

June 12, 2010

Dear National Secretaries,
cc: EXCO, Area Coordinators, Committee members, ServasOnLine team

Here is an update on the ServasOnLine Project; more details follow below.

What has been achieved:

- started the ServasOnLine project with a volunteer team of over 40 people – and room for more
- an overall plan (by Jessica), documenting what was decided at the 2009 GA
- a definition of what ServasOnLine needs to do – the user requirements (Use Case Team)
- a technical structure for Dolphin, ServasOnLine and the connections between them
- a plan outlined for a prototype to be tested in September and October 2010

What is needed:

- time, patience and good will to achieve this important project!
- experienced volunteers to do project management and lead teams of testers
- volunteers to work in teams – preparing testing, reviewing requirements, designing the ‘look and feel’ of the screens, writing training materials, writing updates and blogs, etc.
- help to share information – please let your national group know what is happening.

Our team of highly-qualified Developers – who, like the rest of us, have busy lives – will try to produce a working prototype in 3-4 months.

We are asking interested Servas national groups to get ready, by helping to set up testing teams. The work teams are still small, and need more help. If the prototype is successful (reliable, affordable, practical, effective and consistent with GA direction and Servas values), in 2011 Servas will have its first-ever ServasOnLine running project. Dolphin and paper-based traditional systems will continue in parallel, along with the Servas Interviews, and a continuing high commitment to privacy, etc. (see the diagram from the ServasOnLine Developers meeting).

You can get much more information; we welcome your close inspection of it and advice. Summary details -- please see the following summary by Gary and Penny. You can read more specific documents on project planning, meeting notes, etc. on the Siexco site (http://www.servas.org/siexco/index.php/Annual_Report_materials#ServasOnLine). Clemens (Servas Britain) has done a slide show which Servas Britain found useful for their General Assembly. Thanks to Harley and Geoff S for helping collect many plans and studies for use by all of us.

Please, you and all national member groups and Area Coordinators consider – would you like to choose the topic of ServasOnLine for your national or Area Meetings? Help build on last year’s Servas anniversary celebrations by advancing ServasOnLine, as ServasOnLine points to the future of Servas?

How to give your advice and active help. Using Skype, we can readily include you or a working representative in planning testing and conducting trials. Several member groups have already told us they want to examine the prototype, help improve it, and move towards the ServasOnLine system.

Please let us know.

Gary Sealey
President
Servas International

More details about the Servas Online Project [from Gary and Penny]:

Servas International General Assembly decided on this project based on the work and advice of the 2009 GA Technology Working Group which used a report from an earlier Servas technical group meeting in Turin.

The GA approved that Servas go online, and that Servas establish a levy to fund it.

EXCO has already launched the levy, helped by input from Harley and others after the GA. Jessica took the GA direction and produced an initial Project Plan.

Now, after many teleconferences, many people of good will and competence have been working towards the goal of the project. These volunteers are among the most qualified in Servas, and several have national and international reputations. Several have already designed and developed online systems. They include several of the key people who were at the GA and who met in Turin.

During the technical teleconferences, we agreed on a first step, to define what the online system must do. For this, a team was assembled to write “Use Cases” – stories to describe different processes that the system must handle. Penny and over a dozen international volunteers worked hard to complete the initial Use Cases by May 15, 2010. You can see these online (http://www.servas.org/siexco/index.php/Annual_Report_materials#ServasOnLine). We need help to improve and coordinate edits etc.

Two weeks ago, at a meeting hosted by Mario Burlando in Spinea, Italy a dozen, mostly professional developers from North America and Europe, met to define the technical requirements and infrastructure for ServasOnLine. They recommended a plan for a prototype to be developed in the next few months. The group also agreed that the online system should be called ServasOnLine (without spaces between the words) since that makes it easy to search for on the internet. The ability to work together for three days really moved the project ahead effectively. It cost less than was estimated, partly due to the incredibly efficient and kind hosting of the Burlando family.

Before the meeting, we looked for ways to implement ServasOnLine quickly and inexpensively. Two groups, Tripping (www.Tripping.com) and BeVolunteer (www.BeWelcome.org), volunteered to help with the process, providing mock-ups or detailed overviews of their experience, without cost. [We also briefly considered purchasing a commercial solution, but rejected it as too expensive.] All the helpers declared their belief in the Servas mission of offering opportunities for purposeful travel. Three of the people from BeVolunteer (some of whom are so attracted to Servas they are preparing to apply as Servas hosts) joined the other 9 Servas attendees at Spinea to offer their advice and detailed technical knowledge.

Web screens for the ServasOnLine prototype were drafted at the meeting, and are now being documented by Uwe Federer and Penny Pattison. We expect them to be available for everyone to view in a week or two.

We need your help to

- Review these screens, and
- Arrange and coordinate the continuing work and improvement of the Use Cases.
- Participate in the prototype and testing process

The participants from BeVolunteer held their general assembly this weekend. They discussed their offer to help Servas by adapting their software so that the ServasOnLine project can move ahead rapidly. The plan is for Servas to take over responsibility for the BeVolunteer computer server. Each organization

would have control of its own online data. The costs would be well within the Servas budget for the project.

BeVolunteer may also consider some fund-raising, to increase or accelerate their offer.

Prototype of ServasOnline: Over the next couple of weeks, Developers will be estimate and prioritize what can be done in a sound way, quickly. Their work will lead to a working prototype of ServasOnline for review and testing and further improvements in about 3-4 months. To achieve this goal the prototype will be a simple beginning version, with a limited set of features.

Ownership: All participants at the Spinea meetings pledged that their work on ServasOnline would be free for Servas to use, and the programs would also be free for use by anyone else (this is called Open Source software). The Servas data would be private and strictly under Servas control.

Results to date

- Initiation of the ServasOnline project and a volunteer team of over 40 people participating – with room for more
- An overall plan, documenting what was decided at the 2009 GA
- A definition of what ServasOnline needs to do through Use Cases – the user requirements
- A technical structure for Dolphin, ServasOnline and the connections between them
- A plan to develop a prototype to be tested in September and October 2010
- Documentation team leaders - Harley Thomas and Geoff Sheldon
- Agreement that Dolphin will be maintained to do the jobs it does well: Servas Administration, including national group Key Lists, Host List Management and other administration functions
- Provision for the on-going use of the existing “paper-based” system, through the Dolphin system, so that no one will be left behind
- Commitment to the principle that National Groups and individual hosts will be given the choice of whether and to what extent their data will be migrated to the Servas Online
- Commitment to presenting the ServasOnline system ‘look and feel’ to reflect Servas traditional Peace values and essential processes including the interview
- Expressions of interest to test the new ServasOnline system

Needs:

- Time, patience, good will and respect to achieve this important project-- so that planning, design, development and review to proceed in an open, supportive and constructive way and all encouraged to participate, to ensure success
- Experienced volunteers to do project management and lead teams – testing, screen design, training, documentation, evaluating the prototype, managing subsequent development phases
- Volunteers to work in teams – preparing testing, reviewing requirements, designing the ‘look and feel’ of the screens, writing training materials, writing updates and blogs, probably many other things
- A communication method so that all NSs and others can see what is happening
- A list of member groups that volunteer to use the prototype during September and October 2010

How you can help:

- Offer to do project management or lead a team
- Volunteer to work on a team
- Prepare your National Group to join the ServasOnline project
- Stay aware of the ServasOnline project, and publicize it in your National Group

We invite your support and involvement. This is an exciting project with real benefits to Servas and the world. It needs your help. Please let us know.