Internet Safety Technical Task Force Project Plan
June 27, 2008

I. Background.

The Internet Safety Technical Task Force has been convened in response to a joint statement between MySpace and 49 State Attorneys General. The agreement, announced on January 14, 2008, reads, in part:

> "MySpace will organize, with support of the Attorneys General, an industry-wide Internet Safety Technical Task Force ("Task Force") devoted to finding … online safety tools with a focus on finding ... online identity authentication tools. This Task Force will include Internet businesses, identity authentication experts, non-profit organizations, and technology companies. … The Task Force will establish specific and objective criteria that will be utilized to evaluate existing and new technology safety solutions."

II. Scope.

The scope of the Task Force's inquiry is to consider those technologies that industry and end users can use to keep children safe on the Internet. The problems that the Task Force is working on are large and complex; their boundaries are hard to define. The key questions that we seek to answer are:
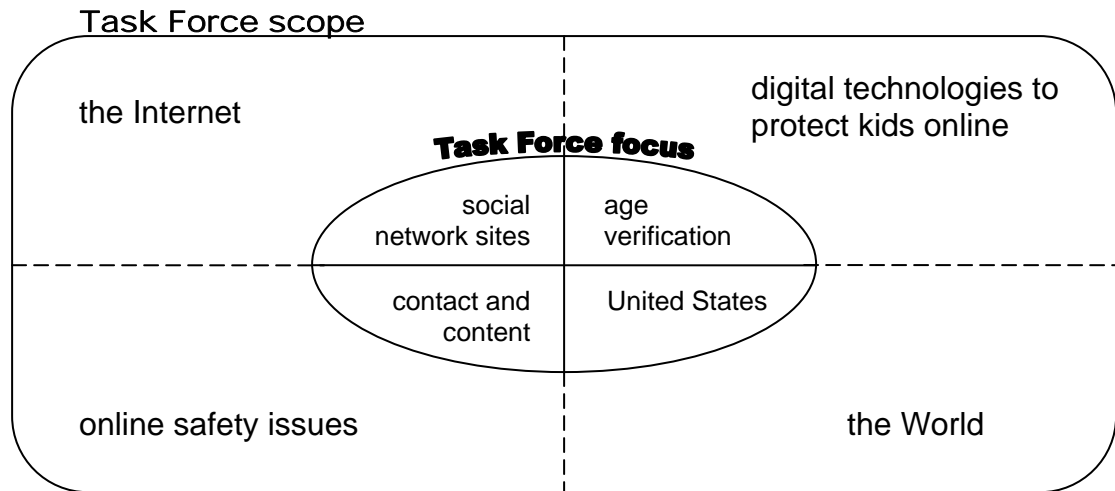
1. Are there technologies that can limit harmful contact between children and other people?

2. Are there technologies that can limit the ability of children to access and produce inappropriate and/or illegal content online?

3. Are there technologies that can be used to empower parents to have more control over and information about the services their children use online?

Within each of these broad topic areas, the Task Force will seek to determine the most pressing aspects of the problem and, in turn, which technologies are most likely to help companies, parents, children, and others in addressing those aspects. The inquiry will address all minors (i.e., people under the age of 18), but the Task Force will seek where possible to tailor its recommendations to more refined subsets in age.

The Task Force is chartered specifically to assess age verification technology as a means to reduce the harmful contact and content experienced by children using social network sites in the United States. Popular media have highlighted privacy and safety concerns that arise when children use social network sites[1], but the nature of the danger

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[1] danah m. boyd and Nicole. B. Ellison, Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *13*(1), article 11, 2007, http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/boyd.ellison html.

to children remains the topic of ongoing research that places the problem in a broader social, technological, and geographical context. Recognizing this broader setting, the Task Force has the flexibility to consider harmful contact and harmful content in the context of online safety issues in general. Likewise, while focusing on harms that occur in social network sites, the Task Force will not ignore the broader environment of the Internet as a whole. Age verification technology will be assessed in the context of other digital technologies that protect children online. Finally, the Task Force will consider the problem of child safety on the Internet in an international context, with emphasis on issues arising in the United States.

Task Force scope

the Internet

digital technologies to protect kids online

Task Force focus

social network sites

age verification

contact and content

United States

online safety issues

the World

The Task Force acknowledges that, given limited time and resources, its work will represent a series of next steps, but not final answers, to each of these problems. The Task Force acknowledges also that while we can list a number of problems, not every aspect of the problems of child safety online can be addressed in full during this process. The Task Force notes that much work has been done in these areas and every effort will be made to build off of previous efforts.

In assessing and describing the possible technical solutions, the Task Force will take into account the feasibility and cost of technology solutions. In the final report, the Task Force will place these technological approaches into a context that also includes related public policy issues. The final report will also include "specific and objective criteria that will be utilized to evaluate existing and new technology safety solutions," as set forth in the joint statement.

III. Structure.

The Task Force is comprised of those companies, NGOs, and academic groups that have agreed to join at MySpace's invitation. The Task Force is directed by John Palfrey, danah boyd, and Dena Sacco, all of the Berkman Center for Internet & Society. The work of the Task Force will be supported by a Research Advisory Board and a Technical Advisory

Board. The purpose of these supporting advisory boards is to enable the Task Force to accept input from experts on these topics who are not members of the Task Force. The Task Force will also include informal subcommittees comprised of Task Force members with a particular interest or expertise in the three issue areas.

