

NTEN 501 Tech Club Leaders Tool Kit

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1. About

NTEN 501 Tech Clubs are informal local groups of nonprofit and technology professionals who use technology in their work for good causes. The name comes from the 501(c)3 tax status of nonprofit organizations in the U.S.

NTEN 501 Tech Clubs were formed to give "techie (and accidental techies!) for good" the opportunity to get to know their colleagues, develop a professional support network, and talk shop. The groups usually meet monthly in coffee shops, bars, or a member's office to network and talk about whatever is of interest to the group.

501 Tech Clubs also have an online space where they network by creating profiles, talking via an email list (listserv), posting blog entries, and maintaining shared resources. All of these conversations are stored in the group's online space.

2. Starting a New Group

a. Overview

Individuals or organizations interested in organizing a 501 Tech Club for their local community can contact Annaliese Hoehling (annaliese@nten.org) for more information about starting a club.

If you are unfamiliar with NTEN's 501 Tech Clubs and other Affinity Groups, we suggest you start by visiting our online community at <http://groups.nten.org>. New visitors will need to register a valid email address to view the different groups and join the email discussions. The 501 Tech Clubs are listed in the "Regional" group category. You are welcome to view the email archives of existing tech club online groups to get a sense of how people participate online.

Each of the Tech Clubs has its own style and varies in activity levels. We have some clubs in large metropolitan areas that may have several hundred members and sustain a high level of online activity through the email list with job announcements, sharing of local resources, event announcements, RFP's, etc., but don't necessarily meet face-to-face regularly. We also have some very successful clubs that have a small number of members (under 30), but who consistently meet each month to discuss a designated topic or tool.

Our goal is that each club suits the needs and interests of its members, which is why, of course, we leave it up to the Club Leader and members to organize the activity format appropriate for their local community.

b. Considerations

There are some important things prospective Leaders need to consider for starting a new club, and NTEN reviews these issues in determining the club's establishment.

1. What is the purpose for the club?

It is important that the prospective leader understand and share the mission of NTEN and its 501 Tech Clubs, which is to provide resources and support for the nonprofit technology community. The 501 Tech Clubs provide a unique opportunity to network at the local level and meet in person (we all spend so much time online - it's a great excuse to get away from the computer and talk face-to-face with people who share your goals or can provide new ideas and tips for your work!).

2. What type of meetings/club will serve that purpose and the unique needs of your local community?

Will your community of nonprofit technology professionals most benefit from monthly, or bi-monthly meetings, for example? Would a more social and informal atmosphere like a bar or cafe be right for your club, or brown-bag lunches in a community space like a library or nonprofit community center? Will your community share planned presentations or simply network in a "happy hour" atmosphere?

3. How much organizing time will be needed for this group?

Once the first two items are considered, you'll get a better sense of the time and organizing requirements involved for establishing a successful club for your community. Will you be able to dedicate that time? You might also consider enlisting co-leaders or volunteers from the club to help organize your meetings, as this has proved helpful for sustaining a successful group.

c. Timeline

When starting a new club, thinking through the initial timeline of setting up the group is important. Here are the three things that can be anticipated:

1. *Creating the group at groups.nten.org*

This step is simple because we can do that for you. However, we'll need to know your timeline for the other two items when determining when it's time to create the group in the NTEN Affinity Groups online.

2. *Growing the email list*

When you are ready, NTEN can send a special announcement and invitation to NTEN contacts in the area and to other appropriate email lists. You will also need to use **your own community channels to spread the word** about your new club. Timing is important because neither you or NTEN will want to invite people to the list before you and "the list" are ready. That means that we'll hold off on the announcement until you confirm that you're ready to manage it, per the other considerations discussed in this tool kit.

3. *Scheduling the first meeting*

It is common for new groups to concentrate growth and activity online first, with the email list, wiki, blog, etc., and then announce the first off-line meeting once the Leader (and club) feel that the time is right (perhaps the group decides together about convenient timing and meeting places, based on options the Leader provides, for example). However, you might be interested in kicking-off your new club with an actual off-line event, and get people from the event to then join the online community. This depends on your particular community and your own preferences. We'll help you get the word out about the meeting, and (shipping time and supplies permitting) send you some materials and giveaway items to have on hand. Don't forget to post the event on our nten.org site (more on that later)--or make sure that we get that posted for you.

3. Email List and Online Tools for Your Club

Though the main idea with NTEN 501 Tech Clubs is that you have an *off-line* component to your mostly *online* nonprofit technology activities, the online portion of your Tech Club is an important part of managing and sustaining your club. In the summer of 2006, we moved all of our NTEN Affinity Groups to a new online platform at <http://groups.nten.org> because it offers several online tools for engaging activity and providing resources. If you have not created a profile on this platform yet, we highly recommend that you do so when planning for your new club. Take a look around the site and get familiar with the many tools there.

a. Moderating and Managing Your Group

As the Leader, you will be designated as the "moderator" of your affinity group at <http://groups.nten.org>. What does this mean, you ask?

