

YOUTH IMPACT

A LEARNS Resource

VOLUME 2

SUPPORTING POSITIVE YOUTH OUTCOMES



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LEARNS provides training and technical assistance to Corporation-funded programs serving youth. LEARNS is a partnership of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and the Bank Street College of Education. Call or e-mail to find out how we can help you:

- Locate resources
- Connect with peers
- Brainstorm solutions
- Design and deliver training

MySpace and YouTube and Blogs, Oh My!

Enhancing Your Youth Program With Web 2.0 Tools

“Facebook is about being connected to your friends. You can know the happenings about different people without needing to call them. You can update people on what you are doing and include photos and albums of pictures from trips you’ve taken. I spend about two hours in it on school days and three per day on the weekend. At parties now if a person has a camera and wants to take a picture he or she will say ‘Facebook!’ instead of ‘Cheese!’”

—Miranda, 17

Most adults over the age of 30 are finally comfortable with using computers to send e-mail, surf the Internet, and create documents and spreadsheets—although sometimes with a greater investment of time and effort than the under-30s require. But even relatively tech-savvy volunteers and program managers can feel left behind with the new generation of applications and Web sites popular with many young people.

These so-called “Web 2.0” tools—and youth’s enthusiasm for them—have both implications and opportunities for adults who manage and volunteer for youth-serving programs. This edition of Youth Impact seeks to demystify many of the most common tools and show you how to put them to work for you.

Context

A new assortment of Web-enabled services has evolved to take advantage of advances in computing power and the growing ubiquity of wireless phone and data networks. Referred to collectively as Web 2.0, they enable a level of communication, collaboration, and connection between people that is more sophisticated and interactive than ever before. They effectively convert Web users from passive readers of static text on Web pages to active creators of information and engaged members of online communities.

What is considered a Web 2.0 tool is open to debate. Lists typically include social networking services like MySpace and Facebook, blogs, wikis, RSS, podcasts, and file-sharing sites like YouTube and Flickr. Text messaging, online video games, and other Web services like Yahoo! Groups and Google Docs are not usually considered Web 2.0. They do, however, support some of the same technological and Web-design innovations and principles. These include enhancing individual connection and creativity, sharing information, and working collaboratively with others.

A New Digital Divide

In the 1990s, the “digital divide” between technological haves and have-nots in the U.S. captured the public’s attention. Thanks to the efforts of schools, advocates, policymakers, and donors, that divide has largely been bridged today. Most youth in this country have access to computers and the Web at home, school, or public libraries.

But not all youth are able to while away hours on MySpace or texting as do some of their peers who have home computers and cell phones. Some youth only can use the Internet at school or at the library, where their time is usually limited and Web filtering software may prevent them from accessing particular social networking sites.

While you can generally assume the youth in your program have been exposed to technology and are comfortable with it, you cannot also immediately conclude they use—or even know about—the latest Web 2.0 tools. Some of the suggestions here for using these tools may not apply to the specific youth you work with. For example, if many of your youth are not allowed or able to access Facebook, it probably doesn’t make sense to use Facebook to connect and communicate with them.

Ask the youth you work with what they can use and are comfortable with. This, in turn, will help you think about and select tools and strategies that will be effective.

Web 2.0 tools have extended the reach and capabilities of the Internet. They have also prompted a re-examination of some of the Internet’s technical and commercial models. Some of these changes or updates associated with—but not necessarily exclusive to—Web 2.0 include:

- **Rich Internet applications:** The software programs most of us use for work and play are run from the hard drives of our desktop and laptop computers. As computer networks (including the Internet) grow more robust and secure, many programs are being redeveloped to reside on distant computers, accessed by using your Web browser. This “network as platform” model recasts software from a product you buy and install on your computer to a service you subscribe to on an as-needed basis. Adobe Flash and Java are among several developer tools you may have used that enable browser-based computing.
- **User-generated content:** As digital media technologies become more affordable and accessible to the general public, end-users gain opportunities to create and add text, images, and audio and video material to Web sites. Flickr, YouTube, and Wikipedia are Web sites that host (and depend on) user-generated content. Materials, comments, ratings, and reviews added by users to wikis, blogs and Web sites can also be considered user-generated content.
- **Support for social networking:** Web 2.0 tools typically incorporate directories, profiles, e-mail, and instant messaging to help people find and communicate with each other. Older tools such as online forums and chat rooms did (and still do) the same thing, but the newer offerings are generally more robust or combine multiple communication tools into one interface.

So, why should this matter to you as a volunteer or program manager working with youth?

