



Learn & Serve America Higher Education Social Media Grants Interim Report, January 2009

Submitted by CIRCLE (The Center for Information & Research on
Civic Learning & Engagement), Tufts University

On September 22, 2008, the Corporation for National and Community Service announced six new grants (for a total of \$2.3 million) to support the use of “social media to engage college students in service to meet community needs.”

“Social media” means a range of tools that permit many people to create and share digital material; examples include Facebook and other social networks, wikis (collaboratively written and edited documents), YouTube videos, Craigslist, and blogs.

The funded proposals were:

- **Bonner Foundation:** There are 1,500 Bonner Scholars at 24 colleges and universities, all involved in community service and other forms of civic engagement, such as community research. Using its Learn and Serve America grant, the Bonner Foundation promotes the use of social media tools—such as wikis and videos—by all of its Scholars. Methods involve social-media trainings at all of its meetings and conferences, an elaborate online platform for shared work at each campus and nationally, and ten competitive subgrants to Bonner campuses that do more intensive work with social media. At the heart of the online platform is a wiki site with hundreds of documents on social issues, student projects, tools, and best practices. After receiving the Learn & Serve America grant, Bonner began to plan PolicyOptions, an additional wiki platform for news and policy background information that will enable campuses to establish local, campus-based PolicyOptions Bureaus that are affiliated through a national network, sharing information and a common web platform.
- **The Campus Kitchens Project:** 20 colleges/universities and high schools across the country, soon to be 26, operate student-led Campus Kitchens where student volunteers partner with on-campus dining services, local foodservice businesses, farmers and farmers’ markets and community food banks to recover unserved food, create and deliver nutritious meals to low-income children, families and the elderly. CKP also offers culinary job training sessions to unemployed adults with foodservice and life skills while teaching participating college students about hunger, nutrition, food, and business (among other topics). The Campus Kitchens Project is using social media tools for coordination, marketing, and motivating students. Each campus now has a Facebook page and the project is also using blogs, Twitter, and Ning.
- **CIRCLE/Massachusetts Campus Compact:** CIRCLE proposed to develop entirely new software for use by a potential audience of up to 250,000 college students in the Greater Boston area to organize and recruit volunteers and to improve the impact of service initiatives across the region. The software powers a new social network site, comparable to Facebook or MySpace, except that the main focus is nonprofit organizations and social issues (not individual students), and the network is made transparent as an interactive “map” of Greater Boston’s civil society. This map can be

used by students to identify needs, assets, and strategies. The new social network will connect to existing sites like Facebook so that students can elect to receive all relevant information through the sites that they already use most heavily.

- **Midwest Consortium**: A coalition of 29 colleges and universities in Nebraska, South Dakota, and Western Iowa, the Consortium has used its Learn and Serve America grant to make competitive subgrants to member institutions. Subgrants fund student-led service-learning projects that incorporate social media tools to recruit participants, collaborate with partners, reflect on and record project outcomes. All subgrantees are part of a social network supported by Ning software for sharing ideas and experiences. Projects range from using the technology to organize complex events, to providing ongoing technical training/mentoring to bridge the digital divide.
- **The Phoenix Project**: In partnership with Craigslist Foundation and the George Mason University's School of Public Policy, the Phoenix Project proposed to identify the online tools that colleges and universities and community-based organizations need in order to work better together. (Examples might include ways for organizations and potential volunteers to match up their needs, or ways for student volunteers to log their service hours.) Having identified the most valuable tools through a national survey and focus groups, the Phoenix Project is exploring with several national organizations deploying certain tools on existing web-based volunteering portals that can be accessed by colleges and universities across the country.
- **The Ashoka Foundation's Youth Venture®** is an international community of young people who create and launch their own sustainable, community-benefiting ventures. Youth Venture currently operates in 18 countries and online at www.GenV.net. Using Learn and Serve America funds, Youth Venture is building an online service-learning platform to provide an online service-learning platform to provide an interactive online experience for young social entrepreneurs that will launch early in 2010. A Facebook game called Impact, Inc. has also been introduced to serve a similar though less comprehensive purpose, teaching players what it is like to run a nonprofit. Youth Venture has meanwhile allocated Learn and Serve America funding toward seed grants for social ventures designed by undergraduate students and, using an online voting process, will select grand prize winners to receive supplementary funding for those ventures.

