



How to Put Together an Aspiration Technology Festival

An internal guide for Aspiration team members.

A step by step approach

- ❖ The purpose of this document is to provide a step-by-step guide for creating Aspiration technology events on the model of the California Non-Profit Technology Festival.
- ❖ The goal of this guide is to provide a set of procedures and guidelines for team members to follow to put together future technology events structured on Aspiration's **Unconference** model.



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Aspiration Events

Building Technological Capacity for Social Justice



California Nonprofit Technology Festival

A bi-yearly statewide festival bringing together nonprofit staff and social justice activists who are using technology as an instrument of social change.

California Nonprofit Technology Festival
Los Angeles

Moseley-Salvatori Conference Center
637 S. Lucas Street
LA, CA 90017

April 3 - 4, 2014

#CATechFest

REGISTER & More Info

<http://fj.mp/1hJVePo>

- Improve the effectiveness of your online communications
- Learn from peers how to save time & money on tech projects
- Join the emerging network of tech & nonprofit leaders in CA!

Help us make this event a success - **VOLUNTEER!**

Email catechfest@aspirationtech.org
Call 415-839-6456

www.aspirationtech.org

ASPIRATION

California Nonprofit Technology Festival

While indeed a “tech” event, the festival is designed to invite ongoing dialog about how principles and practices of social justice should inform how technology is employed, in ways that are consistent with the values and spirit of those working for a more just, equitable and just world.

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ASPIRATION

Overview

A three-stage process for creating Aspiration Events

❖ Outreach

- ❖ The process of connecting people and organizations with the event, as participants, facilitators, trainers and funders.

