



Closer Than Ever

**A guide for social change organisations
who want to start working online**

Margarita Salas and Sulá Batsú
Association for Progressive Communications (APC)
2011

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Introduction

The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) is a global organisation and network made up of different civil society organisations. Our mission is to empower and support organisations, social movements and individuals in and through the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to build strategic communities and initiatives for the purpose of making meaningful contributions to equitable human development, social justice, political processes and environmental sustainability.

APC is a legal entity registered in California in the United States; however, we don't actually have any staff living there. Our staff of around 20 people all work day to day with each other and with APC members and partners from computers in their homes, and in the case of the executive director, in her garden! Member organisations are based in more than 30 countries, and 80% of members and 90% of staff live in developing countries.

The virtual aspect of APC has been present since the beginning, evolving throughout the organisation's 20 years of working for social change, which we celebrated in 2010. In the spirit of this celebration, APC decided to capture our experiences in the area of online work and share them through a guide for other non-profit organisations who also want to do their work online or learn more about specific aspects, such as different processes and tools for working online.

This guide brings together the voices of APC members, partners (people and groups we work with – online of course), consultants and staff and shares their views and experience on working online for social change. Their perspectives are the basis for this guide.

This guide is organised in a sequence that follows the level of importance that the people interviewed placed on each issue. For example, the first chapter is about people, because there was general consensus among the interviewees that the most important aspect of working online for social change is getting the right people involved in the work – people with leadership, commitment, know-how and creativity who can become a true driving force. Of course, once the right people are involved, there need to be procedures to organise their work together and tools to support the different working procedures.

We end with a few experiences we've had working online. We hope they'll encourage your organisation to harness the potential of online work for your causes and that this practical guide based on APC's experience with online work can help you develop and implement efficient ways to work online for social change.

Margarita Salas, Sulá Batsú, APC member in Costa Rica since 2008 and author of this guide

Chapter I: The people

"I feel part of APC not just because I know the people and we do things together, but also because I like the political stand that APC takes, either as an organisation or through the activity of other APC members."

Maxigas, Green Spider Foundation, Hungary

"What has contributed the most in making me feel part of APC is the fact that everyone is very open to people's contributions. You don't have to feel you don't know anything because you come from some faraway place. Everyone is very welcoming of different people and viewpoints, and at the heart of it, everyone has a common goal."

Grant McHerron, apc.au, Australia

"The people who work with APC view their involvement as a lot more than a job. They feel it is a joint cause, which is extremely important to understand how they relate to the network."

Eloise Burke, consultant, Kenya

Why are people's relationships important in online work?

A network is only as strong as the people that are part of it. Working for social change requires passion and commitment to a cause. This becomes even more crucial if the work we do is mostly online, because the support of our co-workers is distant and it is easy to lose motivation or the sense of urgency when we interact through a computer screen instead of face to face.

In this sense, it is important for your organisation to make explicit what you believe in and build common ground among the people in your network that includes your shared ideas, practices and political stance. This is very helpful when new people come into your organisation, so that they can know what everyone expects from them. It can also be a criterion when you start making new relationships and getting involved with other people and organisations.

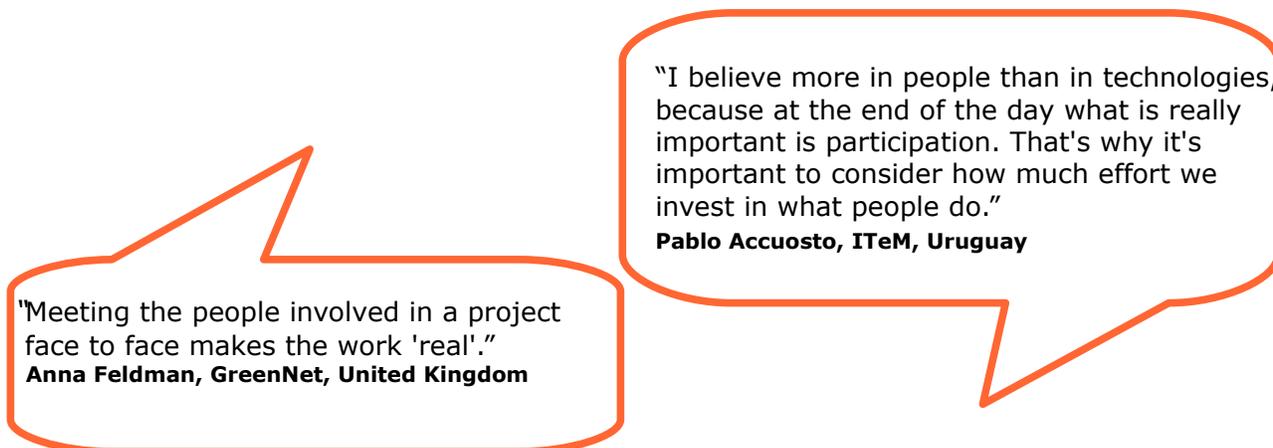
In APC we have a very thorough process for orienting new staff and incorporating new organisations that have applied to become members of our network. A working group (made up of member representatives from different geographical regions and a few staff people) asks the

applicant for detailed information about their activities related to our core work and the impact of their work. We also ask for references and consult them. We talk to other people in the same geographical region that we know and trust to find out if they know the applicant and to get a local perspective on their work. After we have done all this, our governing bodies (the council and board) decide whether or not the organisation is to be accepted as a member of APC. The membership review process can take several months.

When we are still not sure about applicants (e.g. if we are not really convinced that they work that significantly with ICTs and therefore won't be a great fit with us) we may ask to work with them. We put them in contact with our partners, members and projects so that we can actually get some first-hand experience working and interacting together. We've had several experiences where this has happened and the organisation that finally joins us, maybe a few years down the line, is actually better aligned to our mission than they would have been had they joined earlier.

Some people have questioned why we have such a detailed membership process, but we feel our process helps bring together like-minded organisations, which makes it easier for us to work online together in the future. It assures current members of our network that the direction and political perspective that we have created together will not become diluted as new members arrive; on the contrary, they will become stronger.

How do you establish trusting relationships in online work?



When a network, like ours, carries out a significant part of its work online, it is very important to make sure there are healthy and strong relationships between and among its staff and members. In our experience, this means being able to trust the people with whom you work at a distance. Trust requires closeness and being able to rely on the network.

Think about your office for a moment. It is 9:00 a.m. Monday, you arrive, you greet everyone, you ask them how their weekend was and they tell you about their activities with family and loved ones. Every day as you see them, talk to them and listen to what they have to say, you start forming an opinion about your co-workers, you learn how to interact best with each one of them, you feel closer to them.

This process of getting to know your co-workers that happens so naturally in face-to-face environments needs to be helped a little in online environments, because you will not be seeing or hearing your colleagues every day – you will probably be *reading* them. Most of the communication and interaction in our network is through text: an email, a document, an instant

message. This does not mean that you can't have online informal interactions like the ones you would have over a cup of coffee, but it does mean that you might need to plan ways or create spaces where you and your colleagues feel comfortable doing so.

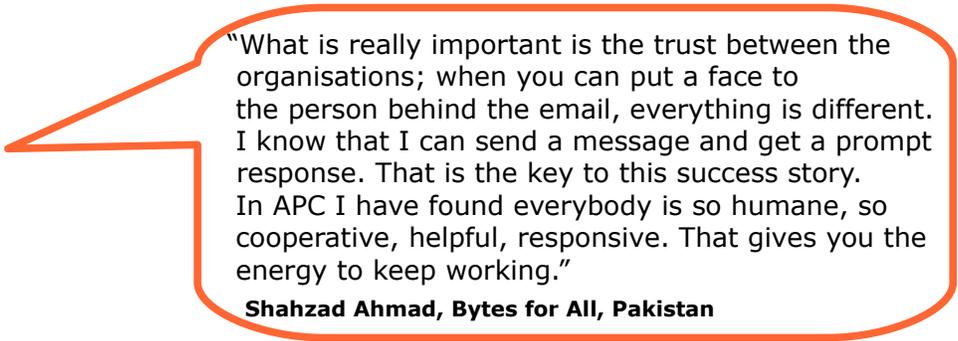
Tips to promote interaction and closeness

“Be there” for your fellow networkers When you work for a social justice cause you need to be able to count on your colleagues, because they are more than just co-workers: they are your companions in the struggle, the ones who will help you when there is trouble. For us at APC this has proven to be one of the most valuable aspects of belonging to the network, because we defend freedom of expression, which in some countries is not a given right. Having a reliable network of organisations willing to support local conflicts and make them visible at an international level has been key for APC members to be able to do their work.

Extend precious face-to-face opportunities If you have the chance to spend time with your colleagues at a meeting or conference, plan to spend an extra day together after the meeting ends so that you can do follow-up together. Face-to-face contact is good for strategic thinking and planning. Once you go back to your desk it will be so much more difficult alone. When you do have a chance to meet face to face, if it is possible, create opportunities for remote participation as well. Feeling left out of these interactions can be alienating for those people who did not have the chance to be present.

Explore the use of social networks to open a space for informal social interaction among the members of the team. Organise playful activities such as contests, surveys and brain teasers. Sulá Batsú once set up a contest to see who could predict the outcomes of the most matches in the football World Cup. Everyone on the staff team received the list of matches, chose their picks and could see the picks other people made. Since not all of the staff work in the same office, this was a fun activity that facilitated conversations, jokes and closeness among members of the team, based on a sport that speaks culturally to Costa Ricans. The organisation even received a request from a partner that found out about the activity and wanted to participate. As each match took place the results were updated, followed by a series of comments online.

Take advantage of the possibilities the technology offers and **welcome posting of personal pictures, stories, links to audio and videos, etc.** Having fun together can contribute a lot towards working well together. Mark these emails in the subject line so that people can filter them to read later, e.g. “Off topic: Willie's recipe for Abgusht-e bademjan soup”.



“What is really important is the trust between the organisations; when you can put a face to the person behind the email, everything is different. I know that I can send a message and get a prompt response. That is the key to this success story. In APC I have found everybody is so humane, so cooperative, helpful, responsive. That gives you the energy to keep working.”

Shahzad Ahmad, Bytes for All, Pakistan

"I think that sharing your lessons globally is important, regardless of how local, specific or insignificant you feel they are. Once you share them you realise how universal your experiences may be and how many tools and strategies people may assist you with, and how you might assist others."

