

USA Services Intergovernmental Newsletter

How E-Government is Changing Society and Strengthening Democracy

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New Opportunities for Involving Citizens in the Democratic Process

By Darlene Meskell
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Information and communication technology (ICT) has become a powerful tool for transforming the way governments interact with citizens. The Internet presents amazing new possibilities beyond the established model of democratic government. In that pre-Web world, government disseminated information and citizens could only express their views through the postal service, by town hall meeting, or in pre-scheduled elections. This time-consuming, iterative process, while critical to the exercise of democracy, didn't feel very participatory.

In the 21st century, as the true potential of the Internet is just starting to be tapped, we're seeing its impact on democratic processes in new and exciting ways. The Internet is providing opportunities for voting online; spreading awareness of lesser-known candidates for public office; permitting citizens to easily petition the government on important issues; helping police fight crime; allowing the public to weigh in on state budget priorities and government regulatory proposals; and making Congress and congressional campaigns more transparent. Online activism, like Moveon.org, can have a direct impact on the political process; videos deliver questions directly from citizens to televised presidential campaign debates; Brazil introduces electronic voting; and Minnesota allows citizens to participate in legislative debates in real-time. Governments now are beginning to post blogs and deliver crucial information in virtual space such as Second Life; national leaders can engage in two-way communications with online petitioners; and national conversations take place with point-counterpoint videos on YouTube.

Recognizing the sophistication of the public and the ways people now make their presence known online, government entities have increasingly begun to harness the potential of the Internet to meet their

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constituents online, because that's where people are making their voices heard and where decisions are being made. Electronic government provides citizens with quicker and easier access to information and services and facilitates decision-making that permits broad grass-roots engagement with the democratic process. Citizen input is not just a matter of convenience any more; it's become an essential for how democracies work.

In recent years, there has been much discussion about the public's lack of trust in government. Much of this distrust is attributed to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the inner workings of government, both in the legislative and civil service arenas. Failure to provide instant, accurate, copious government information on demand and not engaging citizens in the development of public policy feeds a growing cynicism and destroys trust.

This newsletter explores some of the many ways technology is making government processes more accessible and expanding citizen participation in public policy decision-making. It documents the first steps in what is certain to become a wave of remarkable technological applications that will continuously change the way citizens and the governments that represent them interact. The articles describe many of the ways electronic government is:

- Building Trust in Government
- Engaging Citizens
- Facilitating Public Comment
- Using Social Media, and
- Getting to Mature E-Democracy.

Building Trust in Government

Interactive Web-based programs and electronic tools dramatically increase the opportunities for citizens to actively participate in their government. E-Government systems offer maximum transparency and

enable participants to watch the players in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government and to see the impact of their own interactivity. ***E-Democracy in Minnesota*** allows residents to watch legislative debate on television or the Web, read proposed amendments online, and send comments directly to their lawmakers as the debate unfolds. ***MAPLight.org*** is ***Shining a Light on Money and Politics*** by correlating campaign contributions with how legislators vote, thereby providing a window into the connections between money and politics. ***Building Trust in Government in Brazil through Electronic Voting*** describes the evolution of 100% electronic voting in the Republic of Brazil, where voting is compulsory.

Stimulating Citizen Engagement in Government in Hampton, Virginia is part of the city's strategy to enable and stimulate citizen involvement in the process of community governance. ***Online Citizen Participation Service in Korea*** is one of that country's efforts to enhance the transparency and credibility of public administration through citizen participation.

Engaging Citizens

E-Government allows citizens a level of engagement—without leaving their homes—never before made possible. For the Environmental Protection Agency, ***Engaging Citizens Through E-Government*** is near and dear to its mission, which calls for citizen participation in decisions about clean air, water, and the overall environmental quality of their neighborhoods. The ***Gainesville Police Department Engages Citizens and Enhances Public Safety*** by involving citizens in helping to make their communities safer places in which to live.

The Open House Project Helps Congress Define Transparency Reforms by offering recommendations to Congress on ways to more

effectively use technology to further transparency in its operations. The Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency redesigned its website to provide visitors with a user-friendly experience while telling the agency's stories directly to the public. ***So you Want to Podcast***, the author asks, proudly offering suggestions based on his agency's experience. The city of Seattle is helping to close the digital divide and encourage a technology-healthy city with a ***Technology Matching Fund that Helps Seattle's Residents Help Themselves***. The State of Maine's innovative Internet practices are creating ***Generational E-Democracy in Maine***, bringing people closer to their government and enhancing democracy. Recognizing the need for a standardized approach to this new medium, the Australian Government's ***Principles for ICT-enabled Citizen Engagement*** provide guidelines for agencies wanting to enhance citizen participation in government through the use ICT.

Public Comment

Governments are collecting and using public opinion to improve the ways they deliver services to citizens. For example, in the United Kingdom, there is a long tradition of citizens presenting petitions at the door of Number 10 Downing Street, the home of the Prime Minister. Now, the door of Number 10 Downing Street is a virtual one, as current technology updates this practice with ***E-Petitions and Two-Way Communications with the Prime Minister***. Sometimes, citizen concerns are sought to help the government improve its processes, when, for instance, ***Citizen Communities Compel Change for E-Grant Process***. In the case of e-grants, citizen groups offering their opinions improved the initial, basic processes set out in the U.S. government's Grants.gov initiative.

Well-designed structures and processes can enable government

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officials and citizens to hold well-informed and productive discussions online, as in. ***The Great Lakes Water Quality Web Dialogue. Engaging Your Public in Today's World*** demonstrates how different levels of government are using software to engage citizens and benefit from their collective ideas.

If you ***Think It's Easy to Balance a State Budget, Click Here*** when a non-partisan California group takes its Internet tool to schools and civic groups to allow Californians to tell their legislators what they want in policies, programs, and budget priorities. Budget trade-offs that were once handled in back-rooms of the state Capitol are now out in the open for everyone to view, and citizens can juggle the priorities themselves and see how their decisions compare to the Legislature's. At the heart of ***E-Democracy in Action: Locally-Driven Conservation*** is "greenprinting," a process used by the Trust for Public Land that uses Geographic Information System (GIS) models to map a community's priorities for its natural resources. Greenprinting can help galvanize public support for a particular use and encourage partners to work toward common conservation goals to guide growth management efforts.

Using Social Media

Government is on the edge of radical change in the way it communicates with its constituents. Increased interactivity is important for promoting not only online engagement of citizens and public servants, but also offline engagement. The IBM Center for the Business of Government finds ***Federal Blogging Is Poised to Take Off***, and discusses this new technology as a way to foster improved communications in the public sector, both with citizens and internally within organizations. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention (CDC) is taking advantage of as many technologies and media as feasible to get its health messages out to as many people as possible. Its presence on the 3-dimensional multi-user virtual environment "Second Life" is one component of CDC's comprehensive effort. ***CDC in Second Life*** has a first-hand look at the evolution of a new form of blended social and educational networking to take the message to the audience.

One of the most intriguing trends for government information dissemination is ***Government Information Outreach in Social Media and Virtual Worlds***. The National Library of Medicine is collaborating with others in the government health community to find more effective mechanism to deliver health information in an emergency. The Library of Congress is sponsoring ***Government Participation in Social Networks, Joining the Conversation*** using blogs and other social media to educate online communities and enhance citizen discovery of the content of their online collections.

Millions of viewers experienced ***Uploading Democracy*** watching ***Candidates Field YouTube Questions*** in a televised presidential debate in the United States on July 23, 2007. Viewer-created videos, later posted to YouTube, allowed ordinary citizens to pose questions directly to the candidates in real time. The ground-breaking format gave voice to ordinary citizens not normally able to participate in such a forum. The 37 video questions, selected from thousands submitted in advance, drove the debate and showed the candidates and the nation a new form of participatory democracy.

Getting to Mature E-Democracy

Click-Through Democracy poses questions about the positives and negatives of public comment through

mass e-mail campaigns that allow thousands of individuals to send duplicate e-mails by simply clicking a "take action" button. There is a need for simple guidelines for separating thoughtful comments from electronic form letters. Steven Clift, Chair of E-Democracy.org, who believes that government should be leading the charge into an increasingly and fundamentally interactive society, offers ***Ten Practical Online Steps for Government Support of Democracy***. And lest we forget, online interaction between citizens and government will be unworkable unless the process and technology safeguards are in place to ensure that the information exchanged with individuals is protected. Teams are in place through the federal government to create and institutionalize the systems that will safeguard individual privacy and system security. One of these, the cross-agency e-government initiative ***E-Authentication, is Safeguarding Citizen Identity***. The E-Authentication Identity Federation creates an environment in which federal agencies can rely on electronic identity credentials issued and managed by other public and private organizations to verify/validate the identity of individuals accessing their online applications.

These articles document the many ways government—and citizens—are using new technologies to interact, communicate and strengthen democratic institutions. ■

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E-Democracy in Minnesota

I. Minnesota: On-Air Legislative Coverage Available Without a Subscription

By Steve Senyk
Director of Senate Media Services
Minnesota Senate

In 1996, Minnesota state lawmakers took a giant step towards transparency when they opened their chamber doors to Minnesota residents by over-the-air broadcasts of floor sessions and select committee hearings. Unlike nearly all other states with televised legislative proceedings, most Minnesota residents are able to watch their lawmakers at work without the need to subscribe to cable or the Internet.

Senate Majority Leader Larry Pogemiller led the efforts to televise Senate proceedings. "Having informed citizens is essential to a healthy democracy. Allowing more people to see and hear what we do in the state Senate is good for all of us," he said.

Through a partnership with Twin Cities Public Television, the Minnesota Legislature delivers daily programming to over one million homes in the Twin Cities and surrounding area. The programming airs on TPT 17, a UHF channel, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. each day of the legislative session. About 10 high-profile floor and committee debates are televised after 5:00 p.m. per year as well.

In past years, Nielsen ratings indicated that 4,000 to 6,000 Twin City households are tuned into proceedings throughout the day, with some high-profile debates and press conferences reaching up to 25,000 to 30,000 households. The programming is produced by Senate and House staff. Coverage consists of floor sessions and committee and press conferences, as well as public affairs programs and issue-oriented features and historical segments.

In addition to broadcasting proceedings directly to homes, the Minnesota Legislature's television services include providing a video feed to the Twin Cities broadcast news organizations. The service enables political reporters to incorporate floor and committee debate highlights into their evening newscasts.

As broadcast television moves from analog to digital transmission and the number of over-the-air broadcast channels expand, even greater opportunities will exist for producers of legislative coverage. The Minnesota

Legislature will be entering an agreement with the Minnesota Public Television Association for statewide, over-the-air digital broadcasts of its programming.

Through the use of technology, active participation in democratic institutions is greatly increased. In fact, Minnesota residents today can watch legislative debate via television or the web, read the proposed amendments online, and send comments directly to their lawmakers as the debate unfolds.

Pogemiller said, "We know people are watching. They call the Capitol to let us know when they agree or disagree with what lawmakers are doing. It's always good to hear directly from citizens, even when they're unhappy."

II. The Minnesota Legislature Online

By Robbie LaFleur
Director, Minnesota Legislative Reference Library

At the Minnesota Legislature, e-democracy is an attitude, a daily activity, and a goal. The attitude dates back to 1994, when a legislator asked staff members to put legislative documents on the Internet. Why should legislative information just be available to people who manage to come to the Capitol? The Minnesota Legislature has a tradition of transparency and strong citizen outreach, and the Internet provided a new opportunity to continue that tradition. In the following years, the Legislature's website built citizen involvement into the legislative process by offering easy access to bills, statutes, guides, video and audio coverage of proceedings, and analytical reports supporting legislation.

The commitment to using technology to strengthen democracy and citizen involvement remains strong and leads to constant improvement and innovation. For example, bills were published on the web early on, followed by improvements in search capabilities, in how quickly bills were posted, and in presentation. Now you can subscribe to the "MyBills" personalized bill tracking system and choose to be notified of new bills and legislative actions via e-mail or an RSS feed.

Today's citizens expect and are able to watch the proceedings of the Legislature online at their convenience. It's only been a few years since the first audio and video of House and Senate floor debates were available on the web; now online audio coverage of all committee hearings

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and floor sessions is available, and many include video coverage as well.

Timely access to documents produced by legislative offices strengthens the Legislature's image as an open institution. Rich background on policy issues is available to citizens as well as legislators. For example, the House of Representatives Research Department recently produced over 100 "Short Subjects"—two-page explanations of legislative issues to help educate newly elected legislators. Those same great overviews are available to the public online. The House and Senate Fiscal Analysis Offices publish useful spreadsheets and piecharts to help explain the complexities of the state budget. Informative newsletters help citizens follow the Legislature throughout the session. The weekly issues of the House "Session Weekly" and Senate "Briefly" are augmented by daily online updates.

Opportunities to learn about and reach legislators become more extensive with each session. Web pages for House members can include biographies, links to bills authored, RSS feeds of press releases, district maps, video interviews, and podcasts. In the Senate, members have the opportunity to create secondary web pages, and several have added links to additional press releases, surveys, or video clips. Legislators note that they receive few "snail mail" letters any more, and they now struggle with huge volumes of e-mail.

Representative Gene Pelowski, Chair of the House Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections Committee, notes a huge transformation since he was first elected in 1986. He feels that easy access to legislative documents, legislator e-mail addresses, and audio and video coverage of floor debates and committee hearings, makes the legislative process less intimidating. Citizens are more attuned to the process. "It's taken away the veil. The process is demystified; there's no magic here anymore." Rather than sending general comments, constituents now comment on particular sections or items in specific bills and cut and paste sections into e-mail correspondence.

Webcasts of legislative hearings and floor sessions allow citizens to follow legislation in real time or at their own convenience. Additions such as agendas, minutes, and daily online articles from the public information offices

enhance the ability of citizens to thoughtfully follow the process and contribute in a meaningful way. Representative Pelowski was impressed at the number of people who regularly watched his committee hearings on the web during the legislative session, particularly because the committee met from 8:00-10:00 in the morning. "They'll comment, and they are from all over the state."

E-democracy has become a daily activity. As access to legislative proceedings and documents has increased, Minnesota citizens have become more active participants in the legislative process on a daily basis. Even modest developments have had an important impact, such as web-based calendars and e-mail notification of committee hearing schedules. Once that information became available, time-constrained citizens could more efficiently plan to testify at hearings and know when to contact legislators about the issues they were following.

E-democracy exists, but enhancements continue. For example, the Office of the Revisor of Statutes implemented a new XML-based bill drafting system, and an important benefit to all citizens has been improved searching of bills, laws, and state agency rules. To reach more citizens, programmers in the office are now working to improve the search interface for citizens with visual limitations who use screen readers.

Many members of the Minnesota Legislature are eager to develop additional ways to contact citizens and encourage participation in the legislative process. They are interested in more robust opportunities to communicate with citizens, more online public discussions, more online surveys and polling, and more communication among members of a committee. Finding adequate funds to develop systems, purchase and customize software, and upgrade hardware is a continuing challenge, but the Minnesota Legislature website has a strong foundation on which to expand its e-democracy efforts in the future. ■

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MAPLight.org: Shining a Light on Money and Politics

By Dan Newman
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MAPLight.org

Question:

- After being elected, does your Congressperson vote in line with your values?
- Does your Congressperson take money from tobacco companies? Labor unions? Oil companies?
- Does your Congressperson vote in accordance with your interests or with big-money special interests?

MAPLight.org is a groundbreaking public database that can provide answers to these and other questions. (The “MAP” in MAPLight.org stands for “Money And Politics.”) After more than a year of research and technical development, MAPLight.org launched its groundbreaking website in May 2007, tracking contributions to and votes by members of Congress.

This federal search engine doesn't just track bills. It also provides a detailed analysis of the support and opposition these bills garner from interest groups and the campaign contributions given by those interest groups to members of Congress. Website visitors can track the impact of political contributions at the federal level, day-by-day and vote-by-vote.

MAPLight.org is non-profit and non-partisan. It combines campaign contribution information from the Center for Responsive Politics and the National Institute on Money in State Politics with public records of legislators' votes. At the click of a mouse, citizens can now learn which special interests are donating to legislators—and how those legislators are voting on specific issues and bills. MAPLight.org aims to expand citizen

participation by “shining a light” on the power campaign contributions have on legislation, giving citizens timely and detailed information about their elected officials.

The correlation of money and votes that MAPLight.org exposes is information that previously would have taken days or weeks to compile. For example, on May 7, the U.S. Senate passed an amendment to prevent consumers from buying prescription drugs from abroad. Visitors to MAPLight.org can easily learn that the pharmaceutical industry, which supported this amendment, gave an average of \$70,181 to each Senator voting “Yes” on this amendment—more than 2.5 times as much as the \$25,914 average the industry gave to each Senator voting “No.” The industry-backed measure passed by a vote of 49 to 40. (Contribution amounts are from 2001-2006.)

Visitors to our website can drill down and see how their individual legislator voted, along with the amount the legislator received from each contributing industry. Visitors can view a timeline of contributions, showing which legislators received a contribution within a few days of the vote. Site visitors can also get a customized analysis of money and vote data that they can then easily share with others. Information available includes:

- Top 10 interests contributing to each legislator and how often each legislator voted with that interest.
- The amount donated by each contributing interest group and each group's success rate at

passing and stopping legislation.

- Timeline of contributions and votes for each bill, graphically identifying when legislators received large donations before or after their vote.

In addition to covering the U.S. Congress, MAPLight.org also tracks the California Legislature, including the percent of times that legislators voted with each special interest. We will be expanding over time to track money and votes in all 50 states.

Issue-oriented non-profits can also use MAPLight.org to increase their effectiveness. For example, shortly after launching the California MAPLight.org database, Norman Block, President of the Santa Margarita River Foundation—a small non-profit organization—wrote an Op-Ed in the North CountyTimes, the daily newspaper in his area. Mr. Block's organization is trying to protect the Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve from a proposed quarry. He ended his article with a citation of MAPLight.org data:

It is no wonder that these three legislators are eager to support the development of Liberty Quarry. After all, they readily accepted major campaign contributions from builders associations. According to MAPLight.org, of all the Assembly members representing 36 million Californians, Mssrs. Bogh and Benoit are in the Top 10 for campaign contributions from builders associations; and builders associations represent the fourth-highest campaign contributor to Mr. Haynes.

MAPLight.org makes it possible for organizations like the Santa Margarita

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River Foundation to find and cite money and political data that are central to its cause. By referencing MAPLight.org data, Mr. Block strengthens his arguments against a quarry. Simultaneously, he educates his supporters about the impact of campaign contributions on an issue that is deeply personal and motivating to them.

