

***How can we build community engagement and connectivity around climate change?***



**MyCoNet:** Uniting community groups, events, and projects

**Pitch (140 characters)**

Our workshops and [online platform](#) facilitate collaboration that leverages existing community action for amplified local impact.

**Summary (2000)**

Despite a common desire to become more involved in ecosocial action, many people have difficulty building meaningful connections in their community. The myriad of groups, events, and projects makes it difficult to know where to start. For current innovators, there is a need to increase mutual awareness and develop collaborative partnerships. Just as mycorrhizae channel nutrients and information between plants to promote overall forest health, MyCoNet connects the ecosocial community via our online platform, in-person workshops, and sustainable projects. These synergistic programs spark creative collaboration and increase collective impact through more engaged climate action.

MyCoNet is valuable to diverse stakeholders. Our initial expansion targets involved permaculturists and disconnected college students. The average web user can easily access MyCoNet to find and connect with individuals, groups, projects, and events that align with their

interests. Workshop participants gain the intimate experience of finding collaborative partners and new friends who truly understand their needs and offerings while enjoying musical celebration and a vegan potluck. Community project participants also work together to produce tangible benefits for their communities.

Our founding team created and continues to refine MyCoNet using diverse skills and biomimicry principles (nature inspired design). Our yearlong studies of the patterns of mutualism in nature have inspired our solution, which initiates human collaboration by increasing connectivity and awareness. We continually adjust our strategy by scoping community needs, collaborating with others engaged in similar efforts, and applying feedback to our in-person and online strategies. The root problem that limits community cohesion around climate change is the lack of awareness and engagement, which MyCoNet solves by connecting people and making collaborative opportunities easily accessible to all.

### **What actions do you propose? (12000 characters)**

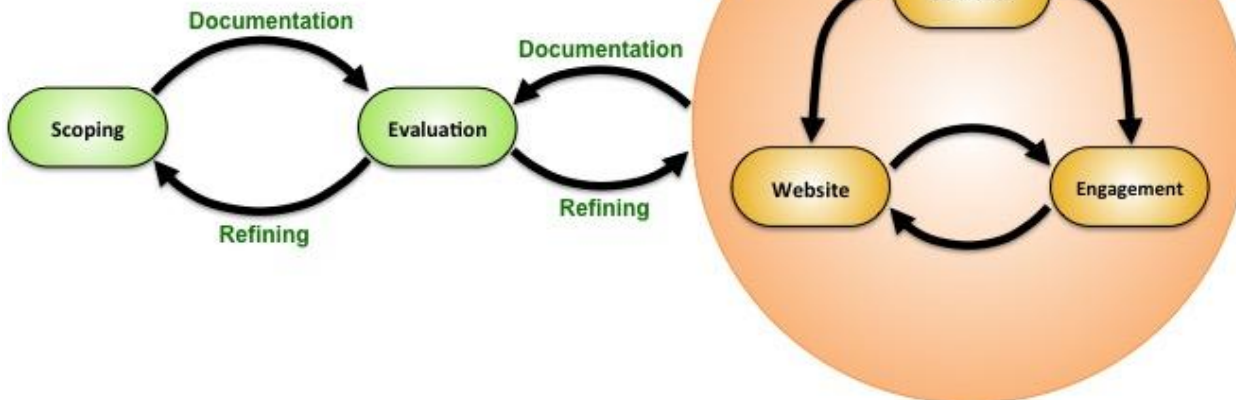
We propose, and are currently executing, specific initiatives which leverage our extraordinary community to develop a system that enables easier ecosocial collaboration between increasingly diverse stakeholders. We create MyCoNet by synergizing Biomimicry with other design methodologies and ecosocial principles. We emulate the genius of nature as manifested in mycorrhizae, collaborative fungi Paul Stamets' calls "Nature's Internet." Itself a product of ongoing collaboration, our continuous design process involves a set of five simultaneous phases:

1. Scoping
2. Outreach
3. Engagement
4. Documentation
5. Refining

These actions are executed simultaneously and synergize, allowing us to efficiently and effectively create MyCoNet's value. Figure One illustrates the relationships between these actions:

## Execution

## Design



Each of these actions is composed of specific initiatives which address key challenges and opportunities.

