

TICTeC Civic Tech Surgery #4

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SPEAKERS

- Gavin Freeguard
- Daniel Carranza (DATA Uruguay)
- Attila Juhász (K-Monitor, Hungary)
- Amy Leach (Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data)
- Myf Nixon (mySociety)

Gavin: So I might start kicking us off. I'm sure that other people will continue to arrive while I'm speaking. So hello, everyone. A very good afternoon from a very sunny North London and a good morning, afternoon or evening to you wherever you may be.

Welcome to this the fourth TICTeC civic tech surgery organised by mySociety and supported by the National Endowment for Democracy, focusing today on storytelling and reach. How can we amplify our successes beyond the civic tech community to evidence our impact through mainstream channels?

I'm Gavin Freeguard, a freelance consultant working with mySociety on the TICTeC Labs programme, among other things, and also an associate with the Institute for Government think tank and a special advisor at the Open Data Institute here in the UK. I'm your chair, facilitator and host for today's event.

Do tell us who you are and why you're here in the chat if you'd like, and thank you to everyone who has done so already.

Over the next couple of hours we're going to discuss some of the challenges and dilemmas we face as a global civic tech community in making sure that people know about what we're doing, that people are aware of our successes, and that we're able to speak beyond our civic tech communities to mainstream channels and to the wider public.

So these first 10 minutes or so I'm just going to outline how it will work and give you a bit more background to what we're hoping to achieve with TICTeC Labs of which this event is a part.

Then we explore various questions about storytelling and reach with the help of some fantastic speakers, and with all of you having the chance to share your thoughts as well. And then we'll think about what might help solve some of the challenges that we've surfaced.

Some quick housekeeping first. Today's event is on the record. It's being recorded and will be published online after the event along with minutes of today's event. You should be able to access a live transcript here on Zoom. Please let us know in the chat if you can't. You're very welcome to share details of the event on social media hashtag #TICTeC. And if you'd like to contribute to today's discussion, we hope you will, you can use the chat here on Zoom. And you can also use the Padlet board which you'll soon get a link to, if you've not had it already. If you've not used Padlet before you'll see it has the questions we're going to discuss and then space for you to add your thoughts and comments by clicking on the plus signs underneath. Feel free to populate it throughout the event. There'll also be a few opportunities later to unmute your mic and tell us what you're thinking as well.

Now for a very quick introduction to the TICTeC Labs programme which is run by mySociety with support from the National Endowment for Democracy. The aim is to discuss and tackle some of the biggest challenges facing the global civic tech and digital democracy sector. We want to grow the civic tech evidence base, address some key issues and enhance the effectiveness and potential impact of civic tech projects.

TICTeC, which stands for The Impacts of Civic Technology Conference started as an annual global in-person conference in 2015. We hope there'll be another in person event in the future. In the meantime, we've converted it into the year-round TICTeC Labs programme of which this event is a part.

Our steering group -you can see them on the right hand side of your screen - identified six big challenges common to civic tech around the world. You can see those challenges on the left, as well as today's subject: 'Storytelling and reach'. We've so far covered subjects including the accessibility of civic tech, and we'll move on to others including using civic tech to tackle the climate crisis. For each of those six topics, we'll organise a civic tech surgery like today's to delve further into the challenges and possible solutions.

After each surgery, there'll be an Action Lab or a small working group of around six people who will commission a piece of work to help solve some of the challenges raised. If you're interested in getting involved in that we'll tell you how to do so at the end of today's event. By the end of the programme in 2023, we hope we'll have six pieces of commissioned work as well as increased connections and learning across the global civic tech community.

This is our fourth Civic Tech Surgery. We've already commissioned some work on public/private partnerships from the first surgery; our second Action Lab is discussing a commission on accessibility at the moment; and we're currently looking through the applications to join our third Action Lab on accessing quality information.

Take a look at the TICTeC Labs website for more information on all of that.

So today we're focusing on storytelling and reach and particularly this big overarching question, what would help the global civic tech community to amplify their stories and successes beyond the civic tech community? So how can we tell everyone, mainstream channels, the wider public, about what we're doing in order to have the greatest impact possible?

31:31

Gavin: Underneath that big question, our objectives for today are going to be to discuss the challenges involved in all of that and understand what the biggest common challenges are when it comes to storytelling and reach; to share what we've all done to try to overcome some of those challenges; to discuss what else we've seen that has succeeded in amplifying civic tech projects through mainstream channels; and perhaps share some existing projects, evidence, research etc on the topic that might be beneficial.

And last, but definitely not least, to explore how the TICTeC Action Lab that will come together after this event can help address one of those common challenges by commissioning a relevant piece of work.

And the way that we'll run that today's event will take those first three questions, the challenges, what we've tried to do to overcome them, what we've seen others do to overcome them, in order to hear some perspective from our speakers - then give you some time to share your thoughts on the Padlet board and in the Zoom chat.

And then for all of us to reflect on what people have been talking about, there may be a chance to unmute your microphone during that bit. We'll then move on to the final part of the event which is going to be suggesting possible ideas for work we could commission to help the global civic tech community overcome challenges around storytelling and reach. Again, we'll start with some silent working on the Padlet board and then get into discussion. And at the very end I'll tell you how you can get involved in the Action Lab that will commission some work building on all of those ideas.

You'll be glad to know that that's nearly it for me in terms of introduction. Time to introduce our brilliant speakers who will share their experiences and kickstart our discussion today. They are going to be Daniel Carranza from DATA Uruguay, Amy Leach from the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, Attila Juhász from K-Monitor in Hungary and our very own Myfanwy Nixon from mySociety here in the UK. We're very grateful to all of them as well as to all of you for joining us today.

So hopefully that all makes sense. If you have any questions, pop them in the chat. I'm just going to stop sharing my screen. If you've got any thoughts as we're going along and share those in the chat or under the appropriate question on the Padlet board. And we can get going into in getting into the discussion properly.

The first question that we're going to explore today is what challenges have you faced or are you facing when trying to amplify civic tech projects and their successes beyond the civic tech community?

That relates to column one on Padlet. If you've got that open, I'll ask each of our discussants to share their thoughts on the topic for around three minutes. Then we'll have three minutes of silent working to add our ideas to the Padlet or to the chat and then we'll have a little bit more time to reflect on everything that people have discussed and everything that's gone on Padlet. So I'm going to hand over, first of all on the challenges to our first discussant and that's going to be Daniel, over to you.

34:45

Daniel: Okay, good. Thanks. It's really nice to be here. Okay, so challenges.

I believe that the main thing that we probably all suffer from in the civic tech community is that we don't have like a single branding that we can go to. We are always doing new projects on different subjects on different topics with different partners. I see the heads bobbing. So I think this is important for all of us.

You're always reinventing your communications, your strategies, and basically the wheel over and over again, with every project. This this is obviously a huge challenge.

And it comes with associated challenges like, do I have different social media accounts for every project? Or do I use my own social media accounts?

We learned this very fast back in 2012 with our very first project. I think maybe two days into the making the second account for the project, we realised like, hey, this is gonna be a problem. We can't have a separate account for everything we do because we won't be able to control it.

So not only do you have this whole brand thing, but you also have to explain every time what civic tech is, what open data is, what collaboration within open government is.

I don't want to go into how to address the challenges. But the problem is, you are always a new version of yourself on every single project. And you have to adapt that version to new audiences, new publics. This also depends on the contract - how much buy-in your partners have in different projects.

This will depend on the project itself of course, but when you have a partner that will take care of, for instance, the communications, it's not such a big deal because it's something that you can kind of, you know, hand over. But in many cases you end up not only doing all the work, but also having to care about communications that shouldn't be part of your partner's, let's say worries too. And I think I'm not going to take too much time on that. So let's start there.

37:24

Gavin: Perfect. Thank you, Daniel. As you said, I could see lots of heads nodding as you were going through some of those problems. I suspect we may hear about some of them again. We'll go to our next speaker now. And that's Amy.

