

NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 22, 2011

The Public Laboratory for Open Technology and Science Receives Support for Expanding Civic Science Programs

BOSTON, MA-- The Public Laboratory for Open Technology and Science announced today that it will use a \$500,000, three-year Knight News Challenge grant to create a toolkit and online community for citizen-based, grassroots data gathering and research. The News Challenge, a project of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, is an international contest to fund digital news experiments using technology to inform and engage communities.

The Public Lab is an expansion of Grassroots Mapping - one of the most successful projects developed through the Center for Future Civic Media at MIT. During the project, residents used helium-filled balloons and digital cameras to generate high-resolution D.I.Y. "satellite" maps gauging the extent of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill - at a time when there was little public information on the subject. Expanding the toolkit beyond aerial mapping, Public Laboratory will work with communities, both online and offline, to produce information about our surroundings.

"Knight Foundation's support underscores the increasing importance of civic technologies and the need for local-level involvement in collecting and interpreting environmental information," said Jeffrey Warren, Research Director at Public Lab. "This generous grant will help us to develop and launch new projects with our local partners as well as expand upon our existing programs."

"At Knight Foundation, we're interested in supporting efforts to connect on-line activity with off-line action," said John S. Bracken, Director of Digital Media at Knight Foundation. "In Public Lab, we found a skilled partner that is experimenting with tools and behaviors that inform and engage local communities in fascinating ways. We look forward to seeing what this investment yields."

With the BP oil spill Grassroots Mapping project as a pilot, Public Laboratory has already begun a series of new collaborations focused on locally produced environmental and civic data. Over the next three years, seven local chapters of Public Laboratory will be created around the United States to support community action with new low-cost, accessible tools and technologies. Ranging from infrared vegetation monitoring to thermal photography for home insulation, these projects will be developed in collaboration with local community and advocacy groups to address specific local issues. Drawing from the participatory and Do-It-Yourself techniques which have generated hundreds of gigabytes of citizen-produced environmental map data in the Gulf of Mexico, the Public Lab plans to tackle new problems in new places, while developing a long-term approach to jump-starting and sustaining such efforts on a broader scale.

About the Public Laboratory for Open Technology and Science

The Public Laboratory for Open Technology and Science (PLOTS) is a community which develops and applies open-source tools to environmental exploration and investigation. By democratizing inexpensive and accessible “Do-It-Yourself” techniques, Public Laboratory creates a collaborative network of practitioners who actively re-imagine the human relationship with the environment.

The core PLOTS program is focused on “civic science” in which we research open source hardware and software tools and methods to generate knowledge and share data about community environmental health. Our goal is to increase the ability of underserved communities to identify, redress, remediate, and create awareness and accountability around environmental concerns. PLOTS achieves this by providing online and offline training, education and support, and by focusing on locally relevant outcomes that emphasize human capacity and understanding. For more information, please visit publiclaboratory.org.

About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

Knight Foundation supports transformational ideas that promote quality journalism, advance media innovation, engage communities and foster the arts. We believe that democracy thrives when people and communities are informed and engaged.

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