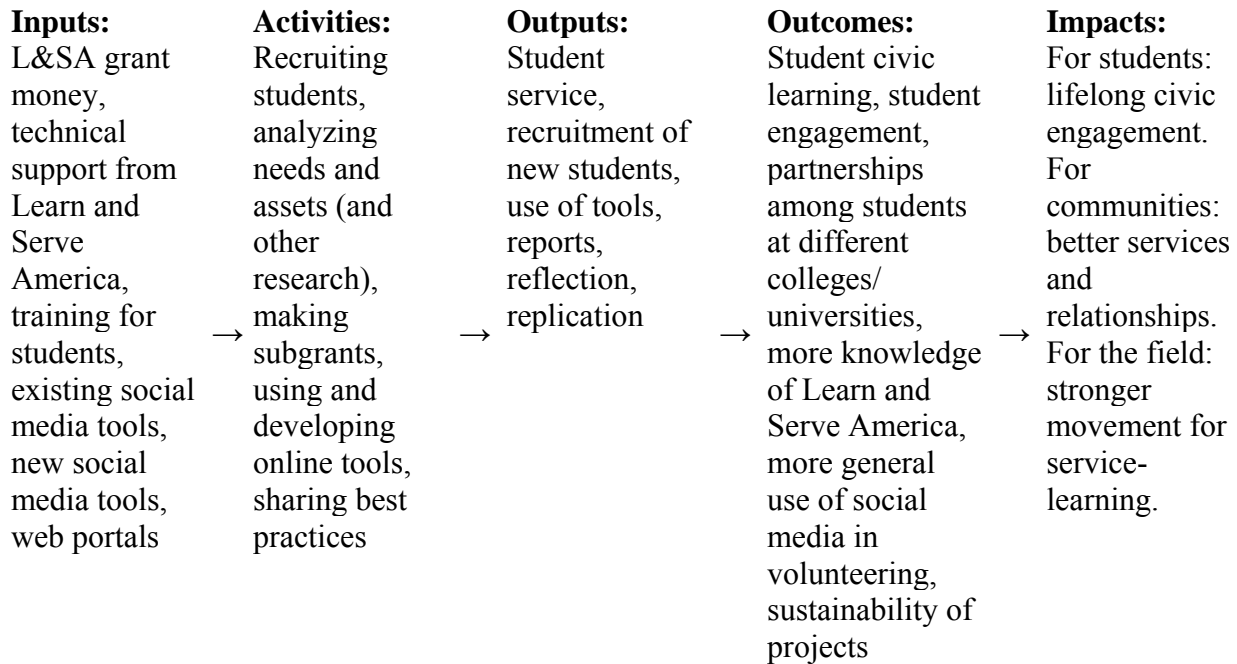
The existing ("off-the-shelf") social media tools used by one or more of these grantees or their subgrantees have included: Facebook, Ning, wikis, online forums, blogs, podcasts, webinars, Twitter, videos, Animoto (a site for creating movies), and a software package for online voting. In addition, CIRCLE, the Phoenix Project, and Youth Venture are developing new software or improving existing programming with Learn and Serve America funds.

CIRCLE was asked to be the convener of all six grantees and took the lead in developing common logic models, performance measures, and preliminary findings.

Summary of the Overall Strategy

At the first Learn & Serve Grantees' Meeting after the grants were awarded (Oct. 21-23, 2008), the six grantees each created "logic models" (strategic plans) for their own projects, plus a

common logic model for the whole project. A simplified version of the common logic model follows:



Evaluation and Performance Measurement

Each grantee proposed an evaluation strategy that included some combination of surveys of participating students at more than one point in time (used by four grantees), surveys of a comparison group (one grantee), surveys of community partners (two grantees), web metrics (four grantees), interviews (three grantees), focus groups (three grantees), and/or online tracking systems for participants to record experiences (four grantees). The purpose of these evaluation methods is to measure *impact on* students and/or communities. At this interim stage, the evaluations are incomplete or merely formative.

