GOVLAB RESEARCH

GovLab Compendium

GovLab Blog Posts, Spring 2013

By GovLab Research

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A curation of new trends, case studies and findings illustrating the potential impact of increased citizen engagement and access to information on how we govern, initially featured on the GovLab blog: www.thegovlab.org

MacArthur Foundation

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Opening Government – Transparency and Effectiveness Through Data

MEASURING THE OPEN DATA ECONOMY

By Stefaan Verhulst

March 5, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/?s=Measuring+the+Open+Data+Economy

A new ebook by Dinand Tinholt of Capgemini Consulting called *The Open Data Economy: Unlocking Economic Value by Opening Government and Public Data* attempts to measure the return of investment behind open data initiatives.

In Tinholt's view, "political support, breadth and refresh rate of data released, the ease in sourcing data and participation from user community determine the degree of maturity of an Open Data program." Using these metrics, Tinholt categorized countries with Open Data initiatives as Beginners, Followers or Trend Setters.

The central insight Tinholt gains in the project maturity section of the book is:

> *"These findings reflect that a strong political will/vision in itself does not guarantee the success of Open Data initiatives. It is important that this vision be adequately complemented with efforts towards sharing quality data with users, ensuring its increased uptake and an active participation from the user community. A coherent approach towards achieving these objectives is essential, in order to realize maximum benefits from Open Data initiatives."*

The Open Data Economy is just one example of recent efforts to provide more objective, quantifiable research on Open Data and Open Government more generally, including those attempts by Deloitte, Forrester and McKinsey (see Alex Howard's overview of some of the research)

The Open Data Research Network, for example, recently announced its "Exploring the Impacts of Open Data in Developing Countries" (ODDC) project. However, unlike ODDC, Tinholt's ebook is more strictly focused on the best practices and challenges of Open Data related to their effect on the economic activity of the host country, with less emphasis on concerns like government transparency and accountability—concerns that will presumably play a greater role in the ODDC research.

After categorizing the project maturity levels of different countries with Open Data initiatives, Tinholt uses case studies to examine the thesis:

> *"In today's challenging economic times, Open Data can act as a significant aid to Government efforts at creating jobs. And at the same time, it can complement the efforts of the private sector to boost the skill set of the hiring pool."*

With outcomes like the estimated €140 billion of annual economic activity generated by Open Data projects in the EU27 economy in mind, Tinholt comes to the following conclusion:

> *"In summary, opening up data holds the key to unlocking economic gains from multiple perspectives. Governments and public authorities need to view Open Data not just as an opportunity to bring in transparency and accountability in their functioning, but also as an enabler of innovation. In these challenging times, it offers the opportunity to drive tangible economic value and stimulate growth and innovation. Governments wishing to establish their position in tomorrow's digital world should leverage the potential that Open Data holds."*

"SMART DISCLOSURE DATA COMMUNITY" LAUNCHED

By Stefaan Verhulst

February 14, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/smart-disclosure-data-community-launched/

On February 11, the U.S. Office of Science and Technology Policy announced the launch of Consumer.Data.gov, the 16th community on the data repository Data.gov. This new "Smart Disclosure Data Community" is a "first-of-its-kind centralized platform containing over 400 smart disclosure data sets and resources from dozens of agencies across government." The announcement defines smart disclosure as "the act of making potentially useful data more readily available—both to consumer directly and to innovators who can use it to build tools that help consumers make smart decisions." As noted on the new site, Consumer.Data.gov is a major step in the administration's continued embrace of smart disclosure initiatives.

> *"The United States committed to promoting the use of Smart Disclosure in the U.S. Open Government National Action Plan. In September 2011, the White House Office of Management and Budget released guidance to agencies on informing consumers through Smart Disclosure. A dedicated Task Force on Smart Disclosure was also established under the National Science and Technology Council."*

The scope of Consumer.Data.gov could help citizen engagement with the portal surpass that of other Open Data initiatives. Joseph Marks notes that the new consumer community features "datasets ranging from census reports to a feed of child product recalls," unlike most previous Data.gov communities that have been "more narrowly focused on a field such as health, energy and oceans." While those more specific communities are undoubtedly important and yield valuable insights and innovations, the categories of available data on

Consumer.Data.gov—such as education, energy, environment, finance, safety and transportation—contain potentially useful information for practically every American citizen.

While consumers can obtain valuable information directly from the portal, like Open Data projects more generally, Consumer.Data.gov is also meant to act as an information hub for the creation of new innovations. "Using the Community, entrepreneurs and innovators can access free Federal data to create the consumer applications, products, and services of the future—all in one convenient location." In addition to the available raw data sets, the site features a number of smart disclosure apps that have already leveraged available data to help consumers make better choices, including: College Navigator, Alternative Fuel Locator and Find a Health Center.

Consumer.Data.gov makes clear that, even beyond new innovations and accordant economic activity, increasing consumer intelligence through smart disclosure is about more than altruism—"poor [consumer] choices reduce overall market efficiency and economic growth. Properly functioning consumer markets depend on consumers' ability to make informed choices." Moreover, "consumers' decisions about higher education, energy, consumption, and mortgages, for example, can affect the nation's competitiveness, security, and fiscal health." So while Consumer.Data.gov is an important step, "Going forward, innovators inside and outside government face a great opportunity—and challenge—to realize the full potential of Smart Disclosure to empower consumers to make better choices."

NEW SCHOLARSHIP ON OPEN DATA, CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND RANDOMNESS

By Stefaan Verhulst

January 30, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/new-scholarship-on-open-data-citizen-engagement-and-randomness/

In this paper, Marcel Sangsari's assesses the EU's European Citizen's Initiative (ECI), a tool that allows citizens to propose legislation and garners an official response from the European Commission once a proposal gains a total of 1 million signatures from supporters in at least 7 member states.

- "Despite its early difficulties, the ECI also promises to embrace an era of transnational, e-democracy and, through the use [of] virtual social networks, there is an opportunity to develop more citizen participation in EU affairs."
- "The moral weight behind the voice of 1 million citizens would make such an initiative difficult for the EU to ignore."

James H. Fowler and Nicholas A. Christakis's "A random world is a fair world," examines research demonstrating the unexpected prevalence of fairness rather than self-interest in human behavior.

