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The Overbrook
Foundation

**WEB 2.0 ASSESSMENT OF THE OVERBROOK
FOUNDATION'S HUMAN RIGHTS GRANTEES**

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ABOUT THE OVERBROOK FOUNDATION

The Overbrook Foundation, located in New York City, is a family foundation established in 1948 by Frank and Helen Altschul. The Foundation took its name from Overbook Farm, the Altschul family home in Stamford, Connecticut.

The Foundation recognizes the importance of a strong community that promotes health, education and opportunity for all of its members. We value the individual rights of all people and encourage the discussion and analysis of public issues. We are deeply committed to protecting our natural resources.

The Overbrook Foundation strives to improve the lives of people by supporting projects that protect human and civil rights, advance the self-sufficiency and well being of individuals and their communities, and conserve the natural environment.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: ALLISON H. FINE

Allison is a successful social entrepreneur and writer dedicated to helping grassroots organizations and activists successfully implement social change efforts. She is the author of *Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age*, the winner of the Terry McAdams National Book Award, published in 2006 by Wiley & Sons.

As a senior fellow on the Democracy Team at Demos: A Network for Change and Action in New York City, Allison researches and writes about the future of social change and civic engagement in this new digital age.

Allison's articles have been published in the Boston Globe, San Jose Mercury Times and the San Francisco Chronicle. She is also a frequent contributor to Huffington Post, Personal Democracy Forum, Alternet and the Chronicle of Philanthropy.

Allison served as the C.E.O. of The E-Volve Foundation in 2004-2005, and was the Founder and Executive Director of Innovation Network, Inc. from 1992-2004.

ABOUT THE REPORT

In early 2007, The Overbrook Foundation engaged Allison Fine, a consultant with extensive experience in social networking and communications technology to help the Foundation and its community of human rights grantees, assess our engagement in the Web 2.0, or social web, world. We were interested in better understanding how the Foundation and its grantees are using the web and other technology tools like blogs and podcasts to further their work. We did not have specific expectations of how any organization (including ourselves) should be connected. In short, The Foundation was interested in learning to what extent these new technologies are being used by its grantees, and finding ways that it, as a Foundation, could help its grantees take advantage of these new tools and thrive in this new digital era.

The Foundation began this inquiry by inviting its human rights grantees to respond to an online survey where grantees described their current uses of social networking tools. Participation was completely voluntary and the information provided remained anonymous. (In the Final Report we do mention names of several Foundation grantees but received permission from the organizations ahead of time to do so.) Following the survey, two group discussions were held at Overbrook's offices. Seventeen grantee organizations attended these two sessions. Finally, the Foundation analyzed the aggregate results from the survey and discussion groups and produced the report that follows here.

The Foundation would like to thank all those who participated. We appreciate your candid responses and your eagerness to find ways to take advantage of the 2.0 world. We look forward to working together to more fully integrating the power of social networks into our strategies for advancing our organizations' human rights missions.

Sincerely,



Stephen Foster

President & CEO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Overbrook Foundation is interested in assessing the extent to which its human rights grantees are adapting to this new digital “Web 2.0” world. The phrase Web 2.0 is used to describe the next generation of wireless and web-based technologies (or social media) that will continue to enhance the ability of social change organizations to engage, educate and mobilize large numbers of people in support of their causes. The findings of this report are based on the responses of The Foundation's US based human rights grantees to an online survey and on the results of two discussion groups held with current grantees. The key findings of the report include the following:

- Overall, the grantees are firmly entrenched in the Web 1.0 world, meaning that they use the web largely as a source of information rather than a tool for interactivity.
- A small handful of grantees, such as WITNESS, the ACLU, Breakthrough, and WYNC Public Radio, are using social media in spectacular ways to engage their constituents in conversations.
- Most grantees are not taking advantage of easy-to-use social media tools effectively. For instance, only half of them have blogs, and only half of these groups allow comments on their blogs.
- Survey respondents and group discussion participants often felt a “common struggle” in understanding which tools are critically important to their work and were at a loss as to where and how to get help for selecting and using new social media tools.

