

# OONI Partner Gathering 2017



**Toronto, Canada**  
**10th & 11th July 2017**

Two weeks ago we hosted the *first OONI Partner Gathering* in Toronto, Canada. This report provides an overview of the event, partner needs and challenges, and future goals to address them.

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## About

Over the last year, the [Open Observatory of Network Interference \(OONI\)](#) project has had the opportunity to collaborate with various digital rights organizations in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. We joined forces to collaborate on the study of internet censorship by collecting [network measurements](#) from local vantage points, reviewing and creating [censorship measurement resources](#), and by publishing findings through [research reports](#).

To strengthen these (and future) partnerships, OONI hosted its first Partner Gathering thanks to support from the [Open Technology Fund \(OTF\)](#), the [Ford Foundation](#), and the [Media Democracy Fund \(MDF\)](#).

This two day event was hosted at the University of Toronto on 10th and 11th July 2017. The 22 participants included the OONI team and our partners from 10 different countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Our Toronto friends from [Psiphon](#) and [The Citizen Lab](#) joined us as well. Participants came from a diverse

set of backgrounds, including lawyers, policy researchers, human rights advocates, and software engineers.

The OONI Partner Gathering brought our international partners together to share skills, knowledge, and research findings on the study of internet censorship. The event also provided us the opportunity to reflect on our collaboration over the last year, and to develop strategic goals and priorities for the next year(s).

Since many of the participants also attended the [Citizen Lab Summer Institute \(CLSI\)](#) during the following days (12th-14th July), we were able to extend our discussions as part of both events.

## Objectives

The objectives of the OONI Partner Gathering include:

- **Strengthening our partnerships.** To strengthen our collaboration moving forward, we aimed to gain a better understanding of partner needs and to collect feedback that can help inform the development of our tools and methodologies. The event also aimed to foster more collaboration amongst OONI partners from around the world.
- **Empowering censorship research participation.** To engage more communities in censorship research around the world, we aimed to share skills, knowledge, and methodologies, and to discuss best practices moving forward.
- **Strategic planning.** By gaining a better understanding of partner needs and challenges, we aimed to brainstorm on solutions, goals and priorities on the study of internet censorship.

## Sessions

The OONI Partner Gathering consisted of a variety of sessions that aimed to be as interactive as possible to encourage participation. Session topics were drawn from both pre-event participant engagement (i.e. suggestions made by participants prior to the event), and requests and suggestions made at the event.

The event's agenda and all session notes can be found [here](#).

Throughout the two-day event, we (the OONI team and many partners) facilitated the following sessions.

## Day 1 - Monday, 10th July 2017

### 1. Information Controls Around the World

This session consisted of the following stations:

- **Africa:** Discussing Case Studies and Challenges
- **Asia:** Discussing Case Studies and Challenges
- **Latin America:** Discussing Case Studies and Challenges

Participants were requested to visit each station (for 15 minutes each) to map information controls and to discuss specific case studies and challenges within countries of each region.

The goal of this session was to provide participants with a broad range of context on which to establish subsequent conversations at the event.

View session notes [here](#).

### 2. Across the OONI-verse



What's OONI up to these days? What's OONI working on next? How can OONI support your work?

The OONI team held the following stations:

- **ooniprobe mobile apps**
- **Upcoming ooniprobe apps for Windows and macOS**
- **ooniprobe for Raspberry Pis (Lepidopter)**
- **Data Analysis & Censorship Alert System**
- **Probe Orchestration**
- **OONI Explorer**

Participants were requested to visit each station (for 15 minutes each) to learn about current and upcoming projects, to ask questions, and to provide feedback.

Based on this session, we were able to collect a lot of direct feedback for the improvement of our tools and methodologies.

View session notes [here](#).

### **3. Building Community Resources for Censorship Measurement Research**

Parallel sessions:

- **Using GitHub to contribute to test lists (*hands-on session*)**
- **Brainstorming on next generation ooniprobe tests**

Participants joined the session of their choice.

Through the GitHub hands-on session, we explained the theory behind git and taught participants how to use it to contribute to [test lists](#).

## 4. Measuring Internet Censorship



Parallel sessions:

- **Measuring Internet Blackouts**
- **Learning all about OONI tests, your data choices, and potential risks**

Participants joined the session of their choice.

View session notes [here](#).

