

Georgia Civil Society 2.0

Rapid assessment & training report

Christine Prefontaine

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Policy, Advocacy, and Civil Society Development in Georgia (G-PAC)

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ABSTRACT

How are Georgian civil society organizations using social media to engage citizens, spark change, and shift public policy? A rapid assessment conducted as part of the *Georgia Civil Society 2.0* project found that most organizations use social media, especially Facebook. However use is often not guided by strategy, mostly characterized by one-way broadcasting, and there is low awareness of limitations and risks. We recommend assessing the Networked Nonprofit model, creating more “edible evidence”, and using new media to weave networks — with free agents as well as with other organizations. We also suggest supporting innovation spaces (especially those connected to public libraries), promoting a DIY/hacker/maker ethic, and nurturing connections with the open source community. Finally, better articulating the project's theory of change and establishing benchmarks will enable the project to advance knowledge in this field.

130-CHARACTER SUMMARY

How are Georgian civil society organizations using social media to engage citizens, spark change, and shift public policy?

KEYWORDS

civil society, social media, civic media, civic participation, civic engagement, Georgia, policy, advocacy, networks, information and communication technologies, ICT4D, ICTD

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Summary

How are Georgian civil society organizations using social media to engage citizens, spark change, and shift public policy? *Georgia Civil Society 2.0* is an action research project that assesses needs and practices, delivers training and resources, and weaves networks. The project focuses specifically on social media and other ICT tools, data mapping and visualization, and information design to improve policy analysis and advocacy.¹

Launched in May 2012, *Georgia Civil Society 2.0* is a small component of the East West Management Institute (EWMI) *Policy, Advocacy, and Civil Society Development in Georgia* (G-PAC) project — a four-year initiative effort (2010–2014) funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to strengthen civil society’s role in advocating for, influencing the development and implementation of, and monitoring effective public policy reforms in Georgia.

This is the first *Georgia Civil Society 2.0* report. It is a snapshot in time: the output of a rapid assessment (based on nine one-hour meetings and desk research) and a series of trainings conducted in Tbilisi, Georgia, from May 14–22, 2012.

¹ Kanter and Fine (2008) define social media as “the array of digital tools such as instant messaging, text messaging, blogs, videos, and social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace that are inexpensive and easy to use. Social media enable people to create their own stories, videos, and photos, to manipulate them and share them widely at almost no cost.”

Jenkins (2007) defines “civic media” as any use of a medium that fosters civic engagement (“medium” includes social practices and protocols, as well as technologies).

Key findings

- **Few organizations have a communication or social media strategy that documents decisions and guides implementation, learning, and reporting.** Developing, implementing, and reporting on a social media strategy may provide an opportunity to hone transferable skills. Specifically, it would provide low-cost, hands-on practice conducting stakeholder analyses, audience/user research, and evaluation, as well as setting up business processes.
- **Most civil society organizations are using social media to broadcast, the next step is to use it to power social networks for social change.** CSO's use of social media can be characterized as official, one-way broadcasting focused on informing. The next step would be for CSOs to assess the "Networked Nonprofit" model (Kanter & Fine, 2010) to assess whether the approach and associated social media practices fit with their organizational mission and objectives. This model aligns with thinking about the new media and network effects in the context of political change, and builds on experiences with organizing and using civil society networks to shape public policy (Ashman et al., 2005). CSOs that decide to adopt networked practices should do so as part of their longer-term organizational development and strategic planning efforts.²
- **Few apparent connections between CSOs and free agents.** TASCHA did not find evidence of efforts to network or leverage "free agents" — independent, networked professionals, content creators, and activists — to spread advocacy messages or translate research findings and NGO-speak into plain language (creating [edible evidence](#)). This may be because of the assessment's limitations, a lack of free agents in Georgia, and the current practices of CSOs. It would be good to learn more because free agents can be valuable infomediaries: processing nuanced content, making it more accessible to a broader audience, and connecting it to current realities.
- **CSOs are active Facebook users, but unaware of limitations and risks of using proprietary or closed platforms.** In Georgia there is a polarized media landscape with a handful of television channels acting as the main source for information about current events. For those with access (predominantly people living in Tbilisi), however, the Internet is emerging as an important alternate source. Facebook figures prominently in this picture, as an information source, email client, and

² See definition on Page 20 of this document.

blogging platform — and perhaps even a forum for vibrant social and political discussions (contrary to prior reports). CSOs recognize this and many use Facebook as their primary digital home, gaining exposure and audience. However they appear to be unaware of issues related to losing control over their online identity, content, and data.

Other observations and opportunities

- **A clearer articulation of the *Georgia Civil Society 2.0* component’s theory of change will help make better decisions and show thought leadership in this space.** The Civil Society 2.0 project could benefit from further investigation into how Facebook is used, a baseline of current levels of online social and political content, as well as what constitutes “a success” in using ICT tools and social media to conduct advocacy and advance policy.³
- There have already been efforts to **nurture open-source developers, technologies, a hacker/DIY ethic.** This should continue. Examples include supporting [innovation spaces](#) (environments that foster the creation and application of new ideas and technologies⁴) and events where CSOs and developers can interact, funding the training and localization of open source technologies, promoting connections with international communities, and paying attention to the broader ICT infrastructure.
- **There may be an opportunity to leverage “It Affects You Too!” campaign.** The collaboration, interest, and engagement generated by the campaign suggest indicate that it could become a trusted brand — and evolve into a platform to address a broader range of civil society issues. The campaign is also significant because it provides an example of networked practices.

³ This was written in the summer of 2012 and is even more relevant now, since citizens’ use of Facebook played a significant role in the outcome of the October 2012 elections.

⁴ An example is Beyond Access’s “Development Lab” pilot initiative — which brings together IDFI, the MOJ’s Public Service Development Agency, the Parliamentary Library, and the Georgian Library association — and focuses on civic engagement.

Summary of recommendations for CSOs and G-PAC

The following summarizes TASCHA's recommendations for CSOs and for the G-PAC initiative.

Recommendations for civil society organizations

- Assess the Networked Nonprofit model, and implement if/as appropriate
- Set up a Communications Tracker and create a Communications Policies & Guidelines document
- Create “edible evidence”
- Start creating content and using social media regularly
- Develop a Facebook strategy... but be aware of the risks and limitations
- Conduct ongoing audience research
- Articulate your theory of change
- Nurture relationships with free agents
- Favor established and well-supported open-source solutions to maintain control of your digital identity and assets

Recommendations for the G-PAC initiative

- Incorporate new media strategic planning into existing efforts to professionalize Georgian CSOs
- Raise awareness about the Networked Nonprofit model
- Weave the network: Advance initiatives that connect CSOs and free agents
- Support or create programs that embed and connect free agents
- Create a civic media baseline — a framework to assess change in this sphere

Next steps

TASCHA to curate resources, and provide mentorship and training to selected CSOs

As part of the current *Georgia Civil Society 2.0* project scope, TASCHA will implement: (1) a mentoring process, (2) an online resource kit, (3) a 2-day festival, and (4) a 2-day training on creating data-driven visualizations to advance public policy analysis and advocacy. **JumpStart Georgia** will assist TASCHA with all Phase 2 activities. They already work with many of the participating CSOs, and are already engaged in similar efforts.

Civic Media Mentoring Team

All CSOs who participated in the assessment will be invited to join the Civic Media Mentoring Team. The goal of this component is to produce a group of CSO representatives who have (1) increased civic media skills, and (2) an ability and desire to share their knowledge with others.

The invitation will request that interested CSOs select one representative and commit to:

- Allocating to their representative a minimum of 10 days over three months on the team activities listed below, in addition to ensuring that they can participate in the 2-day festival and 2-day training
- Actively supporting their representative — so that they have the time and space to attend all mentoring sessions, review materials, practice working with new technologies, and share with others
- Establishing a simple process to review what the team member is learning, with the goal of (1) ensuring knowledge skills/transfer to your organization, and (2) linking mentoring content to organizational goals (for example team members may do a lunchtime debrief following each mentoring session)
- Promoting the 2-day Civic Media Festival
- Providing feedback on learning and remaining gaps

Mentoring sessions will be held at least twice a month and will be conducted in English. Each session will last an hour and will be led either by Christine Prefontaine (from TASCHA) or Eric Barrett (from JumpStart Georgia). Other experts may also be brought in to contribute, as available and as needed.