Sally-Jean Shackleton, Women'sNet, South Africa

In this sense, it is always important to remember that networking is a two-way street: it is not only about receiving, it is also about giving. If you want your co-workers or members to be there for you, you have to be there for them:

- Make sure that you have the full contact information of your closest co-workers and members and make sure they have yours. Very often we only have an email address as a means of contact. It is a good idea to also share at least a telephone number for emergencies. APC asks all staff and members to keep this information in a private area of each person's personal profile on APC.org, viewable to members and staff only.
- Ask your colleagues and members about the challenges they are facing and, according to your possibilities, use the resources you have to help them overcome these challenges. APC members have been able to use chat and voice over IP (VoIP) to contact other members and help them with specific issues. For example, during the Feminist Tech Exchange in Mexico in 2009, we had virus and Wi-Fi problems with several participants' computers and were able to receive help from our colleagues at APC member Colnodo in Colombia using a VoIP service.
- When major natural disasters or political events occur in the place your colleagues live, contact them and make sure they and their loved ones are well and give them an opportunity to air their experiences. During an attempted coup in Ecuador our policy manager, who lives in Quito, received a lot of messages of concern. In turn she gave us a real-time picture of what was happening on the streets.
- Get to know the campaigns and issues that your colleagues or members promote and support them on your website, through personal emails or in your social networks. For example, each year the APC Women's Networking Support Programme (APC WNSP) carries out the Take Back the Tech! campaign on using ICTs to end violence against women (takebackthetech.net). The campaign receives support and dissemination by members who are not necessarily involved in specific APC WNSP projects.

"Whether we are talking about online or face-to-face work, the experience of information sharing is great in APC. Resources are readily available for all the persons and organisations interested. You can use your contacts to learn from each other and gain greater experience."

Chim Manavy, Open Institute, Cambodia

"We could work with any organisation in the world that we wanted to. We find ourselves working with APC more often just because we enjoy it. There is a personal and friendly level, and also professional respect."

Gus Hosein, Privacy International, United Kingdom

What type of people work best in online networked environments?

Not everyone feels comfortable working online. Of course people can adapt to different working environments if they need to, but there are some characteristics that can certainly help a person feel more comfortable with and better suited to this type of work.

As a good online worker you need to be...	Why?
<p>Flexible</p>	<p>As an online worker you need to be able to adapt to different work styles, communication styles and leadership styles in order to work well with your colleagues and achieve the desired goals. If you are working for an international network, then you will also be dealing with issues related to different time zones, languages and cultures.</p> <p>When working as part of a global team, your schedules and those of your colleagues will be different. So flexibility is also useful to deal with delays, connectivity problems or other stressful moments.</p>
<p>A clear communicator</p>	<p>As a good online worker you need to be able to process and organise a lot of information, share ideas in a clear and concise manner, and prepare dissemination materials in formats appropriate for different audiences. Explicit communication can also help you to maintain good work relations and avoid misunderstandings.</p> <p>In this sense, you need to be assertive and direct, without being aggressive. Written communication lends itself to more interpretation than regular oral communication, so you need to choose carefully which medium to use, based on the context and specific needs, and be prepared to switch media. For example, if a situation is tense, switch from email to voice communication.</p>

As a good online worker you need to be...	Why?
Self-organised	<p>To work well online you need to be able to establish priorities, manage your time very efficiently and establish clear boundaries between your personal life and your work. Although this is true of any type of work, it is especially important for online work, since supervisors will not be physically present to provide close guidance.</p> <p>If you do not manage your time adequately, you might find yourself feeling overwhelmed with more work than you can handle and having difficulties with deadlines, or overburdened by excessive dedication to your work, eventually leading to stress and burnout.</p>
Open	<p>Nobody will know if you're having problems when you're sitting alone at your computer unless you share them. Be prepared to open up to your colleagues about any personal or work issues you're having so that others can help you. If you don't tell your online colleagues, they will never know.</p> <p>When you are part of an online network, you are expected to make your knowledge resources available to others, for example, sharing your opinions, relevant documents, links or personal contacts that you have and your colleagues might need regarding a specific topic where you have expertise.</p>

Chapter 2: The processes

Why are processes important for organisations that work online?

“Carrying out collaborative processes online takes longer than working face to face. I think we know it in theory but we forget about it when we are in a project. Face-to-face meetings are crucial; when we have met someone it really facilitates the further online work.”

Anna Turley, AWID, South Africa

"In a regular office environment staff have more means to communicate with each other. If they have a question about a procedure they can just go over to the human resources division and ask. In the case of APC, it is very important to make sure that documentation is clear, and also that the interpretation of it is clear, because we are not available 24/7 if a clarification is needed. People interpret information differently based on their own reality, hence, we've had to be very careful around wording, etc."

Fatima Bhyat, APC Finance & Human Resources, South Africa

As organisations that work for social change it is as important to be clear on what our objectives and dreams are as it is to know how we are going to reach them. In 2010 APC turned 20 and we believe that a big part of our longevity as an online network is due to having the right institutional and organisational processes, which are well documented, available and understood by our members, staff and partners.

In our experience it has been important to think carefully about the different types of stakeholders that are part of our organisation. We have staff, members and partners (groups and individuals we work with) and we have taken the time to establish processes to work together with all of them.

One of the issues that we have learned is extremely important is to make sure that it is clear for everyone involved how we are going to work together and what each person's role is. Also, you must remember that working online together takes more time. You need to take this into account when you plan your projects and activities so that the different partners can share their experiences and ideas and create together.

"It is important to define roles, functions and responsibilities as well as the way we are going to collaborate within a team. APC also has the possibility of combining online with face-to-face interaction, which builds trust among staff and among members, both personally and professionally. If we did not have these face-to-face interactions, I doubt our online work would be so efficient."

Valeria Betancourt, APC CIPP, Ecuador

As an employer, having a well-structured human resource policy has been key to maintaining a highly committed and knowledgeable team of professionals working together as staff. As a membership association, having well-structured decision-making mechanisms has led to the consolidation of an involved membership that truly feels like part of the network.

If your organisation wants to start doing more of its work online it will probably face some of the challenges related to working at a distance. However, you can also transform these challenges into strengths.

Some of the elements that APC staff have mentioned as **key elements of an online organisation** are:

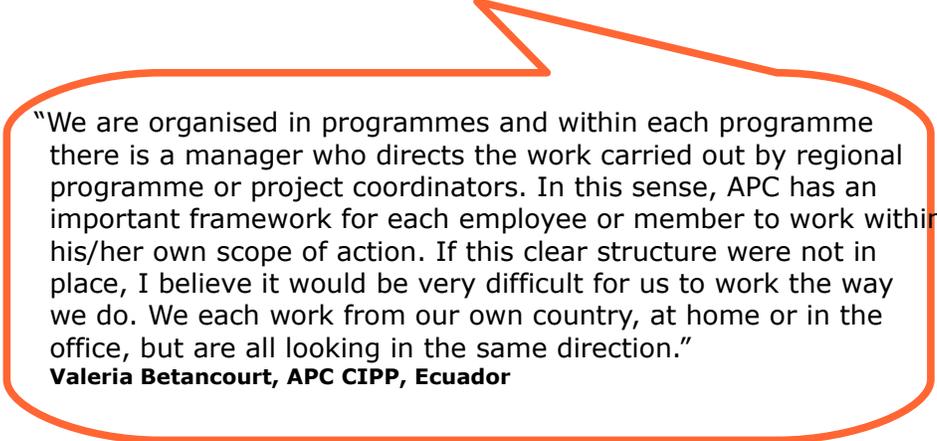
- ✓ Clear human resource policies
- ✓ Training and development for team leaders and team members
- ✓ Standardised organisational procedures
- ✓ A strong organisational culture
- ✓ Clear decision-making and participation mechanisms
- ✓ High levels of autonomy for people to do their jobs
- ✓ Standard initiation processes for new staff and members
- ✓ Structured communication plans
- ✓ Appropriate electronic communication and collaboration technologies

What types of processes does an organisation need to work online?

Many people believe that an organisation that works online is “lighter”, in the sense that it does not require as much of an administrative framework and paperwork as an organisation that has a physical headquarters. Nothing could be further from the truth.

On the contrary, organisations like APC that work online need very detailed, explicit and documented work processes, human resource policies, communication guidelines, etc. **Structure is the anchor that lets our organisation fly freely without losing our bearings.**

Organisations with physical headquarters have many mechanisms to coordinate their actions, such as team meetings, field visits and interviews. The need for these mechanisms does not go away when you decide to work online; in fact they probably become more necessary.



“We are organised in programmes and within each programme there is a manager who directs the work carried out by regional programme or project coordinators. In this sense, APC has an important framework for each employee or member to work within his/her own scope of action. If this clear structure were not in place, I believe it would be very difficult for us to work the way we do. We each work from our own country, at home or in the office, but are all looking in the same direction.”
Valeria Betancourt, APC CIPP, Ecuador

In our experience as a network that carries out a lot of its work online, we have seen that when you speak to organisations about processes they usually only think about the ones related to projects. We have learned that it is a good practice to establish clear human resource processes as well as mechanisms to work together in general.

What about human resources?

Developing human resource procedures and policies takes time and effort and is often regarded as unnecessary bureaucracy. However, if your organisation wants to work online it is very important to have documentation that makes these processes explicit, because fairly often, staff will have to make decisions that in a face-to-face environment would usually be consulted with the human resources department or the director, who are not necessarily connected when we have an online working environment.

If your network has been working face to face for some time and is now starting to work online, it is important to adjust your existing policies to this new environment. If your network is just starting, this is the perfect moment to agree on the conditions and expectations of your working environment.

Step 1 Review existing policies

Review all of the administrative procedures that you have and make the necessary adjustments to incorporate the specific needs of those who will be working online. Go through each procedure and describe how it will work for people who are not physically present in the office. If you are a new network, you need to define procedures that take into account working hours/schedules, remuneration policies, different types of contracts, benefits/vacations, etc.

Step 2 Develop new policies to complement existing policies

Think about the new procedures that might need to be put in place for needs that are specific to online work. Ask the people who will be working online what type of support they might need administratively. Also establish whether expectations from both sides are clear and explicit.

Step 3 Review and update the policies

During the first years, have periodic reviews of how this is working for online workers. Always maintain a learning attitude towards the process, incorporating suggestions and feedback. This will most likely be a process of trial and error until you find the right combination for your organisation, so be patient.

To avoid starting from scratch we recommend approaching a friendly organisation that has a similar structure to your own organisation and asking them to share some of their administrative procedures. Over its 20 years APC has created a number of standards based on good practices and functionality. We provide several baseline references and also help people accommodate to the organisation's activities. APC has various documents, available for members on our website (www.apc.org), that show how some of our processes work.

These documents are related to human resources, financial and administrative issues, among others.

