

Responses Compiled  
from the  
Teen Focus Group on Communication  
Listening to the River  
Wednesday, August 15, 2007  
5:30 p.m. – 7 p.m.  
Land Information Access Association

**Set up:** Twelve former LTTR participants were invited via email to join the session. Follow up phone calls were made to each. Six students confirmed their attendance, but three did not make the session for various reasons (short notice, transportation). No LTTR staff or project team member was present and the session was tape recorded.

**Participants:** This conversation took place between facilitator Scott Mills, summer intern for Land Information Access Association, who is currently a University of Michigan senior majoring in linguistics, and three former LTTR participants: Anna Frick (June 2006 watershed discovery pilot session), Caitlin Chism (Spring Break 2007 session), and Logan Dillon (June 2007 Upward Bound session).

[Note: While more participants (ideally six – eight) would have made for a richer exchange of ideas, the conversation among these three was informative and can serve the LTTR project as both an opportunity to sample questions, and as a springboard to future focus groups. CK]

The notes compiled in this document are a combination of paraphrases of the “group think” (regular font), quoted statements by the participants (italics), and the facilitator’s questions (bolded italics).

### Questioning Route

The facilitator first read this statement: *The purpose of the Focus Group is to help us gain a richer understanding of how to communicate better with the teens who might be interested in the LTTR project – and how to stay in touch with them after they participate.*

Opening: *Please tell us your name and a little bit about what you did with the LTTR program.*

### Introductory questions

**1. Do any of you have a Facebook account? Myspace? Blog?**

Two use Facebook, one uses Myspace, one uses no social networking site, and none of them blog.

**2. How much time do you guys spend online, like in a day?**

***During the school year?***

About 1.5 hours/day on the average

***In the summer?***

Less time, busy with other things, might do a quick check of e-mail or look up stuff and leave.

***How much time do you spend on stuff like Facebook and Myspace?***

All the internet time – except an occasional Google – is spent on social networking sites (their term); it’s the informal communication tool for teens, “because you can see things, see your friends while talking to them.” One group member played a free monthly online video game.

**3. Do any of you read blogs?**

*No, can’t figure them out; they’re kind of strange.*

***Which ones?*** One member reads a cooking blog, but that’s it.

4. **What about older media, like newspapers, TV? Do you use them?**

Two mentioned skimming the newspaper and watching a little TV. Several said they used to watch a lot of TV, but not so much any more. One said, “I wouldn’t touch a newspaper.”

**How about public radio?**

Several listened to radio while driving sometimes, but music-only stations, “not the news, I hate the news – it’s too depressing.” One listens to IPR a little now, after the LTTR experience.

5. **What kinds of technologies do you guys use to talk with your friends?**

**Email?** All said yes, but they call if they’re in a hurry to get in touch. All agreed they mostly use email to send messages, not to receive them. **What kinds of things do you send?** They only use email for “stuff not too urgent,” and when “I want the person to think about it,” or “so I don’t speak before I think..., so I can think about what I’m saying before I type it.” “I haven’t checked my email in a month”, one stated.

**Facebook or Myspace messages? Would you send a post on their wall? Yes**

**Do people get wall posts quicker? Do you have more confidence they would get it?** They (my friends) might get it faster, but also might just ignore it.

**How would your email differ from what you send using Facebook?** When they want to get something to a friend quickly what they typically use is Facebook, using email for more private messages.

**Text messages? Can’t afford it, don’t have it ‘cause it costs too much, would use it if I could.**

**IM’s?** They all use various ones: IM, AOL, MSN, but only for short messages, not long detailed ones.

**What kind of stuff would you talk about?** A quick hi or for shorter messages.

6. **Do you use normal mail ever? Yes, some.**

**What for?** Like away at camp, when I don’t have a computer, when bored. But it’s fun to get letters, but might not send one back They agreed they like getting mail.

**Say you get a letter ...from LTTR; is it easier to slip your mind...? I would open the LTTR letter, read it, but wouldn’t get excited about it – not like if it was from a friend.**

7. **So what do you think is the best way to communicate with people your age about LTTR?**

Probably e-mail, but it would be “sweet” if LTTR had Facebook.

**How would you feel about getting text messages to remind you of LTTR activities?** One said, I wouldn’t know what it was; another said it would be nice, I forget everything.

**Would it invade your personal space? No**

**What do you do when a number you’ve never seen before is calling your phone?** Not asked

**Would you read an email newsletter if it showed up in your inbox?** Not asked.

## Key Questions

8. ***So what if LTTR makes a Facebook group. Would you join it? Would it be effective at all?***  
All agreed they would join. Yes, it could be “sweet”, but you’d have to find me... maybe send out an email to announce it. Like for this meeting, it would have been easier to contact everyone (via Facebook).

***What kind of information should be posted on FB/MS? What’s relevant?***

Schedule of important events and meetings; calendar, invitations

9. ***How about text messages; would you appreciate the reminder?*** Answered above in #5 & #7

10. ***How about LTTR posting videos on YouTube? Do you watch it? What kind of content should be in them? How could they be enticing?***

All three agree they do watch videos (laughter, as if embarrassed...Ed.)  
***...not kids’ work, but like an info piece, for marketing, but staying with the YouTube spirit of do it yourself: Would they get watched, do you think?*** It would have to not be bland, you know? “A guy shoving his head in the river and saying, Listen! Do this! might catch attention [laughs]. If anything was in any way adult-oriented (later described as meaning “formal”), it wouldn’t get attended to. It would have to be fun, maybe even shocking. It would have to catch someone’s attention. One student suggested doing a formal info piece on tctv2, since “you don’t go on YouTube to watch a documentary”.

There was concern about how they would find out there was a video since a search is required.

## Ending Questions

11. ***What do you think makes people your age want to do a program like LTTR? You can talk from personal experience or from other people’s perspectives:***

- *I like the environmental stuff, and am not so into the tech aspect.*
- *I’m just curious, thought it’d be interesting.*

***What grabbed you?***

- *A friend was doing it*
- *It involved in the river – I go kayaking.*
- *I appreciate the environment, am conscious of it. Studying it made me...realize how we take advantage of it, so with the new technology...go in the environment...hang out and relax, but [there’s an] incentive to learn about the environment...to do a little bit of good.*
- *I liked that it had a goal, not just going to class, working towards an end, going to be doing something.*
- *The technology was really great.*

12. ***How can people like you who have done LTTR already help get new people involved?***

*By knowing someone who is completely interested in it.*

13. ***What kinds of incentives would help encourage people your age to participate in LTTR?***

***Does the name LTTR limit interest?*** It should maybe be “Jammin out with the river...” [Laugh] (LTTR) sounds “younger”.

- *In summer it’s hard to communicate with even our friends, and there are schedule conflicts*
- *During school, everyone’s there. Contact them through the schools (email/phone/Myspace, Facebook to recruit)*
- *Maybe a lunch meeting? Maybe, some might come, but*

*people will read/hear key points... will focus on their own interest (Ex: tech or saving the environment). Most will be either/or, but how many would combine interests.*

- *Comments that the term “teens” = “pre-adult” and that the goal of a pre-adult is to focus on wanting to be more mature.*
- *Sounds like fun – the idea of going outside.*

**14. Other thoughts? None.**

*Notes for next focus group:*

- *Eat before, so food noises aren't heard on the tape*
- *Ask more follow up questions – and expand each question to the rest of the group, “So what do the rest of you think?”*
- *Scott had a nice rapport with them, validated the answers well.*
- *Allow more wait time; trust that they'll answer.*