37:38

Amy: Thanks so much. And likewise, I'm really really excited to be here and this is such a fantastic series of really practical, action-focused conversations. So the first challenge I'm reflecting on is that of communicating the impact of longterm systemic change. I work at the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data. We're a network of 600 organisations, competitive governments, private sector, civil society, all united by the belief in the power of data to push and progress change.

And so a lot of our work is very systemic in nature. That means it takes a pretty long time. It's messy, it's iterative.

To give an example: we work a lot with governments on their strategies and approaches to data. For example, we have longstanding relationships with the governments of Ghana and Kenya. And I always think about this kind of systemic change like a spiderweb - there's so many different strands and actors involved. And so then often it doesn't feel very tangible. And I think often people are looking for impact packaged in these very clear, nice narratives and stories.

And that can be really difficult when you're talking about the kind of systemic lens zooming out a bit. Then, I think data and tech can be really challenging areas for constructive narrative building in mainstream spaces.

And reflecting for a second on, I guess what I'm talking about in the context of mainstream spaces here. I'm talking about digital spaces like social media today that's obviously become increasingly polarised, driven by those algorithms. And so often the nature of online debate is much more polarised and stark than people's actual opinions.

And I think also, you see debate having to be kind of condensed into very, kind of pithy clickbait-y nuggets and soundbites and so on. And that's really tough because it then removes the space for nuance.

And so I think it's always interesting to reflect on some of the kind of defining social issues of our time. Climate is one I used to work on; migration, which is another that's come to define a lot of public narratives, often quite negatively. And both of those are obviously hugely complex issues. But there is the potential to boil down things into neat statements and pithy statements and so on. Whereas I think when it comes to data and tech, it's all-encompassing in the modern day, but it is really messy and that nuance is essential.

And so what we've seen is increasing focus on data harms, and rightly on the anxieties around big tech and so on. But really, that hasn't translated into a collective conversation about the urgency of the need for change, and a more constructive dialogue about what a future looks like where data is used really fairly. And I think that is a major challenge for us all working in this space.

And then finally, there's a challenge around stepping outside of the echo chamber and also your immediate constituencies. So we're a network, we have quite a global reach, but we're still constantly thinking about how we can connect with new kinds of people, organisations, and so on. And I think converting any of our work into those mainstream spaces, then really extending the reach on a mass scale is a big challenge. So I'll pause there, but I'm excited to hear more from others on this.

41:23

Gavin: Thanks, Amy. Let's go to Attila Juhász. Thank you.

41:28

Attila: Hello, everyone. It's really great to be here. Yeah, when Daniel said that he sees people nodding, I think I was the one because I can totally agree.

So we are a very small NGO. Our topic is mainly centred around the transparency of public money and entities and participation and citizen engagement. And we do a lot of things, like we do research, we do advocacy, and the technology is just a tool that that we use to strengthen our activities.

And it's just like six of us. So I have five colleagues and we are running two or three projects at the same time. So one big challenge is the capacity that we are neither a communications team, nor a software development team, but we are kind of a civil organisation and we try to communicate with these these other people, and they do a lot of experimentation with the project, what's going to work, what's not going to work.

And at the same time we strive for perfection in our published material. So it's it's a long, long, long way until we get to that point when the project is published. So at that moment, we are just super tired and we still need to figure out how to communicate it and get together the materials we have, and find the target groups.

So it's a lot of work and we often lack the capacity to promote and to build up a communications plan beforehand with properly defined target groups and detailed calls and also to write or work on the communication materials. So that's one challenge: that it's somehow also part of the core activity, the communications but also it's just not the main thing we want to do. And just quickly I want to mention that one other challenge is the maintenance for projects. It's much easier at the beginning when you kickstart, when you are enthusiastic about it and you have a momentum and media outlets are curious about your work and your audience is also enthusiastic about it and also donors are more willing to give you funds.

But when you are done with the project, then you are there with the thing that you have to maintain and after, I don't know, 15 years of work, you have lots of projects to maintain. And that's a big question: how to reuse and how to further develop or upgrade previous projects. And I think these are the two main challenges I would think about.

45:06

Gavin: Fantastic. Thank you. And finally, our own Myfanwy.

45:11

Myf: Yeah, thanks very much. Thanks for having me. And a lot of what I've just heard from the other three speakers again, nodding my head a lot.

So I've been Communications Manager at mySociety for over 10 years now. And it feels like a lot of these problems, we never quite solve them - they keep coming around and we try different ways.

One issue that that is repeated for us, I think is that our work is quite often anchored in fairly complex structures. So we rarely have a simple story that the general public can just understand without a bit of

background on, you know, what are our motivations? What is mySociety's theory of change? So for example, when we're writing about things that campaigners might have achieved through Freedom of Information thanks to WhatDoTheyKnow, we can't take for granted that the average person in the street would understand even what the Freedom of Information Act is, or that it's available to them.

So everything we write has to begin with a little explanation of that, or, you know, in our recent work when we're trying to get people to read the the climate action plans that councils have, and then go in to speak to their councillors about it.

But to do that, you're already assuming that they know what a climate action plan is and how and why local councils are acting on climate change, and then they have to buy into that fundamental world view that, you know, that you would go and make contact with your local council. So that's another issue for us.

For mySociety, specifically, as well, we make open source software. And the great hope is that people will go and pick it up and install their own versions of that software and happily run websites that help people make Freedom of Information requests or report potholes to their councils and so on.

But in the nature of open source software, we don't always know who's using it or why. So we know there are great stories out there, really interesting human interest stories with the ways that people are using our software - often in ways that we hadn't anticipated ourselves - but we don't always know about them.

And then we have a massive diversity of audiences. I think we're talking to a real diverse set of people with different motivations, different levels of understanding, so it's hard to know exactly how to pitch those stories.

Are you talking to the citizens that you hope are going to be using your software or your services? Are you talking to the government, you know, we've set up these things so that you can send your reports into government, to your local council, perhaps we have to make them understand exactly why we're doing that.

And then at the same time, we're talking to funders to make sure that they understand why we're doing what we're doing and why they should grant us money to do it.

And then finally, and I think that this is pretty much what everybody was hinting at as well. It's a lack of resource. So many civic tech groups are just like mySociety, we started really small. And when I first took this job on, there weren't many people that were not developers, you know, the mainstay of the organisation were people who were making the product. That's the important stuff.

We had never put resources into trying to talk to the outside world, whether that's the press or general public. And you know, from then on, I was a single person trying to represent a spread of six or seven different services that we were offering and point it to all of the audiences that I've mentioned. So, you know, one person is a social media manager, a commercial marketing manager, a press officer

copywriter, doing all the internet communications and internal stuff. And you can do all of those things. You can keep them going. But what you ideally want is to do all of those things really well. And that's not always possible when it's just one person.

06:16

Gavin: Excellent. Thanks, and thanks to all of our speakers for those really helpful introductory scene setters. What we're going to do now is take three minutes, I will have a timer on the screen very shortly, three minutes to go to the Padlet board for everybody to populate their thoughts on the challenges that you're facing when it comes to storytelling and reach. Do feel free to post links.

Again, do feel free to add things to the chat if you're unable to access the Padlet. And after those three minutes are done, I'll ask if any of our discussants have any quick reflections on things that people have raised. And again, if you'd really love to speak do let us know and we'd like to do so. Three minutes on the clock, populate Padlet and contribute to the chat - off we go!

08:49

Gavin: Just over a minute left. So add any final thoughts to Padlet or put it in the chat. And if there's something that you really want to talk about, do feel free to use the raise hand function, which you should be able to find down on reactions on Zoom.

09:54

Gavin: Five seconds left, so finish whatever you're writing and let's see what we got on our Padlet. I think there's a lot of common themes from the Padlet from what our speakers were saying as well.

So we've got:

- Head versus heart: we believe in most of our projects, despite the fact of whether people are really demanding them!
- Time: Somebody says they're single person researcher, and when they go on social media they see an upturn in new users, but they don't have the time to be a comms person as well as researcher.

