Emoti-Con! showcases teens’ use of digital media and technology as a means of exploring and expressing their opinions about pressing issues in their global, local, and learning environments.

The annual youth digital media and technology challenge was developed through a unique grassroots collaboration amongst a small number of New York City youth-serving organizations and was supported in 2012 by the HIVE Learning Network NYC, to:

"address the need for a space where youth from tech- and media-oriented organizations across NYC could collaborate and get some much-needed face-to-face time. It's an event that lets youth get offline and connect through their common identity as youth media producers and technologists and receive recognition for the incredible work they do throughout the year!"

The following report summarizes the findings on the evaluation of the Emoti-Con! 2012 Challenge and captures what worked, what didn’t, and identifies opportunities for ongoing development.

Prepared by:

Julie Poncelet & Catherine Borgman-Arboleda
Evaluation Strategies

Action Evaluation Collaborative (AEC) evaluated the 4th annual Emoti-Con! which convened on June 2, 2012 at Parsons The New School for Design in New York City. Over a 150 teens in grades 6 to 12 from 12 organizations across NYC attended the challenge to showcase their digital media and technology projects, to network with fellow teen designers as well as industry professionals, and to compete for prizes.

The Emoti-Con! Challenge was organized as a collaboration between HIVE Learning Network members MOUSE, Global Kids, The New York Public Library, and Parsons The New School for Design (the founding steering committee). The challenge was designed, organized, and led by a unique steering committee of youth (called the A-Team) working with adult educators and youth development professionals from these organizations; AEC worked with both youth and adults to identify elements of the evaluation, including its guiding questions.

In order to address the evaluation questions, a multi-method, participatory design was developed that gathered both qualitative and basic quantitative data. As part of this evaluation, the following methods were used:

• Strategy meetings with both adult and youth members of the steering committee;
• Participant observation work the day of the event;
• Informal interviews with youth and adult participants (including Hive members) the day of the event;
• A paper survey the day of the event (referred to as Short Survey) - completed by 68 challenge participants;
• An online follow-up survey administered to challenge participants one week after the event (referred to as Follow-up Survey) - completed by 21 youth.

This report will summarize the evaluation’s findings and include the following major sections:

• Emoti-Con! Overall
• Emoti-Con! Outcomes
• What Worked and What Didn’t Work
• Reflections and Considerations for Future Events

The evaluation questions are:

1. What are the challenge’s intended outcomes (for youth participants)? And what impacts did the previous year’s challenge have on the youth participants?

2. The day of the event, what worked and what didn’t work in terms of content, format, and venue? What aspects of the challenge were most valuable and least valuable to participants’ overall experience? How can future Emoti-Con! Challenges be improved?

3. Was the Emoti-Con! Challenge a valuable networking opportunity for youth participants and for Hive members?
Emoti-Con! Format

Emoti-Con! is structured to be an interactive experience, to introduce teens to professional conference settings, and to highlight their contributions as media producers and technologists. The all-day event included a number of activities and opportunities, including a timed-team challenge, a science-fair style competition, and professional speakers; see Panel One on the right for an overview of the day’s events.

Teens could elect to participate in the challenge as an audience member (who did not present a project or compete), as a presenter (who presented a project, but did not compete), and as a presenter and competitor. Teens who entered digital media and technology projects in the science-fair style competition competed for prizes, including:

- Best Pitch
- Crowd Favorite
- Most Potential for Social Impact
- Most Entertaining
- Most Innovative

Emoti-Con! brings together members of the HIVE Learning Network, a collaboration of cultural, civic, and learning institutions from the New York City area dedicated to transforming the learning landscape and create opportunities for youth to explore their interests in virtual and physical spaces. Through the Hive, youth have multiple, continuous and connected opportunities to explore their intellectual and skill-based interests. The challenge is equally about giving educators and program directors an opportunity to network, and to learn about different programs and the diverse approaches to achieving hands-on learning with teens (HIVE Learning Network).