BOX 1: POTENTIAL MENTORING & RESOURCE KIT TOPICS

The following topics may be included in the resource kit and deepened during mentorship and in-person skills-building activities. These topics are directly related to each of TASCHA's key recommendations (listed below each section under the orange "TACHA content and support" header). The following is a summary, organized by topic:

High-level ideas

- Assessing the Networked Nonprofit model
- Weaving your network, reaching out to free agents
- Innovation spaces

Strategy

- How to create a useful strategy, including design thinking, guerrilla ethnography, and developing a theory of change
- Bits to atoms, and back again (integrating social media and offline actions)
- Tactical possibilities: Tested and emerging advocacy tactics (highlighting resources like the Meta-Activism project's Civil Resistance 2.0, an update of Gene Sharp's 198 Non-Violent Methods list)

Social media and other ICT tools

- Advanced civic media tools
- Using WordPress to power your organization's website
- Facebook for advocacy, including benefits and risks

Content and data

- Content for change — Creating and communicating edible evidence to advance public policy analysis and advocacy (information design, creating data visualizations and other content "chunks", and sharing them via social media, blogs, podcasts, and video)
- Documenting and sharing tactics as a business development strategy

Privacy and security

- Maintaining control of your digital identity and assets
- Getting the most out of Facebook and other closed ("walled garden") and proprietary technologies while mitigating issues related to privacy, security, data ownership and control, and institutional memory

Practical templates

- Communications strategy
- Social media strategy templates
- Communications Policies & Guidelines
- Communications Tracker

A publicly visible Google Hangout (or similar real-time video conference platform) will be used to conduct the sessions and team members will connect via a private email group in between sessions. Hangouts will be recorded and posted to the resource kit, along with supporting materials — so others can benefit from what we're learning. Some sessions may be conducted face-to-face.

Mentoring sessions will begin by surfacing goals and outlining the topic selection process. Potential topics include:

- Topics emerging from the assessment report (summarized in Box 1, above), organizational needs, and our recommendations
- Introducing change in your organization (new processes, new practices)
- Organizing and facilitating an unconference-style event
- Data-driven public policy analysis and advocacy: data acquisition/exploration/visualization, distilling your message into edible evidence

In this way, participants will spend time learning, practicing, doing the work of bringing new skills and approaches back to their respective CSOs, organizing an event, and creating visualizations that support their work.

Civic Media Resource Kit

TASCHA will create a collection of resources curated for the members of the mentoring team. The kit will be publicly available and we will privilege open resources (according to the Open Knowledge Foundation's definition). The kit may also include source code, datasets, and links to Google Hangout videos.

Civic Media Festival

Deliver a two-day "festival" (a modified unconference format modeled after the successful Mozilla Festival). The mentoring team would act as key co-organizers and co-facilitators, with Christine Prefontaine providing leadership. Sessions would be suggested in advance and documented using Lanyrd, a social conference tool.⁵

⁵ See example for a digital journalism session, note how resources were added after the session: <http://lanyrd.com/2012/mozilla-festival/syqcp/>

Training: creating data-driven visualizations to advance public policy analysis and advocacy

TASCHA will work with team members to identify an issue that they will advance via data acquisition (survey, screen scraping, crowdsourcing, etc.), exploration, and visualization. This process will:

- Advance data-driven debate, versus discourse driven by rumors
- Create “edible evidence” — something people want to examine and share, that raises awareness about an issue in a way that they can take in
- Distill organizational messages on key topics
- Create a tangible, useful output while building skills

The 2-day training would be led by JumpStart Georgia on April 23 and 24, shortly after the festival.

Georgia Civil Society 2.0

Project overview

How are Georgian civil society organizations using social media to engage citizens, spark change, and shift public policy? *Georgia Civil Society 2.0* is an action research project that assesses needs and practices, delivers training and resources, and weaves networks. The project focuses specifically on social media and other ICT tools, data mapping and visualization, and information design to improve policy analysis and advocacy.

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TASCHA's role and project team

Georgia Civil Society 2.0 was initiated by the East-West Management Institute (EWMI). EWMI contracted with the Technology & Social Change Group (TASCHA), at the University of Washington Information School, to deliver short-term technical assistance in two phases. Phase 1 included (1) a rapid assessment of selected CSO needs for advanced social media and ICT tools to achieve specific goals (e.g., election monitoring), and (2) a Training of Trainers workshop in advanced ICT tools for information dissemination and advocacy. The outcome of these activities would then inform Phase 2 project activities, originally envisioned as the delivery of customized technical assistance and training modules, and the development of advanced civic media tools.

Purpose of the rapid assessment

The purpose of the rapid assessment was to get acquainted with nine CSOs' research and advocacy programs, focusing on:

- Organizational culture
- Communications materials and activities typically produced
- How strategies/campaigns are developed and implemented (listening/research practices, theory of change, project management)
- Use of ICT tools (social media, cloud services, and civic technologies), for advocacy as well as for coordination or administration
- Concerns and practices around privacy and security
- Needs and interest to for further training, technical assistance, or ICT implementation

This report documents the activities, finding and recommendations, and next steps from the rapid assessment, as well as training and other activities conducted from 14–22 May 2012.

Activities

This is the first *Georgia Civil Society 2.0* project report. It covers five activities: a rapid assessment, a desk review, trainings, G-PAC website feedback, and additional meetings.

1. Rapid assessment

Christine Prefontaine (TASCHA) and Salome Mekhuzla (EWMI) conducted nine interviews with CSOs between 14–22 May 2012 (Mark West, from EWMI, assisted with the first two interviews). Each meeting was about an hour long, and included three or four representatives. The assessment team also asked about individual information-seeking habits and use of social media and other ICT tools. See Appendix 1 for a summary of interview questions.

Results are presented in the findings and recommendations section.

2. Desk review

To complement the interviews, Christine Prefontaine (TASCHA) also conducted a desk review, looking at:

- Attitudes and behaviors related to NGOs and civic participation
- The Georgian media environment, blogosphere, and public access landscape
- Other organizations and donors working in the Georgian ICT, new media, and civic technology spaces, including research groups and projects (both current and past, Georgian and international)
- New digital advocacy literature

Sources consulted are listed in the References section.

3. Trainings

Training of trainers

Christine Prefontaine (TASCHA) delivered a Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop for IREX/G-MEDIA project bloggers and journalists. The training included a three-hour planning session and a full-day workshop.

Prior to the training participants provided their resumes and five of the seven participants completed a short survey about their personal and professional use of social media, experience with mapping or data tracking tools, and their main objective for attending the training. Curriculum development, teaching methods, upcoming trends, experiences using multimedia content-creation tools, mapping, web development, and developing social media strategy emerged as priorities.

It was challenging to review participants' online presence because of language barriers and because a lot of sharing, blogging, and discussion has moved to Facebook and away from platforms like Blogger or WordPress.

At the planning meeting, participants mapped [what they're good at](#), what they've [already created](#) that can be shared and used for training, [what they need](#), and [stories and experiences](#). The rationale for this was to strengthen knowledge-sharing ties between participants and to model participatory practices.

A presentation summarizing the training is [available for download](#).

Reflections:

- Some participants appreciated co-designing the training, as well as spending time creating rather than just sitting and listening.
- A more thorough review of participants' online presence with a Georgian-speaking partner, looking especially at Facebook content, would provide a better sense of which participants blog, what topics they cover, and what training should focus on. This would also help select participants with the same learning objectives.

Social media training for regional CSOs

At the request of G-PAC, Christine Prefontaine (TASCHA) added an informal, half-day training for regional CSOs to the project deliverables. The training was conducted in English with consecutive translation. [Download the training presentation](#).

4. G-PAC website feedback

While conducting the assessment interviews, TASCHA was also asked to provide feedback on the G-PAC website.