- "It may seem remarkable that randomness is what drives 'fair' behavior in this model, but it is consistent with what we know about other human behaviors that apparently defy rational explanation: uncertainty is key."
- "This is a nice turn of concept. Proximate selfish behavior can be bad for you, and under evolutionary pressure may not even survive because fairness maximizes individual fitness. It may not be fair to be selfish, but it is certainly selfish to be fair."

In this paper, Anneke Zuiderwijk, Marijn Janssen, Sunil Choenni, Ronald Meijer and Roexsana Sheikh Alibaks attempt to move past blanket optimism to determine the "Socio-technical Impediments of Open Data."

- "Most impediments for the open data process concern the actual use of open data. The analysis shows that open data policies provide scant attention to the user perspective, whereas the user needs to generate value from the open data."
- "Based on a literature overview (37 documents), four workshops and six interviews, 118 socio-technical impediments for the use of open data were identified.... The impediments that the open data process currently encounters were categorized in ten categories: 1) availability and access, 2) find ability, 3) usability, 4) understand ability, 5) quality, 6) linking and combining data, 7) comparability and compatibility, 8) metadata, 9) interaction with the data provider, and 10) opening and uploading."

O'REILLY'S BOOK ON OPEN GOVERNMENT MADE PUBLICLY AVAILABLE

By Stefaan Verhulst

January 19, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/oreillys-book-on-open-government-made-publicly-available/

To honor Aaron Swartz, O'Reilly Media has made its new book on *Open Government* publicly available on GitHub. (Aaron Swartz was one of the book contributors, authoring Chapter 25: "When is Transparency Useful?"). In the Preface, the editors define Open Government as follows:

"What is open government? In the most basic sense, it's the notion that the people have the right to access the documents and proceedings of government. The idea that the public has a right to scrutinize and participate in government dates at least to the Enlightenment, and is enshrined in both the U.S. Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution. Its principles are recognized in virtually every democratic country on the planet.

But the very meaning of the term continues to evolve. The concept of open government has been influenced—for the better—by the open source software movement, and taken on a greater focus for allowing participation in the procedures of government. Just as open source software allows users to change and contribute to the source code of their software, open government now means government where citizens not only have access to information, documents, and proceedings, but can also become participants in a meaningful way. Open government also means improved communication and operations within the various branches and levels of government. More sharing internally can lead to greater efficiency and accountability."

COMPENDIUM ON "OPEN GOVERNMENT AND CIVIC TECHNOLOGY"

By Stefaan Verhulst

January 13, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/compendium-on-open-government-and-civic-technology/

In sync with services like Pinterest, the *New York Times* launched in December a new service called "Compendium", allowing their users to collate and annotate content from any *Times* page to their own collections.

Early user Alex Howard, the Government 2.0 Washington Correspondent for O'Reilly Media, compiled a variety of stories since 1990 on "Open Government and Civic Technology" into a recent Compendium. He also did one on Big Data.

A FIRST STEP TOWARD A SINGLE OPEN DATA PORTAL FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION

By Stefaan Verhulst

January 3, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/a-first-step-toward-a-single-open-data-portal-for-the-european-union/

At the very end of 2012, the European Commission launched a beta version of its new Open Data Portal. The European Public Sector Information Platform calls the portal a "first step towards a pan-European data portal that will provide access to all underlying national (and regional, local) data portals across the 27 Member States." While some several European member states have their own open data initiatives—like Data.gov.uk (United Kingdom), Data.gov.be (Belgium) and Data.gouv.fr (France)—the EC's goal is to build a centralized data repository on top of these distributed nation-specific sites. In addition to decreasing the fragmentation of the EU's open data initiatives, the EC's program aims to probe member states that are lagging behind the open data trend, like Germany, a country where "Open Data activists and representatives from industry and science" are having difficulty convincing the government not to lock away data. Vice-President of the European Commissioner (and responsible for the European Digital Agenda and for the Open Data Potal) Neelie Kroes acknowledges in a blog post on unlocking government data, the challenge now is to help different EU administrations fully grasp the idea that providing free or low cost data could benefit their governments.

At launch, the data portal provides access to over 5800 datasets, with most, at this point, coming from the European Commission's stats agency Eurostat. At the moment, the data housed in the portal "concerns all the information that public bodies in the European Union produce, collect or pay for…This could include geographical data, statistics, meteorological data, data from publicly funded research projects, and digitised books from libraries." The EC portal cannot yet match the volume of data stored at the United States Data.gov, but the Commission is committed to working toward achieving that goal. Similarly to Data.gov (United States) and Data.gov.uk (United Kingdom), the EC Open Data Portal does not provide its data in any single, uniform file format; rather, each dataset is made available in at least one reusable, machine-readable format. The new portal also uses SPARQL endpoint for linked data. SPARQL, now the World Wide Web Consortium standard for the Semantic Web, allows both humans and machines to quickly query a database and returns the data in machine-readable formats.

The portal implements the Commission's "Open Data Strategy for Europe," announced at the end of 2011, which aims to "deliver a 40 billion euro boost to the EU's economy annually." After releasing EU data in a centralized portal, "a level playing field for open data across the EU will be established" and new open data measures will be "backed by the €100 million which will be granted in 2011-2013 to fund research into improved data-handling technologies." The Open Data Strategy also includes more specific goals, many of which are furthered by the launch of the Open Data Portal:

- Making it a general rule that all documents made accessible by public sector bodies can be re-used for any purpose, commercial or non-commercial, unless protected by third party copyright.
- Establishing the principle that public bodies should not be allowed to charge more than costs triggered by the individual request for data (marginal costs); in practice this means most data will be offered for free or virtually free, unless duly justified.
- Making it compulsory to provide data in commonly used, machine-readable formats, to ensure data can be effectively re-used.
- Introducing regulatory oversight to enforce these principles.

- Massively expanding the reach of the Directive to include libraries, museums and archives for the first time.

The portal notes that, “this…is about transparency, open government and innovation.” The Commission’s original plan noted that the new Open Data ecosystem in the EU would benefit not only journalists and academics, but also the public at large by boosting “the thriving industry that turns raw data into the material that hundreds of millions of ICT users depend on,” and fostering the creation of innovative new applications, “such as maps, real-time traffic and weather information, price comparison tools and more.”

In addition to the economic value proposition behind open data, a video on the portal’s landing page notes that data is increasingly becoming a “digital echo of the world around us”. As such the Commission recognizes that providing unfettered access to data is also a matter of social justice.