### **1) Scoping: Identify stakeholders and increase mutual awareness**

Understanding existing community efforts is essential. Scoping involves researching and exploring the community. We engage with a wide range of stakeholders to diversify collaboration and embody resilience. This variety enables us to leverage and synergize disparate efforts. We actively search for information about existing groups, events, projects, and other collaborative opportunities to understand current ecosocial activities. Our methods evolve as we learn and gain feedback to ensure we can deliver solutions that are tailored to the identified needs of the community. Examples of scoping activities include:

- Perform online research to identify key individuals, groups, events, and projects
- Host facilitated workshops aimed at identifying collective challenges and opportunities
- Conduct market research via in-person discussions and interviews
- Create and distribute incentivized online and in-person surveys to key populations

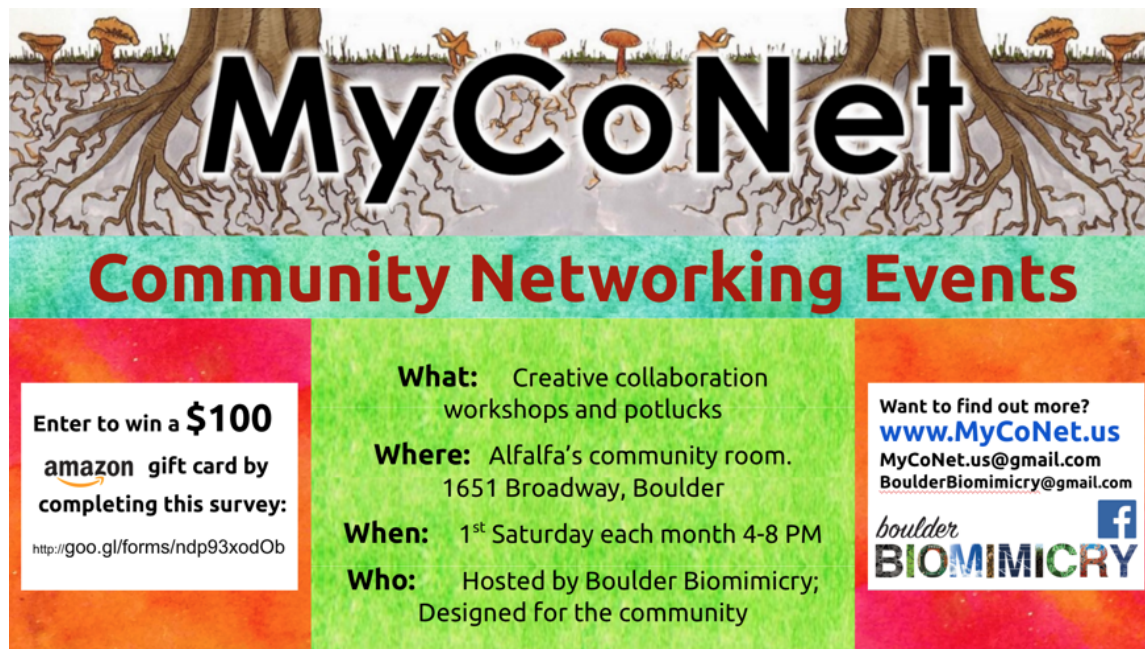
- Collect and quantify informative feedback from participants, users, and surveyees
- Create interest categories to classify ecosocial initiatives for our database
- Identify shared challenges and opportunities amongst similar projects
- Use automated web crawler programs to compile other websites' events and data onto ours
- To view our first online survey click here: <http://goo.gl/forms/ndp93xodOb>

## **2) Outreach: Bring together diverse innovators to create a lasting impact**

To incorporate new users into MyCoNet, we directly invite groups and individuals to participate and conduct indirect promotion to key community regions. Our outreach practices target specific groups and individuals that may be fruitful collaborators and high density community areas such as coffee shops, libraries, co-working spaces, and progressive events. To incentivize adoption of MyCoNet, we offer recommendations for problem-solving strategies, collaborative partners, applicable research, and host customizable workshops.

- Announce launch at Elephant Revival's May 22nd concert at Red Rocks Amphitheater
- Co-organize Permaculture Action Day planned for May 21st
- Promote MyCoNet at EarthFest 2016 at CU Boulder on April 22nd
- Network with leaders, organizers, innovators, and other influential people in the community
- Post inspirational content on environmental forums to direct online traffic to our website
- Create and distribute flyers and advertisements to increase workshop participation
- Hold partnered events with Permaculture Action Days and Solutions Voyage
- Use existing networks and established organizations to spread word of mouth
- Incentivize groups to invite others by offering time featured on our home page

Initially, we will primarily engage with groups and individuals that are relatively small because these groups' operations are easier to understand and have less complex needs. Our first focus populations will be permaculturists, who need a method to coordinate efforts for Permaculture Action Days, and CU Boulder students, who need less time-intensive methods to find out and get involve with climate action. Once we have built rapport with a variety of small groups, we can expand to meet the needs of larger groups, which offer more significant leverage points but due to their complexity, require more time to develop meaningful relationships with.



