the engine room

2014/2015 Roadmap

Where the engine room is headed.

Over the past three years the engine room has engaged with a variety of advocates working on projects that use technology as a core component of their work. We've worked with projects in Peru improving public service delivery and government accountability; projects in Africa using text messaging to proactively stem the tide of political violence and mobilize communities for political engagement; and projects led by international networks delivering support to country teams around the world. From small advocacy projects working for local change to large institutions working on global issues, we have tested different ways of helping groups to get the support they need to create the impact they want.

While there is no one-size fits all solution, we think we are moving towards a recipe that works and one that relies heavily on collaboration with other organizations in the ecosystem of support. We will be looking for program co-funding to round out support, and we will be looking for core funding as we navigate the growth phase ahead. We've developed a clear sense of what models of support and areas of engagement we want to pursue, and in the coming two-year period we will be focusing on:
1. direct, demand-driven support for on-the-ground advocacy projects that are using technology and data
2. supporting advocates to use strong methodologies and tactics when working with evidence and information
3. developing customized approaches to data-driven program design and participatory monitoring and evaluation

Why we are different.

We provide hands-on support for on-the-ground projects using a variety of mechanisms. We respond directly to need, and focus on delivering the right support at the right time. We move beyond guides and online resources to tailor responses for specific types of projects, networks, and movements. We directly tackle challenges faced by partners, and in the process generate resources that are reusable for us and our partners. We don't have a one-size-fits-all fix for technology projects, and we do not have all the answers. We aren't afraid to call upon skilled and dedicated experts and we aren't afraid to offer self-funded

support for organizations we admire and work we believe is important. Also, the internet is our office.

What do we want to change.

We want to:
1. Make it easier for activists to get the support they need, when they need it
2. Make it easier for advocates to use data and evidence ethically, credibly, securely and openly
3. Help international networks use data to monitor their impact and adapt their programs.
4. Document our engagements to help build on successes over time
5. Carry out original research on what does and does not work in tech-supported advocacy

1. Make it easier for activists to get the support they need, when they need it.

There is no easy way for activists to acquire all the skills necessary to pull off the perfect technology project. We don't think that an activist should have to know the right international NGO, funder or computer whiz to get a project off the ground. Nor do we think that any one support organization has all of the skills necessary for most advocacy projects. We think local expertise (developers, data scientists, communications experts) should be sourced for local projects, and that intermediary organizations should be made redundant (including the engine room itself). Matching projects with the right resources and expertise in a demand-driven way will support the growth of community networks over time, and increase the impact of projects.

2. Make it easier for advocates to use data and evidence ethically, credibly, securely and openly.

As evidence becomes an increasingly important component of advocacy efforts, activists and small organizations face complex methodological challenges in collecting, storing, and presenting data. The ease of generating and managing data with tech can obscure challenges to protecting the privacy and security of people reflected in data. Quick collection and presentation of data can also miss important methodological details, damaging advocate's credibility and legitimacy with local communities, policy makers or researchers. Most activists and small organizations don't have experience dealing with these challenges, which are significant even for large research institutions. We want to work with partners, convene expertise and develop resources to make these challenges easier to tackle.

3. Help international networks use data to monitor their impact and adapt their programs.

We want to expand our current work with well-resourced networks and international organizations, to use data in programming and generate reusable knowledge and resources for smaller organizations wanting to do the same. Large organizations can become entrenched in bureaucracy, and staff are likely not interested in another stale

monitoring and evaluation process that aims to tick the box of a donor requirement. We have seen projects that use data for program course correction, but this course correction is often accomplished intuitively by a few smart staff. Using more systematic stakeholder feedback systems, programmatic data collection and research frameworks can improve program design and resource allocation. What works, what doesn't, what evidence supports strategic change in this direction? These are questions and processes that we want to support large networks and organizations in answering.

4. Document our engagements to help build a knowledge base and improve the way that support is carried out.

We *think* that demand-driven support works better, but we also believe it's important to use evidence to test assumptions. Working directly with partners to design, develop, and implement demand-driven processes of support through the course of projects, we plan on testing the effectiveness of the demand-driven approach even more thoroughly than we have in the past year. By documenting every step of the process – from partner selection criteria, to support delivery and the way it changes the trajectory of a project – documentation will lay the foundation for how we develop our work with on-the-ground partners.

5. Carry out original research on what does and does not work.

It's easy to get excited about the transformative effect technology can have on social change projects. But what works best? And what support for using technology in advocacy has the biggest and most lasting effects? What project funding strategies deliver the greatest results? What data can we collect to test the impact that projects have and the role that technology plays in that impact? Using documentation, interviews, surveys, and other methods, we want to produce empirical, actionable research that is useful for support organizations, donors, technologists, and on-the-ground groups interested in learning about what has worked in other contexts. We don't want to replicate academic work, but we want to take advantage of academic expertise and bridge divides between ivory tower resources and activist communities.

How are we going to change it.

Over the next two years we will focus on two core programs and several ad hoc projects. We will continue testing ideas and working with other like-minded organizations to help out, engage, and learn. We will never work alone and will rely on close collaborators to help us push forward.

