

How the Native American Community is Engaging Digitally

Challenges

DemLabs has developed expertise in deploying solutions to tribal lands where the challenges include:

1. Vast distances spread over thousands of acres with rugged terrain and few roads
2. Poor connectivity - little if any cellular or broadband connectivity
3. Lack of funding and few local technical skills
4. The use of mailboxes instead of street addresses

Solutions

DemLabs designs solutions to accommodate the constraints.

1. Apps have to be free or low cost. The technology has to be stable and already well deployed. We do not have the time for experimentation.
2. Easy to deploy by workers with little technical training.
3. Operate without connectivity on regular phones and laptops
4. Exploit existing resources such as the radio stations present on Native American reservations

Case studies relevant to 2020 census

DemLabs approach is to understand a need, test the solution and then freely share the approach and apps used so that other groups can also apply it. Here are a few of the projects we've implemented.

[A Free Canvassing App To Get Out The Vote When You Have No Budget And Limited Time App Converts Phones Into Walkie-Talkies. Ideal For Organizing Without Cell Service](#)
[Western Native Voice Uses Free App To Organize Native American Communities](#)
[New Map Highlights 'Hard To Count' Communities That May Be Left Out Of The Census](#)
[Free canvassing app for voter registration & census turnout – works without internet access](#)
[2020 Census: Let's count everyone](#) (remotely collecting and using videos from community members)

[Leave no voter behind](#) (Using voice chatbots to respond to calls from landlines)

[We're on the warpath](#) (Using appeals on local radio to ask residents to call chatbot powered helpline)

Recommendations

The best solutions will fail without adequate training and support. It is essential that local champions within the communities are trained and supported. Train the Trainer. DemLabs has conducted workshops and worked closely with Native American organizers who are trusted in their communities and sensitive to the cultural norms. An outside technologist cannot achieve that level of trust and credibility.

Tools that can be used immediately for Census outreach (an asterisk indicates that the app is free)

1. Targeting (identifying where they live)

Smart maps - [Statistical Atlas](#)*

Geofencing - Identify their mobile phone device IDs based on where they are at a given time.

Use community members to crowdsource information - [Survey 123](#)

2. Messaging (creating messages that are credible, effective, affordable and easy to share)

Remotely collecting video stories from community residents - [FlipGrid](#)*

Creating professional looking videos with just laptops that can be shared on social media -

[Lumen5](#)*

Create digital stories that combine text, images, videos and maps. - [StoryMaps](#)*

3. Canvassing (make it easy to canvas and collect information)

Canvassing app that works without internet access - [KoboToolBox](#)*

Create mobile apps to manage volunteers, collect information, plan rides - [GlideApps](#)*

Provide information quickly by SMS, Voice and Facebook Messenger chatbots - [Twilio](#)

Final thoughts

The challenge is not that the technology doesn't exist. In fact much of the needed tools are free. What's missing is the training, transfer of knowhow and ongoing support to the people on the frontlines where the census count will take place

Contributed by: DemLabs in consultation with [Four Directions](#), [Western Native Voices](#) and the [Native Organizing Alliance](#)



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