Emoti-Con! Content

Over a 150 teens and adult program coordinators and educators convened at Emoti-Con! to share, to learn, and to inspire - and to be inspired - by showcasing technology and digital media projects. Teens represented 12 organizations including: DreamYard, Girls Write Now, Global Kids, Institute of Play, MOUSE, New York Public Library, The Parsons Scholars Program, and WNYC Radio Rockies. Teens could showcase a diversity of projects:

- Digital Media - including web design, videos, podcasts, music, photo projects, and graphic design (56% of projects)*
- Physical computing - including robotics, electronics, and anything you build with moving parts or blinking lights (44% of projects)
- Games or apps designed for digital formats (33% of projects)
- Development of software or web-based tools (44% of projects)
- Technology social action projects (33% of projects)
- Hacks and mashups utilizing digital or tech mediums (22% of projects)

Event organizers promoted Emoti-Con! as a step in the overall design process. Instead of celebrating the end of a project, organizers encouraged participants to submit ideas or prototypes at all stages of development to seek feedback; 67% of the projects submitted were complete while 33% were still in progress (Follow-up survey). Panel Two (page 4) highlights some of the innovative projects on display at Emoti-Con! 2012.

Emoti-Con! Venue

Emoti-Con! was hosted by Parsons, The New School for Design located in the Union Square area of New York City. The challenge activities took place in a large room on the second floor of the vertical campus and participants had access to a sitting area adjacent to the center of activities. Projects were showcased along the edge of the room.

* Source: Follow-up Survey (n=21); responses represent “mark all that apply” and will not add up to 100%.
EMOTI-CON!
OVERALL

PANEL TWO: On display were a range of unique projects, many driven by social impact, such as:

*Dining Band*, a location and temperature-sensing wrist band to assist the blind or visually impaired with eating (MOUSE).

*Stop and Frisk*, a multimedia documentary about teens’ experiences of the New York Police Department’s ‘Stop and Frisk’ policy (WNYC Radio Rockies).

*Run!*, a space-themed puzzle video game using programs Scratch and Arduino, an open source micro-controller platform (Institute of Play).

*The T.A.P. Project*, a series of assistive technology inventions that offer easy solutions to everyday tasks involving fine motor skills (MOUSE).

*Beyond Bullets*, a series of PSAs designed for the non-profit Beyond Bullets to educate youth about gun violence (Parsons Scholars Program).

*Playing for Peace*, a national game design challenge that generates over 1,000 youth-designed video games entries promoting an end to war (Global Kids).

Emoti-Con! Participants

Emoti-Con! served a diverse population, see Table One below. For those who responded to the short survey, a majority (78%) had never attended Emoti-Con! previously.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE ONE: Emoti-Con! Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ETHNICITY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American or Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Latina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GENDER</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Emoti-Con! Short Survey, n=68. Sample population is made up primarily of youth participants, but some adults completed the survey. * Mark all that apply.
The challenge is an opportunity for teenagers to showcase their ingenuity to design, produce, and build technology and digital media. Teens were inspired by concrete social needs and teens inspired fun ways of learning. Many of their projects are developed in informal learning settings such as after-school programs and represent months of hands-on collaborative work supported by educators and technology professionals.

**Emoti-Con! 2012 Mission**

Emoti-Con!’s mission is to,

"address the need for a space where youth from tech- and media-oriented organizations across NYC could collaborate and get some much-needed face-to-face time. It’s an event that lets youth get offline and connect through their common identity as youth media producers and technologists and receive recognition for the incredible work they do throughout the year!"

Overwhelmingly, a majority of those who took part in the day’s event (97%) felt that Emoti-con’s mission was achieved (Short Survey).

**Emoti-Con! 2012 Oustomes**

The steering committee identified nine teen outcomes that reflected the challenge’s goals (see Panel Three). Chart One summarizes the findings on the challenge’s youth outcomes. Teens who participated in Emoti-Con! indicated that the challenge primarily:

- increased their exposure to new ideas/projects in digital media and technology developed by teens
- made them feel like they were a part of something special, a unique teen-centered community

“[Emoti-Con!] reaffirmed my belief that age is insignificant when it concerns creativity and inventiveness, after seeing such amazing projects done by teens” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant

“The most important outcome to me was that I felt that my creativity was being raised by all the inventions that the teens at the fair had.” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant
CHART ONE: Emoti-Con! Teen Outcomes

- Improve teens’ digital media and technology skills.
- Improve teens’ work and organizational skills.
- Increase teen’s exposure to networking opportunities with technology professionals.
- Motivate teens to be innovative authors and creators of digital media and technology projects.
- Improve how teens feel about themselves.
- Broaden teens opportunities to network with, learn from, and be inspired by teens from different programs.
- Motivate teens to get involved more in digital media and technology programs and opportunities.
- Make teens felt like they were a part of something special; a unique teen-centered community.
- Increase teens’ exposure to new ideas/projects in digital media and technology designed and developed by teens.

Were these outcomes achieved for you? YES, A LOT!

