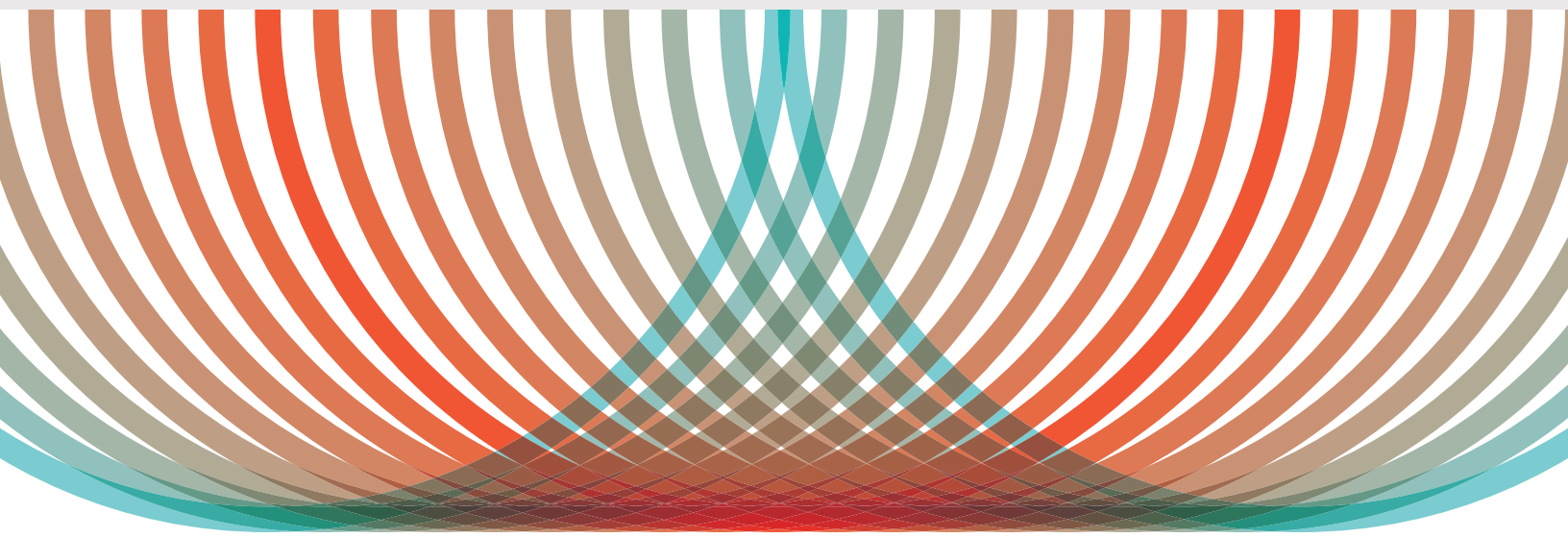# CIVIC MEDIA PRACTICE

Identification and Evaluation of Media and Technology That Facilitates Democratic Process

Written by

Eric Gordon and Gabriel Mugar

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGE-
MENTS

This report is the result of a year-long study that involved dozens of very busy people within organizations attempting to innovate democratic process with technology and media. We are grateful for their time and the insights shared with us about their work. Academics and other leading practitioners donated their time to participate in the workshop, read drafts of the report, and generally provided thoughtful and constructive feedback throughout. Graduate researchers from Emerson's Civic Media: Art and Practice program also played an integral role in the shaping and execution of this research. Listed here are those that provided substantive feedback and supported the various phases of the research described in this report. While they should take credit for making this document better, we take full responsibility for any errors of fact or concept.

We also want to thank all the organizations that participated in the research and informed the final outcomes of this report.

Agora
Anti-Eviction Mapping Project
Center for Art and Public Life at California College of the Arts
City Bureau
Creative Ecology Partners
DS4Si
Family Story Project
Gray Area Foundation for the Arts
Invisible Institute
Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics
Smart Chicago Collaborative
The Center for Interdisciplinary Inquiry and Innovation in Sexual and Reproductive Health (Ci3)
The Open Water Project/Public Lab
Upwell
Urban Works Agency at California College of the Arts
Urbano
Youth on Board
Youth Radio

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In a context of increasing distrust in institutions, including government, media and news, there is need to understand how civic innovators are using media and technology to counter these trends. Based on over 40 interviews with practitioners, this report identifies "civic media practice" as media and technology used to facilitate democratic process. It focuses specifically on those practitioners using media tools to form relationships and build trust - a practice that sometimes runs counter to the apparent needs of organizations to enhance efficiency through technology. This report identifies civic media practice as a direct response to the crisis of distrust and describes the negotiation of values that takes place as media is designed and deployed in organizations.

The process of identification and evaluation of civic media practice is described in detail. The report presents a method of process evaluation that allows practitioners to measure their progress along two central axes: social infrastructure and objective. Civic media practice is always striving towards strong social infrastructure and longevity. As a means of measuring progress along these axes, we identify four activities that can be tracked. They include:

01

NETWORK BUILDING

02

HOLDING SPACE FOR DISCUSSION

03

DISTRIBUTING OWNERSHIP

04

PERSISTENT INPUT

We present reflective questions that can be asked throughout a civic media project to track progress in these areas.

Finally, we provide recommendations for practitioners and funders as they create and support civic media practice. The institution of civic media is nascent. This report is meant to solidify common principles and provide direction for those invested in transforming civic life through media practice.

INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies are transforming nearly every aspect of American civic life, from community meetings, local information consumption, neighborhood activism and elections. And while much of this transformation centers on individual behaviors within social networks, organizations of all sorts play a significant, if sometimes hidden, role. Government agencies, news outlets, and community-based organizations (CBOs), play an important role in mediating civic life, and most are now struggling with their relevance in an increasingly networked and polarized society. Trust in most public institutions is down, with the problem most acute as it pertains to the media. The all-out rhetorical attack coming from the Trump administration on the integrity of information, has exacerbated the existing problem of diminishing trust in institutions generally. A 2017 survey from Edelman shows a sharp decline in trust in the media worldwide. Similarly, trust in government is continuing its rapid decline. In 2015, Pew reported that only 20% of Americans trust the federal government to do what's right at least "most of the time" (Pew Research Center, 2015). And those numbers continue to rise.

Distrust in institutions is nothing new. Narrowcasting and ideological extremes have catered to distinct factions in the media since the start of cable television in the 1970s and certainly with the rise of the web in the 1990s. All this contributed to what the sociologist Robert Putnam colloquially described as "bowling alone" (2000). As the analogy goes, we are still bowling but we're not joining leagues. We are still consuming politics and media, but we're doing it alone or in ad hoc networks. Political scandals, social upheavals, increasing inequality, have all contributed to waning trust in civic institutions.

Many organizations are addressing this trust deficit by "modernizing" communication infrastructure, responding to what they assume is a lack of efficiency in reaching constituencies. The emphasis is placed on new digital tools, often called civic technologies, that can transform how work gets done. From reporting platforms to data visualization tools, technology is embraced as a solution to organizational deficits. To support this work, organizations such as Code for America, Civic Hall, public sector innovation offices and various private sector players have helped to build networks of civic coders and designers throughout the country's urban centers. Significant advances in open data and open governance, led by activists and technologists, have compelled public sector and news organizations to share and utilize public data in their work.