The Research Advisory Board (RAB) will be chaired by the Berkman Center's danah boyd and will be comprised of scholars, professional researchers, and organizations investigating online safety-related issues through large scale data collection. Examples of this group include the UNH Crimes Against Children Research Center, Michele Ybarra, and the Pew and the Internet and American Life Project. The RAB will work with scholars to assess existing threats to youth online safety to determine which are the most common, which are the most harmful, and which potentially can be addressed by technological solutions. It will aggregate what is known about the state of child safety online and the effectiveness of different legal, technological, and educational approaches to addressing it. It will take into account the existing research in these areas, as well as evaluate what additional research would be most helpful. Ultimately, the Board will produce a report for the Task Force that describes the state of the research. Pending funding, the Board will recommend that the Task Force commission additional research as appropriate. Both the report and any future research proposals will be presented to the Task Force and be referenced in the Task Force's final report. Additionally, both will be made publicly available.

The Technical Advisory Board will be chaired by Laura DeBonis and will focus on the range of possible technological solutions to the problems of youth online safety, including identity authentication tools, filtering, monitoring, and scanning and searching. The Technical Advisory Board (TAB) will consider the potential solutions introduced by the Task Force, those that emerge through the Research Advisory Board, and those introduced by the public. It will develop technical criteria for assessing the various solutions. The TAB will reach out to a range of technologists who understand and can evaluate the different available technological approaches to online safety. The Board will accept proposals from a wide variety of vendors and will write a report for the Task Force addressing the different potential solutions. As with the Research Advisory Board, the Berkman Center will convene this ad hoc group prior to the June 20 meeting in Cambridge. It will be comprised of financially disinterested parties who are open to technological solutions to the Internet Safety concerns facing children.

Task Force members are each encouraged to join a subcommittee of the Task Force organized around each of the three key questions under consideration. Each of these subcommittees will be empowered to determine the most pressing issues within each issue area, to assess previous work in each of these areas, to come up with lists of technologies and research to be considered by others, and to propose topics to the Berkman Center team for the final report. The Berkman Center will support conference calls or other means of subcommittee self-organization.

IV. Systems.

A. Reports.

As set forth in the January, 2008 Agreement between the Attorneys General and MySpace, the Task Force owes quarterly reports to the Attorneys General, as well as a Final

Report on December 31, 2008. The Berkman Center will draft the reports. The first quarterly report was submitted to the Attorneys General in April. The reports will be circulated to Task Force members in advance of sending them to the Attorneys General for comment. The Berkman Center team will consider all comments from Task Force members.

B. Meetings.

To undertake its work, the Task Force as a whole will hold a series of day-long meetings. Four of the meetings will be open only to Task Force members and those the Task Force invites to make presentations and/or to observe. Each meeting will involve a segment that is open for the public to participate. We will publish minutes from each Task Force meeting on the web. The meetings will take place on the following dates:

> March 12, 2008 (organizational meeting, in Washington, DC)
> April 30, 2008 (first full meeting, in Washington, DC)
> June 20, 2008 (second full meeting, in Cambridge, MA)
> September 23, 2008 (public session in Cambridge, MA)
> September 24, 2008 (third full meeting, in Cambridge, MA)
> November 19, 2008 (fourth full meeting, in Washington, DC)

The open public meeting on September 24, 2008 is intended to provide a forum for all interested parties to present their views. The Berkman Center will solicit short written submissions from those who intend to attend the open meeting, in order to better keep track of attendees and their input, and will make those submissions available on the Task Force's public web site.

Both the Research Advisory Board and the Technological Advisory Board will likely hold a few conference calls as needed to facilitate their work. They will report their progress to the Task Force formally at the meetings and informally as appropriate.

The Task Force may convene an additional meeting or calls to review technologies and the draft report close to the end of the calendar year.

C. Website and Online Workspace.

The Task Force has a public-facing website that includes a description of the Task Force, contact information for the Berkman Center team, and an FAQ section. The Berkman Center has created a private Listserv for the Task Force as a whole and will do so for each of the Advisory Boards. Postings to the Task Force's listserv are considered off the record and are not to be forwarded to those not on the list.

V. Communications.

The Berkman Center will act as primary contact for the Task Force, both for press inquiries and for requests for involvement by interested parties. Task Force Members are welcome to forward press inquiries to the Berkman Center as appropriate. We ask that you copy all requests from interested parties seeking involvement in the work of the Task Force to us, so that we can act as a central clearinghouse for these requests and so that interested parties are not left out of invitations to participate.

VI. Intellectual Property.

The Task Force has developed and posted an Intellectual Property Policy[2] to safeguard the IP rights of members and non-member contributors. It emphasizes that Task Force members are under no obligation to protect the confidentiality of submissions to the Task Force.

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[2] Berkman Center for Internet & Society, Intellectual Property Policy for the Internet Safety Technical Task Force, June 2008, http://cyber.law harvard.edu/research/isttf/ippolicy.