.

**Cooperative development**
It is also possible to develop a piece of software with multiple stakeholders in a collaborative effort instead of a single client/promoter. This cooperative method allows for a software to be made to suit multiple organizations (with common needs obviously). It is then also supported financially by all the future users – an important advantage when you don't have seed funding like for-profit startups do. A good example of this method is the Apache web server : this open source software is run on 54.2% of all web sites and is the fruit of a collaborative development effort[2].

## DEVELOPMENT BY COOPERATIVES

Finally, complex software is usually programmed by organized groups. Although many of these are corporations, more and more software co-ops are sprouting up. They are obvious partners for software development for co-ops. This is compatible with the principles stated above : a software for our co-ops could be open source and developed by a co-op with a co-operative method!

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[1] Free Software Foundation : https://www.gnu.org/philosophy/free-sw.en.html
[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apache_HTTP_Server