More and more of the young people we serve as clients and recruit as volunteers are savvy users of technology. Whether a person embraces or shuns technology is not dependent on age, and there are technophiles and technophobes among young and old alike. But youth tend to have a greater interest in and ability to use technologies that comes from having grown up using them in their schools, work places, and personal lives.

A 2007 survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that an estimated 93% of American teens ages 12 to 17 use the Internet. The survey also found that large numbers of these online youth are using the Internet to create and share content and interact with others. Fifty-five percent (55%) of the online teens surveyed have created a profile on MySpace or Facebook. Forty-seven percent (47%) have uploaded photos to sites where others can see them, and 14% have posted videos. Another Pew survey in 2008 added that 85% of the teens use personal electronic communication tools, including text messaging, sending e-mail or instant messages, or posting comments on social networking sites. There are some caveats (see the sidebar “A New Digital Divide”), but clearly the majority of young people are exposed to and comfortable with computer and online technologies.

These teens and their younger peers are “digital natives” who have lived with the Internet most, if not all, their lives. They come to our programs with expectations about how they will be engaged, supported, and communicated with using the online tools present in their everyday lives. Connecting with

and relating to these youth in the ways they prefer can help keep them involved and invested.

Beyond accommodating the preferences and interests of youth clients and volunteers, understanding and using Web 2.0 tools can help programs and older volunteers enhance and extend their work. Successful mentoring, tutoring, and out-of-school time programs are enlisting these tools to more effectively carry out their mission and goals, improve organizational efficiency, and reduce costs. Volunteers can promote positive youth development by asking the youth they are tutoring and mentoring to share and explain the tools they enjoy using, as well as exploring and creating online content together.

Understanding and Using Web 2.0 Tools

The following sections describe the key classes of Web 2.0 tools and demonstrate how you can incorporate them into your volunteer work or program. A brief primer on each tool is followed with concrete suggestions for adapting it for your work, with examples, tips, and best practices from youth programs.

Social Networking Services

“What I like about MySpace is that you can stay in touch with people. Like if you don’t live close to a friend, you can still keep up with them. I live way out in the suburbs but I can send messages to my friends closer to town. I also used to live in Las Vegas before moving [to the Portland, Oregon area] four years ago. Through MySpace I’ve been able to reconnect with my old friends. And I get to design my own Web page. I added a background of falling strawberries, a music player, and pet pig I can “feed.” People who say MySpace is dumb often use it anyway. Even my grandma has a MySpace page.”

—Arleigh, 19

What They Are

Social network services are tools to help organize online communities that share interests and activities. They are mostly Web-based and may provide one or several ways for members to communicate with each other, including e-mail, instant messaging, voice chat, discussion groups, and blogs. They allow users some control over the look and feel of their pages and can be customized with add-ins and “gadgets,” small software applications that provide information or amusement.

MySpace and Facebook are general-interest social networking services that are widely used in the United States. LinkedIn is a business-oriented social networking tool used to track professional contacts. Others include Friendster and several that are popular overseas, such as Orkut, Bebo, Hi5, and Tribe.

A newer service, Ning, lets users create and customize their own social networks around their interests and pursuits. A Ning site gives a designer much greater control over the appearance, operation, data, and ads than Facebook and MySpace allow.

“What I like about MySpace is that you can stay in touch with people... if you don’t live close to a friend, you can still keep up with them.”

—Arleigh, 19

“...Facebook is a tremendous tool for staying in touch with youth after they leave our program... Once I started using Facebook and sending e-mail to youth through it, it’s been so much more effective in getting kids to get involved.”

—Dan H.

How You Can Use Them

The increasing popularity of social networking tools among youth and the public-at-large means programs need to—at a minimum—understand what they are and how they are used. But, programs and their volunteers can go farther to actively use the tools to support their work.

For Programs

“We set up a Facebook group for our 125 [AmeriCorps] members. They can communicate with each other, and I can post information, pictures, and video for them. I invite new applicants to join the group so they can get to know the program and their peers, and also alumni so they can stay in touch with us.”

—Liz Carroll, Recruitment Coordinator, Notre Dame Mission Volunteers-AmeriCorps

“I’m reconnecting to more of our alumni and former volunteers. I was going through old yearbooks from the 1980s and searching LinkedIn and finding people that worked or volunteered with us from over 20 years ago. It’s helped me reconnect with people that have been a part of this project in the past.”