- [Human Resources Manual](#)
- [Financial Systems, Policies and Procedures Manual](#)
- [APC Governance Manual](#)
- [Bylaws](#)
- [Language guidelines](#)

"APC's human resources manual was based on a manual from APC's original South African member organisation SANGONeT and has been adapted for APC's staffing requirements. It has always been fairly detailed, but it is an evolving document. As we incorporate new staff and new questions arise, the manual is updated."

Fatima Bhyat, APC Finance & Human Resources, South Africa

"In this particular matter of administrative and financial issues, I would have expected that a single organisation would work better than a network. However, working with APC has sometimes been even more efficient than with organisations that have physical headquarters."

Parminder Jeet Singh, IT4Change, India

Tip: Keep an online repository of all documents related to internal processes and policies. It will serve as a strong guideline for staff.

If your network does not have an intranet or hosted space to store and share documents, there are several tools that give you a certain amount of free online space, such as www.cynapse.com and www.zmanda.com (both have a free and open source community edition), in addition to commercial solutions such as www.box.net and www.dropbox.com.

How do you manage your projects online?

"The biggest challenge when you start working on a project virtually is good project management, maintaining momentum until you get to a point where the project takes off. It is important to know at what moments each person needs to be involved."

Maxigas, Green Spider Foundation, Hungary

"Some of the procedures APC follows can be replicated, but there is also a need to be a group that is very passionate and is able to grow and manage conflict in an open way. APC does the process of making things explicit, of having manuals and work documents very well and this helps a lot to have smooth working procedures."

Eloise Burke, consultant, Kenya

If your organisation wants to work more online, the role of your project coordinators must incorporate a strong monitoring and follow-up component, because they become the ones who make sure that the members of a team are moving in the same direction, at the same pace. These are some suggestions that have strengthened our coordination when we develop projects together among members located in different parts of the world.

Assign a project coordinator

This may seem obvious but small teams very frequently feel that there is no need for someone to coordinate, that the team will “coordinate itself”. When working online it is critical to have a person who leads the process and makes sure that the team is working together. This does not have to be a permanent role; it can be assigned to different people in different projects, but it is important to always designate someone explicitly as the person who will ultimately be responsible for the process.

Make the working process explicit

Just like in a face-to-face scenario, the project coordinator needs to define and/or agree with the project team the scope of the project (size, goals, requirements), how the resources will be managed (people, equipment, materials), the time frame (task durations, dependencies, critical path) and the budget (costs and contingencies). In an online environment it's even more important to have documentation that explains how these areas will be handled so that all members can consult them. We recommend starting the project with a synchronous meeting (using chat or VoIP) to review these documents and make sure that everyone understands how the work will be carried out.

Establish process benchmarks

In order for the project coordinator to provide adequate follow-up, the team should agree upon some benchmarks and relate them to a timeline. It is also good practice to have spaces where the team can see the progress of the contributions of each member. This can be a public web page or site, a private document repository, or even something as simple as a shared spreadsheet.

Repetition and reminders

It is a good idea for the project manager to remind the team members periodically of upcoming deadlines and repeat the project objectives and/or prior agreements. When people work online they have to handle a lot of information and it is easy to overlook an email or miss an important piece of information. The role of the project manager is key in keeping everyone informed and clear on what they should each be doing as well as the overall progress of the project.

Learning assessments

During and after the project it is very important to take time to establish rapid peer assessments among the members of the team. This will help your organisation to improve mechanisms that are not working correctly or strengthen good practices for the future. This can be done online using email; for example, the project manager can send a written instrument to receive feedback from other members of the project. It can also be done by having a short chat meeting where there can be a group review (What was planned? What was achieved? How can we explain the differences?).

What are some of the challenges that come from working online?

A different communication style

To work well online you may need to adopt a different way of communicating. As an international network, APC members and staff have to be sensitive to cultural, political and geographical contexts that have an impact on the way a message is read by their colleagues in another part of the world.

"In APC people are quite respectful; they have been working with ICTs long enough to know that you have to be careful to avoid conflicts. Working online demands that your approach to learning and work is different."

Karel Novotný, APC ST&ND, Czech Republic

"One of the things that made me feel part of APC since the beginning was the very personal nature of any email contact. APC staff were always very supportive and informative."

Erika Smith, APC WNSP, Mexico

"I went to a big APC meeting in London, in July 2006. I had been working with a lot of people and I did not know their faces, and I imagined everyone was older and more formal. When I met them, I discovered several of them were my age, and most of them were very laid-back."

Analía Lavín, APC Communications, Uruguay

Online communication can be tricky. Here are some useful **tips**¹ and practices to have a better experience, especially with email, which is the main online working tool:

1. Don't type in capital letters. In email this is usually considered shouting. Use **asterisks** when you want to emphasise something.
2. In face-to-face conversation, there are many subtle cues provided by body language and intonation that let us know how what we are saying is affecting the other person. When you are working online, strive to be concise, clear and polite in your writing, and flexible in your interpretation of other people's messages. This follows an old network axiom: **be precise in what you send, and forgiving in what you receive.**

¹ Compiled from bit.ly/fzIIbW and bit.ly/fe6saF

3. When you reply to an email message, double-check the recipients to make sure the message is sent only to those who should receive it. Using the "reply all" option sometimes causes information to be received by more people than you intend. For example, if you received a message through an email list and you have a question or comment for the person who sent the message, it is a good idea to write directly to that person, instead of replying to the whole list.
4. Before you send out a message, if you are replying or forwarding information, clean up your message by erasing the previous headings and text that are not necessary or relevant for your message.
5. Be sure to include a descriptive title in the subject line so the reader will know what the message is about. For example, if you started out discussing organic farming and are now starting a conversation about online marketing tools, an example of a bad heading in the subject line would be: "Re (Fwd): Fwd (Re): organic tomatoes". What would be appropriate is to erase those Re and Fwd from previous messages and start a fresh subject line: "online marketing tools". This is also helpful when you need to look for a message within your email, because if you remember that the message was about online marketing tools, you are unlikely to look for it under the heading "organic tomatoes".
6. Avoid sending attachments unless absolutely necessary. Some people will delete email messages with attachments unread because attachments can carry viruses.
7. Never send large unsolicited attachments (this varies but certainly over 2 MB). If you MUST send a large file, forewarn your recipients. Always introduce what is in your attachment in your message, so that the recipient has an idea what the attachment contains.
8. Be careful with formatting, keeping in mind that just because your email programme supports pictures, sound files or stationery doesn't mean everyone else's does or that they want to or can receive multimedia.
9. When writing an email or posting messages be brief. If you are going to deal with more than one topic, write separate messages for each topic and label them appropriately in the subject line. Aim to fit everything you need to communicate in one screen of text and use blank spaces between paragraphs or other logical units of text to break up the text for the eye.
10. Before sending off your email message look over what you have written; make sure you have said everything you needed to say and you haven't said things you didn't need to say. And, perhaps most importantly, never forget that the person to whom you are sending email is another human being, with feelings and beliefs that may be very different from yours!

For more tips on online "netiquette", see www.albion.com/netiquette

Information overflow

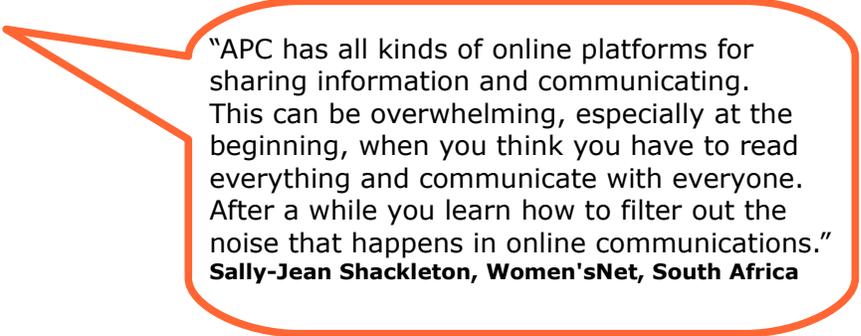
Another key challenge we have faced when working at a distance has to do with information overflow. The regular interaction that happens in a face-to-face environment becomes email messages, chat messages and forwarded information in an online setting. It is important for your organisation to provide information in ways that don't contribute to overload and develop mechanisms to organise the relevant information, as well as criteria to avoid treating all information with the same amount of attention.

To avoid contributing to the generation of information overflow you can:

1. Send out weekly summaries instead of daily messages.
2. Avoid writing messages that are longer than one or two screens, because it makes it harder for the reader to process them.
3. Combine email messaging with regular voice meetings, to avoid the need for lengthy reports.

However, since you will also receive information from others outside your network, here are some useful tips to handle that information better and avoid feeling you have more than you can process:

1. Before you join an email list or subscribe to a forum take a few moments to read the FAQs and make sure the topics under discussion are ones you are interested in talking or learning about. Also, find out how you can unsubscribe, so that if the information traffic becomes too heavy and you need to leave, you can do so easily.
2. If you have large amounts of email, scan your messages and prioritise urgent ones by tagging them so that you can easily return to them later.
3. Use social bookmarking tools (such as Delicious) to organise your links into areas of interest, to reduce repeated web searches.
4. Organise your time so that you receive information in the way that works best for you. For example, if receiving email messages every few minutes is disruptive for you, configure your email client so that it downloads email once every hour.

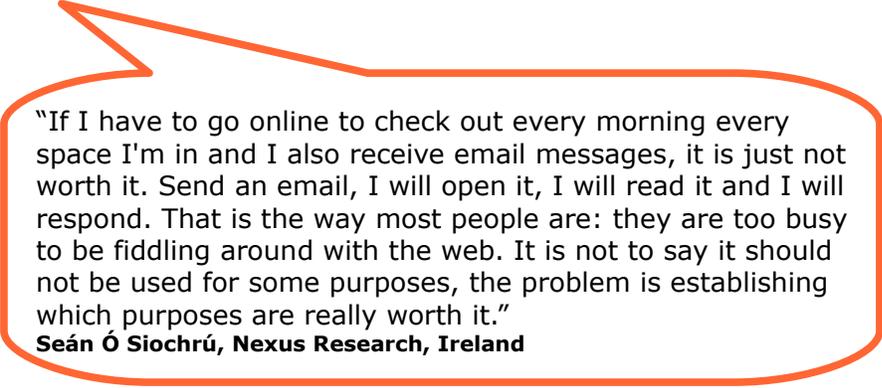


"APC has all kinds of online platforms for sharing information and communicating. This can be overwhelming, especially at the beginning, when you think you have to read everything and communicate with everyone. After a while you learn how to filter out the noise that happens in online communications."
Sally-Jean Shackleton, Women'sNet, South Africa

Over-sophistication of tools

In online work it is very common for organisations to make the mistake of using ICT tools in ways that complicate their work instead of making it easier. To avoid this we recommend asking yourself the following questions before you implement a new tool:

1. Can the task that I want this tool for be done through email? If the answer is yes, define a good process through email rather than trying to deploy a new tool that your colleagues may or may not want to learn and use.
2. Do the benefits of the tool considerably outweigh the learning curve required to use it comfortably? If the new software takes your colleagues several days to learn and it will only be used for a one-hour meeting, there are probably other simpler tools (or a combination of tools) that you can use.
3. How well does the new tool communicate with other spaces of interaction the organisation already has? For this point you need to consider if the software needs everyone to create an account in order to participate and if it can be viewed or accessed from other spaces you might have, such as a blog or a social network. When there are too many spaces, people tend to feel lost or forget about them if there is not a central entry point.
4. How adaptable is the tool to different conditions? Does it have an interface in several languages? Can it be used from a Windows, Mac or Linux operating system? The fewer barriers that your colleagues face to use the tool, the more likely it is that they will use it.