Ms Prefontaine found that the site was designed according to the project's internal logic — not based on user needs. To provide this feedback, she conducted an impromptu session on the basics of user experience and information architecture. Participants identified who is important to the project, the tasks they might need to accomplish when visiting the site, and the content chunks that would meet those needs.⁶ Based on this, the content was organized into an alternate information architecture.

Ms Prefontaine also noted that the site is run with a custom content management system. She recommended switching to WordPress and investing in the Georgian open-source developer community. (This does not need to mean switching vendors, but rather helping them to get up to speed on WordPress or similar open-source content management systems — new skills they can use to sell services both locally and internationally.) The idea is that more Georgian coders connected to a vibrant, global community with open-source values contributes to strengthening civil society.

The outcome was knowledge transfer to the local G-PAC team, and specific recommendations to improve the G-PAC website. [Photos of the session are available online.](#)

5. Additional meetings

Additional meetings were also held with representatives from government and the private sector to learn more about ICT access and digital literacy initiatives, ISPs, and the F/OSS community.

⁶ Generally content chunks are modular pieces of text with a pre-defined word limit. So for each team member, for example, an organization can create a bio in varying lengths. The most useful are generally 130 characters, 30 words, and 100 words. Sometimes content chunks can be video, audio, or images, or a multimedia.

6. Additional activities and early results

As part of the training, and in response to additional requests from G-PAC, TASCHA produced several early deliverables:

- Facebook engagement questions (in English and Georgian)
- Online [Digital Advocacy Quickstart Guide](#)
- Subtitled a TacticalTech video — "[Facebook: A dangerous dance with your privacy](#)" — into Georgian

In addition, a blog posted to the Telecentre-Europe community and the TASCHA website, and the discussions that ensued with the Public Service Development Agency, ended up creating connections that contributed significantly to Beyond Access initiative's Georgia Development Lab pilot project (funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, implemented by IREX). As part of this, a Stakeholder Forum and a Librarians Forum were held the week of January 21, 2013, leading to agreements to start developing a project design.

Findings and recommendations

Under each section below you'll note up to three headings. The first two are recommendations for CSOs and for the G-PAC project. The third highlights the content and support that TASCHA could provide as part of this project.

Few organizations have a strategy that documents decisions and guides implementation, learning, and reporting

Some CSOs reported having a communication strategy, however few provided details when probed about methods used to learn about target audiences. There were also indications that strategy is divorced from day-to-day work (a problem not at all unique to the Georgian context).

Developing, implementing, and reporting on a **social media strategy** may provide an opportunity for organizations to hone skills that can be transferred to other contexts. For example, creating a social media strategy requires:

- Developing concise organizational (or project) descriptions, a process that usually sparks discussions about broader strategic or organizational decisions (this will be discussed more in the following section)
- Establishing systems to create and manage a consistent identity across a range of media and services
- Identifying key players and issues in a space, and establishing a “listening dashboard” to monitor them
- Building and nurturing a network, which implies listening and figuring out what key stakeholders want
- Identifying and using analytics to report on and improve strategy

Implementing a social media strategy implies making decisions like which RSS reader to use, whose feeds to read, and which issues to monitor. CSOs would therefore have to establish practices and define roles and responsibilities: Who will read the feeds? What happens when something significant pops up on a Google Alert? How are comments managed?

This process would provide low-cost, hands-on practice conducting stakeholder analyses, audience/user research, and evaluation, as well as setting up business processes. CSOs can start by developing a strategy for one platform, such as Facebook, and then add other platforms and tools incrementally. These could then be linked “up” to broader organizational goals and objectives.

Recommendations for civil society organizations

Develop a Facebook strategy

Develop a Facebook strategy, starting with the basics: improving the look and feel of the organization’s start page and updating “About” content and linking it to your website. Then you can start experimenting: review available apps and try out a few; make a list of topics, create an editorial calendar, and assign writers; begin reviewing Facebook Insights page and think about what metrics you want to track and why.

After you’ve used Facebook for a while start to document how you’re working and the decisions you’ve made (where appropriate, in a **Communications Policies & Guidelines** document). This is the basis of your strategy. You can expand it by adding additional channels and audience profiles. [More guidelines available online.](#)

Conduct ongoing audience research

Good strategy is based on empathy — understanding your audience’s feelings, needs, and concerns — and tailoring your choices accordingly. While it is expensive to conduct research, we can be “guerrilla ethnographers” — using every opportunity to observe and learn about key audiences.⁷ We can complement this by exploring existing datasets and information sources, and we can also track use of the content we produce.

Information sources include:

- Facebook Insights
- Analytics from email campaigns when sent with services like Campaign Monitor or Mail Chimp

⁷ *Guerrilla ethnography* is a quick way to get a sense of an audience — and experiences — through direct observation in a public place: in the street, on public transport, at community gatherings, or in shops, cafes, and bars. There’s is no informed consent, the researcher does not identify themselves as such, and this method is not systematic or representative. It’s useful for identifying possible needs, values, constraints. Guerrilla ethnography is often accompanied by photographs of people, interactions, and the physical environment. (Example: <http://platingthebird.tumblr.com/post/219287521/always-in-the-field-guerilla-ethnography-for>)

- ACT.ge releases survey results as part of its newsletters (it may also be possible to suggest survey topics to ACT, or have them partner with a CSO, perhaps as part of their citizenship activities)
- Top.ge analytics — users can learn, for example, that on June 7, 2012, almost all — 152 of 160 — of the unique visitors to “[It Affects You Too!](#)” campaign website were referred by Facebook, and that the top three other websites they visited were InterPressNews.ge (48%), Palitrav.ge (38%), and MyVideo.ge (38%)
- The [online data analysis application](#) for the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRRC); this tool allows visitors to create basic figures using sources from a variety of public datasets
- Research sponsored by other organizations and donors

Articulate your theory of change

The ability to articulate how change happens contributes to strategic choices and more effective advocacy efforts. It lays out a path, allowing for discussions about what will be done at each state. It also allows for reflection, critique, and adjustments.

Not all CSOs were asked about their theory of change, and assessment could not glean much from the allotted interview time. Yet those who responded painted a consistent picture: *We raise awareness, and if we’re successful then mainstream TV covers our issue. Then the government is ready to talk, and we can start meeting with them to discuss policy.* All of the CSOs mentioned that Georgian media is very polarized, so if the larger, TV stations (Rustavi 2, Imedi — considered by all CSOs to be pro-government) cover an issue then perhaps this indicates the government’s readiness to put it on the agenda, creating a window for debate and change. A few of the CSOs also mentioned reaching out to international actors to encourage them to pressure the government, for example by making a public statement. This process is outlined in Figure 1, with the main tactics mentioned by CSOs.

Figure 1: Theory of change emerging from discussions with CSOs



Recommendations for G-PAC

Incorporate new media strategic planning modules and resources into existing efforts to professionalize Georgian CSOs

G-PAC already provides tailored training and technical assistance to selected organizations as part of its efforts to develop civil society capacity and professionalize Georgian CSOs. TASCHA content and support products (listed directly below) related to new media strategic planning can be used to augment training and mentoring — advancing G-PAC’s goal to foster unique ideas and increase organizational efficiency.

TASCHA content and support

- How to create a useful strategy, including developing a theory of change and providing communications and social media strategy templates
- Facebook for advocacy, including benefits and risks
- Bits to atoms, and back again (integrating social media and offline actions)
- Design thinking and guerrilla ethnography
- Tactical possibilities: Tested and emerging advocacy tactics (highlighting resources like the Meta-Activism project’s [Civil Resistance 2.0](#), an update of Gene Sharp’s 198 *Non-Violent Methods* list)
- Documenting and sharing tactics as a business development strategy

Most CSOs are using social media as a broadcast communication channel, the next step is to use it to power social networks for social change

CSOs are using social media and other ICT tools as part of their advocacy efforts. Information is disseminated and received mostly via email clients and Facebook. YouTube is widely used, and early adopters are starting to experiment with Scribd, Flickr, and Twitter. Creating and reading stand-alone blogs is low (mostly abandoned for Facebook), as is the use of RSS feeds or Google Alerts. One CSO has implemented a Fix My Street install, another uses Dropbox to share files, and another Moodle to manage online learning. There is also some awareness of Ushahidi. Wikipedia was not mentioned.

