Serckit - Supporting Communities in Working, Learning and Sharing Together

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Over the last 18 years SERC at Carleton College has developed a collaborative platform for science education serving over one hundred projects, thousands of community authors and millions of annual visitors. The platform combines a custom technical infrastructure, Serckit, and a set of strategies for engaging communities in online sharing. These strategies promote dissemination through project websites, cross-project material reuse (with attribution) and access via an integrated geoscience education portal that draws from all projects using the platform.

Science education project websites have common needs:

- A public web presence that establishes the project identity and provides information about the project.
- Tools for authoring, publishing, organizing (as with controlled vocabularies) and promoting the discovery of the open education resources produced by the project.
- Collaboration tools for use both within the project and to engage with their community: private workspaces, email lists, discussion boards, social media integration, and webinar and workshop support.

Generic solutions are available

Most of these needs can be partially met by any of a variety of web hosting options (both commercial hosting and making use of local institutional options) and open source contentment management systems: e.g. Drupal.

As a shared collaborative platform Serckit offers additional benefits beyond the generic solutions

Serckit is a custom-built, web-based platform designed specifically to support science education projects. It runs on infrastructure managed by SERC which also provides direct support in effective use of the system. All the projects using the system benefit from the use of a variety of common features and the transparent cross-project integration facilitated by working on a common infrastructure.

The platform reflects shared tools and practices evolved by the community of projects...

...that enable low-barrier cross-project integration

Projects retain their own identity and have their project-specific needs met while gaining easy integration with other projects on the platform

Serckit provides a common platform upon which individual projects can build their own identities, while allowing cross-project pollination and synergies to be realized without significant extra investment by each project. This is a sustainable model for a collaborative platform that takes advantage of the energy and resources of individual projects to advance larger community goals.

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