Wis.Community and action groups

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As I am sure many of you are aware, I have been working on the Wis.Community project for some time now, trying to build an information and discussion platform for people who need an on-line platform in Wisconsin. Many groups calling for political action are a particularly good fit in many ways for the goals of this project, and I'd like to outline some of the ways that I think cooperation would be beneficial. Wis.Community fits in to this sort of activity both as an outward-facing portal and as an internal resource.

Issues:

I think there are several communications issues that should be addressed. Some of these are what I would call internal issues (that is communicating with our members) and others are external, or communicating to the outside world. Wis.Community can help out in both of these areas.

Internal -

Calendar – Most groups have issues with internal communication that need to be addressed. We now have multiple committees, and people in each of those committees. There are many meetings, trainings, and other events. There is no central place to handle these and members are often not aware of what the scheduling is for different things since it involves finding things in my huge amount of email. Wis.Community can provide both private and public calendars. People could look at our calendar, they can add events directly from the on-line calendar to their own private electronic calendars. We can send out notices of events directly to the different teams, either via email or (soon) SMS messages. This way we can nag people on individual teams, and still give access to when all the meetings are to everyone internally so, for example, I would know when other teams were meeting in case I wanted to go to one of them. We can also keep agendas and minutes from meetings in the system as part of the calendar data. I think this would be the biggest win for us out of the system features.

File and document storage – This gives your group a central place to have documents that can be private to members or publicly available.

Messaging – The system includes fairly powerful and extensible messaging facilities – you can notify teams and members of the community when doing a posting, and people can follow whatever content areas they want to follow. Currently all notifications are via email, but we hope to very shortly also be able to text message for notifications.

Civicrm – One of the deep parts of Wis.community is an implementation of CiviCRM – an open source constituent management system. People with accounts on the site are automatically synced into CiviCRM, and are categorized by the communities on the site of which they are members. This is a

very rich environment which allows us to track contributions, activities, payments of membership, donations, and more. It also has facilities for call banking, voter walk routes, mass mailings, and more. See http://civicrm.org. Currently this is implemented for the use of Wis.community, but I am looking at ways to extend this to work with multiple organizations and get the permissions correct in the database so that each participating organization will only have access to their own members. I do not think this will be fully available to partners until some time this summer, but I am looking for one or two beta testers.

Permissions and teams – the entire site is organized around control of permissions and memberships. Some of the communities are private, some are public. An organization can maintain both public and private areas on the site, and can have complete control over permissions. People are organized by community (which would be your own group of people) and teams within a community – so, for example, you can use a team to send notifications to a sub-group of people, or to set permissions on a particular area of the site that you want to limit to access from a particular team of individuals.

Multi-Media I am working hard on multi-media integration into the site, particularly video. Currently it is very easy to add in video from Youtube and Vimeo on the site – most content has a video field, and you can put in a video from those two sites by simply pasting in the URL of the video. I am working on other options that would allow direct upload of video and audio content to be hosted on high-speed servers, which can then also be re-purposed as video and audio on a Roku channel.

Between Groups – Working on plans to promote interchange of ideas and info between different groups.

External:

The site is designed to also serve as a public-facing portal. Publicly-available content can be viewed by anyone, and can be organized in many different ways. We currently offer a number of different content types including:

- **News** – this is a general news content type where you can produce news articles, the equivalent of a blog entry, or any other combination of text, pictures, video, or audio.

- **Events** – events appear in event listings and calendars throughout the site, organized by which Community they are associated with, and a category of event types.

- **Discussions** – On-line discussions on any topic, which is part of the community. People may subscribe to a community, or to a discussion, in which case they will be able to participate in the discussion via email. Note that discussion threads **must** be started on the web site – you cannot start a thread via email since that would open us up to spamming.

Basically any internal content can also be external – it's just a matter of whether the section of the site it is located in is private or public.

We will be having a public meeting on March 10 to further discuss uses of Wis.Community and to make further plans for growth of the platform. Please visit https://www.wis.community if you want to be kept in the loop.