Emoti-Con! makes teens, especially those who are marginalized and/or have special needs, feel part of something unique and special, where they are valued as innovators and creators.

“Emoti-Con! helped me open my eyes to a variety of career paths that I always deemed to be “boring” or “inaccessible”. For instance, I had never thought about majoring in engineering, because all my friends that are studying engineering often complain about the lack of creativity in their field. However, the presentations of the well established adults of the engineering world showed me that engineering, just as any field, can be creative as well as technologically innovative.” Emoti-Con! Youth Participant

“My generation gave me hope for the future and made me realize that [there is] so much I can do with technology as long as I apply myself and work my butt off.” Emoti-Con! Youth Participant

Less clear are Emoti-Con!’s impacts on teen’s organizational and technology skills and on networking with technology professionals. Although responses from the short survey indicate that teens did not believe that preparing for and/or participating in Emoti-Con! improved their organizational skills, drawing from the follow-up survey - intended to capture deeper reflections - teens reflected on the event’s contributions to their skills, public speaking in particular.

“As a participant, I was required to speak and was soon speaking to people unknown to me, [it] became more or less natural.” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant.”

“The most important outcome I experienced as a result of my participation in Emoti-Con! is my improvement in work and organizational skills. I feel that Emoti-Con! really helped me practice my public speaking skills.” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant.”

“I was a very shy person. I was shy to talk in front of everybody. Since I got in the program I stopped being shy and learned a lot. Now I look at everything different, everything. I see it like a design. Before, I never would have thought of everything as a design.” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant.”

Although not included as an intended outcome, teens also reported that Emoti-Con! inspired them to reflect on future college or career aspirations. The professional speakers gave many of the participants hope that there was still much to be accomplished in digital media and technology and that pursuing an education and/or career in the field could be fun, creative, and meaningful.

“The kids find they can show off their work, with the general population and their work is just as good, or even better, they take pride in the what they have accomplished. It’s bragging rights. It’s amazing these kids will give up their Saturdays, and come from the Far Rockaways to participate. It’s a time of sharing, to show everyone, look what i’ve done! it’s incredible…” - HIVE Learning Network Member

“Emoti-Con! was a very big eye opener. I never would have been interested in technology. I didn’t know what I could do with it until Emoti-Con! You know, it made me feel like I could do something with my life.” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant.

“It was a very good experience. It changed my life.” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant.
Impacts of Emoti-Con! 2011

To identify intended youth outcomes, AEC discussed last year’s challenge (Emoti-Con! 2011) with members of the A-Team in the hopes of capturing some stories on impacts. The nine outcomes identified reflect largely the teens’ previous experiences, but standing out in their stories were:

- motivations to get involved in new opportunities to learn about or employ digital media and technology

- evolving perceptions of technology’s role in their lives and the lives of others, especially as it relates to social impact.

A-Team members talked about being motivated to get involved and to provide technical assistance in their community or at their school. Having gained experience from helping to plan Emoti-Con 2011, one teen applied what he had learned to facilitate events at his community’s temple. For another teen, the experience encouraged him to conduct a mini capacity building workshop at school to troubleshoot technology problems.

For one A-Team member, Emoti-Con! 2011 was her introduction to technology, which ultimately inspired her to seek out the unique teen-centered community she found was nurtured at and in preparation for Emoti-Con! She reflected on “not being into technology prior to Emoti-Con!” and that the passion displayed by her peers at the event motivated her to “want to be excited about and learn about technology”. Following her experience, she joined a robotics program at school in the fall.

For a number of A-Team members, their perspectives on technology shifted after Emoti-Con! 2011. Specifically, they thought critically about what constituted technology and the potential for technology to have a positive impact on others. They recalled the help desk manual that was developed for autistic youth by autistic youth; “technology can be simple and yet have a significant impact!”.

This last point of reflection was a dominant theme in Emoti-Con! 2012 and perhaps speaks to one of the greatest unintended outcomes of the event. Emoti-Con! as a space for expressing and exploring one’s recognition of technology’s potential for social impact.