These technological transformations are important, but they don't get to the core problem. All uses of technology are not equivalent: **underlying every new tool or technology is a series of decisions and negotiations that lead to its invention or adoption.** Optimized efficiency is not always desirable when the higher priority is assuring that a community's voice is heard, that a process is fair, or that the

most vulnerable are able to safely express themselves.

Attentiveness to the values underlying technology is necessary to understand the contemporary civic transformation. Big data and smart technologies are only part of this story. The values driving the work of addressing this trust deficit completes the narrative.

In the introduction to the edited collection *Civic Media: Technology, Design, Practice*, Gordon and Mihailidis define civic media as "any mediated practice that enables a community to imagine themselves as being connected, not through achieving, but through striving for common good" (2016: 2). There are two important aspects of this definition: 1) "striving for" suggests process over product, and 2) "common good" suggests a shared set of negotiated val-

processes in the civic space (Open Plans, 2012; Noveck 2016), whereas the emphasis on media in this work builds on scholarship in communications and media studies that examines the communicative patterns and the role of media in democracies (Goldberg 2010; Dahlgren 2009; Levine 2014). In pushing past the techno-solutionist framing of civic tech scholarship, we de-emphasize technology and situate it within broader communicative and procedural questions of democratic practice.

In the context of the current trust deficit, more and more, organizations are making and deploying civic media because they see it as the only way of acting authentically amidst rising skepticism. In order to understand the current state of civic media practice, we ask three questions in this report:

Civic media is media and technology that facilitates the democratic process. This is distinct from civic technology, which is typically associated with technology that solves a civic or organizational problem.

ues driving the work. Before every finished product, before every celebrated new initiative, values, interests, and power dynamics must be navigated and negotiated.

In short, civic media is media and technology that facilitates the democratic process. This is distinct from civic technology, which is typically associated with technology that solves a civic or organizational problem. For example, civic tech literature looks at how technological innovation can be used to improve existing bureaucratic

— How are organizations responding to a perceived crisis of distrust through media practice?

— What are the defining characteristics of civic media practice, as distinct from other media practices?

— And, how can civic media practices be evaluated in order to understand effectiveness beyond the isolated outcomes of an intervention?

Our conclusions are based on over 40 inter-views with practitioners in grassroots or-ganizations in three US cities: Boston, Oak-land and Chicago (see appendix 1 for full list of interviewees). The cities were cho-sen for their geographic distribution and because they had an existing ecosystem of organizations we knew to be engaged in civic media practices. The research team visited most of the organizations to con-duct interviews, while some were conduct-ed over the phone. After all the interviews were complete, we convened the partici-pants in Boston in June 2017, along with academics and other leading practitioners, for a one-day symposium. This gave us an opportunity to "member check" our prelim-inary findings and gain additional feedback on our assumptions. This report is the re-sult of that work and is meant to serve as a starting point for practitioners, scholars and funders to critically assess civic me-dia practice within context and over time. It concludes with recommendations for practitioners and funders.

DEFINING THE PRIORITIES OF CIVIC MEDIA PRACTICE

The practitioners with whom we spoke consistently describe media as a conduit to relationships. Their use of media was less about problem-solving and more about the communicative and generative possibilities of the tools. While civic media is the use of media and technology to facilitate democratic process, there is a descriptive layer missing from that definition. All the practitioners with whom we spoke were deliberately countering commonly held beliefs about the use of technology -- namely, that it efficiently solves problems -- by using it to form relationships and build trust in process. To describe these sorts of practices, we introduce what we understand as the dominant characteristic of civic media practice - **meaningful inefficiencies**. A meaningful inefficiency is any process wherein efficiency is deprioritized in favor of relation, connection, or reflective practice (Gordon and Walter, 2016).

For example, when an organization seeks to get input into strategy or policy, facilitating public deliberation is a meaningful inefficiency. It is not the fastest way to effect change, but it builds capacity for the group to make better decisions. When a group of activists organize monthly hackathons and reach out to local community, it is not the fastest way to "hack" a problem, but it builds strong communities and demonstrates good faith.

The "meaningful inefficiency" concept derives from the writings of philosopher Bernard Suits. In his philosophical tractatus on games, he describes the experience of playing a game:

To play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs [prelusory goal], using only means permitted by rules [lusory means], where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means [constitutive rules], and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity [lusory attitude] (2005, p. 10).

A game, Suits argues, is a necessarily inefficient system. He uses the example of golf to make his point. The most efficient way to get that little ball in the little hole

would be to pick up the ball, walk over to the whole, and drop it in. But players don't do that. They surround themselves with unnecessary obstacles like sand traps, trees and water, so that they can play the game. The goal of any game is to play the game. The inefficiencies in game systems create the conditions for play, an activity where the means are more valued than the ends.

We are in no way suggesting that civic life is, or should be, a game. We use this term to describe civic media practice where priority is placed on matters of relation

Institutionally, the philosopher Hugh Heclo defends the virtue of institutions. He claims that institutions are not legal structures, they are norms that guide how groups of individuals act collectively. Organizations are the formal makeup of institutions, but they are not the same thing. He suggests that institutions frame most social interactions whether or not people are aware of them. He goes on to criticize what he deems the "postmodern stance" which rejects all inherited values as cultural oppressions and believes that "meaning is to be found only in self-creation, not faithful reception

We are interested in those practitioners who are using media to foster connections between people and create more usable interfaces between typically excluded publics and institutions.

and care so commonly overlooked in the discourse of media. We are interested in those practitioners who are using media to foster connections between people and create more usable interfaces between typically excluded publics and institutions. We are not focused on temporary, discrete interventions in urban life that are meant to momentarily disrupt norms - the sorts described by Guy Debord and the Situationist movement or what is commonly referred to as "tactical urbanism" (1967). Rather, we are interested in the work that media practitioners are doing to open up systems of professional practice to accommodate exploration, deliberation, and the creation of new relationships.

The practitioners with whom we spoke were interested in the transformation of civic institutions. In his book, *On Thinking*

of something beyond oneself" (2008: 100-101). Heclo argues this position mistakes the organization for the institutional values that underlie it. Operating outside of a government organization does not reflect any necessary freedom from the moral framework that structures government.

MSNBC correspondent Chris Hayes represents the opposite perspective in his rather dark, and prescient portrayal of American politics. He draws a clear distinction between institutionalism and insurrectionism, arguing that political action either supports institutional values or rejects them (2012). Media scholar Ethan Zuckerman (2015) applies this perspective specifically to media practice, advocating strongly that "civic media" needs to be situated in the insurrectionist mode.

But Heclo provides a useful nuance to this perspective. So as not to fall into that "postmodern stance," wherein a false binary is created between self and institution, he introduces the concept of "thinking institutionally, which "is to enter and participate in a world of larger, self-transcendent meanings" (2008: 107). Thinking institutionally rests outside of institutionalism and insurrectionism. It is not a matter of supporting or rejecting existing institutional logics, but in thinking through (either critically or otherwise) the values or moral obligations that undergird institutions and the way these morals and values are performed.

