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Session Proposal:

Kevin Novak and Michelle Springer will discuss the promise of electronic government, the challenges and issues facing its implementation, and how social networks and the dynamic web environment are changing how government agencies are implementing electronic government, providing information and services, and planning for the future. The session will use the Library of Congress current strategies and initiatives to demonstrate how one of the largest content and information repositories of government and other information is responding to its users and meeting the promise of electronic government.

Government as a Participant in Social Networks..
Adding Authority to the Conversation

Web 2.0 and soon to come Web 3.0 are creating an electronic community filled with individual voices, social networks, and participatory volunteerism as many reach out to interact, contribute, and relate to the dynamic world around them. We have entered a time of increased innovation and change as a result of increased use of the Internet and its integration into people's daily lives. Young and old are integrating technology, the Internet, and mobile devices into their daily tasks and information gathering requiring information to be easily and instantly accessible and discoverable.

Although many have questioned the value proposition of social networks, usage and integration into lives and activities demonstrate that the world wants to continue to build out social networks and continue to explore new media and applications. Individual and group participation have resulted in mash-ups of all types of data and applications serving general and niche needs that have provided interesting and valuable sources of information and service. Open access and availability have promoted combining information in ways not possible or plausible by a single entity. Communities have connected individuals around the world and blogs have made individual opinion and

insight of the "common" person valuable and important.

This dynamism is here to stay and will only continue to grow and mature as generations continue to shift. Governments must recognize the dynamism that is occurring and ensure they are ready to meet the new demands and requirements of its citizens. Electronic Government's promise of 8 years ago was to bring seamless electronic experiences focused on services and information to Internet users. Today, electronic government must recognize the power and value of sponsoring and supporting communities and networks and making information available. Additionally, government must recognize the full integration of technology into citizen's daily lives that is going far beyond the experiences available via an Internet browser.

A Government Agency in a Web 2.0 World

In the new paradigm of the Web 2.0 community and network environment, government agencies have a responsibility to provide authoritative information and improve the quality of the citizen dialog that emerging technologies encourage and facilitate. The Library of Congress has undertaken a number of initiatives to use these technologies to enhance citizen discovery of content in the Library's online collections and enrich the user experience with authentic and authoritative information from a trustworthy source. The Library has a mission "to make its resources available and useful to … the American people." But to achieve this goal, Library experts have to participate in the conversation; provide access to the tools that facilitate discovery, organization, and sharing; provide content in variable appealing formats that can be easily accessed and pushed to users at their convenience; be present in the online communities and social networks in which users communicate; and finally, evaluate emerging trends and technologies to attract the early adopters that become opinion leaders in this new community. Government must innovatively deliver more content in different and engaging ways than thought possible only a few years ago and the Library is currently undertaking a variety of initiatives to do just that.

Participation
Blogging is a technology and social phenomenon that has just begun to be cautiously explored within the federal community. Finding the proper balance between official communication and personal voice is difficult; blogs that allow comments by the public face additional challenges and federal policy in this area is evolving. The unique benefit

of a blog derives from the blogger's informal, personal voice and perspective, which can put a human face on a government agency, allow behind-the-scenes institutional transparency, and provide opportunities for conversation and relationship building. These relationships are becoming increasingly important to institutions that want to be relevant to the new younger generation of Web users that place value on peer networks and collaboration/community sharing.

Blogs help users navigate the overabundance of information on the Web and can provide a window into institutions in a way that is friendly, timely, and accessible. For these reasons, the Library of Congress began publishing its first blog on April 24, 2007-- one of the few federal agencies to do so, though from interest expressed by our federal colleagues, expect others to follow. Blogging has the potential to allow our experts to share their knowledge with a broad audience and in turn, learn from others in their field who will share their own experience. This sort of collaboration will extend the Library's reach into new constituencies, expose the deeper parts of the Library's collection to readers that might otherwise never penetrate beyond the top level pages, and contribute to the world-wide store of knowledge.

Tools

In the last several years, an ever-expanding number of Web services that help users save, organize, share, annotate, and rate information found online have become increasingly popular, particularly with younger generations. Government has a responsibility to facilitate access to these tools so that authoritative information can easily be a part of what is shared and made retrievable using these systems. The Library of Congress, in a desire to increase user access to Library content as part of its mission, has taken a first step in providing a limited number of links to these types of sharing tools directly on selected Library Web pages. This pilot will evaluate their effect on Web statistics and provide users with easy access that is browser independent. Examination of Library metrics has already provided evidence of spikes in views of items from Library online exhibitions when users have independently placed links to Library content on these sites. Though the Library is one of the few federal agencies to provide direct access to these tools at present, strategies to increase sharing and dissemination of public resources via this type of linking is likely to become routine, and federal Web policies will need to accommodate it as a best practice in the future.

Tapping Community Expertise

One of the features of the social bookmarking sites mentioned above is that they allow their users to tag content with terms they find meaningful; both as a tool for later retrieval and as a sharing device to expose like content on the Web. This tagging activity can be of benefit to the institution that own the materials as well as to the individuals engaged in tagging. While we are the curators of the collections, we can not know all the details about all the items in our entire collections. Tagging allows the institution to open its doors to the collective and individual knowledge of the online world.

