The Opportunity
of the Cloud for Good

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aspirationtech.org/publications/manifesto

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What are we talking about?

▶ What is "The Cloud"?

▶ What I love (and love less) about cloud

▶ Case studies on the same

▶ Pictures real and imagined

▶ Paths for nonprofits to contemplate

▶ Whatever you all want to talk about

Who is Aspiration?

► We work with stakeholders across the nonprofit software supply chain:

- We advise NGO technology decision makers on how to employ tech sustainably and affordably

- We advise vendors and developers on how and what to build for NGO users

- We advise funders on what and how to fund

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Who is Aspiration?

► Most importantly, we support & advise

- **End Users**
  on how to apply technology
- **On Their Terms**
  to
- **Achieve Impact**
  in their
- **Program and Mission Work** :^)

What is the Cloud to Us?

- ▶ Apps running online, available remotely
  - ▪ Maintained, improved by somebody else
- ▶ Data stored on web-accessible servers
  - ▪ Collaboratively edited and curated by permissioned folks
- ▶ Access to all of the above from anywhere you have internet access
  - ▪ Client devices play a simpler role
  - ▪ Organizations can focus on workflow

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Things I Love About the Cloud

▶ Real time collaboration
  ▪ …co-creating documents on a call…

▶ Openness
  ▪ I can invite others into my work and thinking

▶ Focus-ability
  ▪ Someone else worries about the layers I do not love

▶ Availability
  ▪ e.g. when my laptop and I are out on separate dates
  ▪ AKA rich support for "oops, I forgot to bring…"

▶ Serendipity
  ▪ Due to all of the above, interesting things just happen

Cloud Case Study: Project Management

► The problem(s)

- Nonprofit project management is hard (Some would declare that phrase an oxymoron)

- Too often done with clunktastic tools

- Project management processes are often opaque

- Many projects fail because efforts of stakeholders, resources not well integrated

- It's hard to know "what's going on"

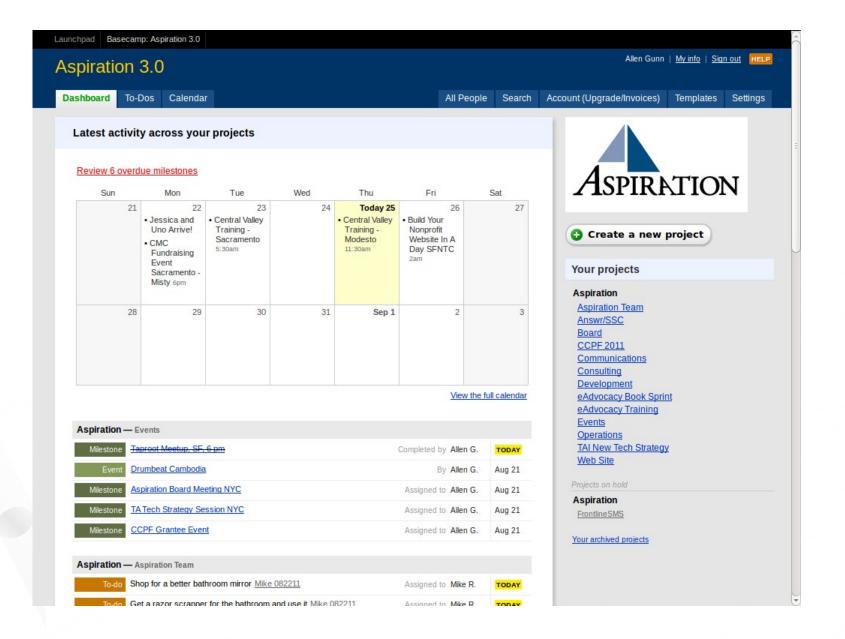- Project assets too rarely find unified, long-term, high-availability homes

Cloud Solution: Basecamp

- ▶ Hosted project management
  - ▪ www.basecamphq.com
- ▶ Simple set of essential features
  - ▪ Deadlines, docs, messages, reminders
- ▶ Per-project access and controls
  - ▪ Believable admin features
- ▶ Unified dashboard
  - ▪ Project deadlines, latest activity, status updates, new assets, active stakeholders

Basecamp Pros and Cons

► Basecamp rocks because

- Criminally simple: subverts resistance
- As a result, fairly ubiquitous paradigm
- It just kinda works