While it is commonly understood that organizations, especially large ones, can be slow to change, they are always comprised of actors that are negotiating institutional values with organizational hurdles or obstructions. These individual actors borrow from some larger institutional framework (be it democratic governance or news) and are guided by moral obligations that correspond to democratic values, such as inclusion, equality, and collective responsibility. Practice, or the things that people actually do in their lives, is a constant negotiation between what needs to get done and the values informing the institution.

What we witnessed in organizations is that engaging in the work of meaningful inefficiencies requires thinking institutionally. The work of facilitating democratic process through trust building is more than just an individual action, or even the action of a single organization. It requires forefronting institutional values, even if they are not clearly stated and universally accepted. This expression of values is often in conflict with the efficiency needs of an organization. For example, a grassroots news organization in Chicago invests time in facilitating community conversations around controversial police data, as opposed to a singular focus on publishing more stories. The reach is reduced because of the investment in community building, but the practice represents an investment in relationships and a mind towards sustaining this work for the long-term.

This values-forward work implies a kind of "taking care." The deliberate nature by which practitioners considered the application of media within and outside their organizations stood out among the people we interviewed. There is a rich literature in philosophy and political science that explores the notion of care. According to Fisher and Tronto, caring is a "species of activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (1990). For Tronto (1993), care is more than a private moral value; it is an essential part of citizenship in a democracy, orienting people towards an understanding that citizenship is the practice of how we work with others to take care of the world we live in. Within this context, Tronto asks: "How can people claim to live in a democracy if their fears and insecurities begin to override their abilities to act for the common good?" (2013). She associates acting for a common good with the act of caring for others, and she argues that democracy is about assigning caring responsibilities.

Tronto defines a hierarchy of caring responsibilities, from caring about, which suggests an attentiveness to a person or issue, caring for, which implies a relation and reciprocity, care giving, which implies the actual action, and care receiving, which is the response to the action. And she proposes a fifth stage that she calls "caring

with." "The final phase of care requires that caring needs and the ways in which they are met need to be consistent with democratic commitments to justice, equality and freedom for all" (23). She explains further that this feminist democratic care ethic "is relational." By this view, the world consists not of individuals who are the starting point for intellectual reflection, but of humans who are always in relation with others" (36).

Caring is central to civic media practice. Practitioners use media to create meaningful inefficiencies so that organizations can become more relational and responsive. In the section that follows we provide detail about what civic media practice looks like in different organizational and contextual situations. And we provide a practical guide for identifying and evaluating these practices as a foundation for an emerging field of practice.

TRACKING CIVIC MEDIA PRACTICE

Civic media practitioners are involved in a near constant negotiation between technological and organizational values. For example, a mobile application for student rights developed with the Boston Public Schools represents a whole new way of involving youth in design and decision making, moving well beyond the actual limited functionality of the tool itself. When people employ media or technology to do their work, they are positioning whatever value the technology holds (innovation,

race, class, gender and sexuality, and other times involving organizational hierarchies. The act of making or deploying civic media is always a negotiation of power within and outside of organizations.

As such, civic media always takes place over time. In the graph below, we provide a method of plotting a snapshot of a project along two dimensions: the horizontal of social infrastructure and the vertical of objective. All media projects begin with some

How practitioners do the work of moving from an act of creation or adoption of new media or technology to one of shared goals and visions is central to civic media practice.

efficiency, youth) alongside the context in which they're working (i.e. police brutality, student rights, etc.). How practitioners do the work of moving from an act of creation or adoption of new media or technology to one of shared goals and visions is central to civic media practice. All the practitioners we spoke to described this process as directly confronting power structures, sometimes involving social difference such as

level of social infrastructure. Social infrastructure is defined as the "people, places, and institutions that foster cohesion and support" (Klinenberg, 2013). It takes different shapes depending on the specific project, including relationships with community groups, leaders, deep and valued knowledge of a community, or access to shared spaces. If a group has strong existing relationships with a community,

they will be on the right side of the plot. If they are brand new to a community, they will be on the left. The second dimension of civic media practice is the objective— how practitioners think about the impact of their work (i.e. impact in the short-term or long-term). Some projects are designed with novelty in mind (i.e. a social media campaign designed to garner quick attention), and some with longevity in mind (i.e. a publicly designed mural on a community center). The former would be plotted on the bottom; the latter on the top.
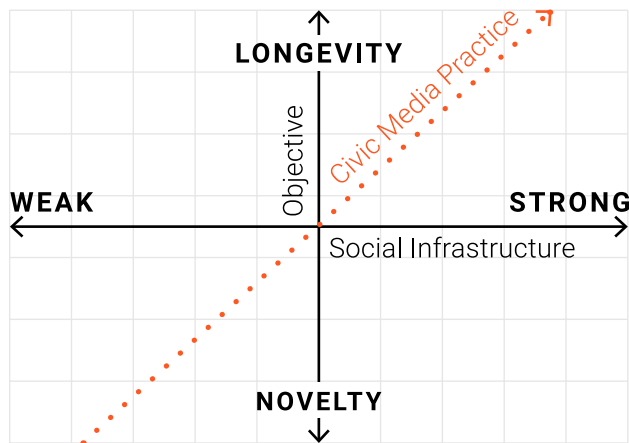
Figure 1. Civic media practice takes place over time across two dimensions.

Every project begins in one of the four quadrants, and over time, through practice, moves in some direction. What defines civic media practice, distinct from other forms of media practice, is the striving towards the top right quadrant, which is the outcome of democratic process. Practitioners work to situate themselves within a network of stakeholders with shared interests, and have made long-term impact a core objective in their work. The work of practitioners doesn't need to begin there, but it needs to aspire towards it.

In the following section, we describe the specific activities practitioners engage in as they create civic media. By calling out these activities, we also provide a means of evaluating civic media practice that goes beyond outcomes assessment of tools and acknowledges the temporal nature of the work.

Activities

In the figure above, social infrastructure and objective represent a snapshot of space and time. Social infrastructure is where a project exists (with what community, with what level of trust, with what foundation of relationships), and objective is when the project exists (for how long). This starting point is essential for understanding the effectiveness of the practice as it attempts to move towards the upper right quadrant. Reflecting on activities of civic media practice should be concerned first with an accurate portrayal of a starting point and second, with the ability to assess the positive or negative value of a slope over time.

Based on our interviews, we have identified four core activities that represent civic media practice. Some version of these activities was common across all practitioners with whom we spoke, and serve as means of measuring progress towards the upper right quadrant of the graph. We have not yet developed the instruments to measure such progress (this is the topic of future work), but we present it here as the conceptual foundation for evaluation that can be useful for practitioners as they reflect on the progress of their work and researchers as they examine specific cases of civic media practice.

ACTIVITY	DEFINITION
Network building	The act of convening either in person or online for the purpose of social connectivity.
Holding space for discussion	Assuring that there is time and space for discussion that makes room for multiple viewpoints and is tolerant of dissent.
Distributing ownership	The designer or convener takes time to build capacity of all stakeholders to reproduce or modify designed activities.
Persistent input	Inputs into products or process from stakeholders continue beyond initial release or implementation.

Table 1. Activities of Civic Media Practice

All of the activities that we describe in this section reflect varying approaches to negotiating the power dynamics of existing institutional models. Such negotiations are often focused on ensuring the equitable representation of interests and values of all stakeholders. For example, the definition of an issue motivating a new civic media practice is less a question of a practitioner identifying an issue to address as it is a question of the practitioner building solidarity around the issue. One such start-

al features of an issue, building solidarity for the motivating values of civic media work was described by many practitioners as essential to the foundation of what they do.