Each grantee was also required to make regular reports of progress toward three “performance measures.” During fall 2008, all six grantees agreed to select two of the same performance measures plus an additional measure appropriate to its own project. By coordinating two of the performance measures, we were able to aggregate some data and summarize the performance of the six grantees as a group. The two shared measures were:

1. Participant Development

Recruit a large number of individuals to use web-based online networking tools that help link individuals with civic engagement opportunities. Participants gain access to information, resources, and avenues to participate in various types of services in their communities as a direct result of participation in this project. By the end of year three, a total of 83,500

students will have used some combination of websites, social media tools, wikis, etc that were created for this grant, and at least 20% of them will report having conducted voluntary service work in their communities as a result of the online tools. (These targets are calculated by combining the separate targets of all six grantees. Individual grantees aimed for as few as 500 and as many as 50,000 participants, and set targets for voluntary service between 10% and 80% of the participants.)

At the end of Year One (summer 2009), performance reports showed that at least 5,426 students had participated. The proportion of these who had served as a result of their online participation cannot yet be calculated, as data is still be gathered from some of the grantees. The number of participants after one year was only about 10% of the three-year target, but several of the grantees have not yet launched public tools that students could use. For example, the Phoenix Project's three-year target is 50,000 students, but at the end of year one—consistent with their original plan—they had not yet launched tools on a web platform. Thus progress toward the three-year goals appeared to be appropriate.

2. Needs and Service Activities

Participants conduct service-oriented projects and related civic engagement efforts in their host communities. By the end of year three, at least 1,455 organizations will be served by students participating in this project and 36% of the community organizations that agree to complete evaluation surveys will state that they are better able to meet their mission because of this student service or grant-related project. (Again, these totals come from aggregating individual grantees' targets, which vary widely. The target number of organizations varied from 45 to 1,000.)

By the end of Year One (summer 2009), at least 314 organizations had been served and of those surveyed, 55% reported that they had benefited from the social media tools. Grantees and subgrantees under this grant program were located in 18 states and the District of Columbia. They reported working on 46 different topics, from After School to Youth Development. Of those topics, the most common were elementary education (10), mentoring (9), and youth leadership development (7). Most grantees and subgrantees did not report the number of hours served as part of this grant, but those who did report hours served by college students logged a total of 9,595 hours by June 2009. By that time, it was estimated that 114 youth had been tutored and 481 youth had been mentored under this grant program. The total number of community partner organizations by that time was 214.

Examples of specific reports filed by subgrantees:

- “Creighton University [a Midwest Consortium campus] hosted Project Homeless Connect Omaha which provided medical, dental, legal, and social services for 430 homeless guests with the help of 700 volunteers. With equipment purchased form the current grant, we began a video project documentaing and reflecting onProject Homeless. We set up a booth at the event for volunteers and homeless guests to record their reflections on the day or themselves; over 20 individuals recorded reflections, from homess guests to a lawyer to a national representative. We also had a video camera

following one homeless guest as well as another video camera roaming throughout the event. In addition to helping people reflect on the day of the event, we plan to edit and make available the videos to help volunteers reflect further on their experiences and to help people who did not participate in the event to better understand homelessness. A survey of the day's events will further inform this project and its continuation."