In terms of organizational websites, some organizations use Facebook as their main home on the web. TASCHA also found that many CSO’s websites are built using

custom code, which typically implies a loss of flexibility and control, and a more onerous and costly updating process. Switching to an open content management system, such as WordPress (which is easy to use and well-documented), may reduce development and maintenance costs and ensure better data backups and control. Organizational websites could also benefit from more attention to user experience (better information architecture, better design, and user testing to validate choices).

Use of social media can be characterized as official, one-way broadcasting focused on informing. This is a good starting point — a base that can be strengthened with sharper, more consistent, and more engaging organizational profiles, as well as cross-promotion across other media.

The next step would be for CSOs to assess the **Networked Nonprofit** model (Kanter & Fine, 2010, see excerpt below) to assess whether the approach and associated social media practices fit with their organizational mission and objectives. If so, how might they be integrated and implemented — in whole or in part?

The Networked Nonprofit model aligns with thinking about the Internet and network effects in the context of political change — see Karpf, 2012, and especially [this video of Yochai Benkler](#) (2012) explaining how an ecosystem of organizations and free agents were able to shift public policy in the United States.

The model also builds on experiences with organizing and using civil society networks to shape public policy (Ashman et al., 2005, p.8):

A shared premise of many civil society programs and projects is that effective civil society organizations are essential backbones of thriving communities and countries. They make vital contributions to citizens' democratic rights and well-being by giving voice to citizen interests and providing services where they are needed. Civil society organizations are recognized globally for their success in shaping public policy, keeping government accountable, transforming conflict and promoting peace, defending human rights and ensuring that citizens have access to basic services.

Networks of civil society organizations, when successful, enable citizens to amplify their voices and achieve greater influence and impacts in policy, democratic governance and social change.

For more on this topic see Creech & Willard, 2001; Creech & Ramji, 2004; Plastrik & Talyor, 2004; Waring, Cwik, & Burzynski, 2002; and VeneKlasen, 2005)

CSOs that decide to adopt networked practices should do so as part of their longer-term strategic planning and organizational development efforts. Communications

choices always reflect organizational health, culture, and strategy — this is especially true with social media. Aspiration Technology has learned the same lesson in their work with helping social justice organizations to create and implement technology strategies. They note that “**technology challenges are organizational development opportunities in disguise**” and explain that:

*Designing and redesigning web sites, developing online communications strategies, deciding who gets to blog, Tweet, and update social network status: these objectives tease out underlying issues of how an organization represents its work, talks about itself, and empowers its staff and allies to convey the same. ...Organizations should be prepared to do heavy lifting in challenging existing process (and/or the lack thereof) and associated control dynamics, and should treat technology engagements as opportunities to move to more transparent and accountable ways of doing business, communicating, and affecting social change.*⁸

Recommendations for civil society organizations

Assess the Networked Nonprofit model

Assess the Networked Nonprofit model and determine if/how it could work for your organization, either in whole or in part. The following is an excerpt from Chapter 1:

Networked Nonprofits are simple and transparent organizations. They are easy for outsiders to get in and insiders to get out. They engage people to shape and share their work in order to raise awareness of social issues, organize communities to provide services or advocate for legislation.

...Networked Nonprofits know their organizations are part of a much larger ecosystem of organizations and individuals that are all incredible resources for their efforts.

Networked Nonprofits are not afraid to lose control of their programs and services, their logos and branding, messages and messengers because they know that in return they will receive the goodwill and passion of many people working on their behalf. Working this way enables these organizations to reach many more people less expensively than they ever could be working largely alone.

⁸ Aspiration’s manifesto is a short, must-read document full of valuable learning: <http://www.aspirationtech.org/publications/manifesto>

...But organizations are not the only entities powering social change in this new, connected world. Individuals — we call them free agents — combine their social media savvy with their passion for social causes to accomplish amazing things. Free agents' facility with social media gives them the power and tools that only organizations had just a few years ago.

... **Social Media Powers Social Networks for Social Change.** When we discuss this equation with people working within nonprofit organizations, they sometimes miss the operative word: social. Their focus is on the gadgetry when it should be on embracing social ways of behaving. This distinction is key not only to using social media, but also to effecting social change.

One constant in life is that human beings want and need to connect with one another in meaningful ways. These connections are made through social networks that are the conduits for the conversations that power social change. The job of nonprofit organizations is to catalyze and manage those conversations.

— Kanter & Fine, 2001, *The Networked Nonprofit*

In their book, *Measuring the Networked Nonprofit* (2012), Beth Kanter and KD Paine propose three primary social media themes (internal, external, and impact), provide definitions and indicators for each, and lay out a rubric to assess social media use and set priorities. Since this rubric provides a detailed view of the Networked Nonprofit model (and specifically its implications on organizational culture and structure), CSOs can *use it to assess the model itself*. It also provides a view into Kanter and Paine's thinking about how social media advances networked practices.⁹

Create a *Communications Policies & Guidelines* document

Create a **Communications Policies & Guidelines** document in an online format (such as a Googledoc or wiki, so it's always up to date). The first draft should simply list current practices and specifications, and outline social media policies (use the **Policy Tool for Social Media**, available at socialmedia.policytool.net).¹⁰ Let staff know that everyone is in learning mode — this means that there will be experimentation, practices will

⁹ A PowerPoint summary of the rubric is available at <http://www.slideshare.net/kanter/cwrf-assessment-frameworks>.

¹⁰ It's helpful when specifications include reference information, such as the optimal size for website images.

emerge iteratively, and any missteps or mistakes are opportunities to update and clarify.

Set up a Communications Tracker

Set up a **Communications Tracker** to organize your accounts and facilitate a consistent digital identity. This is a simple spreadsheet with:

- 140-character, 30-word, and 100-word organizational descriptions
- Links to visual files (avatars, buttons, background images)
- All social media and cloud service accounts, URLs, organizational user names, and associated notes

Start creating content and using social media regularly

Create and share content in the way that fits for you: blog, post photos, ask questions or post comments on Facebook, record and share conversations on topics that interest you (podcasting). As Kanter and Fine (2010) note: “There is no other way to fully understand the power of using social media to connect friends and strangers with common interests than to experience it personally. In other words: Social media use is a contact sport, not a spectator sport.”

Favor established and well-supported open-source solutions

Avoid custom software whenever you can. Favor established open-source solutions with a vibrant user and developer community, such as WordPress for websites. Encourage your developer to explore and learn to use these solutions — it will pay off in the long run. Issues with custom solutions include:

- **Harder to update** — sometimes vendors will even charge you to make small changes that on an open system you could easily make yourself.
- **Difficult to switch vendors.** If issues arise, it's hard to switch because that implies switching software. Related to this: assuming it's a dynamic site, your data may be in a format that is complicated and costly to import into another system. Also it's likely that you will need to request data exports, which means you'll have less control over your data (you can export anytime with WordPress).
- **Less support, less updates and fixes.** An open platform like WordPress has a global community behind it. So bugs are often easy to fix and software is updated frequently. It's a community/movement, not just the efforts of one person.

Recommendations for G-PAC

Raise awareness about the Networked Nonprofit model

G-PAC could translate the first chapter of *The Networked Nonprofit* into Georgian (the authors make it available under a Creative Commons license) and promote it among grantees.

TASCHA content and support

- Assessing and implementing the Networked Nonprofit model
- *Communications Policies & Guidelines* template
- *Communications Tracker* template
- Using WordPress to power your organization’s website
- Advanced civic media tools

Few apparent connections between CSOs and free agents

It did not appear from CSOs, or from the bloggers who attended the training, that there are efforts to use “free agents” — independent, networked professionals, content creators, and activists — to spread advocacy messages or translate research findings and NGO-speak into plain language (note however that **JumpStart Georgia** is an organization that is starting to offer these types of services). Free agents can be valuable infomediaries: processing nuanced content, making it more accessible to a broader audience, and connecting it to current realities. Certainly this happens serendipitously through existing networks, however intentionally incorporating it into institutional strategy and practice is likely to pay off.