- You are listed on the home page of the group as moderator, so visitors and new members can easily see who the leader is
- You can approve/reject email messages to the list if you set the group to "moderated" - recommended for large, high-traffic lists, but in general not necessary
- Update the overview language at the top of the group's homepage.
- Update the email list settings, including the "welcome" and footer messages, determining where replies get sent (to the sender, list, etc.), and modifying the privacy settings. **Please note** that these are pre-set by us when we create your group, and we ask that you **check with us before making major changes**.

For a demo of managing the tools available to you on the platform, you can access a recorded webinar here: <https://cc.callinfo.com/cc/playback/Playback.do?id=k73rn8t7>

We will periodically post a reminder email about our list policies to all NTEN email lists (you can review them here: http://groups.nten.org/wiki.htm/10/Privacy_and_Legal_Policies), so you don't have to do that yourself. However, you may need to remind your group (or address individuals) if an inappropriate use of your group's list occurs.

b. Blog, Wiki, Library - Additional Online Tools for Your Club

An added feature of NTEN's Online Community is the ability to personalize and maintain a blog, wiki, and library for each Affinity Group - it's not just an old-fashioned listserv! As the Tech Club Leader, you can update and manage these items for your group - and encourage your club members to update them too.

> Blog

Your Club's Blog is probably the most important online facet of your club after the email list because it is the *only* aspect of your group that is accessible on the web - all other parts of your online group can only be accessed by members of the NTEN online community (those who've registered an email address and are logged on to the site).

That means that you'll want to

1. Put **overview information, meeting updates, and other important general information** about your club on your blog (including how to join the group).
2. Link to your group's blog from your own blog and/or website
3. Include a link to the group's blog in any announcements to your community

Here is an example of the San Francisco Tech Club's blog (<http://groups.nten.org/group.htm?mode=gvb&igid=6244>)

> Wiki

One of the features of NTEN's online community space that we were really excited to extend to each of our Affinity Groups is the group wiki. The wiki is a popular tool in the nonprofit technology community for collaboratively updating and organizing information and resources. There are several potential uses for you and your club, including:

- summarize and organize helpful information that's come through the email discussions on your list
- store resources and information particular to your local nonprofit technology community - like lists of vendors, meeting places, service providers, etc.
- document discussions and information from your meetings
- create a "tool kit" of your own for management of your club that you and your club members can contribute to and reference
- use as an "agenda" for your meetings where you can list discussion topics, speakers, and the schedule of activities - and invite your members to add items.

> Library

Another convenient way you and your club can store and organize resources is in your club's library. You can store documents, media files, and links to other sites in your group's library.

Also note that 501 Tech Club Leaders have their own, private affinity group at groups.nten.org with a group library, where this tool kit and other resources for tech club leadership are stored.

As the club's leader, we encourage you to populate the library with resources, and then encourage your members to use and contribute to them.

> Calendar and Maps

The groups.nten.org platform now has an event calendar with maps which are accessible (and searchable) on the web. Add your event details to the calendar (or let us know about your event so we can post it). (the calendar is RSS-enabled, and future development includes integration with your particular affinity group, so please stay tuned for those upgrades).

4. Meetings

a. Planning

As mentioned in the overview, 501 Tech Clubs vary in styles, and we encourage the leaders to organize activities that best serve the needs, preferences, and interests of their local communities. We've described 3 of the most common types of meetings here, with tips and considerations to help you decide which one is best for you and help in your preparation. If you have additional suggestions for tips and considerations, please let us know!

> bar/cafe

Probably the most common format for 501 Tech Clubs is the "Social Hour" format, where nonprofit techies are invited to meet at a local bar or cafe to network and share information. Here are the key characteristics of this format:

- very informal atmosphere
- easiest to organize

- usually uses the "same Bat time; same Bat channel" format - that is, the same day each month (like the last Thursday, for example), at the same location
- at a centrally-located venue, accessible by public transportation
- primarily networking opportunity

> brown bag lunch

Another meeting format is the "brown bag lunch" event. This is a format familiar to the nonprofit community, and may be especially appealing because of its low-cost for both organizers and participants (no drinks or food to purchase at a bar or restaurant). Here are some key characteristics of this format:

- appealing for family-oriented and commuter-heavy communities (i.e. during the day rather than after work)
- an atmosphere that promotes group discussions
- can be held in a public/community meeting space or in a tech club member's workplace
- accommodates a speaker presentation
- can be a regular meeting format for the group, or inter-changed with the other meeting formats for special occasions (like for special speakers or demos)

> catered/potluck presentation

The catered/potluck presentation meeting format is less common as a regular meeting type for NTEN 501 Tech Clubs, but can be used on occasion for special events or is a good format for smaller groups with consistent attendance. Particular characteristics of this meeting format include:

- requires more planning and preparation
- accommodates speakers and presentations
- can be held at a reserved meeting place, at a member's workplace, or even at a member's home
- more formal structure - good for initial tech club meetings

b. Costs

Cost is an important factor for both the organizers and participants, and we recommend planning your meetings with these considerations in mind:

1. NTEN can reimburse costs for 501 Tech Clubs up to \$50/month. There is a special document in the Leaders' library at groups.nten.org for requesting your reimbursement. Here are ways you can make the \$50 most effective:

> Bar/Cafe Format

- Remind your members to "BYOB" and establish a "pay as you go" policy so there isn't a single bar tab that you feel obligated to cover
- Order several items from the appetizers menu and include "Free Appetizers" or "Free Snacks" in your invitations and announcements to both attract participants and clarify what will be provided for them.