—Dan Bassill, President, Cabrini Connections and Tutor/Mentor Connection

Many programs have created one or more social networking pages using MySpace or Facebook to:

- Establish a simple Web presence. Social networking sites give users a considerable amount of control over how their pages and profiles appear and function. In this capacity, they can serve as a low-cost, easy-to-use Web site building and hosting tool for programs with limited resources.
- Access an additional marketing channel. Social networking sites provide programs with an additional public face and communication vehicle. They can amplify and extend marketing and outreach messages.
- Improve recruitment and retention. By using social networking sites to market volunteer opportunities, connect applicants with current volunteers and alumni, and stay in touch with volunteers after they move on, programs magnify their recruiting work and increase their chances that volunteers will serve their full terms.

“I found Facebook is a tremendous tool for staying in touch with youth after they leave our program. A lot of youth have Facebook and check it on a daily basis. I use it for announcing alumni events we are having and keeping alumni up to date on what we’re doing. We had always done a newsletter we sent by snail mail that wasn’t very effective in eliciting alumni involvement. Once I started using Facebook and sending e-mail to youth through it, it’s been so much more effective in getting kids to get involved.”

—Dan Hogan, Mentoring Program Coordinator, Circle Urban Ministries

For Volunteers

- Create a MySpace or Facebook account for yourself. It's free, and you can change settings to make your profile as public or private as you want. You can play with it to see how it works and understand what your young person is talking about when she describes her own site. You may even become an avid user yourself.
- Ask the individual you mentor or tutor to share her MySpace or Facebook page. Explore it with her, asking her to point out the designs and tools she likes or uses most.
- If you have a MySpace or Facebook page of your own, ask the youth you tutor or mentor if you can be added to his friends list. Stress that it is more to stay in touch with him and learn what he's up to than to monitor his online activity. And don't take it personally if he is reluctant to add you to his list.
- If your program has a MySpace or Facebook page, ask to be added as a friend. Oftentimes programs use their social networking sites to bring volunteers together and make announcements.

Safety and Security Online

"I don't add people as friends on MySpace unless I've met them in person. And I always check out their profiles. Once, this guy sent me several friend requests, saying he saw my picture and that I was really cute. But I checked out his profile and found out that he's like 40 or something and lives across the country. I told him, 'Stop sending me messages. You're old and far away.' I think my mom and [guardian] think it's ridiculous how much time I spend on MySpace, but they trust me and know that if anything would happen I could deal with it."

—Judi, 19

As with any activity involving the Internet, programs must take care when using social networking services and other Web 2.0 tools to ensure the privacy and safety of youth and volunteers. Some tips for doing so suggested by programs include:

- Create private groups. Take advantage of some social networking services' abilities to host "networks within networks" to create walled-off communities for use by your youth clients and volunteers only.
- Restrict access. You can control who joins your social networking sites. For example, you can allow access by invitation only, as well as verify the identities of individuals who ask to join. You can also change settings to show or hide content and features your users and the public see.
- Scrutinize friend requests. Review the profiles of people or groups who ask to list your program as a "friend". You can decline the request of a would-be friend if there is inappropriate material on the group's site, it would not be a good fit for the network, or it otherwise would reflect poorly on your program.

"Our Facebook group is private so the public cannot see the profiles of the members. And the members cannot see each other's profiles unless they make each other friends."

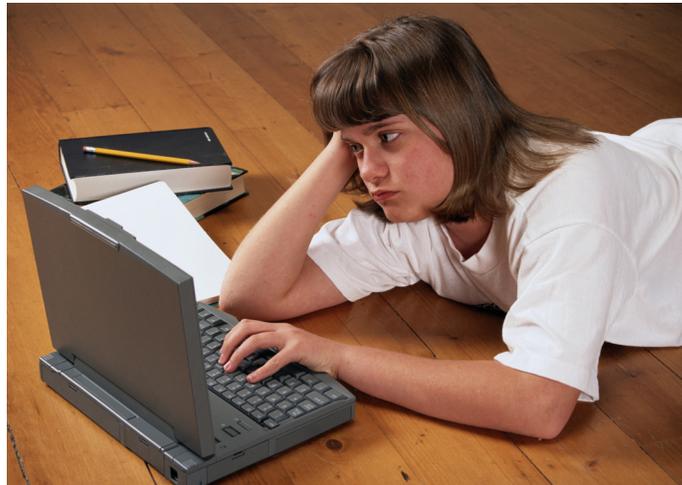
—Liz Carroll, Recruitment Coordinator, Notre Dame Mission Volunteers-AmeriCorps

Blogs

What They Are

Blog—a contraction of the term “Web log”—is a Web site or online journal maintained by an individual or a group with regular entries of information, commentary, and graphics and video. Entries are usually displayed in reverse chronological order.

Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject by experts and laypeople alike; others serve as personal diaries posted to and read by one person or a small group of invited viewers. Most blogs are text-based, although some focus on music, audio (podcasting), and video.



Blogs are easy to create using free blogging tools (see the sidebar “Free Stuff” for examples). Blogs can also be found as features or add-ins in other applications such as social networking services or learning management systems. They tend to work best when they have a clear objective and purpose, are designed with realistic expectations about posting quality and frequency, and provide feedback methods such as comments and ratings.

How You Can Use Them

Blogs can be used as simple Web pages. They are also an effective means of staying connected with stakeholders and sharing updates with them, posting recent information, promoting upcoming events, and boosting search-engine ratings.

For Programs

- Create blogs for your program’s youth and volunteers and encourage them to contribute stories and reflections. These can serve as written testimonials that enhance your recruitment efforts. For example, members of an AmeriCorps*NCCC team from the Denver campus are maintaining a [blog detailing their year of service](#).
- Keep the community informed on what’s going on in your program to provide a forum where they can interact and post comments.
- Disseminate best practices and share resources with volunteers, staff, and colleagues. For example, Volunteer Maine hosts a [blog](#) where guest contributors discuss volunteer-management topics.

“We decided to create a Mentor Program blog to give our mentors the opportunity to connect with each other. We thought we could use it as an ‘open forum’ of sorts. We also thought it would be a great way to post pictures of our events and provide our mentors with information about and links to other community resources. Our blog address is www.fightingbackmentorprogram.blogspot.com.”

—Lisa Falcone, Mentor Program Coordinator, Fighting Back Mentor Program

For Volunteers

- Ask the young people you work with if they read any blogs at school or home; invite them to share their blogs and explain what they like about them.
- If your program offers a blog for your use, check it periodically for news and to stay in touch with fellow volunteers.

Wikis

What They Are

A wiki—taken from the Hawaiian word for “quick”—is a collection of Web pages designed to enable anyone who accesses the material to contribute or modify content using simple tools. They are used to create collaborative Web sites, informal Intranets, and simple knowledge-management systems. The most well-known wiki is Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia anyone can edit and add to.

Wikis can be hosted as stand-alone tools (see the sidebar “Free Stuff” for a link to a service that hosts wikis for free), or be included as add-in features in other Web, social networking, and e-learning tools. They are useful for groups connected by common interests and purposes that need to collaborate on an issue. A wiki can replace the long e-mail trails and documents generated by many group projects and scattered across computer and network file folders.

How You Can Use Them

Because they are used more for facilitating online collaboration and project management—and thus represent “work” rather than “play”—youth are less likely to have used wikis unless exposed to them through school or work. They are most useful for programs, as they can greatly simplify and expedite many team-oriented tasks.

For Programs

- Use a wiki to create a community of practice or repository of effective practices for volunteers and/or staff.
- Use a wiki to organize and manage planning for large-scale events and activities such as days of service or conferences.
- Create a wiki volunteers can use to organize and work on projects you give them or they come up with on their own. An example might be creating an orientation guide for new volunteers joining the program.

For Volunteers

- Engage your youth in using Wikipedia to explore topics he is interested in. Click on the “discussion” and “history” links for an entry and talk about the teamwork and back-and-forth between contributors that led to the current entries. If you or your youth find something in an entry that could be corrected or added to, edit the page together.

RSS

What It Is

RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary. It allows you to keep up-to-date with news and information from your favorite Web sites.

RSS is a family of Web-feed formats that support the syndication of Web content. (This means making information and data on a Web site available to other Web sites.) The feeds notify people when new material is added. The feeds can provide text-only summaries, full pages of content, audio (podcasting), or video. For example, many newspapers and magazines let you subscribe to one or more RSS feeds to receive summaries or full-text copies of their top stories published on the Web.



The feed receiver benefits from access to fresh and timely material that can be used on his or her own Web site to make it more interesting to visitors. Other receivers use RSS to save time by having new content from their favorite sites sent to them, rather than finding it themselves. The feed sender benefits from the increased exposure and traffic the feeds draw.

How You Can Use It

Programs and volunteers can use RSS to stay abreast of news of interest to them and their work. Programs can also use it to allow others to receive information they publish on their Web site. For example, programs can often subscribe to RSS feeds at government agencies, foundations, and other funding organizations to receive news and updates on grant competitions.

