

Open Collaboration to Understand Social Needs

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Digital Frontiers Seminar:
Online Collaboration for Offline Good

1. HOW WE STARTED

Background

- EOL anecdote
- Democratize research so that anyone can do it

- From *participatory* to *open collaboration* needs assessment

→ **Serious, complex work can be taken without institutional direction**

Background

Therefore, instead of just talking about it...as I have on many occasions...

<http://www.ipscommons.sg/the-promise-of-open-collaboration-in-delivering-social-services/>

...we finally decided to just do it because...

“The number of people who are willing to start something is smaller, much smaller than the number of people who are willing to contribute once someone else starts something”
(Shirky 2008: 239)

2. WHAT WE DID

Wiki Project to Understand Social Needs

Current Host

- http://wiki.socialcollab.sg/index.php/Main_Page

Governance Document

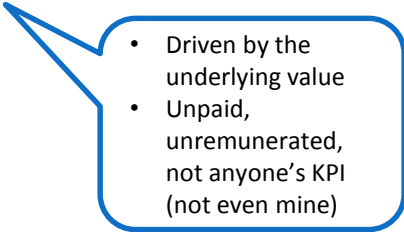
- <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NMGcnM7P1ItLJImWFv9UWCfI6SE6rEBIOrQJJiau5VE/edit>

Progress

- Roundtable and call to action (July 2016)
- Testing wiki hosts, migrating to new domain
- 3 on-going projects: Disability, Migrant Workers, Ex-Offenders

CALL TO ACTION

- You can be part of more than one team if you like
- You can calibrate your involvement to as much or as little as you want
- You can quit anytime
- Anybody can join any team (but some may be more suitable than others)

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- Driven by the underlying value
 - Unpaid, unremunerated, not anyone's KPI (not even mine)

BACKBONE TEAMS

TEAMS	ROLES/TASKS	ORG/INDV
Facilitators/Connectors	Facilitate, coordinate and connect across teams & partners; guidance & strategic planning	NVPC? Lien Centre? NCSS?
Scribe & Documentation	Document open collaboration process for learning & improvement; monitor progress; possibly publish report	CTPCLP?
Marketing & Communications	Help tell our story / e.g. social media, webpage	Comms students?
Outreach & Volunteer Recruitment	Reach out to organizations & individuals to participate	
Knowledge Team	Design content & structure of knowledge base; support needs assessment process of anchor partners; train & equip new participants	IPS, academics, Lien?
ICT Team	Provide ICT advice, development & support so that partners use the most feasible & usable platform	IT professionals, SmartNation?