Our website recently received first prize in the NetSquared Innovation Awards, a contest for the best non-profit technology project. Projects from around the world—more than 150 in all—were judged on social impact, technical innovation, and sustainability. This award is a recognition of the significant impact of making government information available to everyone in a wide-ranging, easy-to-use way.

MAPLight.org is designed to help keep government closer to the consent of the governed—American

citizens. A well-functioning democracy depends on constituents' meaningful access to knowledge about their elected officials. This transparency leads to increased accountability for legislators; constituents can now demand explanations about why legislators voted a certain way and from whom they received campaign contributions. As Justice Louis Brandeis said, "Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants."

The idea for the website came about when it was recognized that traditional grassroots organizing, while vital, is not enough. Putting key government data into the hands of citizens empowers them to hold legislators accountable and facilitates the ability of citizens to take action on issues they care about. Over time, MAPLight.org has the potential to improve trust in government, as citizens hold their

legislators accountable for their votes and legislators respond.

Websites such as MAPLight.org are part of a broad movement that is making use of the Internet and "Web 2.0" technologies to make government information publicly accessible and to increase government transparency. This kind of work is the wave of the future. With the power and bandwidth of today's Internet, it is no longer necessary to pore over and cross-reference documents for thousands of hours long after the data is relevant. MAPLight.org and other sites like it allow the public to follow the money trail on specific issues they care about in real-time. ■

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Building Trust in Government in Brazil Through Electronic Voting

By Danilo Piaggese
Chief, Information and Communication Technology
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Brazil is a presidential and federative republic with considerable decentralized federalism. It is made up of 26 states and a federal district (Brasilia). The government includes a directly elected president with a national constituency and a congress. The legislature is made up of a 513-member Chamber of Deputies and an 81-member Senate. Congresspersons serve for a basic four-year term, while senators serve for eight years. The states have unicameral legislatures that are elected simultaneously with congress. The municipalities have city councils that serve for four-year terms; municipal elections take place two years after state and national elections.

The computerization of the electoral system started in 1986 with the development of the National Registry of Voters. The development of this central database system

improved the reliability of the registration process by preventing voters from registering in more than one local registry. It also increased the efficiency of the registration process and developed a computerized network to connect The Tribunal Superior Eleitoral with the 27 Regional Electoral Courts and the 2,900 precincts. The development of this network was the first step toward the more ambitious objective of establishing an automated vote counting process.

Electronic count was introduced in 1994. A year later, a task force put forth a proposal for the development of a computerized ballot box. The proposal was sent to all institutions, political parties, and ministries in the country. Experts from the federal ministries were invited to participate in establishing the system's technical

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requirements and specifications. The electronic voting machine was first tested in the municipal elections of October 1996. The test included cities with more than 200,000 voters and all state capitals, involving 33% of the voters. A second test was performed during the 1998 general election and included cities with more than 40,000 voters, covering 67% of all voters. The system was first tested in the entire country during the 2000 municipal elections.

The voting procedure is quite straightforward. A voting machine consists of two terminals installed in each polling station. The first, a numerical keyboard with a two-line liquid crystal screen, is used by the representative of the voting board to type a voter's identification number. If the voter is registered in the precinct, his or her name is displayed on the screen and identification is accomplished. The second terminal is used by voters, and it also includes a keyboard and a liquid crystal display. First, voters type their candidate's identification number. The screen shows the candidate's name, initials of the party or coalition he/she belongs to, and his/her photo. After verifying that all data are correct, voters press "enter" to confirm their choice. The keyboard contains two additional keys. The first is the correction key that allows voters to restart the process. The second one allows a voter to cast a blank ballot.

The Trustworthiness of Electronic Voting

The trustworthiness of the electronic voting service is embedded in institutionalized procedures as well as the technical features of the software and systems. This combination of procedures and technical features provides security for the system and software before and during the election.

Software development stops 180 days before the elections. The source code is made available to the technical experts of political parties so they can ensure that it complies with approved legislation and test the reliability and trustworthiness of the entire system. Sixty days before the elections, the software is sealed during a public ceremony. Representatives from political parties and civil society are invited to participate in order to digitally sign the compiled copy of the software code. During this ceremony, a

sequence of important events takes place. The first is the generation of hash-function tables to prevent the software's source code from being modified and verified afterwards. The second step is the digital signing of the compiled version of the software source code to ensure the integrity of the software uploaded into e-voting machines. In the third step, software applications, which are already digitally signed and encrypted, are distributed to the regional electoral court (Tribunal Electoral Regional, TRE), which is the authority managing the electoral process.

E-voting machines are put in place on the day before elections. However, a percentage of these machines, depending on the number of voters in the state, are taken back to the TRE to check their reliability. At 7.30 a.m., on the day of the election, the president of the precinct, in the presence of representatives of the Voting Board and the political parties, turns e-voting machines on and runs a calibration check. Detailed information on the votes is printed and signed by the president of the precinct and representatives of political parties on the day after the election. The data can then be independently verified by several groups, including the electoral committee and political parties.

The system itself is protected by a security infrastructure that prevents data from being intentionally or unintentionally modified and/or deleted. The security of the system comprises two separate programs loaded on all voting machines. The system auditing program records all transactions performed on the particular machine, including initialization and the casting of every vote, as well as machine downtimes due to power failures, print-outs requested, and other such information. All transactions are time stamped. Transaction records from a sample of machines are examined following the conclusion of the voting process. The system security program prevents any tampering with the actual machine, such as, for example, the removal of the diskette on which votes are stored. Any such action will result in the machine shutting down. ■

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Stimulating Citizen Engagement in Government: Hampton, Virginia

By Charles N. Sapp, Ph.D.
Hampton City Council
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Assistant City Manager
Hampton, Virginia

In a recent essay for the IBM Center for the Business of Government, Donald F. Kettl highlighted “citizenship that work(s) more through engagement than remoteness” as a key imperative for the performance of American government in the 21st century. He went on to say that this mandates “a new role for citizens, one that requires them to rethink their connection to—and involvement in—the pursuit of public interest.”

It is within this context that the city of Hampton, Virginia, has developed a strategy designed to both enable and stimulate citizen involvement in the process of community governance. The strategy is built around four pillars: (1) citizenship skills; (2) quality information; (3) information infrastructure; and (4) public venues.

1. Citizenship Skills

Alumni from the following initiatives are a key source of recruits to serve on various community boards and commissions and serves as a farm team for further community leadership development.

Hampton Civic Community College (HCCC) – Students participate in an engaging curriculum that teaches them about the organization, operations, and services of the city government through a combination of lectures, panel discussions, and field work. Since its inception in 1994, the HCCC has graduated some 455 citizens, 130 of them since 2004. (www.hampton.gov/neighborhoods/college)

Neighborhood Leadership Institute – This institute offers leadership knowledge and development training to neighborhood organizations with the goal of increasing the effectiveness of their neighborhood organizations. Over 210 citizens have graduated from this program since its inception in 2004. (www.hampton.gov/neighborhoods/college)

Youth Commission – This award-winning model for youth civic engagement acknowledges that young people have a real stake in improving the places where they live, learn, play, and work. Youth civic engagement provides meaningful opportunities for young people to serve others, to influence decisions, and to gain leadership and work experience. (www.hampton.gov/foryouth)

2. Quality Information

According to a Hart-Teeter study for the Council for Excellence in Government, citizens identified greater public access to information as one key benefit of e-government. From the citizen’s standpoint, quality information is at once accurate, complete, and timely. The Internet and a variety of associated tools now provide access to information that was not previously readily available to the public. Hampton relies heavily on technology to help increase access to the legislative process and the supporting information.

Decision Support Data Packages – The city maintains a robust website that provides in-depth decision support information identical in

content and timeliness to that received by City Council members. The information management system allows public review of entire agenda packages, including background reports, resolutions, accompanying slide presentations, and zoning maps. Full-text search capabilities permit in-depth research, with links to Notices of Action, the history of legislative items, and complete council minutes dating back over half a century. (www.hampton.gov/council/council_documents.html)

On Demand Video – While Hampton live-broadcasts City Council and Planning Commission meetings on the local cable public access channel, and over the Internet, it is also possible to watch past meetings from an archive. Citizens may view the entire session or skip directly to an agenda item that interests them. Video is also linked directly to the associated decision support packages, allowing citizens to search for a specific legislative item of interest using a full-text search tool and then navigate directly to the portion of the meeting where the item was deliberated and acted upon. (www.hampton.gov/council/council_meetings.html)

3. Information Infrastructure

Even the best e-government access strategies can be thwarted by the lack of high-speed Internet access.

Digital Infrastructure – Hampton is aggressively pursuing the building of fiber plant infrastructure within the community, collaborating continuously with incumbent

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communications providers and new entrants into the market. Believing that electronic infrastructure is analogous to streets and roads for the 21st century, the city staff has actively engaged to build partnerships, plan the telecommunications highway system, promote digital inclusion, and push for large bandwidth capacity at affordable prices. Such efforts have increased awareness, stimulating incumbent service providers to build additional infrastructure and to participate in a competitive environment to reduce prices. Two-thirds of citizens now indicate they have high-speed Internet access available from either home or work.

Digital Inclusion – Over the past several years, the city’s library system has been transformed from a traditional book-lending organization into a full-service information service and access provider. Over 170,000 terminal sessions are initiated each year.

Digital Mobility – Whereas many cities have chosen to subsidize free wireless networks, Hampton was the first in the nation to build a free wireless network based upon a self-sustaining financial model. The result of a public-private partnership, the city’s wi-fi network utilizes an unobtrusive banner within the Internet browser that contains advertisements and links to local vendors. A citizen accessing the Internet from his or her apartment downtown might see an advertisement for an apparel shop across the street. The network produces over one million page views a year and is growing.

4. Public Venues

Skills and access to information have limited value without opportunities to participate in a meaningful way.

Planning Activities – Public planning charrettes provide access to the community, land use, and neighborhood master plan development processes. These sessions are typically attended by hundreds of citizens.

Boards, Commissions, and Advisory Committees – The Redevelopment and Housing Authority, Planning Commission, Finance Committee, Federal Areas Development Authority, Military Affairs Committee, and Neighborhood Commission are examples of key bodies staffed primarily by citizens appointed by the City Council. These bodies have a profound effect on the crafting of public policy and the execution of important community development programs.

Direct E-Mail Exchange – E-mail addresses for elected officials and key city staff are published to allow citizens and decision-makers to routinely communicate on a wide range of public policy topics, resulting in hundreds of e-mails exchanged annually on a wide variety of topics.

Conclusion

This focus on developing citizenship skills, providing quality information, the development of information infrastructure, and creating meaningful public venues has begun to pay off in a more involved public and improved public policy decisions. Results to date have been encouraging; the future looks bright. ■

Charles N. Sapp, Ph.D., is a member of the Hampton City Council and an alumnus of Vice President Gore's National Performance Review. John Eagle is an Assistant City Manager of Hampton, Virginia and former Director of the Information Technology Department. For additional information contact john.eagle@hampton.gov.

Online Citizen Participation Service in Korea

By Hyo-young Lee
Deputy Director, E-Government Headquarters
Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs
Government of Korea

Background and Objectives

The main objective of e-government in Korea is to enhance transparency and trust in public administration through increased participation by the public. Although the public's interaction with government is enabled by the online provision of civil services and disclosure of government-owned information, the current levels of service take-up and satisfaction with public services still have much room for development.

People who attempt to file public complaints and civil petitions are often frustrated by not knowing which agency is responsible for the relevant service, resulting in repeated submission of similar petitions to multiple agencies. Such incidents increase the burden on public administration, lower work efficiency, waste administrative resources, and curtail public trust in government.

In order to address this problem, the Korean government decided to integrate the diverse channels for receiving civil petitions and applications for public policy proposals. It enhanced the system further by creating a portal to serve as a single channel for listening and responding to the voice of the public.

This Online Participation Portal at www.epeople.go.kr is a single window for receiving public complaints and policy proposals. It is also a place to engage in public online forums on national policies through the site's network of administrative agencies, local governments, and public organizations.

The service is expected to deepen public trust in government through enhanced efficiency. It will eliminate repetitive civil complaints and reduce waste in administrative resources through the one-stop processing of civil petitions. The reduction in processing time and assurance of efficient and trustworthy services will further enhance service satisfaction levels.

Progress So Far

As a first phase of the project, Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) and Information Strategy Planning (ISP) initiatives were carried out for three months, from June to September 2004. The Korean government then established an action plan for phased implementation of the Online Citizen Participation Service.

The second phase of the project involved integrating the

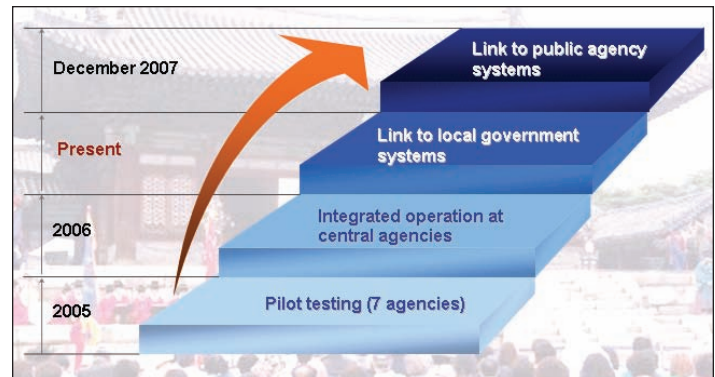


Figure 1: Project Phases

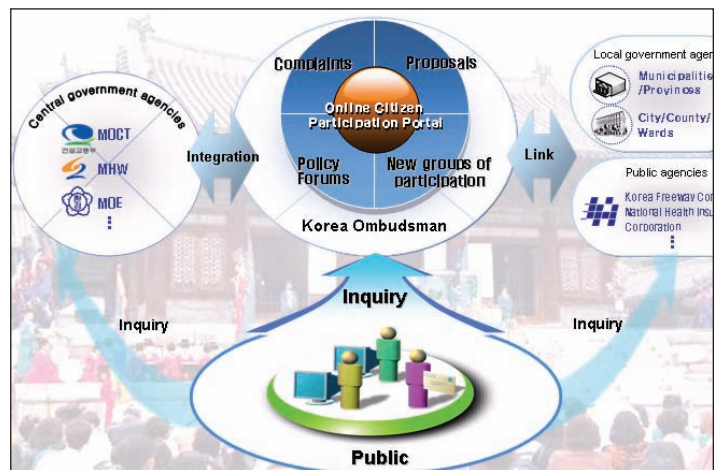


Figure 2: System Overview

civil participation services of all central government agencies. First, based on the results of the BPR and ISP, a pilot project involving seven agencies, including the Presidential Office, the Ombudsman Office, the Ministry of Construction and Transportation, and the Ministry of Environment, was carried out from December 2004 to July 2005. Services provided through the portal were upgraded based on the results of the pilot project and feedback collected from the public users. Beginning December 2005, the Online Citizen Participation Service was disseminated to 49 central government agencies.

Beginning in October 2006, the Service was further enhanced, in terms of stabilized operations and information security, for connection of the portal to local government agencies and public organizations. By April 2007, the system was linked to 20 local government agencies. Next year, the Korean government aims to provide links to more than 200 local government agencies

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for the non-stop processing of civil complaints and petitions.

Main Services

The main services provided by this online portal for citizen participation include: civil complaints, public proposals, policy forums, and community clubs. The portal aims to enhance transparency and credibility of public administration through citizen participation and ultimately to promote an “open government” for the people.

1. Civil Complaints and Public Proposals

The public can more easily ask questions, submit civil petitions, and make public proposals through this single portal. Whereas in the past users did not know exactly which agency to address their inquiries to, www.epeople.go.kr automatically categorizes public applications and refers them to the relevant agency. The agency can also process the inquiries more efficiently by referring to precedent cases. Responses to complaints, petitions, and inquiries are sent to the applicants via e-mail or mobile phone SMS service, along with the name of the agency and public servant in charge. Responses to complaints are promised within seven days, but the average time required for processing a complaint has dropped dramatically to 1.6 days. Petitioners who submit policy proposals are promised a reply within 30 days.

2. Policy Forums and Community Clubs

This online portal also provides a venue for public users to engage in forums regarding public policies, to collect opinions, and to conduct e-hearings and e-polls on policy issues. The people can also voluntarily form community clubs among members, after which forum results can be submitted as civil complaints or public proposals.



Figure 4: Online Citizen Participation Service Portal (www.epeople.go.kr)

Key Achievements

The Korean government estimates that the time required for processing petitions and civil complaints has been reduced significantly – the time for processing complicated petitions dropped from 44 days at the end of 2004 to 15.1 days by the end of 2006. The satisfaction rate of users has increased significantly, from 30% in 2005 to 45.9% in 2006, and further to 52.2% as of the first part of 2007.

In terms of cost savings, \$940,000 was saved by reducing the number of applications for civil complaints, more than \$3 million was saved in integrated processing of repeated petitions, and over \$4 million was saved by reduced maintenance costs due to integration of the systems. ■

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Figure 3: System Functions

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EPA: Engaging Citizens Through E-Government

By Molly A. O'Neill
Assistant Administrator
Office of Environmental Information and Chief Information Officer
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

The topic of how e-government is changing society and strengthening democracy is especially relevant for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Our mission of protecting human health and the environment is only possible with the involvement of many outside of the agency, especially citizens who have a keen interest in how clean their water is, how safe the air is to breathe, and how to ensure the environmental quality of their own neighborhoods.

The Environmental Protection Agency is, by legislation, a regulatory agency. Information technology is enabling a new level of citizen involvement and transparency in our core business process, which is how we develop, improve, and make final the regulations that safeguard us now and for generations to come. Through the President's Management Agenda, EPA has developed and is now operating the award-winning E-Rulemaking portal (<http://www.regulations.gov/fdmspublic/component/main>). This is the one place citizens can go to see all rules the entire federal government—not just EPA—is proposing. Citizens search for and comment on proposed rules and carefully monitor this very important work the federal government does on their behalf. Transparency and involvement in the process are made easier by technology.

The second key area of progress is how EPA is leveraging the web to do what is fundamental to the agency's value structure—which is to provide access to the data we have. "Window to My Environment" (<http://www.epa.gov/enviro/wme/>) is a powerful, web-based tool that provides a wide range of federal, state, and local information about environmental conditions and features in a given area. The application is provided by EPA in partnership with federal, state, and local governments and other organizations.