The Foundation wishes to encourage its grantees to appreciate and act upon the current reality in which successful organizations in this new digital age are those who recognize that the fundamental functions of institutions are quickly and incontrovertibly changing. As a result of these findings, The Foundation will reorganize its web site as a hub of information, resources and case studies for grantees. Additionally, The Foundation is considering organizing a series of lunches for grantees to come together and discuss these issues and strategies for overcoming their personal and organizational challenges.

OVERVIEW

Web 2.0 is a phrase used to describe the next generation of wireless and web-based technologies (referred to here as social media) that will continue to enhance the ability of social change organizations to engage, educate and mobilize large numbers of people in support of their causes. It is distinguished from last century's broadcast era and the first phase of use and development of the web, often described as the Web 1.0 era. The proprietary structures of the previous era rewarded gathering information and making it available in a one-way broadcast to passive consumers. The Web 2.0 era is marked by open sharing of information and encouragement of interactivity side-to-side of participants and constituents. Social change organizations must be open, agile and participatory in order to use the new technology to its best advantage. For many organizations this means a significant shift, and a struggle, in how they think about and conduct their work within and without their organizations.

“Social change organizations must be open, agile and participatory in order to use the new technology to its best advantage. For many organizations this means a significant shift, and a struggle, in how they think about and conduct their work within and without their organizations.”

- Author

The Overbrook Foundation was interested in assessing the extent to which its human rights grantees are adapting to this new digital world. The ultimate aim of this effort was two-fold: 1) to assess the success and readiness of The Foundation's grantees to engage in the web 2.0 world; and, 2) to develop a set of recommendations for the Foundation of ways to support grantees on their pathways into this new world.

It is important to note that the extent to which grantees are currently successful using new social media tools is not a reflection of their overall programmatic success. The transition from the information age for which success hinged on proprietary methods of gathering and storing information in a competitive marketplace to the connected

age in which organizations work best in networked ecosystems that require information sharing, more inclusive, decision-making styles is a difficult one. Working successfully in this new age means more than mastering any specific gadgets or software. Organizations, particularly their leaders, must change the *way* that they work in order to move from last century's hierarchical institutions that speak to and at people to connected activists that create and empower communities of active constituents.

This report will provide a summary of the assessment process, the results of the data collection efforts, an overall analysis of how grantees are faring in these fast-changing times, and conclude with specific recommendations for The Foundation as it and the grantees move forward.

Methodology

The assessment effort involved the creation of three data sets.

Elizabeth Miller, a program associate at The Overbrook Foundation, created a spreadsheet of a few key statistics about fifty-five US-based Human Rights Program grantees and their websites. A list of the grantees is attached.

Subsequently, a survey was posted on SurveyMonkey that the cluster of Human Rights grantees were invited to complete. Thirty-four organizations responded to the survey. The survey and survey results are also attached in the appendix and will be available online for use by other foundations and organizations.

Finally, two group discussions were held at the offices of The Overbrook Foundation. Representatives from nine grantee organizations attended the first discussion; eight attended the second. The total list of attending organizations is attached.

DATA ANALYSIS***Description of Grantees***

The Overbrook Foundation provides financial support to fifty-five human rights organizations. As the data from the spreadsheet illustrates, the grantees represent a wide range of size in terms of budgets (from \$500,000 to \$23 million) and number of staff (from 4 to over 200), issue areas (The Foundation organizes them by the following areas: trafficking, reproductive rights, HIV/AIDS, domestic human rights, LGBT, movement building and international human rights) as well as their use of web-based technologies. A large cluster of grantees, twenty-eight are based in New York, twelve grantees are based in Washington, DC.

