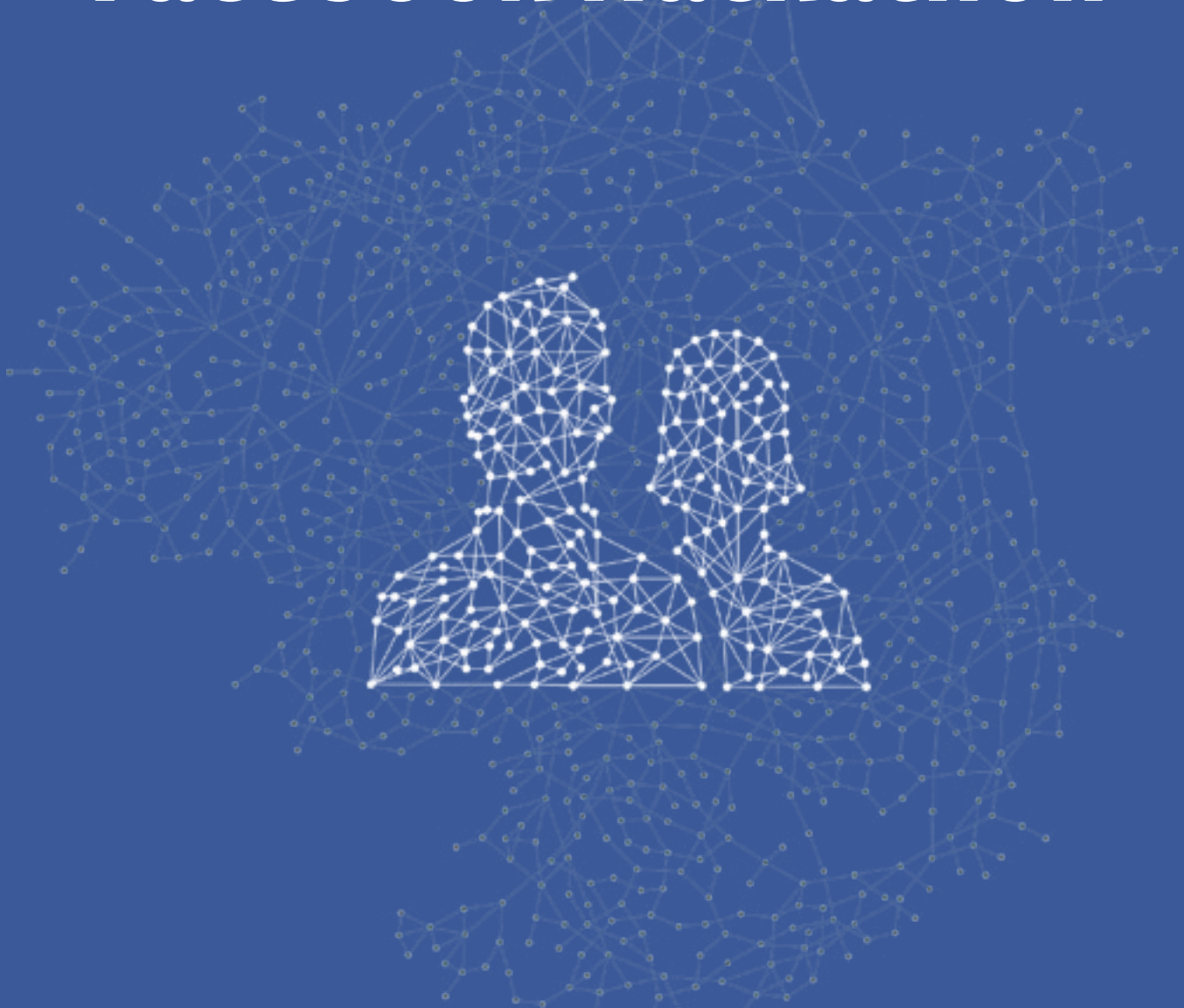


Congressional Facebook Hackathon



SUMMARY REPORT
112th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

“It is essential to liberty that the government in general should have a common interest with the people, so it is particularly essential that the House of Representatives should have an immediate dependence on, and an intimate sympathy with, the people.”