The activities described below unpack varying tactical and strategic approaches to negotiating interests and power dynamics across a range of stakeholders.

① NETWORK BUILDING

Civic media practitioners place a premium on convening people as part of their practice. They often place value on informal gathering spaces that bypass some of the strictures of formal meetings or input sessions. Such spaces, including community centers or social media interactions support encounters between stakeholders and allow people to identify critical mass around local issues as well as explore possible approaches for taking on particular challenges. These sorts of encounters, whether on or offline, build networks that further enable opportunities for sharing experiences and knowledge. In our conversations with practitioners in Oakland, such informal spaces were described as essential

> **An issue motivating a new civic media practice is less a question of a practitioner identifying an issue to address as it is a question of the practitioner building solidarity around the issue.**

ing point for building solidarity is **acknowledging the intersectionality** of constituent identity, attending to how the dimensions of race, class, and gender shape the characteristics of an issue (Crenshaw, 1991). While collaborating, practitioners and target constituencies may not exhibit a direct overlap and agreement on the intersection-

to their work. There was a collective fear expressed amongst different practitioners that, with the rising cost of real estate, the economic feasibility of preserving such physical spaces was being threatened.

Youth Radio's niche is providing the youth perspective on specific issues to which

other news outlets don't have access. Success for Youth Radio is described by their being part of the larger and well-respected network of NPR, providing a specific form of content that they specialize in and that NPR needs.

"We've been NPR's youth desk for more than 20 years. We created an appetite for youth voice in national public media, and now we also are responding to that demand. When it's an issue about education, or an issue about the adolescent brain, or adolescent health, there is an interest in hearing directly from young people. I think that's a product in part of the moment in the media that we live in where people do want those kinds of first-person lived experiences connected to the issue reporting that comes out in the news." - Lissa Soep, Senior Producer and Research Director at Youth Radio

While the quality of their reporting matters, success isn't measured by better stories, but more trust within an established network of practitioners. For the Anti-Eviction Mapping project in Oakland, success is also described as being part of a broader network of people working in the problem space of eviction.

"Since doing this work, my own sense of community in the Bay Area has shifted dramatically, and it's really nice to know - to have good relationships with people in different neighborhood coalitions. Whether it's a housing clinic or a legal organization, it's nice to know that I can email or call or, you know, show up to somebody's office and people know who I am and who the Mapping Project is. It's nice to kind of feel that we're not single-handedly having to do anything but that we're one of many groups doing a lot of things, and that there's some sort of a network, and people generally understand where we are." Erin McElroy, Founder at Anti-Eviction Mapping Project

② HOLDING SPACE FOR DISCUSSION

The work of striving for common good in making civic media involves defining a shared set of values and anticipated benefits. Our research reveals that the work of defining the characteristics of common good is supported by holding space for discussion. We observed this through the descriptions practitioners gave of holding regular meetings and workshops where the interests and needs of various stakeholders were articulated, shaping subsequent steps in the media making process.

For City Bureau, a community journalism organization working in Chicago's South Side, holding space to define mutual benefit is accomplished by hosting the Public Newsroom, a weekly gathering at their offices where journalists and members of the public discuss local issues, share information about emerging stories, and support residents in conducting their own reporting efforts. The decision to hold space for discussion on a weekly basis comes as a measure to counteract a long standing distrust of journalists in the South Side. This distrust is due to the standard relationship journalists have with communities, where they show up to do a story and disappear when the story is done.

To address this source of distrust, City Bureau intends to stay in the area and be involved with organizations for the long-term as a way to build up meaningful and productive relationships with the community. Andrea Hart, City Bureau's Community Director, notes that there is an uptick in applications to participate in her program, something she points to as evidence of growing trust in City Bureau. As Andrea points out:

"There are some folks who are so jazzed about the community reporting and how we do things that they've been waiting for us,

and they're really excited. And then, there are others who have that historic distrust of media, and so they have more questions. And they might be a little apprehensive."
-Andrea Hart, Community Director at City Bureau

Holding space for discussion in the neighborhood where they work allows City Bureau to be **responsive to the issues of the community by supporting work to directly address those issues**. While this is part of the day-to-day work of City Bureau, it is an integral part of what Andrea Hart sees as a long-term objective of becoming part of the community fabric. She says:

"I don't know if we're necessarily part of the fabric of the community yet. I think that's going to take a long time, but I definitely think it's a mutually beneficial relationship where we try to assess needs around information and issues that they care about, and then try to go back and do reporting or do some sort of project that then we just bring back and have dialogue around and help inform folks to make better decisions."

③ DISTRIBUTING OWNERSHIP

Distributing ownership describes the work of positioning the constituents of a problem space to take it over and further define the characteristics of a civic media project. In our study, the work of distributing ownership appeared when practitioners outline clear pathways to participation, actively encouraging a power dynamic where stakeholders take the reins of the practice, or when practitioners adopt an open source ethos to their work, sharing knowledge and encouraging appropriation and repurposing of practice.

For the Gray Area Foundation, an organization that supports civic art projects in the Bay Area, the practice of distributing ownership appeared in their requirement

of all civic artists to connect with neighborhood stakeholders to ensure that there are strong relationships between the artists and the neighborhood that results in the neighborhood eventually taking care of the project after the artist has completed it. This work required artists to attend neighborhood meetings and build consensus around the objectives of the work so that there was a clear value proposition for everyone involved.

As they approached the end of their funding, Upwell, in Oakland, produced a report that documented their practice and the outcomes of their efforts. By providing this documentation of their work, Upwell hopes that others will learn from their experience and continue their work in new settings. Similarly, the Gray Area foundation works to document their ongoing work and make it accessible to other practitioners, promoting and encouraging the replication and adaptation of their work in other cities around the country. As their Director of Education points out, "We have a strong focus on creating scaffolding and open-source structures so that other cities can pick up the ball."

Similarly, the Open Water Project in Boston describes influencing a community of stakeholders. They saw a community of citizen scientists take on new water monitoring technology and act as stewards in the deployment, use and care of the technology.

"Our organization is heavily involved in engaging residents of the watershed in the work of documenting the conditions of the environment. And, it's an intentional practice to encourage stewardship through engagement and greater knowledge about the local rivers, ponds, lake." -Patrick Herron, Organizing Team for Open Water Project

In Chicago's City Bureau, distributing the ownership of their mission is carried out when project alumni go on to do their own

work and develop their own professional networks. They are then able to activate that network when they work in the same area. They do this through online tools such as Facebook Groups and Slack where they maintain steady communication with alumni, keeping them engaged with the organization and with each other.

For CUT Group, an organization that engages Chicago residents in the testing of civic technology, cultivating stewardship was a core component of their strategy for long-term sustainability. This involves inviting active user testers in their network to become proctors, coordinating and overseeing user testing sessions. By inviting active members of their network

describes that getting people to provide the stories they were looking for required the University partner to come into the community from a position of humility rather than show up and act like it was a hero. This asymmetry in who shapes project objectives and deployment is sometimes addressed through a process of co-design, where the opportunity to provide expertise is distributed to across multiple stakeholders. The designer brings design expertise, the reporter another expertise, and the community member brings local expertise and proximity to an issue. The co-design process through which many practitioners did their work is an explicit allocation of expertise across all stakeholders and a clear process for providing input.