All of the grantees have websites, and about half have blogs. Ten allow readers to download blog posts (online diary entries) to their own browsers on a continuous basis using free software called RSS (really simple syndication), and three allow users to download documents in HTML format.

Survey results

The survey results mirror the descriptive data regarding the grantees with a similar spread in terms of issue areas and size.

Again, half of the respondents have blogs. The survey also revealed that of the groups that have blogs, half allow comments on their blogs and this same percentage of groups have links to other blogs on their site. The surveyed organizations without blogs are smaller in budget and staff sizes, unlike the overall descriptions of the grantees that had more budgetary mix for organizations with and without blogs. There was no pattern regarding geography or issue area and whether organizations have blogs.

Half of the organizations provide videos on their sites, a third have podcasts and four organizations have hosted webchats.

Almost all of the respondents (94%) accept donations on their websites.

All of the respondents are using email extensively to communicate internally and externally, half use instant messaging. Three quarters of respondents report regularly monitoring the Internet for mentions of their organizations. Most (65%) use listserves to communicate with a host of constituents including staff, board, volunteers, interested citizens and donors.

Forty-four percent of respondents report always sharing time-sensitive advocacy information with volunteers, a quarter report doing so with collegial agencies.

Not surprisingly, grantee respondents feel that there is a high level of competition amongst their peers for funding, and they most often do not identify a lead agency among a group of organizations for communications and fundraising in a time of action.

Thirty-six percent report never having calls with more than one donor at a time, and three quarters “never” or “once in a while” ask volunteers to self-organize fundraising events.

Regarding The Overbrook Foundation itself, grantees expressed strong interest in having The Foundation convene grantees as well as connect grantees to other funders.

Discussion group results

The two discussion groups provided an opportunity to explore issues of connectedness further and deeper for grantees. The participants represented a range of sizes and issues although all were based in New York City. The participants also represented a mix of roles within their organizations: executive directors, development officers and several people who focused solely on web-based technology

efforts. Naturally, given the different roles that participants play, there were different perspectives about the use of social media within their organizations and the challenges that they face. A few of the groups that attended are extremely sophisticated in the various ways they are using social media to engage internal and external constituents in discussions and actions for their issues. Most were not, and their candor and courage in admitting their shortcomings and challenges was admirable. Several themes emerged during the two sessions:

- Participants felt a “common struggle” in understanding which tools are critically important to their work. “I’m in a perpetual state of anxiety about which tools I’m supposed to be paying attention to.”
- Most of the attendees were at a loss as to where and how to get help for selecting and using new social media tools. “We don’t know who can translate these things for our needs.”
- There was almost universal frustration voiced about using outside technology consultants. The organizations felt that it was difficult to identify an appropriate one and felt that they were often left maintaining systems or tools for which they didn’t feel qualified. Smaller organizations said that they could not afford help of any kind, particularly their own staff dedicated to technology.
- Many organizations expressed the real difficulties of using technologies with constituents or in countries where the digital divide is very real and their constituents may be at risk of punishment by local governments for their activism.
- There were a few instances of constituents self-organizing to support the grantee organizations, as reported by the participants, but not many.

- Participants felt a generation gap with the new technology. “I’m always trying to catch up to my younger staff members.”
- All of the groups are using the web for donations; some to much greater success than others. As one participant said, “Money is the ultimate user generated content.”

“I’m in a perpetual state of anxiety about which tools I’m supposed to be paying attention to.” - Discussion Group Participant

ANALYSIS

Overall, the grantees are firmly entrenched in the Web 1.0 world, meaning that grantees use the web largely as a source of information rather than interactivity. None of the participants dismissed the need for communications technology as an essential part of the way that they work. They all have websites with information that can be downloaded, and that allow supporters to donate money and sign up for listserves. They are using email and electronic communications to communicate easily and inexpensively with those they know.