For those interested in analyzing the toxics released in their neighborhoods and/or states, EPA developed the TRI (Toxics Release Inventory) Explorer (<http://www.epa.gov/triexplorer/>). This tool allows users to display multimedia TRI data on chemical releases and waste management on a map or download the data for use in other applications.

In January 2007, we launched the EPA Geospatial Data Access Project (http://www.epa.gov/enviro/geo_data.html). The project provides downloadable extensible markup language (XML) files containing key facility information for use in mapping and reporting applications. The file currently contains close to 60,000 records, including those of facilities on the Superfund National Priorities List, in the Toxics Release Inventory, the National Pollutant Discharge Permit Elimination (Majors) Permit Compliance System, and EPA's Performance Track Program. To date over 200 individuals have signed up to receive e-mail notifications of data updates, added datasets, and other topics of interest from this groundbreaking project designed to enhance access to environmental information.

One of the criticisms of the federal government is that it builds large national stovepipe systems that do not allow integration of data by other partners. At EPA, we have developed, with our state and local partners, the largest Environmental Information Trading Network in the world today (<http://www.epa.gov/exchangenetwork/index.html>). Internet based, XML and web service enabled, the network breaks the stovepipe model and allows anyone at any level of government on the network to freely exchange data. This frees our state, local, and tribal partners to build their own systems on their own schedules and use the network to exchange the data for the environmental problem at hand.

So much of what we hear today is how important collaboration is to solve the multifaceted problems facing our nation. Scientifically defensible data are imperative for sound environmental decision making. Our e-gov response has been to develop a portal called the Science Portal (<http://portal.epa.gov/ESC>) where scientists, no matter where they live and work, can collaborate, exchange data, and more efficiently complete this valuable work.

What has been on my mind lately as a CIO, and I would think a number of other CIOs, is how to provide transparency and ready access to all the data resources an agency has, whether websites, databases, content management systems, or any other way we store and manage data. As the amount of information increases and people's expectation and need for it becomes more and more immediate, we need to find ways to navigate and discover these important resources. This means continued investment in new search capabilities including meta data and tagging. While we incorporate the latest search technologies, we also need to seek the experience of information specialists in each agency who have expertise in helping people locate information. At EPA, we are committed to advancing the search and discovery of critical environmental information. ■

Molly A. O'Neill is Assistant Administrator for the Office of Environmental Information and Chief Information Officer, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. For additional information contact Christopher Orlando at Orlando.Christopher@epamail.epa.gov.

Gainesville Police Department Engages Citizens and Enhances Public Safety

By Lieutenant Ed Posey
Gainesville, Florida Police Department, and
Chuck Georgo, Executive Director
NOWHERETOHide.ORG

The majority of citizens in our country will never come into contact with their local law enforcement officers, let alone have exposure to the inner workings of police and sheriffs' departments in their region. The Gainesville Police Department in Gainesville, FL, wanted to change that. They sought out and successfully employed easily available Internet technologies to share the wealth of crime data they collect routinely. The data provides a tool to better engage the citizens of Gainesville in helping to make their communities safer places in which to live. More specifically, the police department wanted to:

- Demystify law enforcement operations for the citizens of Gainesville.
- Motivate community groups to have a stronger hand in addressing crime.
- Enable individual citizens to better protect themselves from criminal activity.

Before the Internet era and the advent of law enforcement websites, citizens had to watch the evening news or read the newspaper to know about the major crime incidents that occurred around them. News reporters had to literally drive to the local police station and read a paper blotter, or they had to call the station and have a supervisor tell them what was happening. Incidents not reported by the media were very difficult for the average person to find out about. Even if citizens did learn about an incident, they had to either physically go to or call the police station to get a

copy of an incident report. More often than not, they had to wait three days to return to the station to pick up the report, or they had to wait until the report was mailed to them.

Then the Internet arrived. This provided law enforcement agencies with an electronic way for citizens to become more aware of crime and public safety issues in their communities and more involved in helping their local police department, address those issues. Even the simplest law enforcement websites let citizens see the "police blotter" for their community or show photographs of missing persons or local criminals who have been arrested.

The Gainesville Police Department is doing these things and more. They are taking full advantage of the Internet and web technology so that citizens can get the information they need and become informed and involved without leaving the comfort of their homes or businesses.

The department has two websites. The first site answers citizens' basic questions about the Gainesville Police Department, such as:

- What district and zone do I live in?
- Who is the Chief of Police?
- What officer works my area of the city?

The second website is called the "Police to Citizen," or P2C, website. P2C was developed by the technology vendor that provides the police department's Records Management System. The project took six months to develop and implement at a total cost of \$10,000 to the department. The

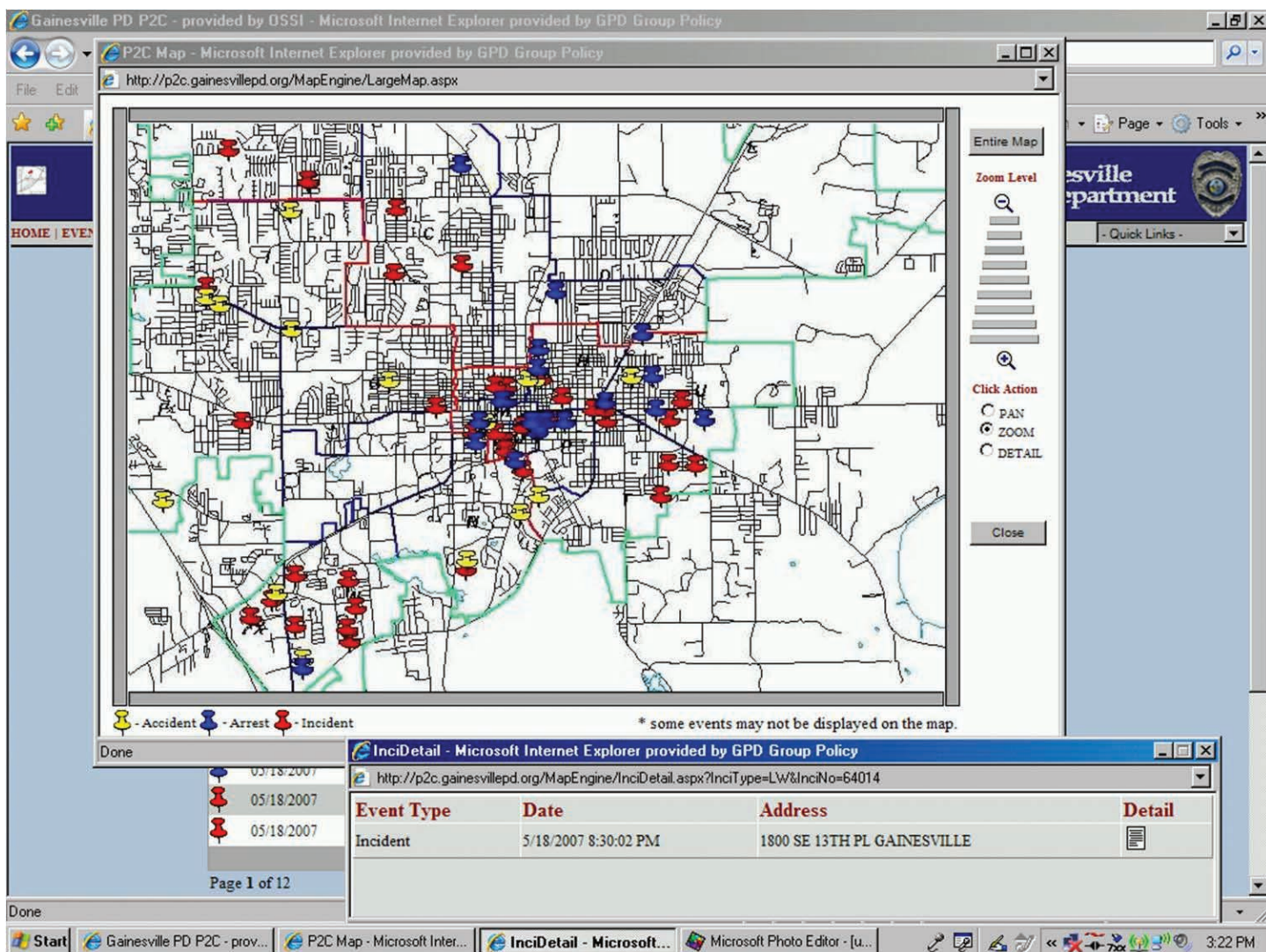
same software now sells for approximately \$30,000.

The P2C website allows citizens to create a police blotter on-demand and to plot crime incidents on a map. By entering a local Gainesville address, citizens can create a map of the city around that address and view accidents, incidents, and arrests that occurred in that neighborhood for the last 30 days. Individual incidents are color-coded red, yellow, or blue to distinguish the different types of events. Citizens can "click" on any dot for more detail about a particular event.

What is particularly innovative about the P2C interface is that the maps are computer generated at the time the citizen requests the information, not static maps manually created by an analyst in the department. To comply with state and local privacy laws, not all police reports are shown on the blotter or on the map; i.e., sexual battery reports are kept off the P2C website. A sample map is shown on the next page.

Why are the maps so important to citizens? Gainesville is the very proud home of the University of Florida, which has an average enrollment of 50,000 students. Before students relocate to the Gainesville area, they want to know where in the region are the best and safest places to live. In the past, our agency would receive many telephone calls from students and concerned parents, asking the department if an apartment complex or residential area was a safe area for the student to live. Unfortunately, because of legal reasons, the department was not permitted to

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Screen capture of Gainesville, FL Crime Incidents and location.

recommend a particular area of the city, nor could the department suggest a student not live in a particular area. Now, through the use of the P2C website, students and their parents can use the interactive maps to identify safe areas themselves.

The P2C website has also been a valuable tool for Gainesville citizens actively involved in crime watch or neighborhood watch activities. They currently use the website to stay abreast of crime in their respective communities and to notify affected neighbors, either in person, via the phone or via e-mail, about those crimes and what they can and should do to protect themselves from future occurrences.

The information relayed to Gainesville citizens does not stop with just crime data. The P2C website also allows citizens to learn about traffic citations that were issued and the locations of vehicle crashes in the region. Citizens can also use the maps to identify roadways and

intersections where traffic lights or signage may need to be improved to reduce vehicular injuries and deaths.

In this era of the Internet, citizens now have the ability to be more aware of the criminal activity occurring in the neighborhoods where they live and work. The Gainesville Police Department's P2C website has proven to be a low-cost and effective e-government tool to give citizens the information they need, not only to better protect themselves, their families, and their property, but also to become more involved in keeping their own neighborhoods and communities safe. ■

Lt. Ed Posey is a 23-year veteran of the Gainesville, Florida, Police Department. He currently serves as the Executive Lieutenant for District Three. For additional information contact poseyej@ci.gainesville.fl.us. Chuck Georgo is the Executive Director of NOWHERETOHide.ORG. He can be reached at chuck@nowheretohide.org.

Open House Project: Helping Congress Define Transparency Reforms

By John Wonderlich
Program Director
Sunlight Foundation

Democracy in the 21st century faces a valuable but critical moment. Transparency can play a key role in radically shifting the relationship between constituents and their elected officials in a way that is both politically significant and civically productive. In this spirit of strengthening democracy, the Sunlight Foundation recently created the Open House Project. This new forum gives government employees and private citizens an unprecedented opportunity to collaborate in defining straightforward reforms that can make congressional information meaningfully accessible to the public.

The Internet is creating a dramatic change, not just in the way we are aware of politics, but also in the way we relate to the systems that carry that legislative information. Through e-mail and new political websites, communities are growing around issues, parties, and candidates. As political web communities develop, a new set of stakeholders for political information is emerging. As the public's capacity for information from the government increases, the incentive structure that exists around sources of public information will be realigned. The formation of the Open House Project is the direct result of disparate groups recognizing their shared interest in legislative information.

Accordingly, citizens, technologists, media figures, and advocacy groups are joining forces. They recognize that access to primary sources—in this case, specific data about the U.S. Congress and its work—is fundamental to all journalism (be it citizen journalism, blogging, or traditional

journalism). As their shared interest in securing broad digital access to legislative data becomes clearer, this diverse coalition of transparency allies is developing a more unified voice.

The technological developments that are transforming newsgathering are also shaping the public's knowledge and appetite for the workings of Congress. Because of increasingly sophisticated broadcast capabilities, news organizations have enhanced their ability to spread timely political information to a constituency eager to blog about such updates. Likewise, when video cameras were introduced onto the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives to cover debate, lawmakers found a new venue to communicate with their constituents.

Until very recently, however, the public has played a comparatively passive role in the ongoing development of legislative communications. As information consumers, American citizens were, by and large, only an audience for news broadcasts and editorial boards, demanding disclosure largely in response to scandal and influencing news content only obliquely.

With the release of its first report in May 2007, the Open House Project has taken a first public step in helping Congress encourage citizens to be civically empowered participants in the democratic process. Proceeding with Speaker Pelosi's initial endorsement of the project and its goals, contributors to the project built a consensus around practical technology reforms to enhance public access to the House of

Representatives. The report to Congress released in May was welcomed by Minority Leader Boehner and has sparked a fruitful dialogue on Capitol Hill.

By deliberating in the open, on a public list, participants are also demonstrating the sort of powerful collaboration they hope to encourage within Congress. The forum has attracted opinion leaders from both sides of the aisle, with prominent bloggers, web developers, librarians, and entrepreneurs taking part in the conversation.

In addition to the valuable contributions of stakeholders normally outside the political process, the Open House Project has also attracted the participation of net-savvy congressional staff members who see the strong political potential of legislative data tools. Lawmakers from both parties find, just as advocacy groups do, that citizens armed with primary sources can become their strongest allies.

Currently, Open House Project collaborators are meeting with congressional members and staff to define the best avenues to begin implementing the recommended reforms. Having long advocated for technological reforms and funding, many congressional staff members, House IT staff, and other technical staff are connecting with newfound allies and are finding enthusiastic support for their ideas through the Open House Project. In addition to a wealth of support and technical advice afforded by the growing list of Open House Project participants, congressional staff are also attracted

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to the specialized audience offered by the group.

For example, a contributor posting a question to the Open House Project discussion list about a program that might lose funding might be met with an explanation of the program's charter from a member of the group that helped start that federal program. Similarly, an official looking into video system upgrades can easily find experts in video systems or informed advice from others who have undertaken similar projects.

Since a system as administratively complex as that of Congress may likely be fraught with waste and redundancy, only rigorous coordination will enable our

legislature to smoothly adapt to the needs of electronic political awareness. Creating a department or agency with broad jurisdiction over existing departments is politically difficult; the Open House Project is filling that need.

The group's reform efforts are now beginning to negotiate the process of implementation and are encountering potential obstacles of partisanship, limited funding, complex and guarded jurisdiction, and the complex inertia of the historical and administrative aspects of Congress. Acting with a strong, shared interest in transparency reform, many of the group's recommendations will succeed, given the group's strong bipartisan support, the decreasing

cost of Internet development, and the stated administrative commitment to transparency in government

In particular, government employees' contributions to the Open House Project are encouraged and can be anonymous. Visit www.theopenhouseproject.com to view updates and follow the link to the Google group to participate in or read the group's discussions. ■

John Wonderlich is the Program Director for the Sunlight Foundation, a Washington, DC, based non-partisan, non-profit transparency advocacy organization. For additional information, contact John via email at johnwonderlich@gmail.com or at 202/742-1520.

So You Want to Podcast?

By Leonard A. Sipes, Jr.
Chair, Website Committee
U.S. Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency

The Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) is a federal executive branch entity providing parole and probation services for Washington, DC. The agency has a national reputation for excellence in design and execution, so when we began planning for the redesign of our website (www.csosa.gov), we wanted a site that matched our reputation. We wanted to provide a web experience that would be user-friendly by giving the public a choice of reading, listening to, or watching story-based accounts of our operations.

The title of our radio and television show is "DC Public Safety." We are now one of the highest ranked shows for criminal justice issues (per key search terms) on search sites such as Google and iTunes. We have been called a "national model for communication" by the International Community Corrections Association. We are a resource for major national websites, like "Justice Talking" by National Public Radio. Our programs are featured on the front page of a Department of Justice faith-based website. We are featured on the U.S. Government's primary web portal, USA.gov. As of April 2007, our podcast site has had 75,000 hits.

How We Began Podcasting

The website committee for the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency wanted to add audio and video content to our redesigned website. Podcasting is the tool that allows us to do that.

Podcasting was something I had heard about, but that was about it. I was reasonably proficient at word processing, e-mail, and Internet search, but no one would accuse me of computer or technological excellence. The thought of podcasting was daunting. I was intrigued by the possibilities, but woefully lacking in podcasting skills.

What Is Podcasting?

Podcasting is recording your voice or a conversation by computer and then placing the recording on a server so others can hear what was said. Podcasting uses an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed that allows others to download the recording onto their computers or to a portable device, like an MP3 player. Your program is now available for anyone in the world with Internet service to listen to. You do not need an iPod or other portable MP3 device to access a podcast. Most people listen to or view podcasts using their home computers.

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Video podcasting uses the same principles. You load a video program created by your agency or a local public access station. Throughout this article, I'll refer to both audio and video efforts as podcasting.

Why Podcast?

All of us in government and the private sector complained that we lacked opportunities to tell our stories without the filter of media. We wanted the public, the media, and our partners to understand who we are and what we do. Without access to money for an advertising campaign, we were almost solely dependant on the media to tell our stories.

Websites were our first opportunity to present ourselves in the way we wanted to be portrayed. Podcasting is now giving us the second opportunity to convey our messages and tell our stories directly to the public.

Podcasting and handheld digital devices are giving the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency the ability to bring citizens along as we do our jobs. We can take citizens with us when we serve warrants. Citizens can join the correctional officer when he or she walks his or her beat in the most difficult part of the prison. Judges can bring everyone into their courtrooms.

Podcasting gives us endless opportunities to present sensitive issues directly to the public. We control the content. We get to say what we want to say and how we want to say it.

What Are the Responsibilities of Podcasting?

Podcasting comes with a new set of responsibilities. We become our own publishers. If we are going to podcast, we need to publish what is fair, honest, and accurate—the same standards we demand from the mainstream media. As someone who has spent nearly 28 years in public relations for the criminal justice system, I fully understand that agencies can see situations through blinders. If we are going to control the message, we need to be certain that we are telling all sides of the story.

