Google Wave – Creation, Collaboration, & Project Management Tool
I don’t currently use Google Wave but have heard of it and thought it might be a useful tool for our group working on Eugene’s digital art projection festival. Because this project is complex, collaborative, and inaugural, I think a program that archives our casual conversations, meetings, image-sharing, task lists, and brainstorming sessions will be invaluable if this event continues on an annual basis (as planned).

Not only might a tool like Google Wave make planning easier, more effective, and more productive, it can also preserve dialogues for future planning sessions so ideas can be retrieved and retooled, planning documents reused, and past mistakes avoided. After a trial period, we’ll be able to better assess program design, functionality, and usability.

Description/Features
Google Wave was launched in 2009 as an experimental online application for creation, collaboration, brainstorming, and project planning/management.

A “wave” is essentially a multifaceted tool or living document shared by group members who can contribute in real time to planning/brainstorming sessions or dialogue, allowing participants to actively engage, make the most of time and resources, and return to conversations with new thoughts and ideas at a later date.

Waves are archived in the clouds so they can be re-viewed, amended, modified, added to, enhanced, reconceived or rewound at any time, whether by original group members or via permissions so others can learn from past work. A standout feature is “rewind”, allowing participants to play a wave back to see who said what when.

Based on my observations and exploration of the site, collaboration is at the core of Google Wave. The application is focused on making group work easier by allowing work to take place collectively, in real time, through active group sessions or on each individual’s schedule, so someone can “jump in” whenever they have extra time, new ideas, or more documents or material to contribute.

While Google Wave is still currently accessible via login as an expired “lab”, it will be replaced by a stronger application later this year. The site states that current users’ waves can be exported to the new platform when the time comes.

Application/Use
Google Wave facilitates use of multimedia in online conversation. Contributors can engage through text, image, video, notes, maps, or links, and groups can choose from a variety of document or wave templates in order to design and craft their project
platform in the most suitable format (e.g., event plan, dialogue, brainstorming session, structured meeting, interactive wave).

A major drawback of Google Wave is its lack of intuitive design, especially given that Google is known for keeping things fairly simple when it comes to user interface. Perhaps this is partly why it’s being replaced.

When Google Wave is opened up, the screen is completely full. Such little white space and breathing room makes for a claustrophobic environment that feels cluttered—not a good thing when trying to manage complex projects!

It’s also not clear where to begin, how to use contacts, how to choose a new wave template/format or invite others to the wave, and the meaning of menu items (e.g., despite being an avid Google Search/Docs and Gmail user, I have no idea what “All”, “By Me”, or “Requests” mean, and I assume that “Inbox” means I’m connected to my Gmail, since that’s how I signed in, but in fact it’s a confusing, cluttered, scrunched together inbox of “waves”). While there is a brief instructional video one can view from the first launch, this is very small-scale and difficult to follow and decipher.

**Value**

The Google Wave concept holds a lot of value and has much potential as a useful project management tool that is web-based and free to users. Once one gets the hang of it, I can imagine it making project planning and meeting sessions easier, especially when a group is large, disparate, has conflicting schedules, or is otherwise difficult to bring together in person.

It’s also a promising platform for sharing multimedia. It can be cumbersome for group members to pull up videos, links, or images on laptops and share them with a table or room full of people, especially when projectors or screens become necessary. With Google Wave, a group can share media quickly and easily, enriching dialogues with visual illustrations and examples and helping visual and auditory learners benefit from unique methods of presenting and sharing information in the planning process. In turn, someone new can immediately be brought into the conversation if necessary or desirable and determine at a glance what has already been discussed and the discussion’s status or outcomes using the “rewind” feature.

Finally, it’s great to imagine a single hub holding all to-do items and task lists so everyone is on the same page and can track progress. This is one of the most difficult aspects of project planning because everyone takes and stores notes individually and differently, yet it’s arguably the most critical component of the process. Thus, Google Wave can contribute greatly to project management’s organizational aspects.

Because of the above possibilities couple with appeal to a variety of learning types and engagement styles (visual/textual/auditory, introverted/extroverted), I see Google Wave’s successors helping project planning become more interactive, organized, fruitful, and fun.