

Democratic Spaces Online

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure *BUILDING BLOCK 2 OF 12 – CREATING SPACES FOR CITIZENS*



Local and neighborhood-level online forums are proliferating dramatically in communities all over the country. They can be very simple technologically, often consisting of nothing more than an e-mail listserv.

An Arena for Public Life Online

Rockville, Maryland (pop. 61,000)

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Two local residents launched a community blog, "Rockville Central," in 2007. The purpose of blog was to create an open, fair and civil space in which residents could share views about their city. News, information and volunteer opportunities were also featured on the site. The online community now has more than 1,500 participants, including the mayor and members of the city council. The site is among the top local blogs in the state of Maryland. In 2011, Rockville Central moved to Facebook, but users do not have to join Facebook to visit the site.



PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS:

- Inform and educate citizens.
- Build a stronger sense of community.
- Develop smarter, more widely supported policies.
- Support other components.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Help establish neighborhood/school online forums.
- Help establish local online forums.
- Connect online forums with neighborhood and school groups.

WORK BEST WHEN:

- They are operated by, or connected to, neighborhood or school associations and groups.
- They are moderated.
- They utilize a registration system that requires participants to use their real names.
- They are connected to face-to-face events and meetings.
- There are computers at libraries, schools and other public places that are available, free of charge, to people who do not have computers at home.
- There are free opportunities for people to get basic training in online skills.