OPENING RUSSIA

By Sean Brooks

December 1, 2012

http://www.openinggovernment.org/opening-russia/

Below we’ve copied a statement made by Prime Minister Medvedev at the Russian Government meeting on November 29th. He describes open government as a priority and he reasserts a commitment to join Open Government Partnership. The original Russian transcript is available here.

“Now, let’s talk about the quality of public administration and improving the efficiency of public service. We should focus on introducing transparency standards for government agencies to include public participation in drafting government documents, openness and availability of information for discussion, the ability of citizens to share their suggestions and actually take part in government decision-making. In late October, the State Duma passed in the first reading a draft law prepared by the Government which provides for the participation of representatives of public councils at ministries and departments in the work of contest and evaluation committees. Thus, civil society will get additional leverage on government human resources. We assume that this document will be adopted and come into force as early as next year. A performance assessment system for regional leaders has been introduced recently, which takes into account demographic, economic and social factors and the friendliness of the business environment. I have recently approved two lists of specific performance indicators. Importantly, the final assessment should reflect public opinion as well. The most successful regions will receive grants from the federal budget.

Finally, the seventh point that I’ll make today is about the Open Government. An ongoing dialogue with civil society is, perhaps, one of the most important innovations in our work. I would like to specifically emphasize the term “dialogue,” not monologues by heads of ministries and departments. It should be a two-way street based on feedback and dialogue supported by subsequent actions of the authorities.

In early August, I approved the first half of the members of the Government Expert Council: 200 representatives of different social groups. I hope that decision on the other half will be made soon.

Dozens of bills and public programmes have been discussed and many revisions have been made, with some documents sent back for revision. It was comforting for me to know (I think you also noticed it) that public and business organisations have expressed their satisfaction with the way the system works, saying that some of the issues that have remained on the back burner for years were quickly resolved by the Open Government, such as industrial safety regulations.

At least 20 bills will be reviewed by the Open Government. Of course, I will take active part in this work. I believe all Government members should be involved. Some of them, as a public initiative, can be put to a public vote by 100,000 citizens who are entitled to make such decisions. Let's see how this tool works. Anyway, it's interesting to launch such a project. Let me remind you, federal departments have been charged with the task of implementing the Open Government principles. I hope you'll do your best to make this happen.

Next, there's an Open Region project which is now being implemented in 18 regions and 4 municipalities. The main goal, of course, is to bring government and people closer together and maintain an active dialogue. The Open Government is not something that we came up with sitting in comfortable armchairs. Open Government programs are implemented all over the world and there is the Open Government Partnership . I hope that we will join this partnership in March."

"OPEN GOVERNMENT: A NEW PANORAMA FOR GOVERNANCE"

By Stefaan Verhulst

October 25, 2012

http://www.openinggovernment.org/open-government-a-new-panorama-for-governance/

The Instituto Electoral y de Participación Ciudadana de Jalisco (Mexico) along with UNDP released an English version of their report on "Technology and Citizen Particpation in the Construction of Democracy. " The report includes eleven essays and case studies regarding technology's capacity to improve citizens' level of democratic engagement, and the resulting improvements in government. Ravneet Singh notes that recent history has been defined by a boom in technology—including growing internet penetration rates, increasing broadband coverage and the rise of social networks—and a simultaneous decline in citizens' interest and engagement in democratic politics. Not surprisingly, many recognized that these concurrent trends pose an opportunity. The authors find that whether studying e-democracy initiatives, electronic voting, improved collaborative capabilities through mobile or social media-aided digital activism, technology, while not the solution to government's failings in its own right, is increasingly acting as a medium between citizens and their elected officials.

Exploring perhaps the most talked about current example of technology in government, Jorge Soto's "Open Government: A New Panorama for Governance" hits on many of the familiar advantages of the open government movement: increased transparency, improved decision making, increased service quality and the potential for new innovations, among others. While Soto is certainly supportive of all of these open government aims, he, like the other authors in the publication, considers technology to be less a means of directly improving government workings and more of a path to increasing citizens' participation and collaboration. Once technology helps these citizens to become engaged and empowered, they have the capacity to effect positive change in their government. Both the release of open government data (OGD) and the crowdsourcing of policy "establish a more efficient dialogue" and "work as a medium" between government and the general public. According to Soto, open government is about much more than transparency; it is about inviting "the public to form part of the governing process, by making their political capacities effective." To do this, Soto, like Tim O'Reilly, believes that "governments must focus on becoming platforms and creating developer ecosystems."

The new engaged, collaborative communities created through open government are not, however, exclusively made up of government, developers and individual constituents. Soto believes that open government can build bridges between government, civil society and citizens from diverse disciplines. While the creation of new and innovative applications through the use of OGD is undoubtedly beneficial, newly built communities of people from a number of areas and fields of knowledge working with the government to address societal problems will likely have even greater long-term benefits. After the government releases data, a variety of people are needed to make the most of that data. Communities are built through OGD by utilizing people "from the technical field to extract and manipulate data, from the social or journalistic field to identify their relevance and from the graphic field to create easily-understood visualizations." While informing the public and creating innovative applications are undoubtedly noble results of these collaborations, the collaborations themselves are perhaps the most important byproduct of the system.

Interestingly, while still recognizing the potential of crowdsourcing and the dissemination of OGD to address governmental blindspots, Soto calls for a more strategic, targeted form of open government. He argues that, "data have to be used to satisfy projects or carry out specific actions and to create communications with shared experiences that encourage participation." That is not to say that governments should only release data for which there is an immediate need, but Soto is clearly advocating a greater role for government than simply making all of its public data available in machine-readable formats. Not surprisingly, this goes back to Soto's main theme: creating participation and community through open government. Adoption, he argues, is driven by simplicity and responding to real user needs and societal problems. There will, no doubt, always be a dedicated few interested in mining endless streams of OGD in the interest of creating something innovative, but to create communities of engaged citizens, industries and NGOs, OGD must recognize societal needs and opportunities, and supply the information necessary for the public to respond to them.