“[Emoti-Con!] helped me realize that technology is not only used for fun and games. It can be used to help people who need it.” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant

“The people come up with ideas outside of the box. They thought about helping disabled people.” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant

“Young people having such intense and innovative ideas that could change the world.” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant
TABLE TWO: Summary of What Worked, What Didn’t Work and Reflections on Improvements/Future Events*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT WORKED</th>
<th>WHAT DIDN’T WORK</th>
<th>IMPROVEMENTS/FUTURE EVENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OVERALL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created something special and unique: a nurturing teen-centered technology/digital media community, an event designed for teens, by teens, and where young people can network with their peers.</td>
<td>Some teen and adult participants were not certain what to expect; based on past experiences, they did not realize it would be so fun and inspirational (which impacted how they prepared)</td>
<td>Continue to share with participants, especially teens, a “feel” for the event to inspire their participation and their preparation for Emoti-Con!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FORMAT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The presentations by professionals were powerful and inspirational for teens</td>
<td>The timed-team challenge did not integrate teens from different programs to work together</td>
<td>Continue to create opportunities for teens from different programs to work together throughout the event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The competition and the fair showcasing digital media and technology projects created by teens</td>
<td>The shout-out board/backchannel was not well integrated into the event</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving positive feedback from technology professionals and from fellow peers</td>
<td>Judging guidelines were confusing</td>
<td>Continue to share judging guidelines and to ensure that the contributions by younger teens (elementary and middle school) are judged fairly (compared to projects completed by older teens)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONTENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of projects showcasing teens’ use of digital media and technology; social impact focus was powerful and motivational for teens</td>
<td></td>
<td>Continue to encourage a diversity of projects, including those that do not tackle social needs/problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VENUE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Concerns about the space to adequately display all projects; to give participants room to view &amp; interact with projects and designers</td>
<td>Continue to consider the growth of Emoti-Con! and the venue’s ability to adequately accommodate projects and opportunities for networking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Source: Short Survey, Follow-up Survey, and Informal interview with youth and adult participants.
WHAT WORKED?

PANEL FOUR: Overall, Emoti-Con achieved its mission by:

Creating something special and unique: a nurturing teen-centered technology/digital media community, an event designed for teens, by teens, and where young people can network with their peers.

Exposing teens to a professional conference setting that was fun, informative and inspiration (and didn’t feel like school!)

Providing opportunities for educators and organizations to learn about the different programs offered by HIVE Learning Network members

“Emoti-Con! is a great opportunity to learn and be inspired” HIVE Learning Network Member

“You feel that this is [an event] for youth, by youth” - HIVE Learning Network Member

Overall, participants liked:

The FORMAT for the event - the activities that were planned, when the activities took place and the amount of time dedicated to the activities. (73% thought the format was great and 27% thought it was OK).

The FACILITY - the space dedicated to Emoti-Con! (69% thought it was great and 28% thought it was OK).

The LOCATION/VENUE - The event being hosted at Parsons, The New School for Design and traveling to the location. (69% thought it was great and 30%)

Emoti-Con! Format - What Worked?

The presentations from professionals were greatly appreciated by teens and identified as one of the most valuable aspects of the challenge. The presentations were the highest rated activity at the event with 86% of participants noting that they contributed “a lot” to their overall positive experience (short survey). Refer to Table Three (page 10).

Teens found the ideas presented to be inspirational (76% said “a lot”; making teens think differently about the role/impact of digital media and technology in their life and the lives of others), to be motivational (67% said “a lot”; making teens think of pursuing new opportunities in digital media and technology), and to be useful (52% said “a lot”; useful to teens as media producers and technologists) (follow-up survey). For teens, the speakers’ messages were the most powerful they had heard at Emoti-Con.

“Engineering is not boring, not ugly, not lonely from [an] adult. It changes my mind about engineering.” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant

“I don’t play video games because I did not find a meaning behind it. Today video games became another medium to teach a lesson.” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant

“Don’t break the things you hate, break the things you love” It really made me think deep.” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant

“The most powerful thing I’ve heard was from a few of the adults. They gave advice and shared their experiences. That inspired me to look forward to the future and what I want to do.” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant

The competition and the fair showcased teens digital media and technology projects giving teens an opportunity to teach and to inspire their peers. Participants noted that the science-fair style competition and the teen’s project fair contributed “a lot” to their overall positive experience (69% and 65% respectively; short survey).

“youth inspiring other youth. empowering youth to be creators.” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant

“Young people having such intense and innovative ideas that could change the world.” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant
Receiving positive and constructive feedback from professionals and peers gave teens an opportunity to consider the potential of their project in the longer-term. Most Teens (78%) noted receiving feedback from adults that would help them make improvements or assisted them in troubleshooting design challenges; 62% of teens reported receiving similar feedback from their peers (follow-up survey).

Emoti-Con! Content - What Worked?

The diversity of projects showcasing teens’ use of digital media and technology amazed and excited teens and adults alike. The opportunity to share new ideas was an important challenge outcome for teens.