MyCoNet advertisement

### **3) Engagement: Building social infrastructure for increasing community cohesion**

Our in-person creative collaboration workshops, interactive web platform, and community projects facilitate mutualism between previously disconnected individuals. Three activities form the core of our engagement efforts:

1. [First Saturday workshops with MyCoNet](#)
  - a. Bring together people with diverse backgrounds and networks
  - b. Promotes group cohesion through regularity in our meeting time
  - c. Identify and address collective needs and opportunities
  - d. Educate workshop attendees on design methodologies to help them address challenges in new ways
  - e. Allow individuals to make organic connections and network through social time
  - f. Create positive reinforcement for our ideas with music and vegan food
  - g. Focus workshop topics to cater to unique interests
  - h. Incorporate Violeta Manoukian's Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) strategies to document progress and create accountability

## 2. MyCoNet.us Platform

- a. Continue to build an easily accessible database for users to find and engage with individuals, groups, events, and projects which align with their interests
- b. Organize resources and offerings to ease coordination of events and projects
- c. Develop sleek user interface to streamline experience
- d. Create algorithm to match needs and yields between groups and individuals
- e. Allows people to discuss topics of interest online
- f. Develop mobile app and website plug-in to tap into additional user bases

## 3. Projects

- a. Create tangible benefits for the community
- b. Coordinate multiple groups' efforts to meet unique community needs
- c. Give participants additional opportunities to network with like-minded people
- d. Host project design competitions to encourage community participation

In addition to our monthly general workshops, we also host more focused topic-oriented workshops designed to address the needs of specific communities. We hosted a workshop of this type on December 30, 2015 with applicants of this CoLab. Our 3-hour discussion yielded fruitful insights about the key challenges we faced as CoLab participants. The participants included two members of MyCoNet, Finn Woelm from CarbonNeutralBoulder, David Takashi from Reclaim the Power of the Engaged Citizenry, and Jacob Hollander of United for Progress, who joined on the phone from Las Vegas. Our facilitated discussion allowed us identify specific challenges and opportunities for promoting community collaboration.

We concluded, as reflected in Finn and David's proposals, that starting at small scale and leveraging pre-existing networks is key to the success of community collaboration projects. MyCoNet identifies, engages, and documents as many small-scale networks as possible to discover their strategies and challenges and make this information accessible for those interested in joining a community or participating in collaboration. Hosting regular workshops with leaders of neighborhood and university communities are particularly beneficial because both networks are central to Boulder's culture. For instance, quarterly meetings between leaders of neighborhood associations could yield mutual learnings about shared challenges and also form a unified voice which could inform policy and community movements at larger scales.



Additionally, MyCoNet is working with the Permaculture Action Network and Solutions Voyage to leverage our shared networks and create tangible impact more quickly. These organizations have already worked together and developed infrastructure to bring communities together around ecosocial action. This collaboration is a key entry point for MyCoNet to offer value to an established community immediately and give us room to rapidly expand.



Permaculture Action Workshop at Solutions Voyage, Arise Music Festival 2015



A Permaculture Action crew after a hard day's work

The essence of MyCoNet's in-person engagement efforts will manifest at EarthFest 2016, an ecosocial music festival organized by us, the Biomimicry Club at CU, and Solutions Voyage, to be held on the CU campus on April 22nd. This event will bring together musicians, students, non-profits, healers, and artists for a full day of learning and celebration, with workshops and speakers that address alternative energy, permaculture, biomimicry, poetry, greenhouse gas reduction, social justice, and more.

#### **4) Documentation: Tracking and sharing progress**

Documentation allows us to share our effort with others, get feedback, and establish metrics to track our success. This helps us both grow MyCoNet offerings and support our users' needs. We can provide value through these types of documentation:



1. Documentation of our activities as a resource to others
  - a. Create written, video, and podcast media to promote our ideas and initiatives
  - b. Create strategy reports so others may use our methods to start collaborating in communities we haven't reached
  - c. Display our community mapping efforts [www.myconet.us/groups](http://www.myconet.us/groups)
2. Enabling users to document their activities
  - a. Build commenting and rating functionality on site for users to document their own activities
  - b. Customize website experience to a user's past activities for increased accessibility
  - c. Implement Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation at workshops
3. Internal documentation used to evaluate and refine our activities
  - a. Survey forms
  - b. Quantified feedback
  - c. Business strategy
  - d. Community database

## **5) Refining: Integrating development with growth**

We will continually use the results of scoping, outreach, engagement, and documentation to improve our strategies, grow organically, saturate niches, and cater to increasingly varied stakeholders. Additionally, we will evolve team competencies, develop a locally attuned and globally scalable business model, and fill key team and partnership roles to execute our mission.