THE OPEN GOVERNMENT REVOLUTION: THE DAY AFTER THE ARAB SPRING

By Kevin Hansen

September 16, 2012

http://www.openinggovernment.org/394/

IN BRIEF:

- Governments exist to organize the transmission of information and expertise to and from citizens, but our current system of information flow is designed for an earlier age of communication.
- Scientists have recently begun to see flow as a defining feature of systems, offering insight into the pervasive public dissatisfaction with our current institutions.
- The next great superpower will be the one whose governance structures connect hierarchical institutions and networks to enable its citizens to collaborate to address our most significant social problems.
- Citizens must redesign their institutions of governance to curate more participatory opportunities and devolve power.

In her TED Talk from June 28, 2012, former U.S. Deputy Chief Technology Officer Beth Noveck argues that citizens must demand a more open source government. In her view, this open government revolution would happen in two steps.

First, information is beginning and will continue to flow more rapidly and efficiently between citizens and their governments, making governments smarter. According to Noveck:

"In the first phase of this open government revolution, we're seeing designs for channeling information to government to make institutions smarter. Safecast is supplementing and checking government with distributed radiation measurements in the wake of the Fukushima plant disaster. We'll want to experiment with new ways of educating legislators and bureaucrats independent of lobbyists to inform decision making."

Second, Noveck posits that open government is not simply transparency and data-sharing. A more open government would be one in which citizens actually begin to take on more traditional functions of governance:

"The second phase is in getting decision-making power out. Participatory budgeting has long been practiced in Porto Alegre, Brazil; they're just starting it in the 49th Ward in Chicago. Russia is using wikis to get citizens writing law together, as is Lithuania—when we start to see power over the core functions of government–spending, legislation, decision-making–then we're well on our way to an open government revolution."

Ultimately, Noveck argues that the most important step citizens must take next is to demand a more open source government:

"We need to start with our youngest people…we start by teaching young people that we live not in a passive society–a read-only society–but in a writeable society where we have the power to change our communities, to change our institutions. That's when we begin to really put ourselves on a pathway towards this open government innovation, towards this open government movement, towards this open government revolution... The important thing for us to do is to talk about and demand this revolution."

The talk is an excellent provocation, but the devil is in the details. How do we get from where we are to where we must go? How do we redesign the flow of our institutions to allow for meaningful participation and devolution? Our work creating a research agenda and community to help design participatory innovations is a response and a starting point.

For three related TED videos on the future of government, check out Jen Pahlka's talk on "Coding a Better Government," Clay Shirky's presentation on "How the Internet Will (One Day) Transform Government" and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom David Cameron's speech titled, "The Next Age of Government."

Beth Noveck is a member of Opening Government and can be found on Twitter at @bethnoveck.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY:

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Civic Information – Public Data Gets Big

HOW UNIQUE ARE WE? WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR MOBILE PRIVACY?

By Stefaan Verhulst

March 27, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/how-unique-are-we-what-does-this-mean-for-mobile-privacy/

Many policy makers are considering the increased use of (big) data to solve public problems. In many cases, data originating from mobile phones is being used to make, for instance, cities "smart".

However, a new study published in *Scientific Reports* demonstrates the privacy implications of our increased mobility. Yves-Alexandre de Montjoye, César A. Hidalgo, Michel Verleysen and Vincent D. Blondel, all from UC Louvain or MIT, studied fifteen months of human mobility data for one and a half million individuals to determine how easily we can be identified.

The paper starts by explaining the changing context of mobility:

> *"While in the past, mobility traces were only available to mobile phone carriers, the advent of smartphones and other means of data collection has made these broadly available…. All these are fuelling the ubiquity of simply anonymized mobility datasets and are giving room to privacy concerns….*
>
> *All together, the ubiquity of mobility datasets, the uniqueness of human traces, and the information that can be inferred from them highlight the importance of understanding the privacy bounds of human mobility."*

Subsequently, the authors indicate their findings:

> *"We show that the uniqueness of human mobility traces is high and that mobility datasets are likely to be re-identifiable using information only on a few outside locations. Finally, we show that one formula determines the uniqueness of mobility traces providing mathematical bounds to the privacy of mobility data. The uniqueness of traces is found to decrease according to a power functtion with an exponent that scales linearly with the number of known spatio-temporal points…."*

Illustrating the increased potentital to identify anyone using only a few snippets of data:

> *"Even coarse datasets provide little anonymity. These findings represent fundamental constraints to an individual's privacy and have important implications for the design of frameworks and institutions dedicated to protect the privacy of individuals…."*

TWO Q & A SESSIONS ON THE WORLD'S LARGEST COMPUTER OWNERS AND SKIN-IN-THE-GAME POLICY MAKERS

By Stefaan Verhulst

March 22, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/2-q-as-on-owners-of-the-largest-computers-and-skin-in-the-game-policy-makers/

Computer scientist Jaron Lanier being interviewed by The Spectator about his new book, *Who Owns The Future?:*

Q: "What will the future economy look like if technology keeps advancing the way it does and we do nothing?

A: Well, identify almost any human role in our current society, and imagine that being aggregated into a software scheme in the future where the people don't get directly paid anymore. We can already say that there are virtual editors of newspapers. In the future nearly every existing job will be gradually weakened because of cloud software. The only one left standing at some future date is the owner of the largest computer on the network. Whoever has the biggest computer wins in our current system.

Q: Is this true for politics as well?

A: Yes. If you have the biggest computer and the biggest data, you can calculate how to target people with a political message, and have almost a guaranteed deterministic level of success. Politics then becomes about who has the biggest computer instead of what the agenda is. The way Obama won the last US election was by having the best computer strategy. That method of winning an election works, but if that is to be the future of politics, it will no longer have meaning. The path we are on is not compatible with democracy."