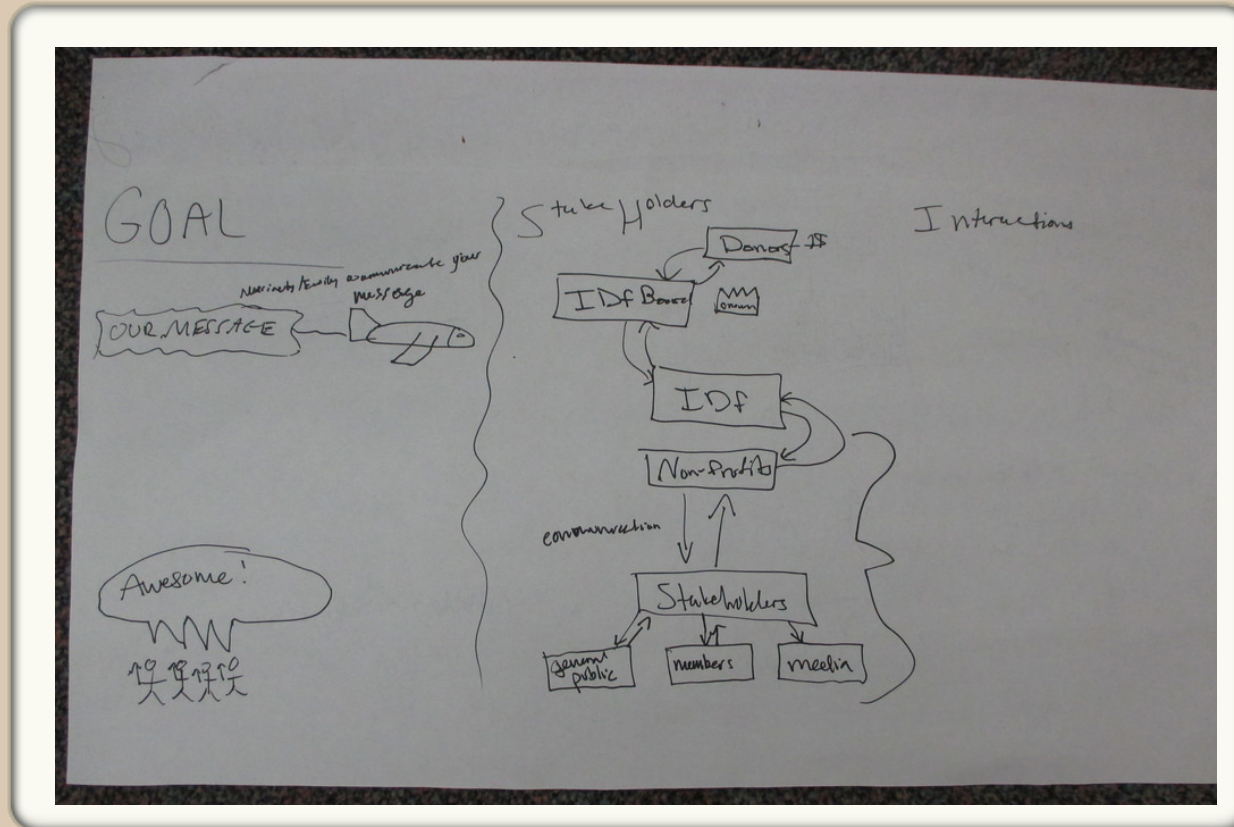
❖ Agenda

- ❖ Setting objectives, sessions and topics for the event. The event itself is structured around an *Unconference* format, in which sessions are proposed and facilitated by the participants themselves, leveraging the knowledge base and addressing the needs of those convened.

Overview

A three-stage process for creating Aspiration Events

- ❖ Communications
 - ❖ Internal / External
 - ❖ Pre-Event / Post-Event



Outreach

Defining an Intentional Approach



Defining Outreach Goals

Aspiration events are first and foremost convened to strengthen ties and social networks among technology users in the non-profit and non-government sectors. Our goals are driven by the desire to train and empower NGOs and activists to use technology efficiently in their work.

To accomplish this goal, we need to be intentional about both internal outreach and relationship building efforts.



Outreach

Agenda

Communications

Aspiration's outreach approach is intentional in two regards:

1. Statewide

Locally:

Area where festival is held.



Regionally:

e.g.: Southern California, Bay Area, Central Valley

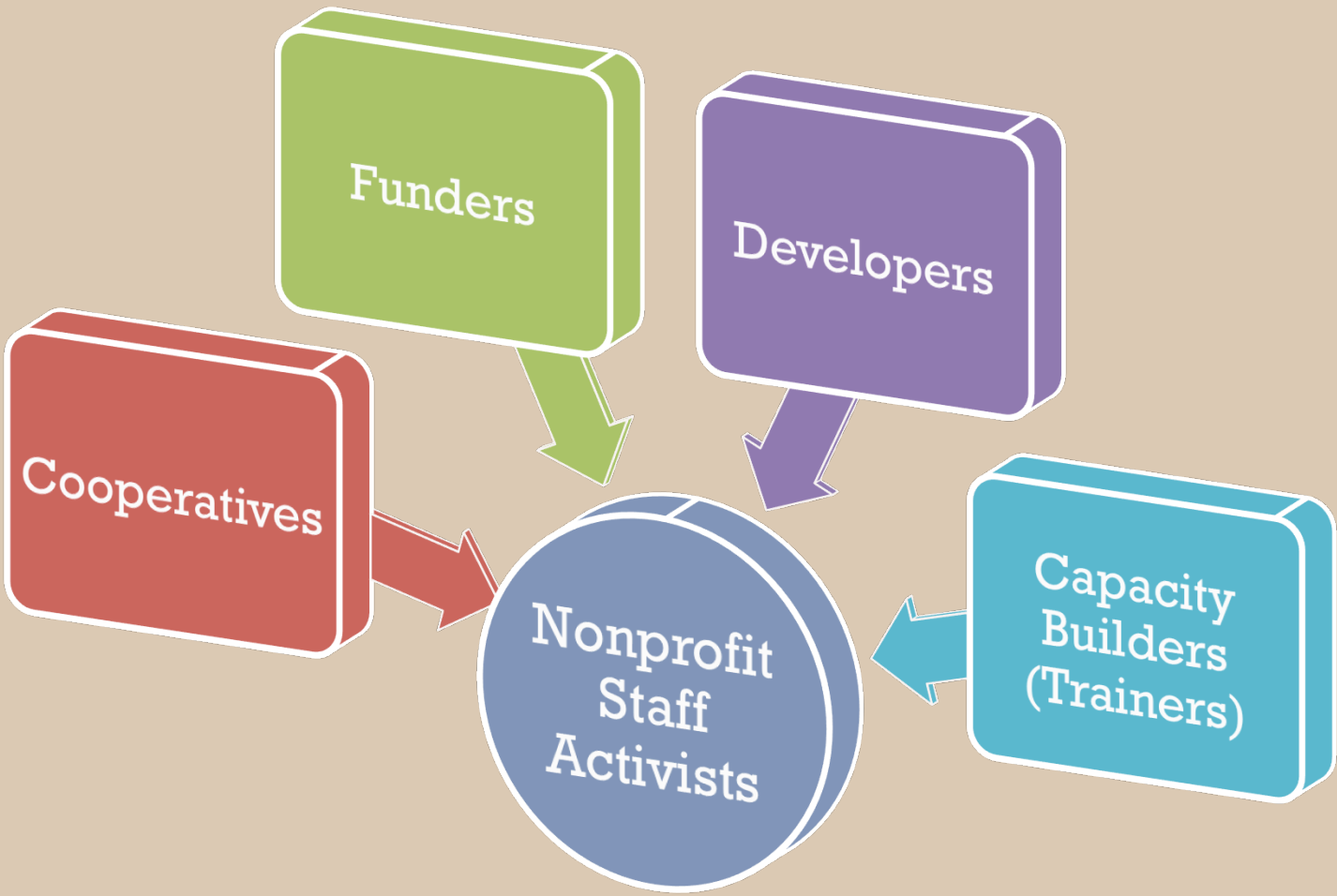


Outreach

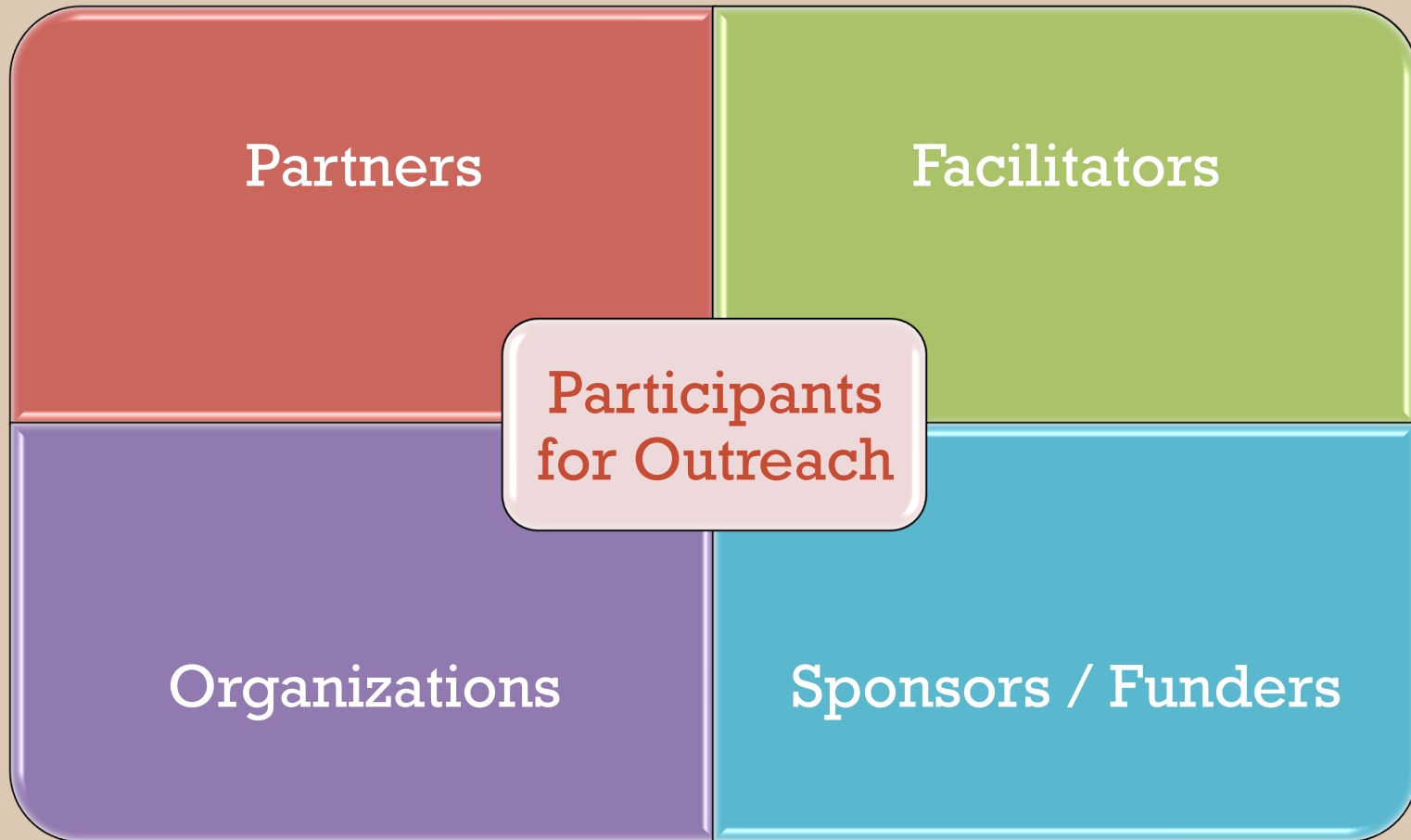
Agenda

Communications

The Non-Profit Supply Chain



Identify the following groups ahead of the event.



Identifying Partners

Partners serve a number of different roles



Co-organizers

- Help plan events, and make sure their interests and community are represented at the event.

Community Partners

- Help spread the word to their networks and bring folks out to the event.

Agenda Partners

- Facilitate sessions on topics they are passionate about.

Goals for Partners

- ❖ Identify at least 3 – 5 co-organizing partners.
- ❖ At least two should live locally in the city where the event is to be held.



Partner Management

As an Aspiration team member, your responsibilities in managing partner relations should include the following tasks:

- Get final approval on event announcements
- Post announcement in all promotional materials and newsletters
- Post event logo and information to website
- Send event outreach and “Spread the Word” texts.



Outreach

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Partner Management

- Send participant list as it grows.
- Link to social media.
- Check in monthly with partners prior to event.
- Get feedback on early drafts of agenda.
- Look for opportunities to connect partners with each other prior to the event.
- Offer gratitude to partners for their participation in the event.

Facilitators

A Facilitator is a person who leads knowledge sharing and capacity building sessions at the event.



One-fifth of participants are facilitators.

For every 100 anticipated participants, identify at least 20 people ahead of time who can:

- ❖ Lead collaborative, small group discussions on their topic of expertise.
- ❖ Bring an ethic of sharing and learning to sessions, rather than a one-way, 'fire-hose' approach to training.
- ❖ Attend at least one pre-event call with the festival lead organizer to learn how to design a session .



Outreach

Agenda

Communications

Pre-Event: Identify Facilitators

- ❖ Capacity builders
- ❖ Emerging leaders
- ❖ Organizations we want to build relationships with - NGOs, technology and social justice activists.
- ❖ Experienced trainers and workshop leaders.
- ❖ Cohort participants

Pre-Event: Identify Facilitators

- ❖ Youth and youth developers
- ❖ People who have previously attended tech fests.
- ❖ People who have led sessions at other events.
- ❖ Experienced trainers and workshop leaders.
- ❖ Recommended by previous participants and partners.

