

The NMC Campus Project

Application for the Linden Prize

Abstract/Summary

The New Media Consortium is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit association of 300 colleges, universities, museums, and research centers that since 1993 has dedicated itself exploring and understanding emerging technologies and their applications for learning, research, and creative expression. The NMC Campus Project is a collaboration that includes more than 125 institutions. More than 14,000 individuals from 54 countries have registered to follow the work of the project. Launched publicly in June 2006 at the NMC's annual Summer Conference, the NMC Campus Project has always had a simple but clear vision: to comprehensively support colleges and universities who wished to experiment with virtual worlds. The original campus, located on a single sim, was intended to be a test bed for research and demonstration activities and was originally only open to NMC members.

As the project grew to 87 regions, the project opened its doors to all, and now anyone can visit the entirety of the NMC Campus. At every turn, the vision has been to inspire and influence future development, to expand working knowledge, to showcase creativity and ideas, and to encourage collaboration both inside and outside of Second Life. Among the very first educational organizations to enter Second Life, the NMC has by any measure had a profound impact on the adoption of virtual worlds by academia. The project community has created a remarkable legacy on the web. Links to these materials and other documentation referenced here can be found at <http://www.nmc.org/pdf/linden-prize-documentation.pdf>.

Full Description

The key to the success of the NMC Campus Project, which has been completely self-sustaining now for more than two years, has been three fold: to be a good community member; to set a high standard for design, aesthetics, and technical proficiency; and to make educational spaces as compelling and immersive as possible.

All indications are that we have hit those marks — the average time that the 15,518 unique visitors who came to the NMC Campus sims over the last 100 days was an astounding 98 minutes per visit (sources at <http://www.nmc.org/pdf/linden-prize-documentation.pdf>). These visitors span the globe, with visits from more than 56 countries over that same time, including areas such as North America, Europe, China, Malaysia, Australia, Japan, and even Africa! More than 14,000 individuals have voluntarily provided us with their contact information; the NMC Campus Observer blog routinely sees more than 4,700 unique visitors each month from dozens of countries around the globe. Since July 2007, the NMC has ushered in nearly 6,500 new educators to Second Life via its own *reg-API* site, averaging upwards of 450 new SL educators per month.

As our own sophistication with Second Life has grown, we have continued to add to the ways we support educators. When we realized that educators lacked safe, dependably PG neighborhoods for their classes, we created special educational communities to provide educators with inexpensive ways to begin using Second Life (for more, see <http://www.nmc.org/pdf/nmc-edu-communities.pdf>). As we saw that faculty needed a more in-depth orientation to Second Life, one that had a variety of levels of learning, we created the NMC Orientation island, now the most popular island on the NMC Campus by far.

Our original goal was to move virtual worlds into everyday use by campuses by getting a critical mass involved, and we have directly helped more than 125 real-life institutions in ten different countries. That work took place not only in English-speaking countries like the US, the UK, Australia, and Canada, but also in Sweden, Turkey, Slovenia, France, and Spain. Our indirect influence —through our own highly successful series of virtual symposia, through dozens of keynotes and sessions at real-life conferences, via an extensive web documentation of our activities, and an ongoing stream of highly regard research and academic papers, including the NMC's renowned *Horizon Report* — is widely cited as the reason that several hundreds of other colleges and universities have decided to build out programs in Second Life.

It was a natural extension of our real-life work to begin to look at the potential of Second Life as a venue for genuine sorts of academic meetings. Beginning in 2006, we have brought more than 2,000 scholars into Second Life to explore weighty topics like the *Impact of Digital Media, Creativity, the Evolution of Communication*, and more via the NMC's continuing *Series of Virtual Symposia*. These fee-based events (\$295 US registration) are ranked very very highly by attendees for their innovative use of the platform and the engagement level of the virtual setting. To date, every single symposium has been oversubscribed.

The NMC is also a committed member of the Second Life community, and sponsors a wide range of events, art exhibitions, performance groups, and more that are free to the public on an ongoing basis. To learn more about the NMC arts mission, see <http://www.nmc.org/pdf/Aho-Museum-of-Art.pdf>.

There is far more to this story than can possibly be told here. NMC has applied for the Linden Prize because we believe that we exemplify the values of creativity, of collaboration, and of continued pursuit of excellence that underlie that recognition. Now beginning our fourth year in Second Life, the NMC is as committed as ever to its mission of helping educators make the highest possible use of this platform via support, the sharing of models and resources, pushing possibilities, and absolute transparency. At the NMC, we share everything we learn, and give back to the community every way we can.

We have provided extensive documentation via a list of urls that we think are critical to understanding the impact of the NMC Campus. This simple list of links will take you to literally tens of thousands of images taken by our community, to dozens and dozens of YouTube videos, and to a wide range of NMC web resources, academic papers, and much more.

This documentation can be found at <http://www.nmc.org/pdf/linden-prize-documentation.pdf>.

The NMC Business Model

The NMC's operations in Second, which include the ownership of some 62 regions, are completely self-sustaining via the work of the NMC Virtual Worlds services unit. All of the past and ongoing costs of operations have been and continue to be met via operations of this unit within the eco-system of Second Life.

The NMC, which operates as a 501(c)3 not-for-profit, provides its members and other educational organizations high quality educational design, architectural, and development services at cost. NMC's builders are renowned for their creativity and understanding of the learning and research missions of educational organizations. NMC Educational Communities allow colleges and universities to rent virtual property in 16 custom regions at below market rates. The NMC's series of Virtual Symposia provide another revenue stream to the project.

As a not-for-profit, the NMC is committed to sharing its work with the educational community. All of the reports, research, and other materials the NMC produces in the project are published under Creative Commons licenses. In addition, the NMC has created and stocks the largest open educational content repository in Second Life, in the NMC's full-sim Resource Center on Learning. Content from business attire to learning objects, to medical equipment and entire buildings, to orientation experiences and much more, is all available on Learning for free.

In early 2008, the NMC announced a program of \$100,000 US to stimulate the production of open virtual content. Under the program, 20 Virtual Learning Prizes of \$5,000 US each were awarded for innovative ideas that the NMC then built out and released into open content.