> Brown Bag Lunch Format

- If participants are bringing their own lunches, then you can provide beverages like sodas, water, juice, coffee, and perhaps some dessert items like cookies, brownies, or other pastries.

> Catered/Potluck Format

- If you're organizing a potluck meeting format, then you can provide beverages and dessert items - or a special food that would compliment the potluck contributions
- A catered meeting will obviously require cost, and likely more than the \$50 NTEN can reimburse you for. Please see the section about securing other sources of funding and supplies below.

2. Securing other sources of funding and supplies for your meeting.

Depending on the location, size, and format of your club's meetings, you may want to reach out for additional support. Here are some ideas:

- Invite individuals or organizations to "host" a meeting. For example, the New York 501 Tech Club has a running invitation for hosts to cover the tab of their monthly social hour in return for the opportunity to present their company, product, or project to the group that month. Besides covering the bar tab, a guest host could provide meeting space, raffle items or giveaways, catering, or contribute to the provisions you've organized already.
- Contact your local nonprofit resource center about free meeting space and a list of vendors and local food providers that would be willing to donate provisions or supplies for your meetings
- Use your own club members as resources. Volunteers, meeting places, and even supplies are likely contributions from your own tech club - use your email list and/or group wiki to organize resources for each month.
- Request donations from local vendors - from napkins to canned sodas to bagels, you might be surprised what you can secure from local companies when you ask them formally to donate for your cause: nonprofit technology education. You can find sample request text in the templates section of this kit.

c. Activities

You likely already have meeting activities in mind, and the format will also determine how your meeting will play out. Here are some more ideas for your monthly meetings:

1. Mixing It Up

- even if you're organizing a more formal gathering with designated speakers and presentations, it's important to allow for socializing time - your members value the networking opportunity. If you have a meeting agenda, include socializing time either at the beginning or end of your meeting - or both.
- you can encourage networking by having nametags - simple stickers and markers on hand
- add some "organized" networking to the informal happy-hour setting. How about coming up with a topic (like, "favorite Web 2.0 tool for nonprofit sector" or "top of my wish-list for technology invention") and getting everyone to write an answer down on a scrap of paper (or back of business card) and put in a bowl to

kick off a discussion, or to create an uber-list on someone's laptop - document in the tech club's wiki!

2. Speakers/Presentations

- invite a member of the club or an expert in the community to discuss a particular topic or project
- invite a member or expert to demonstrate a tool or service
- use the NTEN speaker directory (<http://nten.org/speaker/directory>) or contact NTEN to help find someone for your meetings

3. Discussion

- engage the whole group in an open discussion of a designated topic (make sure to have some questions/points to start things off, and some resources in mind/on hand for the topic -- this is where NTEN resources can help too)
- break the meeting into smaller discussion groups, perhaps to tackle different parts of the overall topic
- have a problem-solution discussion: invite a nonprofit to introduce a problem they're tackling, and as a group discuss the tools and strategies that can help

d. Documenting/Follow-up

Don't forget the many ways you can make the fun and information last beyond the meeting:

1. Take pictures. Bring your camera and upload the photos to Flickr - tag them with "nten" and "501techclub" - and don't forget to tell your members to do the same. After you update photos, email your list to let them know where they can find them.
2. Blog. Ok, so you and your members may already be in the habit of updating your blogs about news and information concerning your work, but don't forget to update your group's blog about the happenings at your Tech Club. You can include highlights of the discussions, and even link to organizations or projects that drew attention.
3. Update the wiki and library. The group's wiki and library are there for you to document any especially helpful references or resources that came up at the meeting. And you don't have to go it alone - encourage your meeting participants to contribute.

5. Templates and Checklists

You can find the following resources in the [Wiki](#) and [Library](#) of the Tech Club Leaders group.

1. [Announcement/Invitation for new Club](#)
2. [Reimbursement form](#)
3. [Donation request](#)
4. Organizing [Checklist](#)

6. Other Resources

1. 501 Tech Club logos (for the web, or get some flyers or post-cards from us -- just ask!)
2. [NTEN Event Postings \(http://nten.org/events\)](http://nten.org/events)
3. [Recorded webinar for managing your online group](#)

4. Additional event-management tools (to create event announcements for outreach and to collect RSVP's):
 - [eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com)
 - [evite.com](https://www.evite.com)
 - [spongecell.com/promote](https://www.spongecell.com/promote)
 - [upcoming.com](https://www.upcoming.com)
5. Other channels to reach out to
 - YNPN email lists in your region
 - Your local nonprofit resource centers
 - Your state association of nonprofit organizations