Recommendations for civil society organizations

Nurture relationships with free agents

Identify free agents and strengthen your connections with them. Ways to do this might include:

- Hold network mapping events or sessions within events: identify bloggers, Facebook influencers, media outlets, CSOs, researchers, international NGOs,

projects, open-source developers / technologists, etc. (could be done as a series, on a per-issue basis)

- Once identified, nurture relationships with free agents — reaching out online (via email or social media messages, comments, “likes”, etc.) as well as offline (provide “hotdesks” so they can work from your offices — creating a mini innovation space, invite them to your events, organize activities / events specifically for them, attend events where they are likely to congregate, etc.)

Recommendations for G-PAC

Weave the network: Advance initiatives that connect CSOs and free agents

As part of the *Georgia Civil Society 2.0* project, organize an “Open Georgia” event and include as part of that (the day before) a workshop to advance “unconference” and other “open space technology” logistics and facilitation skills. G-PAC can also co-sponsor or promote others’ efforts to network free agents and CSOs as they emerge, including encourage/supporting grantee participation. Another key way to connect CSOs and free agents is to invest in innovation spaces, discussed below.

Support or create programs that embed free agents

Design programs that temporarily embed journalists or free agents into organizations so that both can practice creating “[edible evidence](#)” — content that can easily spread through social media and lead to more in-depth discussion and engagement (along the same lines as the Knight-Mozilla Open News project that embeds developers into newsrooms, see [MozillaOpenNews.org](#)).

TASCHA content and support

- Content for change — Creating and communicating edible evidence (information design, creating data visualizations and other content chunks, and sharing them via blogs, podcasts, and video)
- Weaving your network: The role of infomediaries and free agents in advocacy
- As they develop, raise awareness about innovation spaces and spark ideas and discussion about how CSOs might use them

CSOs are active Facebook users, but unaware of limitations and risks of using proprietary or closed platforms

The “Facebook-o-sphere”

In Georgia, **Facebook** is more than a social network. It is an alternate Internet: an information source, a blogging platform, a discussion forum, and often CSOs’ only or active digital home — replacing or eclipsing their website. In Tbilisi, 70% of Internet users reported using social networking sites as their primary online activity, while less than 25% report sending/receiving email, which suggests that it has become a messaging platform, replacing email clients. Many people reported keeping a Facebook window open throughout the day.

According to Facebook, there are now 780,080 Facebook accounts in Georgia, roughly 18% of the population. TASCHA’s limited review of Georgian blogs and Facebook indicates that there has been a shift away from using open blogging platforms, like Blogger or WordPress, toward Facebook. Facebook also provides group organizing features: Bloggroll.ge, a donor-funded aggregator of Georgian blogs launched in October 2009, but after two years it disbanded due to technical and financial problems.¹¹ The [Georgian bloggers group on Facebook](#), however, has more than 800 members. Also some progressive thinkers may now be blogging on *Liberali.ge*, rather than on their own websites.

Odnoklassniki.ru, a Russian-language network, is the fifth most popular website in Georgia. It is losing ground among the liberal elite in Tbilisi, but still popular with older users, and for those in the regions who have Internet access (see Sidorenko, 2010, p.8–9).¹²

Forum.ge is another important platform. Top.ge ranks the Tbilisi section as one of the most-visited sites in Georgia. CSOs reported using Forum.ge as an information source, as well as to identify supporters. External analysts have noted that it has more political

¹¹ Sources:

<http://netprophet.tol.org/2011/08/19/blogging-in-georgia/>

<http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/bijan-kafi/forums-and-flame-wars-in-georgia>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/geobloggers/members/> (There were 805 members as of June 26, 2012. Most recent member joined three weeks prior.)

¹² According to *The Commercial*, President Saakashvili has stated that that Odnoklassniki.ru “was created by FSB in order to get informed about the clichés of the people living in the post Soviet Union countries”, that the rise of Facebook shows that Georgia is “no longer a post Soviet mentality country” and that “It’s very important that Georgians get actively involved in social media. It’s the battlefield of today’s ideological fight.” (November 2011)

content. Notably, it was the only Georgian website blocked by the government in August 2008 (Sidorenko, 2010, p.8–9). Kafi (April 2010) notes that the Forum.ge’s format appeals to Georgians:

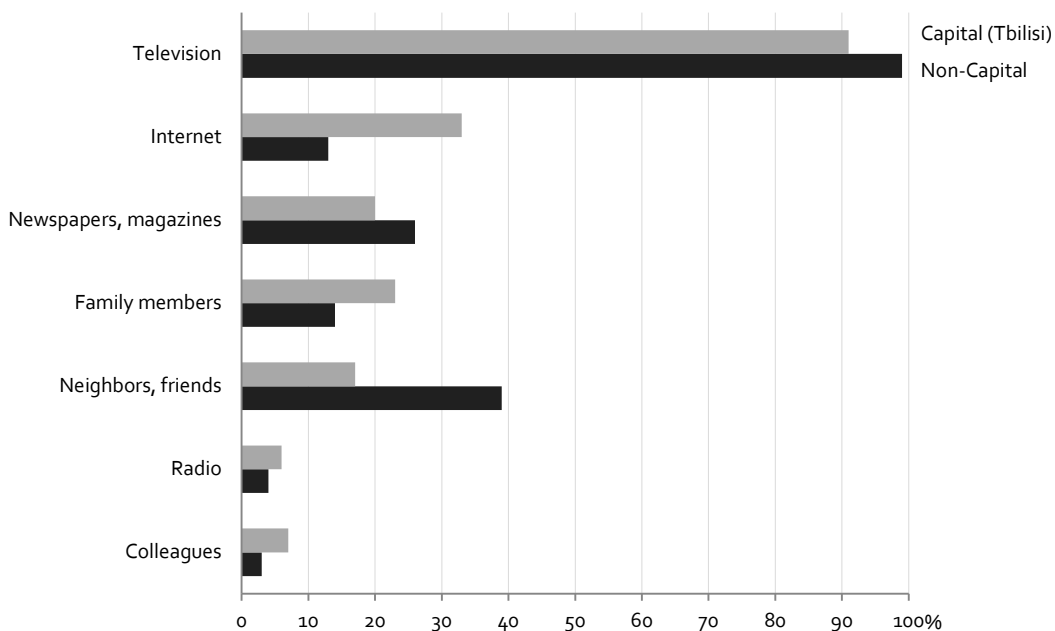
...places like Forum.ge are still the preferred means for gathering and exchanging news because they best meet people’s information needs and preferred mode of conversation. Forum.ge consistently proves it is an extraordinarily socially powerful institution, as not only Tbilisi’s former mayor had to learn. This influence extends to daily life: search for a Georgian term on Google Georgia and an entry on Forum.ge is likely to spring up, directing ordinary traffic to its boards.

It’s important to contextualize the use of Facebook, Odnoklassniki.ru, and Forum.ge. The following are findings from an analysis of existing data about information-seeking habits, online activities, and differences between rural and urban Internet use. These findings are consistent with what CSOs and others reported during interviews.

Sources of information about current events

Where do people go for information about current events? Combining reported primary and secondary information sources about current events from CRRC’s 2011 Media Survey (see Figure 2) reveals that television is the primary source for 99% of people outside of Tbilisi, and 91% in Tbilisi. After that, the Internet is a key source in Tbilisi, but outside the capital neighbors and friends are more important.

