# LocalWiki Community Program

In November, a police officer pepper-sprayed students sitting in the UC Davis Quad, kicking off a maelstrom of international media attention. But while the world's presses buzzed, Davis residents were busy compiling every bit of information about the event on their local wiki, DavisWiki.org. Residents created an ever-updating chronology of events; posted and analyzed photos, videos and letters; discussed and debated the events; and countered incorrect information that was rapidly circulating.

Even before the event occurred, the DavisWiki had extensive pages about the UC Davis Police Department, the UC Davis Chancellor, the head of the police department, and the location of the event. With the DavisWiki, residents were able to share and learn about an important event in its full context, not just consume the latest new updates.

During the week of the event, over 25,000 people visited pages on DavisWiki related to the pepper spraying, and the page about the event was edited over 700 times by over 100 different residents. But residents didn't simply read and share online — they turned this information into real-world action, including the largest protest in the city's history.

The pepper spraying incident and many others like it have shown the immeasurable value of a vibrant, collaborative, community information hub. The LocalWiki project is our effort to help other communities create valuable resources like the DavisWiki. Thanks to a Knight News Challenge grant, we tackled the first major obstacle in popularizing this new medium by creating an entirely new kind of "wiki" software designed specifically for local, geographic collaboration. Our simple, intuitive software breaks new ground in usability and makes it possible for people without any technical skills to collaborate with their neighbors. We also launched our first pilot community project, DentonWiki, serving Denton, Texas.

Our focused approach and innovative new software has put the Denton project well on its way to becoming an invaluable local resource — the project has already seen more traction than DavisWiki did in its early days. Over the past six months we've helped begin promising projects in Sacramento; San Francisco; Raeligh-Durham, N.C.; the Pacific Crest Trail; Sydney, Australia and Palmer Station, Antarctica.

And since our first general-public software release only a month ago, over 150 communities have independently installed our LocalWiki software, making us one of the most-installed Knight News Challenge projects in only a matter of weeks. Independent projects have sprung up in Olympia, Wash.; San Diego, Calif.; Boulder, Colo.; Port Townsend, Wash.; Gaston County, N.C.; Gainesville, Fla., Chicago, Ill.; Berkeley, Calif.; Sissach, Switzerland — and many more. We find new ones every day.

The DavisWiki wasn't an overnight success — it took several years for it to cement itself in the community and hit various critical mass points. What is needed now are the resources to turn this energy and momentum into a strong, self-sustaining movement. We propose a robust community program with the following goals:

## Implement a focused community program in 20 locations, including at least 3 Knight communities

The DavisWiki is an incredible success story, but for those who want to replicate its success, it is not at all clear how to do so or even where to start. What is most needed is more such success stories, distributed throughout different communities in the U.S. and the world.

To that end, we will implement a focused community program in 20 communities over 2 years and help them build strong, successful projects. We believe this is a critical number to aim for in order to demonstrate our model as viable and replicable across a variety of community types, to gain visibility and exposure for this movement, and to set the stage for massive, successful adoption in thousands of communities around the world.

We have strong evidence that a focused, one-on-one approach results in significantly more successful projects. Working with 20 communities over 2 years will allow us to give each community the required attention and course correct as necessary while making a large impact in a cost-effective way.

## Build a network of such projects

Along with helping each individual community with its local wiki project, we will build a network that will connect all the projects and their creators together. This will raise the visibility of all of the projects, allow them to share their experiences and best practices, and create a support system for new projects that are just starting out. This will be the best way to find a local wiki near you or to get advice and guidance about starting a local wiki from someone who already runs one in a nearby community and who speaks your language.

## Create a knowledge base

Building a local wiki is experimental, cutting-edge work, and the process has never been documented. Currently, new communities must experiment blindly or seek out personal connections for advice when getting started. We will create a well-organized knowledge base for documenting the experiences of different projects and sharing best practices on everything from building unique content to marketing tips to managing online communities. Over time, we will distill a reliable, step-by-step guide to starting and sustaining a local wiki.

## Test and document partnerships with new organizations such as public libraries and develop community funding models

Many public libraries have expressed strong interest in developing local wikis for their communities. This grant will allow us to explore and document partnerships with local library systems, most of which are struggling to find new roles in their local communities.

With the DavisWiki, we expect we could raise $30,000 to $60,000 per year to support the project with modest investment in fundraising. With more strong projects distributed throughout the world, it's easy to see a road to total project sustainability. This grant will allow us to implement a fundraising program and explore structured relationships with localwiki communities.

## Community-driven software development

Thanks to our Knight News Challenge grant, we now have the core technical infrastructure for the project in place. Our technical focus will now shift toward accommodating particular needs of our focus communities.

What we've found is that, because of the varied information needs of communities, what works well in one community may not work well in another. For instance, some communities may want to integrate their project with SeeClickFix, others may need to maintain pages in both Spanish and English, others may want a structured way to post local events, and others may want to radically change the design of the site or integrate it with a larger project. With varied set of focus communities, we can explore solutions to local problems that can be further replicated in communities across the globe.

We will provide hosting and general technical assistance to our focus communities. We will also develop the technical infrastructure for networking and federating localwiki projects.

## Budget possibilities

*Roughly: the creation of a staffed community program, one full-time Software Engineer position, and all associated community, technical and hosting expenses over a two-year period.*

- $600,000 — The plan as laid out above over a two-year period.
- $400,000 — Our current plan, and either a scaled-back time frame (e.g., one year) or no technical development funding. Additional demand on team to identify and secure essential funding.
- $200,000 — Scaled-back time frame and minimal technical development funding. Additional demand on team to identify and secure essential funding and highly increased reliance on our open-source community for technical development.