

Digital Organizing Resource C: Key Terms and Definitions

This resource is part of a suite of publications based on a study of digital organizing that was conducted by the Research Hub for Youth Organizing at the University of Colorado Boulder and commissioned by The Colorado Trust, to support the digital organizing work of the Building and Bridging Power strategy grantee partners. Data comes from interviews with ten organizing groups and a review of available literature. [Go to our website](#) for more information.

The following are key terms and definitions that are frequently referenced across the Digital Organizing suite of resources.

Application software (Apps)—Apps are the computer programs that make digital devices like computers and cell phones usable. Everything from the program used for word processing, to hosting an online event, to communicating, to organizing information, is considered an application. There are several different ways that applications can be classified. In this study we found that community organizers describe two major categories of applications: 1) Applications used for engaging community and building power, and 2) Applications used for building and sustaining the organization’s infrastructure. These categories of applications are not mutually exclusive, there are some apps (e.g., video conferencing applications or messaging apps) that can be used for both purposes.

Base building—Expanding the number of people 1) who are aligned with an organization’s goals, 2) are in direct communication with organizers, and 3) will take action on an issue. Typically, base-building is seen as a relational process that involves identifying and understanding peoples’ shared interests, aspirations, and everyday lives.

Broadband—The transmission of wide bandwidth data over a high-speed internet connection. Broadband provides high speed internet access via multiple types of technologies including fiber optics, wireless, cable, **digital subscriber line** (DSL), and satellite.

Content creator—Someone who develops any kind of digital content—like video, photos, or text – either to advance their own identity as an influencer or for the content of a company or organization. Influencers are one type of content creators. They are people with the ability to sway or influence hundreds of people by promoting or making recommendations on social media.

Devices—Devices are the digital technology you can touch. Twenty years ago, the primary device used for digital work was a desktop computer, or a high-end laptop. Since then, devices, or digital hardware have been in a state of constant evolution. Affordable devices like mobile phones, Chromebooks, tablets, and laptops have significantly expanded digital access. Even with notable inequalities, mobile phones are more accessible than ever.

Digital organizing—Practices and strategies used by community organizing groups that employ digital tools including social media to engage, organize, and build political power.



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Digital strategies—We use this term to reference how people use different digital tools in their community organizing.

Digital tools—This term is inclusive of devices, software/apps, internet access, and the internet in its entirety.

GIF (Graphics Interchange Format)—A GIF is an image file format commonly used for one or more images or animations on the internet.

Going viral—A phrase used to describe something (often a message or post) that is spreading and reaching many people.

Influencer—People with the ability to sway or influence hundreds of people by promoting or making recommendations on social media. Influencers are one kind of content creator.

Internet—Throughout this report, we use the term internet to reference the infinite space that holds our collective digital global information network, some of which is accessible to the public and some of which is private or needs to be purchased.¹

Internet Access—The Cambridge Dictionary offers the following simple explanation, “the ability to connect to the internet.” However, the reality of community organizing in under-resourced communities and communities that are intentionally marginalized makes this “ability” far from simple to understand. Internet access by design is a utility that must be paid for whether provided through a mobile device contract, wired, wireless or satellite. Contracts between a company and an individual or paid for by a local government involve a cost to access the Internet. Because the internet is treated as a private utility and providers aim to make a profit, not every community has equal access to reliable internet services. Throughout this study we heard about challenges accessing the Internet especially in rural areas and low-income urban neighborhoods. Finally, the quality and cost of a digital device also significantly impacts the quality of internet access. See [Resource D: The Digital Divide in Community Organizing](#) for more information.

Memes—Images paired with text that follow a commonly understood joke structure.

Narrative power—The power to influence stories that circulate in broader society.

Post—A message published in an online space or newsgroup.

Software—Software or apps, are the computer programs that make the hardware usable. At the most general level, there are three types of software—system software, utility software and applications software.² This report focuses on applications software or Apps.



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Endnotes

¹ Internet. (14 April 2022). In Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet>

² The 3 types of computer software. FutureLearn. (n.d.). Retrieved April 19, 2022, from <https://www.futurelearn.com/info/courses/computer-systems/0/steps/53500>



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