"If I have to go online to check out every morning every space I'm in and I also receive email messages, it is just not worth it. Send an email, I will open it, I will read it and I will respond. That is the way most people are: they are too busy to be fiddling around with the web. It is not to say it should not be used for some purposes, the problem is establishing which purposes are really worth it."

Seán Ó Siochrú, Nexus Research, Ireland

Relationships with partners

If your network starts working more online you will have to develop strategies to strengthen relationships with partners with whom you will now start working at a distance. In our experience, having a network of friendly organisations has helped build the credibility and impact of APC's work. We have fostered this network by using the following mechanisms:

- **Make the most of face-to-face opportunities.** Although at APC most of the work is online, there is an important part that is also face to face, for example, workshops, conferences and meetings. Our organisation takes advantage of these spaces to promote interaction among our staff, members and partners. For example, we frequently book tables in a restaurant at events where several APC members and partners are participating. Everyone pays their own way at an "APC dinner" and everyone agrees that it's an excellent mechanism to strengthen bonds and create better conditions for our future work.
- **Establish permanent communication channels.** Often there are people who want to collaborate with APC or have information about our work, so we have enabled several online spaces, such as the APC Forum email list. For the general public, the mailing address on our website (info@apc.org) is constantly monitored and we try to respond to incoming messages within 48 hours, in English, French and Spanish. We are also experimenting with Twitter and Facebook pages.
- **Work with your partners.** Since we have a presence in different parts of the world we often develop projects together with regional or local partners, which strengthens our relationship with them. For example, when we organised the Feminist Tech Exchange in South Africa we worked together with our partner organisation AWID and other partner organisations in the region who could contribute as trainers and facilitators - as well as APC and women's programme members.

"I am from Latin America, and being on the APC Forum list –where there are many organisations that are close to APC worldwide – was key for me when I went to study in England, because it was a space where I could meet members and others who were also in Europe."

Patricia Peña, Mujeres en Conexión, Chile

"When I met APC, I was pleasantly surprised to see such an open network with such a strong presence of Southern-based members. I was very impressed and decided to do volunteer translations for APC during the process of the World Summit on the Information Society, to learn more about how APC did this work that seemed so helpful for the public policy process."

Katitza Rodríguez, Electronic Frontier Foundation, Peru

Chapter 3: The tools

If your organisation is interested in working more online you will need tools that can provide a channel for interacting at a distance among the people who make up your network.

ICTs can be strong allies for your organisation if you define a strategic approach to their use and place them at the service of your organisation's objectives. They can help your organisation improve communication, by opening up channels among the different members and stakeholders of your network. ICTs can lower your costs, by using VoIP solutions instead of regular telephone, or by using web conferencing programmes for project follow-up and coordination. They can reduce air travel. You can also use ICTs to increase your public profile, by using blogs and social networks to disseminate your work.

Which ICT tools are the most useful for working online?

There are myriad web-based and/or downloadable tools that your organisation can use to work online. When choosing which tools you want to use it is very important that you define your needs first, that is, the objective you want to achieve by using a specific tool. It is also important to consider the characteristics and conditions of your organisation in order to choose the tool that fits best.

One of the lessons we have learned at APC through our 20 years of working online for social change is the importance of steering away from technological fads and **concentrating on the functionality** of the tools.

Even though our network has some members that are very technologically skilled, most agree that the application that has given them the best results is still email. This does not mean it is the only tool APC uses to communicate and interact; we do use a combination of tools, but the main application 20 years on continues to be email.

The other lesson that has proven useful for us is to use a combination of tools that is appropriate for the colleagues you are working with and their conditions.

Here are several websites where you can find tools for online work and collaboration, links to download them or use them freely online, as well as manuals and recommendations:

1. **[Social Source Commons](#)**

Here you will find tools that other non-profit organisations are using, as well as their reviews and experience with the tools. You need to create an account, but it's free and well worth registering.

2. **[KS Toolkit](#)**

Under the heading "Master list of tools" you will find a compilation of ICT tools that can be used for sharing information, communicating more efficiently, networking, and other necessary functions to work online. Under "Master list of methods" you will also find a list of knowledge-sharing techniques, which are also very useful when you need to have more dynamic collective processes.

3. **[Sourceforge](#)**

This is a great repository of free and open source tools. Some of these tools work only for Linux-based systems, while others work in Mac and Windows as well.

Closer Than Ever: A guide for social change organisations who want to start working online

4. **Mashable**

This post has links to 60 tools that can be used to share files and calendars, monitor projects and have meetings, among others. Some of these tools are services you will need to pay for, others you can use for free.

5. **IMARK Module: Web 2.0 and Social Media for Development**

This is an online self-learning module that describes a wide range of social media tools and explains how to take advantage of those tools for more effective networking, collaboration and exchange of knowledge, written by APC.

The best ICT tool to work online is the one that fits the needs and conditions of your organisation. Most organisations that work online use a combination of ICT tools to take advantage of the strengths each one has and to provide people with more than one channel to work together.

What is free and open source software (FOSS)?

For APC an important consideration when choosing ICT tools is the promotion and support of FOSS² programmes, which have licenses that give users the freedom to run, copy, distribute, study, change and improve the software as well as share copies of either the original or the modified software. "Free" refers to free use. Some examples of FOSS are the operating system Linux, the office package OpenOffice and the internet browser Mozilla Firefox.

FOSS is the progressive answer to proprietary software³ which has restrictions on using, copying and modifying as enforced by the proprietor. Some examples of proprietary software are the operating system Windows, the office package Microsoft Office and the web browser Internet Explorer.

We strongly endorse FOSS and created a prize called the Chris Nicol FOSS Prize to encourage the use of FOSS by non-profit organisations and other general non-techie types.

We included FOSS as the fourth theme of our [Internet Rights Charter](#), stating that:

Working with FOSS is empowering, it builds skills, is more sustainable and it encourages local innovation. We encourage governments to make policies that encourage the use of FOSS, particularly in the public sector.

We encourage your organisation to adopt FOSS and endorse FOSS initiatives too. Start by installing easy-to-use programmes like OpenOffice for creating documents and presentations, Firefox for browsing the web and Thunderbird for email to replace any pirated software on your machine. You won't regret it!

² www.fsf.org/licensing/essays/free-sw.html

³ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proprietary_software

Free software	What is it for?
Thunderbird	Email client
Mozilla Firefox	Web browser
Pidgin	Instant messaging
OpenOffice	Documents, spreadsheets and presentations
PeaZip	Compressing archives
Gimp and Inkscape	Image editing
Audacity	Audio editing
OpenShot	Video editing
Identi.ca	Micro-blogging
FreeMind	Mind mapping

Here are some useful links to learn more about FOSS and how it can benefit your network:

- [Thinking Outside the Cage: An Introduction to Free/Open Source Philosophy](#)
This text by Paul Mobbs introduces the reader to the main concepts behind the openness philosophy and how it relates to sustainable development.
- [Free Software Foundation \(Resources\)](#)
Here you will find a searchable directory of over 5,000 free software packages, community reports of successful free software usage from all areas of computing, a directory of people offering their free software services for hire, mailing lists to discuss FOSS, a list of people who can speak about FOSS at your events, materials to support your presentations about FOSS to others, and many other related links.
- [How to start contributing to or using Open Source Software](#)
This article explains how to move progressively from proprietary software to FOSS and provides links to helpful resources such as mentors for this process.

How should my organisation start using ICTs to work online?

Progressively. Using new tools to work will probably bring important cultural changes for your organisation. It is better to incorporate these changes progressively so that your organisation and its members can adjust to the new ways of working and handling the organisation's relations with others.

If your organisation is starting to work online, the best advice is to take some time to think about which processes you want to use these tools for. Then, according to your objectives, choose the tools that are better suited for your organisation. We have found it useful to ask ourselves the following questions:

Step 1 Why are you doing this?

It may seem overly simplistic, but it is very important to have a clear idea of why your organisation wants to start or increase its online work. Is it because you want to save money? Is it because you think it will help you involve younger people? It is very important to make explicit the expectations everyone has regarding what you hope to solve or do better by working online.

Step 2 What changes do you need to make?

Once your organisation has established clearly in which direction you want to move and why, then you have to draw a map of how you plan to move from point A to point B. It is important to map out all of the changes your organisation will need to make in order to start or strengthen your online work. Then your organisation can prioritise these changes and organise them in a sequence that takes advantage of the resources you already have. For example, if training is needed, are there people within your organisation who can teach others about the new tools?

Step 3 Which ICT tools can you use to achieve these changes?

Although the same ICT tool can be used for very different purposes, we would like to share our experience with seven commonly used tools to work online: email, instant messaging (chat), wikis, blogs, websites, web conference systems and social networks. We trust these examples will serve as inspiration for you to define how you want to use these tools.

"We have tried many tools and we always come back to the basics: email discussion lists are by definition THE space. We have also seen instant messaging work well for specific immediate issues, when the people you need to reach are online. But email is definitely APC's most efficient tool."

Julián Casasbuenas, Colnodo, Colombia

"I prefer the mailing lists, I think they are more effective, and they make me have a continued sense of being part of a broader community. APC uses mailing lists in a really elaborate way, they are properly organised and handled. It is the mailing list that makes me link to what is going on in APC."

Anna Feldman, GreenNet, United Kingdom

"A lot of 'serious' processes happen through email. You're expected to read all the messages that you get copied on, and to reply when needed."

Jac sm Kee, APC WNSP, Malaysia

Email lists

Email requires low bandwidth and is easy to use. However, it is important to note that in APC we use email in a very structured and strategic way. In the previous section about frequent online challenges we gave some tips for everyday email use and online communication. Let's look at using email lists.

