Don Blair
Application for Research Affliate Appointment,
MIT Center for Civic Media
11/4/2014
Reference: civic team: https://civic.mit.edu/team

Statement of Work

As a Research Affliate with the Center for Civic Media, my aim would be
to deepen a set of collaborative projects that have already begun to coalesce
within the welcoming, open environment maintained at the Center. As an
Affliate, I would hope to contribute to an array of emerging and existing
projects and themes (detailed below) in several modes: through the writing
of blog posts, working papers, and book chapters; by assisting others in their
projects (through technical development and strategizing); and by engaging
in and facilitating relevant dialogues within the Civic Community. An ini-
tial project list - surely to undergo revision over time - might look like the
following:

Support structures for community science. The aim here is to build
on initiatives already underway within the Civic community by connecting
them to complementary intiatives in the Public Lab and FarmHack commu-
nities. Ongoing and planned Civic initiatives focused on civic monitoring
projects in the US, Brasil, Kenya, China and elsewhere might usefully draw
upon the technical and social support structures for community science be-
ing developed within Public Lab's Open Water, Open Air, and Open Land
initiatives; indeed, there is already work being done on the Open Water
project at the Center. FarmHack's Growing Clean Water adds a long-term
remediation perspective, and the community around food production, to this
collaborative space. My aim would be to leverage the expertise and talent
in Civic to convene collaborations around the design processes, community
education practices, and various notions of accessibility that undergird these
projects. I look forward to continuing to work with Heather Craig on this
project, and see strong overlaps with the work being done by Emilie, Wang
Yu, Jude Mwenda Ntabathia, Erhardt, and Nathon in this area.

Hierarchies, labor, and the role of institutions in the knowledge commons. As communities gain access to more powerful, decentralized tools for monitoring, manufacturing, energy production, and remediation, and as existing institutions seek to accomodate these new sources of data and material output, issues of regulation, certification, calibration, data veracity, and safety are coming to the fore. I would like to use a set of ongoing, concrete projects, in the areas of

- environmental monitoring (Public Lab);

- remediation, sanitation, and food production (Farm Hack); and

- human health (Innovations in Mother Child Health)

as anchors for the development of frameworks and analyses (via essays and working papers) and ongoing community dialogues (via meet-ups and colloquia). For these projects, the gathered expertise and infrastructure at the Center would be a great boon; working with Erhardt Graeff, J. Nathan Matthias, Tal Achituv (Fluid Interfaces), Willow Brugh, and Alexis Hope.

Civic Engagement Through Narrative. In my own recent work, I have begun to see (after being exposed to the vision of people in the Civic Community) strong and useful connections between the aspirations of community science communities like Public Lab, and the tools, methods, and approach already being employed within professional and academic fields whose focus is on narrative, rhetoric, interpretation, and communicating with specific audiences: the fields of journalism, communications, literature, design, art, and much of the humanities. As part of the scope of a planned Environmental Storytelling Institute (NSF or other funding pending), I would like to include research at Civic into the incorporation of these narrative techniques and insights into the civic engagement space. Catherine's work, the networked stories group, the Future of News Initiative, Matt, Adrienne, Rahul Bhargava.

I would also hope to prompt dialogue related to the above themes through blog posts (on the Civic blog) as well as short essays (on, for example, medium.com), written in collaboration with people from the Civic community, on topics like:

"Hidden Needs." Lessons from the breast pump hackathon – market broken – levearge tal's work.

"Dangerous Toys." folksonomies. decentralized certification. micromorts, community health centers and food in india. compare micromorts across countries w/ regulation.

"Social Network Regulation?" the argument from harm re: the regulation of social networks and their increasing importance for the basic networking needs of people.