The Technical Stuff

- Audio podcasting will cost you about \$1,500 for a computer, software, microphones, headphones, and a mixer (less if you are using an existing computer). It will cost about an additional \$500 for a handheld digital recorder. Get one that is easy to use; user-friendly software exists for both Microsoft and Apple products.
- You can take your existing computer and download or install the software you need. While the geeks in podcasting can argue endlessly about the type and quality of microphones and mixers and settings, a trip to any electronics store can give you the basic information you need.

- **NB:** You will want a two-microphone set-up. This will increase your start-up costs a bit, but interviews are necessary to keep your show interesting. It takes gifted people to inform and entertain by themselves.
- There is great news about the cost of servers. The server is the device you put your podcasts on so anyone with Internet access can watch or listen. There is a wide variety of organizations (available via an Internet search) that will allow you to rent a server or part of a server for \$10 to \$12 a month. Hundreds of people can access your shows at one time without server failure. Your IT department will likely thank you, because they often do not have the bandwidth to provide the same service from your website.

Available Resources

- There are books and websites that explain the process of podcasting. Plug “books” and “podcasting” into any search engine. Go for the books that describe themselves as basic introductions. Books also exist for intermediate levels and marketing. I probably invested 150 hours in reading and Internet searching.
- Get thee a geek! Professional consultants are available if you can pay approximately \$100 to \$150 per hour. Get someone who is excited about podcasting and who looks forward to showing you what equipment to buy and what to do. Consultants can be found at the local community college and in the community. They want to show you how to do it!
- Online instructions abound. Courses are available.

Some Final Thoughts

- Podcasting is less expensive and more affordable than many of us think.
- Podcasting technology is understandable, and you do not have to be a studio engineer to do it. Using a computer and inexpensive microphones, I get quality sound that a couple of years ago would have required a professional recording studio. If I can do it, anyone can.
- I went through lots of trial and error to get to this point and, yes, it was a humbling process at times. I continue to make mistakes and learn. But it's been worth it.

Podcasting is the wave of the future. It will become as important as your website. It's like having a team of proficient public relations specialists on duty 24 hours a day. The time to invest is NOW. ■

Leonard Sipes is a Senior Public Affairs Specialist and Chair of the Website Committee for the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency. For additional information, contact Leonard.Sipes@csosa.gov

Technology Matching Fund: Helping Seattle's Residents Help Themselves

Bill Schrier
Chief Technology Officer
City of Seattle

Many, many people in the United States are online every day, using the Internet, electronic mail, and a variety of other technology tools to conduct their daily business and enhance their personal lives. But—a significant digital divide still exists in our country. Because of where they live or how much they earn, others do not have access to the technology a majority of us take for granted. While access to technology has increased for many, studies still show troubling gaps in access and literacy skills that are essential for full participation in our digital society.

In 1997, the city of Seattle established a Technology Matching Fund (TMF) grant program to support community efforts to close the digital divide and encourage a technology-healthy city.

If a community is contributing volunteer labor, materials, professional services, and/or funds to expand technology access, the city of Seattle will “match” these contributions with cash grants from the Technology Matching Fund.

Seattle uses its Citizens Telecommunications and Technology Advisory Board (CTTAB) to help the Seattle City Council decide how to award the grants. CTTAB was established in 1995 to advise elected officials and the city's Chief Technology Officer on a variety of issues relating to the use of information technology. CTTAB reviews TMF applications and recommends projects.

Technology Matching Fund grants go to eligible organizations to assist them in promoting citizen access to information technology, improving literacy in the use of technology, and applying technology to foster civic engagement. Funded projects have:

- Enabled parents with limited English-speaking ability to access their children's online public school records.
- Allowed immigrants and refugees to obtain essential workforce computing skills.
- Given young people the opportunity to learn digital storytelling and programming as a means of improving academic achievement.
- Provided victims of domestic violence with online access to information on safety.

In 2007, Seattle awarded \$160,000 in Technology Matching Fund grants to 15 community projects that are furthering

the city's commitment to education, inclusion, and race and social justice. Funding for the grants comes from cable franchise fees. Seattle—like many local communities in the United States—allows cable companies to use its rights of way. In return, cable companies pay a 4.2% franchise fee. A portion of this fee is allocated for the TMF.

Recent projects include a wide cross-section of initiatives:

- The **Seattle Municipal League Foundation** built a capability to conduct web surveys, discussion forums, and streaming video. The Municipal League—a “good government” organization—analyzes the results and reports the findings to participants, policy makers, and the media.
- **Reel Grrls** used its grant for a summer program to help teenage girls increase their media production and project management skills. Participating young women produced videos for community non-profit organizations.
- **Sustainable Seattle** trained young people to serve as field assistants for community street-level surveys in 10 Seattle neighborhoods. Survey volunteers used handheld computers, digital cameras, and other technology tools to collect data and communicate community priorities to city government.
- **East African Community Services** taught refugee and immigrant parents basic computer skills. Using these skills, parents are able to access student and school data online, helping their families to take better advantage of Seattle School District programs.
- The **International District Housing Alliance** funded its Citizenship Exam Preparation Project. Homebound, disabled Asian and Pacific Islander immigrants and refugees learned how to prepare for the citizenship exam through an in-home training program using laptops and educational software.
- The **Phinney Neighborhood Association** created a digital media literacy program to help seniors find, critically evaluate, and effectively apply information from digital media sources, as well as produce their own media content.
- **Provail** staged a “Computer Camp for Children with Disabilities.” Underserved children with disabilities

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attended a week-long camp where they learned to use computers, adaptive equipment, and specialized hardware and software. Parents also had an opportunity to understand the equipment, become familiar with necessary skills, and learn how to obtain appropriate technology for their children.

These projects—and many others over the last 10 years—have benefited a wide range of Seattle residents, including youth, seniors, disabled residents, immigrants

and refugees, and victims of domestic violence. The funded projects have provided education, employment training, and opportunities to explore community issues. By harnessing the power of existing community organizations and groups, Seattle's Technology Matching Fund program helps residents "bootstrap" themselves into the digital age. ■

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Generational E-Democracy in Maine

By Matthew Dunlap
Secretary of State
and Lisa Ann Leahy
Office of Information Technology
State of Maine

It is no secret that the youth of our time enjoy a synergistic relationship with technology unparalleled by any other cohort. Generations X and Y rely on it for all aspects of their hurried existence. We observe them "plugged" in to iPods for entertainment, masterfully using laptops for schoolwork, surfing the Internet for research, social networking, communication, and purchasing products. They traverse the world through their fingertips. Our future as a society is reliant on engaging their civil participation by leveraging electronic democracy. The liberties we exercise today were earned by generations of forward thinking individuals.

The E-Path to Maine Lawmaking

Baby boomers in Maine remember all too well the School House Rock Saturday morning civics lessons through the cartoons "How a Bill Becomes a Law," "Preamble" and "Three Ring Government." The Maine Secretary of State website provides a similar learning experience for Maine youth. The site gives an overview of the legislative process with related activities and resources for young people to make the road to

governance less bewildering and the path of Maine lawmaking easier to travel.

The goal of "The E-Path to Maine Lawmaking" site is to de-mystify the Maine legislative process so that youth can understand how the steps in the process result in state laws. Specifically, youth are extended an online invitation to come along on a cartoon journey on "The Road to Maine Lawmaking," or to view the online video, "Person to Person: Legislating Maine," about the state's legislative process. The six online lessons and activities that accompany the video are designed for teachers to help students understand how legislation is introduced, how laws are passed, how public policy decisions affect their lives, and how they can contribute to governance in Maine. A writer's guide is provided to help them write to their legislator, including important tips on what to include in the letter. If they visit the State House, the "Guide to Testifying" will guide them through the public hearing process and help them prepare testimony in front of a legislative committee. "Law Talk" aids in understanding the terms they will hear at the State House and in

public hearings. The "Parliamentary Procedures" page provides links to online sources to help understand the process for running a meeting in an orderly way. If they can't visit the State House and want to listen to a public hearing or legislative debate in the House of Representatives or Senate chambers, they can visit the "Listen to the Legislature" audio link.

In de-mystifying the legislative process for Maine's youth, it is important that young people recognize the fiscal impact of exercising their civic duties. Governor Baldacci presents an interactive "Budget Balancing Education Tool" on the Maine.gov website. This tool allows visitors to view the most current budget projections and adjust expenses and revenues, while viewing the results in real time. They can then send the Governor their balanced budget proposal.

E-Democracy for Kids and Young Voters

Engaging youth to participate in the voting process when they are of age is a vital component of the democratic process. To that end, Maine.gov offers

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an area devoted to this topic. Election information for young voters is presented in several categories:

- **Maine Mock Election**

The Maine Student/Parent Mock Election is an excellent way to encourage young people to become interested in voting and involved in state and national issues and candidates. It is sponsored by the Maine Secretary of State.

- **Maine Youth Vote Media Project**

Maine students are producing public service announcements to explore issues about voting, elections, and why it's important for young people to take an interest in our democracy. It is sponsored by the Maine Secretary of State.

- **Student Activities**

Maine students can download Board Games and play "Run for the Governor's Office" or "Travel the Road to Maine Laws." Maine youth can learn all about democracy, citizenship, freedom, liberty, and civics on the famous quotes page. They can become more familiar with the features of the State of Maine legislative website by searching online for answers in WebQuest.

Preserving Democracy for Future Generations

Pre-college and college age students use the Internet to access digitized archives from past generations for research. The Maine Secretary of State, Matthew Dunlap, is on a crusade to bring digital archives to reality. Secretary Dunlap meets with students from across the State of Maine and impresses upon them that—when it comes to technology—the records of our times are slipping through our fingers every day. In his message to students, he repeats the warning that we are heading toward a catastrophe unparalleled since the burning of the library at Alexandria, Egypt. Interestingly, that same comparison is being made by leading scholars on the topic such as Jim Barksdale and Francine Berman in "Saving Our Digital Heritage" (2007).

While much of the information housed in the archives is intrinsically interesting, such as affidavits from Revolutionary War Veterans or the battlefield reports of the Maine Civil War regimental commander, many might reasonably ask whether such documents have any real, material value. The reason we retain documents such as the original, hand-written constitution, and every variant

published since adoption, is that any fool with a printing press can print copies of a constitution and leave out inconvenient provisions such as the right to a jury trial, free speech, the right to bear arms or to assemble peaceably. The value in retaining the trail of documents affirms in historic evidence that, in fact, we do enjoy these rights because we can trace them to the original meetings where they were first discussed.

As a recognized leader in leveraging the Internet to deliver electronic services to citizens, the State of Maine is identifying and implementing ways to electronically engage younger generations in the democratic process crafted by older generations. The expectation is that, once they understand the principles of governance, they will become more informed, responsible, and involved citizens. ■

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Australia's Principles for ICT-enabled Citizen Engagement

The Principles issued by the Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO), are intended to guide Australian Government agencies considering engaging with citizens using information and communication technology (ICT).



Preamble

What are the Principles?

The Principles are a best practice guide for agencies wishing to engage with citizens using ICT as part of their policy making processes. 'Citizens,' in this context, refers to individuals, business, community and other organisations and sectors. These principles are the result of research of existing national and international principles and with input from agency representatives from all levels of Australian government. The principles may need to be updated from time to time with the advent of emerging technologies, citizen demand and from lessons learnt.

What do we mean by engagement?

The OECD has developed a three stage maturity model for government engagement with citizens using ICT (*Promise and Problems of E-Democracy: Challenges of Online Citizen Engagement*, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/9/11/35176328.pdf>):

Stage 1: Information Stage Government → Citizen

A simple one-way relationship in which government delivers information to citizens.

Stage 2: Consultation Stage Government ↔ Citizen

A two-way relationship in which citizens provide feedback on issues defined by government.

Stage 3: Active participation Stage Government ↔ Citizen

A collaboration in which citizens actively shape policy options, but where government retains the responsibility for final decisions.

It is anticipated that agencies' engagement approaches will vary depending on specific project requirements, their individual progress on the maturity model, resource availability, priorities and constituency expectations.

Why do we need the Principles?

ICT has the potential to increase levels of citizen participation in public discussions on the development of government policy. Citizen engagement using ICT also has the potential to further promote a culture of democratic decision-making in Australia.

One example of citizen engagement using ICT is online engagement. Online engagement can include online forums, Web Logs (BLOGS) on nominated discussion topics or e-mail discussion groups. For an existing example of online engagement, visit Queensland's Get Involved website (www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au)

Who are the Principles for?

The Principles have been developed for agencies across the different spheres of government who are considering engagement using ICT as a means of interacting with citizens.

How will Agencies use the Principles?

The Principles are to operate as a guide to matters agencies should consider before undertaking engagement with citizens using ICT.

It is recognised that some agencies have limited resources to engage online. The Principles are aimed at supporting the development of engagement initiatives, rather than mandating specific outcomes.

Other resources

Agencies planning to undertake a process of online engagement will find additional, practical guidance by consulting the Australian Government's Better Practice Checklist for Online Policy Consultation at http://www.agimo.gov.au/_data/assets/file/33928/BPC12.pdf.

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Principles for ICT-enabled Citizen Engagement

1. Commitment

Agencies committing to engagement using ICT need to ensure citizens have appropriate mechanisms to communicate and participate effectively. Commitment to engagement using ICT is strengthened through the development of partnerships between governments and citizens.

2. Community Focus

When adopting ICT for engaging with citizens, agencies should facilitate information access, knowledge-sharing and discussion amongst participants and, through this, strengthen community consultation, participation and input into government policymaking.

3. Community Capability and Inclusiveness

Agencies need to seek broad and diverse involvement across all sections of the community and not exclude citizens without access to ICT or those who face other barriers. Employing methods that are accessible and/or complement traditional means of engagement will assist individuals to participate and will build their capability for contributing to policy development.

4. Mutual Respect, Confidence, and Trust

To demonstrate respect and build confidence and trust in online engagements, agencies and citizens should agree on consistent standards for communication when engaging with citizens. Agencies need to facilitate clarity of understanding and transparency of engagement processes by disseminating information, guiding participants' input, and explaining how the input will be used in government decision-making.

Confidence and trust between the citizens and government will be built by ensuring that engagement using ICT is a two-way and responsive process.

5. Interactivity and Flexibility

Agencies need to promote active engagement and discussion while employing flexible and innovative ICT-enabled mechanisms to take account of participants' diversity of capability, location, and socio-economic circumstances. The 24/7 capabilities of ICT can be used to help participants inform themselves and enable them to provide considered views in their own time and space.

6. Responsibility and Accountability

Agencies need to inform participants at the outset about how their input will be received and used in policy-making. Once a decision has been taken, agencies should indicate how citizen input through online engagement has been used. Agencies also need to be clear about who is responsible and accountable for the online engagement process and any decisions resulting from such engagement.

7. Security and Privacy

Agencies need to implement privacy protection, information security, and, where appropriate, identity authentication measures. Agencies should comply with relevant security and privacy legislation.

8. Evaluation and Efficiency

Agencies can maximise the efficiency of online engagement through planning and effective collection, facilitation, and processing of participants' input. Agencies need to evaluate the benefits of online engagement by identifying and measuring the impact of online engagement to policy-making. ■

AGIMO is the office within the Australian Department of Finance and Administration that manages the national e-government program. Its website is www.agimo.gov.au.

E-Petitions and Two-way Communications with the British Prime Minister

By Jimmy Leach
Head of Digital Communications
Office of the Prime Minister
United Kingdom

There is a long-established tradition of members of the public presenting petitions at the door of Number 10 Downing Street, the home and office of the Prime Minister—the British equivalent of the White House.

The E-Petitions service at <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk> was designed to offer a modern, online parallel to this practice. E-Petitions makes it more convenient for petitioners to present their petitions and enables them to pass the petition to supporters digitally without incurring significant costs. Unlike paper-based petitions, this new service also provides an opportunity for Number 10 to respond to petitioners via e-mail.

Since its launch in November 2006, the E-Petitions website has proved to be a highly popular innovation in the way that people communicate with government and with the Prime Minister's Office in particular.

The service allows anyone who is a UK citizen to create a petition and to collect signatures via the website. Petitioners are asked to meet basic criteria, set out in an acceptance policy, but we aim to accept most petitions.

Since launch, the site has been very busy. Around 23,000 petitions have been set-up by users, with around 4.5 million signatures originating from roughly 3.5 million different e-mail addresses. The petitions cover a wide range of issues, from repealing the Hunting Act 2004 to restricting the use of lottery money to fund the London

2012 Olympics, prohibiting puppy farms, and “banning ice cream vans from disturbing the peace of British homes with their annoying chimes.”

Around 8,400 petitions are currently live and available for signing; almost 3,200 have finished; and another 11,500 have been rejected.

The information in a petition must be submitted in good faith and in compliance with the law and the Civil Service Code. We reserve the right to reject:

- Petitions that are similar to and/or overlap with an existing petition or petitions.
- Petitions that ask for things outside the remit or powers of the Prime Minister and the government.
- Statements that don't actually request any action.
- Wording that is impossible to understand.
- Statements that amount to advertisements.
- Petitions that are intended to be humorous or that have no point about government policy. (However witty these are, it is not appropriate to use a publicly funded website for purely frivolous purposes.)
- Issues for which an E-Petition is not the appropriate channel (e.g., correspondence about a personal issue).
- Freedom of Information requests. (FOI requests go through other channels.)

The most common reason for

rejection is duplication. Many users commented that there were many petitions on similar subjects clogging up the site. We are trying to eliminate too much duplication or overlap, while balancing the need for the nuances in petitions that are similar, but take the subject in a slightly different direction. Many of the rejected petitions are resubmitted, as everyone is given a second chance. Some users address the issues we raise with them, some prefer not to.

We set ourselves a target of processing new petitions within five working days. In practice, this has sometimes proved tricky, since every petition has to be read to ensure the E-Petitions site does not fall afoul of the law, the Civil Service Code, or other standards expected of a publicly funded website. In a few cases, propriety, ethics, and legal advice have had to be sought from appropriate specialists within the Civil Service. As various issues have been resolved, the speed of handling has improved, and we're now clearing most petitions on the day they arrive.

It is fair to say, however, that we at Number 10 Downing Street have been surprised at the number of petitions received. To keep things both manageable and a justifiable use of resources, we have reluctantly decided that we cannot respond to petitions signed by fewer than 200 people, unless they relate specifically to small groups (for example, people from a small community). And if a petition cannot really be expected to gain a ministerial response—the point is its existence rather than the

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response from government—then we reserve the right to simply not respond.