There's going to be quite a lot about language, harmonising the language, and overlapping concepts. We've got:

- Strategic planning to find enough time and capacity for publishing something.
- We don't always talk to a diverse audience, it can be hard to reach.
- Challenges include that it's a 'wonky' seeming subject without immediate impact at a time when protests and more dramatic action gets all the attention
- Institutional structures are not conducive to scaling up
- Resource resource resource. We could always be doing so much more if we had more capacity.
- As a comms manager, the challenge is often persuading technical colleagues of just how much language needs to be simplified in public messaging, connecting the value of open data and source to use cases with significant societal democratic and economic benefits.
- Talking to a tangle of different audiences

- Different scenarios pitch the narrative again, a range of stakeholders has come up with somebody else as well.
- Getting interest from media outlets to be interested in promoting open source projects
- The public is not aware of issues such as algorithmic harm and how it might affect them individually.
- Not always easy to track what people are doing with your open source software.
- Work is embedded in complex structures, not always easy to communicate
- The civic tech community can feel like a bubble, closed, hence we often overlook the essence of simplifying our stories without speaking in jargon.
- We've also got 'maintaining stable team', that has just come in as well, because you can't pay market rates
- and resources again.

So resources and language are two of the big things coming through there. And I wonder if any of our discussants wants to come in quickly reflecting on any of that, or indeed if anyone else in the audience has anything they'd like to add quickly, particularly to those thoughts. Daniel?

12:03

Daniel: Yeah, sure. I think many of the of the comments focus on talking about civic tech and the difficulties of talking about civic tech. And what we try to do basically is solve all the problems first and civic tech later. I mean, we never communicate saying like, "This is an open source solution' or 'This is a solution done with open source, open data', whatever. I think that's absolutely a key issue. And eventually, you get people to understand that part.

I don't know if this is your experience, Myf, Atilla, Amy. But you know, like 10 years later, we now say 'open data', and we don't have to explain like a whole paragraph about what that is.

12:44

Myf: I still explain anyway, but yeah, time has a great effect, doesn't it?

12:54

Gavin: Attila, you want to come in?

12:57

Attila: Yep. I can relate to the to the resource part and, and with the structured strategic planning, I think you can have a lot when you learn to let things go and you keep within your ability capabilities. And that helps you a lot because you want everything to be nice, that's the ideal thing, but you cannot do everything right. You have to cut things off and you have to let things go and the thing is you can only do your best. And it's a long way of learning how to do that. But that will happen a lot of the time.

13:44

Gavin: Excellent. Thanks, Amy. Do you have anything to add to that?

13:47

Amy: Sure. I mean, the head versus heart point really stood out in terms of framing. I think that's a huge challenge around civic tech and data. And it also really links back to what Daniel was saying about the entry point. Because I think ultimately you need to bring it back to what connects with people on a more emotional level.

You need to bring up some of these kind of big issues like big data and so on back to the everyday and what resonates with people. And I think Dan, well, that's really effective. But in practice, as I'm sure we all grapple with, that can be really difficult to do.

14:20

Gavin: Brilliant. Thank you. I think I will move on to the second question. So the second question for us to discuss is: what, if anything, have you done to try and address some of these challenges? And I'll go in reverse order this time, so that's Myf first, Attila, Amy and then Daniel. So over to you.

14:42

Myf: Yeah. So just reflecting on what we were just talking about, I think the temptation is often to talk about it from the civic tech angle.

So, you know, "Oh, we've got this amazing open source, data rich tool". Those are not words that necessarily reflect with the average person. When we're talking about quite complicated stories, I always feel like I had a great benefit because when I joined mySociety, I was coming from a totally unrelated sector. And I had very little knowledge of what exactly what exactly civic tech was and what its aims were and I've never forgotten that a lot of our readers will be at that same starting point.

I think you can do a lot with words. It's often a bit of a drip feed, just stopping and putting yourself in your readers' shoes. And just, you know, imagine that you are trying to explain at a party or to a relative who has absolutely no idea what you do in your job, and writing very simply. It's a skill and you can develop it.

So one of the things that I've done during my time here is develop a style guide that makes all of these points really clear. You know, "Hey, guys, you're a developer, I know you want to talk about the code behind this tool, but actually that will mean nothing to the people who just want to know how it's going to help them in their everyday life".

I talked a bit about keeping track of who has installed our open source software, and how hard it can be to find the stories that we know are out there. And one way that mySociety has tackled this is through the creation of communities just like TICTeC.

So TICTeC is obviously one community where we find out a lot about what other people are doing, not just with our software, but all across the civic tech world. We have well, to a differing degree, with more success and less success, we have communities that are specific to different codebases - we've got Google Groups. If somebody's asking us a question, how can I install FixMyStreet for my country, we try to point them towards the Google Group because hey, there's a whole load of people there who have been through the same issues. They've tried to install it themselves, come up against the same

problems and found some solutions, and then you can all sort of cross communicate and learn from one another.

And when funds allow, we've been able to have conferences, and that has been really gratifying and a great way of bringing people together. Alavetelicon brought together people who run Freedom of Information websites all around the world. And my goodness, you could not stop them from talking to each other and the conversation in the bar afterwards was of the sort that only Freedom of Information enthusiasts would have enjoyed. But for those people, you know, it was so golden it was really valuable.

When I was talking about trying to talk to a number of different audiences, it's been interesting, actually, we've been more kind of systematic about this than ever before on our work with the Climate Action Plan. So really early on, in fact, I think as part of our funding bid, we sat down and we figured out who it was that we wanted to reach.

And this was all based on the kind of impact that we hoped that we would be able to make on carbon emissions at a local level. So, you know, we came up with a distinct audience of campaigners, people who are already very into climate and more likely to take action. Council staff were going to be key; journalists to help us amplify; researchers to use the data.

And then finally, we wanted people all around the world in the normal mySociety way to pick up the code perhaps or to get inspiration from our project.

And once you have those audiences in mind, that is a starting point that it's very easy to start thinking about what is your communications plan? How are you going to reach these people and what words are you going to use? What are their motivations that will really get them using that stuff?

And then finally, on lack of resource, well, you know, it's a prioritisation thing, I think. So as I said, for years and years, mySociety's biggest focus was on getting the software right, and rightly so. You know, we couldn't be spending time and money on telling people about it at that point, but I think every organisation reaches a point where they realise that communications are a really important part of the puzzle.

And once you do that, and once you've got you've been established a bit, you can work it into your funding bids as a line in every grant application.

We're also just beginning to look more seriously at what volunteers can do for us. We're looking at WhatDoTheyKnow particularly: you know, could a volunteer be looking through recent Freedom of Information requests to see if there's a real good story there with real human interest and writing them up for us? And that is valuable for the volunteer and it's really valuable for us.

And then, you know, what, what about if we were encouraging our users to seek their own publicity as well? So whatever transaction they've just taken, you know, they've just submitted a Freedom of Information request or they've just made a report about a dreadful pothole in their local area that's

bigger than anyone they've ever seen before, could we be giving a little nudge that if it's worthy of a local news story, here's some advice on how to contact the press? Yes. So just a few ideas.

20:43

Gavin: Excellent, excellent. Myf, a great start to answering this question about what we tried to do to address the challenges. I'll go to Atilla next.

20:51

Atilla: Thank you. You've mentioned a lot of things and we have a lot to learn from you. Like, we all try to answer these challenges. But yes, we are only five, six people. We just can't afford to have a Communications Manager at this time. And, and to have proper communication plans for every project as we have, I don't know 10, 15 projects in a year. So that would take a lot of our capacity.

So it's always like, how you can do it more more efficiently? And I think for us, as I mentioned, it's very important at the beginning to find that momentum. But you will really focus on that and then what are you are not focusing on?

Like for example, we have a project called Hotel Oligarch - it's to develop a map based website where we put hotels and restaurants of politically exposed people.

And at the beginning, it was a lot of ideas all together, like what kind of database it should be, and how to connect it to different other databases and very great ideas. But it was like, just a fun project without any funding, just to work with, with volunteer developers, and it was like, Oh, come on, we cannot do this all we have to do is cut it down.