- James Madison
FEDERALIST NO. 52

THE HACKATHON EXPERIMENT

The first Congressional Facebook Hackathon was an experiment. We aimed to create a bipartisan forum that gathered together stakeholders from Capitol Hill and programmers from around the country to explore how social media could improve the legislative process.

We believe that the public's enthusiasm for the event demonstrated that we are on the right track. Talented individuals, from both inside and outside of Congress, share a common passion for developing solutions to restore the faith of the American People in our country's legislative institutions.

Programmers and software developers are uniquely positioned to improve our nation's legislative institutions; their creations will empower citizens to more meaningfully engage in the legislative process.

New technologies have consistently provided both challenges and opportunities for our nation's government. In the 1920s, it was radio. In the 1950s, it was television. In the late 1970s, it was cable television. Today, we are again at such a moment; the rise of social media will enable a legislative process that is more participatory, more transparent, and, ultimately, more satisfactory to the American public.

What follows in this document are the results of our first experiment, a Congressional Hackathon, to explore ways that social media can be used to improve our country's legislative institutions.

As always, in #HackWeTrust.

Matt Lira
Digital Director
Majority Leader Eric Cantor

Steve Dwyer
Online Communications Director
Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer



RECOMMENDED ACTION ITEMS

There are three actions items, developed from discussions at the Hackathon, that we wanted to highlight in particular. While the House should improve its own digital platforms, the most important action item is to publicly release information that will empower third-party developers to innovate on their own.

Release Structured Machine-Readable Legislative Data

Providing legislative data in a bulk format to enable third-party developers to create more dynamic interfaces for legislative information.

Improve Access and Reliability of Committee Video

A more stable and standardized platform for streaming committee video would provide developers with dynamic material to connect citizens with the process.

Strengthen the Dialogue with the Developer Community

The release of data should be continually improved, incorporating the feedback of the developer community. It is clear that this dialogue will benefit both the legislative institutions and the American public.



REMARKS BY
ERIC CANTOR
MAJORITY LEADER

“Increased access, increased connection with our constituents, transparency, and openness are not partisan issues.”

Thank you, Steny. Good afternoon. It's a real pleasure for me to be here to greet you. The idea for this event originated with a trip Matt Lira and I took out to Silicon Valley. We were visiting Facebook and had an opportunity to meet with Mark Zuckerberg, Sheryl Sandberg, and the rest of the team there and got to talking about how we could further the work that we've already begun here to increase people's access to what goes on in Congress.

Increased access, increased connection with our constituents, transparency, and openness are not partisan issues. God knows we are looking for ways to work together on something around here, and this is a great place for us to do that.

I think there's a huge potential for leverage given your know-how, bringing that to bear in how we disseminate information, how you use this information that we generate everyday, to connect to more people to the process.

In my office, we have over the last several years launched a program called YouCut. We wanted to build a very genuine way for people to make a difference in the legislative process.

We want to replicate that, and not in a way that's just driving one agenda. We want to provide a platform for more people to know what's going on here.

There are a lot of hearings, discussions, deliberations - not only in the chambers of the Capitol, but in the committee rooms and the subcommittee rooms - that frankly a lot of people may be interested in. In the world of six second sound bites, it's very difficult for the media to do justice to some of the subject matter. So I'm hopeful that we can foster more engagement by our constituents by using the principles of social design to more directly involve the public in the legislative process.

So again, I'm delighted to be here. I really look forward to your suggestions. I hear there are going to be some really productive workshops after this, and I look forward to partnering not only with my colleague, Steny Hoyer, and my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, but with you in the innovation community to help us make this Congress more the Congress of the People. Thank you very much, and good luck.

REMARKS BY
STENY HOYER
DEMOCRATIC WHIP

“For Congress, we have a duty to make the legislative process as open and accessible as possible.”



The Republican Leader and I may debate vigorously on many issues, but one area where we strongly agree is on making Congress more transparent and accessible.

Through social media platforms, Members of Congress are able to interact with our constituents to keep them informed and stay informed ourselves so we can better serve them.