## 5. Using and Analyzing OONI data

- **Analyzing OONI network measurement data (*hands-on session*)**

Through this hands-on session, participants learned how OONI analyzes network measurement data. The aim of this session was to enable partners to analyze data that they collect through the use of [ooniprobe](#).

## Day 2 - Tuesday, 11th July 2017

### 1. Sharing Partner Knowledge and Experience

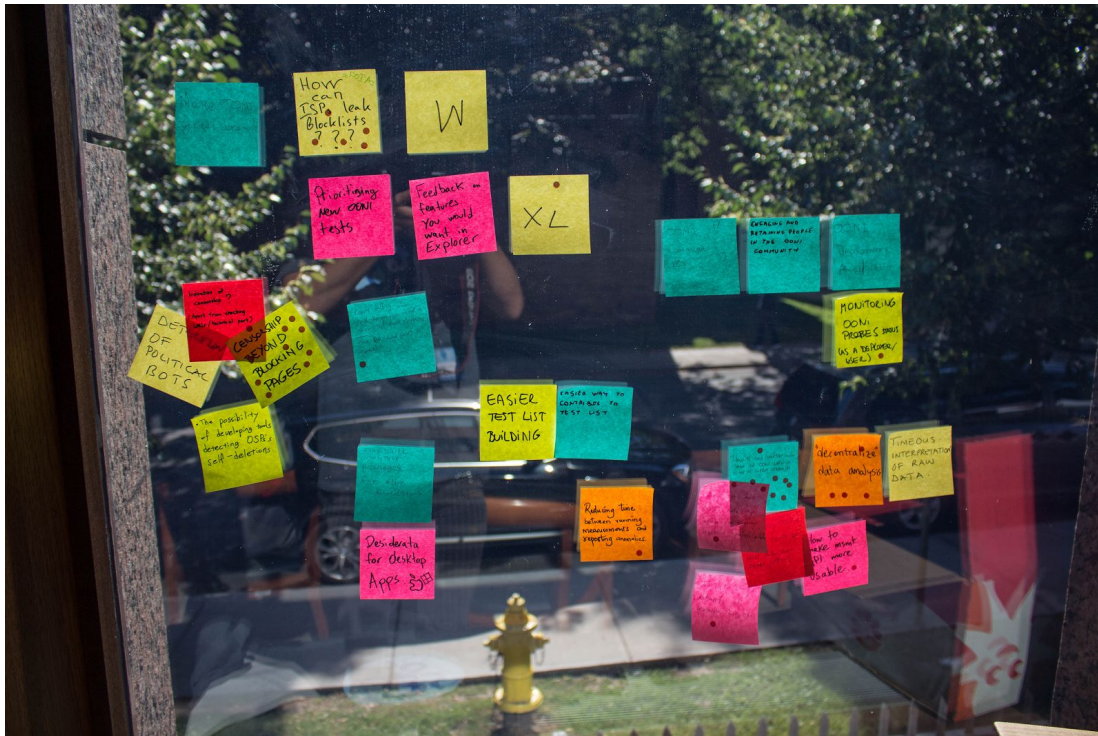
This session consisted of the following stations:

- **Africa:** Measuring internet censorship
- **Asia:** Measuring internet censorship
- **Latin America:** Measuring internet censorship

Participants were requested to visit each station (for 15 minutes each) to share experience and knowledge that is specific to measuring internet censorship in countries of each region. More specifically, participants were requested to map out and discuss their experience, associated challenges and needs.

View session notes [here](#).

### 2. Strategic Planning



This session consisted of the following stations:

- **NEEDS:** What are your needs to examine internet censorship? How would you like to collaborate with OONI and other partners?
- **PRIORITIES:** What are your priorities in terms of examining internet censorship?
- **SHORT-TERM GOALS:** What would you like to achieve in the short-term (e.g. next 12 months) through our collaboration? How can we achieve these goals?
- **LONG-TERM GOALS:** What would you like to achieve in the long-term (e.g. next 3 years) through our collaboration? How can we achieve these goals?
- **FUNDING:** Identifying and mapping relevant funding sources that could potentially help make our goals possible.

Participants were requested to visit each station (for 15 minutes each) to discuss and share their thoughts and feedback.

View session notes [here](#).