Facilitators Emerge On-Site

Many more festival participants step up and volunteer to facilitate sessions over the course of the event.

Identifying as many of these folks prior to the event is critical to developing leadership and building a backbone for the festival agenda.

More on facilitator guidelines:

<http://facilitation.aspirationtech.org>



Outreach

Agenda

Communications

Pre-Engagement

Inviting facilitators and partners into the process early and often is a great way to discover potential session topics and immerse them in our participatory agenda format.

- ❖ One-on-one interviews are a chance to ask facilitators what skills and expertise they bring to share and what they want to get out the event.
- ❖ Whenever possible, interviewing ALL festival participants offers a golden opportunity to identify promising facilitators and invite them to co-create the agenda.



Outreach

Agenda

Communications

Pre-event interview questions

Personal

- ❖ “Briefly describe your work and your interest in the event.”
- ❖ “What do you personally want to get out of the event?”
- ❖ “What would make you feel like your time at the event has been well spent?”

Pre-event interview questions

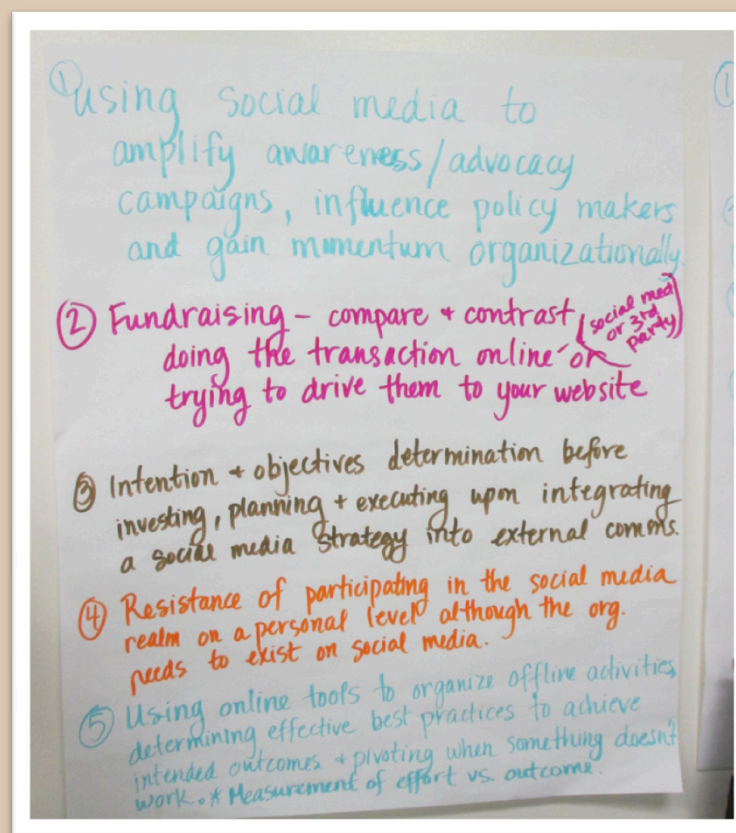
Agenda

- ❖ “What are the most important things for this group to discuss in our time together?”
- ❖ “What topics do you want to make sure are addressed in the agenda?”
- ❖ “Are there any relevant topics on which you’d like to share your experiences?”
- ❖ What topics or issues do you think participants or most likely to disagree on or desire to debate?”

Talking to Facilitators

Tap into their passion.

Think in meta terms about what the facilitator does, the thing that they bring to the table. Engage them and draw out the unique knowledge, perspective, or teaching opportunity they have to offer.



Talking to Facilitators

Example One

Facilitator:

“I teach video editing.”

Ask

“Would you be interested in leading a discussion on how to teach video editing?”

Move the conversation from *What* skill they teach, to *How* to teach that skill.