Expertise would not seem to be a hurdle, but in civic media practice where authenticity is premised on co-production and relationships, the power asymmetry that comes with expertise can be quite detrimental.

to take on leadership roles, CUT Group increases the capacity of their services while also broadening the number of people in their community that have the skills needed to conduct citizen user testing work. By promoting testers to leadership positions, CUT Group not only sets itself up for long-term success, but also bolsters its capacity to take on more work.

Expertise would not seem to be a hurdle, but in civic media practice where authenticity is premised on co-production and relationships, the power asymmetry that comes with expertise can be quite detrimental. Many of the people we spoke to explicitly discussed the challenge of bringing expertise to the table, with humility. Seed Lynn, from South Side Stories in Chicago,

④ **PERSISTENT INPUT**

Practitioners understand the context of their issues by not simply asking people what they think, but doing so from a position of stability, continuity, and trust: asking once, and then being in the same place to ask again. This persistence is reflected in long-term relationships between practitioners and the communities they work in. This practice of understanding the problem through persistent relationships is not only what motivates the design of a particular story or project, it is the value driving the entire practice.

Jamie Kalven of Chicago's Invisible Institute notes that while he didn't know how

to solve the broader issues he was seeing, he knew that there was a problem, and he wanted to "recruit reality" as a way to highlight a problem, even if he didn't know what would fix it.

"I'm not a policy guy. I don't know what to do with public housing, but I'm standing here. And I was standing here yesterday and I'll be standing here tomorrow...I know this about these conditions. So, it was kind of recruiting reality to our ends."
-Jamie Kalven, Founder of Invisible Institute

Kalven recognizes the importance of persistence--that understanding problems is not simply a matter of asking people what they think, but doing so over time from a position of trust. He sees this as the fundamental distinction between standard institutional practice, mired in bureaucracy and lacking in relationships, and emerging institutions built on new value propositions.

Similarly, City Bureau emphasizes the importance of persistent relationships with the residents of their community. As the program directors indicated, the South Side has deep-seated distrust of journalists, as they are often perceived as outsiders, parachuting in to report and leaving when they are done. For City Bureau, the practice of understanding the problem through persistent relationships is not only what motivates the design of a particular story or project, it is the value driving the entire practice.

The above descriptions of persistent input feature examples of practitioners that have close proximity to the problem spaces. In some cases, however, practitioners are not directly embedded in a problem space. For them, approaching and becoming sensitized to the issues occurs through long-term engagement with tight-knit **social networks** of collaborators and colleagues that have closer proximity to the problem. Access to such social networks allows practitioners that are not directly situat-

ed in the problem space to gain situated knowledge of a particular issue.

For example, the work of The Design Studio for Social Intervention (DS4Si) in Boston is influenced by long-term collaborators and colleagues who had closer proximity to the issues that DS4Si wanted to design around. This strategy yielded different results depending on the tactics used to engage their network.

"Reaching out to our local organizational partners and their constituents and merchants and people who live and work along the Fairmount line was really important to catch, too. And I think one thing that we noticed was, when things were hosted here at the studio, they were definitely more sort of heavy on planners and designers and the artists. And then, when we do events - when we did events in Four Corners or Uphams Corner, they were much closer to where people lived, and it was closer to where organizations are based." -Ayako Muruyama, Design Studio for Social Intervention

While the influence that locations have on the input of stakeholders is well documented in the participatory planning and research literature (Muller and Druin, 2002), it is worth pointing out how important persistent input is to understanding. This humility, or recognition of the limitations of the media creator, was a common theme among the practitioners with whom we spoke. Another example is the Nomadic Civic Sculpture at Urbano Project Boston. They reached out to their network of relationships with neighborhood organizations around Boston as a way to have conversations with people who were both closely tied to, and expert in, the issues Urbano Project wanted to explore.

CASE STUDY:

CITIZEN POLICE DATA PROJECT

The Citizen Police Data Project (CPDP) is a website that provides access to complaints filed against police officers in the City of Chicago. The data in CPDP comes out of decades of legal work by the project's founder, Jamie Kalven, and his collaborators to make the records publicly available. The website makes the data accessible through a graphic interface that features visualizations and summary statistics about complaints, making it easy for a user to, for example, contextualize the data by location, quantity of complaints, or individual officer.

The impetus to make these records available to the public came from Jamie Kalven's long-term experience as a reporter in the Stateway Gardens public housing project. In his time as a reporter he observed and conducted extensive interviews with residents that were regularly harassed by a group of police officers. As a reporter focusing on the realities and implications of public housing, he decided that taking a one-time policy stance on what he was witnessing would not be effective. Instead, as he put it, he sought to recruit reality from a position of marginality. By garnering persistent input through his long-term reporting about the lived experience of residents in the Stateway Gardens public housing project, he represented the problem of police harassment by focusing on

the concept of impunity, showing how officers working in spaces such as housing projects could act however they wanted.

Recognizing that officers were seldom disciplined for their infractions, Kalven distributed ownership of the project with a network of activists and lawyers who were working to bring more accountability to the actions of officers in the Chicago Police Department. Through extensive FOIA requests and an eventual State Supreme Court ruling, Kalven and his colleagues managed to gain access to decades worth of reports about police complaints. With the content in hand, Kalven describes how he and his colleagues assumed the function in civil society of curating and making information available to the public.

While the efforts around building this database were situated within and supported by Kalven's extensive social network of reporters, activists, and legal experts, there was the unavoidable tension between his efforts and the interests of the City of Chicago and the Police Union. Recognizing this tension, Kalven notes that the allies he sought from such institutions were never those that held power, but those that operated within the institutions and saw a need for change but were not in a position to affect it. By creating the database, Kalven began to build a network of allies who were

operating within police departments and saw the efforts of the database project as an outside resource they could leverage to shed light on specific abuses.

Soon after its deployment, the relationship between CPDP and the City of Chicago shifted when data from the project played an integral role in the indictment of an officer accused of shooting an unarmed citizen. While we cannot infer causal relationship in the events that followed the indictment, the public nature of the database and the inequalities around accountability that the database lay bare during the case may have played a part in the creation of Chicago's first ever police accountability task force.

Beyond the case, Kalven has observed that relationships with institutions of municipal and state government and the CDPD emerge as a regenerator of legitimacy, where institutions viewed with increasing distrust and suspicion regain some degree of legitimacy by publicly acknowledging the importance of CDPD in their work as public servants.

This shifting relationship with the City of Chicago demonstrates that the value of technological innovations for civic life are not dependent on any single user base or network of relationships, but are supported by a range of constituents with varying and potentially competing interests. In the case of CPDP, aligning those interests reveals that making the appeal for distributed ownership is often out of the hands of the innovator and is instead reliant on tertiary actors (in this case the opinion and trust of the public) to highlight the value of the work and attract key allies.

Figure 2. Map of progress over time of the Citizen Police Data Project.

Figure 2 describes the trajectory of the project from a novel technological solution with existing social support from activists but suspicion from city offices, towards a project that has buy-in from a wide range of stakeholders and a seemingly long-term future with a City Hall and Police Department seeking to redefine its public image.