- On a Bonner campus, "We have created a summer camp for area youth that extensively uses Serve 2.0 tools. The purpose of the camp is to provide an alternative summer experience for disadvantaged youth. The goal of the project is to help students use Serve 2.0 tools as means of expression and learning. Students use blogs and video as they create poetry and other performance pieces. The camp takes place from June 29 - July 30. The participants are immigrant and refugee children from Vietnam, Africa and Burma. The camp seeks to provide a safe space for children to express themselves while improving their academic skills."
- On a Midwest Consortium campus, "In small groups students in Occupational Therapy 417 Health Promotion worked with a community agency to provide health promotion services using social media to document, research and communicate. One project was with Mason Apartments, low income housing sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy. Three CSM students worked with young teen girls on self esteem, healthy lifestyles and healthy behaviors. This took place over several weeks of meetings at the apartment complex. There were 6-8 participants each week. Participants learned about healthy relationships, nutrition, exercise, academic skills, college life (including a fieldtrip to CSM), and had mentoring relationships with the college students. The beneficiaries were 8 teens aged 11 – 14 from Sudanese families living at the Mason Apartments."

Lessons Learned

- There is currently no free or low cost and widely available "killer application" for college student service. Several corporations have developed university focused service-learning software packages. The Phoenix Project's research confirms that these software packages offer many of the tools sought by the service-learning community. However, none of the products are very widely used as yet, in part because the developers' current business plans are based on a campus by campus sale of the software for annual fees ranging between \$5,000 to \$20,000. No off-the-shelf tool—a.k.a. a "Facebook for Service"—has yet transformed the scale, quality, or impact of service. Short of securing the intellectual property rights to an existing software suite, or developing its own version to make freely available, Learn and Serve grantees, universities and community partners can use combinations of individual free tools to support excellent practice.
- It is important to have a strategy for using social media before you wade into using many tools without having decided exactly what they are for and whether they fit your particular audience. It is easy to spread yourself too thin.
- The six grantees have a wealth of highly concrete knowledge about how to use such available tools—knowledge that should be shared with the field. The six grantees represent much more than six initiatives, because several grantees have multi-pronged projects or have changed their tools and methods repeatedly during the course of the grant.

- Some of the off-the-shelf tools have been highly problematic. For example, the e-Learning platform that Youth Venture initially licensed from a private vendor was expensive and proved clunky, unattractive, and lacking features that students requested.
- The three new software packages or sets of tools that are being developed as part of these grants (CIRCLE’s mapping tool, the Phoenix Project’s portal, and Youth Venture’s game) have taken many months to develop and beta-test—longer than anticipated in every case—and have not been fully launched. Therefore, evaluation of their impact would be premature. An innovation like one of these could be a killer application, but that is inevitably a long shot.
- Use of social media requires training; it does not come automatically to college students or to program staff. The six grantees should exchange ideas about priorities and methods in training (especially ways to deliver training online). Especially for staff, time to receive training is in short supply.
- Organizations with missions other than using social media struggle to find time and skills to use social media effectively with their existing staff. At least one grantee added a whole new position to handle social media, although that was not part of the original plan. Social media do not necessarily save time; they add opportunities that may require staff time. The challenge of using social media in nonprofits also provides an *opportunity* for service-learning by students who are skilled with those media.
- Several grantees (notably Midwest Consortium, the Phoenix Project, and Youth Venture) or their sub-grantees experienced staff transitions that slowed progress in Year One.
- As noted in the logic model, increased public awareness of Learn & Serve America is an anticipated “impact.” Progress toward this goal has probably been slight so far, but there is an opportunity to publicize all the grantees and their tools and training materials through the Clearinghouse, thereby bringing attention to Learn and Serve America.
- Privacy has been an issue, for vulnerable populations involved in service projects and for students who do not want to be too easily found online.
- The digital divide remains an issue for some populations, such as Native Americans in rural areas. The nature of the divide may change as more people use social media through mobile devices. When projects include providing equipment, issues about ownership and security of equipment arise.
- Some grantees have encountered a tradeoff between using existing social media, such as Facebook, that students are used to and understand, versus using specialized or custom-designed social media that are better suited to service-learning but new to students. A promising direction is to create links between the two. This approach could also address privacy concerns because the custom-design social media can be public and the Facebook or other sites can be private.
- There is an enormous amount of social media, especially in young people’s lives. Promoting social media specifically for service or civic engagement in this busy environment is challenging.
- The context for projects involving social media and service is changing very quickly. There is enormous interest in the topic, which is drawing senior people in business and technology, government, higher education, and the nonprofit sector. In various configurations, they are discussing collaborations and developing projects. Meanwhile, the relevant technologies and tools are changing rapidly. This is an exciting and promising environment, but also a challenging one for people who are trying to

implement modest-sized grants with work plans that were negotiated in 2008. The grantees are not always aware of, nor able to benefit from, the most ambitious current developments in the field.