Outreach

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Talking to Facilitators

Example Two

Facilitator:

“I work with a cooperative that does design and development of websites. I work in the development side and know Wordpress.”

Respond

“A lot of our nonprofits work with designers and developers and wonder about the best questions to ask to start a technology project. Could you offer some advice around this topic?”

Propose further questions. Go deeper into the topic. Anticipate participant’s questions.



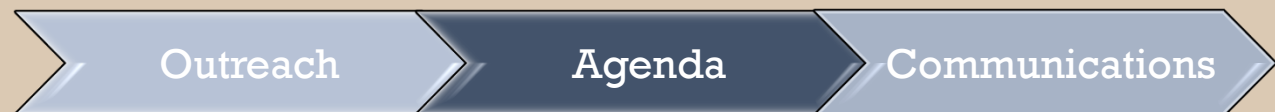
Creating the Agenda

Running an open, participant driven *Unconference*.



Hacking the Unconference

Aspiration's intentional approach to the unconference format is designed to give all participants equal input into the agenda and set a collaborative and communal tone for the event.



The Aspiration approach to Unconferencing

You may be familiar with the ‘unconference’ or ‘open space’ model that aims to make conferences more participant-driven and collaborative in nature.

At many such events, session times and slots are claimed on a first come, first serve basis, favoring more assertive participants and keeping many from having input on the agenda.



Outreach

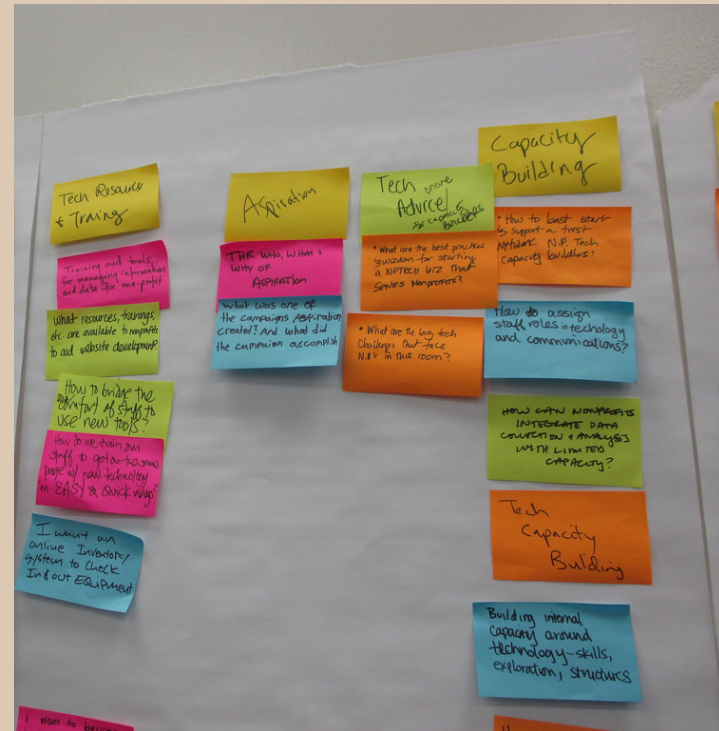
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Agenda Hacking

- ❖ The Agenda Hacking exercise at the start of each day of the festival ensures that all attendees play a vital role in the process.

In this exercise, participants collectively brainstorm a list of topics, propose new sessions, and allocate session topics for each day's agenda.



Setting the Agenda

- ❖ While technology and tech strategy are a primary focus of the event, many of our sessions and workshops also engage with the greater purpose of promoting social justice in California, and we take time to learn about and reflect on work being done in this regard by organizations and activists across the state.