A small handful of grantees are using social media in spectacular ways to engage their constituents in conversations. WNYC, ACLU, WITNESS and Breakthrough are four such examples from the discussion groups. For instance, the ACLU’s web site includes a regular blog, an ongoing library of civil liberties podcasts and RSS feeds of news and action alerts by topic. The ACLU online campaign to restore habeas corpus rights offered a variety of ways for activists to support the campaign include signing a petition, joining into a larger offline rally and lobbying day, commenting on the issue blog, sending postcards to friends, visiting a MySpace page dedicated to the campaign, donating to the ACLU, and adding a campaign icon to the supporter’s own home page or blog. Most grantees are not using the web in this extensive, coordinated and

interactive way, and it is these groups that are the focus of the remainder of this report.

It is not surprising that the groups expressed almost universal exhaustion, fear and competition for funds – it is, after all, the nature of being nonprofit organizations. For our purposes, this raises myriad problems. Organizations are frantically raising money and do not feel that they have time to stop and think about how they work, how they engage their constituents, and what the most appropriate approaches to social media are for them. This leads to a culture of pushing the new tools away because the groups don't know enough about them, don't have the staff to explore and learn about them, and are working in environments that are often on the wrong side of the digital divide. As one participant in the group discussions said, "I think I'm missing something really big, but I don't know what it is or how to find out what it is."

Because they have pushed away both the responsibility for and investment in new social media, these organizations and their leaders are missing a new generation of tools and a new way of working. As demonstrated in the discussion groups, for too many nonprofit managers, the word technology only connotes a server and desktop computer that requires expensive outside experts and consultants to use and manage and fix. But the new tools do not require outside expertise, in fact, they do not require any expertise at all. That's precisely why blogs, cell phones, instant messaging, and online videos are growing in number and usage so quickly and widely. In the discussions groups, it was clear that many of the participants were wary of the new technology and see it only as the purview of outside experts or young people.

"I think I'm missing something really big, but I don't know what it is or how to find out what it is." -

Discussion Group Participant

There are two instances, in particular, that indicate that grantees are not taking advantage of easy-to-use social media tools effectively.

The first is the fact that only half have blogs, and that only half of these groups allow comments on their blogs. If one believes, as I do, that a blog is an online conversation between a diarist and an audience, whether that audience is one person or thousands or even millions, then not having comments is a surprising and disappointing development. Human rights organizations desperately need to lead conversations with a broad array of constituents about their issues and blogs are potentially a very inexpensive and broad scale way to achieving that, but only if they allow for interactive conversations.

Advocates are in the business of raising awareness of their issues. Their job is to inform, educate and mobilize communities of people to act directly or push for public policy for their causes. The Overbrook grantees are precisely the kinds of organizations that need to engage in conversations with more than the converted. An enormous opportunity is being missed if they are mainly using email and listserves to talk to their internal constituents and are using blogs as brochures not conversations.

Several participants in the discussion groups mentioned the fact that they work for causes that attract particularly vocal and profane opponents. This can be wearing for organizations to handle. However, there are mechanisms, such as requiring registration for users wanting to comment and banning particularly abusive participants that can reduce these problems. There is a far greater cost to opting out. By not creating robust, trusting online communities of participants, these organizations are missing an opportunity to empower their own supporters to self-organize and push back against loud dissenters and disrupters. A community of participants can comment on a grantee's blog, but also on their own blogs and the blogs of collegial agencies. This is how organizations and causes move from linear growth -- recruiting one volunteer or donor at a time -- to creating geometrically larger networks of supporters through online social networks.

The second area that groups were surprisingly not engaged in was the use of RSS feeds. RSS stands for really simply syndication. People interested in a group's blog content can sign up for syndication of that content that will automatically appear on their own browser or blog. Using RSS feeds allows readers to monitor any new content posted by a grantee without having to actually go to their webpage. RSS feeds are free and very easy to use. Not having RSS feeds, and not having links to other groups on their blogs, are indications that grantees are not taking full advantage of working within network structures. An analogy is that CNN wants users to stay only on their site, whereas the organizers of the DailyKos blog know that people surf the web and use it to its best advantage by sharing their list of favorite sites and creating, in their case, an echo chamber of like minded bloggers who share information and join each other's causes. Overbrook grantees should be doing everything they can to engage readers, become part of other blog conversations, and become active, not passive, members of the blogosphere.