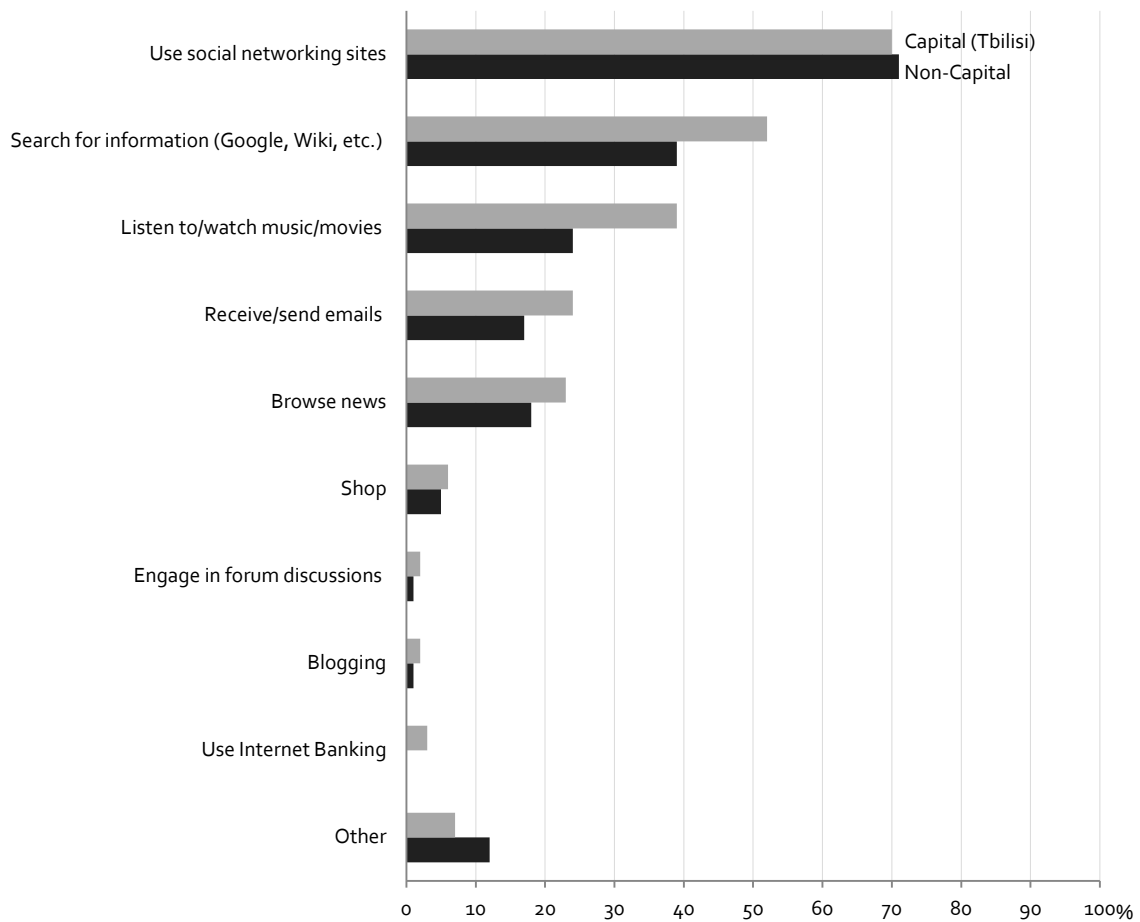
Figure 2: Sources of information about current events, by settlement type



Most frequent activities while online

Once on the Internet, people are mostly using social networking sites, searching for information, and listening to music or watching movies, as seen in Figure 3.¹³ Only 2% of respondents in Tbilisi reported spending time blogging or engaging in forum discussions. Given how people use Facebook, however, these findings should be interpreted carefully: Facebook is also a platform for messaging, getting news, engaging in commentary and debate, and sharing user-curated and user-produced content.

Figure 3: Most frequent activities while browsing the Internet, by settlement type

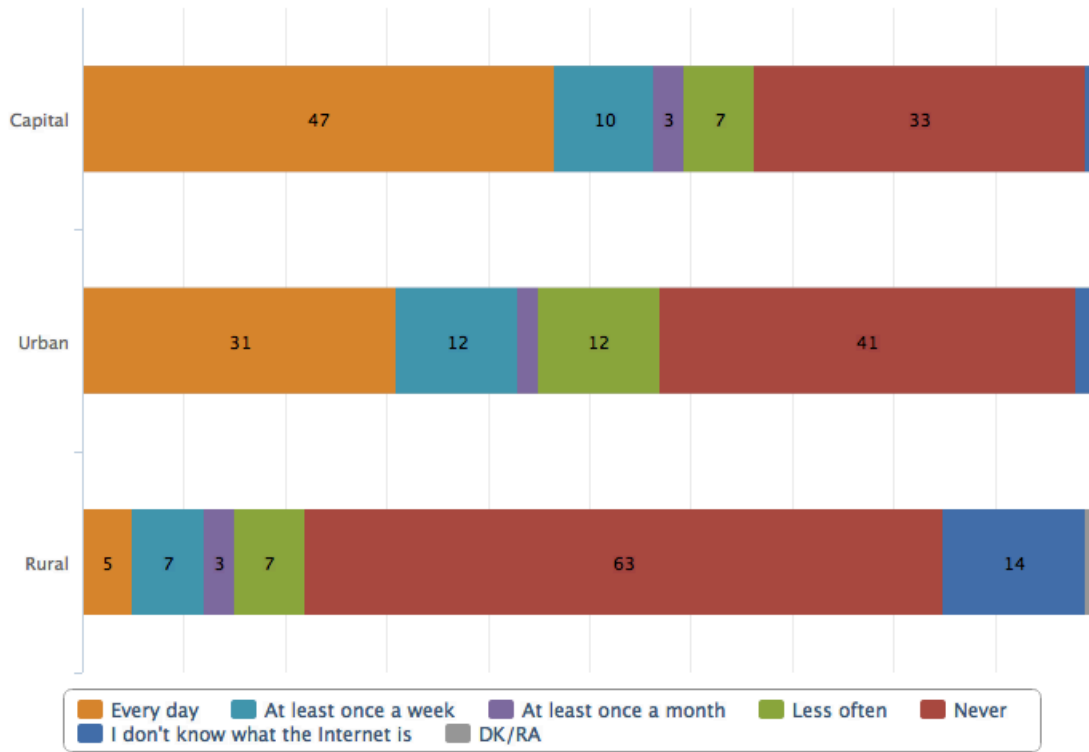


¹³ Source: The Caucasus Research Resource Centers, 2011 Georgia Media Survey.

A rural-urban split

Finally, there is a significant urban-rural split. As one observer pointed out (see Figure 3), roughly 77% of the people in rural areas do not have access to Internet (including 14% who do not know what the Internet is).¹⁴

Figure 4: Frequency of Internet usage, by settlement type



Georgians appear to discuss political and social issues online

Over the course of the assessment, interviewees and others reported that Georgians shy away from online political debate because of the conflict and upheaval they have experienced over the last decade. This was also reflected in the literature: “People are overwhelmed with political discussions in their social circles, in the media (mostly on TV). Surveys show that the Internet audience is not interested in social-political issues — that’s why there’s not a single blog about political life” (Paitchadze, 2012, p.48-49).

¹⁴ The Caucasus Research Resource Centers, 2011 Caucasus Barometer.

Likewise, the [Beyond Access](#) initiative's backgrounder on public access to information in Georgia states that "Internet users in general do not exchange or disseminate socially or politically important information. Mainly private information and entertainment is exchanged through the net." (Beyond Access, June 2012).

TASCHA's assessment did not support these views. On Facebook, for example, there appears to be a significant amount of social and political content — mixed in with the usual entertainment and social chatter. Vincent Boivin, a researcher formerly with Geowell Research, estimates that 20 to 30% of Georgian Facebook posts are about politics, international news, or global issues (personal communication, June 19, 2012). Both Boivin and Paitchadze note the increased use of Facebook by networked, politicized elites:

...there is a large number of people who run discussion groups and engage into communication on Facebook — they actively comment recent events, share links and information sources. Liberals, libertarians, political activists — this is the main core of this group. (Paitchadze, 2012, p.48-49)

For example, Giorgi Kikonishvili, 23, launched "Soliteri's Blog" (solitme.wordpress.com) in June 2010. Some of his content was deeply political, this is from a post entitled [First, they came for ... someone!](#):

We live in the country, where the saying "someone's plague, not my trouble" is nearly the most popular wallpaper for the desktops. For the last four months IDPs have been protesting the inhuman living conditions in the yard of the Ministry of IDPs, Accommodation and Refugees, living in the tents, mostly starving and fully frozen by the cold winter weather. In the age of the internet and advanced mass communication tools it took exactly four months — for us — young people, to get the information about these protests. Well, this definitely IS a shame, but I strongly believe, we can do something to change current situation, even our activism is somehow late, but I think it's promising.