On occasion, there have been big spikes in traffic when the site has been getting 150 hits per second. This has led to some service issues, with petitioners getting “busy” error pages rather than the service they were expecting. But we have been serving the site at 99.5% reliability, and we are taking steps to further minimise interruptions to the service. In general, we feel that the numbers who have signed up to petition show that the site is working pretty robustly, though we are always looking for improvements.

Finally, it's worth reminding users that the code used by mySociety to build this site for us is open source, so other organisations can build a similar site under the Affero GPL software license. You can download the source code from <https://secure.mysociety.org/cvstrac/dir?d=mysociety> (look under “pet”) and help develop it further. You're welcome to use it in your own projects, although you must also make available the source code to any such projects.

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Citizen Communities Compel Change for E-Grant Process

By Christian T. Harker, PhD
President
Cayuse, Inc.

The impact of e-government is everywhere. For individuals who apply to U.S. government agencies for grant funds, it is profound. Why? A 2002 presidential e-government mandate fundamentally changed the grant application process from paper to electronic submission via Grants.gov. The broad goal of the initiative is to use IT to increase government efficiency and improve delivery of services.

This mandate has both polarized and motivated the grantee community in two concrete ways: (1) grantees lobbied Grants.gov for improvements in the process and in technology capabilities, and (2) they banded together to collaborate and build system-to-system (S2S) solutions. Solutions are needed to protect revenue, reduce costs, and avoid the risks of proposal submission failure inherent in the limited-functionality software from Grants.gov.

Why is this change significant? Because the free software tool supplied by Grants.gov to support the new application process proved far from adequate for securing grant funds—worth \$400 billion dollars—that are essential for the survival of individuals and private and public sector research enterprises. Among the many criticisms of the free tool is that it inhibits the collaborative activities required for grant preparation and submission, resulting in an increased burden on applicants and their support staff.

To date, applicants and groups have invested heavily in mastering the complex process of preparing and

submitting their paper proposals—some up to 600 pages long. Depending on the focus of the proposed research, only 2% to 3% of grant applications are funded, making proposal development and submission a critical, large-scale effort needed to sustain these research enterprises. Moreover, the process is made more complex by the creation of a third-party intermediary, Grants.gov, which receives grant proposals and forwards them to the 26 federal grant-making agencies, each with a different set of well-established technical requirements and institutional policies.

The first community response to Grants.gov, other than a mild form of panic, was to work with government agencies through established channels, including the Federal Demonstration Partnership (thefdp.org) and the Council on Governmental Relations (cogr.org). This approach was somewhat effective. Improvements in implementation and some concessions in the deployment timetable were made because of these discussions. Additionally, many of the more important policies for administering the grant application process were aired, providing a way for both the federal agencies and the applicant community to ease the transition. This dialog continues.

Most examples of the second approach—that of building a better solution—have been self- or research-funded. Cayuse Inc., Duke University, and Pennsylvania State University (PSU) have built solutions

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making the Grants.gov process seamless and accessible for the applicant community.

According to Ken Forstmeier, Director, Office of Research Information, PSU's self-funded S2S initiative is an outgrowth of a decade-long Electronic Research Administration (eRA) strategy that integrates budget building and reporting systems to manage over 1,800 awards with a \$440 million grant portfolio from federal agencies.

Duke experienced a similar business need for the development of its S2S initiative, according to Judith Dillon, Director, Office of Research Support. Duke began its pilot submissions in June of 2006 and submitted 416 proposals totaling \$496 million in requested funds. Like PSU, Duke's self-funded S2S initiative stemmed from an eleven-year investment in a single system to manage the entire research enterprise.

From the Cayuse, Inc. perspective as a private, research-funded S2S developer, essential dialog between the federal government and interested individuals took place in public venues such as the National Institute of Health (NIH) Commons Working Group (CWG). The CWG meetings were critically important given the ambitious implementation schedule and specialized functionality required

for the NIH implementation of Grants.gov.

As the previous examples demonstrate, once software development began, significant and ongoing dialog was, and continues to be, required. Rapidly evolving agency rules surrounding "valid data" have proven to be a moving target for S2S developers. Many of the community's lobbying activities toward the federal participants have centered on managing the rate and scope of changes to the system.

Maintaining the system in the face of these ongoing changes continues to be a daunting challenge, causing some S2S initiatives to flounder due to the technical burden. As with most technical implementations of this scope, building systems in an environment of constant change can be costly and increase technical risk for both the applicant community and the federal agencies. This constitutes the single most important area of concern for the S2S community.

The outcomes so far are promising. In addition to the conspicuous success of the individual S2S efforts on the efficiency of institutional business practices, many more S2S proposals are flowing into the Grants.gov portal. In May 2007, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) reported the receipt of over 3,300

proposal submissions to date from the S2S community.

The lesson learned from citizen involvement in these initiatives is that the systems built by these individuals and teams have fundamentally altered the means by which individuals and enterprises interact with the federal government. This type of response was inconceivable when the process of applying for grants was paper-based. The beneficial results came about, not due to government being more responsive to individual input, but because of the electronic format and business imperatives of the application process. These pressures enabled citizen groups to creatively and effectively band together to improve the basic process set out by the federal government initiatives.

It is clear that the Grants.gov initiative is far from complete, but it has moved into a full production environment that encompasses everyone—government, individuals, and institutions—in a new process with significant benefits. Cayuse will continue to be an active participant in the community efforts to carry this initiative forward. ■

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The Great Lakes Water Quality Web Dialogue

By Frank Bevaqua and Paula Fedeski-Koundakjian
International Joint Commission
Laurie Maak, WestEd
and Nicholas Dewar, Jones & Stokes Associates, Inc.

Overview

To supplement a series of public meetings around the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River, the International Joint Commission (IJC) held a web-based dialogue to bring interested citizens from Canada and the United States into a single, substantive, and coherent conversation. Increasingly, organizations find that they must live with shrinking travel budgets, and citizens find that it is more difficult to attend public meetings. The Great Lakes web dialogue shows that, with a well-designed structure and process, it is possible for government officials and citizens to hold well-informed and productive discussions online. Such positive results do not automatically flow from web-based consultation processes, as the IJC had learned from previous attempts at online discussions. Careful planning is needed, along with a well-designed web dialogue structure and process. Lessons learned from the Great Lakes web dialogue experience are described below.

Structure of the Web Dialogue

In response to a request from the governments of Canada and the United States, the IJC began a public consultation process to identify issues for the governments to consider as they began to review their Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. An integral part of this public consultation was the web dialogue. The agenda for the four-day web dialogue was structured to move from general expectations for the future of the Agreement to more specific issues. The dialogue agenda was posted and announcements inviting participation were issued approximately three weeks in advance. Topics from one day set the stage for the next day's topics, based on clearly defined "desired outcomes." Background resources were provided in a library with recommended readings linked to each topic. A facilitator helped to guide the dialogue, while, each day, a different set of expert panelists informed the discussion of the topics.

The dialogue was conducted simultaneously in French and English, so that the French-speaking residents of the watershed could fully participate. The goal was to provide real-time translation of every contribution to the dialogue. Each participant could select the language of his or her choice and participate in the same dialogue as those using

the other language. At times, there was some delay in the translation.

Reinforce Participation by the Public

The web dialogue was designed to reinforce public participation and strengthen the connection between the participants and the process. The goals for the dialogue were clearly stated on the home page and in the announcement. Staff and members of the Commission were accessible and active participants. The agenda addressed questions that were provided by an advisory group made up of leaders of a diverse group of stakeholder organizations.

Registration to participate in the web dialogue was open to all. Participants could take part at any time of day or night during the four-day dialogue. Information about each participant was linked to his or her name and message. This included his or her role in the dialogue, the body of water he or she lived closest to, and his or her interest in the waters of the Great Lakes. A daily summary was prepared, linked to the agenda, and sent to all registered participants at the start of each day.

Lessons Learned

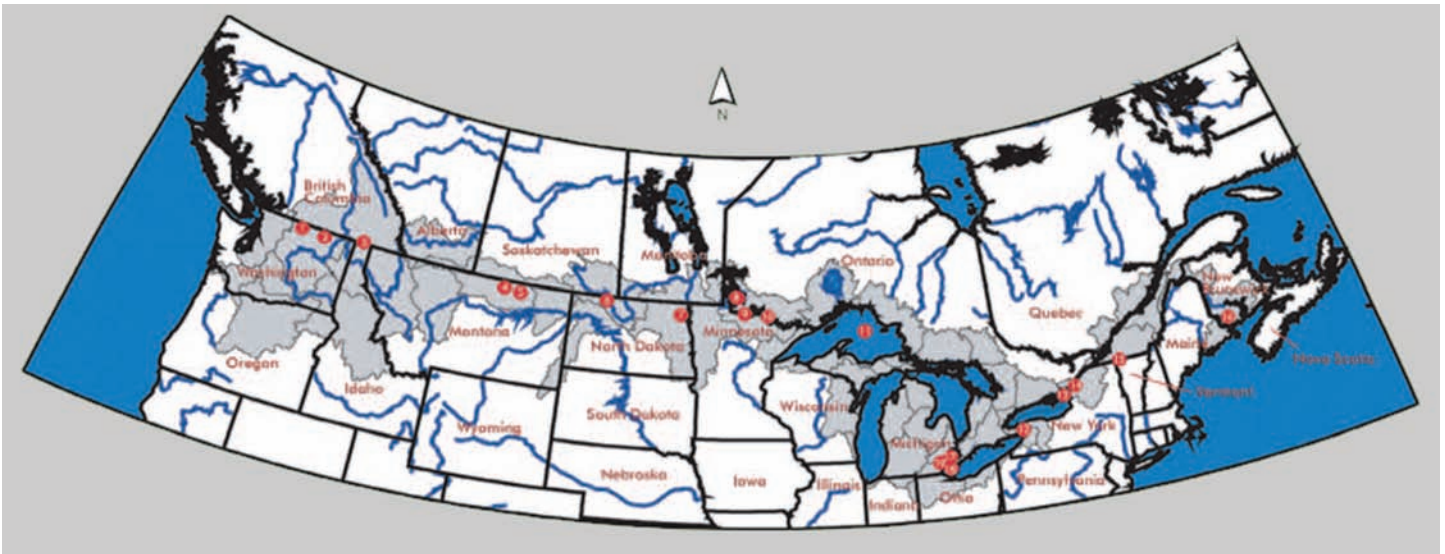
Authenticity and transparency: The public consultation must be authentic and transparent. IJC Commissioners were visible participants during the dialogue, especially to welcome and encourage discussion. They also prepared a public report synthesizing the public input at the conclusion of the consultation process.

Active interaction: Earlier attempts at online consultation by the IJC that had relied primarily on participants to generate discussion were not successful. This dialogue was based on a focused agenda and specifically invited the public to discuss their views and concerns.

Attention to the whole communications context: The dialogue was designed as an integral part of the public engagement process, not an "add-on" and was advertised as such. This approach promoted broad participation and awareness. Information about the dialogue and the public involvement process as a whole described how the results of the process would be available to the public and who in government was responsible for using it. This contextual clarity helped to keep the public participation meaningful and prevent misunderstandings about its significance.

Role of facilitator: A trained, fully bilingual facilitator was active during the dialogue to remind participants of the goals, relate key points, and identify needed clarifications. This contributed to the focus and momentum of the discussion.

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Role of panelists: Each day, between four and six panelists with expertise related to the day's topic were available to make observations and answer questions. The panelists also provided a reality check that helped to ensure the discussion was factually based, as well as contributing interactivity.

Convenience of participation: Members of the public could join the discussion at any time during the four days. All they needed was to connect to the Internet and register for the dialogue. Participants could read through comments and contribute when convenient without having to participate in the discussion in "real time." Even panelists found that they were able to take part satisfactorily by floating in and out of the discussion, while still devoting about half of their time to their other responsibilities.

The (mostly) self-governing nature of the discussion: While many people participated in the dialogue (283 over the four days), the discussion was focused and productive; there were a total of 382 postings. People mostly intervened when they had something new to contribute. Evaluation feedback tells us they had the impression that they were participating in the dialogue, even if they did not post comments. Participants engaged each other and, at times, challenged some of the assertions that others had made. One or two participants tried to dominate the conversation by repeating their comments, but intervention by the facilitator was effective in correcting the situation.

Agenda and daily summaries: The combination of a carefully designed agenda that was explicit about the desired outcomes of each topic, and daily summaries, available each morning, provided participants with a clear sense of direction and a concise and timely record of the ground already covered.

Wide geographic reach: The expansion of the discussion to include participants from the entire watershed meant not only increased participation and the inclusion of upstream and downstream perspectives in one conversation, but also the generation of international grassroots input into national governments' decision-making, even in the presence of two language groups. We believe that this modality has the potential to expand constituencies, strengthen international organizations, and improve the quality of solutions to trans-boundary problems.

The significance of a robust structure: The web dialogue contained a structure and process designed to orchestrate productive discussions among large numbers of participants. The carefully focused agenda, active participation of experts, availability of online library resources, well-written daily summaries, and orchestrated communication with registrants throughout the dialogue all provided the process with the momentum that made the dialogue effective for asynchronous participation during 24-hours each day, even when facilitator, panelists, and staff were not available to monitor or intervene.

Invitation to the Dialogue Website

The Great Lakes Water Quality Web Dialogue archive can be viewed at www.webdialogues.net/ijc/greatlakes. No registration is necessary. ■

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Engaging Your Public in Today's World

By Dan Bevarly
Senior Director
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Neighborhood America

As U.S. presidential contenders travel the nation seeking the early support of American voters, they continue to rely heavily on the cornerstone of our democratic society – the town hall meeting. Why? Because participatory governance is the foundation of our nation – a government created by the people, for the people.

But away from the campaign trail and out of view from the camera lens, the town hall meeting of old has become a rather antiquated form of citizen engagement. The concept is timeless—reaching out to local citizens, giving them an opportunity to voice their opinions, and using that information to help make decisions. It's the reality that has changed over the years.

An Evolving Timeline

Years ago, residents filled the forum halls to enjoy coffee and donuts, along with constructive dialogue with local officials. Today, however, those same halls are largely empty—aside from the vocal majority that never seem to miss a beat, but who also do not typically represent the majority. Few people can afford the opportunity cost of attending such meetings, and not even the lure of donuts can pull busy citizens away from the countless obligations vying for their time.

Enter the web. The Internet offered a unique opportunity to complement the traditional public meeting forum and to achieve more representative participation. Both the actual cost (data and computer use) and opportunity cost (time) of electronic communication with government have been reduced to nearly zero. Web-based public participation efforts—e-

democracy—at first blush represented the newest and most powerful means to attain greater inclusion.

However, this low cost vehicle for communication has proven to be a double-edged sword. In 2004, for example, when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency solicited public feedback for a proposed rule that would limit mercury output from power plants, it received over 540,000 comments over the Internet. Almost 173,000 were from one single website—an online political action group—that allowed citizens to simply click a button and send a form e-mail. The problem is no longer attaining inclusion (as it was with the town hall). It is managing inclusion.

Thus, while the basic strategy for government involves opening up to allow electronic citizen interaction, the overall strategy must find a way to marry the best of both worlds: the meaningful interaction that takes place in a traditional town hall with the opportunity for widespread citizen inclusion that can be accomplished via the web.

Success Stories

The power of the web can be successfully leveraged with “Software as a Service” (“SaaS”) solutions. Delivered via the web without the need to purchase additional hardware or software, these solutions can be deployed quickly and typically include 1) the software application; 2) hosting; and 3) services such as customer support and training.

Both the public and private sectors are rapidly adopting SaaS solutions

because they offer a cost-effective alternative to building in-house systems and are easy to deploy. Consider the ease of using perhaps one of the best-known SaaS models: Google.

There are some shining examples of agencies fully tapping into the power of the web to engage citizens more effectively. Take note, America—the promise of e-democracy is not just on the horizon. As the following cases illustrate, the future is already here.

Local Government

A small team with the Atlanta Development Authority was charged with the monumental task of planning for the Atlanta Beltline—a proposed 22-mile loop that will encircle the downtown and midtown areas of Atlanta, connecting diverse neighborhoods that had never before been unified. To ensure all constituents in the surrounding areas were offered inclusion and received consistent messages, a “Software as a Service” solution was deployed.

It allowed planners to capture the diverse views of residents, understand immediately how the public felt about proposed plans, proactively adapt plans when necessary, and easily identify new ideas that had not previously been considered.

City planners received input via the web from over 10,000 residents in just six weeks. The software enabled planners to receive fast, accurate, and structured information and reports for quick decision-making, which served to accelerate the planning process.

This magnitude of community participation could not have been

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achieved through the traditional town hall meeting forum, nor could the small team staff have devoted the amount of time it would have taken to read and make sense of 10,000 e-mails. In sharp contrast, the results were nearly immediate, decisions were inclusive of citizens' input, and credible reports were generated to support overall recommendations.

Federal Government

When the Citizens' Health Care Working Group (CHCWG) was charged with presenting recommendations to the U.S. Congress for national health care reform, its strategy for inclusion integrated two primary approaches: 1) traditional community meetings to be held in approximately 60 cities; and 2) web outreach.

While the community meetings were essential to reach key target audiences, the online interaction empowered the working group to not only quadruple the participation rate, but also to do so at a fraction of the cost. Factoring in the costs associated with implementing both outreach strategies, the ultimate cost to government for the community meetings was \$250 per participant – versus a mere \$7.50 per online participant.

Communities: The Catalyst for Change

Although these success stories are widely diverse—in scope, geographic reach, and purpose—the one consistent factor that contributed to the success of each was the ability to create high-value “communities” around the issues at hand.

In the Atlanta example, local officials engaged residents to educate them, nurture common interests, and ultimately build support from them for the project. And the team behind the CHCWG created a community of American citizens with an interest in shaping the future of our nation's health care system.

The key in both scenarios is the basic understanding that communities are not crowds, but rather strategic entities that can be relied upon to add value to decisions. Our experience has continually shown us that these high-value communities are formed only when 1) the opportunities for participation are meaningful (in other words, their input is valued and listened to); and 2) when it is convenient for them to do so.

Technology must provide the infrastructure that does not compromise the structure and integrity of governmental processes. However, equally important is the ability to adapt to the rising expectations among citizens to influence decisions via the web—and

to do so in ways that citizens have grown accustomed to. The desire to collaborate and share ideas online has become a way of life. If governments desire greater citizen participation, they must adapt to the changing expectations and preferences among constituents.