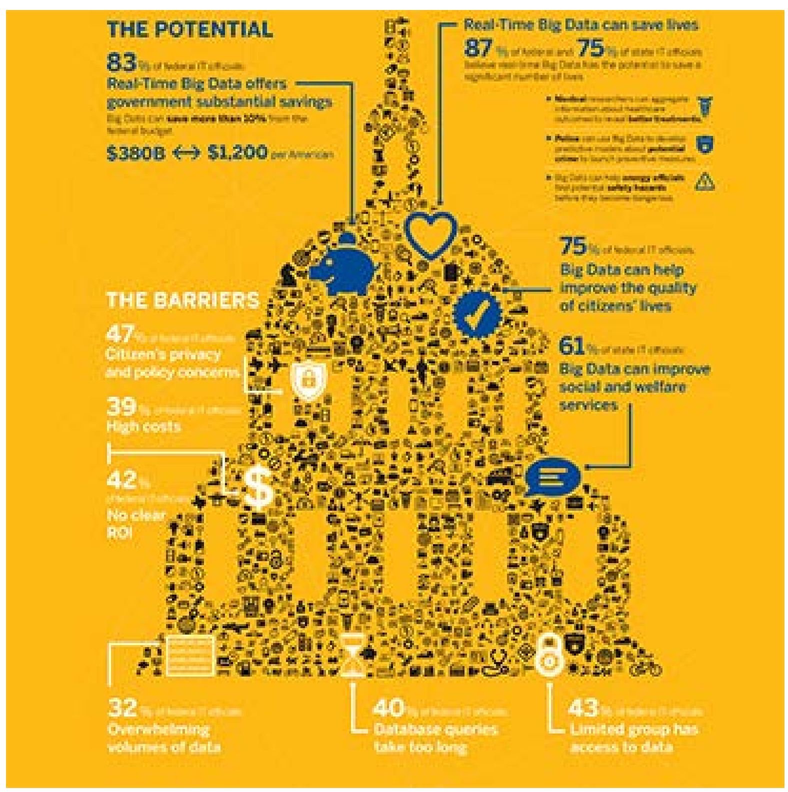
See this Q&A at Reddit with *Black Swan* and *Antifragile* author Nassim Nicholas Taleb on how to establish "Skin-In-The-Game" among policy makers, and the challenges of doing so.

SURVEY: BIG DATA CAN IMPROVE PEOPLE'S LIVES

By Stefaan Verhulst

February 21, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/survey-big-data-can-improve-peoples-lives/



The results of a survey released by the TechAmerica Foundation revealed that a big majority of federal and state IT officials believe that big data and other analytical tools have great potential to make governments more efficient and improve citizens' lives, particularly in health and public safety sectors. The study indicates a variety of value propositions of big data for the public sector, including:

- "Substantial budget cuts: Federal IT officials say real-time analytics of Big Data can help the government cut at least 10 percent annually from the federal budget, or about $1,200 per American, for example by detecting improper healthcare payments before they occur.
- Lifesaving potential: According to 87

percent of federal IT officials and 75 percent of state IT officials, the use of real-time Big Data solutions will save a significant number of lives each year. For example, medical researchers can aggregate information about healthcare outcomes to reveal patterns that lead to more effective treatments and detection of outbreaks.

- Crime reduction: 75 percent of state IT officials see the practical benefits of Big Data in medicine and public safety as extremely beneficial. Police departments are currently using Big Data technology to develop predictive models about when and where crimes are likely to occur, helping dramatically reduce the overall crime rate in specific locations.
- Enhanced quality of life: Real-time Big Data is helping the government improve the quality of citizens' lives, according to 75 percent of federal IT officials. For example, by gaining insight into huge volumes of data across agencies, the government can provide improved, personalized services to citizens."

See also The Big Data Commission report, "Demystifying Big Data: A Practical Guide to Transforming the Business of Government"

BIG DATA, SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE INFORMATION ECONOMY: THREE QUOTES TO REFLECT UPON

By Stefaan Verhulst

January 10, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/three-quotes-to-reflect-upon/

"Only 3% of potentially useful data is tagged, and even less is analyzed."

–According to IDC, in a report that argues the biggest challenge related to Big Data is the prevalence of unstructured data, which makes metadata tagging more labor-intensive and time-consuming.

"The Impact of new technologies is invariably misjudged because we measure the future with yardsticks from the past."

–According to Stephen Baker in a *New York Times* opinion article on how social networks' "matrix of humanity" is not having the expected revolutionary effect on marketing and advertising. Baker believes though that "it's bound to spawn new industries in consulting, education, collaborative design, market research, media and loads of products and services yet to be imagined."

"There's this idea that whoever has the biggest computer can analyze everyone else to their advantage and concentrate wealth and power. [Meanwhile], it's shrinking the overall economy."

–According to Jaron Lanier in an interview with *Smithsonian*, where he argues that the so-called information economy and the belief that "information wants to be free" are having a disruptive effect on the middle class while further entrenching industrial power.

RE-ENGINEERING GOVERNMENT THROUGH BIG DATA

By Stefaan Verhulst

October 24, 2012

http://www.openinggovernment.org/re-engineering-government-through-big-data/

The Partnership for Public Service and the IBM Center for the Business of Government recently released the second report, "From Data to Decisions II: Building an Analytics Culture," in a series on how using innovative analytical tools can improve capabilities and efficiency. The initial report explored how seven federal agencies, including FEMA and the IRS, use data analytics. This follow-up report explains the specific components of analytics agencies should implement to produce more effective data and build more open analytics culture.

Using the original seven agencies and insights from focus groups as reference points, the report advocates agencies build upon current practices and incorporate an "analytics approach to management." Agencies must "take stock of their priorities and activities, identify opportunities to improve how they deliver results, and use analytics to demonstrate they are meeting mission goals efficiently and could do so at less cost in the future." The collaborative report states that the outlined practices are widely transferable across agencies, and that implementation would create significant internal and external benefits.

To further explain the recommendations made in these reports, the Partnership for Public Service released videos of panel discussions on the topic.

"REINVENTING SOCIETY IN THE WAKE OF BIG DATA": *EDGE*'S INTERVIEW WITH MIT'S ALEX "SANDY" PENTLAND

By Kevin Hansen

October 3, 2012

http://www.openinggovernment.org/reinventing-society-in-the-wake-of-big-data-edges-interview-with-mits-alex-sandy-pentland/

In Brief:

- The collection and combination of massive datasets is revolutionizing our ability to model and predict individual human behavior.
- On the whole, such analyses hold promise for improving global socioeconomic outcomes but also raise troublesome privacy and civil liberty concerns.

Sandy Pentland is, per *Edge*, "one of the most-cited computer scientists in the world and was named by *Forbes* as one of the world's seven most powerful data scientists." He is also the Director of both the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)'s Human Dynamics Laboratoryas well as its Media Lab Entrepreneurship program. Worth mentioning, MIT recently announced the founding of the Intel Science and Technology Center (ISTC) for Big Data in addition to announcing several other big data initiatives.