And, and at the end, we developed a very simple app with a very simple database. It looks nice. It's just a map with pins on it. And the people loved it. So if you can find a really good idea to develop, work on it. Just do it and and hope it's gonna work out. Like if you plan the target audience, how they are where they are, but just ask people as that's another very important thing.

That is, as a group working for participation, it's always important to ask people what they want, but what they expect from us and and sometimes it's just very simple things that people could be happy with.

And another example is to find those small subjects that people can relate to. There's another map based application from us, it's a childbirth experience map for where the young mums could could review what kind of healthcare services they received from the hospital.

And that was a tool for collecting data about the healthcare system. Now, data-wise it was not a smart move to put a free text box at the end, because it's really difficult to analyse the data.

But then on the other hand, in a communications way, it was a really really good idea, because people could share their experience and it made the whole portal personal and people loved it. People shared it and and that's why it went kind of viral.

So that's another point to find, or to try to localise those topics or small subjects where people feel a connection, like it's difficult to talk about transparency and corruption.

It's always really difficult to find 'people' pictures for our materials. Sure, you can put a picture of money on it and that represents 'corruption', but it's very difficult to make it visual. But that's the important part wherever you can, you explain to people that it's their life, it affects their life, and if you can find these points in certain projects, actually, that will make it useful for people.

25:53

Gavin: Excellent, thank you. And we'll get to Amy and then Daniel, and then we'll have a bit of silent working again. But just a reminder that you can add things to Padlet or to chat as we go along as well. So Amy.

26:06

Amy: Thanks, and so many rich insights already to build on. Someone mentioned on the Padlet the challenge of that tangle of different audiences. And I think something we've really found again and again, is the power of working with and through your partners to extend your reach.

So one example of this is we're really proud to be part of the global partnership, part of the Data Values project, which is a policy consultation and advocacy campaign, really aimed at building that consensus around what a fair data future could look like, and then thinking very practically about the steps to move towards that.

We're just over a year into that and there's constant lessons and constantly evolving and iterating as is always the way with these kinds of campaigns.

But activating our established community to then move beyond that through other partners has been absolutely central to success so far. One thing that is really important in the Data Values project is young people and engaging young people, but traditionally the Global Partnerships network hasn't focused that much on youth.

And so we've been working with Restless Development, which is such a fantastic youth-focused organisation to really bring in that lens. And we've now got a youth focus group who are a really important engine, the thinking and ideas and so on that we're feeding in, but that's the constituency that is far beyond our usual reach and network.

Second, which you know, both Myf and Atilla have touched upon, is moving beyond the kind of technical language of data and numbers to bring people into the frame and that really brings these issues to life.

I think when used right, data and tech is essential, and telling stories of the past and the present and the future, and how might that future look, but really to do that you have to bring in that more human

centred lens. Language can do that really effectively and trying to kind of boil down language - Myf spoke to that a lot.

And then Atilla mentioned the importance of visuals and particularly on tech focused areas you have to make things visual. We share the challenges sometimes around the use of photos. And what we found works really effectively sometimes is then illustrations and animations.

So to give an example, we're currently working with various partners on a data science fellowship. And I think we'll all agree that data science is often seen as one of the driest and most technical areas. But we've managed to tell the story of that project and the fellows involved in that project by working with a young Nigerian illustrator called MJ to really bring to life the fellows' world and it's been fantastic and there's just these really colourful and fantastic images that have really injected life into this and it's been really effective.

And then finally, if you're trying to do global engagement, which is at the centre of our work, then what's absolutely essential is being multilingual. And we're trying to really focus on doing this more and more and I think what's essential there is that not being seen as a bolt on but really absolutely fundamental to the design of any projects and campaigns.

So thinking through you know, dissemination strategies in different languages, thinking through advocates which can speak, different languages and all the resources being multilingual and so on. A theme throughout this discussion, obviously, so far has been limits around resources. So that is just a challenge, I think, because I think often we are all united in a belief that there needs to be more multilingual content, but very practically, that can be a real challenge in terms of actually having the resourcing to make that happen. And thanks.

30:00

Gavin: Thanks so much. And before we go to the silent working for three minutes, Daniel.

30:07

Daniel: Okay. So many ideas to pick up. Okay, let's try to get this into three minutes.

We have a slight advantage in our team because we are a small team also like Atilla's, but two out of the five of us have come from communications. So this is something that we really care about. I think it has been a huge differential in our work through all those years.

But this has led us to the concept of trying to streamline projects and communications both as much as possible. We basically designed projects to be as easy to maintain and easy to communicate as possible. This is something that makes a lot of difference.

And for instance, we are very grateful users of mySociety tools, and one of the things that we noticed is that not all the the administration tools assume you have people that are on those like 24/7 or full time, whatever. This is something that we learned that we had to change when we created our own tools - we

can't offer services that need us to be present there the whole time. So that has been our model for development specially.

And we try to also plan for updates and improvements in parallel with new partners or new funding opportunities. We realised somewhere along the way, and we didn't plan for this, that every three years or so we were motivated to find a new partner and have that as an excuse to update a project.

You know, we have to have like, this sprint where we work on a project. I also talked about that, we work on a project, we focus on it for six months, a year, whatever. And then we kind of have to let it just be there and work on its own.

We can't keep giving it attention because we have other things to do. And maybe in a few years we'll go back and improve it or whatever. And that's the way we found, this like, I don't know, bipolar way where we focus our attention on one site or the other. This way of working has been the way that has worked for us.

Because it also has a lot to do with how we work with partners, and Amy actually talked about this. We have to in our case, partners are very invested in projects, because we co-create projects with them. They care about what the project does, but they don't always have this buy-in throughout their organisations.

So maybe they care a lot in a technical sense, but the communications people actually don't even know the project exists. That's a huge problem. And we also have to try to get this by hand in the communities around projects. That helps a lot with with you know, getting it out there.

But it's also a challenge because many times when you engage with communities and please let me be clear, you have to do that, they also expect from you all kinds of answers that you don't really have.

I mean, we have to engage, for instance, with the environmental community through our app that deals with recycling, but we don't have the answers to the questions they ask us. We don't know! We're not experts on sustainability or recycling.

In that case, for instance, our partner is, and that's the way we found to reach the communities and give a proper response. Going back to the point of entry, as Amy so eloquently put it we came to the conclusion that we don't necessarily want to *start* our communications by saying well this is open data, open source or open government or whatever.

But somehow even with some shame, I must say that we came to the conclusion that people don't really necessarily need to know about that. Our partners, yes, government, yes, decision makers, absolutely.

But you know, the guy or girl or whatever that's using our tool? Not really important. We just put all the information there on the website. Basically we have this very thought-out new footer that we created, where you can really go deep and learn about absolutely everything related to open government, open

data, and our organisations, but we are very, very aware that 95% of people won't even get there on the website. So that's something you know, we just let go and have to make peace with.

35:01

And with the audiences, something that also Atilla and Myf brought up before, you don't always have a clear audience, and that's a challenge. You know, we work on health, recycling, or Freedom of Information. None of those have clear audiences. Basically everyone cares about those issues.

So that's very hard. You can't always find like, this is my target audience and these are the places where I can find them. Sometimes your actual target audience is everyone, which I know is a sin in communications but that's the truth.

And the funding for that, I think Myf made a very important point, when you have to, you know, present projects for grants or whatever most people won't put communications into the budget. That's a huge, huge, huge problem. And I think that's a very systemic problem that we have brought up with many of our funders, and we don't see a clear path to a solution right there.

Maybe like huge and very mature organisations like mySociety can actually present you know, what, 30% of our budget is for communications. And someone on the other side might not, like, tell you to get the hell out of here.

But in our case, at least, especially working in Latin America, which involves, you know, very, maybe a little bit of racism, a little bit of other things, but you don't get like significant budgets for communications.

On visuals, I just wanted to bring up a little problem that we had for I think 10, 15 years. We haven't even agreed on a logo or an image or an icon for open data. So yeah, we do have an issue with visuals. This has been like a nightmare of mine for the last 10 years. And this is a big problem to communicate those like contextual issues like open data, civic tech, open software and stuff like that. And we're not helping ourselves not having this solved yet.

