



Kathy Schrock's Tech Quest

How do I create a collaborative, Internet-based project?

by Kathy Schrock

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A reader wrote that she wants to better integrate the Internet into her lessons. Rather than having her students simply use the Web for research, her goal was to create an interactive project in which kids collaborate with classrooms around the world. Such projects are highly varied, but usually involve gathering data, written information, or artwork from other schools via the Internet. As "hosts" of the project, you and your students will analyze and/or compile the submissions, and create some type of publication (e.g., an online art gallery or a weather-data map). The beginning of the school year is the perfect time to start. You can look at the topics you plan to teach and determine how such a project will fit in best. Plus, if you start now, there will be plenty of time to plan your project, announce it on the Web, collect and compile data, and reflect on how it went.

To learn how to create a collaborative, Internet-based project, let's go on a **Tech Quest** together. Each letter in "quest" stands for a step we'll take. Also, each quest is aligned with a standard from the International Society for Technology in Education's "ISTE Recommended Foundations in Technology

The Quest: Collaborative, Internet-Based Projects

Q Questioner: Who is going on the quest? It may be a classroom teacher, computer teacher, or library media specialist.

U Understanding: What is the purpose of the quest? What are collaborative Internet projects? How can I integrate them with my curriculum?

E Explanation: Exploring options for finding an in-depth answer Collaborative, Internet-based projects are a great way for your students to use the Internet to gather submissions from students in other cities and countries and use them

for All Teachers." (For more information, visit <http://www.iste.org/standards/ncate/found.html>)



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in creative ways. For example, your students can learn about weather patterns by collecting weather data from around the world and charting the data on a map. Or they can note regional dialect differences by soliciting slang words from across the country and creating a dialect dictionary. The possibilities are endless.

Coming up with a project idea

Since Internet projects can quickly become overwhelming, try starting small for your first one. Also, be sure to create a project that supports your curriculum standards. You can get ideas by reviewing current Internet projects, many of which are listed at www.gsh.org/pr/index.cfm

Planning your project

Depending on the grade level you teach, you may want to do some of the following steps ahead of time. Save others for your students to do.

1. **Title** Come up with a catchy, descriptive name for your project. For example, "Weather Watchers" sounds more interesting than "Collecting Weather Data."

2. **Purpose** Summarize why you are hosting the project and what you expect the students to accomplish with the results.
3. **Where to make announcements** Locate Internet sites where you will announce the project (see "Registering your Project," right). Don't forget to jot down the sites' addresses so that you have them when you are ready to begin.
4. **Standards** Look carefully at your state's standards or the national standards to determine the particular educational goals the project will address. When you make your announcement, you should include the standards addressed by the project, the subject areas covered, and the grade levels it's appropriate for.
5. **Skills** List the skills students will use during the project -- and the skills they will learn. Include computer skills, such as accessing and compiling data, and off-line skills such as summarizing, comparing and contrasting, and journal writing.
6. **Details** Include all the information the prospective participants will need, including
 - ✓ your name
 - ✓ grade level
 - ✓ school address
 - ✓ school phone number
 - ✓ e-mail address
 - ✓ the number of schools or classes you would like to participate
 - ✓ the grade

You can also create a free "virtual corkboard" at eBoard



(<http://www.eboard.com/>). At this easy-to-use site, you can post questions, information, and pictures for participants. They can then add their answers, data, and messages to the board through the "chat" feature.

Registering your project

Once you've decided on your project's format, sign up with an online registry to spread the word. Allow five or six weeks for sign-up before starting the project. One of the most popular places to list projects is the Global Schoolhouse's Internet Project Registry (www.gsh.org/pr/index.cfm).

Sources: Finding out more information The following online resources offer more advice on how to put together your own collaborative Internet project.

✓ <http://205.146.39.13/linktuts/inteproject.htm>

This site is packed with helpful hints for creating successful Internet projects.

✓ <http://home.talkcity.com/academydr/nicknacks/NNplanner.html>

Visit this site for an easy-to-follow template to help you plan your project.

Thoughts: Afterward, reflect on your quest

T When the project is over, consider writing an article for a professional publication or Web site about your experience. Include the ups and downs of running the project, and allow others to learn from your successes. Also, think about future Internet projects you can do to enhance your curriculum.

BUILDING TECH SKILLS

Some of the technology standards, in addition to content standards, that may be addressed when conducting a collaborative Internet project include:

- Using e-mail and listservs to announce the project

like to participate ✓ the grade level spans of the participants ✓ the registration date for participation ✓ the beginning and ending dates of the project ✓ the time commitment involved ✓ a list of information that participants need to submit to join.

7. **Technology requirements** Be sure to explain any special hardware or software needed to participate in the project.

8. **Final announcement** Include in the announcement what you will be giving participants (or posting on the Web) when the project is over, such as a spreadsheet of weather data, or a word search of regional slang. Teachers who participate in your project may also come up with their own creative ways to use the data you give them.

- Using e-mail and listservs to announce the project
- Creating a Web page with project information
- Using a computer to generate a flow chart on the process of the project
- Conducting self-designed (or class-designed) surveys for data collection
- Downloading compiled information into the appropriate program on the computer
- Using the appropriate local software to compile, process, and analyze collected data
- Generating tables, graphs, and charts using the collected data
- Creating a multimedia presentation explaining the data findings

Collecting data

To collect your data, consider a few different options. The simplest way is to have participants send you information in an e-mail. A more



sophisticated way of collecting data, however, is to use an "online survey" or "virtual corkboard."

To create an online survey, visit Flashbase (<http://forms.flashbase.com/>). After participants complete the survey that you've created, Flashbase can collect the data and compile it for you in a chart or graph. You can also download the information into databases or spreadsheets on your hard drive so that you don't have to retype it.

This Tech Quest addresses ISTE standard C.3: Design, deliver, and assess student learning activities that integrate computers/technology for a variety of student group strategies and for diverse student populations.