For Programs

- Subscribe to feeds to keep up-to-date on important topics in the field of youth service. For example, youth programs sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service may wish to subscribe to one or more [news feeds](#) the Corporation offers.
- Use an RSS feed on your Web site, blog, or social networking site so volunteers, clients, members of the community, and other stakeholders can be notified when you post announcements and volunteer opportunities.

For Volunteers

- Subscribe to feeds to keep current on important topics related to your volunteer work.
- Subscribe to RSS feeds on topics your mentee is crazy about so you have things to talk about with him and activities you can do together.
- If your program's Web or social networking site offers RSS feeds, subscribe to them so you can be notified when the program posts news, training schedules, and other material of interest.

Free Stuff

Many tools put Web 2.0 and other online services and materials in your hands at little or no cost. Listed below are several of the most-used ones:

- **Adobe Premiere Express.** A stripped-down, free version of Adobe's Premier Pro video-editing software. It is included as a video-editing tool in YouTube, Photobucket, and MTV.com. See the [Adobe Premiere Express Web site](#) for more details.
- **Audacity.** Audacity is a free digital audio editor that can be used for recording and editing podcasts. More information can be found on the [Audacity Web site](#).
- **Blogger, TypePad, WordPress.** These and other free blogging tools let you set up and maintain an individual or group blog. Visit their Web sites for more information.
- **Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Ning.** Virtually all the major social networking tools are free to set up and use. Visit each service's Web site to learn more and sign up.
- **Google Page Creator.** This free service from Google lets you create and host a Web site. It is template-based and easy to use, and so is particularly useful for novice designers or programs with limited funds. See the [Google Page Creator Web site](#) for more details. In addition, Dan Hogan of Circle Urban Ministries prepared a helpful [PowerPoint presentation](#) demonstrating how he used Google Page Creator to create a site for his mentoring program.
- **Picasa.** This free service from Google lets users import, organize, and edit digital photos. See the [Picasa Web site](#) for more details.
- **Wikispaces.com.** This "wikifarm" will host a wiki for you. Hosting is free if you accept ads on your wiki, with ad-free hosting available for a modest fee. Other features include no limits on the numbers of spaces, pages, and members; full support for RSS; and integration with Blogger and TypePad. See the [Wikispaces Web site](#) for more information.

Podcasts

What They Are

A combination of the words "iPod" and "broadcast," podcasts are digital media files distributed over the Internet and listened to on a portable media player. A related term is "vodcast," which describes podcasts that incorporate video.

Podcasts were originally conceived as a way for people to create their own radio shows without needing a recording studio or transmission network. They evolved into a means of recording and distributing speeches, classes and

training sessions, and public safety messages. They are especially popular in K–12 schools and colleges: Teachers and professors use them to record lessons, debates, and guest speakers for absent students or later use, and students use them to record their presentations, projects, and experiments

Podcasters and vodcasters record their audio and video sessions, edit them, and upload them to a feed. Listeners and viewers use a “podcatcher” service such as iTunes to search for and subscribe to one or more feeds. When a new podcast or vodcast is released on the feed, the audio or video file will download automatically to the subscribers’ iPod, computer, or other device so that they can listen to or view it at their leisure.

How You Can Use Them

Podcasts are not found as frequently among youth-serving programs as other Web 2.0 tools. Nonetheless, here are a few ways programs and volunteers can use them:

For Programs

- Seek out podcast feeds from researchers and practitioners working in your particular field of youth service and play them for staff and volunteers in training and orientation sessions.
- Create podcasts and vodcasts of client and volunteer testimonials to include in online recruitment strategies.
- Record presentations at conferences, seminars, and other events to replay for your staff, volunteers, or other stakeholders.
- Help volunteers work with youth to create a podcast series on a topic of the youth’s choosing.

Programs sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service may be interested in subscribing to a [podcast feed on service-learning](#) from the Service Learning Clearinghouse and others on [community engagement and strengthening](#) at the Resource Center.

For Volunteers

- Browse podcast and vodcast feeds together with your youth and select one or more that you both find interesting. Subscribe to the feed(s), and have your youth do the same. This will add to the list of things you and your youth share and can talk about.
- With support from your program, create and record a podcast or vodcast series on a topic of your youth’s choosing.

File-Sharing Sites

“I like that people put funny things [on YouTube]. And there are TV shows you can watch. I also look up videos for songs I hear on the radio and like. Sometimes I just browse. Or I type in some of my friends’ names to see if they have any videos, which they usually don’t (they post them to MySpace instead). I haven’t posted any videos myself, but I might be in a video a friend posts.”

