Community Networks (61)

Communities often lack the information and communication infrastructure needed to: a) support and sustain the social networks of clubs, organisations, associations, groups, agencies, families and individual citizens that constitute the structures, organisation and activities of community life; and b) enable effective organisation, planning and enactment of local campaigns when threatened from outside.

The potential scope for ICT to support, enhance and sustain community communications is immense but effective community networks can only be built through meaningful and mutual partnerships of knowledge exchange. If community networks are to emerge as significant components of modern community life, external partners must understand this in context and content. Only then can they contribute in a meaningful way.

Written by Peter Day

Equal Access to Justice (69)

The fundamental principle of full and equal access to the justice system, particularly for those who suffer disparate barriers or are otherwise vulnerable, faces new opportunities and challenges from the advances in information and communication technologies, which can provide increased pathways for quality access but can also perpetuate or exacerbate existing barriers or even create new ones.

Currently, technology is creating opportunities for people to use their home or nearby library branch or community center to find out about, initiate or respond to court or other law related needs, obligations or requirements, communicate and exchange documents with their legal service provider or others in or associated with the legal system less expensively, using less time and effort, without having to travel to a central city, and with less time away from work or other necessary resources. Meaningful access to justice can and does empower people to be part of creating their own just societies. This effort is the first such undertaking, and can provide a useful example that can be adapted and used not only in other places, but in other sectors of basic public need, such as access to health care, access to food, access to safety, and other essentials.

Written by Donald J. Horowitz

Grassroots Public Policy Development (78)

Policy is governance. It helps address questions like, How will we live together in a complex society? How will we deal with the problems of our time and how we collectively define what those problems are? Will governance be of the people, by the people, for the people? Ironically, public policy development is very unpublic. It's often silent, invisible, and developed "behind the scene." This results in poor public policy that favors narrow interests and blocks progress. As power and wealth become more concentrated, wealthy people and institutions become more dominant in the policy arena. When that happens, local and marginalized voices are not heard; people feel disempowered and disengage further from the political process. Although public policy should reflect public wisdom "ordinary" people generally stay far from the public policy arena. The discipline required for policy work must be distributed throughout the body politic in civil discourse, research, and inclusive creative deliberation.

Written by Douglas Schuler and Michael Maranda

Voices of the Unheard (83)

Despite the significant effort and thought that goes into decision making and design, bad decisions and designs are frequently conceived and implemented primarily because a critical and relevant perspective was not brought to bear. This is especially true if the missing perspective represents that of someone who holds a stake in the outcome. As a variant of this, a prototype creativity tool has been created. The idea is to have a "board of directors" consisting of famous people. When you have a problem to solve, you are supposed to be reminded of, and think about, what various people would approach this problem. Ask yourself, "What would Einstein have said?" "How would Gandhi have approached this problem?" Provide ways to remind people of stakeholders who are not present. These methods could be procedural (certain Native Americans always ask, "Who speaks for Wolf"), visual (e.g., diagrams, lists) or auditory (e.g., songs).

Written by Douglas Schuler