A mailing list is an automatic message-sending programme that stores a list of the email addresses of all the people interested in a particular discussion. Each discussion has its own email address (e.g., forum@lists.apc.org) and when a message is sent to the list address, everyone subscribed to the mailing list receives it.⁴

In APC we use email lists to create **separate spaces for different working groups**. As an international network we handle a high volume of information traffic, so it becomes very important to make sure we deliver the information to the people for whom it is relevant. For example, we have regional email lists, because for an organisation in Asia it is not relevant to receive a call for papers for a conference in Latin America. Your organisation should define how it will filter and organise the information it produces and receives, because if you do not there is a high risk of feeling overwhelmed.

We have identified the different audiences we interact with and have set up separate spaces for each one. Below are examples of some of the lists we have and what they are used for.

- **Forum:** This is our broadest list. We use it as an information exchange place for staff, members, partners, former staff and other APC friends. It's a mechanism to stay in touch and share information about campaigns, events and activities among people and organisations who are close to APC.
- **Council:** This is a space for council members plus APC staff. Each APC member

⁴ www.idrc.ca/openbooks/848-1

nominates two representatives to participate in this list. Hence it is also the space where we make official announcements and hold council meetings.

- **Regional mailing lists:** There are separate spaces for APC members and staff based in Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, North America and Latin America, so that we can network at a regional level.
- **Team mailing list:** This list is for information exchange for our staff. We're starting to move some of the discussions that are going on here to our social networking space (such as check-ins, as we frequently post images too, since it brings a sense of "being there", and lots of images in an email message would eat up bandwidth).
- **Tenders mailing list:** When APC needs to contract work, we use this list to make a call to our members – which keeps things transparent.
- **APC techies:** Technicians from APC member organisations use this list to ask for advice, troubleshoot and sometimes plan. It is open to the APC network past and present, so techie "old timers" from the founding of APC are still with us in some cases. And of course they are not even old!
- **Project lists:** Lists are set up each time a new project goes into planning or is being implemented. For example, Africa wireless: a list for the participants in wireless workshops organised by APC in four African regions ending in 2006. The list is still used for networking by both the experts and those who first learned to set up networks all those years ago.

To set up an email list you will need to follow these basic steps:

A. Define the purpose of your list

The first step is to decide the objective you have for the list and accordingly choose the list settings.

A list can be open (anyone can subscribe) or restricted (people have to request access); it can be moderated (all messages sent to the list are approved before they are distributed) or non-moderated (messages from members are distributed automatically); it can be an announcement list (only selected people can post) or a discussion list (everyone subscribed can post). For example, our lists are private working spaces, hence they are all restricted, and since they are networking spaces they are also unmoderated, though periodically we may nominate a facilitator, e.g. for a meeting.

B. Define two basic roles: list owner and facilitator

List owner	Facilitator
This person will administrate the list technically; s/he will be in charge of subscribing and unsubscribing addresses and solving technical problems, such as messages that don't arrive correctly. If you decide to make the list moderated, sometimes the list owner is also in charge of moderation. This depends on the level of activity of your list. Some email lists are so active they have moderation as a separate role.	This person is in charge of making sure that the email list meets the objective it was created for. If the email list is for a project, then the facilitator coordinates, reminds people of deadlines and organises the work. If the email list is for interaction and discussion on a specific topic, then the facilitator starts up new discussion threads, summarises inputs from the group and in general creates a good environment for dialogue.

C. Choose the software for your email list

As we mentioned above, a mailing list is an automated message-sending programme. You can purchase a mailing list service from an internet service provider or you can use a free commercial service, commonly known as an online group (e.g. Yahoo Groups, Google Groups). Here are some pros and cons for both options:

Private mailing service	Free online group
There is a service fee.	There is no service fee involved.
People can participate with any email address they choose.	People usually have to create or use an email account from the provider (e.g. a Yahoo! Mail account if you are using Yahoo! Groups).
The terms of use allow for higher security and privacy standards.	The terms of use often compromise security and privacy for commercial purposes.
No publicity is displayed to users.	Publicity is used in headers, footers and web interface.
Although messages are stored, there usually is no web interface to store and share documents.	There is usually also a document and message repository that users can view online.

For our discussion lists APC uses a private mailing service hosted by an APC member. This means we are assured a secure, reliable service.

For our announcement lists, such as our press lists, we've recently started using MailChimp (www.mailchimp.com). You can design your own email campaigns, it has sign-up forms to embed on your website, it allows you to import existing mailing lists, it supports various languages, it has an extensive reporting feature, and it allows for segmentation (i.e. those who sign up can choose what type of information they want to receive – we love this feature). We chose MailChimp because it was the only service we found that supports multiple languages. It is a free tool if you send out to less than 6,000 recipients a month.

Many APC members provide secure lists and other services. Check the APC website to find out if there is a member providing hosting services in your country.

D. Invite the list members

The last step to start interaction is to invite the people who will be participating in the email list. When you invite people to join the list it is important to explain clearly the purpose of the list, how it will work, how they can unsubscribe and who to ask for help in case they need it.

For more information on using email lists to work together we recommend these resources:

- [IMARK Module: Building Electronic Communities and Networks](#)
This module covers the approaches, methods and tools used to build electronic communities, and covers the various steps and procedures for developing and facilitating electronic communities.
- [A Few Good Email Discussion List Tools](#)
This short article provides information on features of discussion lists to help you choose the system you would like to use.
- [A Network of Networks: Email Lists, Nature Protection, and Pollution Control](#)
Written with small environmental groups in mind, this white paper uses them as a framework for best practices for any organisation using email discussion lists.

Using email lists for online meetings

One of the most strategic practices we have at APC is using email lists for asynchronous online meetings. When the email lists are used for meetings, we always establish a clear procedure so that everyone involved in the meeting knows how long we will be discussing, what topics will be discussed each day or each week, and how subject lines will be handled.

A typical online meeting can take place over three weeks:

- Week 1: signing in and posting of discussion topics
- Week 2: discussion of topics
- Week 3: voting.

These are the basic steps that we follow for our online council meetings:

1. Two weeks prior to the meeting, the meeting facilitators will post the proposed meeting agenda and motions to the Board of Directors for approval.
2. One week prior to the meeting, the executive director will post the meeting agenda, including the full slate of proposed motions, to the council email list. This is an example of how an agenda looks:

The APC 2010 special council meeting is now officially open. The meeting wiki which links to the agenda and relevant documents is at:

<http://old.apc.org/tiki/tiki-index.php?page=APCcm2010>

Welcome everyone, and a special welcome to the new members (AT/Radio Viva) and others who are

participating in their first APC council meeting.

Agenda: APC Council Meeting, 15 November to 26
November 2010

Topic 1. Welcome and Agenda
Topic 2. Signing-in to the meeting
Topic 3. Presentation of APC Board of Directors 2010
report
Topic 4. Presentation of APC Board of Directors 2010
meeting report (May 2010)
Topic 5. Presentation of APC 2009 annual report

Topic 6. Resolution on amendment to bylaws -
discussion and vote
Topic 7. Member reports
Topic 8. Member meeting March 2011 (F2F CM)
Topic 9. Any other matters

Please note that all these topics are open for
discussion *at the same time*. An annotated agenda is
available on the meeting wiki:

[http://old.apc.org/tiki/tiki-index.php?
page=full+agenda+for+the+APCcm2010](http://old.apc.org/tiki/tiki-index.php?page=full+agenda+for+the+APCcm2010)

If anyone needs help with accessing the wiki write to
Karel@apc.org

Looking forward to hearing all your voices online in
the next 2 weeks.

Warm greetings from Johannesburg.

Anriette and the rest of the APC staff and board teams

4. Then we start the discussion by sending out one message for each point of the agenda, so that members may reply accordingly to each subject line. The first messages are for checking in: each member that will participate in the meeting sends a short message stating their name and organisation, so that we all know who is participating. Then we continue by replying to messages according to the subject headings of the agenda.

Example:

Subject: [APC.council] OLM1110 5: APC 2009 Annual report

This topic is for the presentation and discussion of APC's 2009 annual report.

The report is available in French, Spanish and English from this page:
<http://www.apc.org/en/pubs/about-apc/apc-annual-report-2009>

5. Once the meeting is finished there is an official message closing the meeting and thanking everyone for their participation. All council members will then receive a summary of the agreements and points discussed.
6. During the meeting the facilitator has a key role in making sure everyone is participating, clarifying any doubts in the procedures, and asking relevant questions to those members who have been silent (sometimes off list, encouraging them to participate).

Chat

Instant messaging or chat is an excellent tool that we have used to keep an open channel among staff members around the world and for holding small meetings. If your organisation has staff or members in different locations who need to keep in touch on a daily basis we recommend that you use an instant messaging service.

Establish some basic rules of how the chat will be used for office communications, for example:

- Ask staff to log into their chat software as part of their daily routine. On the APC staff team, as soon as we log on in the morning we log into our chat software so that we can instantly see who else is "in the office". It's a staff obligation that if a person is online working, they should be **visibly** working online, unless they have negotiated to work "offline" for a particular task.
- If you are busy and don't want to be disturbed, set your status accordingly, and be mindful of the status reported by others. You might be bothering your colleague during a meeting or presentation!

When we have used chat for project meetings we have also found it useful to define a procedure, because since several people can write at the same time it can get rather messy.

We recommend that you follow some of the same rules that you would follow in a face-to-face meeting, adapting them to the online tool.

Running an online chat meeting (synchronous meeting in text)

In advance of the meeting:

- Define and circulate the agenda.
- Set a time for the meeting that is suitable to everyone's time zones. Use the [World Clock Meeting Planner](#) to check if times are good for everyone.
- Agree on how long the meeting will take in advance. A good amount of time to have a chat meeting is no longer than two hours; after that time we have seen that people become tired and their attention drifts.
- Designate a facilitator for the meeting.
- Agree on and circulate meeting participation codes.

! = Raising my hand to speak
... = I'm not finished speaking
// = I'm finished speaking
:) = I agree

Running the meeting

- As the meeting progresses, announce each time a new topic is beginning so that people do not feel lost.
- Remember that the facilitator chairs the meeting. If several people are writing at the same time, make a pause and remind everyone of the participation codes.
- As each topic finishes, write a two-sentence summary of what was agreed, before you proceed to the next topic

Ending the meeting

- One of the good things about chat meetings is that everything is already written down, so you can just copy it and send everyone the transcription, along with a summary of the main points and agreements.

If working in a small team where everyone has good connectivity, you can use VoIP and have a voice or even video conference. This way you can work faster, and voice tends to be more personal than text. We combine this with emails, to previously share the agenda and any relevant documents, and shared calendars, to schedule and remember upcoming meetings for the project.

Wikis

A wiki is a web space that allows people to edit and add new content very easily. It is based on simplified mark-up language and creates a series of web pages linked to each other. Pages can be public or private.

