Project Title

Open Civic Library Project

What is your project?

The Open Civic Library Project consists of a website and tools to locate, download, convert, normalize, and index civic documents from local municipalities and provide a method for users to get notifications and alerts of things changing in their communities.

The project consists of three major parts. One, a set of powerful open source tools for document discovery on the internet. Two, a portal for easy searching, tagging, sharing, and commenting on civic documents. Three, automatic rule-based notifications via email, Twitter, and SMS that push near-real-time information right to community members.

Our focus will be on maintaining data quality and maximizing user experience to ensure the highest possible exposure rate of civic information to users.

Initial research has been started to better understand the methodologies for best handling large quantities of civic documents and data. The current and future findings for working with large amounts of different types of civic documents will be published as an output of this project.

In hopes of promoting collaboration and increasing code security and quality, all software for the project will be licensed using a Free Software Foundation approved license.

What assumptions will you test?

We will be testing the assumption that the reason why more individuals are not more civically involved in their local community is due to a lack of information or ease of obtaining that information. The Open Civic Library Project looks to provide the simplest way for individuals to obtain information, as well as to continue to feed them information as it is available.

There are municipalities today that have a means to send information to citizens, however it is not standardized nor is it available across the entirety of the United States. The Census reports there are almost 40,000 municipalities and over 50,000 school districts nationally. The amount of redundant systems that exist across all of these entities, with a limited amount of nation-wide collaboration, is a disservice to the citizens they serve.

We will deploy existing and new technology to obtain civic documents from dozens of municipalities in Central and Western NY as a pilot before preparing to deploy the Open Civic Library Project to the entire state of New York, and finally to the nation.

What is the audience/user of the project? How will they be impacted?

The target audience for this initiative are citizens interested in real-time information about their community, as well as journalists reporting on it. The goal of the project is to create a living collection of civic documents and to present a way to intuitively get the data within those documents as easily as possible for all users.

We expect two primary types of users to start. One, citizens who want to become more aware of what is going on in their community and two, journalists who are interested in gathering data across massive geographical areas and having it aggregated for them based on pre-defined rules.

We hope to provide such a high quality product and experience that organizations, such as news outlets and public media, will pay a small yearly fee to have access to more advanced portions of the system. We hope to fall under the well defined "Freemium" model, where the cost of infrastructure and operation is covered by the premium members, but the system can still be enjoyed by all free of cost.

Who is on your team?

Tim Duffy: I am a civic hacker and full-stack developer who spends his free time working on free and open source tools that help citizens become more involved in their communities. I am the lead developer on the Yellr and MonroeMinutes projects.

Julie Lathan: I am from Oneonta, New York where I graduated with an English degree. While in college I worked in two departments of the college library and was a student representative on the College Library Committee and in the College Senate. I now live in Philadelphia where I'm working on my Master of Library and Information Science at Drexel University. My work experience in libraries started with volunteering in high school and has continued in academic and public libraries. One of the reasons I chose librarianship is the possibility of working with new methods of data organization to make good information more readily available to the public.

Luis Rosario: I am a Front-End and Drupal web developer from Rochester, NY. I am an RIT graduate working with Archer Communications in the city. My main responsibilities are website architecture mapping, interface design, and technical implementation.

What progress, if any, have you made on this project?

Research in the various methods of obtaining, converting, indexing, and storing civic documents from municipality websites using internet technologies has been Tim Duffy's passion for the past several years. He has deployed similar but smaller applications as the Open Civic Library Project locally in Monroe County, NY. Tim won second place in the Rochester Civic Apps Challenge for his work on "MonroeMinutes" which aggregates and indexes town meeting minutes in Monroe County, NY. The experience he has with this project will translate extremely well into the Open Civic Library Project. Many of the technologies used in "MonroeMinutes" have been broken out into separate tools so they can be easily used within the acquisition portion of the Open Civic Library Project.

Visual Media.

(see attached)

Organization (if applicable)

<none>

Location

Rochester, NY and Philadelphia, PA