CASE STUDY:
THE BOSTON STUDENT RIGHTS APP

In 2016, youth from the Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC) developed a mobile app that informs students about their rights if they were facing expulsion from school. The app also gives students the opportunity to file grievance reports or start conversations with administrators in the Boston Public Schools if the students think they are not getting a fair disciplinary process or find that they are the target of discrimination.

The idea for the application came from long-term school climate assessment campaigns that Youth on Board, one of the organizations that supports BSAC, has been involved with. The Dignity in Schools campaign, an independent national initiative supported by youth advocacy organizations across the United States, collect stories from students relating to disciplinary processes, their outcomes, and the impact they have on the lives of students. As one of the organizers behind the student rights app pointed out to us in an interview, the persistent input from their long-term listening projects, which involved collecting stories around school disciplinary processes, gave them an acute understanding of the problems that needed work.

Through their long-term work of collecting stories and their ongoing conversations with an extensive network of youth advocacy practitioners, BSAC members began to explore ways in which to reduce unfavorable outcomes for students that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. Their primary approach to promoting equitable and just outcomes in school disciplinary procedures started with making the language around school discipline rules and codes of conduct more accessible, taking a dense 80-page legal document and turning into a user-friendly experience in the app.

While translating the dense legal language was supported by legal counsel, the grievance reporting feature required more negotiation with and buy-in from stakeholders in the Boston Public School administration and Teachers Union. Initial concerns had to do with incorporating student grievance reports into existing bureaucratic processes while also attending to concerns that students might abuse the grievance feature. Addressing these concerns around process and student use became part of a larger campaign to distribute the own-

ership of the app within the Boston Public School administration. Through our interviews we learned that the organizers behind the app wanted to show how it was not being positioned as a tool to be used against administrators and teachers, but was instead a tool that could improve the disciplinary process.

To demonstrate the value of the app and encourage shared ownership, BSAC engaged administration in meetings throughout the development of the app. BSAC also brought attention to the app's development by holding space for conversation via tabling in school cafeterias so as to gain student and teacher input and support. Meetings with administrators involved sharing prototypes of the app early and often for user testing and feedback, as well as extensive conversations about how the app and the grievance reporting feature would fit into and modify existing school disciplinary processes. At one point in the process, the Boston Public Schools took over user testing and the development of the app as a way to ensure it would work their existing information technology systems.

From making the language around school conduct more accessible to giving students more agency, the work of changing how schools engage in disciplinary procedures was not a matter of taking a tact of disruption through a novel technology, rather it was a matter of carefully and strategically building the technology with all stakeholders, from IT administrators to students.

The development of the Boston Student Rights App is an example of how the novelty of technology was immediately situated within the objective of long-term sustainability through the cultivation of persistent input, distributing ownership, and holding space for conversation, ensuring that what could ultimately disrupt and reconfigure the disciplinary process was done as a shared endeavor that required building a network of allies.

Figure 3. Progress over time of the Boston Student Rights App.

Figure 3 represents the trajectory of the BSRAPP project from a novel technological solution with support from activists but uncertainty from school department officials, towards a project that has buy-in from a wide range of stakeholders and a seemingly long-term future with a school system looking to improve the educational experience for its students.

EVALUATING CIVIC MEDIA

The evaluation of civic technology has proven to be complicated. In recent years, there have been declarations of best practices (Knight Foundation, 2015) for evaluating civic tech, and sophisticated and deliberate approaches to evaluating civic learning (Graeff, 2016). But practitioners and academics have long struggled with questions such as what gets measured and why? Can success be measured through reach? efficiency? policy changes? Does individual learning lead to systems change? These questions are important, but we argue that practitioners need to turn their attention to process over outcome. As we have described in this report,

there is need to understand civic media beyond the measurable impact of a tool, as democratic process that takes place over time. This section is meant to help practitioners and funders map the starting point of civic media practice in terms of social infrastructure and objective and to track its progress towards an ideal condition over time through four core activities. We stop short of providing instruments to measure this progress, but we provide a series of questions for reflection that can be immediately implemented by practitioners (see appendix 2 for a reflective practice guide for practitioners).
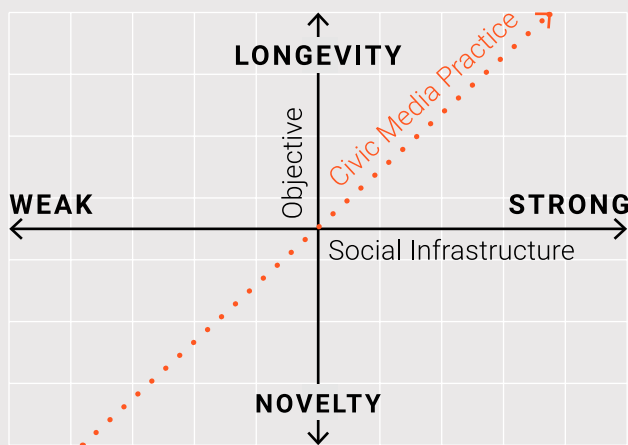
Plotting the Starting Point

Figure 4. Ideal trajectory of civic media practice over time

The assessment of social infrastructure is the first task in understanding civic media

practice. What level of connection does the practitioner have to real or perceived end users? How strong are current relationships? Has the practitioner been working with or in the community for a long time? If they are new to a community, are there trust brokers in place (NGOs, community groups) that can facilitate connections?

The answers to these questions should be considered when making a determination about where to place the project on the horizontal line. Locating on the right side of the vertical suggests a relatively strong social infrastructure, whereas the left side represents a weak, or nascent social infra-

structure.

The assessment of objective is based on the stated intentionality of the practitioner. Is this particular project intended to be short-lived or long-term? Will the media or technology developed remain in the community for an extended period of time? Is the media or technology designed to capture attention through its novelty? Locating on the top side of the horizontal suggests that this particular initiative is designed with the intentionality of longevity. Locating on the bottom side of the horizontal suggests that novelty of practice is more important.

The location along the x and y-axes should accurately represent the starting point of a project. The starting point should be determined through the honest and evidence-based assessment of practitioners, and in no way should it be understood to reflect the quality or worthiness of a project. That is determined by how activities over time push the project's position to the upper right quadrant.

Measuring Progress

The measurement of activities should be conducted at regular intervals over the course of a project. Those intervals should be appropriately spaced depending on the needs and structure of the project. The chart below provides questions practitioners can ask themselves to assess positive or negative value of activities.

ACTIVITY	QUESTIONS	EXAMPLE
Network building	▬ Have you developed new connections in the community you're working in? ▬ Do you feel like you can call on them to make further connections? ▬ Do you feel more capable of starting a new project in the future with this community?	The Anti-eviction mapping team and tool has become a resource for housing activists in the Bay-Area (see page 15).
Holding space for discussion	▬ Are you taking steps to engage people outside of your immediate network? ▬ Are you ensuring that non-expert perspectives or lived experiences are being heard?	City Bureau's Public Newsroom (see p. 16)

Distributing ownership	— Are you creating opportunities for stewardship by members of the community? — Are you sharing the process and outcomes of your work to encourage adoption of your ideas by external stakeholders? — Are you addressing power asymmetries by creating pathways for non-experts to influence the shape and objectives of the project?	Citizen scientists taught how to take over long-term maintenance of data collection tools (see page 17).
Persistent input	— Are you keeping the feedback loop open after the project's initial deployment? — Are you engaged in long-term conversations about local issues and challenges? — Are you collaborating with people that have long-term relationship with the problem space?	Invisible Institute's long-term on the ground relationship with residents of Chicago's public housing (see page 18); DS4Si appealing to network of activists working in target problem space (see page 18).

