Current Challenges

The Civic Network faces several challenges, which mean that few users regularly use and return to the platform after a project is completed. The current challenges consist of limited resources, limited functionality of the platform, and limited high utilizers who are incentivized to return to the platform and who lack a unified vision for the future of the platform.

The Impact Denver team has not completed a true cost-benefit analysis; however, it has become evident that a significant amount of financial resources have already been invested into the Civic Network. Funding has been expended over C.N.’s history for the initial creation and launch of the platform, in its hosting and maintenance throughout the years, in adding new features as requested by high utilizing groups, and in the uncalculated labor costs of Bill Fulton’s time and others who have served as troubleshooters and problem-solvers related to the product. There has come a point at which far more significant resources would need to be spent to modernize the platform or increase the functionality of tools within the platform, to help meet the current needs of the high utilizers, or to integrate outside tools into the platform. The Civic Canopy could either invest their own resources into the platform or find outside grant or philanthropic funding to cover the additional costs. However, that would mean that the Civic Canopy would need to consider technology to be a major sector of their work and dedicate the resources in an outside company to help build out the platform’s infrastructure or invest in an in-house team member whose role would be dedicated to the upkeep, modernization, troubleshooting, and future planning of the platform.

The limited functionality of the tools within the platform is evident in nuanced areas of the platform including such limitations as being unable to schedule recurring meetings in the calendar module and being unable to edit documents in real time in the document module. The Civic Network is limited in other ways in that it does not have the same social networking features of traditional social media platforms where algorithms propose groups a user should connect with or populates with work done by other groups in similar spaces. Sometimes this limited functionality leads users to use other platforms when communicating with their teams and projects such as Google Suite products for both the calendar function and the document editing function. For others, the functionality is too confusing or is yet another tool they need to learn to use and so they resort to emailing documents back and forth or simply calling their already established contacts instead of trying to find people in the Civic Network, especially in smaller community settings. And for others, they turn to tools like LinkedIn, which have some of the social media functions they’re looking for.

These types of users demonstrate that there is no cohesive view of the platform. From interviews, the Impact Denver team heard repeatedly about the “potential” of the Civic Network to be a one stop shop for civic-minded groups to come together, collaborate through the use of the tools on one platform, share learnings and outcomes with one another, and find other likeminded individuals and groups across the state of Colorado. This is a very broad vision and one that would be difficult to achieve to meet the individual needs of each user group – from the small town nascent group to the sophisticated urban collaborative. At first, users are drawn to the Civic Network likely because of project they were working on in which the Civic Canopy was involved and they were told about the product. So each member of the project signs up, created a basic profile, and connects to a network within Civic Network. That is where the majority of the interaction ceases. Perhaps they return a few more times over the course of the group’s work together, but never are they truly incentivized to come back regularly, check in on what other networks within the platform are up to, or connect with users outside of the sphere of their project. When interviewed or surveyed, the users don’t have a consistent response for what they want the platform to be, only that they can see the “potential.”