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Supporting Digital Community Networks in the Prairie

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The city of Champaign-Urbana was recently ranked by Newsweek magazine as one of the ten most wired communities in the world. It is served by a nationally recognized computer-based community network called Prairienet.

Information on Prairienet is organized following a city metaphor with information and organizations grouped into general categories. However, this arrangement does not optimally support local problem-solving and resource-sharing.

In order to eliminate a serious barrier to stimulating coordination and collaboration in community development, Team Engineering Collaboratory at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is developing PrairieKNOW (Prairie Knowledge Networks On the Web) makes visible the community's virtual social and knowledge networks to help enhance one's ability to access the community's knowledge network. Prairienet, in partnership with the Urban League of Champaign County and the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science, is currently engaged in a project intended to develop more effective ways of identifying and mobilizing those sharable assets which are currently hidden within organizations and missing from Prairienet itself.



Noshir Contractor is an associate professor of speech communication and psychology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His current research is collaboration, focusing on coordination among individuals involved in civil infrastructure development and maintenance for a city. Professor Contractor developed the first Collaboratory at the University of Illinois. Currently, he serves as the Director of the Department Computing and Instructional Laboratories, and was Chair of the University of Illinois' Oversight Committee on Computing and Communications in the Social Sciences. The facility, now named, Team Engineering Collaboratory (TEC), is a conference room facility where participants have at their disposal a large number of computer-based "groupware" tools. He is also the lead developer of IKNOW, a web-based tool to identify and support knowledge networks on Intranets.

He has published over 75 research papers, appeared in *Decision Science*, *Organization Science*, *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *Human Communication Research*, *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, and *Management Communication Quarterly*.

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