Given Pentland's background at MIT, his interview with *Edge* is a revealing peek behind the curtain of how a diverse set of groups is working in various ways to break down data silos, connect datasets and perform advanced predictive analytics on large datasets often referred to under the umbrella term of "big data." In *Edge*'s edited transcript, which is part of a broader collection of *Edge* conversations on technology, Pentland summarizes his definition of big data as follows:

> *"It's not about the things you post on Facebook, and it's not about your searches on Google…Big Data comes from things like location data off of your cell phone or credit card, it's the little data breadcrumbs that you leave behind you as you move around in the world. What those breadcrumbs tell is the story of your life. It tells what you've chosen to do. That's very different than what you put on Facebook. What you put on Facebook is what you would like to tell people, edited according to the standards of the day…Big data is increasingly about real behavior, and by analyzing this sort of data, scientists can tell…whether you are the sort of person who will pay back loans…if you're likely to get diabetes."*

As Pentland alludes to, big data can be used to make incredible predictions. Political campaigns can (and do) correlate intensive personal databases to develop a voter's probability of support. Taken to its full potential, healthcare and insurance companies could develop hyper-personalized risk assessments, disease control officials could prevent epidemics by immediately identifying those struck with a pandemic before a broader outbreak is allowed to occur, and dramatic market failures such as the famous 2010 "flash crash" can be predicted and prevented.

But in the process, such data can also be used to expose incredibly private insights into a person's life–consider predictions of a couple's divorce likelihood or an individual's sexuality–let alone the simple fact that strangers might gain access to timestamped data on everywhere you've been in the past few years, in addition to maybe your payment history and personal company. As Pentland puts it:

> *"The fact that we can now begin to actually look at the dynamics of social interactions and how they play out, and are not just limited to reasoning about averages like market indices is for me simply astonishing. To be able to see the details of variations in the market and the beginnings of political revolutions, to predict them, and even control them, is definitely a case of Promethean fire. Big Data can be used for good or bad, but either way it brings us to interesting times. We're going to reinvent what it means to have a human society."*

Related to Pentland's work is the recent U.S. Consumer Privacy Bill of Rights and the European Union's proposed data protection reforms. Existing legislative frameworks and more recent reforms have generally fostered a primarily opt-in, market-like data protection system. In essence, private companies are forced to secure the permission of individuals in order to the use their data, permission they typically receive by offering some kind of consumer benefit. If organizations provide enough of an incentive for citizens to give up their data and the organizations then use the data within the applicable government regulations, Pentland considers it a win-win-win.

Understandably, big data and the computational science underlying it has the potential to play a dramatic supporting role–if not a leading one–in the redesigning of our government institutions.

For an extended tutorial on big data, check out this lecture by the Josžef Stefan Institute Artificial Intelligence Laboratory. For a shorter video about an MIT Media Lab project, watch this Youtube video on privacy preserving personal data storage.

FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

- Cox, Lauren. "Getting More Value from Cell-Phone Data." *Technology Review* (2011).
- Issenberg, Sasha. *The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns*. Crown, 2012.

- Wen Dong, Bruno Lepri, and Alex 'Sandy' Pentland. "Modeling Co-Evolution of Behavior and Social Relationships Using Mobile Phone Data." Mobile and Ubiquitous Multimedia (2011).
- Wen Dong, Katherine Heller, and Alex 'Sandy' Pentland. "Modeling Infection with Multi-Agent Dynamics." International Conference on Social Computing, Behavioral-Cultural Modeling, and Prediction (2012).

Government Innovation – Transformation with Technology

INNOVATION CONTESTS: A REVIEW OF THE GROWING LITERATURE

By Stefaan Verhulst

April 8, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/innovation-contests-a-review-of-the-growing-literature/

To stimulate innovation and help solve really big problems, (prize-induced) innovation contests are increasingly considered by a variety of organizations and governments. As R&D budgets tighten and information and communication technologies continue to advance, leveraging the public's expertise through innovation contests is becoming more attractive to industry and public agencies worldwide. Contests offer many advantage—including paying only for results, establishing an ambitious goal without having to predict which team or approach is most likely to succeed, bringing out-of-discipline perspectives to bear, stimulating private sector investment that is much greater than the prize value—but U.S. Chief Technology Officer Todd Park and others believe that the greatest advantage comes from widening the pool of potential problem solvers beyond the "usual suspects." This explains the growing popularity within the U.S. government to hold innovation contests. The contest portal, Challenge.gov, features various contests and prize-induced projects from many agencies, including the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Energy.

A new article in the *Journal Creativity and Innovation Management* provides a detailed literature analysis and classification of innovation contests. While not focused on the use of contests to innovate governance solutions, the paper does provide insight in the current state of play regarding research on the phenomenon. The authors (Sabrina Adamczyk, Angelika C. Bullinger, and Kathrin M. Möslein) start with a historical overview of the use of contests to generate innovation. The following table illustrates the longstanding use of innovation contests for a variety of purposes:

Table 1. Overview of Selected Historical Innovation Contests

Field of application	Description of innovation contest	Outcome of innovation contest
Agriculture and food	Napoléon's prize for enhancing the preservation of food (1795)	Canning of food
	Napoléon's prize for discovering a process to manufacture a butter substitute (1869)	Processing and production of animal fats (margarine)
Automobile	Wisconsin prize for substitute for horses and other animals (1875)	Machine propelled by steam or other motive agent
	"Chicago Times-Herald" prize for motors (1895)	Development of practicable and self-propelling road carriages
Aviation	"The Daily Mail" prize for crossing the Atlantic (1913)	Crossing the Atlantic within 72 hours by airplane
	Kremer prizes for human-powered flight (1959, 1977, 1979)	First flight by a human-powered aircraft
Energy and power	Prize for propelling vessels without a paddle wheel (1825)	Use of a screw propeller at the front of the boat
	"Liverpool & Manchester Railway" locomotive prize (1829)	First passenger rail service and beginning of rail road industry
Sustainability	"French National Institute Class of Moral and Political Sciences" contests (1798–1802)	Solutions to governmental and social order questions
	"Steam-Coal Collieries' Association" prize for preventing the emission of smoke from the chimneys of boilers (1855)	Prevention of smoke during combustion of steam coals
Mathematics	"French Royal Academy" scientific and mathematical prizes (1721)	Work on kinetics or magnetic compasses
	Wolfskehl's prize for Fermat's last theorem (1908)	Proofs of the theorem after 90 years
Medicine	"Duke of Oldenburg" prize for the best treatise on yellow fewer (1822)	Treatise on yellow fewer including its nature and contagiousness
	"Congress for the Study of Tuberculosis" prize for the best essay on tuberculosis (1892)	Essay upon the diagnosis of latent tuberculosis before its appearance or after its cure
Navigation	Spanish longitude prize (1567)	Discovery of a method to find longitude at sea
	British longitude prize (1714)	Method of accurately determining a ship's longitude
Software, computers and IT	Loebner's prize for artificial intelligence (1990)	Development of a computer program that offers human-like responses to conversations
	"US Federal Communications Commission" reward (1991)	Development of new spectrum-using communication services and technologies
Textiles	Awards for spinning and carpet manufacture (1757)	Spinning in workhouses and carpet manufacture
	Napoléon's prize for a flax spinning machine (1810)	Development of flax spinning technology

