Chats, Docs, Standups and 2.0: Collaboration Tools for Virtual Teams
Erin White and Susan Teague-Rector, Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries

Problem Statement
What tools and strategies do you use to successfully manage a small team that is working on multiple projects from multiple locations?

- Small team: Web Team (3.5 FTE) at a public university library; manager 80% off-site
- Multiple projects: Major website redesign, daily maintenance and ad-hoc projects

Factors to consider for remote work

Practical factors
- Tasks conducive to remote work
- Team members’ autonomy/motivation
- Team work style/communication dynamic

Technological factors
- Organizational support and policies for VPN, video chat
- Team members’ comfort level with chat and virtual collaboration
- Hardware/software needs, network connectivity, tech support

Organizational factors
- Organizational culture and history
- Administrative approval processes, policies and procedures at library level and above

Collaboration Toolbox

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Pros/Cons</th>
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<tr>
<td>Google Talk</td>
<td>Text, audio and video chat; now includes phone calls and text messaging.</td>
<td>Excellent for text chat. Video and voice chat extremely difficult to use over VPN. 2-way chat only.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>Text, audio and video chat; screen sharing. Video chat with up to 10 people.</td>
<td>Excellent overall, but considered “peer-to-peer” software and prohibited by University computing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dimdim</td>
<td>Text and video chat, whiteboard, document sharing, screen sharing.</td>
<td>Numerous technical issues with video streaming.</td>
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Workflow that works

- Create and use artifacts that can help communication
  - Shared workspaces and drawings archived on 3rd party sites
  - Chat transcripts
  - Shared documents on Google
- Encourage ambient availability through chat and “check in”
- Touch base daily with 10-minute virtual stand-up meetings
- Meet in person regularly to keep communication open
- Embrace informality with chat software
  - Give up on spelling correctly - getting the idea across is what’s important
  - Embrace emoticons ;)
- Keep the conversation going
  - There’s no such thing as overcommunication
  - Don’t be afraid to ask questions
  - Don’t forget that you can pick up the phone