It can have public and private areas, requires continuous connectivity and for most services you need to have your own hosting.

Wiki pros	Wiki cons
It can have public and private areas.	It requires continuous connectivity.
By creating pages and links it allows you to organise information.	Most services require you to have your own hosting and install the wiki software.
Several people can edit a document directly and the wiki stores and compiles the versions automatically.	It is less intuitive than most Web 2.0 tools, so there is more learning involved in how to use it.

APC started using wikis in the early 2000s during our online and offline meetings and for projects.

We like them for projects, as a way to have all the materials and inputs collected in one space. They are also useful for different people to write articles or materials together and to co-write the final report of an event. If you are new to wikis you can find tutorials, information and software reviews here: en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Wiki

Using a wiki to write a document together

1. Designate someone to create the general structure, including the main headings, the index on the first page and the links to the pages listed on the index.
2. Once the general structure is ready give clear instructions on where each person should contribute. To start it is best if you assign a subsection to each person.
3. Define a working procedure and schedule. For example, you can agree that in week 1 each person will work on their subsections, in week 2 each person will provide feedback on the subsections written by others, and in week 3 each person will integrate all the feedback received and write a final version.
4. Wiki systems store all versions of the edited pages, so you can always go back to prior versions and compare.
5. Designate a wiki "gardener" who tidies up the wiki if the pages become messy or unstructured.

To start using wikis we recommend you use PBworks, which is a web-based solution with free options that allows you to start using a wiki without needing to handle hosting or installing any software. Their terms of use are very respectful of your privacy and they also have good tutorials to learn how to use the tool.

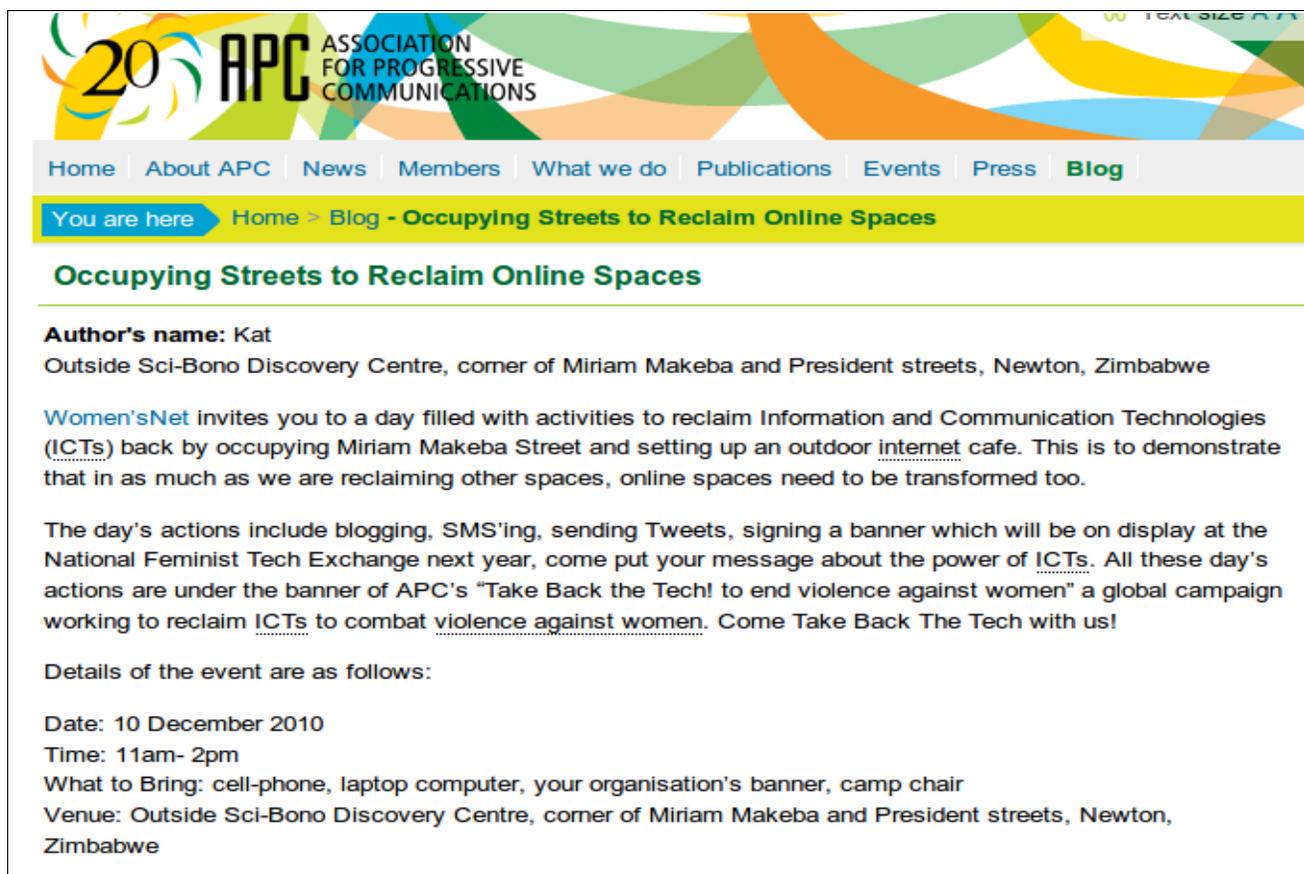
Blogs

This tool is used mostly to disseminate content, with the advantage that you can authorise more than one author to write in the same blog. If your organisation does not have a website, a blog can showcase what you do.

Think of a blog as the noticeboard in your office: a place where all co-workers and/or members can post their stories, opinions and events.

Blogs allow people to comment on each post, so they can also be a space to interact. If you allow people to comment on your blog posts it is a good idea to moderate the content, so that you can avoid spam and also hateful or disrespectful comments.

In APC our blogspace is "APC with attitude". Anybody registered on the website can blog and we don't change or edit any of the content (other than occasionally blog titles because they appear on our homepage – edits are usually confined to making the title more relevant to an international audience or fixing typos). Tags allow people to search our blog posts by region, by topic or a combination of both. It is a great space to hear voices and perspectives from different people around the globe and promote causes and campaigns.



The screenshot shows the APC website header with the logo '20 APC ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS'. The navigation menu includes 'Home', 'About APC', 'News', 'Members', 'What we do', 'Publications', 'Events', 'Press', and 'Blog'. A breadcrumb trail reads 'You are here > Home > Blog - Occupying Streets to Reclaim Online Spaces'. The main heading is 'Occupying Streets to Reclaim Online Spaces'. The author is 'Kat', located at 'Outside Sci-Bono Discovery Centre, corner of Miriam Makeba and President streets, Newton, Zimbabwe'. The post text describes an event where Women'sNet invites people to reclaim ICTs by occupying Miriam Makeba Street and setting up an outdoor internet cafe. It mentions actions like blogging, SMS'ing, and signing a banner for the 'Take Back the Tech!' campaign. Event details include the date (10 December 2010), time (11am-2pm), and venue (Outside Sci-Bono Discovery Centre, corner of Miriam Makeba and President streets, Newton, Zimbabwe).

There are many blogging systems: some offer free hosting, others you can download and use from your own server. If you are relatively new to blogs you can find useful resources on how to get started through these links:

- www.blogtips.org (blogging and social media for non-profits)
- havefundogood.blogspot.com
- how-to-blog.tv/blog-series/beginners
- www.problogger.net
- www.bloggingpro.com

Websites

A website is a good tool to document and organise content on mid-term and long-term initiatives. It also allows you to integrate several of the tools mentioned above as well as social networking applications.

At APC we have around ten active websites. There are pros and cons⁵ to having separate websites for different activities.

Have a separate site if...	Use the same site if...
<p>The objective is clearly different from an organisational/network space.</p> <p>E.g. Take Back the Tech!, a campaign site that has contributions by APC and by autonomous campaigners in different parts of the world.</p>	<p>The areas of work overlap, because the aggregation, monitoring and tracking of information and content on different sites can be difficult and result in double work.</p>
<p>The site has evolved to have its own identity/community/readership.</p> <p>E.g. GenderIT.org is an APC portal that has evolved to become a key reference site, with its own audience.</p>	<p>There is danger of the network identity becoming diluted.</p> <p>Since each site will have its own look and feel, and different people leading it, the network's identity could become diluted or confused.</p>
<p>It is a complex site with a navigational structure that retains its own logic.</p> <p>E.g. although it's possible to have a GenderIT subsite on apcwomen.org, it would complicate navigation, making it pointless to have it within apcwomen.org.</p>	<p>It becomes hard to keep the site active and the community engaged.</p> <p>Budgets do not include sustaining an online space afterwards, animating it with conversations, actions and follow-up.</p>

⁵ Based on email correspondence with Jac sm Kee of APCWNSP.

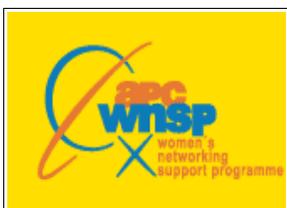
The official face of an organisation or project



A website can be used as the official presentation of an organisation or programme.

APC.org (www.apc.org) News and information about the use of internet for social justice and sustainable development from and about APC and the network for the general public. Full versions available in English, Spanish and French and a limited version in Portuguese. There are three associated newsletters (APCNews, APCNoticias, APCNouvelles) to which anyone can subscribe.

To keep this site updated at least twice a month with new content APC employs three language editors and works with a number of translators. We invest significantly in the site as the public face of our work and as a place that tells stories of real uses of ICT for development in the world that otherwise may not be told.



APC Women's Networking Support Programme (www.apcwomen.org) APC's women's programme's dedicated website features their key initiatives. It has full content in English and some content in French and Spanish. There is no capacity in the women's programme to keep the website updated manually on a regular basis so the site has been set up to automatically pull content produced by other APC websites (called "RSS feeds"). This is a clever way to maintain an active website with minimal staff intervention.

A thematic website can be used to position a topic of special interest for the organisation or network.



GenderIT.org hosts APC's gender and ICT policy content. Most of the content is original and produced by commissioning writers. There are three part-time editors working in English, Spanish and some Portuguese. The site was originally expected to be a space where lots of organisations would contribute so it was not

given APC branding. There is an associated newsletter in English and Spanish (Gender Centred/PolITICas).

Training and capacity building

A website can also be used as a repository for training resources and products that strengthen the capacities of the network and of others.



ItrainOnline (www.itrainonline.org) A multilingual online repository of training resources in ICT. The website was set up by APC and a number of partners who all shared any training materials we had produced freely to anyone on the internet.

How do you develop a website?

What we usually refer to as a website is the combination of three elements: a web hosting service, a domain name and an application that manages the content.