Excerpt from Knowledge Ecology International (2008).

The paper subsequently categorizes the different perspectives used in the relevant literature (201 publications were identified) along the following lines: economic perspective, management perspective, education focus, innovation focus and sustainability focus. "The 'economic perspective' and 'management perspective' are meta-perspectives. The three subordinated foci describe possible purposes of innovation contests. Thus, the 'education focus' entails innovation contests that can be utilized as instruments to develop skills. The 'innovation focus' comprises innovation contests to stimulate and foster innovation. And the 'sustainability focus' contains innovation contests to promote sustainability".

Figure 1. Overview of Research Categories

The categories provide a way to also categorize some findings of the literature on what works. For instance:

- Research in the economic perspective suggested that innovation contests with higher awards, lower time cost, shorter problem description, longer duration and greater popularity will capture more participants to solve the underlying innovation task;
- Research in the management perspective pointed towards various aspects closely linked to the management of innovation contests such as motivation of participants;
- Current research with an education focus shows that innovation contests are effective tools for fostering the creativity of students and stimulating the development of their skills;
- Regarding the innovation focus, publications mainly introduced innovation contests as powerful alternatives for generating new ideas compared to traditional new product (or service) development initiatives;
- Publications with a sustainability focus demonstrated that innovation contests can be used as a new method to anchor sustainability issues not only within the firm, but also with the public.

The paper ends with an identification of the shortcomings of (and opportunities for further) research:

> *"One important shortcoming of the literature on innovation contests is the lack of theory. Up to now, there are no mainstream theories for exploring the research object of innovation contests…. A further shortcoming of the literature on innovation contests is the imbalance between qualitative and quantitative research."*

RE-INVENT GOVERNANCE

By Stefaan Verhulst

April 6, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/re-invent-governance/

Reinventors is a “series of virtual roundtables done over group video with innovators who can help figure out how to reinvent 20th-century systems to work in the 21st. Each session starts with an anchor interview of a remarkable “reinventor” who lays out his or her ideas on how to fundamentally reinvent a field and that flows into a roundtable discussion with other experts and innovators who can build off those ideas.”

This week, Jen Pahlka, founder and executive director of Code for America, led a roundtable that made the case that “a Reinvention of Government Bureaucracy may well be at an inflection point”:

> *“The number of successful experiments are reaching critical mass, those inside government are taking to innovation, public attitudes seem to be shifting, and the digital tools are ready for prime time.”*

For the full roundtable and summary, visit: http://reinventors.net/roundtables/reinvent-government-bureaucracy/

THE ROAD TO GOVERNMENT 2.0

By Stefaan Verhulst

March 18, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/road-to-government-2-0/

The Aspen Institute’s Forum on Communications and Society (FOCAS) convened in August, 2012 in Aspen, Colorado to discuss the “movement towards open and innovative governance and develop tangible proposals and recommendations to increase transparency, promote smarter governance and enhance democracy.” The report of the proceedings, entitled “Road to Government 2.0”, has recently been released.

In the foreword, Charlie Firestone, Executive Director of the Communications and Society program frames the potential of Government 2.0 by pointing to the:

> *“Burgeoning “open governance” movement to use information and communications technologies to foster accountability, transparency and trust, to open up traditionally closed systems and to transform governance. Collaborative technologies such as social media are now enabling two-way information channels between citizens and governments, helping to solve problems at the local, state and national levels. Digital technologies also have the potential to reduce costs to governments and citizens, and to create enormous opportunities for more transparent, participatory and responsive governments.”*

To advance the effort toward opening government, the FOCAS report, written by rapporteur Greg Ferenstein, lists a series of “tangible, meaningful solutions to immediate problems facing the open government movement” concerning the following 3 issue areas:

> *“**Awareness and Media:** Even if governments can become more open and participatory, there is no guarantee that citizens will be aware or motivated to engage with new opportunities. Nor can we be sure that the media will want to inform their readers about important, but nonetheless unexciting bureaucratic developments. FOCAS participants recommended an automatic alert systems for new services, empowering citizens to spread messages through new media channels and working with volunteer programmers who could develop media-friendly software for resource-starved journalists.*
>
> ***Procurement:** Many government contracts are won by a small group of well-connected vendors. Yet, in many cases, there are better solutions that are either free or more cheaply available from smaller start-ups. Participants recommended overhauling the procurement process to favor prize-based competitions and volunteer contributions.*

__Participation:__ Policymakers, especially at the federal level, are often overwhelmed with feedback from citizens. Unfortunately, there is no reliable way to filter out the most helpful information or to understand which issues should be prioritized. FOCAS participants recommended developing a system where citizens can indicate their individual expertise and be notified when such advice is needed."

A list of participants and the agenda of the meeting can be found here.

WHAT WORKS? THE CONCEPT OF EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNMENT

By Stefaan Verhulst

March 15, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/what-works-the-concept-of-experimental-government/

In a new blog entry, Geoff Mulgan, Chief Executive of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA), focuses on why government needs to be more experimental.**"**Experimental government**"** describes Nesta's efforts to create a more experimentation-based system of government through so-called "What Works" centers. The new project follows Nesta's previous Alliance for Useful Evidence. In the blog entry, Mulgan argues:

"In essence this is the idea that, wherever possible, governments should test new ideas – preferably on a relatively small scale – before spreading them. Not all the methods used in medical science (like double blinds) are directly transferable to public policy. But a surprising amount of the experimental method can be used in everything from the design of forms or websites to how police catch burglars."

