



Neighborhood Networks

Quarterly Consortia Conference Call



Digital Storytelling as a Capacity Building Tool December 5, 2006

On December 5, 2006, Neighborhood Networks held the first of four Quarterly Consortia Conference Calls in the 2007 fiscal year. The call was entitled "Digital Storytelling as a Capacity Building Tool" and featured digital storytelling expert Danielle Martin, a Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) intern with MassIMPACT, the Neighborhood Networks Massachusetts-based consortium. Neighborhood Networks asked Martin to participate in this call because she has been a digital storyteller for several years. She led major digital storytelling workshops, has spoken at large conferences across the country, and is currently developing an international digital storytelling portal.

Digital storytelling originates in Berkley, CA, at the Center for Digital Storytelling. It is influenced by popular education, third world cinema, and the community documentary movement. Digital storytelling values the power of story as a tool for discovery and reflection, community building and education, program documentation and advocacy. This form of storytelling is an excellent tool for Neighborhood Networks consortia and centers because it brings communities together, involves both children and adults while building their self-esteem, teaches the users how to use multimedia and technology production, improves users' critical thinking, and augments their oral, written, and visual communication skills.

Highlights From the Call:

- *How are digital stories told?* All participants create a video of two-to-four minutes through an intensive process of script development, media collection, and multimedia editing. Digital stories are based on participants' own experiences and are told through their own perspectives. Their voices are recorded and integrated with photographs, letters, home videos, and other artifacts.
- *Resources needed to create digital stories at Neighborhood Networks centers and consortia locations.* Since digital stories are about people's lives, identifying a group of residents that have expressed an interest in telling stories digitally is critical. Once this is accomplished, centers and consortia should take an inventory of optional and required technological resources:
 - Required:
 - Computers with an operating system that includes iMovie or Windows Movie Maker (most computer operating systems released today include a type of movie making program), audio in/out, a minimum of 40 gigabytes of drive space, Ethernet port, at least 256 RAM (Random Access Memory), a minimum of a 500MHz (megahertz) processor, internal CD-burner (if no external burner available).
 - Flatbed scanners (and installation software).
 - Digital still camera (to capture the images).
 - Condensor microphones (Shure, AKG, Audio-Technical).
 - External USB (Universal Serial Bus) or FireWire drive with at least 60 free gigabytes.
 - Speakers for computers.
 - External flash drive.
 - Assorted cables - Mini-to-Mini, FireWire, RCA.
 - Headphones.
 - Blank CDs and DVDs (a medium to distribute stories).
 - Pens, papers, markers, flipcharts.

- Software:
 - ❖ Either: Adobe Photoshop 6.0, Photoshop Elements, iPhoto, or equivalent.
 - ❖ Either: Adobe Premiere 6.0 or higher, iMovie, MovieMaker, or equivalent.
 - ❖ Software that permits direct sound input into computer (Acid, Audacity).
 - Optional:
 - Computers with FireWire ports.
 - Digital video camera.
- *Before creating a digital story.* Digital stories are created over time, perhaps in two hour sessions about once a week or depending on the availability of participants and center staff for as long as is required to complete a two-to-four minute story (typically several weeks, but can be longer or shorter depending on a number of factors such as time constraints, storytellers' technology skill level, etc.) Storytellers need to:
 - Have a goal for the story – it is not enough to have only the desire to create a story, it needs to convey a clear message with a clear purpose.
 - Take time to gather story elements, such as images, sound, or background music.
 - Think about the audience that will view this story. Knowing the audience will allow storytellers to suit the need of whatever audience is going to be viewing it.
 - Keep in mind that the story is the voice of the storyteller. The sound portion of the story should include the actual voice of the story creator, his or her voice intonation or inflection, and manner of speech.
 - Make sure that the story has a plot, just like a movie or a book. Without a plot the viewer will get lost.
- *While creating a story.* The best stories are told when a combination of events happens. Here are some pointers to keep in mind when creating and presenting digital stories:
 - If applicable, beware of using copyrighted material and obtain permission ahead of time to use such materials.
 - When recording sounds, beware of background noise. If possible, find a secluded place to record the voice portion of the story.
 - Ensure that transitions between images and frames are in place and are in harmony with the plot of your story.
 - Create a rough draft of your story and share it with others to solicit feedback. Once you obtain the feedback, make improvements accordingly.
 - Spend time sharing your ideas with the rest of the group and present another draft before finalizing your story.
- *Presenting your story.* Presenting the story is one of the proudest moments for someone that has been working on it for hours.
 - Many participants present their story in conjunction with another community event. For example, a community in Springfield, MA, has a celebration every year. A local digital storytelling group, called Telling our Legacy Digitally, presents digital stories during this community event. The result has been that more community members became interested in this digital medium and have begun to try and create their own stories.
 - Upload your story online so that others are able to view it.
 - Invite others to view your story.

Specific Resources:

The presenter discussed some specific resources that will aid centers and consortia to increase capacity.

- **Online resource for community of digital storytellers - an international digital storytelling portal:** www.storiesforchange.net.

- Danielle Martin's blog that includes the Quarterly Consortia Conference Call PowerPoint presentation with additional links to digital storytelling resources: www.CTCVISTA.org/blog/Danielle_Martin.
- Sample of digital stories: www.massimpact.org.
- Free video hosting: www.blip.tv and www.ourmedia.org.
- Example of an annual event featuring digital storytelling (Boys & Girls Club of Boston): www.BGCBCyberSummit.blogspot.com.
- Community Technology Centers' VISTA (CTC VISTA) Project: www.CTCVISTA.org.
- Center for Digital Storytelling: www.storycenter.org.

The call concluded with a general question-and-answer period for participants. The next Quarterly Consortia Conference Call will be held on March 6, 2007, when the topic will be "Internet Safety."