Two Georgian students urgently coordinated a special support group on Facebook called "Spend a Night with IDPs in Tent." 3-4 activists go to the tents every night, spend night with them, talking about their problems, supplying foods, water, firewood and all the things needed. At the same time they keep on blogging and informing society. The solidarity group already has over 400 followers on Facebook — that's fantastic and can be respectively considered as the beginning of [in the future] strong Georgian social activism and civil journalism, initiated not by NGOs, institutions or organizations, but by the free civilians themselves.

The blog is still online, but it hasn't been updated since May 2011. Now he's blogging on *Liberali.ge* and active on Facebook.¹⁵

Giorgi Kikonishvili's Facebook content combines posts on Deep Purple, pictures of cute cats, and social and political issues. And it appears that people engage with his content: On June 17th he shared "[Utopia of Equality](#)" — a blog by [Lela Rekhviashvili on *Liberali*](#) — and subsequently received 284 Facebook comments in 24 hours. (The substance of which is unclear without a Georgian translator.) There were over a dozen more comments on the *Liberali* website, which garnered an additional 400+ Facebook likes.

The fact that this content could be retrieved from Giorgi's profile without "friending" him points to another finding: Georgians appear to be completely unaware or unconcerned with privacy or security issues — on a personal level as well as on an organizational level.

Nurturing the information commons: Increasing access and diversity

To sum up: In Georgia there is a polarized media landscape with a handful of television channels acting as the main source for information about current events. For those with access (predominantly people living in Tbilisi), however, the Internet is emerging as an alternate source. Facebook figures prominently in this picture, as an information source, email client, blogging platform, and a forum for vibrant social and political discussions. CSOs recognize this and many use Facebook as their primary digital home, gaining exposure and audience but losing control over their online identity, content, and data.¹⁶

In the context of advancing civic engagement and policy alternatives a few ideas emerge:

- Getting more people online, especially outside of Tbilisi, may improve information/media diversity
- If people access information via public access venues, such as libraries or telecentres, there may be opportunities to promote alternate sources of information and stimulate facilitate debate and engagement
- Georgian Facebook use is high, so CSOs should understand it and use it to meet their goals

¹⁵ See <http://liberali.ge/blogs/giorgi-kikonishvili>

¹⁶ See Howard, 2012. This is but one critique among many. Allen Gunn at Aspiration Technology is a good resource about Facebook data, security, and privacy issues.

- Media diversity is important, but so is “digital diversity” — not having all of one’s eggs in the Facebook basket (eggs = data, a subset of which is content)

Recommendations for civil society organizations

Begin with Facebook...

CSOs efforts should initially focus on Facebook; that’s where their audience is. That said, Facebook raises concerns related to:

- Privacy
- Security
- Data ownership and control
- Institutional memory

... but maintain control of your digital identity and assets

Aspiration Technology’s [manifesto](#) includes critical observations for CSOs looking to leverage technology for advocacy. First, **“What has worked offline for generations still deeply informs what works best overall.** Technology has not changed the game so much as it has changed the process of winning... Tech fetishism is never a substitute for great organizing.” Second, **“Nonprofits should center their technology strategy and resource allocation around the creation and curation of data.”**

Aspiration explains: Data is each organization’s digital power. Technology is simply a vessel to create, maintain, and carry data into the future. Data will outlive technology. Proprietary technologies can be like a cage that traps that power — limiting options and control over operations and processes.

Closed and proprietary technologies (walled gardens) decrease flexibility, charge ongoing fees, and dictate specific licensing, workflow, and data formats.

Activists have figured out ways to use closed and proprietary solutions for advocacy — Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google Apps. The challenge is to get really good at Facebook while ensuring that CSOs are not dependent on it, and that systems are established to protect and preserve organizational data (Allen Gunn, personal communication, June 19, 2012).

Aspiration suggests that organizations:

- Maintain data in open and accessible formats
- Verify portability, migration, and integration options on a regular basis
- Avoid or mitigate the use of closed and proprietary technologies

To begin, this means maintaining a website *that you own* — independent of Facebook. Your website should be your primary digital home.

Recommendations for G-PAC

Create a civic media baseline

Jenkins (2007) defines “civic media” as any use of a medium that fosters civic engagement (“medium” includes social practices and protocols, as well as technologies). It would be good to get a sense of current levels of civic content — social or political content that advances policy analysis and change. Likewise, beyond Facebook, what are the other key online spaces? *Liberali? Global Voices?* This information could inform project design, impact evaluation, and theories of change, as well as sparking tactical ideas. [Aday et. al \(2010\) provides an excellent framework](#), and recommends research methods.

TASCHA content and support

- Maintaining control of your digital identity and assets
- Advocacy in a [walled garden](#) — getting the most out of Facebook and other closed and proprietary technologies while mitigating issues related to privacy, security, data ownership and control, and institutional memory

Additional observations and opportunities

These are findings and suggestions that are worth noting, but beyond the *Georgia Civil Society 2.0* project's current scope.

Articulate the *Georgia Civil Society 2.0* project's theory of change and establish benchmarks

The *Georgia Civil Society 2.0* project is a small component of G-PAC, a large multi-year initiative with a number of inter-related goals, objectives, and benchmarks. Better articulating how *Georgia Civil Society 2.0* fits into the broader G-PAC project could provide an opportunity for EWMI and USAID to advance knowledge in the areas of digital advocacy, civic media, and social movements. Similarly, articulating the *Georgia Civil Society 2.0* component's theory of change — the process and mechanisms by which CSOs' use of social media and other ICT tools will contribute to advancing advocacy, public policy reform, and democratic development in Georgia — could improve its design and evaluation, as well as mitigate the risk of falling into a [cyber-utopian](#) mindset and misallocating resources. Currently, *Georgia Civil Society 2.0* project documents only hint at its theory of change (increased professionalism, more robust networks, messages accelerated and amplified, increased transparency and accountability).

TASCHA can assist the G-PAC team with this. Activities may include:

- **Advancing practical frameworks.** This includes articulating conceptual frameworks concerning (1) stages of organizational use of social media (sit/crawl/walk/run/fly stages proposed by Beth Kanter, Allison Fine, and Mary Joyce, or the levels and practices laid out in NPower's *Social Media Audit Matrix*) as well as (2) stages of citizen engagement.
- **Establishing goals, objectives, and benchmarks.** What's the baseline snapshot? What are the outcomes of successful online advocacy efforts? Which indicators will the project track? This could start modestly, working in parallel with CSOs as they develop their social media strategies. It could also include more involved activities, co-generating information helpful to a range of CSOs, such as mapping Facebook influentials, connections, and discussions.

- **Developing updated models of how digital advocacy works in contexts where activists start with a very different set of civic media.** In Georgia, “the blogosphere” may never exist in the same way as it does in other countries, nor play the same roles in public debate and policy processes. For example, Figure 3 suggests that Facebook may provide a “one-stop” platform. In this context, the project should carefully think through how CSOs are advised, the implications of promoting a proprietary/closed platform with data privacy and control issues, and the best focus for capacity-building efforts.

Security, maintenance, and internal tools

Georgian CSOs are advised to pay more attention to data security and maintenance. Likewise, there could be better awareness and use of internal management and collaboration tools. The rapid assessment did not reveal use of internal productivity tools that could boost organizing advocacy campaigns, such as email campaign services with tracking features, or project management, constituent relationship management (CRM), or website content management (CMS) systems.

Next steps related to security, maintenance, and internal technologies might include:

- **Training on critical issues and practices related to the cloud, online identity, backups, security, and privacy.** *Almost none* of the CSOs backed up their most valuable resource — their data — and there was no awareness about privacy issues related to using Facebook. Aspiration Technology has excellent webinars on these topics. These can be made accessible to CSOs in a variety of ways.
- **Promote the need for ongoing “gardening”.** Launching a platform is the first step. Ongoing maintenance includes thinking about the practices and resources to keep existing platforms operational (tasks, bug reporting, updates, hosting, etc.), as well as “community gardening” — integrated online-offline promotion, weeding out spammers and trolls, and nurturing participation and engagement. Editorial/content calendars, community guidelines, and training on the use of analytics to guide decision-making and report on successes are part of maintaining existing technology investments. These can be bolstered by local gatherings where CSOs can share knowledge, experiences, and practices related to their uses of civic media.
- **Raise awareness about technologies that support CSOs’ effectiveness.** As originally designed, the *Georgia Civil Society 2.0* project focused on externally visible ICT tools, such as social media and mapping. But internal management and collaboration tools also play an important role in implementing effective advocacy

campaigns — some more directly than others. Increasing awareness and use of these technologies should be done in coordination with existing capacity building efforts.