This raises the final very important issue with which grantees are struggling. Pushing power to the edges is a key component of advocacy in the Web 2.0 world. It is a counterintuitive notion that, in essence, means that by doing less organizations can accomplish more. And it is the essence of moving from top down hierarchies to side-to-side networks for organizations. In the survey results and during the discussion groups, grantees reported working in more traditional ways that are holding them back from really empowering their constituents to work on their behalf – because of fear and because of a lack of knowledge. For instance, only a quarter of the survey respondents reported sharing time-sensitive advocacy information with collegial organizations – presumably because they feel they are competing with these groups for funds. Three quarters of the groups report never or only once in a while asking volunteers to self-organize fundraising events. Similarly, most of the discussion group participants appeared baffled by the question as to whether or how their constituents

initiated activities and events that the organization followed. One participant said, “They might suggest something, but we’re still going to do what we’re going to do.”

Successful organizations in the new digital age are those who recognize that the fundamental functions of institutions are quickly and incontrovertibly changing. Constituents are not waiting to be told what to do – they are receiving information from many sources, donating to multiple organizations, volunteering for various causes. Advocacy organizations, perhaps more than any other activist groups, need to engage their most passionate constituents in conversations rather than dictate actions to them. Unleashing the innate power that individuals have to make a difference and enlisting their creativity, energy, social networks and expertise is a fundamental part of their work. Most of the grantees appear not yet to have made this shift in their thinking and efforts. That the common concern about funding is draining and can feel overwhelming is understandable; however the fundraising cacophony is masking two truths about the connected age that organizations, regardless of size, issue area and geography need to understand: 1) unlike the large investments made in IT infrastructure over the past ten or so years, Web 2.0 tools are not expensive to implement. A blog can literally be created for free in ten minutes; 2) some staff time is required to implement and manage the new tools, however, organizations must move from a mindset of doing all of the heavy lifting themselves to facilitate the engagement of passionate volunteers to, for instance, become bloggers, and monitor blog comments. Grantees must begin to think hard and analytically about changing the way they work or they will become less relevant and effective over the next few years.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE OVERBROOK FOUNDATION

As mentioned above, one key reason for engaging in this assessment is to provide recommendations to the Foundation on ways it can support grantees as they move forward.

Participants in the group discussion were eager for assistance and support. However, their needs and desires should be weighed against the spotty track record of efforts to build the capacity of grantees over the past decade. Some efforts to create intermediaries to support grantees have been fantastically successful. Others have had mixed success; and many grantmaker capacity building programs, for instance the Packard Foundation, have fallen by the wayside.

Here are several recommendations for discussion by The Foundation:

- For whatever reasons, grantees are not aware of help and information that is available to them. The Foundation is well positioned to serve as a hub of information and resources for grantees. This does not mean that the Foundation has to create these services but simply provide a doorway for grantees and other advocacy organizations to find them. The hub would include links to capacity building organizations like Compumentor's NetSquared program and relevant blogs.
- The Foundation can help grantees become more tool-savvy. It can also help them to become more aware of the cultural shift that needs to take place to embrace the new era of tools and connectedness. The Foundation can help grantees, and potential grantees, make this shift by highlighting case studies of existing grantees and how they're using social media to good effect. For example, a case study of WITNESS video Hub project would be instructive for other groups thinking about how to use video for advocacy.