And finally, with the multilingual thing, in cases like ours, where we work with an audience with just one language, the biggest problem is that you have to take some of your resources and use them to translate or at least create materials about your project so you can reach a global audience. And that global audience is not users - it's just other people like you that we need to partner with and work with. But it's definitely like taking it from a place where you need to invest resources to another place that is also important, that doesn't get you results or impact.

37:58

Gavin: Brilliant. Thank you, Daniel, and some great chats going on in the chat. I think we're already heading towards some of the possible solutions. And we might be thinking about it later but we're going to do for the next three minutes, and we'll get the timer up very shortly. For the next three minutes. It's time to get started working. Use the chat, use the Padlet, to put your answers to the question: What

have you been trying to do to overcome some of the challenges that we've discussed? The three minutes silent working, Padlet and chat, and go for it!

40:49

Gavin: 30 seconds left for any ideas and then I'll come to our discussants see if they've got any any quick reflections and again, if anyone in the audience has something that you really want to say? Do use the raise hand on the reactions button on Zoom.

41:25

Gavin: So let's see what we got on the Padlet. What if anything, have you done to try and address these challenges? We've got:

- Motivate and stimulate -

that one moved across as I was speaking, and

- address the licensing of copyrighted Commons materials, making a case for reuse
- Collaborate with people who've done same things
- Put comms in as a budget line - that's something we've been talking about a bit.
- Create partnerships with local media organisations, promote through community, Facebook groups and other online groups.
- Think about your audiences before you launch, before you start coding.
- Open democratic organising work - this process is slow and takes much more time than 'quick win' projects
- Create communities, including online spaces where people can chat together and share stories.
- Promoting a local open source project by the Digital Public Goods registry.
- Keep language simple - goes back to a point we've made quite a lot already.
- Today you've got to consider comms to be as essential as any other part of the project, not an add-on that you consider after launch
- And motivate/stimulate users of your data and platform to promote or explain their work in their work, how they've used it to open a data set.

It's got lots of really good constructive solutions to some of those challenges. Don't know if any of our speakers want to add anything quickly? Yes.

42:44

Atilla Just a quick comment on keeping the language simple. A very, very simple idea. I really like it that if we are about to develop a project I always talk about it to my mum. And if she can understand, if she can relate to it, and then it can go through. So that is a good test for how simple the language or the idea is.

And I just wanted to comment on another - to put communications in as a budget. The main problem I think for us is that we don't have a communication officer or communication manager so this task is just sorted out in between us, like I also do some communication. I do the MailChimp and I write blog posts but there's another guy who who's better at it. But there's no dedicated person. And I think we cannot afford one at this point. So it's really difficult even if we have a budget to find the place or to find the

proper person who is who's actually gonna take care of the communications and who's not totally a UFO from another organisation or from another company. So that's the main challenge for us.

44:13

Gavin: Excellent, thanks. Amy then.

44:17

Amy: This has already kind of been a theme of the discussion, but suddenly I was struck by 'comms not as a bolt on'. I'm sure we all really grapple with that and working with others on that. And I think that that kind of budget line and so on, just speak to the point of, you know, sometimes it's as much about that internal advocacy and building buy-in within your organisation or you know, Daniel spoke to kind of building buy-in with partners and those communities, to then build the foundations to let you scale and do all the work externally.

And that takes time and energy and I think something I've seen in lots of different contexts is actually not a recognition of the importance of that. And giving people the bandwidth. And to do that, I think, because again, a kind of core theme here is challenges around resources. And I think that is a big challenge, not one that's overcome easily, but collaboration and crowdsourcing and sharing of resources and knowledge I think is just so fantastic. Like even in this session today, we've already had people share image libraries and so on.

It's something I found time and time again, for example, there's so many might be part of the Slack digital charities space in the UK. There's always been resources shared there. So I think the more we can do, and obviously mySociety with this session is already fantastic, to build those structures to enable crowdsourcing ideas and sharing of resources, the better, because that's just really beneficial for everyone.

Gavin: Thanks, Amy. Myf.

45:56

Myf: Yeah, just listening to Atilla speak, it reminds me very much of mySociety's much earlier days. I feel like it's a teething problem that every organisation goes through, where your ambitions exceed your capacity. And one thing I put in the chat actually was the one really hard thing mySociety had to do a few years back was look at the vast spread of all of our different projects and just think, no, we've got to close some of these down because we just haven't got the capacity to be not only talking about all of them, but you know, monitoring all of them, making sure that the code is up to date, making sure that all the bugs are squashed, and all the rest of it.

But actually going back to what Amy was saying, yeah, there are some sort of, you know, things that just keep the momentum going on their own, which I think civic tech organisations are quite good at thinking through.

So for example, when you complete an action on one of our services, it will quite often flag up another service. So you've written to your MP, maybe at the end of that it says, well, well done doing that. Now.

Are there any problems in your local area that you want to report to your council? Or are you having problems getting this pothole filled? Perhaps you'd like to put in a Freedom of Information request to find out more about the background there? So those things don't cost very much, but they do have a bit of an impact.

47:30

Gavin: Brilliant, thank you. And Daniel,

47:33

Daniel: Actually, Myf just made me remember, this footer I was talking about where we also have this information about open source and open data and other governments - the main reason that we started working on that is that we realised that none of our projects mentioned the other projects. So we had all this current audience and we were just letting it go.

And it has a lot of information but the main thing, the main reason that we made it is because we have the little logos of every other single project that we have, and from that we can get at least some traffic or some recognition.

48:11

Gavin: Excellent. Thank you very much. And we're going to move on to our third question of the session which is: What have been successful ways you've seen to get civic tech successes and projects into mainstream channels? I suppose as well any useful resources, research, etc, that you've seen. So what others have done that you thought was really rather good in terms of getting civic tech into mainstream channels. And this time, I'll go in the order: Amy, then Daniel, then Myf then Atilla. So, Amy, let's start with you.

48:41

Amy: So, two very different examples. The first builds on that point of really, the power of building in engagement and communications as a core pillar, the strategic kind of outreach from the very start.

We worked with Wellcome and an organisation called African Voices on a project tackling antimicrobial resistance in Kenya, which is one of the biggest public health challenges but there's a real kind of lack of understanding and awareness around it. It's one of the less tangible public health issues.

And so this project worked around an SMS campaign and a campaign with local radio stations in three counties to really try and drive more of a public conversation around what AMR looks like day to day, what can be done, and what in your everyday life you could be doing to play a role in tackling it. And the purpose of that was twofold.

So first, it was that point around building knowledge and awareness and more of a conversation. But there was also an exercise around data collection, because this project was all about generating and using citizen generated data as a complementary dataset alongside official data which when it comes to AMR is pretty patchy and it was incredibly effective. And I think for a number of reasons.

So there was a really strong focus on bringing the human dimension into it. So in a lot of radio shows, you'd have people: there was a mum with her baby, just speaking very practically to how that looked in the context of their day to day lives.

There was also widespread engagement across at the county level, like doctors, nurses and practitioners, and that was really, really essential.

And then there was really tailoring it in different contexts. So all of these radio shows and SMS campaigns were conducted in local dialects. And the project saw kind of a lot of buy in from government.

It saw policy shifts, but I think yeah, from the very beginning, there was real clarity around audiences. Rather than talking about data - this is something that Daniel has spoken to - they were talking about the public health issue.

So data was not the entry point, even though it actually is a data collection exercise. And so I think that's a really interesting example.

And then the other example, which is very different and not related to the work that we do is around censuses, because I was thinking about, okay, what is data tech stuff that is really in the mainstream? And in most countries you have the census as a kind of pillar that most people are aware of it happens relatively regularly, that drumbeat of the census and people understand it as that kind of information gathering exercise.

But how do you use the census to drive that broader conversation around data as a core tool to understand our societies and our present and our future? And I think in the UK, the 2021 census did that fantastically. And the UK Office for National Statistics did some really incredible campaign work around that.