1. Focus initial efforts on the permaculture, activist, and university communities in Boulder
2. Study the unique needs of other niche groups to enable expansion
3. Adjust offerings to address highest leverage points
4. Allow unique value and mission to adapt to new needs as they arise
5. Grow and define team roles and equity to ensure fair ownership
6. Increase quantity and quality of partnerships with established organizations
7. Acquire funding by applying to contests, incubators, investors, and grants
8. Include crowdfunding/donation feature on website home page
9. Create and execute solutions to address key needs identified by scoping

### Who will take these actions? (2000 characters)

MyCoNet team members and general community members have complementary roles listed in Table One. The roles of the MyCoNet team include web development, workshop facilitation, data entry, marketing, and business. Currently each cofounder performs multiple roles. You can learn about our core team here.

MyCoNet	Community
<b>Scope</b> <b>Outreach</b> <b>Engage</b> <b>Document</b> <b>Refine</b>	<b>Ecosocial Action</b> <b>Build Network</b> <b>Participate</b> <b>Create Content</b> <b>Give Feedback</b>

Although this presents significant challenges, MyCoNet relies on cross disciplinary collaboration and the interconnected actions of diverse ecosocial innovators. Our strategy to address these challenges is to focus efforts on key niches and then expand our offerings into adjacent niches to reach increasingly more disparate niches. In addition to our links with the CU Environmental Center and campus as a whole, we are currently working with two other organizations which serve as our first major community entry points.

Our current partnerships include two established organizations that have extensive community organizing experience. The Permaculture Action Network (PAN) and Solutions Voyage (SV) specialize in collaboration, education, and direct action at concerts and music festivals. Music is a key catalyzer of ecosocial activism because it engages the community through celebration and healing. The PAN and SV serve as our entry points to a community of thousands of musical activists across the country. By co-organizing action events and workshops at music events and by providing an online resource to connect volunteers with action projects and follow-up events, MyCoNet will ride this momentum and access an established and expanding user base.

Both of these organizations perform similar activities in unique ways to facilitate collaboration and community connection as displayed in Table Two:

Permaculture Action Network	Solutions Voyage
Organizes Action Days, Tours, and Coordinates with Local Chapters	Organizes Community Spaces at Musical Events
Teaches Educational Permaculture Action Courses	Teaches Educational Programs on Sustainable Practices
Hosts Workshops Spaces called Permaculture Action Hubs	Hosts Collaborative Workshop and Healing Spaces at Festivals

Future entry points include neighborhood associations, art projects and social activists. While MyCoNet is currently focused on promoting collaboration in Boulder, our model is easily adapted and will eventually include the establishment of national and international MyCoNet chapters.

### **What are the key challenges? (2000 characters)**

Applying our problem solving methodologies involves identifying and addressing the various barriers involved in our work. We have identified three categories of key challenges currently facing MyCoNet and have actions to address all:

#### **1. Developing community offerings**

- a. Creating mutualistic partnerships depends on the discovery and synergy of diverse, subtle, and changing needs and offerings, and requires increasing involvement as more collaborations are formed.

- b. Building automated matching algorithms on our site depends on both quantification of needs and offerings and executing advanced web development.
- c. Facilitating our workshops and projects requires coordination.
- d. Catering our offerings to established stakeholders requires both adaptability and prioritization for our targeting efforts.

## **2. Evolving MyCoNet.us capabilities**

- a. Including many unique offerings needs careful anticipation and prioritization of future users' needs, and is accomplished through feedback and market research.
- b. Developing back-end platform functionality to enable database expansion will continue to require significant time and talent.
- c. Converting website functionality into an aesthetically appealing, easily accessible, and engaging user interface for both first-time and returning users requires development.

