Internet at Standing Rock

*Blog post by Lisha Sterling, originally posted to *

Since September I've been working with the Oceti Sakowin Camp at Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota. A big part of that work has been setting up Internet connectivity for camp. Before we even started on that, though, we sat down with members of the community at Standing Rock, most especially the elders who run the camps, and asked what they would like to have happen in regards to Internet in their space(s). The unanimous answer was that they wanted Internet in specific locations at camp, but they didn't want enough connectivity at camp that people would go back to their outside world behaviors of living their lives with their noses stuck in their phones. We also talked with locals and researched various options regarding the best place to get our Internet back haul. It quickly became clear that the best option was to turn to the tribe's own telecom for that connectivity.

Based on those discussions, we came up with a plan. We'd bring Internet from Standing Rock Telecom to camp using Ubiquiti PowerBeams. We have a hill between us and the cell tower, so we would need to put a small installation — a network hop — up there so that we could catch the signal from the tower and send it down into camp. From there, we'd use Ubiquiti Nanos to provide the other long jumps between camps, pointing our Internet connectivity directly into specified tents that would become our "Internet Cafes". When the folks from Red Lightning Camp at Burning Man showed up with a giant geodesic dome, we knew exactly where to put the main Internet Cafe at Oceti Sakowin.

But there were a number of special groups that wanted to have some sort of network connectivity in other parts of camp as well. The medics need access to their favorite reference sites. The school needs some educational materials, especially around Lakota language and culture. The camp leadership would like everyone to have access to some legal information about treaties and tribal law. And of course, media and legal teams need connectivity for their own reasons.
What's more, security needs encrypted comms. Right now they use family walkie talkie radios set to channel 7 for security purposes, but that channel is crowded and often receives hours long

harassment from DAPL's private security. Over WiFi, security could use Signal and other encrypted communications tools without having to listen to someone on the next hill saying, "Aren't you Indians? Where are your horses?"

Roberto Monge and Worried Monkey at Rosebud Camp in October.

For all of these things, we plan to build a WiFi mesh Intranet. The Intranet will be built from open source WiFi routers and we'll use some refurbished computers to provide local copies of the resources that the camp has requested to have on hand at all times. The one resource that will have a line to the outside world will be Signal, which we are encouraging all the people at camp to use for text messaging and voice calls.

We've been able to do all this work in part because of the amazing support from Roberto Monge and the Red Cloud Defense Center which funded the Ubiquiti dishes and solar set ups to power them. We've had a lot of other help, too, from various people who have come to camp for a few days or a few weeks. Volunteers have helped with the network design, construction of a mini-tower (AKA "the stick in the ground on Hop Hill"), fixing the solar power when I couldn't find the blown fuses, and so much more.

One thing we need now is some workshop facilitators who can run crypto parties in the big dome to help people learn about how to better protect themselves on the Internet and while using their phones. It would also be great to have some people who could help diagnose and clean problems off of mobile phones since so many of them are "acting strangely". We have an ongoing need for legal observers who will be willing to come for a month to get trained up and then keep a log of incidents that are evidence of digital surveillance and other interference of our communications.
If you want to help with technology at camp, you can email me at lisha@gwob.org.
If you would like to support the camp itself, don't give money to a random GoFundMe or Indiegogo. Instead, go directly to http://ocetisakowincamp.org, and if you want your money to go toward a specific purpose, put that into the note in your PayPal donation. Supporting the camp directly is the

only way you can be sure that your money is going where it's most needed in this community of 5000 people.