A **web hosting service**: The information that you are publishing needs to be stored somewhere. There are companies that provide space on a server they own or lease for use by their clients as well as providing internet connectivity, typically in a data centre; they are called web hosts.⁶

Here are some helpful resources to help you choose your web host:

- [How to Choose the Best Web Hosting Service](#)
- [Criteria for Choosing a Web Hosting Company](#)
- [How to Choose a Web Host](#)

Remember: Many APC members provide secure hosting services. Check the APC website to find out if there is a member providing hosting services in your country.

A **domain name**: In order for people to find your website you need to give them an “address” with the form [www.mywebsite.com](#) – called a domain name – which you need to purchase. Buying and registering a domain name is a simple procedure and most service providers can set this up for you. Costs vary but can be between USD 10-25 per year for a domain.

Here are some guidelines:

- [How to Buy a Domain Name](#)
- [How Do I Get a Domain Name?](#)
- [How to Buy Domain Names Like a Pro](#)

You will also need an **application** that manages the content (text, images, audio, etc.) that you want to publish. Currently, most people use a content management system (CMS) to develop their website. There are applications you need to pay a license for and there are free applications. You need to have more technical knowledge to manage a CMS than to use the other tools we have talked about in this guide, but in case you are interested:

- This is a comparison of four free and open source applications (Drupal, Joomla, WordPress and Plone): [bit.ly/h3gSDI](#)
- [The Drupal Cookbook for Beginners](#) This guide takes the user step by step to learn how to set up and use this application.
- [An Absolute Beginner's Guide to Joomla](#) This guide also takes you step by step, and even includes video tutorials to learn how to install and use this application.
- [Your New WordPress Website Step by Step](#) This guide is also for beginners to learn how to make the most of an application that is not just for blogging but also for

⁶ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_hosting_service

complex websites.

- It will take you through the installation, development and administration of your website.

Online conferencing systems

One of the greatest hopes we have placed on ICTs is that they will enable us to bridge distances by allowing us to meet and interact online in conditions that are increasingly similar to that of face-to-face interaction. Web conferencing systems have brought us closer to that objective, combining audio, video, chat, whiteboard and desktop sharing in one single web application.

At APC we have started using a web conferencing system in combination with email. For us, using these tools is very important to contribute to reducing the environmental impact of international face-to-face meetings that involve air travel and conference venues. In the section on good practices we talk about how we used the online conferencing system to hold a project meeting, so we would like to share the basic steps in web conferencing here.

Step 1 Choose an online conferencing system

There are different types of conferencing systems. For some of them, in order to participate in a meeting, you need to download and install software; for others you just need a web browser and a password. Most have a basic set of features that include a shared whiteboard, a chat window, audio (either through VoIP or using a telephone conference call) and video.

Here are some reviews comparing different web conferencing systems so that you can choose the one that fits your needs and budget. As you will see, almost all systems involve a fee, although some of them (such as Elluminate) have versions that can be used for free

- [Online Meeting Tools Review](#) (11 applications)
- [Review of six web conferencing applications](#)
- [Price comparison of web conferencing systems \(50 applications\)](#)

Step 2 Plan the meeting

As you would do for a face-to-face meeting, you need to plan your virtual encounter.

- Define a date and time that is convenient for most participants. Remember to take into account differences in time zones.
- Prior to the meeting send the participants instructions on technical requirements they will need to connect to the meeting, explaining any adjustments they might need to make in their computers or programmes they might need to download or update. It is very important to offer technical support prior to and during the meeting, as it is very frustrating for participants to be blocked from a meeting due to technical reasons.

This is a sample of instructions sent to APC members for our council meeting where we used a web conferencing system to vote on a specific issue. Each bullet is a link with further instructions.

Online Council Meeting 2010; real time "Special member meeting" - instructions for using meeting platform

Meeting details

Where: The meeting will take place on APC's meeting platform Elluminate:
[Http://chatroom.apc.org](http://chatroom.apc.org)

When: Friday November 23, 1 pm GMT See the timing in your city: <http://tinyurl.com/apccm2010timezones>

Who: Council representatives with voting rights (one per organisation)

Duration: Estimated one hour

Instructions for using meeting platform

For the synchronous part of the meeting will be using Elluminate Live! meeting platform which is tested on all common operating systems.

- [Online Council Meeting 2010; real time "Special member meeting" - instructions for using meeting platform](#)
- [Meeting details](#)
- [Instructions for using meeting platform](#)
- [HW/SW requirements & basic set-up](#)
- [Webcam](#)
- [Configuring your audio](#)
- [Most common issues with loading Elluminate](#)
- [Support during the meeting](#)
- [Casting your vote](#)

Step 3 Facilitate the meeting

- Designate one person as the facilitator of the meeting and one person to provide technical support in case it is needed during the meeting.
- Define a procedure of how the meeting will be carried out and explain it to the participants.
- Have a training meeting for people who are using an online conferencing tool for the first time.
- Also, allocate some time at the beginning of the meeting (30 minutes) for participants to become familiar with the platform and make any technical adjustments necessary to participate. As a facilitator, walk them through the main functions they need to handle to participate in the meeting, such as how to raise their hand, or how to send a public chat message to everyone or a private message for technical support.

Step 4 Send a report to participants

- Once the meeting has finished it is important to send an email to participants with a summary of the main meeting points and agreements.
- Remember that most web conferencing systems allow you to record the session, which can help you have all the information necessary for the report.

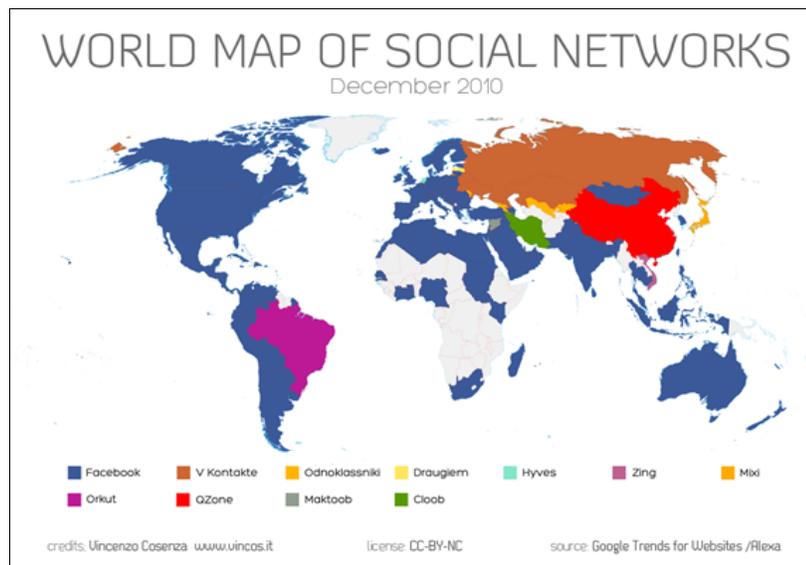
APC recently developed a guide titled **Online Conferencing Tools for Development Practitioners**, which can help you choose the right tool for your needs. The guide addresses key issues such as privacy, security, interoperability, bandwidth and integration with other tools, and it also provides a glossary of terms associated with these types of tools.

Social networks

What is commonly referred to as a social network is really a social network service:

(...) an online service, platform, or site that focuses on building and reflecting of social networks or social relations among people, e.g., who share interests and/or activities. A social network service essentially consists of a representation of each user (often a profile), his/her social links, and a variety of additional services. Most social network services are web based and provide means for users to interact over the internet, such as email and instant messaging.⁷

There are public social network services (e.g. Facebook, QZone, Orkut, V Kontakte, Cloob) where each person signs up for an account and starts building his/her network. These types of networks were originally used mainly for personal social interaction, but since the number of people who have a profile on them has grown exponentially, they are also being used as spaces to connect professionally, to market an organisation's services or to promote specific causes.



The popularity of social network services varies in different countries and continents.

⁷ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network_service

Facebook, the most popular site at the time of writing, has two main networking tools for organisations: Pages and Groups. Pages are used for broader dissemination, since they are indexed and visible to users who are not registered. On the other hand, to receive information from a Group you need to be part of the Group, so it is considered more geared to interaction. Since Pages are more recent than Groups, there are comparisons available about their functionalities and differences for users:

- [Facebook Pages vs. Facebook Groups: What's the Difference?](#)
- [Facebook Group vs. Facebook Fan Page: What's Better?](#)

At APC we've set up Facebook Pages in three languages: [English](#), [Spanish](#) and [French](#), which we use mainly to disseminate news from APC to our different audiences.

If your organisation wants to set up a Facebook Page or a Facebook Group you will need to set up a personal account and click on the buttons you will find on the left sidebar to either create a Page or a Group. Here are some useful resources to make the most of your Page or Group:

- [5 Elements of a Successful Facebook Fan Page](#)
- [Why You Need to Make a Facebook Page for Your Website NOW!](#)
- [How to set up a Facebook fan page that works](#)
- [10 Steps to Make Your Facebook Group Go Viral](#)
- [How to Make a Killer Facebook Group](#)

What is Creative Commons?

All of these tools and online interaction produce a great amount of content (text, images, audio, video). It is important for you to decide how all of this content will be used, now and in the future. We are living in a time when information can easily be shared, but this also means that it is easier for others to use our documents, video tutorials and radio training programmes in ways that we don't agree with.

One of the ways we have dealt with this challenge at APC is using Creative Commons licenses. Creative Commons is an organisation that has developed and supports:

(...) a set of copyright licenses and tools that create a balance inside the traditional 'all rights reserved' setting that copyright law creates. These licenses provide everyone a simple, standardised way to keep their copyright while allowing certain uses of their work – a “some rights reserved” approach to copyright – which makes their creative, educational, and scientific content instantly more compatible with the full potential of the internet.⁸

8 creativecommons.org/about

There are currently six licenses, combining one or more of the following aspects:

1. Attribution: recognising you as the author of the work – if that is what you want
2. Share-alike: protecting how the work will be shared – if that is what you want
3. No-derivatives: prohibiting others from creating new contents based on your work – if that is what you want
4. Non-commercial: forbidding others to use your work commercially – if that is what you want!

If your organisation wants to use a Creative Commons license for your work, you can use the license chooser tool. After you select the options that best fit your organisation, the chooser tool will indicate the corresponding license, as well as the text that you will place on the content you want to protect (document, website, etc.). There is also an FAQ with information about when and how to use Creative Commons licenses.

Chapter 4: Good practices

During its long experience working as an online organisation, APC has developed a lot of online processes. We would like to highlight some of them as an inspiration to other organisations who are starting to develop online work.