Perhaps the most important use for social media and the Internet in government is to improve transparency. President Obama deserves a lot of credit for launching Data.gov in 2009, with over 250,000 data sets from the executive branch placed online. Another promising initiative is WeThePeople.gov, where citizens can directly petition the White House online.

For Congress, we have a duty to make the legislative process as open and accessible as possible. One thing we could do is make Thomas.gov – where people go to research legislation from current and previous Congresses – easier to use, and accessible by social media. Imagine if a bill in Congress could tweet its own status.

The data available on Thomas.gov should be expanded and made easily accessible by third party systems. Once this happens, developers, like many of you here today, could use legislative data in innovative ways. This will usher in new public-private partnerships that will empower new entrepreneurs who will, in turn, yield benefits to the public sector.

One successful example is how cities have made public transit data accessible so developers can use it in apps and websites. The end result has been commuters saving time everyday and seeing more punctual trains and buses as a result of the transparency. Legislative data is far more complex, but the same principles apply.

Another area ripe for transformation is the way we correspond with our constituents. Social networks and new web technologies present exciting opportunities to involve the public in the legislative process. The limitations only extend as far as your creativity and imagination.

I hope today’s ‘Hackathon’ is informative and productive, and I look forward to hearing what ideas emerge from it.

LEGISLATIVE WORKFLOW AND LEGISLATIVE DATA

GROUP CURATORS: STEVE JOHNSTON AND ROB PIERSON

The Legislative Data group explored all facets of the Congressional legislative workflow, ranging from the writing and editing of bills to committee hearings to the bulk data encompassing bill text, amendments, and votes. By examining the bill production process and the data that is available or could potentially be made available, participants focused their discussions on ways to produce better legislation under more transparent conditions.

MADISON

Real-Time Bill Markups by the Public

Chairman Darrell Issa of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee introduced MADISON, a new real-time markup engine developed by a team of developers working with Chairman Issa's digital staff. MADISON enables the public to comment on legislation as it works through the committee process, allowing them to indicate bill text they support and suggest revisions to improve legislation. Seamus Kraft, Digital Director for Chairman Issa, stressed that MADISON is a work in progress that will require ongoing feedback from the developer community for continued improvement.

Legislation Creation

A Git Repository for Legislative Text

A git repository for legislative text would be a place to view which Members of Congress included specific portions of bill text and when they included it. This process is based on the repositories used by developers working together on a project that enables them to submit their code in order to track changes over time. This would enable richer legislative data that could identify involvement in the writing and editing of a particular bill as well as larger trends in bill drafting activity over the course of a Congress.

Committee Hearings

Crowdsourcing Before & After Testimony

Social media could help committee members and their staff to create more effective hearings and to analyze testimony. As soon as a committee schedules a hearing around a particular bill or topic, committees could get crowdsourced suggestions on witnesses to invite, subtopics to explore, and questions to ask witnesses. This would promote public participation earlier in the hearing development process. During and after hearings, a public website would allow experts to comment and fact-check testimony, building a richer record for analysis.

Bulk Data

The bulk data group brought a diverse collection of stakeholders together, ranging from representatives of the GPO and the Library of Congress, House and Senate administrative staff, and developers from around the country. There was a lengthy discussion about the benefits of structured format for publications like the Congressional Record and for online platforms like THOMAS so that bill names, numbers, amendments, sponsors, and other unique identifiers can be more easily parsed from bulk data sets. In order to ensure that data is being provided in a way that will best serve the needs of Americans, we need to facilitate a dialogue between the publishers of this data and the developers who utilize it.

Madison Empowers

keeptheweb#OPEN

Help Edit This Legislation

1

- 1. **SECTION 1.** The Commission shall carry out the duties assigned to it in this chapter.
- 2. **SECTION 2.** The Commission shall carry out its duties in accordance with the following:
 - a. It shall advise the Governor on the following:
 - 1. The creation of a new agency or the consolidation of agencies.
 - 2. The creation of a new position or the consolidation of positions.
 - 3. The creation of a new department or the consolidation of departments.
 - 4. The creation of a new office or the consolidation of offices.
 - 5. The creation of a new division or the consolidation of divisions.
 - 6. The creation of a new unit or the consolidation of units.
 - 7. The creation of a new position or the consolidation of positions.
 - 8. The creation of a new position or the consolidation of positions.
 - 9. The creation of a new position or the consolidation of positions.
 - 10. The creation of a new position or the consolidation of positions.
 - b. It shall advise the Governor on the following:
 - 1. The creation of a new agency or the consolidation of agencies.
 - 2. The creation of a new position or the consolidation of positions.
 - 3. The creation of a new department or the consolidation of departments.
 - 4. The creation of a new office or the consolidation of offices.
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 - 8. The creation of a new position or the consolidation of positions.
 - 9. The creation of a new position or the consolidation of positions.
 - 10. The creation of a new position or the consolidation of positions.

