

Harness Technology for Social Good

A Grand Challenge for Social Work



The Grand Challenge to **Harness Technology for Social Good** is unique among the Grand Challenges in that it sets out not to address a specific issue or problem, but to fundamentally transform the field of social work with respect to its relationship to technology. Specifically, it aims to harness big data and deploy information and communication technology to improve the efficacy of social programs, accelerate the pace of social discovery, and reduce inequalities.

During the past five years, network members have led the field in this direction through their practice, research, teaching, and advocacy. They have served as a resource for the field, providing information and serving as a forum for people to meet and connect around the technology issues affecting them and their work.

A great deal of movement has occurred in 2020, as COVID-related social distancing measures drastically accelerated the field's adoption of technology — from remote working and teaching to virtual conferences to telehealth. In this sense, the coronavirus pandemic brought new attention and urgency to this Grand Challenge.



Celebrating 5 Years of Progress on the Grand Challenges!

Network Leadership

NETWORK CO-LEADS

Brendan Beal, PhD

Assistant Professor
University of Montevallo
bbeal@montevallo.edu

Stephanie Berzin, PhD

Dean
Simmons University
stephanie.berzin@simmons.edu

Claudia Coulton, PhD

Distinguished University Professor
Case Western Reserve University
claudia.coulton@case.edu

Shari Miller, PhD

Associate Dean
University of Georgia
semiller@uga.edu

Melanie Sage, PhD

Assistant Professor
University at Buffalo
msage@buffalo.edu

Jonathan Singer, PhD

Associate Professor
Loyola University Chicago
jsinger1@luc.edu

LOOKING BACK

Over the past five years, members of the Grand Challenge to **Harness Technology for Social Good** and their colleagues have:

- **Authored** working papers on [harnessing big data](#) in social work and [innovating social work practice](#) through the integration of technology
- **Articulated and advocated** for [policy recommendations](#) including:
 1. **Expanding** internet connectivity for underserved households
 2. **Unlocking** government data to drive solutions to social problems
 3. **Opening** the possibility of social work practice across state lines
- **Hosted** a six-part webinar series covering such topics as [telemental health](#), [thanatechnology](#), and [digital mapping](#) as well as a special webinar on COVID-19, [“Leading in a time of crisis”](#)
- **Participated** in [Project Connect](#), an initiative of the University of Washington School of Social Work for “social work students to gain valuable experience by working with local agencies to support vulnerable populations impacted by the COVID-19 crisis”
- **Hosted** a conference, sponsored by the University of Southern California, on social work and technology
- **Published** numerous articles and a book, [“Teaching Social Work with Digital Technology,”](#) which aims to help “educators make pedagogically sound, rational, practical, and ethical decisions about integrating technology into their social work programs”
- **Advised** their colleagues and students of social work, both formally and informally, including several DSW students from USC whose final projects were focused on technology, including resource website and apps
- **Developed** SWVirtualPal, a [social media platform](#) for social workers, as part of their work with [iHeartTech](#), the Institute for Healthy Engagement and Resilience with Technology
- **Discussed** the implications of [artificial intelligence](#) for the field of social work in light of COVID-19 in [The Social Work Podcast](#), hosted by network co-lead Jonathan Singer
- **Pioneered** novel applications of virtual reality to social work education at the [University of Utah](#) and [Ball State University](#)

LOOKING AHEAD

Over the next five years, **Harness Technology for Social Good** network members and their colleagues will work toward the following objectives:

- **Provide feedback** on the Technology Advisory Group of the Council on Social Work Education
- **Conduct and publish** a first-of-its-kind, rigorous, comprehensive review of the scholarly literature around social work and technology published between 2015 and 2019. This peer-reviewed publication will provide a better understanding of the state of the science around these issues
- **Engage** in policy-related efforts around the “digital divide,” which has become more striking in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic
- **Collaborate** with all of the Grand Challenge networks to identify creative, effective uses of technology to address issues in each challenge area

Join Us

- grandchallengesforsocialwork.org
- GCSocialwork@ssw.umaryland.edu

 [Join Our Mailing List](#)

 [grandchallengesforsocialwork](#)

 [GCSocialWork](#)

 [@GCSocialWork](#) | [#Up4theChallenge](#)

 [Grand Challenges for Social Work](#)

 [Give](#)