► Basecamp sucks because

- Criminally simple: features missing
- Weak integration with other cloud tools
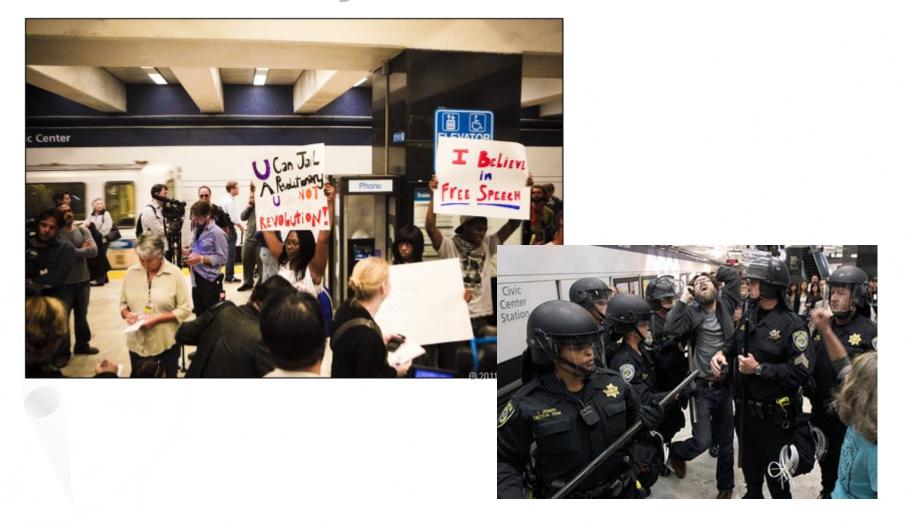- Lame data export/project migration

Basecamp changes our game

- ► Establishes collaboration zones
  - Private places to throw it all together
  - Relatively "organizational culture neutral"
- ► Reduces collaboration boundaries
  - No custom firewall access to servers
- ► Preserves organizational memory
  - Across fire drills and turnover
- ► Drives accountability and transparency
  - Your laundry is on(the)line

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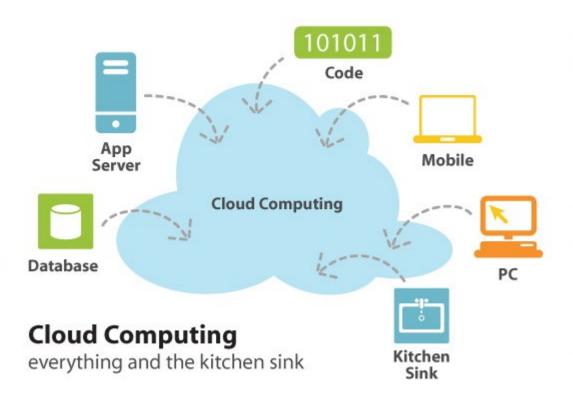BETTER TOOLS FOR A BETTER WORLD

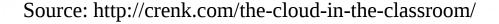# Case Study 2: BART Protests

Let's get conceptual...

► There are 2 ways of envisioning Cloud
   ▪ The way it is sold
   ▪ The way it works in practice
   ▪ ...and we've got pictures

► We look at cloud through a lens of organizational development
   ▪ Goal: .orgs control their technology destiny
   ▪ The path to the same is workflow-driven
   ▪ Our mantra: "Sort the Technology Last"

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The Cloud of Lore

Our Cloud of NPTech Reality

aspirationtech.org

Control in the NPTech Cloud

▶ Nonprofits should follow cloud strategies that maximize their control over long-term destiny

▶ Much comes down to what routes through your domain name

  ▪ "Why Facebook=Enterprise #FAIL for us"

▶ The game is figuring out what makes sense to store at what layer of control

It's all about the Data

► Tragedy of the 501 "990-driven" reality
  ▪ There are budget line items for software
  ▪ There are budget line items for hardware
  ▪ There are budget line items for labor
  ▪ There are rarely line items for DATA
► Apps are vessels to story and carry data
  ▪ As you consider cloud, it's about the DATA
  ▪ Your DATA is your digital power
  ▪ Center your cloud thinking on this truth

