

Appendix B:

Technology Platform Selection Criteria

After several discussions about the nature and goals of the Conflict/Situation Assessments Online Working Group, the platform selection subcommittee identified several considerations to guide the choice of a discussion technology. The options are listed below in order of importance, with the most important listed first.

1. Discussion Management

The threaded dialogue is the core framework of online discussion management. Well created threads or topics which focus the dialogue are not only crucial to moving the discussion forward in an orderly manner, they are also a structured means of re-locating specific conversations. Laying out the threads and topics to be addressed in an online dialogue is analogous to creating and distributing an agenda. The capacity to move a posting from one thread to another is an important capability for a facilitator.

2. Learning Curve/Complexity/Ease of Use

Any new technology should be learnable to a level of reasonable functionality in less than 20 minutes. It should also interface with common existing technology understanding (such as email).

3. Consensus evaluation

Private messaging and polling tools can also be very helpful in enabling the facilitator to make contact with individual members or groups so as to get further clarification on their sentiments with regard to a particular point.

4. Storage and Archival

Knowledge management is a crucial part of any working group. All past messages should be available in an easily accessible central location, and they should be full-text searchable.

5. Synchronous / Asynchronous

The discussion will likely consist primarily of asynchronous messages exchanged in the threaded discussion environment, but ideally the platform will have a synchronous communication option as well (a chat environment) where visitors can speak with each other in real-time. A calendar function can help to set time expectations and publicize internal deadlines.

6. Security

Dialogue systems should have a full spectrum of security options. Complete transparency is needed for dialogues subject to Sunshine Laws. For most other discussions restricted access is

needed, but aggressive, hacker-proof security is not required. Email is not secure. As a good rule of thumbs, as security levels go up, ease of use and access goes down.

7. Access through Email

Understanding that email is most people's primary mode of electronic communication, all dialogue should be noticed or accessible through email. Ideally the entire conversation should be fully functional through email (such as with Webboard).