Table 2. Questions that practitioners of civic media can ask to measure the progress of their work.

RECOMMENDA-TIONS

This report is meant to provide guidance for practitioners and funders as they identify and evaluate civic media practice. The fields of civic technology and civic innovation have evolved considerably over the last several years with more sophisticated technologies and attention to evalu-ation. But as we detail in this report, civic media practices need to be understood beyond specific interventions; likewise, assessment of quality and impact needs to recognize the complexity and diversity of practices that compose civic media work.

Practitioners

The following five principles should serve as general guidance for practitioners as they begin civic media work. These principles were sourced by the 40 practitioners consulted in this research.

01 EXPRESS YOUR VALUES

Be clear about your values from the beginning and don't be afraid to adjust those values as the project persists.

02 DON'T LEAD WITH TECHNOLOGY

It is important that the motivation for the work is understood before the mechanics.

03 BUILD OR SITUATE YOURSELF IN A NETWORK OF STAKEHOLDERS

The impact of civic media exists over time and is not just as a relationship between media intervention and end users. Rather, the impact of civic media should be understood as a matter of strong social infra-structure and longevity.

04 PAY ATTENTION TO PROCESS

How things get done can be just as important as what gets done.

05 OWN EVALUATION

Outcomes evaluation can be useful, but it can never tell the whole story. Evaluate the process from the beginning of a project so you can help shape the narrative.

Funders

Support for civic media is complicated, with different funders having distinct understandings of the practice. Over the last six or seven years, the field has been bolstered by mainly private foundations investing in tools and innovative process. More recently, foundations have focused on structural efforts to support organizations and field building. We received consistent feedback from practitioners that short-term project support has limited value for the relational work in which they were engaged. However, we heard from funders that without clear process of evaluation, longer term support is difficult. Currently, funders either don't require evaluation, or rely on periodic outcomes assessment to assure the quality of investment. The evaluation framework presented in this paper provides a powerful alternative as it presents a strategy to ascertain value of civic media practice over time such that longer term commitments can be made with clear understanding of progress.

The following four principles are recommendations for funders. These were sourced from feedback from practitioners about their relationship with their funders. The principles were then presented to funders as part of the "member checking" process.

01 FUND MEANINGFUL INEFFICIENCIES

Relationship building takes time. Funders should encourage grantees to do this work (i.e. stakeholder meetings, social events, design sprints, online discussion opportunities) and to prioritize long-term commitments.

02 CONSIDER INDIRECT STAKEHOLDERS

If appropriate, assure that support goes to supporting research or design participants.

03 FAIL FAST, CHEAP...AND MINDFULLY

Rapid prototyping and iteration is good practice. However, it can come with consequences. Assure that collaborators are appropriately supported if things go wrong, regardless of how quickly it happens.

04 ADEQUATELY FUND EVALUATION

In most cases, don't worry about third party evaluation. Build capacity of grantees to use qualitative evaluation frameworks and hold them accountable for regular updates.

Future research should focus on building and validating evaluation instruments based on the framework provided. For the field to advance as something that can be truly transformative of civic life, there is need to understand civic media practice as distinct from more traditional models of media interventions.

CONCLUSION

The care ethic is the practice of working with others to take care of the world we live in (Tronto, 1993). In this orientation towards caring for others, a civic media practitioner works to create conditions in which all voices and interests are represented, accounted for, and involved in shaping the outputs and effects of the media practice. Civic media is therefore a normative model of media practice. It is not a genre, suite of technologies, or even set of best practices; it describes an approach to media making uents. The work of civic media then is to "think institutionally" in order to reshape institutional logics such that we invent more "authentic" ways of representing and connecting that, for example, could inform governance or journalism.

Civic media is not about new business models; it's about new value models. By focusing on and operationalizing moral obligations that undergird institutions, the practice of civic media works toward creating media products and experiences

Civic media needs to be understood in the context of civic institutions lacking legitimacy among the public or direct constituents.

that sits in direct opposition to the logics and actions that have perpetuated deep-seeded distrust in institutions. As media and technology dominate social life and the everyday interfacing between people and institutions, the establishment of the institution of civic media, whereby caring practice over time generates longevity and strong social infrastructure, has taken on enhanced urgency. We call this practice meaningful inefficiencies and we point to the need for supporting and evaluating the practice.

Civic media needs to be understood in the context of civic institutions lacking legitimacy among the public or direct constit- that construct and facilitate democratic process. In this case, innovative civic media practice is not about disruption, but about media practice that seeks to transform institutions through the values of democratic process. As Americans take stock of the contemporary political moment and navigate the crisis in trust throughout civic life, there is need to support organizations committed to democratic transformation through media. This report provides a way of talking about and evaluating civic media practices that are at the center of this transformation.

REFERENCES

Arendt, H. (2013). The Human Condition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Atton, C. (2001). Alternative media. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," Stanford Law Review 43:6, 1241-1299.

Dahlgren, P. (2009). Media and Political Engagement: Citizens, Communication and Democracy. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Edelman (2017). Trust Barometer - 2017 Annual Global Study. http://www.edelman.com/executive-summary/)

Fisher, B., & Tronto, J. (1990). "Toward a feminist theory of caring." In E. Abel & M. Nelson (eds), Circles of Care: Work and Identity in Women's Lives. New York: SUNY Press.

Goldberg, G. (2010). Rethinking the public/virtual sphere: the problem with participation. New Media and Society. Retrieved from http://nms.sagepub.com/content/early/2010/11/11/1461444810379862.abstract

Gordon, E., & Mihailidis, P. (2016). "Introduction." In E. Gordon & P. Mihailidis (Eds.), Civic Media: Technology, Design, Practice. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Gordon, E., & Walter, S. (2016). Meaningful Inefficiencies: Resisting the Logic of Technological Efficiency in the Design of Civic Systems. In E. Gordon & P. Mihailidis (Eds.), Civic Media: Technology, Design, and Practice (pp. 243–266). MIT Press.

Graeff, E. (2016, May 2). "From User to Citizen: Evaluating Online Engagement as Civic Learning." blog post.

Hayes, C. (2012). Twilight of the Elites: America After Meritocracy. New York: Crown.

Heclo, H. (2008). On Thinking Institutionally. New York: Oxford University Press.

Karpf, D. (2016). The Partisan Technology Gap. In E. Gordon & P. Mihailidis (Eds.), Civic Media: Technology, Design, and Practice. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Klinenberg, E. (2013, January 7). Adaptation: How can cities be "climate-proofed." The New Yorker, 32–37.

Knight Foundation (March 2015). Assessing Civic Tech: Case Studies and Resources for Tracking Outcomes.

Levine, P. (2014). Beyond Deliberation: A Strategy for Civic Renewal. Journal of Public Deliberation, 10(1). Retrieved from http://www.publicdeliberation.net/jpd

Lievrouw, L. (2011). Alternative and Activist New Media. Malden: Polity Press.