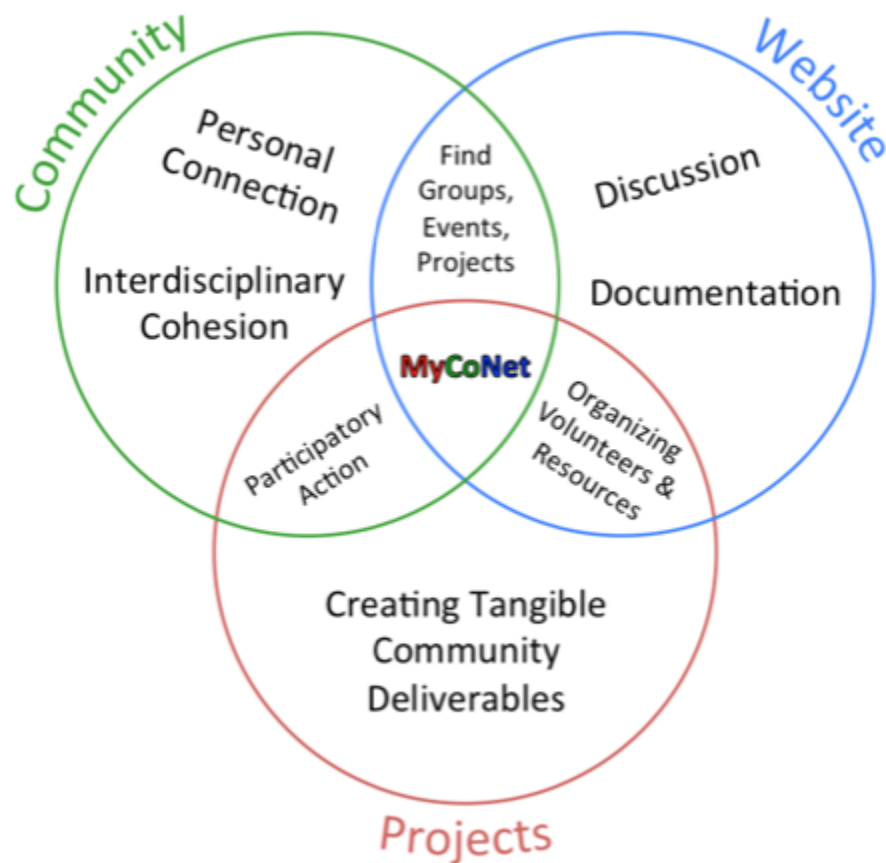
## **3. Acquiring capital**

- a. A primary revenue source, featuring groups, events, and projects, is difficult because those with the capital to invest significantly in advertising often have pre-existing networks and more capital-intensive needs for us to address.
- b. Finding community sponsors who are willing to financially support our efforts without compromising our ethos and vision requires increased visibility.
- c. Participating in competitions for our initial seed-level funding, although encouraging continual design, diverts time and energy from engaging the community in climate collaboration, which could be solved by acquiring an external funding source.



## What are the key benefits? (2000 characters)

MyCoNet offers unique value by combining an accessible, interactive, and categorized database, social media, and collaborative in-person workshops and projects. To our knowledge, this combination is unmatched by any existing model. This synergy is continually improved with our problem solving methodology, which is a blend of physics, biomimicry, design-thinking, systems-thinking, permaculture, and entrepreneurship. These components work together to maximize collective impact and provide multiple avenues for different people and groups to collaborate.



MyCoNet.us will allow for both individuals and groups to gain awareness of and engage with the community. People will use the MyCoNet platform to find other like-minded individuals, volunteer opportunities, jobs, groups, events, projects, and funding sources. As the user base grows, its service as an advertisement for groups will become increasingly valuable. Over time, we will expand online features and develop an app to make collaborating on progressive projects increasingly easy so that more people can contribute to climate-change solutions.

Creating community is easiest while individuals are in close proximity, where people can develop closer bonds. Thus, to stimulate collaboration, we bring people together through in-person interdisciplinary workshops, projects, and other events as opportunities for people and group representatives to connect with one another. The events are also opportunities for groups and individuals to share their events, needs, and offerings with the group. We use a participatory workshop structure to allow for continual improvement.

Community action projects offer additional tangible benefits. These projects are designed collaboratively to ensure that the needs and offerings of the community are understood and met. Community projects allow further opportunities for individuals to network and celebrate our collective abundance while contributing to a greater good.