The right technology solution can provide the infrastructure needed: to bring like-minded citizens together online; to enable the sharing of insights and ideas; to allow for the uploading of relevant content such as video comments, photos, and even mobile phone content; and ultimately to provide the value needed to really connect with citizens and better understand their needs.

Conclusion

As the web world changes, so too must the ways in which we engage the public. Citizens are becoming increasingly mobile, creating challenges for governments trying to reach them. Whether initiatives span local, state, or federal government, the right technology can help ensure that government entities are prepared to manage and effectively utilize this new world of citizen engagement. ■

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Think It's Easy to Balance the State Budget? Click Here.

California Budget Challenge Team
NextTen.org

What does the average person know about writing and passing a state budget? According to a recent Public Policy Institute of California poll, not much. The poll found that 68% of likely voters in California cannot identify the state's largest budget spending item as K-12 education and 63% cannot identify the largest revenue source as personal income tax. "NextTen," a non-profit, non-partisan organization, is working to reverse this trend through a unique, online educational tool called the "California Budget Challenge."

"The budget is about people; it is not just a collection of numbers. We want Californians to understand that budget decisions greatly affect our infrastructure, our schools, our taxes, our criminal justice system, and our healthcare," said F. Noel Perry, the venture capitalist and philanthropist who founded NextTen.

The California Budget Challenge allows users to log on through NextTen's website at www.nextten.org, get a brief lesson in budget basics, and then create their own version of the state budget, line by line. Users work through nine different spending policy options that determine funding for K-12 education, higher education fees and access, state healthcare programs, environmental policies, criminal justice spending, unemployment programs, and the size of the budget reserve. Next, users work through revenue policy options that determine income, sales, car, corporate, property, gas, and carbon tax levels.

The Budget Challenge provides non-partisan background information on each policy choice so budget builders can weigh their options and make informed decisions. As users make their way through the budget process, a "budget meter" tracks the deficit or surplus being created, so users will immediately see and understand the fiscal impact of their choices. During the budget building process, Challenge users are able to let state leaders know their views on different policy choices by clicking on the "Take Action" button.

"Leaders at the highest level of our state government are hearing from Budget Challenge users on vital policy decisions. Because of the Budget Challenge, voters don't have to wait until Election Day to make their voices heard,"

The screenshot shows the 'NEXT TEN California Budget Challenge' interface. On the left is a navigation menu with categories like 'Start Home Survey', 'Policy Options', 'Environment', 'Revenue', and 'Your Budget'. The main content area is titled 'Protecting the Environment' and asks 'What steps should California take to reduce greenhouse gases? (select one)'. It lists five options with their budget impacts: 'Status Quo' (No change), 'Replace auto fleet' (-\$0.7B), 'Increase solar subsidies' (-\$0.9B), 'Impose surcharge/rebate' (No change), and 'Take all three actions' (-\$1.6B). A 'Budget Meter' shows a deficit of -\$1.9B. A 'Background' section provides context on climate change and California's role. Navigation buttons for 'Back' and 'Next' are at the bottom right.

said Leon Panetta, former White House Chief of Staff to President Bill Clinton and senior advisor to NextTen.

Since its launch in 2005, more than 40,000 users have taken the Budget Challenge. People from all walks of life are logging on and struggling with some of the same trade-offs state budget policymakers are required to make. NextTen is working with organizations like the League of Women Voters, PTA, and California Libraries to spread the word about the Budget Challenge. This innovative educational tool has been used in classrooms throughout the state to teach high school and college students about the budget decision-making process and current policy issues. Its popularity, accessible format, and educational value have led several organizations in other states to look into adopting the Budget Challenge for their constituents.

"Californians need more information about the state budget, and the California Budget Challenge brings this important political process right into your home," says NextTen founder Perry. To further engage Californians in the state budget process, the Budget Challenge is going on the road. Recently, a budget forum was held in Oakland, California. More than 125 students, business and civic leaders, educators, local government representatives, and community members from around the San Francisco Bay Area worked together to create their own version of the state budget. Participants used instant response keypads to make choices on 56 different policies. The "Town Hall forum was dynamic, fun, and very educational. We passed a balanced budget," said Ericka Erickson, Programs Director for the Grassroots Leadership Network of Marin. Similar forums across the state are planned and results from all forums will be presented to California's top state leaders. ■

To learn more about the California Budget Challenge log on to www.nextten.org and build a version of the California state budget.

E-Democracy in Action: Locally Driven Conservation

By Ann Morrill
Contributing Writer
The Trust for Public Land

In rapidly developing communities, it is often hard to see beyond one's own backyard. What lies behind the new homes on the hill or on the other side of the open fields? Further, what will happen to that farm land "for sale" between this town and the next, and how might its loss impact traffic or important wildlife corridors? How can citizens voice their concerns about the places and resources that brought many to the area in the first place, and how does a community gauge what its conservation priorities will be?

A unique, collaborative process developed by The Trust for Public Land (www.tpl.org) called TPL Greenprinting is helping communities grapple with these complex questions. Greenprinting involves Geographic Information System (GIS) models that compile data on the natural resources a community has prioritized. Greenprinting can then help community stakeholders better understand the lands and resources that most need protection and provide a framework for towns and regions to work together toward common goals. It can also promote public support for specific measures or fundraising efforts to help meet the conservation goals.

According to Breece Robertson, TPL's Director of Geographic Information Systems, a town, region, or land trust might contact TPL to initiate a Greenprint when they need to revise their comprehensive plan, to get a better grasp on rapid development, or to understand how development might impact a specific resource, such as the availability and quality of their water supplies. To

create the Greenprint, TPL works with community members to facilitate strategic meetings where the community identifies a steering committee and defines who the broader stakeholder team will be. Robertson emphasizes that it is up to each individual community to determine these stakeholders—it might include the general public or it might be elected officials, planners, and community-based organizations—noting that many towns have already held public meetings and gathered polling information around conservation issues before contacting TPL. At these stakeholder meetings, citizens discuss their goals, such as park equity, water quality, or wildlife conservation, and choose a locally-based Technical Advisory Team (TAT). The TAT and the Trust then work to identify data sources, gather data, and work out how the customized GIS Greenprint should be modeled.

After the initial models are created, additional meetings are held. Here the TPL Greenprint team uses GIS interactively to work with stakeholders to comment and apply priorities to conservation goals through a weighting system. For example, if protecting water quality is the most important goal, then the model will weigh the data to develop scenarios that best protect water quality. High scores are given to parcels with certain soil types, topography, and land uses that offer better protection opportunities. Robertson comments that when stakeholders can visualize through the GIS maps how their conservation priorities converge on the ground,

then they become fully engaged, adding that this is where compelling community involvement in the process often truly begins.

Tim Abbott, TPL Director of the Litchfield Hills Greenprint Project in northern Connecticut, believes that Greenprinting is unique. It is not exclusively a TPL product or delivery of a product, but rather a jointly branded and created model that depends on a long-term investment in both place and mission. Interaction with the GIS Greenprint allows a group of communities to look at their resources and conservation goals with more than just an emotional response and helps them to better understand how to choose among many valid conservation values. Abbott emphasizes that TPL does not go into meetings with stakeholders with preconceived ideas, but rather the approach is "I listen and you talk."

In the case of Litchfield Hills, an area which encompasses 27 towns on close to 600,000 acres in northern Connecticut, the initial stakeholders included the general public. The Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) is the conservation organization for the Housatonic River Valley, which includes Litchfield Hills. HVA held several widely publicized meetings in collaboration with TPL when they recognized the need to get a better handle on increasingly fast-paced development, loss of farmlands, and shrinking open spaces.

Instead of towns and land trusts individually responding to local crises, Abbott notes that Greenprinting allows for "proactive conservation." As part of the Litchfield Hills Greenprint, the Trust and the Technical Advisory Team created regional and town-specific threat maps that demonstrated what lands were most likely to be targeted for development. This information helped individual town commissions and other stakeholders to determine the most vulnerable and significant lands. Smaller towns and land trusts can be individually overwhelmed by the costs and energy involved in saving

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significant farmland or open space, remarks Abbott, adding that “Greenprinting allows them to invest in a concept across landscapes, which makes it easier to target funding.”

If e-democracy can be defined as access to and encouragement of online citizen collaboration in shaping government policies, TPL Greenprints contribute both through the citizen deliberations that are integral to creating the GIS model and the flexible nature of the model itself. On the Litchfield Hills Greenprint site (http://www.tpl.org/ct_litchfield/), an Internet Mapping Service (IMS) makes it possible for anyone with Internet access to choose a town or county and display several features individually or as overlaps. Site visitors can see existing roads and trails or existing parks and preserves, as well as projected features. Moreover, if a community or region

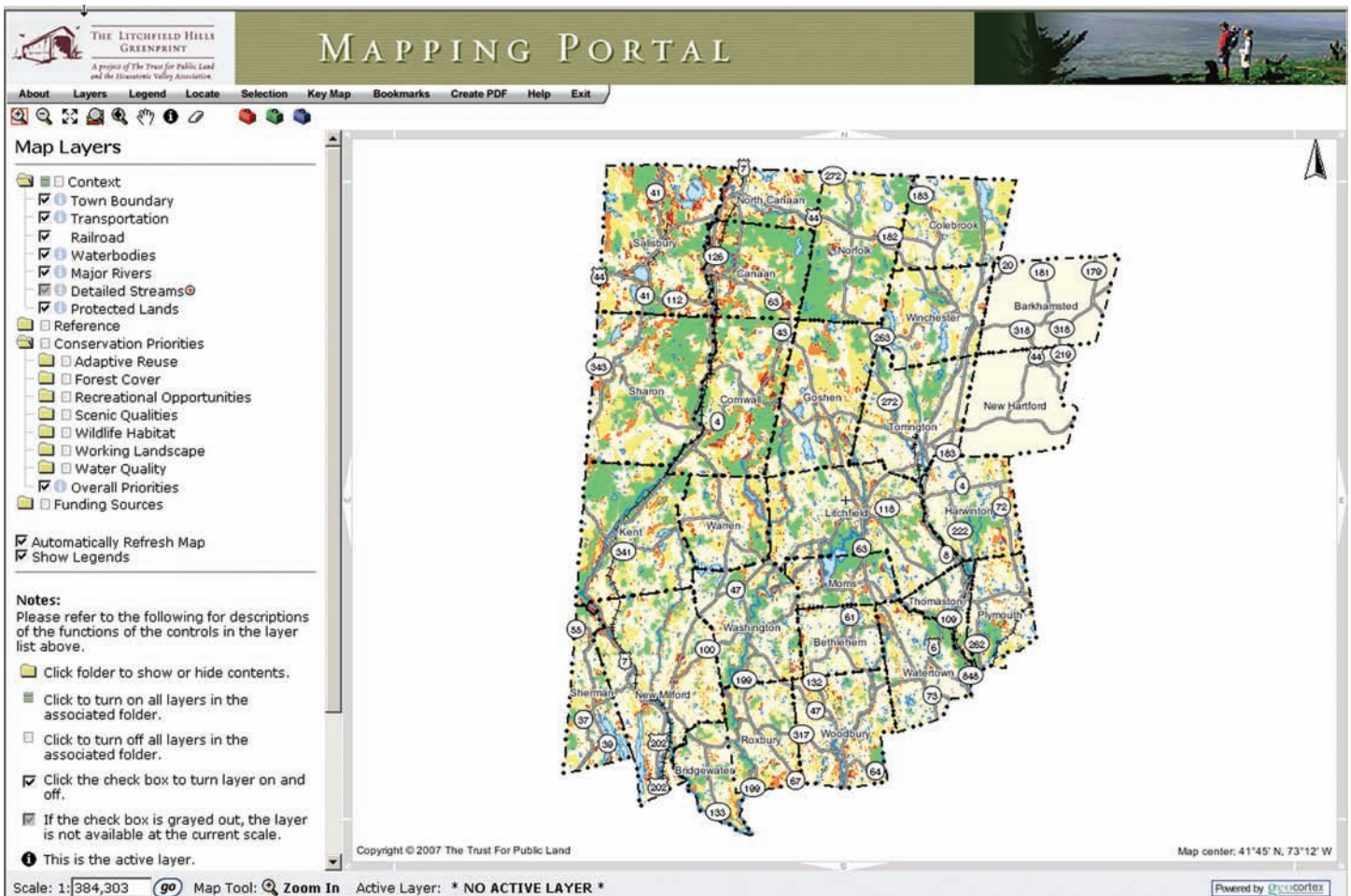
finds that their conservation priorities or specific data have changed, these changes can be easily incorporated into the model by adding new data and re-running the model. The model becomes a “living” decision-support tool for the community for years to come.

At present, The Trust for Public Land has completed 44 Greenprints around the country and has dozens more underway. According to TPL, many have led to permanently protected land, new public funding for conservation, and the development of new parks, playgrounds, and greenways. In upcoming TPL Greenprinting projects, an IMS component provides an avenue for even broader public involvement in prioritizing land conservation issues. The IMS allows stakeholders to add and tweak information directly onto the Greenprint, write comments or

queries online, as well as mark up overview maps that display parcel priority rankings based on a community’s specific goals.

In addition to Greenprinting, TPL’s Conservation Services help all levels of government secure funds for conservation, and serve as an independent principal in conservation real estate transactions. TPL also researches conservation issues and publicizes their findings in order to educate conservation professionals and garner public support for good public policy at the local, state, and federal levels. ■

For more information about the Trust for Public Land’s Greenprinting or other conservation services, contact Will Abberger in the East (will.abberger@tpl.org), Milton Ospina in the West (milton.ospina@tpl.org), or visit www.tpl.org/services.



Federal Blogging Is Poised to Take Off

By John Kamensky
Senior Fellow
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Since the dawn of the 21st century—just seven short years ago—how we communicate as a society has begun to change rapidly. One example is the “blog,” short for “web log.” Over 60 million individuals now maintain a blog—a user-generated online journal updated regularly by the author. Even more participate in social networks such as Facebook, MySpace, and Second Life, all of which allow interactivity among their users.

Government, however, has been more cautious in entering this new world. A recent report by Dr. David Wyld, “The Blogging Revolution: Government in the Age of Web 2.0,” describes what the author terms “blogoneers,” pioneers in the use of blogs in government. It documents the early stages of government blogging and provides a concise summary of how it has already moved from a teen and college student phenomenon to the corporate world, with government poised to be the next wave of users.

Bloggng: A New Interactive Communication Tool

Dr. Wyld examines the phenomenon of blogging in the context of the larger revolutionary forces at work in the second-generation Internet, where interactivity among users is key. Wyld observes that blogging is growing as a tool for promoting not only online engagement of citizens and public servants, but also offline engagement. He describes blogging activities by members of Congress, governors, city mayors, and police and fire departments in which they engage directly with the public. He also talks about activist citizen bloggers who

have organized successful campaigns leading to the adoption of legislation.

Less well-known is that blogging is now being used internally by the federal government. For example, Marine General James Cartwright, commander of the U.S. Strategic Command, observed “When al Qaeda can outmaneuver you using Yahoo, we’ve got something wrong here.” In response, he provides a real-time, secure blog to connect generals and warfighters. “The metric is what the person has to contribute, not the person’s rank, age, or level of experience. If they have the answer, I want the answer. When I post a question on my blog, I expect the person with the answer to post back.” Other agencies launching blogs include the Patent and Trademark Office, which allows comments on pending patents, and the Library of Congress, which offers interactivity for online discussions of history and poetry.

Bloggng 101

A blog can be updated regularly, with entries typically displayed in chronological order. The blogging phenomenon took off four years ago and has migrated from the purview of teens and college students to mainstream businesses and government. Every hour, more than 54,000 posts are made to blogs.

Wyld’s report chronicles the evolution of blogs as a new phenomenon in government. He catalogs more than 400 blogs created by elected leaders—members of Congress, governors, mayors, and others. He also summarizes lessons by blogging pioneers in the public and corporate

worlds on how to be successful in the “blogosphere.” Dr. Wyld distills these lessons into 10 blogging tips for government executives and encourages them to “just do it.”

10 Tips for New Bloggers:

- **Tip 1:** Define yourself and your purpose. State the reason for your blog.
- **Tip 2:** Do it yourself! Readers can detect authenticity.
- **Tip 3:** Make a time commitment. You have to make time available to both post and read comments.
- **Tip 4:** Be regular. If you don’t post at least twice a week, people will quit reading.
- **Tip 5:** Be generous. Take the opportunity to highlight others, not just yourself.
- **Tip 6:** Have a “hard hide.” You will receive comments that are unpleasant.
- **Tip 7:** Spell-check.
- **Tip 8:** Don’t provide too much information. Who cares what you had for breakfast!
- **Tip 9:** Consider multimedia. Video and audio are now the cutting edge.
- **Tip 10:** Be a student of blogging. Read others’ blogs and benchmark against the best.

What Is Web 2.0?

Web 2.0 is the new and broader Internet phenomenon, of which blogging is but one tool. Web 2.0 is characterized by the rise of user-generated content on the Internet, where users no longer need to know

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anything about computer programming to enter content. Dr. Wyld notes that his report is a snapshot of the early stages of Web 2.0, where blogging is the most publicized technology used to create social networks. He also points to other Web 2.0 technologies, such as the creation of wikis—where thousands of users can jointly collaborate in creating something such as the online encyclopedia, Wikipedia. Another fast-growing Web

2.0 phenomenon is 3-D immersive experiences, such as Second Life, where users assume a “virtual identity” and have a personal avatar—an animated character—that can shop, play, and learn online. About 70 universities use Second Life to conduct online seminars. Companies use it to conduct employee meetings. Government may someday use it or something like it to deliver services. ■

John Kamensky is a senior fellow at the IBM Center for The Business of Government, which sponsors research by academics on cutting edge challenges facing government managers. For additional information contact john.kamensky@us.ibm.com. For a copy of “The Blogging Revolution: Government in the Age of Web 2.0,” call (202) 515-4504 or download a copy at: www.businessofgovernment.org.

Uploading Democracy: Candidates Field YouTube Questions

By Richard Auxier and Alec Tyson
Pew Research Center

The July 23, 2007, debate with U.S. Democratic party presidential candidates, held at the Citadel in Charleston, SC, was widely anticipated for its groundbreaking format. For the first time, individuals could submit video questions via YouTube; the questions would be shown on-screen and answered by the candidates. The submissions varied in content and presentation and engaged the candidates on a wide range of issues, some of which had not been addressed in previous Democratic debates. What follows is an analysis of the format and major themes of the debate as compared with public opinion data.