But one thing really stood out to me. And that was the work of the historian, Professor David Olusoga. And his work really talking about the history of the UK and the census and its role. And there's tons of amazing stuff he did, so I recommend a Google, but one particularly exciting thing to me, was some really interesting work around data literacy in the context of school kids.

So he ran an interactive lesson to over one and a half million school kids, I think it was on representation, equality and the census, that really walked through how the census fitted into national identity, how the questions have changed, and so on. And that to me, was really inspiring and building a different conversation around the role of the census in our societies. And then also just a really interesting case study and how you build data literacy and with young people, which is so essential. So that's two examples from me.

53:02

Gavin: Fantastic. Thanks, Amy. I'm gonna be checking some of those out after this event. Let's go to Daniel next.

53:12

Daniel: Okay, so the first thing I believe is buy-in. If you don't have partner buy-in you are really in deep trouble, basically.

And the the best example that we have, at least, it's an interesting one, is what we have achieved with ¿Dónde Reciclo? which means Where Do I Recycle, which is our app for recycling as you might imagine.

Our partner is an NGO that comes from the Chamber of Industry. So they have deep connections with industry. And what we do is of interest to many big producers of you know, consumer products, because they have this law that makes them responsible for the waste they produce. So, through that, we found a way for them to have a direct interest in our project.

And that allowed us to sort of hack our way into their own communications. We allowed them to become partners of the app, not only, you know, supporting and like paying for the logo to be in the app, but giving them incentives to use the logo of the app in their own communications.

So, miraculously, our little app ended up on TV, you know, radio, and you know, outdoors and everywhere. I'm talking like hundreds, hundreds of thousands of dollars of advertising with our logo over there that we could have never paid for.

Then you have other stakeholders' buy in, we have this other project 'A su servicio' - or 'At Your Service', which deals with health service provider indicators, like key performance indicators and this was by chance, not by strategy, but since then the project had a lot of traction.

The health service providers ended up caring a lot about how they were seen there. And they ended up doing in this one case, advertising that they were ranked first in the satisfaction index or whatever we showed. So they ended up using us as part of their communications materials.

Then you have press buy-ins, and this was brought up in the Padlet. I do agree that you need to create these long term relationships with press, you end up being a source. At least for us, we know that press releases, good old press releases are the easiest way to get three minutes of free communications, because many journalists just find it a very nice and easy way to have an article without a lot of work. So you do the work and they publish the article basically.

But you also have to manage expectations. We have these partnerships. We had these longterm partnerships, especially trying to push data journalism, and we ended up doing a lot of free work because they didn't have the capacity and they ended up, like, using us. It's not in such a bad sense - more like an external and free provider of data for the sessions and stuff like that.

And finally, on storytelling, it's one of those terms that it's you know, a buzzword and everybody's talking about storytelling and it's it is important, I don't want to challenge that. But what I see with a lot of, you know, online courses about storytelling and capacity building seminars and whatever, is that

everybody's focusing on one kind of storytelling. That's basically you know, a watered down version of a TED Talk. Like, this was the problem and this is my personal story, and why do I care and how I solved it and how the world is better because I did this. And that works of course, but that can't be the only way to tell stories.

57:39

Like please, I'm begging everyone, any other thing. There are many other ways of telling stories and they are relevant. Personal stories are not relevant in this sort of thing. I have been asked for instance to make stories about our projects, personal. And, I mean, I'm not, you know, recyclable waste. So I can't talk to you in a personal sense about that. And people shouldn't care who I am. If they shouldn't care about Open Data they should care even less about who I am or why I'm doing this - so storytelling, yes, but which one?

58:15

Gavin: Excellent, really interesting. Thanks, Daniel. Myf, to you next.

58:19

Myf: Thank you. I've just remembered actually, a couple of times FixMyStreet has appeared unexpectedly on primetime TV, like somebody's just mentioned it whereupon many, many more people than we would expect suddenly flooded onto the website. And, you know, thanks to our developers, it does seem to withstand that sort of influx, but often goes a lot slower. So I suppose a bit of a warning to be prepared for when when one of your comms forays is actually successful against all expectations.

In a very comms manager sort of way, I've actually prepared some slides. So do you mind if I share some visuals?

Cool. So if I just do that, then that can everybody see? Yes. Great. Okay, so yeah, so I've just got a few examples.

This was a fairly recent one. We worked together with Climate Emergency UK, another organisation, to gather together all of these climate action plans of all of the local councils and then Climate Emergency UK themselves put in an absolutely colossal amount of effort going through all the different councils' action plans and scoring them.

So at the end of this project, they had this huge amount of data, which they just knew was going to be a great exclusive for a newspaper. And in that case, it was a strong enough story that "Hey, we are going to put out this data that basically says which councils have done really well and have a good plan in place, and which ones are lacking", that they actually just rang up the Guardian, which is our national left leaning newspaper, spoke to a journalist and secured an exclusive, so that went out before the story hit anywhere else.

It was on the Guardian front page for some hours actually, it was like the most one of the most viewed stories and then after that it was on like the climate front page for a few days. So that's one of the most successful recent attempts that I've seen.

The other thing on the back of that again, it was man hours, like putting in the time - and we helped out with this at mySociety as well - emailing every regional newspaper in the country, with a dedicated, you know, "this is what your council has scored in the scorecards". So it had to be tailored to each each region one by one. But of course once you've written the email, you just need to be copying and pasting the data in each time.

And that's quite a mySociety way of doing things. We quite often do things that take a long time, but don't take lots of money. For good or ill, that's how we often approach things.

And this is one that we wrote about on our blog quite recently. Transparencia in Belgium, that's an Alaveteli site, running a Freedom of Information website. They're quite proactive at just poking the authorities with pointed sticks.

And in this case, this was about a piece of legislation that was asking councils to pre-publish agendas of council meetings so that citizens could see what was about to be discussed. So the legislation was sort of pending, I think it's just gone through just in the last week. But in the time before it was going through, some councils were getting ready. Some were doing very well.

And you can see here, the green patches were the councils who were already publishing this data. Yellow were the ones I think perhaps they were intending to or they were part way there and the red ones were the ones that that hadn't done anything at all.

And Transparencia - we've written it all up on our blog - Transparencia said that every time they published this data out, it was the number one topic of conversation in councils because no council wanted to be shown up as one of the red areas.

And how they achieved this sort of coverage - again, they got it in two quite major newspapers - was to pair up with journalists and teach those journalists how to use Freedom of Information requests in bulk right across the country. So to put in a request to every council across the area and ask them, "How far along are you towards adhering to this legislation?"

And then of course, a bit of coding and data munging to actually get it into a nice map, but the really clever bit - like, what's that saying about teaching a man to fish? So teach a journalist to use a Freedom of Information request. And then they have a bit of ownership over that data and it's more likely to get into the papers.

Oh, this is a nice one that we benefited from a couple of weeks ago. So I don't know whether everybody around the world is as keyed in as we are to the fact that Boris Johnson, our prime minister, had a party during lockdown. This is a real political hot potato in the UK and it has not dampened down over several weeks.

What we noticed was that on our website WriteToThem, which allows citizens to contact their MPs, there was a massive upturn in numbers. So obviously, we can't look at what people are writing to their

MPs. We don't know what the content is. But we can very much say well, you know, on the day that this story hit the front page of all the newspapers, whoa, like numbers went up, and we're pretty sure people were writing to their MPs to express their feelings about Boris Johnson having had a birthday cake and a little party. So that was good one and that got picked up.

All we did was put out a tweet. We didn't actually contact any journalists. But it did get picked up and the tweet was the story. So you know, you can't ask for more than that. That's nice, easy work for a Comms Manager.

This one is from the Czech Alaveteli site. They were lucky enough to win a competition that gave them some free billboard space. And I'm always talking about getting billboards, and obviously that is a funding issue and mySociety has never been in a position to purchase out of home space like that. So this was really interesting for me to learn about.