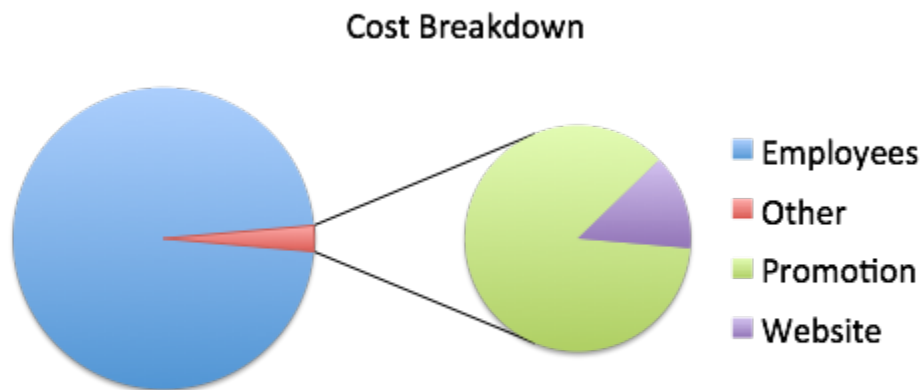
### **What are the proposal's costs? (2000 characters)**

MyCoNet is low cost and high impact. Since initial startup costs are low, capital can be directly channeled into rapidly expanding the offerings and user base.

The main cost requirement will be for staff employed in web development, design, data entry, marketing, business, and support roles. Currently, all of these roles are being done by MyCoNet cofounders for equity or for free by consultants who support our vision. You can learn about our core team at [myconet.us/about](http://myconet.us/about).

Our costs break down into a few main sections. The most significant expenditure is the living costs for sustaining our core team, consisting of 3 individuals. Earning \$12/hour plus equity, each individual costs \$1,920/month, collectively costing \$5,760/mo. Adding benefits and taxes will increase this figure by an unknown amount. We will also require legal consult.

Other costs are insignificant relative to costs of employing staff. The next most significant cost is the general promotion materials, which require at least \$100/mo, but will increase with our funding. Upgrading the server to handle increased traffic is \$9.95/mo. The one-time purchase of a top-level domain, MyCoNet.org, is \$5.75/mo. Thus, the cost of operating MyCoNet full time is approximately \$5,900/mo. Other potential costs include workshop materials, consulting, and legal fees. Workshop space is currently freely provided by Alfalfa's in Boulder. As we expand our workshop offerings, a more personalizable space will be desired.



MyCoNet can operate on a minimal budget (all founders currently work for equity), but progress is constrained due to team members needing additional sources of living income. The more capital we acquire, the more we will be able to expand our offerings as we can hire more people to complete our extensive action items. Several potential revenue streams including advertising, fundraising, and progressive consulting fees can be used to maintain growth and repay initial investments.

### **Timeline (2000 characters)**

Our timeline reflects the team's current efforts, currently limited due to full-time employment and academics. We encourage readers to visit [MyCoNet.us](http://MyCoNet.us) to see our progress.

### **2016: Official launch, engagement projects, funding, continued development**

1. Continue website development, offering unique value beyond any similar services such as Hylo; tailor initial website offerings to meet the needs of Permaculture Action Days
2. Reach 500 monthly website users
3. Populate blog documenting progress, record 10 podcasts featuring local activists (sponsored by Denver Botanic Gardens; in collaboration with [Jordan Wiitala](#))
4. Reach 50 monthly workshop participants

5. Establish 3-6 topic focused workshops, with topics including neighborhood associations, urban farming, and social justice
6. Solidify business plan and team roles
7. Continue professional development, implementing skills such as Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation
8. Apply and secure funding from multiple sources
9. Spearhead launch of Denver Permaculture Action Crew
10. Organize and facilitate EarthFest, an ecosocial music festival on the CU campus scheduled for April 22nd
11. Declare and promote official launch at the May 22nd Elephant Revival/Rising Appalachia Red Rocks show and May 21st Permaculture Action Day

#### **2017-2019: Geographic and topical expansion, operating structure**

1. Expand into other ecosocially active cities such as San Francisco, Portland, and Detroit
2. Increase core offerings to address increasingly diverse user interests
3. Begin developing long term strategy
4. Formalize operating structure and create space for innovation
5. Acquire 501c(3) status
6. Secure significant sponsorships, profit streams, and crowdfunding
7. Begin publishing reports on ecosocial collaboration in Boulder

#### **2020 and beyond:**

1. Complete 30+ community action projects annually
2. Host 200+ workshops annually
3. Attain 100,000+ monthly site users
4. Establish regional MyCoNet offices and crews
5. Facilitate high impact projects with government and NGOs
6. Create strategic plans for the long term future