### 3. Community Engagement



Parallel sessions:



- **Strategies for Community Engagement: Best Practices for Expanding Network Measurements & Engaging New Users Safely**
- **Measuring Internet Blackouts - Part 2**

Participants joined the session of their choice.

View session notes [here](#).

#### 4. Using OONI data for Research and Advocacy



Parallel sessions:

- **How to use OONI data as part of your work**
- **Brainstorming on questions for data visualizations based on OONI data**

Participants joined the session of their choice.

View session notes [here](#).

## 5. Closing Plenary

Participants summarized the key outcomes from the event, and they each wrote down (and shared with OONI) their desired next steps for continuing collaboration after the meeting.

## Inclusiveness

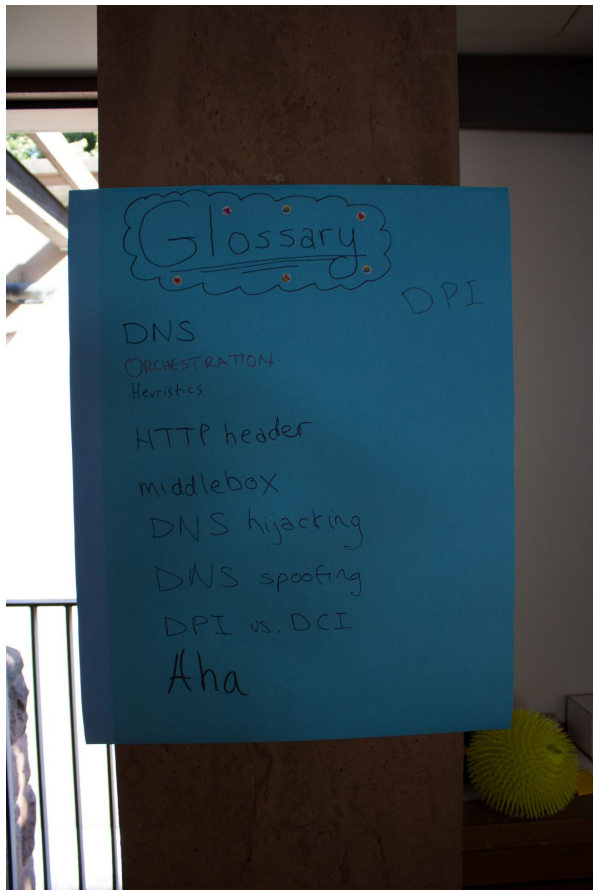
The OONI Partner Gathering was committed to providing a safe and welcoming environment for discussing issues related to internet censorship.

Given that participants came from more than 10 different countries and cultures, and from a diverse set of backgrounds, it was imperative to us that the event was as inclusive as possible to encourage participation, and to ensure a pleasant and fruitful experience for all.

To this end, we shared the event's [Code of Conduct](#) with all participants prior to the event, and discussed it as part of the Opening Plenary. We set up an Incident Response Committee, comprising of two partners and one OONI team member, but no violations were reported.

We formed the agenda based on suggestions and requests made by participants prior and during the event. All sessions included small groups, to encourage more participation.

As the OONI project uses a lot of specialized technical terminology and participants came from a diverse set of backgrounds (including lawyers, policy researchers, and human rights advocates), we set up a glossary that was populated with terms during both days of the event.



We encouraged participants to write terms in the glossary whose meaning they weren't sure of. We plan to create an online glossary on our website soon, which would include (hopefully) easy-to-understand descriptions of the terms pointed out as part of the OONI Partner Gathering, as well as other terms that community members bring to our attention.

## Challenges and needs

One of the core objectives of the OONI Partner Gathering was to gain a better understanding of the challenges that our partners have encountered over the last year and their associated needs. This would inform the development of our tools and methodologies, improving upon our collaboration on the study of internet censorship moving forward.

The table below summarizes the main partner challenges and associated needs that were identified as part of this event.