WSIS: Using ICT tools to raise the voices of civil society

As an organisation that carries out advocacy and promotes communication rights, APC had a strong presence at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). We developed policy papers and publications to contribute to the debate and also got involved directly in the process by establishing conditions that would enable participants from different sectors to be more involved.

"APC was very active in the WSIS in Geneva. When I met them I was very impressed with their wide global network. There were several documents from civil society that needed to be translated back and forth in order to enable real live participation of non-English speakers in the process.

Karen Banks was coordinating the work group and Valeria Betancourt was also involved. APC was facilitating the Latin American Caucus of Civil Society for WSIS, they opened up an electronic group to gather materials and coordinate the process of live document translation. It was an interesting space to meet other people and organisations linked to the WSIS process."

Katitza Rodríguez, Electronic Frontier Foundation, Peru

APC developed a range of online processes during WSIS as part of its contribution to facilitating and coordinating a worldwide network of organisations and individuals involved in a range of thematic interests in the summit.

A website was created which outlined the various ways civil society was organised during the process: www.wsis-cs.org/index2.html

home@wsis-cs

[A very brief introduction to the WSIS process](#)

[Overview of Civil Society Elements and how to get involved: the Plenary, Content and Themes Group and Bureau](#)

[Civil Society Caucuses and Working groups](#)

[Website links: Civil Society Organisations Civil Society Division ITU](#)

[Civil Society Translation team](#)

[Create a new mailing list](#)

✳ Powered by [GreenNet](#)

>> [about the wsis-cs.org domain](#)

The Wsis-cs.org domain was created at the end of PrepCom II.

As per discussions and subsequent agreement during the final Civil Society plenary in Geneva on Feb 28th, the wsis-cs. establishment of lists to discuss and share information between PrepComs and the Summit.

>> [what you will find on this site](#)

✳ Information about the elements which make up Civil Society - the Civil Society Plenary, Content and Themes Group, how, and to what extent, you can participate in these spaces.

✳ Information about Civil Society regional and thematic caucuses and working groups, their focal points, information abc you would like to join these spaces.

✳ Links to content produced by Civil Society Content and Themes group.

✳ Information about how to request the creation of a mailing list @wsis-cs.org.
[All regional and thematic caucuses are invited to use this domain, if they wish, for the creation of mailing lists to facilitate]

✳ Links to other useful WSIS related websites.

>> [what you will NOT find on this site](#)

✳ Information about fellowships and grants, accomodation, accreditation and registration. For this and other information | further contact information:

[Fellowships and grants](#)

[Accommodation](#)

[Accreditation](#)

[Registration](#)

[Information about the PrepCom and Summit Agendas](#)

Conference and room bookings ([Palexbo](#))

Conference and room bookings ([ICT4DEV](#))

Mailing lists: APC created over 20 mailing lists as online workspaces for the civil society plenary and thematic working groups, as well as other spaces that were needed for drafting work and governance purposes.

Each mailing list had facilitators, drawn from the thematic groups, whose role it was to facilitate debate and discussion, to organise collective action, and to organise inputs to thematic and collective statements to the WSIS process.

Facilitators were also responsible for ensuring that remote participants had an opportunity to contribute content to discussions, diversifying and increasing participation for those who weren't able to attend the WSIS events in person.

In addition to the possibility of remote participation, APC, along with several other initiatives, also managed travel grant opportunities allowing hundreds of people to attend WSIS over the course of the five-year process.



Civil society translation team: A pool of volunteer translators, drawn from the community as a whole and the ICT volunteers network,⁹ provided a "rapid response" translation service to the WSIS civil society network as a whole. Thematic groups and the plenary group would draft statements that often needed to be translated into the main United Nations languages overnight.

Documents would be sent to the translators list and the translations would be done and returned the next day. This service added incredible value to, in particular, non-English speaking participants, allowing for a far more inclusive process and a very diverse set of multilingual voices

9 www.ictvolunteer.org

to be heard in collective documents.

During the WSIS process, APC also developed a guide to help civil society organisations organise their own local and national WSIS consultation processes.

[Involving Civil Society in ICT Policy: The World Summit on the Information Society](#) was aimed primarily at people from civil society organisations who access and use ICTs to promote peace, development and human rights, and who want to advocate for more enabling policy environments. It was designed to build civil society organisations' awareness of and capacity to engage in WSIS within the summit process, as well as other policy-making spaces at international, regional and national levels. It highlights issues most relevant to civil society and suggests ways to get involved.

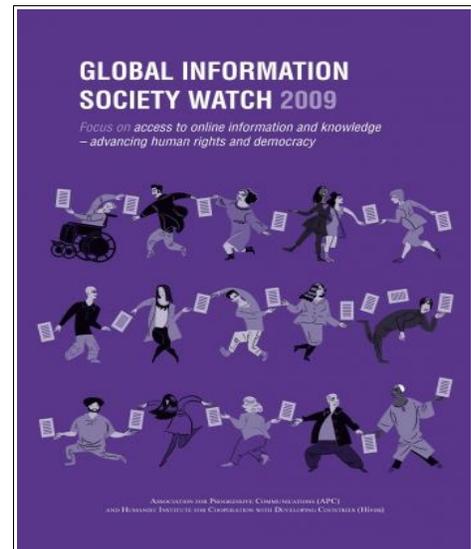
GISWatch: Writing a book together online

The [Global Information Society Watch](#) (GISWatch) report focuses on ICTs and how they are being implemented in different countries across the world. The purpose of the report is to stimulate a collaborative approach to policy advocacy, and to create a common platform where disparate experiences can be shared. Ultimately, GISWatch hopes to impact on policy development processes in countries, regions, and at a global level.

GISWatch takes a different thematic focus each year. Most of the authors who wrote for the first edition (2007) have kept participating every year. Once the topic of focus is decided, the editor invites different member organisations to write reports and follows up using a combination of VoIP and email. The process is very well structured. The editor sends the authors a report structure that includes the subtitles of each section and indications regarding the desired length and aspects to be touched upon. The editor also sends out a style guide and resource links, and agrees on a submission date for the first draft. Once the authors send their papers, a back and forth feedback process takes place through email between each author and the editor. When this process has concluded, the authors send in their final drafts. In some regions (for example, Latin America) the authors also meet face to face to share impressions and lessons of the process, which are incorporated into the dynamic of the next edition.

The main role of the editor is not only to provide this feedback, but also to make sure all contributions are ready in time for the publication. GISWatch has been published four times and the number of countries involved has grown from 19 to 53, making this publication an excellent example of how ICTs can enable us to produce a valuable publication based on country reports from local organisations, a process that in the absence of this technology would become more expensive and difficult to achieve.

GISWatch is edited by Alan Finlay, who shared with us his experience working online with APC members to create this publication.

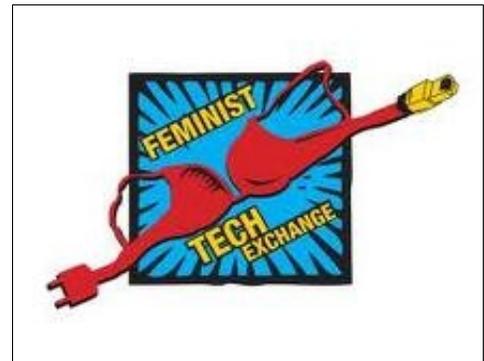


"Editing GISWatch is a challenging and exciting job. It is interesting to work with all the authors from the different countries, and very challenging, because we work in English and people have different writing skills. Hence, the editing can be quite difficult sometimes. It seems to be having an impact, being used in universities, and regional nodes seem to be developing. We've had mailing list discussions and the feedback has been very positive from the people involved in the project since 2007."
Alan Finlay, GISWatch editor, South Africa

FTX: Planning an international workshop together online

In 2008, the APC Women's Networking Support Programme (APC WNSP) and the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) organised the first Feminist Tech Exchange (FTX). The FTX was a three-day gathering of 100 women and men from Asia-Pacific, Africa, Latin America, Europe and North America. It was held in Cape Town, South Africa on 10-12 November, preceding the AWID Forum on 14-17 November.

The FTX gathered activists interested in using ICTs to foster gender equity who represented different regions, types of organisations and thematic issues. As if this wasn't a large enough challenge, the FTX also put together an international team of sixteen women trainers from different parts of the world.



"We deliberately opened the call for trainers to beyond the APC WNSP network, to draw in diverse experience, expertise and areas of advocacy that would both inform and enrich our understanding, articulation and shaping of feminist practices and politics of technology."
APC WNSP¹⁰

There was an important preparation process that relied on ICTs, since the members of the coordination team and the trainers were geographically dispersed. During the months prior to the event, the coordination team met online regularly using chat to have synchronous communication, email for follow-up and to exchange documents, and a wiki where each person would contribute to the proposals. There were two face-to-face meetings in preparation for the event, but most of the preparatory process was conducted online, in order to be able to organise five parallel capacity-building tracks and a space for open exchange sessions.

¹⁰ www.apcwomen.org/wiki/tiki-download_file.php?fileId=55

"We worked really close together for six to nine months, using email and instant messaging to have meetings with a lot of people from different parts of the world. We used wiki spaces really effectively; different people were responsible for each part. It was a new experience for me."

Anna Turley, AWID, South Africa

This event was a great success in itself, and it inspired the development of other FTX events in different regions and countries worldwide. After the first FTX, the APC WNSP team organised the resources produced on a website (ftx.apcwomen.org), which made them easily available for the following training events.

GreeningIT: Running an international project workshop online

From 28 October to 5 November 2009, representatives from APC member organisations that are part of the GreeningIT initiative participated in an online research capacity-building workshop. Participants shared their GreeningIT research plans and ICT and climate change policy scan findings, clarified key terms used, and brainstormed for a future GreeningIT global campaign.

Karel Novotný was the organiser and moderator. He announced the workshop on the GreeningIT mailing list, including the schedule, the goals of the activity, and the technical requirements.

Participants were asked to test the web conferencing programme to prevent any foreseeable problems. No special equipment was needed, just a regular computer and the software. The activity was carried out over five days, and scheduled during the afternoons based on Central European Time (CET) to handle time zone differences.

This example shows how ICTs can have an important role in helping to reduce the environmental impact that is produced when we have regular face-to-face meetings, by enabling virtual environments that maximise the interaction experience by involving audio and video, as well as other working tools such as a virtual blackboard and shared documents.



"It was exciting to try something new. I was curious and got involved in almost all the sessions during the whole length of the online workshop. No doubt, it is a communication tool that has to be learnt. I am optimistic about it, without having illusions though. No technology can replace face-to-face contact. However, much time, money and energy can be saved through virtual workshops. Balanced, multi-channelled communication could be an environmentally sensitive answer for global communication."

Rozi Bakó, StrawberryNet Foundation, Romania