

Practical Considerations Before you Start

Summary:

These are some things you might want to think about before you start using the platform. Thank you to Linda Raftree for guidance on this work ([see her blog for details](#)) Download the document in PDF: [Practical Considerations](#).(Note this page content was transferred from the retired Ushahidi community site.)

Ask yourself, “Why am I doing this?”

Do you just want to use a new cool and free tool? Is there a gap you are trying to fill? Do you have the resources to support the project? More specifically:

- What information needs to be gathered? What are
- your communication goals?
- Why are you collecting the information?
- What will be done with it?
- Who will it be shared with and why?
- What change will it contribute to?

Example: Linda Raftree and her team wanted to gather information on the amount, types and location of violence happening in communities where they were working on a Violence against Children (VAC) project. They wanted to know where the violence is happening most, and what kind of violence it is. The information was then going to be used by the youth and project participants, staff, and relevant local or national authorities. The goals were to generate awareness, inform programmatic efforts, and advocate for more attention and services to prevent, respond to and treat violence against children.

Tip: If none of the above considerations apply, you probably need step back and think through your goals and purpose. Outline what your information needs are, and why you are gathering information or setting up a project in the first place.

Planning

Determine benefit of visualizing your information and establish whether you can work within a particular framework or partner with an existing project/program

- What is the benefit of using mobiles or mapping to track your information? The information does not need to be crisis related. You might want to map existing community resources within a geographic area or raise awareness of local events.

Example: The Kenya AIDS NGOs Consortium (KANCO) used the Ushahidi platform to map HIV, AIDS & TB Facilities.

Example: The Urban Mirror project uses the Ushahidi platform to offer, “a window into Kenya's urban art scene: audio, visual, performance, literature...” Art-related individuals, events, and locations are featured.

- Does someone else have existing indicators or initiatives or information needs or formats that you should be linking in with and following or supporting?

Tip: If you want to do election monitoring can you use indicators established by reputable election groups like the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES).

Example: In the violence against children project, the whole project was framed within the UN Study on Violence against Children (UNVAC). The study identifies types of violence and contexts in which violence happens. The information gathering will be set up within that framework. If possible, they would also like to track the age and sex of those who experience violence, because that can help in designing prevention programs and services.

- Are there local organizations that are involved or engaged with your topic/theme/project/initiative already? How can they be involved and engaged?

Audience

- Who is your audience? Who do you want to use or visit the site?
 - Who are the target audiences, persons, decision makers, and/or populations that you want to impact?
- What information do you need to show to these groups in order to reach your established goals?
- Does your audience expect feedback from you?

- How will people find out about your initiative? If you're using SMS, how will you advertise the number to send information to — by radio, television, billboards, handmade posters, word of mouth, in schools.
- What is your overall publicity strategy?

Example: If you are mapping crime in your neighborhood, are you hoping to reach it the people living in that area? The Media? The Police? Or all of these groups? Think about how the same information can be used by different audiences.

Example: The Unsung Peace Heroes project in Kenya used a multimedia publicity strategy, including placing ads in the newspaper, making TV and radio appearances, handing out fliers, participating in local peace events and having an online presence, to spread the work about their project and to collect nominations of Peace Heroes throughout Kenya. This strategy allowed them to target various diverse audiences and in the end they received over 500 nominations for Unsung Peace Heroes throughout Kenya. For a more in-depth analysis of the project, please refer to the Case Study.

- What are the parameters for information collecting? What is the local use of ICTs?
 - What is the geographic range for information collecting? One community? One district? One state? Nation-wide? Several countries? Global?
- Is there detailed geographical/map information for the area you want to work in? Do you actually need it? If it doesn't exist, what will you do about it?
- How do people in the community use the internet and mobile phones?
- What is your set-up for collecting information and who will collect it/submit it? Do you expect a broad public to use SMS to send in information? Or will you do mobile data gathering where trained individuals go around collecting information using mobile based forms such as those on Frontline SMS Forms module?

Caution: This is especially critical if you are collecting medical or human rights related information from or about children under legal adult age or other sensitive populations or in potentially risky situations such as conflicts or elections.

What are the privacy and protection issues that you may run into?

- What are the risks to those who report information?
- Will you have a private Ushahidi instance or public one? (eg. available to the public, or only available to those involved in the project?)
- Whether your site is public or private, how can you assure that sensitive information remains private and that it's treated confidentially by those managing the system?
- Are you prepared to address any information/ privacy breaches if they should happen? How? Who will be responsible?

Example: Survivors Connect Connection GeoMap is an example of a private Ushahidi instance. It seeks to create a space to share critical information about trafficking and anti-trafficking activities, promote transparency, engage communities and learn best practices, current challenges and needs in the global effort to fight modern-day slavery.

Example: Referring again to the the violence against children project, there were concerns about privacy and protection, and potential retaliation against children who could be caught reporting violence. They planned to discuss this in depth with staff and participating children and youth to be sure that they were aware of the implications of this type of project and information gathering. Some potential risks they were already aware of include: a child not deleting the SMS after reporting; a child reporting and expecting immediate help which may not be available; risk to the youth group that is promoting and leading this project; community rejection of the project.

Tip: Some possible ways of reducing risk they came up with include good promotion of how the project works and of how to delete an SMS after sending; not using an easily identifiable automatic text reply to those who report (eg., an auto reply SMS that says "thanks!" might be smarter than one that says "Thanks for reporting!"); openly raising awareness about the project and getting community support for it; ensuring adult allies and engaged adult decision makers; password protection for the website at first until we're sure that privacy and protection are well managed and ensured.

How will you close the feedback loop and manage expectations?

- Will there be a response to those that submit information? What will it be? Who will respond?
- How will you ensure that there are no expectations around the project or information gathering system that you cannot or are not set up to meet?
- How will you return the information to the community/local district/those who provided reports so that they can use it for decision making or program intervention?

Example: The Voice of Kibera project is an example of a project maximizing local information sharing opportunities.

- How will online/offline be managed and streamlined into an information gathering, communication and feedback system that works for the different levels of access of the populations you want to collect information from and share information with?
- In your project design, how will you take into consideration and maximize local information sharing formats, customs, and opportunities?

How will you ensure that your project is sustainable?

- What will the project look like in long term? Or is it designed to be a short-term campaign specific project?
- What happens when you leave? Who will manage and run the initiative? Will you or someone else be needed and available later on to support? How will this be managed?
- What future costs are implied in maintaining the system? How will they be covered?

Other Useful Resources

- “SMS How-To Guide” - A Changemakers & kiwanja.net Collaboration - [View resource](#)
- “Utilizing Mobile: Installation and Use of Frontline SMS for basic data collection or outbound messaging” - [View Resource](#)
- [Mobiles in a box](#) - Tactical Tech