Madison Bill 7

the Edit Box

Like

Share

1 Community Suggestion

This suggestion was created by a user who is not logged in. You can log in or register to suggest changes to this legislation.

NAME: [REDACTED]

0 Community Comments

See A Bill Edit / Comment

Make Bill Edit

Make Comment

Thank you for your contribution.





LEGISLATIVE MAIL AND CORRESPONDENCE

GROUP CURATORS: GERRIT LANSING AND MARCI HARRIS

The most direct way for constituents to impact the legislative process is to write their Member of Congress. However, as recent studies have indicated, the methods to process constituent correspondence have not kept pace with the exponential growth in the volume of correspondence. Working to ensure that constituents are able to meaningfully contact their Member of Congress is a high priority for the institution.

Real-Time Voting Information Updates

As Members of Congress vote, using structured information provided by the Clerk, their social media platforms would automatically be updated with their vote. In addition to showing how a Member casts each vote, it could also link to legislative summary information on both the Clerk's website and THOMAS.

"Storify" for Policy Issues

While staff focuses on quick responses to constituents, they could be supplemented with longer Storify-like pages on major issues being considered by the House. In place of conventional website issues pages, these would enable constituents to stay informed on an ongoing basis as the House acts on various issues.



Civic Profile Application

The three goals of legislative mail are to connect citizens with elected officials, educate citizens on the policy positions of their Representative, and verify that they are actually constituents of the specific elected official.

Similar to the way that the Write Your Representative web portal prioritizes email correspondence, this application would verify that citizens contacting Members via social media are their constituents.

After completing a registration form, the Civic Profile application would show constituents their entire slate of elected officials – ranging from the President to their local officials. Constituents would have the opportunity to subscribe to updates from their elected officials.

This application should also build Open Graph constituency identities for the end user, which would then enable any application to use the civic profile identity to verify an end user's status as a constituent.

Facebook Message Tab

Elected officials should have a tab on their Facebook pages to enable constituents to contact the office via the social network, while also having that information plug directly into the existing constituent correspondence processes within the office.

This will end the ad hoc nature of constituent responses that currently exists on social networks, and begin to build systemic solutions for this activity, as it becomes an increasingly central method of constituent correspondence.



CASEWORK AND CONSTITUENT SERVICES

GROUP CURATORS: KARINA NEWTON AND ANDREW FOXWELL

One of the core responsibilities of a Congressional office is constituent casework. Unlike legislative correspondence, which concerns a constituent's views on a specific policy or issue, casework is facilitating processes within the federal government on behalf of a constituent. This ranges from flag requests to liaising with federal agencies who constituents feel are not serving them well.

Privacy and Confidentiality Issues

Casework often involves extremely personal information; ensuring that a constituent's personal information remains secure throughout the entire casework process was identified as a vital priority.

Ask.House.Gov

A webpage to provide answers to constituents' frequently asked questions on various Congressional services. The best answers are voted up by the public, in a Quora-like model, to provide a continually improving clearinghouse of information on how to best utilize the entire array of services offered to the public.



Casework Tracking Portal

Each casework request would be assigned a tracking number, similar to how shipping companies process packages, so that constituents will be able to track the progress that is made on their specific request. Aggregated data could be made publicly available to show the overall casework workload processed by Congress on an ongoing basis.

MyTour Interactive Visitor Map

Create an interactive map on House.gov, which would use a heat map to show where people who've taken Congressional tours are from in the world. It is possible that this could be created automatically using the data gathered from the ticketing process.