Nurture open-source developers and technologies... and a DIY ethic

Donors should invest in **building a vibrant open-source developer community and promoting the use of open technologies**, starting with the vendors currently providing services to CSOs.¹⁷ There are already Georgian developers who are aware of and interested in open-source solutions, but they don't have enough time to experiment, nor the support needed to abandon their familiar practices when delivering on client work.

Moving to open tools will give organizations more control over their data, and vendors can build skills in globally recognized systems — allowing them to eventually serve international markets. WordPress developers are in high demand and Georgia's ICT sector — *and specifically professional services* — is already recognized as **a growth sector with strong export potential** (Bolkvadze/Deloitte, 2011). (In fact, if this is successful may be issues of some newly trained developers being hired away by the private sector — good for economic growth, but likely frustrating for CSOs in the short term.)

There is another, bigger reason why donors and CSOs should nurture open technologies and approaches. Simply put: **the open-source, DIY/maker/hacker ethic is a driver of innovation and civic engagement**. The word "hacker" in this case refers to a person who engages with technology to learn, solve a problem, or simply to play. It involves pushing boundaries, perhaps breaking a few rules, trying out something new, remixing, modifying, and creating. Underlying this is a sense of agency: people who see themselves as *creators* rather than *consumers*. Hackers and makers don't shrug their shoulders and walk away from problems — they say "Let me see that!" and keep at it until they find a solution.¹⁸ *Most civic technology and open data initiatives* have emerged from this ethos and from environments that promote connection and experimentation.

¹⁷ This is becoming the norm in the United States. The White House's 2012 *Digital Government Strategy* has identified a "need for open content management solutions" and makes "open data, content, and Web APIs the new default."

¹⁸ For more on this see talks by Beth Kolko at Harvard's Berkman Center, listed in the references section. Ethan Zuckerman has a wonderful [summary of Beth's January 2012 talk](#) on his blog. Henry Jenkins and Andrew Schrock have also written on this topic, see civicpaths.uscannenberg.org.

They've emerged from collaborations between developers, designers, and civic leaders — people passionate about building stronger communities, increasing citizen engagement, and demanding good governance. Ushahidi, Alaveteli, and FixMyStreet, got their start this way.

The Open Society Institute, Transparency International, and USAID have already funded activities in this space: **they should continue**. The importance of an active, networked, open-source developer and maker community cannot be over-emphasized. Activities might include:

- Provide developers to CSOs who want to switch to WordPress, while at the same time supporting those developers with training and mentoring so they have a safe space to build skills.
- Localizing/translating WordPress and other solutions like Drupal, CiviCRM, MediaWiki, and Etherpad.
- Nurturing national and international connections, including helping Georgian developers contribute code and build their reputations (support for events like meetups and camps; training and mentoring; paid internships).
- Organizing “hackathon” or “Open Georgia” style events to connect developers with CSOs — focusing on the connections between the open Internet, open societies, and good governance (this is similar to what TASCHA/EWMI/Mozilla’s [Open Cambodia](#) event, which resulted in the localization of Firefox into Khmer)
- Supporting [innovation spaces](#) — coworking, hacker/maker spaces — places where developers, entrepreneurs, and CSOs can meet, work, and host events. This could be a cross-sector effort, since there would be benefits for the private sector as well as those with democracy, governance, and economic growth goals. *More detail follows.*

Finally, nurturing open-source communities also implies paying attention to the broader ICT ecosystem: local ISPs, infrastructure, and government telecommunications policies.

Invest in innovation spaces

A good example of an innovation spaces is the [Centre for Social Innovation](#) in Toronto (they have [open-sourced their business model](#)). **Public libraries** can also be innovation spaces — or they can have innovation-space elements integrated into their

programming and physical layout. They can also be delivery points for training and other services.

Note that Portugal's *demo.cratica.org* — a site where citizens can learn about members of parliament and read full transcripts of parliamentary sessions — was launched by Manufactura Independente, a design studio that also ran the Hacklaviva hackerspace from 2009 to 2012. Similarly, Jonathan Brun, one of the owners of Station C, a coworking space in Montreal, is a co-founder of *three* initiatives focused on government transparency and citizen engagement: Open North, Québec Ouvert, and Montréal Ouvert. [Citizen Budget](#) is one of his projects. These are but a few examples.

Investing in innovation spaces, and using them to connect CSOs and open-source developers and other free agents, will accelerate the development and use of civic media — and spark social innovation. G-PAC could select a partner to:

- Identify actors already involved in establishing/supporting innovation spaces (e.g., local developers, activists, and organizations; USAID and other development projects; the Georgian Ministry of Justice/Public Service Development Agency)
- Document prior activities to support open-source developers and technologies, so that those can be built on
- Design a strategy to strengthen the “open” ecosystem and promote a “do-it-yourself”/maker/hacker ethic

An opportunity to build on the “It Affects You Too!” brand?

The *It Affects You Too!* initiative was cited as a success by all CSOs involved. Also translated as “This Concerns You!”, the campaign aims to improve election legislation and develop a better pre-election environment, including ensuring better media coverage (Caucasus Election Watch, 2012 May).

Most significantly *It Affects You Too!* demonstrates the **networked practices** described above. It is an example of a **collaborative**, well-coordinated, multi-faceted advocacy campaign with online and offline components. It has resonated with the public, generated much interest and engagement, and received strong international support.

Tactics included:

- Website, esshengekheba.ge
- [Facebook page](#) with 2,800+ likes, as well as the purchase of Facebook ads
- Twitter account, [@esshengexeba](#)

- YouTube Channel, with 176 videos posted and 11,793 views
- [Scribd](#) account with documents in Georgian and English
- Street protests with locations coordinated and chosen in advance, and bright t-shirts and “aprons” that go over participants’ clothing, creating a sense of visual coherence — as well as good opportunities
- Leaflets
- TV advertisements, including regional channels
- A huge, well-attended launch event (200+ people), including editors, journalists, and influentials
- Targeted outreach to international contacts and embassies, and specifically to the United States Ambassador and the United Nations Representative
- Email outreach by each of the organizations to their respective contacts
- A package of legislative proposals submitted to the Parliament along with signatures collected via online and offline petitions

The campaign was initially coordinated by the Open Society Institute, who also provided a public relations professional. It functions as a coalition, bringing together Transparency International Georgia, GYLA, and ISFED, as well as some media outlets.

During the assessment, Salome Mekhuzla (EWMI) pointed out their successes, and recommended that G-PAC explore how the campaign/coalition might become a platform to address a broader range of issues. It appears they have developed a solid brand. It would be worthwhile to reach out to the coalition to see if there is interest to do more.

Appendix 1: Rapid assessment

Questions

Questions, dates, organizations are attached as an appendix; actual conversations with each CSO varied.

Team introductions

- Support Georgian NGOs use of ICT tools in advocacy and communication campaigns
- Assessment trip with 9 NGOs — to better understand your work and organizational structure, internal procedures, tactics — what you're using to advocate, communicate, and build your constituency
- Output will be a report and high-level recommendations
- There will be another trip in the late fall
- We may also be able to propose and introduce specific tools, depending on your interest and capacity

Main categories of questions

Organization: structure, goals, activities

Communications processes and practices

- Staffing
- Audiences (Listening or research practices?)
- Dedicated communications staff? (Status?)
- Have a strategy? Theory of change?

Communications tools and tactics

- Email
- Website CMS? Processes?
- Social media
- SMS
- Offline tactics

Personal use of new media and ICTs (As consumer? As producer? Blog?)

Information sources and habits

Data security?

Communications needs & aspirations

Any questions for me?

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