Core Programs

Partnerships Program

Activists and organizations using technology to implement projects have a hard time finding the right types of support at the right time unless they are already well connected. Current models for training and support don't address the diverse needs of increasingly complex, innovative projects, and are not a sustainable way to build strong tech-supported

advocacy communities.

This project will:

- partner with advocacy initiatives,
- support them through the project design process,
- match them with resources and expertise to support their work throughout the project cycle, and
- facilitate tactic sharing across global communities of activists.

Success would result in improved partner projects, continued networking and support for partners after the project is completed, adoption of partners' techniques by other advocates, and interest from support organizations and experts to work with partners through this process again. As with all engine room programs, documentation and research will play a key part in charting the program's path. Open documentation will overlay project activities and directly inform how the project takes shape. We are fortunate to have funders interested in letting the project evolve organically instead of following a predetermined set of deliverables. We will be using that flexibility to test methods and build on successes.

More information is available at https://www.theengineroom.org/partnerships/.

Responsible Data Program

Technology poses significant challenges for data-driven advocacy. The speed and the reach of information today makes issues like privacy, consent and the re-use of data especially challenging for activists and small organizations using evidence and information in advocacy.

The Responsible Data Program is a focused effort to improve the capacity of advocates to collect and use evidence in advocacy. Outputs will include:
1. Partnerships and mentorships with advocacy initiatives to improve data collection, management and sharing practices
2. Convenings online and offline, large and small, to share experiences and identify the most critical challenges to responsible data practices in advocacy
3. Tools and reusable resources to help advocates tackle specific challenges in data collection, storage and use
4. Documentation on processes of collecting, using and opening data in advocacy
5. Development of a community of practice for supporting the responsible use of data in advocacy

More information is available at https://www.theengineroom.org/projects/responsible-data-program/.

Ad Hoc Projects

The Responsible Data Program and Partnerships Program will drive our work, but we will continue to experiment with smaller projects to test ideas, carry out original research, and develop collaborations with partners large and small. Examples of ad hoc projects in 2013 include:

- Researching and reporting on how digital security trainings of trainers function and how they may be improved (funded by Internews)

- Assessing the way that Amnesty International researchers use digital tools and ways that they can improve their digital collaboration and secure sensitive data (self-funded)

- Working with Frontline Defenders to research how digital security communities are developed in repressive environments and how the sustainability of such programs can be improved (funded by Front Line Defenders)

- Managing and co-authoring the Norwegian review for the OGP (funded by the Open Government Partnership)

- Interviewing 20 donor organizations to explore how donors support grantee's in responsible data practices (self-funded)

- Developing best practices for organizational infrastructure and communication in a blog post series (Getting off Google, https://www.theengineroom.org/getting-off-google-step-one-hosting/) (self-funded)

- Evaluating the first phase of the Land Matrix Project, to provide evidence for enhancing the project's strategy for community and engagement and technology use (funded by the Land Coalition)

- Developing a modular survey mechanism to document common practices and perspectives in the "Tech for Social Good" sector (in partnership with iiLab, self-funded)

- Documenting and sharing innovative uses of technology to increase government transparency and accountability (funded by Personal Democracy Media)

Who will help us with this work

Close Collaborators

We regularly check-in with trusted allies and partners. We work on projects with a few collaborators regularly, both because we enjoy it and because it helps us contribute to the support ecosystem in a complementary way. Our sounding board plays a big part in how we think about moving forward and how we set our strategic direction. While it's hard to do justice to how helpful our core collaborators are with a list, here is a link to a list anyway (https://www.theengineroom.org/about/). Some of the most active members of the sounding board include: Allen Gunn at Aspiration, Kristin Antin at New Tactics for Human Rights, Jun Matsushita at iilab, Becky Hurwitz at the MIT Center for Civic Media, and Tanya O'Carroll at Amnesty International.

Donors

Over the past year, the engine room has consolidated its programs to prepare for larger scale support from private foundations. We have shifted from submitting proposals in open calls to working towards a vision. We are developing interconnected programs and an organizational multi-year strategic plan. We are in the final proposal phases with OSF to support an output-driven launch event for the Responsible Data Program, and with the Hewlett Foundation to cover two thirds of the partnership project for two years. We are looking to secure remaining funds for the Responsible Data and Partnership Programs from other funders, and will also be looking for core support to ensure a smooth growth

trajectory. When possible, we will work on contract with larger international support networks to carry out support, and to complement private foundation funds.

Core Staff

The engine room is currently run by three dedicated staff and a team of consultants and volunteers. The Responsible Data Program will be run by one program manager, two full-time staff, and experienced researchers and advocates who will help to design the direction and outputs of the program streams. The Partnership Project will be managed by a program manager, implemented by three regional leads, and driven by experts and advocates with experience designing cutting edge on-the-ground projects. For ad hoc and short-term projects, we will work with our trusted network of consultants. Core organizational staff for managing finances and administrative duties will be hired when funds are available and core funds will be used to consolidate an administrative support team. This will allow for delineation of tasks based on expertise as the organization grows to accommodate larger funds and programs.