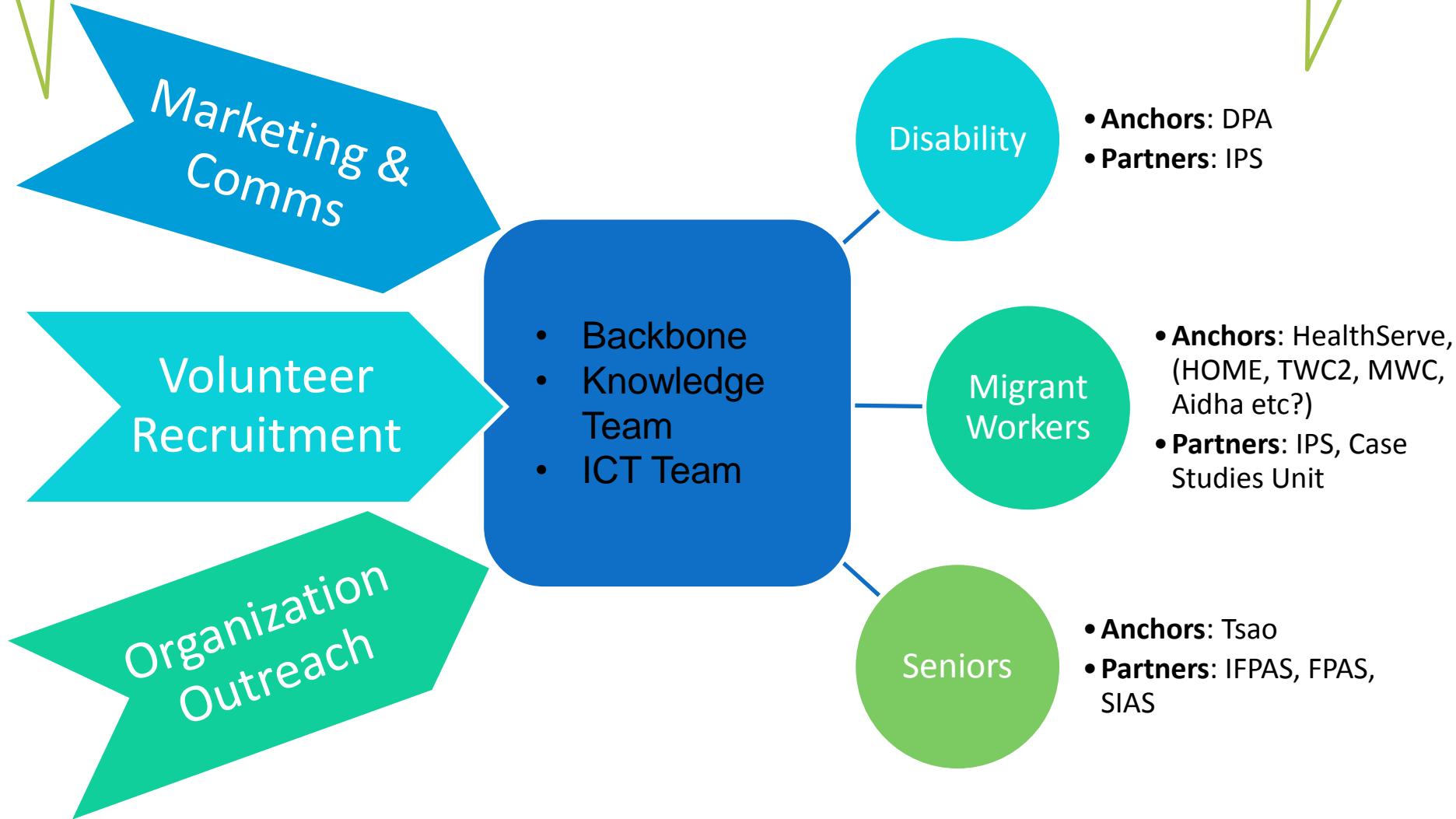
SOCIAL CAUSE TEAMS

CAUSE/ISSUE	ANCHOR ORGANISATIONS (PERM)	PARTNERS
Financially Vulnerable Seniors	Tsao Foundation	IFPAS, FPAS, SIAS
Distressed Migrant Workers	HealthServe, Aidha (?) HOME (?) etc	IPS, Case Studies Unit
Disability	DPA	IPS
End of Life	Singapore Hospice Council (?)	Community Service Offices of IHLs
Ex-Offenders	SCORE (?), SACA (?), SANA (?)	SMU students (?)
Children	Just Cause (?), Community Foundations (?) SCS (?)	
Etc LGBT?		

Bring in
volunteers,
organizations

Produce Needs
& Gaps Report
2017, 2018 etc

NETWORK STRUCTURE



Ideal Work Process

- Needs assessment work:
 - On a regular basis: anchor organizations contribute to knowledge base with help from partners, students, volunteers
 - Knowledge team support social cause teams as much or as little as desired
 - Anchor organisations to meet others once or twice a year to stock take and make sense of information, in order to write needs & gaps report
- Backbone and connection work:
 - Determine what wiki hosting sites or other ICT platform can allow needed functionalities
 - Bring in strategic partnerships, monitor progress & improve processes

3. CHALLENGES

Requirements for Open Collab

1. Analytic Framework

- Knowledge base that is 'contributable to'
- Facilitate collective sense-making

2. ICT Infrastructure

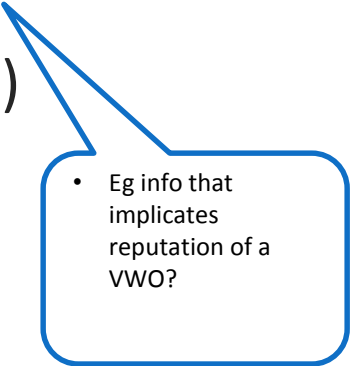
- Magnify the reach and ease of digital collaboration

3. Social Participation

- Buy-in and commitment
- Right ethos of working together

Current challenges

- Not just a research problem, but also a knowledge management problem
 - Knowledge architecture to allow contributability & coherence
 - Determining sound editorial policies & process
 - Access and editorial rights (controlled or open?)
- Sustaining energy & commitment
 - Existing organisations and persons
 - Drawing in new partners

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- Eg info that implicates reputation of a VWO?

4. BENEFITS

	CENTRALLY LED	OPEN COLLABORATION
Quality of knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -‘Snapshot’ and static -Complete in itself, but Fragmented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -‘Live’, constantly updated -Coherent accumulation: seek clarity instead of arbitrary completion
Ownership	Proprietary	Public
Growth	Incremental gain	Exponential growth
Ethos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Best agency to do the work (do for others) -Turf issues (‘avoid duplication’, ‘role delineation’) -Defensiveness: need to seem authoritative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -All can contribute (community helps one another) -Democratized -Humility: transparency about ignorance
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hierarchy -approval required -logic of central planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Network -distributed collaborations -logic of coordination

Participant Testimonials

“The fragmentation of knowledge is a huge problem for VWOs, social enterprises and researchers...while there is a lot of willingness to do good, it takes a lot of effort just to find out what the needs are. You have to start building networks, talk to various people and organisations, and even after all that work, the information is not shared...if everything comes to a centralized platform, all the energy, time and manpower can be channelled to solutions instead”

“It’s because we believe in it in the first place, that why we are here”

5. FORWARD PLANS

Specific Initiatives

- Draft of editorial policies
- Needs Assessment guidelines / templates for contributors
- Locality based needs assessments

Future of Open Collaboration?

So far we have only talked about:

Understanding Social Needs

- Snapshot reports by experts & government agencies → 'Live', always updated knowledge base maintained by community organisations in partnership with relevant specialists

Broader possibilities and ambitions:

- **Service Delivery & Collective Impact**
- **Charity Analysis**
- **Associations and Membership**

Thank You!