Like, what would you do with that space if you had it? And what they did was I think this is something like "According to 106" - that must be the FOI Act. "According to 106, I have the right to ask...", and then a number of posters would come up with ideas for things that you might like to ask and I think this one says, "Who picked the companies that imported face masks from China".

So this was a COVID related thing that just sort of normalises the concept of using Freedom of Information to find out the things that you might be wondering about every day.

And then finally, I love this organisation. They're not an Alaveteli site but they are a Freedom of Information site and good friends of mySociety's, Frag den Staat. They are so cheeky and they're not afraid to go into opposition with government, with authorities, to go to court. They often crowdfund for the fees that they need to take people to court.

And in this case, they had published the cancer risks of, how do you pronounce it, glyphosate. So the fertiliser that has a number of different risks attached to it, and that has gone all the way to court. And Frag den Staat have won their case that it was lawful to publish. So you know, one way of getting stories out there perhaps is to just be reckless and naughty and take people on. Yeah, I'll stop sharing now.

1:07:00

Gavin: That's brilliant. Thanks for fantastic examples. Is there Atilla? Thank you.

1:07:08

Atilla: I think you already mentioned a lot of great things. What can be useful for getting into the mainstream media? I really like the idea that I think all or most of these are centred around creativity - like how to replace the lack of capacity with creativity. Like you have to be creative because you are hungry.

The state media channel has like a yearly budget of 250 billion euros. You cannot compete with that. You cannot compete with the main media channels. So you have to be creative, and I really like the

idea of using billboards. And I remembered when when we wanted to buy places from the Budapest transport company to advertise a cell phone app for our corruption database like that.

That's also a map-based application where people look for what kind of corruption related news is located around them. And actually they refused to sell to us places because they said it's against their business policy as there was a corruption scandal around the transportation company on the map so we tried to use it, but yeah.

So basically, it's just creativity and, I really liked that you talked about about media, because that was the point that I wanted to say at this question to use the media as a tool and not just a tool but as a partner.

Like here in our country or in our society or our field of work like mainly in Budapest, the main news channels of the country are located in the capital and it's not a big metropolis so basically, you know, those people who we work with, or who are writing the news - maintain a good relationship with them, also personally, I used to go to the same university as some of the journalists now so it's very, effective to use this this kind of relationship like sometimes I tell them even before the material is published or even before I send out press releases, to let them prepare and they are really grateful, as Daniel mentioned, that somebody is doing actually their job writing articles and they are happy to publish these materials most of the time.

And so yeah, basically these personal channels or personal relationships can help a lot. Yeah, an example for one of our campaigns: I already mentioned the healthcare, childbirth data mapping tool. So at the beginning, we ran a campaign that reached some 15,000 reviews, which is quite good for us and we were happy with that.

But then later on, like one year after, we wanted to run another campaign to have new data. Like, what's happened in maternity care? To see what happened in maternity care in the last year. And as I mentioned, it's always a challenge to rerun a campaign or to have the same topic dropped in for the second time.

And we prepared different media materials, like we did a video report with one of the media outlets on the topic. Also, we had an article, a series of articles, in another mainstream media so to just to combine and, yeah, like combining the different media surfaces and being creative. And then yeah, that was already mentioned before the last question - to make it personal, that's another thing.

1:12:07

Gavin: Excellent, thank you very much. So we're going to put three minutes on the timer to give everyone three minutes of silent working on the Padlet and in the chat. It's column three on the Padlet: what have been successful ways you've seen to get civic tech successes or projects into mainstream channels? Any useful resources, research and examples had some brilliant examples already. Please do go to the Padlet and put in the chat now. Your three minutes will begin any moment. And for reasons of time, I'm also going to ask our discussants if you've got any reflections on what's going on, Padlet or

in the chat for this particular question - if you put them in the chat, we'll be able to move on after this one to our final question. So yeah, some incredibly rich examples already, so thank you.

1:14:30

Gavin: We've got around a minute left. Any examples we've not heard of so far. successes of getting things into mainstream channels.

1:15:26

Gavin Final 10 seconds, so finish whatever you're typing and paste it on the Padlet or in the chat and again, discussants if you've got any reflections on anything that's gone up if you could use the chat to share those that would be wonderful. Thank you very much.

So let's see what we've got on the Padlet. We've got:

- the glyphosate report
- doing something about a current issue but optimising a civic tech value to that story that others can't do.
- Join a media outlet as a partner into your project.
- Never waste a good crisis connected to your work.
- And we've got the Digital Charities Slack community.
- We've got the letters to MPs, from mySociety
- Partnerships with local journalists, influencers and activists using our own national and local and regional outlets,
- Funding from a funder who's willing to take a chance on projects different from other projects
- Transparencia
- And the climate scorecards in the Guardian

Lots of excellent examples there. So thank you very much everyone, for answering all the questions we put to you so far, for a really brilliant discussion.

We've thought about what the challenges are. We've heard about how people have tried to overcome them. And we've had some other wonderful examples of successful attempts to get civic tech projects into mainstream channels.

In the remaining time we're going to start thinking really practically about solutions to some of the problems that we have covered. So as I said earlier, the Action Lab or working group that will come together after today's civic tech surgery will have up to 3,760 US Dollars available to commission a project that aims to solve one or some of the problems that we've highlighted today.

So in the remaining time, the question we're going to think about is, "What sorts of things might help to address the common challenges discussed so far?" Because we are going to start thinking about specific projects that we can commission, but the Action Lab will consider. So what sorts of things might help to address the common challenges we've discussed so far? Again, we're going to start with five minutes of silent working so you can add ideas to the Padlet board. I think it's going to be the fourth

column of that. You can also add things to the chat. And then we'll have some time to see what our discussants think of those ideas. And again, if anybody else wants to say something in that time of reflection, please do say in the chat or raise your hand using the reactions button and so five minutes or some silent working. The timer will start any moment now. What sort of things, what sort of projects might help address the common challenges to storytelling and reach that we've addressed so far today?

1:19:36

Gavin: Discussants, so when I come to you for reflections on on this question, I'll go in the original order so Daniel, Amy etc. And then we've got another three minutes yet. Some great ideas going up on Padlet already. So please do keep them coming and use the chat if for whatever reason you're unable to access the Padlet.

1:20:57

Gavin: Just under two minutes left to keep your ideas coming. For things that we could practically do to tackle the challenges the common challenges we've discussed, the sorts of things that we actually might be able to commission three, a bit over three and a half thousand US dollars.

1:22:22

Gavin: 30 seconds left. So any final ideas and sentences that need finishing, do those now!

1:22:43

Gavin: 10 seconds Excellent. So things people have suggested include:

- Promoting a civic Commons framework. Repurpose the creative commons framework to become a forked Civic Commons framework. Create comms to promote licencing in this framework where possible and highlight exceptions
- Partner with a media platform show how civic tech could be applied to benefit its own work.
- Develop a canvas for effective civic tech comms, including concrete examples and successful stories
- Media training for civic tech comms folk
- to get people outside of a bubble,
- a prize for a newsroom. You can use data from one of the included organisations to craft a story. That can actually use the money that we have to give a prize
- Civic tech media fellowship for local journalists, so aimed at local trained local journalists on the best ways to report the impact of civic tech projects in local news outlets
- Collate civic tech visual explainers so sort of signposting or resource on something that explains what open source, Open Data, Creative Commons et cetera are
- A journalist and civic tech conference that could bring journalists and civic tech people together or just a bursary that allows civic tech people to go to journalism conferences as speakers.
- This one came up earlier as well: pay a photographer to photograph some of our many abstract needs as an open source photo library
- Local press fellowship: with an example from Data4SDGs

- A civic tech storytelling competition. And we've got a speculative fiction competition as an example
- A portal that published case studies from a load of civic tech organisations in one place so journalists could subscribe to and easily ask for more details. It would be a resource for journalists

Some excellent ideas in there. Again, if anyone in the audience has any reflections on any of that, please do put your hand up or put your idea in the chat. Otherwise, we'll hear from our discussants so let's go to Daniel first.

1:24:53

Daniel: Okay, so I believe the big overarching issue is basically shared resources versus capacity building and strategic planning.