Specific projects, especially those oriented towards addressing a particular social need, were among the most valuable aspects of the challenge and made an impression on youth. Stop and Frisk, the multi-media documentary about a young, African American male’s experience with the New York Police Department’s policy and practice to stop and search a persons under reasonable suspicion of committing a crime, was the project referenced the most during the evaluation. The story was both alarming to teens who knew little about the practice and painfully real for those who had experienced it first hand. Both the message and medium were powerful contributors. Dinning Band and Run! were also mentioned as projects that were among the challenges most valuable attributes.

“Radio Rookies Stop & Frisk. Touching, I’ve been pulled over a lot so it struck a cord.” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant

“I think the stop & frisk was the most powerful because I feel like there definitely is a problem with fact that the ones we are told to trust as children are the ones we now fear as young adults and to see it as a problem & take this kind of approach the problem is very impressive.” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant

### TABLE THREE: Emoti-Con! Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contributed “a lot” to participant’s overall positive experience</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The presentations from professionals</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking with adults/professionals</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking with teens</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science fair-style competition</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen project fair</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shout-out board</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catered lunch</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional conference setting</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giveaways and swag</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>timed team challenge</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emoti-Con! Format - What Didn’t Work?

Teens and adults noted that the timed-team challenge did not integrate teens from different programs to work together. It was the lowest rated activity of the day; according to the short survey, 44% of participant agreed that the timed challenged contributed “a lot” to their overall positive experience, while 56% reported that its contributed nothing/something. The activity was identified as one of the events least valued attributes.

“There should be a group activity (not just the table to table activity), which [makes] people meet more people.” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant

Some event participants identified the shout-out board/back channel as being challenging to see and to interact with. Although 64% of participants found that the shout-out board/backchannel contributed “a lot” to their overall positive experience at Emoti-Con!, others identified it as “an after thought” and “not well integrated”.

Some teens reported being uncertain about the judging guidelines. These teens were frustrated that their projects was reviewed by only one judge. Some adult HIVE members were concerned that projects submitted by younger participants could not compete with those submitted by older participants.

“Level the playing field some - Middle School can’t compete with High School.”- HIVE Learning Network Member

“My project was only seen by 1 judge and there [were] four judges there. The lack of being judged would prevent me from coming back next year because it wouldn’t be fair for my team’s project.” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant

Emoti-Con! Venue - What Didn’t Work?

Emoti-Con! participants were concerned about the size of the room or the space available to accommodate effectively and showcase equitably all projects.

“More space to show what we have been working on”. - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant

WHAT DIDN’T WORK?

PANEL FIVE: A number of teen and adult participants reported not being certain what to expect at Emoti-Con!. Teens noted that they did not realize the challenge would be so fun and inspirational, which had an impact on their preparation for the event.

“I wish I could have both done more research and was provided materials about past Emoti-Con’s. I received such good treatment there (as compared to other expos and events), but I was initially unwilling to sacrifice my free time because I had no idea it was going to be such an enlightening experience” - Emoti-Con! Youth Participant

“[HIVE organization] explained [Emoti-Con!] as being very formal and strict, so we were afraid.” - HIVE Learning Member Adult Participant

There were mixed reviews regarding Emoti-Con! as a networking opportunities for adult members of the HIVE Learning Network. While it was an opportunity for some educators and program coordinators, to learn about opportunities they could bring back to their schools or programs, for others, there were few opportunities to network. Instead, these adults remarked that Emoti-Con! was about the teens’ accomplishments and that they needed to remain at their booths to support their program’s participants.

“It’s not about networking. I’m here for the kids. Maybe a mixer for adults afterwards would work.” - HIVE Learning Member Adult Participant
REFLECTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE EVENTS

PANEL SIX: Considerations for future events

Continue to share with participants, especially teens, a “feel” for the event to inspire their participation and their preparation for Emoti-Con!

Continue to share information about the event early to assist organizations in structuring their programs

Continue to create opportunities for teens from different programs to work together throughout the event

Continue to share judging guidelines and to ensure that the contributions by younger teens (elementary and middle school) are judged fairly (compared to projects completed by older teens)

Continue to encourage a diversity of projects, including those that do not tackle social needs/problems.

Continue to consider the growth of Emoticon and the venue’s ability to adequately accommodate projects and opportunities for networking.