The Library community has moved over time to adopt a variety of cataloging and metadata standards. Additionally, the Library receives content for which no metadata or cataloging data exists. As a result of this lack of data and changing landscape, libraries and other content repositories are recognizing that they need help. The power and scale of social networks, including the high level of participatory volunteerism, provide an institution like the Library of Congress an opportunity to build a repository of identifying information that promotes individual and group relevance to the riches of the libraries' collections. Imagine the library has a collection of photos with simple identifying information. We know the picture is of military personnel before an aircraft carrier in the pacific. What we may not know the identity of the individuals in the picture. The power of tagging will allow others to help us better describe and identify who is in the picture. This not only helps the library in identifying its material and related information, it instantly builds relevance and makes history come to life by place and name.

The Library is currently in the planning stages of various pilot projects that would allow users to tag Library content, benefiting both users and the Library. The Library opportunity would be to harvest the metadata which emerges through this Web 2.0 conversation while users would gain the ability to provide metadata that they find most meaningful for their purposes. Exposing user-generated content on government Web pages is a challenge for federal agencies, and this pilot will explore that challenge. In addition, as an authoritative source of data, it's vital to ensure the integrity of government generated expert data, so any pilot has to operate in a manner that does not compromise but supplements the expert data available.

The pilot's goals are threefold: to expose Library public domain content to the public in environments outside the Library's Web site where communities of interest have been developed (communities interested in photographs, for example), provide this content in a context that supports user-generated tagging, both as an altruistic and as a self-interest

exercise, and support the creation of a folksonomy that can be used to assess their value as supplements to the available expert-generated taxonomies.

Downloadable Formats

The rise of mobile and wireless technologies are increasing the demands to ensure content is "available and deliverable" in multiple formats, sizes, and ways. Additionally, the desire and movement of Web 2.0 is pushing the concept of delivery straight to the desktop or device interface removing the web browser from the equation. The Library must evaluate and use technologies and approaches utilized by the online and "wired" audience--in order to maintain relevance in a digitally changing world. Looking for new ways to reach its current and future audiences, the Library began offering rss feeds on loc.gov in 2006. Most recently the full text of the Library of Congress blog became available as a syndicated feed. Pushing frequently updated printed content to users is an important step to encourage access but multimedia materials will soon also be available in this manner. Portable media is an excellent vehicle for the Library to communicate with its multiple audiences, especially the younger members within those audiences. The breadth of multimedia material in Library collections and the curatorial expertise available will allow Library podcasts to be both entertaining and educational. This type of outreach can extend what is already being offered on the Library of Congress Web site, enriching some of the Library's best-regarded presentations, each with a special audience of its own. The Library will employ multiple channels of dissemination for this material. This content will be available via rss subscription and the multiple popular aggregators used by the public to find podcasts of interest.

There are major challenges to re-purposing content from Library collections and providing it in downloadable formats: digital rights/permissions agreements and ensuring compliance with 508 accessibility requirements. As government exploits new technologies to push downloadable content to portable media devices, these constraints require innovative solutions. On the Library's Web site, flash technology has been employed to accomplish one of these goals and can be found within the videos currently offering commentary on the MacDowell Colony Online Exhibit (http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/macdowell/).

> Examples of the 14 video clips that Columbia University and the Library of Congress developed for this online exhibit can be found here:
> http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/macdowell/highlights/artists/index.html

These videos use Adobe Flash technology to sync captions and provide them within the video stream while allowing access to both keyboard and screenreader users. The multiple accessibility features of the video implementations in the MacDowell online exhibit are a first of its kind for a US government agency Web site.

Virtual Communities & Evaluating New Technologies
Social networking, syndication, and a growling wireless world have and will continue to place the institution into areas it has never encountered, and now virtual worlds have entered the conversation. Delivery of content and forming communities in a 3D virtual environment may be the future of the Web. After early adoption by the emerging technology and gaming communities, several federal agencies, libraries, universities, and corporations are now leasing virtual land within various massive multi-player online environments (MMOEs) such as Second Life, to experiment in their use as an outreach and educational platform. The Library needs to pay close attention to what is happening in the virtual worlds and determine intelligently what is hype vs trends; ensuring that the institution can continue to maintain its relevance in the online and electronic space while intelligently allocating its resources. The federal agencies' level of success in using their Second Life presence as a way to market and invite collaboration around their content is yet to be determined, but they are gaining knowledge about 3D data visualization and delivery that will be invaluable if this technology does develop into a widely accepted mainstream application. In addition, their early forays into this field give them the opportunity to guide its growth and influence developments. The Library has been evaluating the positive and negative aspects of creating a presence in one of these 3D platforms to obtain a relatively low-cost place for experimentation in the delivery of 3D content and services, begin creative exploration of how to market the Library in the new social networking paradigm emerging on the Web, and position the Library to provide leadership in best practices in this medium. Proactive exploration of this medium has the potential to give the Library an opportunity to experiment with a new way to educate and communicate within a platform that lends itself to community and discourse with a worldwide audience.