The Technology

Even before the CNN/YouTube debate, the importance of the Internet in politics and elections was well established. In the 2006 midterm elections, 31% of the public used the Internet to get political news and information and to e-mail others to discuss the race. Surveys by the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that 15% of Americans used the Internet as their primary source for campaign news in 2006, more than double the percentage that did so in the 2002 midterm elections (7%).

The debate highlighted the emerging role of online videos in the 2008 presidential campaign. Some 15% of adult Internet users report having watched or downloaded political videos online, and 2% report doing so on a typical day. Recent popular campaign videos have included Hillary and Bill Clinton’s parody of the final episode of “The

Sopranos,” “I got a crush on Obama,” John McCain joking about bombing Iran, and a tape of John Edwards combing his hair. Fully 44% of the public have heard of at least one of the four videos and 27% have seen at least one.

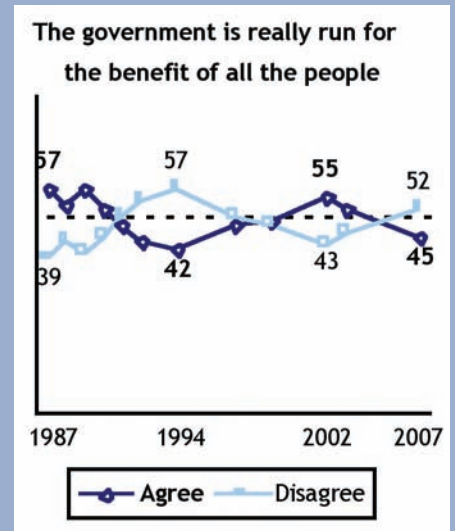
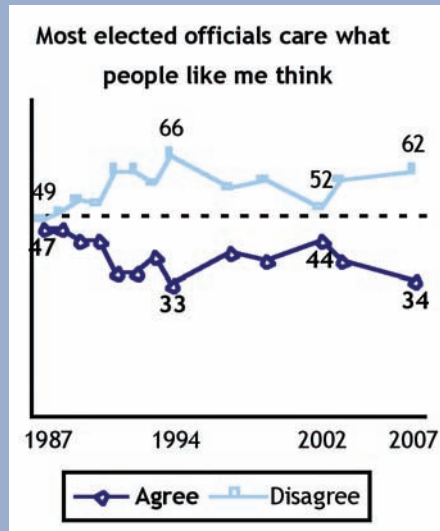
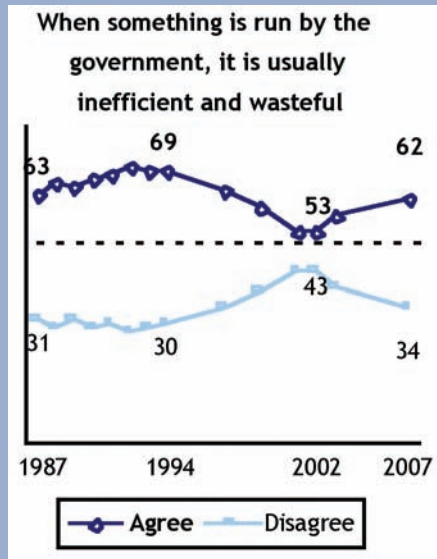
The Questions

The YouTube format gave voice to a range of citizens not normally heard on the presidential debate stage. Considering that a 62% majority of the public disagrees with the statement “most elected officials care what people like me think,” it was not surprising that a current of skepticism toward government ran through many of the questions—a sense that little ever changes in Washington and that government today is not run for the benefit of all people.

Excerpts from the questions include:

- “What’s going to make you any more effectual...how are you going to be any different?”
- “Partisanship played a major role in why nothing can be done in Washington today.”
- “I know you all are going to run around this question, dipping and dodging, so let’s see how far you all can get.”
- “Is the reason why we are still in Iraq...due to the Democrats’ fear that blame for the loss of the war will be placed on them by the Republican spin machine?”

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Polls reveal source of skepticism displayed in video debate questions.

- “I’d like to know if you plan to defend that statement, or if you’re just going to flip-flop.”
- “Congress seems to never have a problem when it comes time to give themselves a raise. But when it came time to increase the minimum wage, they had a problem.”
- “...Yet everything is business as usual in D.C.”
- “How would electing you, a Clinton, constitute the type of change in Washington so many people in the heartland are yearning for...”

Recent polling by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press shows that much of the frustration expressed by the YouTube questioners is widely held by the public.

Fully 79% of Americans agree that “generally speaking, elected officials in Washington lose touch with the people pretty quickly.” This belief is

widely held across demographic groups, and Republicans are as likely as Democrats to agree with the statement. It comes as little surprise then that, while Americans are evenly split (45% to 46%) in having a favorable or unfavorable overall opinion of the federal government in Washington, the public is twice as likely to have a very unfavorable opinion of the federal government (15%) as it is to have a very favorable opinion (7%).

The public also shares doubts about the competency and role of government. More than six in ten Americans (62%) say that when something is run by the government, it is usually inefficient and wasteful. And a 52% majority does not believe that “the government is really run for the benefit of all the people,” though on this point Democrats (58%) are much more likely than Republicans (36%) to disagree. Additionally, 63% of

Americans say that “you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right” only some of the time.

Despite the cynicism expressed by the YouTube questions—and shared by the public—seven-in-ten Americans (71%) still believe that “voting gives people like me some say about how government runs things.” This helps explain why individuals took the time to submit around 3,000 video questions—though skepticism towards candidates and Washington exists, the public still views the election process as a way to have their voice heard. ■

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CDC in Second Life

By John Anderton, PhD, MPA
Associate Director for Communications Science
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Multi-User Virtual Environments (MUVES) have increased in visual detail and complexity, thanks to the emergence and diffusion of excellent computer graphics cards and high-speed Internet connectivity, but as social networks they remain in adolescence. Victorian-era mechanical devices, such as the telegraph, facilitated not only rapid information transmission but social exchange among persons far distant from one another. Twentieth century technology went beyond signals to sounds and visuals to enable even greater connectedness between persons and events throughout the world. Science fiction literature presaged technical innovation with classics such as "Tom Swift and his Wireless Message," by Victor Appleton (1911), and offered glimpses of societal dystopias such as in "Logan's Run," by William

Nolan (1967),* and "Snow Crash," by Neal Stephenson (1992).*Technologically advanced societies teeming with persons pursuing their interests amid sinister undercurrents of social control are recurring themes in this literature.

The arrival of the Internet and the concomitant explosion of available information have influenced this social paradigm. Websites abound that offer social spaces for persons to meet, mix, and mingle. The emergence of online communities also facilitated not only human interaction, but disease transmission in real life, as persons who meet in virtual spaces can and do continue online relationships into the real world. Health promotion around prevention of syphilis has used the venue of Internet chatrooms to

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influence persons to prevent transmission of disease when moving from virtual to actual sex.

Hygeia Philo (Greek for 'lover of health') is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lead avatar in the virtual world of Second Life.* Second Life is a visual, three-dimensional, virtual space called a "metaverse," a term coined by Neal Stephenson. Carrying CDC's mission into this new frontier, Hygeia has hosted a health fair and staffed a traveling health exhibit. Hygeia is now a permanent web location that conducts health education and provides web links to CDC information such as the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, health podcasts, the Public Health Image Library, and other CDC resources. CDC has been active in Second Life since July 2006 and is preparing to expand its presence there this fall.

Social networking and interaction are key elements of metaverse involvement. Participation in this new channel for information dissemination adds to CDC's traditional tools and methods of reaching specialized audiences. The photograph accompanying this article shows Hygeia and other avatars in Second Life, but there are thousands of

other places where participants can meet and interact in this and other virtual worlds. Whyville* is another example. Each avatar in a virtual world is connected to a real person with real health issues and needs. Avatars are giving CDC another avenue to communicate CDC prevention messages about infectious and chronic diseases. As virtual worlds enter the mainstream of human interaction, they may mature and evolve into a whole new form of blended social and educational networking. ■

* Use of trademarked names and titles is for descriptive purposes only and does not imply endorsement by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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Government Information Outreach in Social Media and Virtual Worlds

By Victor Cid and Laura Bartlett
National Library of Medicine
National Institutes of Health
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

The Age of Social Media

The way information is produced, used, and shared on the Internet is evolving rapidly. "Digital natives," people born in the digital age, are taking over the Internet and "digital immigrants," those who adopted the Internet and related technologies later in life, are becoming more sophisticated Internet users. As this happens, libraries and government agencies that provide public information find it increasingly difficult to keep up with the Internet tools cybercitizens use to communicate, collaborate, and learn. Open information syndication,

"folksonomies" (user-generated web content taxonomies), blogs, wikis, and many other related technologies empower people to access, organize, and democratically promote information from a large number of dissimilar sources, while also becoming themselves producers of information. Social media, the term used to refer to many of these online tools and practices, allows people to create virtual communities and collaborate at an unprecedented scale.

The popularity and success of many social media applications are creating interest within the U.S. National Library of Medicine (NLM) and other

government agencies. These organizations are exploring the opportunities and challenges that new Internet technologies can offer to users of government information and how the technologies can further agencies' public-service missions. Many organizations are already making successful use of social media applications to reach specific user communities and to interact and collaborate in ways not previously possible. Some libraries, for example, are exploiting social media tools for collaborating with peers globally to produce innovative information services and products that can reach a much larger community. Rather than presenting information under "one user fits all" model, organizations can use social media tools to transform the information into a product that fits individual or specific community needs.

NLM and the Challenges of Emerging Social Applications

The National Library of Medicine is the world's largest medical library. As part of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human

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The interactive Toxtown poster.

Services, NLM makes available a large number of websites with authoritative, reliable, openly accessible health and biomedical information. These information services are accessed by millions of Internet users from all over the world. NLM also conducts a number of outreach efforts, nationally and internationally, to promote and educate people about its health information and to disseminate health information where it is needed.

Despite the popularity of social media, some government agencies are blocking their employees' access to many social tools, because of security concerns and the possibility of abuses and other government policy violations. Since there are no guidelines for the appropriate use of social networking and related technologies for government purposes, many agencies abstain from exploring their benefits. The social media landscape is evolving, and some of these technologies and their information content change rapidly. The strict quality and reliability standards of government agencies demand a cautious adoption of new technologies, especially of social media technologies that have yet to prove they are mature and reliable enough to support the role of the government.

Social Media in the Web 2.0 Context

Social media is one of the defining characteristics of Web 2.0, a term used to describe the set of technologies, applications, and other elements defining the current stage of evolution of the Internet. The term encompasses the change from a "flat" web model to a highly dynamic mix of rich applications. These latest technologies enable a much higher participatory role for users in the generation of information content and a new level of interactivity of users with information and among themselves, among other features.

Social media involves a wide range of technologies and services, including blogs (Blogger, Blogflux, etc.); wikis (Wikipedia, Wikia, Wetpaint, etc); social networking sites (MySpace, facebook.com, gather.com, etc.); video and picture sharing sites (YouTube, Flickr, Google Video, etc.); social bookmarking sites (del.icio.us, Digg, reddit, etc.); chat services (Yahoo! Chat, Skype, Windows Live Messenger, Gmail chat, etc.); virtual worlds (Second Life, Active Worlds, There, etc.); as well as podcasts, forums, and others.

Exploring the Opportunities of Virtual Worlds

Second Life (SL), created by Linden Labs, is one social media application that has captured much traditional media attention in the past few months. In the Second Life virtual world, users interact in a 3-D environment through virtual representations of themselves called "avatars." Most of the content in this virtual world is created by its own inhabitants. Participation is free, but a paid subscription is required for a few advanced features. The highly graphical and interactive medium allows for an elaborate level of social interaction and can potentially enable new ways to present, access, and interact with information. Mechanisms embedded in the virtual world allow its residents to create applications that communicate with the web, allowing both virtual environments to converge. Although SL is a very popular virtual world today, it is not the only such virtual environment on the Internet. Other prominent ones include Active Worlds, There, and Entropia Universe. Second Life and other virtual worlds have their own virtual economy that is connected to the real economy.

A number of government agencies and hundreds of private companies and universities are already participating in Second Life, and they join several million users worldwide. For example, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is displaying 3-D simulations of hurricanes, tsunamis, and other environmental events; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is providing access to health information; and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is showcasing 3-D models of its spacecraft. Many organizations and other groups conduct meetings and other regular activities in this environment. Political candidates and activists have held virtual political rallies, and a number of government officials have made live presentations to the (virtual) public participating in this medium.

The NLM is exploring the capabilities of

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this virtual environment for health information outreach and collaboration. Reliable demographic data about Second Life users is hard to obtain, but from many accounts and our own observations, SL residents seem to include people of all ages from 18, which is the minimum age required to participate in the SL universe to senior citizens. (Note: there is a separate version of SL for teenagers.) People use the medium for multiple purposes, but mostly for entertainment and socializing.

NLM is collaborating with other libraries in Second Life to research effective mechanisms to deliver health information in this 3-D environment. At the moment, the effort focuses on exploring the underlying technologies that enable the development and dissemination of different types of information content in SL; issues involved in establishing a government presence in this medium; strategies for promoting health information; and opportunities for inter-organizational collaboration. It is expected that the findings from this experience can be applied to a number of NLM efforts. For example, NLM is now working on the

development of a Disaster Health Information Management Research capability that could benefit from this 3-D environment. Potential applications in SL include emergency simulations; disaster impact studies; and demonstrations, response, and mitigation training exercises, among others.

According to Gartner, Inc., 80% of active Internet users might have some activities in virtual worlds by 2011, although not necessarily in Second Life (see <http://www.gartner.com/it/page.jsp?id=503861>). Linden Labs is facing increasing competition, as there is growing commercial interest in virtual world environments. Also, more companies have announced projects to develop their own virtual reality services, and new virtual worlds are starting to appear. Second Life is also being challenged by its own success, as the popularity of the service is often putting its underlying technological infrastructure under pressure. For example, the number of SL user accounts has increased by more than 600% since late October 2006.

Conclusions

The potential benefits of social media for government information dissemination and collaborative work are yet to be fully determined, but there are already studies and exercises underway to explore these technologies and their challenges. It appears that virtual worlds are here to stay. As the underlying technologies (such as broadband Internet access, computing power, graphical software applications, and computer-human interfaces) evolve, they may well become ubiquitous tools that can revolutionize government services, citizens' participation in government, and more. ■

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Government Participation in Social Networks: Joining the Conversation

By Kevin Novak
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Office of Strategic Initiatives
Library of Congress

Over the last decade, the world has dramatically changed. Because of the World Wide Web people are easily able to create new online communities and conversations, which allow them to create new relationships as well as supplement existing ones. The principle of participatory volunteerism is moving people to reach out, interact, contribute, and relate to the world in new ways. With the web, people can be exposed to new ideas and information in unprecedented ways. Young and old are integrating technology, the web, and mobile devices

into their daily lives. This greater exposure to information and technology is leading to continual innovation. The challenge before government agencies is to investigate new technologies and determine which communities and conversations to join within the parameters of proper government conduct and policy.

Many have questioned the value proposition of online communities and social networks. Usage statistics demonstrate that people want to utilize social networks and learn about their applications. For example, according

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to the social networking site Facebook, 50% of the site's users sign on everyday, and Facebook expects to have 50 million active users by the end of 2007.¹ In general, online communities connect individuals around the world and make individual opinions and insights of the "common" person more easily publishable and accessible and thus more valuable and important. The government, as an authoritative source of information and content, must react, prepare, and meet these changing user expectations by engaging in many different environments, communities, and conversations.

A Government Agency in an Online and Networked World

Government agencies have a responsibility to provide authoritative information in a way that is effective and relevant to the citizenry they are called to serve. Over one billion people are now on the Internet worldwide and 77% of Americans ages 12 and older go online at least once a day. In recognition of this growing usage, the Library of Congress has undertaken a number of initiatives, some launched and others forthcoming, to utilize online communities to enhance citizen discovery of content in the Library's online collections. The goal is to enrich the user experience with authentic and authoritative information from a trustworthy source. The initiatives include the recently launched Library blog and over 20 RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds providing content and information. Coming in the fall of 2007 will be a pilot with "Flickr" to build our collection data with social tagging; the availability of widgets that can be taken and posted to personalized individual pages (i.e. Facebook, iGoogle) that highlight content from the collections; improvements to search and discovery; podcasts highlighting the Library's collections and curatorial expertise of our staff; and the consideration of a pilot in the virtual world of Second Life. We are moving forward in these spaces and technologies to meet our users in their environments, recognizing the dynamic change of the active, as opposed to the passive, web.

Starting Conversations

Conversations are what the government should be seeking. They can take many forms and can result in many different types of input and feedback that assist agencies with meeting their missions.

Blogging is a social phenomenon that has just begun to be cautiously explored within the federal community. The unique benefit of a blog derives from the blogger's informal, personal voice and perspective, which can put a

human face on a government agency, allow behind-the-scenes institutional transparency, and provide opportunities for conversation and relationship-building. The Library launched its blog in April of 2007. Having these conversations with our users has extended the Library's reach into new constituencies, exposed the deeper parts of the Library's online collections to readers who might otherwise never penetrate beyond the top-level pages, and contributed to the worldwide store of knowledge. The effort has resulted in positive feedback and has provided the Library with new users and attention. The blog has quickly moved from being the 70,000th-most popular blog, as ranked by Technorati, to the 31,000th-most popular blog out of 70 million tracked. This demonstrates that the online communities are hungry for conversation and community with agencies, meeting them in their world and in their environments.

Social tagging allows users to tag content with keywords they find meaningful as a tool for categorization, retrieval, and sharing. Tagging also benefits the institution that owns the material. While institutions are the curators of the collections and information, they cannot anticipate every way that a user may request that information. Social tagging gives an institution, like the Library, an opportunity to build a repository of user-identified keywords for items within a collection.

And as with blogging, social tagging allows the Library to have a conversation with its users. Let's say that the Library has collections of photos with little identifying information. One of the photos could be of military personnel standing by an aircraft carrier in the Pacific. We may not know key information, such as who is in the photo. Tagging allows our users to help us better describe and identify who and what is in the photo. With social tagging, users may finally be able to retrieve that photo in a search.