I think the focus, and you can see it in the responses we have in the Padlet, the focus is mostly put on how we build capacity, and how we teach organisations to be more strategic and more effective, and whatever.

And besides the fact that I hate canvases, I hate filling them in, how many times you can learn something where you actually gained something from it. I mean, every time we get a big fund, they make us go through this process of strategic planning and whatever.

That's okay. I mean, they're on the whole, right, and they care about the project, the products and the projects, but it gets to a point where you're just basically wasting most of the time you're doing that sort of thing. I think those resources should go to creating common resources, common shared resources for the whole world. So we use that persist in time.

To put a few examples on this. Centrally I think we should have something to help us out with the most technical part of communications, which is not like thinking up campaigns or strategic thinking, but advertising like crude, full advertising about we will say in Spanish, like buying advertising, a central online marketing how if you wish, somebody that can negotiate prices and do bulk buys for Facebook ads and Twitter ads and whatever.

We use mostly digital resources for communications, and we are paying extremely ridiculous prices for something that could be negotiated much more cheaply if we were all buying together something that could be actually financed through small commissions from the adverts that I think everybody else is buying. So it's actually really easy to obtain. And I think this is the sort of challenge that one funding organisation could take on and really help us solve a lot.

We don't have the knowledge for online advertising, and we don't have the specific knowledge of tracking campaigns and clicks and conversions and stuff like that. That's very complicated. Believe me, I tried to learn it. I couldn't.

So that's the sort of thing you know, the image bag that we were talking a while ago, we could even have, you know, a common Matrix server. I don't know if anybody else is running away from Slack and going to Matrix or Elements right now. But having a shared space wouldn't only be like a good policy, you know, on privacy and encryption and whatever. But it will also be a place where it's much easier to have exchanges between us and create specific groups and work on projects and stuff like that.

We have like a million Slack servers or whatever around the world. And everybody's saying, like, join my Slack server. I don't think that's the way we should go forward. Yeah, well, that's basically I mean, the other examples of things that we all need and we could share, but I think you'll get it.

1:28:15

Gavin: Fantastic. Thank you, Daniel. We've got just under 10 minutes left. Amy next.

1:28:21

Amy: What an incredible set of suggestions and ideas and it's just so energising and exciting to read through them all. And building on what Daniel was saying, as he says is this kind of the common theme around knowledge sharing and upskilling and so on. So I think alongside the shared space, whether that be with images or templates and so on, and accompany thing there that can be so useful, is a series of kind of comms workshops.

There's been some common threads here, like media engagement, digital skills, and tools and so on. So perhaps a series of workshops geared towards anyone working on these issues because obviously a lot of smaller organisations might not have comms people or teams, but that really has a civic tech lens. Because I think even in this session today, there is just so much expertise and ideas that's coming through that can be built upon.

And then just the other thing that I think really came through is how do you kind of crowdsource creative ideas and inspiration, and I really love that idea of, you know, a storytelling competition or something similar, and I thought that was great.

1:29:36

Gavin: Thanks Amy. Atilla?

1:29:41

Atilla: Thank you very much. I think what you all said it's around, like, experience sharing and learning from each other. And I really think this is very important, like this is the way - how can we go after the mainstream media or even in front of the mainstream media? Or how we can get our issues into the media and reach a broader audience. So this is a really hard question.

I was thinking a lot about about this issue, because one sum of money just won't solve all these problems. So the main challenge or the main problem for us like in general for our organisation, like how to keep a stable budget for not just for the next year, but for the next 10 years. So to find those points where you can find the reliable resource for a longer time and I would go into this direction in this this communication, knowledge sharing field as well to build something which lasts for a longer time,

like either it can be a common website or a website with common information of useful tricks and tips or relationship, a bit like personal relationship between organisations or people who work in organisations so I would mention here like I really like conferences as well, like those kinds of conferences where you can really share your experiences, your negative thoughts, your positive energies, and I feel like a bit like that now as I heard about your stories, too, so it is really nice to feel that, that point that there is a very similar struggle in Uruguay for example, as we have here, so these emotional sorts of things are happening a lot to keep us in the challenge. And then yeah, so I know it's not a very concrete answer, but something.

1:32:33

Gavin: Excellent, thank you very much. And finally, Myf.

1:32:36

Myf: Yeah, completely agree with what Atilla was saying. And also Daniel - that it's a tricky sum of money to do something that is going to have a long term impact because yes, you can skill up today's civic tech groups, but then five or 10 years down the line will that all have completely disappeared? Obviously creation of something like a wiki or website, or like Atilla said, YouTube videos, but you know, things keep moving.

When you think how much social media has changed and the way that you can advertise on Google or Facebook has changed just in the last couple of years, I fear that that sort of knowledge is going to be very quickly lost.

One thing I do really like is this idea of a prize for journalists for a number of reasons. Partly because every journalist loves, "Surprise!". You know, how nice to get an award. It's very tempting then to dig in and find out a little bit more but also because then they are publishing stories that presumably would have this little logo of the prize on it might encourage people to click back and find out more about it. So it's sort of a virtuous circle and a win win.

And then finally, just this idea of a photo library that came up in chat in real time during this meeting, answers a need that was expressed by a number of different people. So, yeah, again, that's something that might have a nice long lasting effect if we could get enough photographs that clearly help explain the sorts of projects that civic tech organisations are always struggling to find something nice and graphic.

1:34:21

Gavin: Fantastic. Thank you very much. And Amy, come back in.

1:34:25

Amy: Yeah, just to add very quickly, because as you say, this photo library I think captured the imagination of this group. Alongside that what can be really helpful is a kind of photo guidance and imagery guidelines for civic tech. Because I think in the past, I've seen some really fantastic guides around, you know, capturing images with smartphones and so on, but actually some kind of creative ideas about what photos you could use, if you are on projects could be a really fantastic companion to a

kind of library of images to help organisations gather their own content, even if it is with smartphones and without professional photographers.

1:35:06

Gavin: Excellent thank you, and Daniel.

1:35:07

Daniel: Beyond photo libraries, especially whether it is not necessary to create something new. We have a bunch of shared resources already that we already use. Wikimedia Commons. Fontawesome is one of the most used icon libraries in the world and maybe, you know, the community can spend \$10,000. That is the amount they charge for a new icon and have an Open Data icon that is like everywhere. The Noun Project, there's a bunch of places where people already are looking for materials, and I think that's where we need to go first.

1:35:42

Gavin: Excellent, thank you. I'm going to start bringing us to a close now and hopefully you can see a slide on the screen which gives you a sense of what's going to happen next. Can everybody see a big thing which says Action Lab 4? Yes. Excellent. Thank you.

So thank you all for a really useful discussion today. This will end up going somewhere which is after this event, there will be an Action Lab, aka a working group that will convene. There'll be around six people on that; they will work together looking back at what we've discussed today, what's on the Padlet, what's in the chat, what's in the in the discussion, to commission some work to help address some of the challenges that we've raised.

Anyone can apply to join that Action Lab. So please do sign up to the TICTeC mailing list or you will find a link on the website. And possibly in the chat as well. So you'll find that when both applications that open do apply, and then they will make the funding available through a call for proposals to get somebody to do some work, which will help to hopefully solve some of the problems that we've talked about today. Not all of them, because there are a lot as we've been discussing, but hopefully we'll be able to get to a really practical solution that will help civic tech across the world based on what we discussed today.

So all that remains for me to say a huge thank you to our brilliant speakers. A huge thank you to all of you in the audience for coming as well. Some really useful contributions in the chat and on the Padlet as well. And a big thank you to the National Endowment for Democracy for funding this work as well.

We will be back in a couple of months for the next global civic tech surgery. In the meantime, keep an eye out for that opening of the Action Lab applications and also keep an eye out for the calls for proposals around accessibility and inclusivity, and civic tech and accessing quality information TICTeC surgeries as well. So yes, do sign up to the mailing list. Hopefully see you again in a couple of months for the next civic tech surgery if not before and thank you very much again enjoy the rest of your days. Thank you.