Emoti-Con! Communication Strategy

- **Early Challenge Announcement** - HIVE members appreciate being able to access as early as possible information regarding Emoti-Con’s format and the types of projects teens are encouraged to showcase. With this information, program coordinators and educators can structure their curriculums or lessons plans around preparing for the challenge. For teens, having a supportive structure (adults and peers, time) and some technology assistance is what helped them most to prepare for Emoti-Con. Giving educators and program coordinators time and information to structure the challenge’s prep time benefits teens and their projects.

- **Sharing Emoti-Con! Promotional Videos Directly with Teens** - Teens would appreciate knowing more about Emoti-Con! directly as most learned about the challenge from their program coordinators. As this year’s challenge was recorded, short videos highlighting elements from the actual event could give teens a better “feel” for what to expect and how to prepare. Sharing videos directly with teens is key to making this an effective strategy. The use of social media platforms (existing videos are posted on Emoti-Con’s Facebook page), encouraging coordinators to play videos during program hours, and posting videos on the Emoti-Con! registration page and on HIVE members’ websites could be beneficial.

- **Emoti-Con! Teen Fellows** - A number of teens who participated in this year’s event will be attending college in fall 2012. Although these teens will not be participating in future Emoti-Cons!, they reflected very positively on their experiences planning and attending the challenge. Considering the impact of the professional speakers on teens, there is an opportunity to have previous participants who have moved on to post-secondary opportunities (college or career) to share their experiences with younger peers and to reinforce how their programs (and equally their participation in Emoti-Con!) impacted them. Perhaps these teens could give a brief talk at next year’s event or participate (briefly) in making a short video to be shared at Emoti-Con! 2013.

Emoti-Con! as a Networking Strategy

- **Networking Opportunities** - It remains unclear how beneficial Emoti-Con! is as a networking strategy for the HIVE Learning Network. Are people staying in touch after the event to exchange information (about programs effective learning strategies, etc)? Are they forming new partnerships? What mechanisms during the event could support networking between adults? Perhaps extending Emoti-Con! participation to include an “mixer” for adults could give educators and program coordinators an opportunity to network more directly and effectively.
• Support Networking Beyond the Event - A third of teens who attended Emoti-Con! 2011 (30%) reported that they remained in touch with young people they had met outside their programs. For most teens, Emoti-Con! is an opportunity to meet new people and to learn. As there are no Emoti-Con! related activities across programs outside of the event, the challenge is structured to support same-day knowledge exchange but not necessarily networking post-Emoti-Con! Perhaps include occasions for teens from different programs to work together on a project or activity during the year.

• Inviting Industry Professionals (but not as speakers) - Consider inviting industry professionals to attend the event, but not to present (perhaps from partner organizations that provide support and internships to HIVE members). This could give teens an opportunity to speak with a greater number of professionals, to seek diverse feedback on their projects, and to ask questions about education/career opportunities.

Emoti-Con! Format, Content, and Venue

• Consider the Diversity of Participants’ Abilities - Some teen participants and HIVE members shared their concerns about how projects submitted by younger technologists were judged along those submitted by older, more experienced producers. Ensure that the judging guidelines are shared in advance.

• Consider the Mission - Having a positive social impact using technology was a dominant theme at this year’s Emoti-Con!. Teens recognized and celebrated the potential for digital media and technology to bring about positive change in the lives of others. However, a few teens and adults raised concerns regarding the relevance of their projects which were not aimed at dealing with a social problems; would Emoti-Con! continue to be a good fit for them? Consider reassuring educators and program coordinators that all projects, not just those dealing with needs and problem, are key to Emoti-Con!’s success. Or clarify the mission statement to reflect the challenges social impact stance.

• Consider Space - Parsons The New School for Design has provided Emoti-Con! with tremendous support and an accessible central venue to convene an exciting and unique challenge showcasing teens as producers and technologists. In future years, consider the growth of the event and the appropriateness of the current space.

• Consider the Impact of Speakers - Following the speakers presentations, teens asked many questions (most were posed by girls): what inspired these professionals to seek a certain education or career, how did they get started, how did they find funding to support their ideas or projects, what were the barriers and challenges that they encountered and how did they overcome them? Continue to seek out speakers who can share their personal and professional experiences and who remain accessible during the event. For teens, these adults represent what they hope to accomplished - to produce and to be technologists. The professionals willingness to share their experiences with teens directly was particularly meaningful to participants.

Emoti-Con! 2012 Competition Evaluation Report
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Action Evaluation Collaboration is a collaborative partnership of independent consultants who use evaluation as a tool for strengthening social change work. Action Evaluation Collaborative (AEC) provides a structure for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and support.