Conclusion

Online communities and conversations are starting everyday. Blogging and social tagging are just two potential places to start. Government has a responsibility to provide information in a relevant and effective way to the citizens it serves. To reach our users, we must be where they are in the online environment. Government must now join the communities and conversations that are taking place online or risk becoming an irrelevant resource. ■

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1. http://developers.facebook.com/videos.php?f8_keynote

Click-Through Democracy¹

By Dr. Stuart W. Shulman
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Several large scale electronic public comment campaigns are underway or have recently concluded. Whether on behalf of Peruvian jaguars, Rocky Mountain gray wolves, adorable sea otters, or some other photogenic cause, someone, somewhere is probably sending an e-mail expressing their outrage, fear, sorrow, hopes, or dreams. There is a political and administrative debate brewing about whether these proliferating comment campaigns are simply anomalies or worrisome harbingers of a slide into a technological arms race predicated on plebiscite-style governance.

Most opportunities for public comment to federal agencies garner only modest citizen input. It is a rare proposed rule, advance notice, or agency decision that generates an avalanche of comments, electronic or paper. Yet the potential is there for large-scale, continuous e-mobilizations generating virtually uninterrupted streams of e-mail messages directed at diverse agency personnel. Indeed, we probably already are in a state of permanent e-mobilization. The most interesting question may be whether this emergent form of democratic activism will grow only incrementally or geometrically before it is ultimately neutralized or transformed.²

The now familiar "Action Alert Center" web pages are permanent features on many "Tell-a-Friend" and "Donate" pages. Alert centers can carry a wide range of issue-oriented campaigns simultaneously.³ The Internet-based tools that generate and manage these citizen comments are sold (not inexpensively) in the

marketplace and shared for free in the open source domain.⁴ These electronic form letter campaigns, for better or worse, are one of the principal contributions of online democracy to date in the United States. Yet, as a form of participation, engagement, and information dissemination, their virtues and failings remain a puzzle. The most basic question is: should we welcome or resist this drift toward click-through democracy?

The standard delivery of the interest group "ask" is very likely familiar to anyone reading this. In your wisdom, at some point in the last 5-10 years you gave your name and e-mail address to an interest group. Perhaps

If you are like me, thanks to Al Gore's brilliant slide show,⁵ your four year old son regularly waddles about the house on all fours as "cubby" the endangered polar bear searching a vast sea for disappearing ice.⁶ Thinking that both your kid and the man-slaughtering but adorable bears are worth saving, you just might click the "TAKE ACTION" button, perhaps feeling more than ever that it is time to 'do something' about global climate change.

The *thing* that you do is proceed directly to web service with a pre-written e-mail. You are then invited to edit the text of the e-mail and often compelled (even when it is not required by the agency) to complete various personal information fields.

The political, organizational, and informational imperatives driving these campaigns fit neatly under the mobilization umbrella. The member education, where and when it happens, is likely to be superficial, pushing the reader headlong toward adversarial thinking. Commenters do

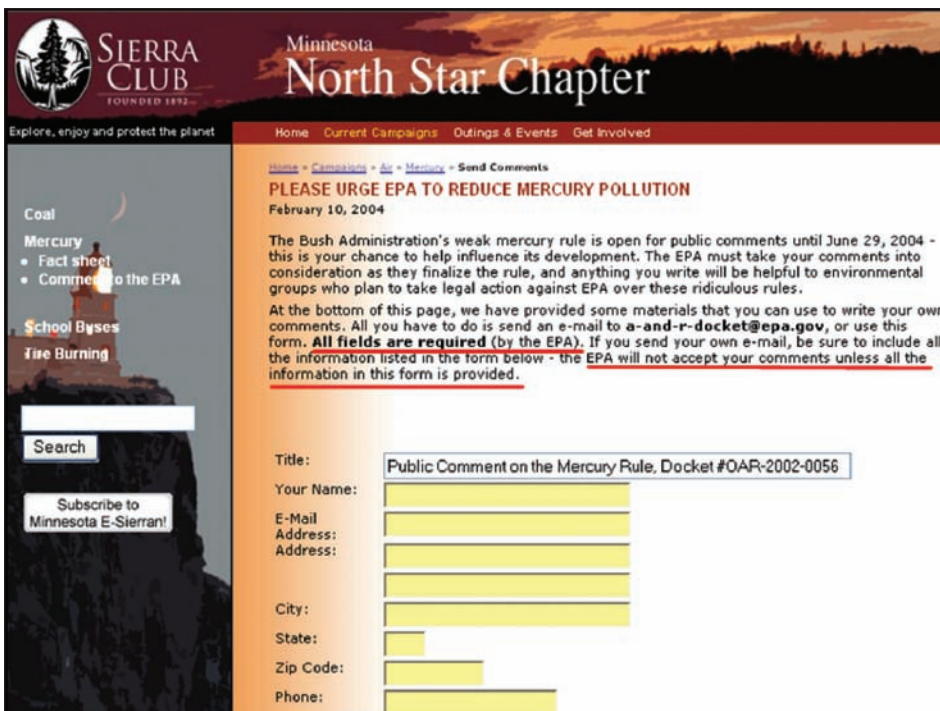
The screenshot shows an email interface for Environmental Defense Fund (EDF). At the top, it says "ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE" with the tagline "finding the ways that work" and "e - UPDATE". Navigation links for "DONATE", "FORWARD", and "SUBSCRIBE" are visible. The main content is titled "JULY '07 - IN THIS ISSUE" and lists several articles with blue arrows pointing to them. A prominent "ACTION ALERT" section is titled "Tell EPA to Cut Smog Pollution" and contains text about smog pollution and a "TAKE ACTION" button. Below this, a box titled "the numbers" displays "1483" as the "Number of Red Alert days with".

Excerpt of an e-advocacy e-mail received in July 2007.

you signed an online petition or responded to a direct mail campaign. For whatever reason, as a result of the Internet and widespread database technologies, you are now never more than an e-activist's click away from receiving something like this:

routinely learn from the website designers that "adding their own words" will "make it more meaningful," however they rarely receive any guidance about precisely which words will have that effect. It is probably too much to expect a full

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Screen capture of an e-advocacy site misleading users about EPA requirements

lesson in preparing meaningful public comments on such a website. Nonetheless, it is certainly not too much to expect a simple user guide prioritizing the generation of thoughtful comments over invective-laden tirades.

From the advocacy group point of view, this particular form of click-through democracy is really about the numbers that measure comment throughput, increased visibility, membership, and those life-sustaining donations eked out of a finite pool of e-activist disposable income. Campaigns using the "Action Alert" model attempt to cash in on the economics of relatively low cost e-

activism and the power of Metcalf's Law, which posits that the value of a network increases proportional to the number of subscribers. It is now therefore standard procedure to use referral systems, listservs, and related constituent and customer management web services to grow the grassroots of an interest group on the back of a public comment campaign.

New tools for rules inevitably will end up on the desktops of regulation writers. As it becomes easier to generate large numbers of comments, tools such as these will be essential for the smooth and cost-effective functioning of the regulatory process.

The Administrative Procedures Act derived "notice and comment" process never was intended to be a rote slog through giant piles of duplicative comments sorted manually by the shape of the words on a printed page. The applied side of ongoing tools for rules research (<http://erulemaking.ucsur.pitt.edu>) is eliminating the so-called "plague" of duplicative e-mails that obfuscates the role of knowledgeable public commenters shaping the views of experts in federal agencies.

Invariably, new tools for rules also will impact the way various vendors, interest groups, individual commenters, and agency personnel view the role of e-mail in the public comment process. Efforts at manipulating the rulemaking system predate the digital communications era. It remains to be seen how more widespread use of duplicate detection and other tools under development for the Rule Writers' Workbench will alter the tactics used by groups and vendors who created the existing mass e-mail public comment system. ■

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1 This research was made possible with a National Science Foundation grants IIS-0429293 "Collaborative Research: Language Processing Technology for Electronic Rulemaking." Any opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Science Foundation.

2 The author is director of a research group that seeks to harness human language technologies for the purpose of making large public comment datasets more intelligible.

3 See the Defenders of Wildlife "Wildlife Action Center," which features several such campaigns at: http://action.defenders.org/site/PageServer?pagename=act_homepage.

4 See http://www.convio.com/site/PageServer?pagename=prod_advocacy for an example of the high-end commercial version and <http://organizersdb.org/> for an example of the free option.

5 See <http://www.climatecrisis.net/> for the home page of "An Inconvenient Truth," which of course features a "Take Action" page. To its credit, the site encourages actions that are not limited to click-through democratic voice option.

6 The NRDC raised \$300,000 to run an advertisement on CNN (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ua8jF1ZPaAU>) in hopes of generating 1,000,000 comments on listing the polar bear as threatened. In the ad, narrated by children, it states: "Some polar bears have to swim so far they drown. Baby bears have died."

Ten Practical Online Steps for Government Support of Democracy

By Steven Clift
Chair, E-Democracy.org
and Ashoka Fellow

Q. Does e-government have anything to do with democracy and citizen participation?

A. Let's get straight to the point. Not yet.

Q. Should it?

A. Yes. Government should be leading the charge into an increasingly and fundamentally interactive web.

If you believe in government of, for, and by the people, then government—both representative and administrative—should be leading a charge into the increasingly and fundamentally interactive web.

Access to information, considered the safe starting point for government accountability online, now mostly presents the public a daunting needle in a huge haystack. Not only are governments excluding themselves from the increasingly interactive public lives of citizens, but the fundamental information access system is so complicated that the valuable and substantive information that government produces is often ignored in our increasingly online lives. The lack of real and effective online access to governance will substantially increase cynicism about and distrust in government among a public that demands a more participatory representative democracy.

A bit of context: In the early days of e-government, I coordinated e-gov initiatives for the state of Minnesota. As a citizen, I independently started E-Democracy.Org, which created the world's first election information and discussion website in 1994. When

“services first, democracy later” enveloped most e-government projects, I skedaddled in late 1997. Since then, I've spoken and consulted across 26 countries on “E-Democracy.”

Join the Evolution

Here are the 10 things I would do in government at every level to help rescue our democracy in the information age.

1. Provide timely, personalized access to information that matters.

Government decision-making information is not really public or relevant if people cannot act on it when it still matters. Give people tools like personalized e-mail alerts based on keywords, location, etc. and eliminate the “nobody told me” backlash government often receives due to poor public outreach.

2. Help elected officials receive and sort, then better understand and respond to, e-mail.

The number one complaint I hear from elected officials around the world is about e-mail. Most officials want to respond effectively, but simply aren't given the tools they need. If there ever was an opportunity for open source collaboration among governments, this is it. In general, our representatives and representative institutions must start to invest in online infrastructure that allows them to connect directly with the public they represent.

3. Dedicate at least 10% of new e-government developments to democracy.

Let's define democracy starting with public input. In an e-service initiative, the 10% should start with citizen focus groups to guide the design of the service. Tools could include usability testing, studies to generate user input and accountability, and post-transaction user surveys. If the investment is a new content management system for information access, then use the 10% to add personalization and survey input features or democratized navigation—those nifty menus that show you the top 10 articles or downloads for that week.

4. Announce all government public meetings on the Internet in a uniform manner.

All public meeting notices, agendas, handouts, and digital recordings must be online. The system should be standards-based and tie state-by-state systems into a national network covering federal, state, and local government public meetings. This is the only way for people to ask to be pro-actively notified of any government public meetings within a certain geographic area that are addressing topics of specific interest to them.

5. Allow citizens to look-up all of their elected officials, from the very local to the national, in one search.

Along with the ability to look-up all public meetings, Americans should have the right to easily learn who all the current elected and appointed

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officials are who represent them. Just before elected and appointed officials assume office, every government unit should be required to enter contact information for those officials into a national database.

6. Host online public hearings and dialogues (or “e-consultations,” as they are known outside the U.S.).

As in-person public meetings begin to incorporate live online features, governments should consider more deliberate online exchanges to improve the outcomes of the decision-making process. If a government agency hosts five public hearings across the country or in a state, it should host the sixth hearing online and improve the format as part of the process. In 20 years, the legislatures, commissions, and city councils that do not hold hearings online will be in the minority.

7. Embrace the rule of law by mandating the most democratically empowering online services and rights across the whole of government.

Technology itself is not forcing real institutional democratic change. I estimate that 90% of the democratic innovations online that really share power are based on a political tradition or law that existed before the Internet arrived. If we want all citizens to benefit universally from a more wired democracy, then now is the time

to update our legal requirements and fund core online democracy services.

8. Provide access to raw data from decision-making information systems.

Let’s explode decision-making data—like congressional information and rulemaking-related content—into bits via XML and open standards and make it easy to re-use public government data from many sources to create views and searches that provide insight, understanding, and accountability. Think “Web 2.0” interactivity built on top of government data by those outside of government.

9. Fund open-source sharing internationally across governments.

Sharing and supporting open source software takes resources. E-Democracy tools are an ideal starting point, so open-source initiatives that seek to reduce technology costs and build systems for eventual use by multiple governments make the most sense. Efforts to place modules and customizations out for community use will be key. Government and vendors who sell to government must contribute code back for the wheels of reciprocal value to start turning.

10. Build local democracy online.

To build e-participation momentum, citizens need to experience results they can see and touch. By investing

in transferable local models and tools, governments can enable more people to use the Internet as a tool to strengthen their communities, protect and enrich their families and neighborhoods, and be heard in a meaningful way. Starting with community-by-community measurement access and participation-related online service and content indicators, government agencies can create momentum for a “Democracy Tune-up.” This same tune-up concept should be applied at the federal and state levels as well.

Conclusion

In the early days, folks thought the Internet was inherently democratic. Parts of it are, but that mistaken sense of technological determinism has not carried over to make constitutional and legally-based representative processes more open and responsive. Today, online “politics as usual” may actually make things worse. Civically conceived e-participation efforts may first need to counter such negative trends and also dispel the notion that “online politics” is just an extra option. Preservation of democratic rights is an important outcome. E-Democracy has the great potential to support, fulfill, and enhance this function. ■

Steven Clift leads the Online Consultation and e-Participation online community of practice at DoWire.org.

E-Authentication: Safeguarding Citizen Identity

By Georgia Marsh
Acting Program Executive, E-Authentication Program
U.S. General Services Administration, and
Jeff Gallimore
Partner, Excella Consulting

The Internet has touched virtually every aspect of our lives in countless and different ways. One area where the Internet has made a substantial impact is in politics – electronically engaging citizens to participate in government. The value of increased citizen involvement is obvious: improved laws and policies, help in setting government priorities, more informed citizens, and better overall decision-making in government. However, citizens are concerned about their security and privacy when they go online.

To realize the benefits of citizen participation, the federal government must not only provide the applications and information to meaningfully engage citizens electronically, but also to overcome associated security and privacy concerns.

Consider the following statistics regarding the demographics, usage, and attitudes of people using the Internet:

- 71% of adults use the Internet, including 87% of those between the ages of 18 and 29. (Pew, 2007)
- 93 million people visit a government website at least once annually, and 12.9 million people visit a government website daily. (Pew, 2006)
- 30% of online users have used the Internet to try to change a government policy or affect a vote on a law. (Pew, 2006)
- 1 in 5 people say their last interaction with government was to express an opinion. (Pew, 2006)

- 31% of people got their political information over the Internet in 2006, compared with only 4% in 1996. (Pew, 2006)
- 14 million people contributed electronically to political discussion and activity in 2006. (Pew, 2006)
- 92% of Internet users said protecting their identity is important. (Zogby International, 2007)
- 75% of consumers support a single, secure, and private verification environment. (International Association of Privacy Professionals, 2004)

We can draw a number of important conclusions from these statistics. First, citizen involvement in government is becoming increasingly electronic. Second, providing an electronic channel for engaging citizens increases their involvement in government. Finally, security and privacy are important issues to people who are going online – they want their personal information to be protected, but they also want that protection to be simple.

The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) has created the E-Authentication solution to connect individuals, federal agencies, other governments, and the private sector.

This solution not only recognizes the trends and opportunities of Internet use, but also responds to the security and privacy concerns of the people using the Internet. Launched in October 2005 as part of this solution,

the U.S. E-Authentication Identity Federation (or more simply, the Federation) makes it easy for citizens, businesses, and representatives of other governments to securely identify themselves when accessing federal government applications online. The Federation does this by creating an environment in which federal agencies can rely on electronic identity credentials (such as user IDs/passwords, and PKI credentials) issued and managed by other organizations inside and outside the federal government to verify/validate the identity of the individuals accessing their online applications.

The Federation itself is made up of numerous federal agency applications and federal and private sector identity credential service providers that have adopted a set of common agreements, standards, and technologies to form a consistent policy framework for the entire Federation.

This policy framework is based upon existing security and privacy legislation, governmentwide guidance, open standards, and commercial best practices. These include the E-Government Act of 2002, the Privacy Act of 1974, memoranda from the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, technical guidance from the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and industry standards such as the Security Assertion Markup Language. GSA has also developed tools to help Federation members understand and implement the requirements of the policy framework, including an electronic risk and requirements assessment, a credential assessment

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framework, an approved interoperable technology provider list, and numerous implementation “cookbooks.”

The statistics presented earlier show citizens are more likely to access online government services if they know their personal information is protected. The counter is also true: security and privacy violations hurt the adoption of and participation in the Federation. In recognition of this, the Federation ensures the integrity of the applications and information within the Federation’s operational environment to increase the trust and participation of its members and end-users. The Federation does this in a number of different ways.

- Federation members take appropriate steps to comply with existing law, policy, and Federation requirements to protect against unauthorized access, sharing, and use of personal information.
- The Federation adds only trusted credential providers into the Federation membership.

- The Federation provides guidance to assist its members in balancing the costs and risks associated with security and privacy.
- The Federation clearly defines the security and privacy requirements for participation in the Federation.
- The Federation monitors its members to ensure they are employing the appropriate security and privacy controls.
- The Federation defines policies and procedures to handle security and privacy violations within the Federation.

The recognition that security and privacy are core requirements of the Federation, coupled with the efficiencies of a common, standard approach to electronic authentication, has led to steady growth of the Federation. There are now 21 agencies and more than 50 applications participating within the Federation, including applications like Regulations.gov which allows citizens to easily access and participate in the federal rulemaking process.

The bottom line is the federal government has an opportunity to increase citizen participation in government by opening up access to its electronic applications and information. However, the government needs to do this in a way that is easy for citizens to use and that effectively addresses their security and privacy concerns. The E-Authentication solution is one that achieves both of these goals. Increased adoption of the solution and the Federation’s continued growth will open up the federal government to more meaningful citizen involvement in a way that protects the privacy of the user and ensures the security of the federal government’s applications and information – results that are better for everyone. ■

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