	Challenges	Needs
1.	Hard to use GitHub to contribute to <a href="#">test lists</a>	Web platform to easily contribute to test lists (without using GitHub)
2.	Testing URLs other than those included in test lists	Web platform to easy submit URLs for testing (without using GitHub)
3.	Choosing the types/categories of URLs to test (currently that requires passing your own list via the command line)	Web platform that allows users to choose which types/categories of URLs to test (e.g. excluding pornography which may be illegal)
4.	Running ooniprobe on desktop platforms (still requires some use of terminal, despite <a href="#">web UI</a> )	Desktop applications for ooniprobe that are easy to install and use
5.	Many community members interested in running ooniprobe are Windows users (ooniprobe is not currently available for Windows)	Windows application for ooniprobe that is easy to install and use
6.	Setting up and configuring ooniprobe on Raspberry Pis	Easier way of setting up and configuring ooniprobe on Raspberry Pis
7.	Trust (i.e. hard to gain the trust of new members to run ooniprobe)	Strategies for building trust across community networks (through regional workshops, for example)
8.	Apathy (Who cares? Why run ooniprobe?)	Educational materials (e.g. animations/videos/visualizations) that explain why running ooniprobe matters & local workshops
9.	Specialized and highly technical nature of the project (hard to explain ooniprobe and the project overall to new people who lack technical expertise)	Educational materials (e.g. animations/videos/visualizations) that explain technical concepts and how ooniprobe tests work, as well as relevant workshops
10.	Communicating report findings to local audiences	Localizing materials, research reports, and tools
11.	Risks (running ooniprobe and engaging users in high-risk environments)	More choices (for example, in terms of which URLs to test), more consultation with local lawyers/experts, local workshops discussing and evaluating risks

12.	Scary <a href="#">Risks documentation</a> & informed consent procedure (hard to engage new users)	Tailor risks information & informed consent procedure to different types of users? Perhaps remove the HTTP Invalid Request Line disclaimer on “hacking”, since that is highly debatable? Create a map showing relevant legal risks per country?
13.	Bandwidth cost related to running ooniprobe (in some African and Asian countries, for example, it is extremely expensive to run ooniprobe)	Financial support to cover bandwidth costs, and/or trying to ensure that ooniprobe consumes less bandwidth
14.	Bandwidth consumption (in some countries, running ooniprobe hogs the network of users)	Trying to ensure that ooniprobe consumes less bandwidth
15.	Limited resources (time, funding, staff, etc.) to collaborate with OONI on a volunteer basis	Funding to support the resources required to collaborate with OONI on an ongoing basis over time
16.	Retaining community members (continuing to run ooniprobe, contribute to test lists, etc.) over time	Funding to support their work, community engagement activities (e.g. workshops, educational materials)
17.	Monitoring, detecting, and reporting on internet blackouts with evidence	Methodology for the automatic detection and examination of internet blackouts
18.	Monitoring, detecting, and reporting on forms of censorship that expand beyond the scope of current ooniprobe tests (e.g. throttling)	New ooniprobe tests designed to measure more forms of censorship (e.g. throttling), engage more with academic communities
19.	Interpreting and using data from OONI Explorer (currently hard to use and interpret)	Revamp OONI Explorer to show the top censorship findings per country, and explain the measurement data
20.	Identifying confirmed censorship cases vs. potential false positives through OONI Explorer	Provide lists of confirmed censorship cases and anomalous measurements (potentially including false positives) per country in OONI Explorer
21.	Interacting with OONI Explorer to provide feedback on the accessibility of sites and services from local vantage points	Enable users to submit feedback via OONI Explorer (based on the measurements that it exposes)
22.	Hard to use and analyze <a href="#">json files</a>	Export data in csv files
23.	Analyzing OONI network measurement data to confirm censorship events	De-centralize the data analysis (i.e. teach more people how to analyze the data, create

		community networks of data analysts, and/or tap into existing data analyst communities and engage them with OONI data)
24.	Understanding the context around network measurement data (i.e. which laws, policies, and/or events led to and/or explain censorship events?)	Contextual information around network measurement data, Cross-community collaboration and information-sharing
25.	Rapidly responding to censorship events based on OONI data (currently hard to interpret the data and to rule out false positives)	Censorship Alert System that notifies community members of emergent censorship events and which provides them with the data that they need (e.g. for advocacy) in a timely manner
26.	Engaging lawyers, policymakers, and journalists with OONI data	Make OONI data easier to use and understand by less technical audiences, create educational materials, facilitate relevant workshops
27.	Storytelling based on OONI data	Ability to export graphs and data visualizations from OONI Explorer

## Future goals and priorities

The challenges and needs, as identified through sessions facilitated at the OONI Partner Gathering, will inform (many of) the goals and priorities of our collaboration moving forward.