—Aurora, 14

What They Are

File-sharing sites let users upload files, photos, and videos for others to view and download. They usually include feedback tools that allow others to rate and comment on submissions.

The most popular are Flickr and Photobucket for sharing images and YouTube for sharing videos. YouTube has a [section](#) for videos produced by activists and nonprofit organizations. [SchoolTube](#) is a teacher-moderated video networking site that hosts video contests and video collaborations for schools, classes, and individual students.

How You Can Use Them

File-sharing sites can be useful for both programs and volunteers. In addition to exposing program marketing materials to wider audiences, file-sharing sites can ease some of the headaches involved in storing digital media (especially video). Volunteers can use them to share common interests with mentees and tutees. Programs and volunteers can also work together with youth on photography and video projects that are then uploaded for display on file-sharing sites.

For Programs

- Host your recruitment and training videos on YouTube or Google Video so you don't have to worry about taking up hard drive space, configuring a streaming server, or making videos work in different players. You can then embed links to your videos on your Web or social networking sites.
- Design projects together with volunteers where volunteers work with youth to create a photography or video project that will be posted online when completed.

“We create promotional videos using iMovie to help recruit mentors and upload them to Google Video. Like YouTube, Google Video is free and lets you embed video in your Web site. But with YouTube, when your video stops playing it displays links to other videos that pull viewers away from your site. Google Video doesn't do that, so that's why I prefer it. You can see an example on our Web site at circlerockmentoring.googlepages.com.”

—Dan Hogan, Mentoring Program Coordinator, Circle Urban Ministries

For Volunteers

- Browse YouTube for clips of performers and TV shows you enjoy and have your youth do the same. Then share and discuss your clips with each other.
- With help from your program, work on a photography or video project with your youth and post the product(s) you create together to a photo- or video-sharing site. Examples might include taking pictures of the youth's neighborhood and community, videotaping a conversation with a family or community member, or creating a how-to video for an activity the youth enjoys doing.

“I haven't posted any videos of myself [on YouTube], but I might be in a video a friend posts.”

—Aurora, 14

Text Messaging

“I use my cell phone more for texting than talking. With texting, you can end a conversation whenever you want to, and it comes in handy if you don’t feel like calling. You can think about what you’re saying rather than blurt it out; you are limited to 150 characters so you have to be precise... I don’t currently have texting capabilities, though. It was taken away because of the cost and the amount of time I spent doing it. I was sending about 100 texts a day and receiving another 100. This was during all hours. If someone texted me early in the day I would definitely respond. If I was bored or couldn’t sleep I would text. Suddenly not having it really affected my lifestyle. I definitely don’t stay in touch with some people as much as I used to.”

—Miranda, 17

What It Is

In text messaging, or texting, people send messages from cell phones using the Short Message Service. This usually describes person-to-person messaging, but can also include interactions with automated systems. For example, volunteer centers using the United Way’s Volunteer Solutions application can send news items and volunteer opportunities as text messages to volunteers that elect to receive them. There are also online services—such as Facebook—that let users send text messages to cell phones (generally) free of charge.

Texting is not usually considered a Web 2.0 technology. However, it is worth mentioning here because it is extremely popular with youth. A 2005 study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that 63% of cell phone users ages 18 to 27 text, compared to 31% of users ages 28 to 39, 18% of cell phone owners ages 40 to 49, 13% of users ages 50 to 58, and 7% of cell phone users over the age of 60.

The increasing popularity and use of texting among youth has caused concern among some parents and educators. Text language (such as the shorthand “C U L8R” for “See you later”) is increasingly found in writing and exams, generating a concern that the quality of writing among youth is in decline. Parents and teachers also worry their children and students are wasting time and not paying attention in class because they are texting. This also ties to a larger concern about whether extensive texting and Web use are creating shorter attention spans.

How You Can Use It

As more and more adults and youth use cell phones and texting becomes a standard service, texting offers another way for youth, program staff, and volunteers to stay in touch.

For Programs

- Add a question to your application and intake forms for volunteers and youth, asking if they would be willing to accept text messages from you and their mentee/mentor (you will also need their cell phone numbers).

- When you need to contact a youth client, try texting first before calling. Many youth are more responsive to a text than a call.
- Consider using a service that broadcasts news as text messages to volunteers with cell phones who have opted to receive them. This provides you with another marketing and communication channel to your volunteers. Both Microsoft and Yahoo! offer free Web-to-SMS messaging applications you can use to send texts to subscribers of certain wireless providers in the U.S. You may also find smaller providers and applications on the Internet that do the same thing at little or no cost.