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Control in the NPTech Cloud

► We look at the cloud as 4 layers of enterprise leverage

- 1) Stuff within our domain name on servers we own and admin
  - e.g. vpn to internalserver.aspirationtech.org
  - "meh", but an essential option to know you have

- 2) Stuff behind our domain name on servers we contractually control on terms we like
  - e.g. our Drupal and Wordpress sites hosted at rochen.com
  - "woof", "yum"

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Control in the NPTech Cloud

▶ We look at the cloud as 4 layers of enterprise leverage

- 3) Stuff behind our domain name on application servers we don't control
  - e.g. Wordpress.com, Google for Domains
  - The idealized cloud of "I don't think about IT or hosting hassles"
  - Redundancy and long-term support become more of a concern
  - You retain your (theoretical) ability to point at something else

- 4) All Other Stuff (aka "minimal control of our destiny")
  - Basecamp, Facebook, Twitter, bit.ly, Flickr, YouTube ...
  - Your mileage is guaranteed to vary
  - If you love yourself, keep local copies of anything that matters

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Aspiration's Cloud Checklist

- ► All tech relationships should be predicated on divorce
  - ■ Nothing tech lasts forever. Nothing.
  - ■ "Pre-nup thinking" becomes critical
- ► Relationship Questions to ask about cloud options
  - ■ Can we put it behind our (sub) domain?
  - ■ Can we talk to other clouds in this relationship?
  - ■ Who else is this cloud hanging out with?
  - ■ Can we leave when we want?
- ► Asset questions to ask...
  - ■ Can we export our data on demand in open, complete formats?
  - ■ Is our data really our data?
  - ■ Is our data secure, encryptable, private?
  - ■ Who else can look at our data?

The Other Thing: The Big "I"

► Online enterprise identity is unsolved
  - We all manage dozens of credentials
  - "Fragmented" is an understatement
  - Battle for control of online identity rages

► The other other "I" thing online
  - Org identity and individual identity blur
  - "Can you invite my GMail, not my .org"
  - You need clear policies for distinguishing

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So What to Do?

► Focus on three poles of NPTech
  - First People
  - Then Process
  - Last Technology

► Do incremental research and migration
  - Acknowledge that cultural change is hard
  - Leverage opportunity to improve processes
  - Don't make any big cloud bets right away

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Migration approaches

- ► Take a workflow-oriented approach
  - Consider cloud for related sets of processes, tasks, outcomes
- ► Which workflows are least effective now?
  - Distinguish mission critical versus "the rest"
  - Start with non-mission-critical workflows :^)
- ► Have a stated goal
  - Explore cloud-based ways of achieving the same
- ► *"Technology challenges are organizational development opportunities in disguise"*

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For me, now, the cloud enables workflows like

► Collaboration on documents
  ▪ Discipline with tools is biggest challenge
► Online Publishing
  ▪ Publishing, maintaining, tracking metrics
► Project management
  ▪ How was it I did this before cloud?
► For other folks, there are many others
  ▪ CRM, finances, campaigning, fundraising, …
  ▪ All of the above are candidate migrations

The NPTech Cloud is young

- ► Enterprise data management
  - We need more than a new place to store data silos
  - Many apps don't understand how nonprofits work
- ► Identity, identity, identity
  - Stuff needs to talk to stuff on OUR terms
  - It's a tough, unsolved problem
  - This is where to be wary in placing bets
- ► Interoperability, interoperability, inter...
  - Prioritize open standards, long-term APIs, free/open src
- ► Rich offline synchronization
  - Because single-points-of-failure are **so** 1970's

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- ► The Cloud is not a fad
  - ▪ And it really can increase impact
- ► Intentionality is key to migration
  - ▪ Involve all users in process from Day 0
  - ▪ Base migration on workflows, not tools
  - ▪ Assert control and portability of your data
  - ▪ Maximize control of your online identity
  - ▪ Have fallback plans at the ready
  - ▪ Rinse and repeat

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The Opportunity for Good

► The cloud gets nonprofits to better places
  - Innovative ways of engaging and building allies, audiences, support, awareness
  - Collaboration, cost savings, convenience
  - Ability to focus on impact, not on IT

► These are exciting times for new paradigms
  - There is more than one way to get there
  - The journey should be the .org reward
  - Make your organization's path one of greatest sustainability, not least resistance :^)

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Thank You!

Questions?