Some of our *high priority goals* over the next two years, with the aim of addressing the challenges and needs of our community members, include the following:

### 1. Making ooniprobe easier to install and run across more platforms

To enable our partners to engage more community members with the use of ooniprobe and to subsequently expand the global coverage of censorship events, we aim to make ooniprobe as easy to use as possible. To this end, we aim to create native ooniprobe apps for Windows and macOS, particularly since many community members around the world are Windows users. We will also continue to improve upon our mobile apps and distribution for Raspberry Pis based on community feedback.

## **2. Improving upon our data analysis techniques and creating a Censorship Alert System**

To enable rapid response to emergent censorship events by policy and advocacy groups in our community, we aim to improve upon our data analysis capabilities to detect censorship events around the world faster and more accurately. We also aim to create a Censorship Alert System that will disseminate timely alerts of emergent censorship events to community members.

## **3. Expanding our methodologies to examine more forms of internet censorship**

To support the work of advocacy groups (such as the [#KeepItOn campaign](#), which includes some of our partners), we aim to develop a methodology for the automatic detection and examination of internet blackouts around the world.

As part of the OONI Partner Gathering, we facilitated [two sessions on measuring internet blackouts](#), and we identified the next steps for our experimentation. We also plan to expand our methodologies to measure more forms of internet censorship, such as throttling.

## **4. Expanding our partnerships to empower censorship research participation around the world**

OONI has been a community-driven project since the very beginning and moving forward, we aim to de-centralize the project even more.

By expanding our partnerships, we aim to foster cross-community collaboration, and to engage more groups with the study of internet censorship around the world. This would lead to stable network measurements being collected from more local vantage points, the review of more test lists, and the publication of more research reports in collaboration with partners (who provide extremely valuable local expertise and knowledge).

The expansion of OONI's community can also help decentralize the analysis of OONI data, and engage more policy and advocacy groups. It can also help foster regional and

local workshops (for community engagement, discussing choices and potential risks), and other related activities (such as the much needed localization of materials).

In addition to all of the above, we would also like to achieve the following:

- Creating a web platform that is synchronized with git, through which community members can easily contribute to test lists;
- Enabling users to choose which URLs (and which categories of URLs) to test directly through the ooniprobe mobile and desktop apps (thus limiting potential associated risk);
- Improving upon OONI Explorer to export csv files, filter confirmed censorship cases vs. anomalous measurements, expose top censorship findings per country, and potentially export graphs and data visualizations;
- Engaging community members with the creation of a wiki database that can help provide context around network measurement data around the world (this was discussed more thoroughly as part of a [CLSI session](#) that we facilitated).
- Creating educational materials (e.g. animations, videos, visualizations) that can help explain ooniprobe tests and why measuring internet censorship matters.

## Outcomes

The main outcomes of the OONI Partner Gathering can be summarized as follows:

- We collected **feedback** from our partners that will help inform the development of our tools and methodologies;
- Participants acquired new skills and knowledge related to measuring internet censorship (as detailed through the [session notes](#));
- We gained a better understanding of the **challenges** that our partners have encountered over the last year and we brainstormed on solutions for addressing them;
- We gained a better understanding of our partners' **needs**, based on which we will tailor the development of our tools and methodologies, and our overall collaboration moving forward;
- We specified the next steps for creating a methodology for the examination of internet blackouts (through the [sessions on measuring internet blackouts](#));
- We determined our **goals and priorities** for the next two years based on partner needs and feedback;
- Our partners had the opportunity to potentially form regional (or cross-regional) collaborations amongst them;



- The event enabled the OONI team to meet its partners in real life and to bond more (thus enabling stronger partnerships moving forward).

## Acknowledgements

The OONI team would like to send a warm **thank you** to all of the participants who took time out of their busy schedules to fly across the world to join us in Toronto. Thanks to your invaluable feedback and participation, you made the first OONI Partner Gathering a success.

We would also like to thank all of our other partners and community members who unfortunately weren't able to join us, but who play a significant role in increasing transparency of internet censorship on a daily basis. The world needs more people like you.

Finally, we would like to thank the [Open Technology Fund \(OTF\)](#), the [Ford Foundation](#), and the [Media Democracy Fund \(MDF\)](#) for supporting the event. Thank you for making the first OONI Partner Gathering possible.