For Volunteers

- If you have a text-capable cell phone but have never tried it out, have your youth teach you how to send and receive text messages.
- If your program allows it and your youth has a cell phone (and is willing), use texting to confirm meetings and carry out other communications you currently do by phone. You may find young people respond more promptly to text messages than calls.

Online Video Games

“When I play World of Warcraft, I like that there are people I know playing it with me. My uncle plays it, and other family members and my friends play it. I like to be online with them. When I play Medal of Honor, I like that you can connect with people around the world. When I look for video games online, I look for the multiplayer ones.”

—Eduardo, 12

What They Are

Like texting, video games are not usually considered Web 2.0 technologies. However, many of them are designed for multiple players using the Internet, incorporating some of the rich Internet programming and social networking features associated with Web 2.0. Like texting, they are very popular among youth. A growing number of Web sites such as Miniclip.com offer online games that are free and (generally) appropriate for younger users, although not as sophisticated as those run from a computer or game console like PlayStation.

How You Can Use Them

Video games and entertaining software “gadgets” that can be embedded in Web pages can help draw younger visitors to a program’s Web site. Video games may also be an interest that a tutor or mentor might share with a youth, or that they can explore together.

For Programs

- Consider recruiting volunteers (especially younger ones) by advertising on Web sites offering free (and benign) games.
- Consider adding a game, gadget, or other interactive diversion to your Web or social networking sites that youth visit. An ideal game would reinforce a positive message or a goal of your program, or at

least not detract from it. You might also consider having a custom game made for your program. For example, a volunteer or college intern (or youth client) could create an Adobe Flash game or activity for placement on your site.

For Volunteers

- If you know your youth enjoys playing video games, ask her to show you her favorite ones and demonstrate how they are played. If the game(s) offer(s) a two-player mode and/or they can be played over the Internet, offer to play together occasionally. If the games are violent, or you get the sense the youth spends a potentially unhealthy amount of time playing them, talk to your program coordinator. There may be a need to share your concerns with the youth's parents or guardians.

Things To Keep In Mind

Veteran program staff members offer the following pointers and advice for programs considering adopting Web 2.0 tools:

- **Understand the commitment.** “These are not the kinds of things you set up and leave alone. They require ongoing maintenance. You need to make the decision to make time to maintain them.”
—*Dan Hogan, Mentoring Program Coordinator, Circle Urban Ministries*
- **Design with your audience in mind.** “Involve your audience as much as possible in the evolution of what you're creating. Survey them to see what they think, ask for suggestions, and make changes as needed.”
—*Deanna Cameron, Volunteer Coordinator, Spectrum Youth and Family Services*
- **Support reluctant users.** “Talk to [volunteers] about the importance of learning the new tool. Learning these types of tools is something they are going to have to know and do more of. Go through with them how to access the tool, and be ready to assist them as they start using it.”
—*Marissa Mizer, Coordinator, AppalCORPS*
- **Be patient.** “Be aggressive in marketing and patient in waiting for responses. We began a blog and a MySpace page a few months ago, and it has taken a while for them to catch on with our mentors and mentees. However, I do not feel that it has been a wasted effort, but I do think it will take continual and creative approaches on our part to market these tools in a way that appeals to our target populations.”
—*Lisa Falcone, Mentor Program Coordinator, Fighting Back Mentor Program*

- **Keep the tools in perspective and aligned with your mission.** “We have to get beyond the fascination with the tools to get to how we will use them for a purpose. That’s true of Web 2.0 and will be true when Web 3.0 comes along and makes us all giggly. The key question is: how do we use them to make life better? Different technologies are merely tools that are intended to be used in accomplishing the goals of the organization. Keeping that in mind, these new learning, collaboration, and communication tools can help individuals and groups connect and work together on a cause. We should learn to make maximum use of them, as well as adapt new tools to our work as they emerge.”

—Dan Bassill, President, Cabrini Connections and Tutor/Mentor Connection

“We have to get beyond the fascination with the tools to get to how we will use them for a purpose.”

—Dan B.

Summary

Properly used, Web 2.0 and related tools can promote positive outcomes for youth and the programs and volunteers that work with them. They can help keep tech-savvy young clients and volunteers connected to and engaged with a program. They give volunteers opportunities to learn things about their youth and create things together with them. And they can help programs extend their reach and mission; better support clients, staff, and volunteers; and promote organizational efficiency.

