

Workshop Proposal

Impact from Anywhere

How technology can facilitate meaningful and productive humanitarian experiences across broad networks of volunteers

Jim McGowan

Director, Information Management and Situational Awareness, North Central Division of the American Red Cross

Karen Smilowitz

Professor, Industrial Engineering and Management Sciences, Northwestern University

This proposed workshop will present approaches to designing and implementing collaborative projects between the American Red Cross and a broad range of volunteer networks, including the Industrial Engineering and Management Sciences at Northwestern University, Microsoft, coding non-profit Humanitarian Toolbox and the greater civic tech community in Chicago. Our workshop will focus on the use of volunteers to expand the technical capabilities of the Red Cross and how these partnerships enable the organization to embrace new technologies. In addition, we'll discuss how the data generated by these projects are informing the future direction of volunteer engagement.

Specifically, we will present several existing projects to foster an interactive discussion on such partnerships.

One noteworthy success is the allReady project. Leveraging GitHub, allReady is a community web app designed to facilitate preparedness campaigns by giving organizations the ability offer services, coordinate volunteers and share metrics. Supported by Humanitarian Toolbox and Microsoft, allReady has engaged a wide range of volunteer developers, designers and humanitarians from all over the world, to build a solution to connect communities with opportunities to become more resilient.

As another example, the Red Cross has partnered with Northwestern University over the past four years to engage students in several new Red Cross ventures. Students working in the area of volunteer engagement have focused on ways to broaden volunteer participation in disaster response activities. Drawing on data compiled by the Red Cross volunteer database, the team focused their analysis on solutions to make volunteer deployment more efficient. Proposals such as the implementation of a data-driven scheduling system will greatly enhance both volunteer response and commitment. As a next step, Red Cross is engaging the broader Chicago tech community to implement these ideas into their scheduling and dispatch software.

Finally, we'll demo how the Red Cross is leveraging crowdsourced mapping to help document some of the world's most vulnerable populations through their Missing Maps project.

Participants in the workshop will be encouraged to discuss their existing partnerships. The workshop will include a brainstorming session of best practices and lessons learned.