Milan, S. (2016). Liberated Technology: Inside Emancipatory Communication Activism. In E. Gordon & P. Mihailidis (Eds.), Civic Media: Technology, Design, and Practice. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Mounk, Y. (2017).. The Age of Responsibility: Luck, Choice, and the Welfare State. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Muller, M., & Druin, A. (2002). Participatory design: the third space in HCI (pp. 1–71).

Noveck, B. (2016). Reimagining Government Through Civic Media: Three Pathways to Institutional Innovation. In E. Gordon & P. Mihailidis (eds.), Civic Media: Technology, Design, Practice.

Open Plans. (2012). Field Scan of Civic Technology. New York. Retrieved from http://datasmart.ash.harvard.edu/assets/content/Field_Scan_of_Civic_Technology.pdf

Pew Research Center, November, 2015, "Beyond Distrust: How Americans View Their Government "

Putnam, R. D. (1999). Bowling Alone. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Tronto, J. C. (1993). Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Tronto, J.C. (2013). Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice. New York: NYU Press.

Zuckerman, E. (2015). "Insurrectionist Civics in the Age of Mistrust," My Heart's in Accra. http://www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/2015/10/19/insurrectionist-civics-in-the-age-of-mistrust/

BRIEF AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Eric Gordon is a professor of media art at Emerson College and the executive director of the Engagement Lab. His research focuses on how groups employ emerging media for civic participation, with a particular focus on games and play. He is the author of Net Locality: Why Location Matters in a Networked World (Blackwell 2011), and the editor (with Paul Mihailidis) of Civic Media: Technology, Design, Practice (MIT Press, 2016). His new book, Meaningful Inefficiencies, will be published by Oxford University Press in 2019.

Gabriel Mugar is an associate researcher and faculty member at the Engagement Lab at Emerson College. His research explores the conditions of participation and the production of subjectivity on digital participatory platforms. He earned his PhD from the Syracuse University School of Information Studies.

INTERVIEWEES

NAME	ORGANIZATION	CITY
Harry Backlund	City Bureau	Boston
Mia Birdsong	Family Story Project	Oakland
Megan Clark	Center for Art and Public Life	Oakland
Caitlin Donnelly	Youth on Board	Boston
Matt Ganucheau	Gray Area Foundation for the Arts	Oakland
Melissa Gilliam	The Center for Interdisciplinary Inquiry and Innovation in Sexual and Reproductive Health (Ci3)	Chicago
Mark Green	The Open Water Project/Public Lab	Boston
Sophia Hadingham	Youth on Board	Boston
Andrea Hart	City Bureau	Chicago
Patrick Herron	The Open Water Project	Boston
Patrick Jagoda	The Game Changer Lab at Ci3	Chicago
Salvador Jiménez-Flores	Urbano	Boston
Jamie Kalven	Invisible Institute	Chicago
Janette Kim	Urban Works Agency at California College of the Arts	Oakland
Seed Lin	Southside Side Stories	Chicago
Denise Linn	Smart Chicago Collaborative	Chicago
Jeremy Liu	Creative Ecology Partners	Oakland
Ayako Maruyama	DS4Si	Boston
Sonja Marziano	Smart Chicago Collaborative	Chicago
Erin McElroy	Anti-Eviction	Oakland
Stella McGregor	Urbano	Chicago
Amber Murray	Center for Art and Public Life	Oakland
Marquez Rhyne	Transmedia Story Lab at Ci3	Chicago
Kristian Simsarian	California College of the Arts	Oakland
Rajiv Sinclair	Invisible Institute	Chicago
Lissa Soepp	Youth Radio	Oakland
Max Stearns	Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics	Boston
Elsa Sze	Agora	Boston
Rachel Weidinger	Upwell	Oakland
Kyla Williams	Smart Chicago Collaborative	Chicago
Glorya Wornum	Boston Student Rights App	Boston

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE GUIDE

Plotting your starting point
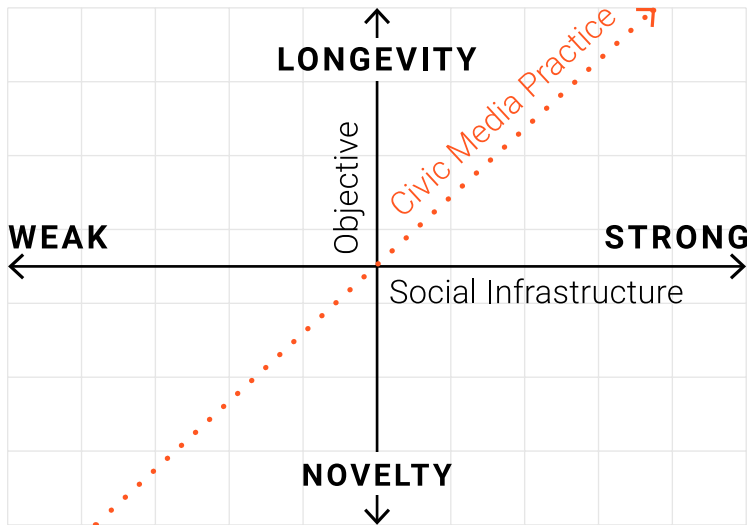
At the beginning of a project, ask yourself the following questions.

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE (X-AXIS)
— What level of connection do you have to real or perceived end users?

— How strong are your current relationships?

— Have you been working with or in the community for a long time?

— If you are new to the community, are there trust brokers in place (NGOs, community groups) that can facilitate connections?

OBJECTIVE (Y-AXIS)
— Is this particular project intended to be short lived or long-term?

— Will the media or technology developed remain in the community for an extended period of time?

— Is the media or technology designed to capture attention through its novelty?

Based on your answers to these questions, plot your starting point on the graph. If responses to the first set of questions are generally negative, then your starting point will be to the left. If they are generally positive, it will be to the right. If responses to the second set of questions are generally negative, your starting point will be on the bottom. If positive, then it will be on the top.

Assessing progress

Throughout the project, project leaders should ask themselves the following questions to ascertain progress. Use your answers to these questions as general guidance for assessing progress towards the top right quadrant. It is important that you be honest with your assessments and that you return to the questions on a regular basis.

Network building	— Have you developed new connections in the community you're working in? — Do you feel like you can call on them to make further connections? — Do you feel more capable of starting a new project in the future with this community?
Holding space for discussion	— Are you taking steps to engage people outside of your immediate network? — Are you ensuring that non-expert perspectives or lived experiences are being heard?
Distributing ownership	— Are you creating opportunities for stewardship by members of the community? — Are you sharing the process and outcomes of your work to encourage adoption of your ideas by external stakeholders? — Are you addressing power asymmetries by creating pathways for non-experts to influence the shape and objectives of the project?
Persistent input	— Are you keeping the feedback loop open after the project's initial deployment? — Are you engaged in long-term conversations about local issues and challenges? — Are you collaborating with people that have long-term relationship with the problem space?

Based on your answers to each of these questions, make your best guess about movement. It is important to realize that movement is not always forward - projects can have setbacks, which might negatively impact progress in the short-term, but understanding them can significantly enhance long-term outcomes. Try to reflect on progress at least five times throughout the life of a project.