MyDistrict Real-Time, District-Specific Analytics

A real-time analytics system to display what issues are being publically discussed within each specific Congressional district on social media. This would likely use a combination of existing APIs with information from the Civic Profile application.

Facebook Casework Tab

A Facebook tab which embeds the existing secure casework forms from a Member's website. This would help ensure that a constituent seeking help with a federal agency would be able to connect with the appropriate process, while also taking steps to protect their privacy. A constituent should be able to complete the entire casework submissions process without leaving their Member's Facebook page.

PRESS STRATEGY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

GROUP CURATORS: STEPHEN DAGADAKIS AND DAVID ALMACY

The PR/Press breakout group addressed the ways by which social media is enabling communications to evolve due to the increased velocity and volume of communications, both outgoing messages distributed to the media and the public and incoming messages from constituents that must be received and responded to. The growing importance of social media blurs the line between press messaging and constituent correspondence, leading Congressional offices to reevaluate how they allocate staff and other resources. While this poses new challenges, it also presents profound opportunities for Congress to utilize increasingly widespread, sophisticated, and cost-effective technologies to become more responsive to the concerns of the American people.

Create Digital Content that Will Drive Traditional Media

As a part of their press strategy, Members of Congress should create digital content that originates online and generates further discussion on TV and in print news outlets.

The key is to consider how content will be integrated across all channels, cutting through the clutter and amplifying its message for full effect. For instance, a Member may make an announcement exclusively on their social media account rather than through a more traditional press release. That announcement, which links to a webpage, generates blog coverage, leading to a mention on the evening news and in the next day's newspaper. Attention garnered from this media drives traffic to the webpage, where constituents can react and submit their responses, spurring additional original digital content.

Thinking about how messages can move across channels rather than sit idly within a single silo allows Congressional communicators to expand the possibilities of the message selected and the medium used.

What a Social Media Press Conference of the Future Looks Like

Digital tools expand what is possible when it comes to traditional media events like a press conference. A social media press conference of the future would allow for richer engagement by more people while disseminating a Member of Congress' message to a wider mass of people or to a larger niche audience.

Journalists, reporters, and bloggers could register to receive notifications of these online events via email or push notifications. After signing up, they could submit questions to the communications staff, allowing for a more diverse variety of questions from a greater number of individuals.

Update the Rules of Congress to Encourage More Digital Innovation

Given the rapidly changing nature of social media and the accompanying technological advances, it's imperative that we reevaluate the rules governing the use of digital media tools. Modernizing these rules will allow Congress to avoid inhibiting potential applications of technology that could help bring about better communication between Congress and constituents.



NEXT STEPS

If there was one overriding question on everyone's mind at the Hackathon, it was, "How do we keep this community's momentum going?" We are dedicated to doing just that.

Civic Profile Application

The Civic Profile Application would have unique importance to many other possible applications, while also providing an immediate benefit to Congressional offices and the public. We are looking at the best way to develop this application, perhaps as a social media addition to the Write Your Representative service.

Reinforce a Culture of Customer Service

In addition to looking for ways that technology can improve Congressional institutions, we need to simultaneously look for ways to reinforce a culture of constituent service as customer service. Companies such as Zappos, Amazon and others have a particular expertise in leveraging technology and workflow to improve experiences for their customers; we need to learn from those examples and try to apply the relevant lessons to the House.

Build an Ongoing Dialogue

As the House works to modernize, we need to continue this ongoing dialogue with the developer and transparency communities to ensure that the House consistently enacts incremental progress. This should include developer events, both large and small, that allow innovators to develop solutions. Of course, we view it as critical that these efforts continue in a bipartisan manner.

It is clear that we are at a moment of opportunity; the rise of social media presents unique possibilities, particularly if we build a strong community that combines engineering talent with institutional knowledge. Working together, we will heal the relationship between the American public and their legislative institutions.

**DATA
TO THE
HOUSE**

Constituent Mail - Email, Web, Snail Mail
Casework Requests and Information
Policy Information - Studies, Bill Ideas



Legislative Data - Bill Text, Process, Status
Legislative Workflow - Hearings, Amend
Congressional Video - Floor, Committee

**DATA
FROM THE
HOUSE**