Outreach

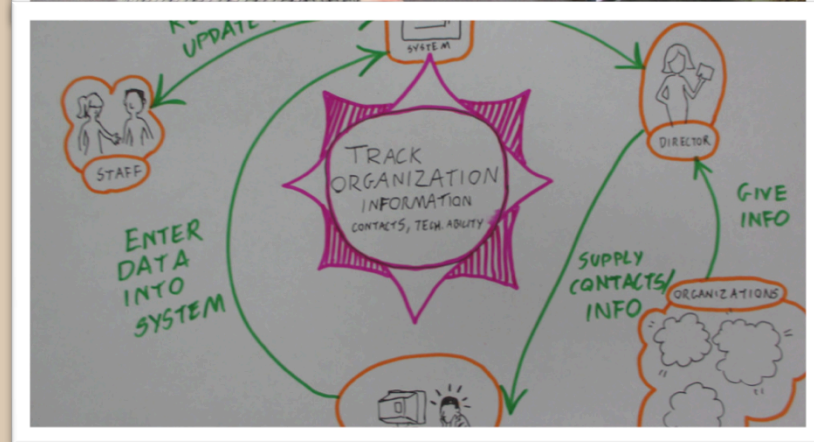
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Participant-led sessions

More than half of the agenda will be built by participants both before and during the event, covering topics, tools, themes and issues proposed by those in attendance.

Aspiration events de-emphasize lectures and presentations in favor of small-group discussions, or break-out sessions



Breakout Sessions

- ❖ Starting with a large group discussion, the group then breaks into smaller, focused sessions that are self-organized by the participants around their own interests and passions.
- ❖ The format is designed to be highly interactive, enable learning and peer sharing, and support collaboration.



Sessions generally fall into one or more of the following categories:

By Issue Area

- Creating space for participants working on specific campaigns and causes.

By Region

- Inviting participants from different parts of the state to share what they are doing, achieving, and learning in their area of focus.

Learning by making

- Hands on workshops for sharing essential technology skills.



Outreach

Agenda

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Sample Festival Agenda

From the California Nonprofit Technology Festival,
Los Angeles, April 2014



Outreach

Agenda

Communications

Day 1

Morning

- ❖ Registration / Coffee
- ❖ Opening Circle
- ❖ Interactive Group Exercises
- ❖ Introductory Discussions
- ❖ Agenda Hacking
- ❖ Interactive Project Showcases
- ❖ Lunch

Afternoon

- ❖ Afternoon Breakout Sessions I
- ❖ Break
- ❖ Afternoon Breakout Sessions II
- ❖ Closing Circle
- ❖ Happy Hour



Outreach

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Day 2

Morning

- ❖ Opening Circle
- ❖ Strategy Mapping Session
- ❖ Break
- ❖ Hands-on Breakout Sessions
- ❖ **Lunch** (Encourage participants to sit with folks they don't already know.)

Afternoon

- ❖ Afternoon Breakout Sessions
- ❖ Break
- ❖ “Where Do We Go From Here” :
 - ❖ Individual Commitments
- ❖ Closing Circle



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Opening Circle

- ❖ Participants are seated in a single, large circle, facing one another. Each attendee introduces him or herself and is encouraged to briefly share a few words about themselves, their work and their thoughts on the event. Participants are also encouraged to put away electronic devices and other distractions and listen actively to these introductions.
- ❖ Encourage participants to not just hang out with friends but to seek out and meet new people.



Interactive Group Exercises

Exercises and games help build a sense of community among participants, stimulate session topics and inspire further connections and learning opportunities.

Examples of exercises employed at Aspiration events have included:

- ❖ Spectrogram
- ❖ Strong Wind Blows
- ❖ Speed Geeking



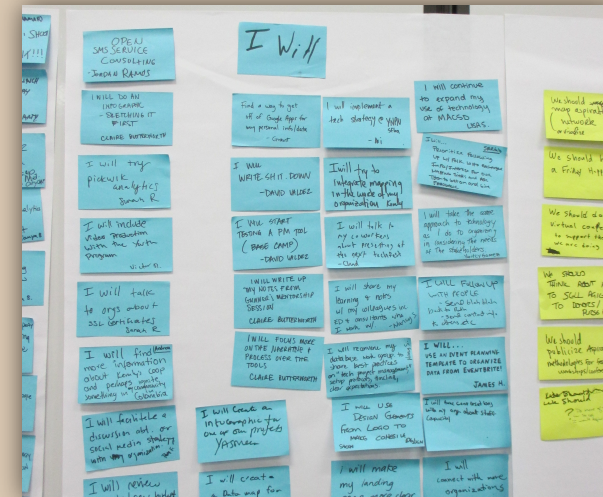
Individual commitments:

“Where Do We Go From Here?”