- The application process can be used as an opportunity to provide thought provoking questions, and expectations, for potential grantees. These questions are not intended to exclude potential grantees from acceptance, but rather to serve as prompts for conversations within nonprofit organizations and between The Foundation and potential grantees about how they could be using new tools to enhance their efforts. For instance, questions may include:
 - In what ways are your volunteers involved in strategy development?
 - Do you have a blog? Do you allow comments on your blog? Does your blog have links to other blogs?
 - In what other ways is your website the start of a conversation?
 - How do you listen to your volunteers? (This is not an evaluation or measurement question but one about conversations and how they happen, or don't happen.)
- Several of the executive directors of smaller organizations expressed a sense of isolation during the discussion groups. For these groups in particular, The Foundation can help organize a series of lunches for participants to come together and discuss these issues and strategies for overcoming their personal and organizational challenges. The Foundation could underwrite the series that may include costs for lunch and a facilitator and perhaps time to post suggestions and resources on the hub site. The Foundation staff should not participate in these sessions but appoint a facilitator who could be an outsider or a staff member of one of the grantee organizations to provide a safe space for grantees to share their experiences without worries about funding.

- The Foundation should explore with other funders and a capacity building organization like NPower NYC ways to provide training, tools and resources to grantees to help grantees change how they think about their work as well as what they do. The Foundation should not be the sole underwriter of such capacity building assistance, although it can take a lead in identifying partner grantmakers.

A SNAPSHOT OF RESOURCES***General Technical Information and Support for Nonprofit Organizations***

- Aspiration Tech (<http://www.aspirationtech.org/>) Aspiration Tech's mission is to connect nonprofit organizations with software solutions that help them better carry out their work.
- Idealware (<http://www.idealware.org/>) Idealware provides candid Consumer-Reports-style reviews and articles about software of interest to nonprofits, centralized into a website.
- MobileActive (<http://mobileactive.org/>) is a global network of activists and campaigners using mobile phones for civic action and engagement.
- The NPower Network (online resources plus twelve local affiliates) www.npower.org. NPower is a national network of local nonprofit organizations that provide high-quality, unbiased, affordable and appropriate technology assistance to other organizations.
- NetSquared from Tech Soup (<http://www.netsquared.org/>) NetSquared is responsible adoption of social web tools by social benefit organizations. There's a whole new generation of online tools available – tools that make it easier than ever before to collaborate, share information and mobilize support. These tools include blogs, wikis, RSS feeds, podcasting, and more. Some people describe

them as "Web 2.0"; we call them the social web, because their power comes from the relationships they enable.

- NTEN (<http://www.nten.org>) NTEN facilitates the exchange of knowledge and information within our community. We connect our members to each other, provide professional development opportunities, educate our constituency on issues of technology use in nonprofits, and spearhead research, advocacy, and education on technology issues affecting our entire community.
- Tim O'Reily's explanation of Web 2.0 (<http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html>)
- You Tube Video on Web 2.0: (<http://youtube.com/watch?v=6gmP4nk0EOE>)

Great Nonprofit Blogs - General

- Beth Kanter's Blog (with a fantastic set of how-to's) (<http://beth.typepad.com/>)
- Have Fun – Go Good (<http://havefundogood.blogspot.com>)
- Marnie Webb's Blog (<http://www.netsquared.org/blog/marnie-webb>)
- Michael's Stein's Nonprofit Technology Blog (<http://>)

michaelatmo.blogspot.com/)

Great Nonprofit Blogs - Advocacy

- Network Centric Advocacy by Martin Kearns of Green Media Toolshed (<http://www.network-centricadvocacy.net/>)
- Dr. Len's Cancer Blog on the American Cancer Society site (<http://www.cancer.org/asp/blog/>)
- Save Darfur Blog (<http://www.savedarfur.org/blog>)

Advocacy Campaigns

- Who is Sick? (<http://www.whoissick.org/sickness/>)
- Find Habeas.com (<http://www.findhabeas.com/>)
- UN World Food Programme FightHunger: Walk the World campaign in Second Life (<http://www.fighthunger.org/>)