Illustrative Screenshots

All of the Midwest Consortium's student grantees create Ning sites for their projects. This is an example:



All of the Bonner campuses have wiki sites (editable webpages), often embedding videos, maps, and blogs. This is an example from West Virginia Wesleyan:

Center for Community Engagement
VIEW EDIT

FrontPage

Welcome to WVWC's [Center for Community Engagement wiki!](#)

At West Virginia Wesleyan College, our students learn both inside and outside of the classroom. The value of a private, liberal-arts education enhances when you include partnerships between the college and the community.

The mission of the **Center for Community Engagement** is to support teaching, learning and scholarship that engages faculty, students and staff with their larger communities (local, state, regional, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. These quality service experiences will assist each student in demonstrating local and/or world citizenship as well as engaging in experiential learning throughout their time at Wesleyan.

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PROGRAMS/ORGS	INITIATIVES	RESOURCES/PROJECTS
<p>AmeriCorps VISTA (WVWC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Website • Wiki page <p>Bonner Scholars (WVWC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Website • Wiki page <p>RESULTS (WVWC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Website • Wiki page 	<p>Community Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CE Initiative (Journal) • National Serve 2.0 (Social Media) • Serve 2.0 at Wesleyan • Sustainability • Strategic Planning • Weekly Service Opportunities <p style="text-align: center; color: #f4a460;">DIRECTORIES</p> <p>CCE Staff Profiles</p> <p>Community Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alphabetical List of Community Partners "NEW" <p>Google Maps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bonner Scholars Summer Service Sites "NEW" • Community Partners (By Local, Regional, National and Global) • Wesleyan CE Travels <p>WVWC Campus Wiki Index</p>	<p>Resources by Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For Community Partners • For Faculty • For Staff • For Students <p>Current Projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bonner Foundation Serve 2.0 Grant: Main Street Arts Co-Op • CE Course Development Grants • Learn & Serve Grant Committee <p style="text-align: center; color: #f4a460;">COURSES</p> <p>May 2009:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global May Term: Belize

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FEATURED VIDEO:

The Sustainability Task Force - a group of faculty, staff and students - has created a short video highlighting food waste in our Aladdin cafeteria. With your help and support, we can create

Part of Ashoka's e-learning platform is a game that plugs into Facebook:

facebook Home Profile Friends Inbox 51 Peter Levine Settings Logout

IMPACT inc.

Choose your Cause, Make your Impact!

Impact 1

Invite ?

Funds \$12720


Experience Level 1 0/10

Network 7/7

Media 7/7

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All Challenges Education Business

Description	Requirements	Reward
Host a Children's Storybook Day at the Library	\$20 2 Network 0 Media 0 Volunteers	Impact +1 Earn more +3 Experience Take the Challenge!
Teach a Child How to Play a Popular Game	\$40 2 Network 0 Media 0 Volunteers	Impact +1 Earn more +5 Experience Take the Challenge!
Teach English as a Second Language After School	\$50 4 Network 0 Media 0 Volunteers	Impact +1 Earn more +5 Experience Take the Challenge!
Service-Learning Project: Teach Youth a New Sport	\$100 4 Network 0 Media 0 Volunteers	Impact +1 Earn more +5 Experience Take the Challenge!
Distribute Healthy Breakfasts to Low-Income Youth	\$135 6 Network 0 Media 0 Volunteers  x1	Impact +1 Earn more +6 Experience Take the Challenge!