Resources

General Web 2.0 Introduction and How-Tos

- **The Machine is Us/ing Us.** This [five-minute YouTube video](#) made by Michael Wesch, an assistant professor of cultural anthropology at Kansas State University, offers a general introduction to the technology and design principles of Web 2.0.
- **The Common Craft Show.** This series of short, engaging videos by Lee and Sachi LeFever of Common Craft offer “explanations in plain English” for various Web 2.0 tools. The series can be found on Common Craft’s [Web site](#) and [YouTube channel](#).
- **Discovering Web 2.0 and Social Media.** This Corporation for National and Community Service [learning blog](#) offers information on Web 2.0 tools and tips for using them effectively.
- **Learn and Serve America’s National Service-Learning Clearinghouse.** The Clearinghouse has a [helpful page](#) on its site—“Marketing 101: Using Social Media/Web 2.0 to Highlight Your Program”—that explains several Web 2.0 tools and offers suggestions, guidance, and resources for incorporating them into service-learning and other programs.
- **The Resource Center.** Sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service, the Resource Center provides online tools and training resources to strengthen volunteer and service programs. The Resource Center’s [Web site](#) offers a wealth of tools,

training, and information that can help your program succeed.

- **TechSoup.org.** TechSoup provides technology information and services to nonprofits. Its Web site's [Using The Internet](#) page provides articles and resources programs can use to better incorporate the Internet (including Web 2.0 tools) into their operations.
- **Idealware.org.** Like TechSoup, Idealware supports the use of technology by nonprofits. It evaluates software using *Consumer Reports*-like reviews. Among the [collection of articles](#) on its Web site are reports on Web 2.0 software
- **Lazy Eyes: How we read online.** In summarizing research on Web site usability, this [June 2008 article](#) from *Slate* offers insights on how people read online that you may wish to consider when designing Web sites, blogs, and social networking sites for clients and volunteers.

Tool-Specific Guides

Social Networking Services

- **A beginner's guide to Facebook for nonprofits.** This [blog post](#) offers a step-by-step guide to creating a Facebook page for your program.
- **MySpace Best Practices for Nonprofit Organizations.** This [Web page](#) from DIOSA | Communications offers numerous helpful tips for nonprofits seeking to use MySpace.

Blogs

- **Blogs.** In this February 2008 [article](#) from The New York Review of Books, author Sarah Boxer reviews several books about blogging, providing insights into the history and use of blogs along the way.
- **Nonprofit Blog Exchange.** This [blog](#) offers links to bloggers writing from or about organizations in the nonprofit sector, as well as informative articles on how to use blogs and other Web 2.0 tools.

Wikis

- **Nonprofits Share Their Wiki Success Stories.** This [online article](#) from TechSoup.org demonstrates the benefits of wikis for nonprofits by profiling two organizations that have used them.
- **Wiki Best Practices.** This [how-to article](#) created by employees of Sun Microsystems offers tips for using wikis effectively.

RSS

- **Building and Using an RSS Feed.** This [Web page](#) provides a tutorial with examples on creating RSS feeds.
- **Why Nonprofit Managers Must Use RSS — And How to Start.** This [online article](#) from TechSoup.org describes the benefits of

using RSS for nonprofits, and provides instructions on how to get started using it.

Podcasts

- **9 Steps to Great Nonprofit Podcasting.** Nonprofit marketer Nancy E. Schwartz offers this [list of guidelines](#) for creating effective podcasts.
- **How to Create Your Own Podcast—A Step-by-Step Tutorial.** This [online article](#) provides detailed instructions on how to record and stream podcasts, as well as links to further reading and resources.

File-Sharing Sites

- **How Nonprofits Can Get the Most Out of Flickr.** This TechSoup.org [article](#) offers 10 tips for nonprofits on how to use Flickr effectively.
- **Video Toolbox: 150+ Online Video Tools and Resources.** This [Web page](#) provides descriptions of and links to a wide assortment of tools and Web sites that can help you create and post videos online.

Internet Safety and Security

- **MySpace.com.** MySpace offers parents a [Web page of safety tips](#) to help them help their children make safe decisions about using MySpace and other online communities. The page includes links to other Web sites offering additional information and guidance.
- **Nonprofit Risk Management Center.** The Nonprofit Risk Management Center provides products and services to nonprofits on designing and implementing risk-management plans. Among its extensive list of [free online articles](#) are resources on managing safety and security risks caused by computer and Internet technologies.

“Virtual Volunteering”

- **Creating a successful online mentoring program.** This [effective practice](#) from the Resource Center provides tips for creating an online mentoring program.
- **ServiceLeader.org.** ServiceLeader.org is a project of the RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. Its Web site includes a [list of readings](#) describing and providing guidance for virtual volunteer opportunities.

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