Participants write on index cards their intentions, thoughts and strategies for moving forward with the knowledge and tools gained at the event. These statements are sorted and posted on the wall in three categories, as follows:



- ❖ **“I will” statements**
- ❖ **“We should” suggestions**
- ❖ **“Don’t forget” learning / teaching points**



Outreach

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Closing Circle

Summarize what has been learned and the possibilities for moving forward.



Outreach

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Communications

Getting the word out and getting feedback.



Internal

- Draft outreach list.
- Draft facilitator list.
- Share progress with Aspiration team members and incorporate their feedback.
- Share event information with partners.



Outreach

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External

Getting the word out about Aspiration events.

Aspiration's external communication and outreach efforts are strongly focused on our constituents, partners and facilitators. Eschewing general press converge, we seek to directly reach these constituents – youth and grassroots activists, developers, funders and decision makers working for social justice.

Our promotional efforts should target outlets that serve these groups.

- ❖ Youth Journalists
- ❖ Social Justice / Technology Blogs
- ❖ NGOs
- ❖ Aspiration website

www.aspirationtech.com



Outreach

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Promoting the event

Pay careful attention to language, tone and emphasis when putting together a promotional package for an event.

Consider the needs of our non-profit audience. A significant number of readers will be non-technical or tech agnostic.



Promotional Materials

- One pager** – Introduction or pitch page for the event
- Brochure**
- Case Studies** – Positive testimonials and narrative accounts from previous festival participants
- Poster**
- Print ads** for papers, newsletters and other print publications
- Web banners**

Getting Feedback

- ❖ A simple survey can generate invaluable data and foster strong, ongoing relationships between Aspiration and our participants, constituents and facilitators. It can be distributed at the event or mailed afterwards to all registered attendees.
- ❖ Don't forget to thank the attendee for their participation in the festival and invite their input.

Sample Survey Questions:

Outcomes

- ❖ “Did the event change your thinking about nonprofit technology? Elaborate”
- ❖ “What were the two or three most useful things to you about the event?”
- ❖ “How do you see yourself applying what you’ve learned at the event?”
- ❖ “Would you recommend future CA Tech Fest events to other people?”

Sample Survey Questions:

Agenda

- ❖ “Was the agenda format too structured, unstructured, or about right?”
- ❖ “Which sessions did you find most beneficial?”
- ❖ “What was not covered that you would like to see included in the agenda?”
- ❖ “Was the Wiki a useful part of the event?”

Additional Survey Questions and Suggestions:

Include space for respondents to make a brief statement about their experience at the event, as well as offer suggestions about what would improve the festival experience for them.



Outreach

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Conclusion

Making this event work.



Guiding Principles for a Successful Convening

An Aspiration event should be a supportive, collaborative and empowering experience for every participant.

Guiding Principles for a Successful Convening

Some guiding principles to keep in mind before, during, and after the event.

- ❖ **Include everyone in the circle.**
- ❖ **Ask questions early and often.**
- ❖ **Embrace the spirit of sharing.**
- ❖ **Share first, debate later.**
- ❖ **Invite participants to bring others with them to subsequent events.**
- ❖ **Help us to realize the full potential of this gathering.**

Further Information

More information on the how to organize and facilitate Aspiration Technology Events can be found on our main site and at our Wiki.

- ❖ www.aspirationtech.org
- ❖ facilitation.aspirationtech.org
- ❖ catechfest.aspirationtech.org

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