Despite the recognition of challenges—both logistical and ideological—to a new experimentalist system in government, Mulgan believes that there is too much societal and technological momentum for government to ignore the potential benefits of more public-sector experimentation:

"This feels like an idea whose time is coming, or at least returning. If governments want to know what works, they have to be willing to invest in finding out. That will require them to experiment."

See also video on the launch of the "What works" Centers.

INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION, COLLABORATION AND "CREATIVE SPACES"

By Stefaan Verhulst

March 14, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/institutional-innovation-collaboration-and-creative-spaces/

In recognition that, "Institutions are embedded in the cultures, technologies, and infrastructures of their time, and the emergence of new social and technological infrastructures often catalyzes fundamental institutional innovations," John Hagel III and John Seely Brown's new paper on **"**Institutional Innovation**"** argues that institutions must become more intelligent and collaborative to keep pace with rapid technological and societal change.

First, the authors argue that traditional institutional architectures are out-of-date in the modern world:

"Scalable efficiency has been a winning model for the past two centuries. However, it relies on centralized governing systems, rigid hierarchies, and a paradigm of long-term planning and forecasting. While effective in times of stability and predictability, these systems break down during times of rapid change and uncertainty. Centralized leadership is unable to dictate all of the requisite changes quickly and, as a result, can, and probably will, become dysfunctional and massively inefficient during times of uncertainty and change.

"As the pace of change accelerates, the value of any stock of knowledge depreciates faster and faster. Today, competitive advantage is not based on stocks of knowledge, but having access to flows of knowledge to enable up-to-date information that enables adaptability."

The central focus and recommendation of the paper is on creating an institutional ecosystem that allows for both more internal and external collaborations around so-called "creation spaces":

"Institutional innovation requires embracing a new rationale of 'scalable learning' with the goal of creating smarter institutions that can thrive in a world of exponential change. Through new architectures, organizations can build 'creation spaces' that help facilitate (rather than limit) interactions and relationships, allowing organizations to increase the flow of information within and across their organization's walls to increase learning, adaptability, and downstream product and process innovations."

More importantly they argue (with a hint toward crowd-sourcing) that:

"Creating architectures of relationships reaching beyond the walls of our institution is one of the most powerful ways to tap into richer and more diverse flows of knowledge and accelerate learning."

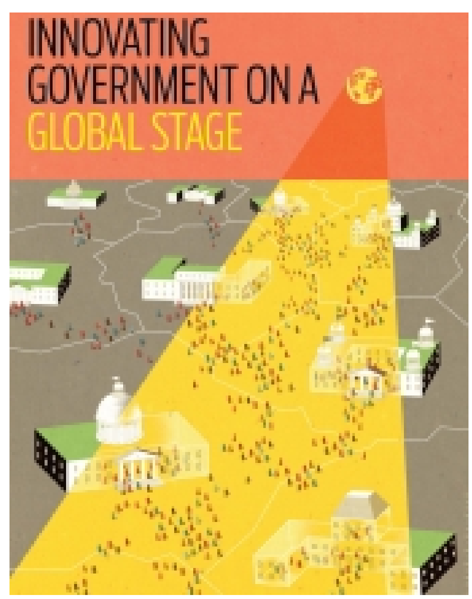
INNOVATING GOVERNMENT ON A GLOBAL STAGE (OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP)

By Stefaan Verhulst

February 23, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/innovating-government-on-a-global-stage-open-government-partnership/

In the Spring 2013 edition, *the Stanford Social Innovation Review* features a supplement on the Open Government Partnership, with nine articles from OGP experts. They include:



- Transforming Multilateralism: Innovation on a Global Stage by Jeremy M. Weinstein
- Shattering Decades of Diplomatic Protocol by Maria Otero & Caroline Mauldin
- Innovating Modern Democracy, in Brazil and Globally by Jorge Hage
- Advocacy from the Inside: The Role of Civil Society by Warren Krafchik
- The UK's Transparency Agenda by Jane Dudman
- Tanzania's Transparency Agenda by Elsie Eyakuze
- Philanthropy Can Catalyze an Open Government Movement by Martin Tisné

- India in Open Government and Open Government in India by Nikhil Dey & Aruna Roy
- Building a Global Norm on Open Government by Aryeh Neier

THE FORTHCOMING DISRUPTIVE INNOVATION OF GOVERNANCE (QUOTE)

By Stefaan Verhulst

February 17, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/the-forthcoming-disruptive-innovation-of-governance-quote/

Moisés Naím, a scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and a columnist for *El Pais*, describes in his new book *The End of Power* the diffusion of traditional means of control: "To put it simply, power no longer buys as much as it did in the past … power is easier to get, harder to use – and easier to lose."

More importantly, reflecting on the need for innovation in governance he writes:

> *"Restoring trust, reinventing political parties, finding new ways in which average citizens can meaningfully participate in the political process, creating new mechanisms of effective governance, limiting the worst impact of checks and balance while averting excessive concentration of unaccountable power, and enhancing the capacity of nation-states to work together should be the central political goals of our time.*
>
> *"Without these changes, sustained progress in fighting the threats at home and abroad that conspire against our security and prosperity will be impossible. …*
>
> *"In short, disruptive innovation has not arrived in politics, government and political participation. But it will. We are on the verge of a revolutionary wave of political and institutional revolutions….power is changing in so many arenas that it will be impossible to avoid important transformations in the way humanity organizes itself to make the decisions it needs to survive and progress."*

See also his TEDxGeorgetown Talk.

INFORMATION FOR IMPACT

By Stefaan Verhulst

January 31, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/information-for-impact/

"Information for Impact: Liberating Nonprofit Sector Data," a report by Beth Simone Noveck and Daniel L. Goroff for the Aspen Institute's Program on Philanthropy and Social Innovation (PSI) was officially released on January 31 at the "How 'Big Data' on the Nonprofit Sector can Spur Innovation, Knowledge, and Accountability" event in Washington DC.

In the report, Noveck (NYU) and Goroff (Sloan Foundation) argue that the IRS Form 990—which includes information on nonprofits' basic finances, mission details, activities and organizational and governance structure—should be released in an open, "computable" form. Noveck calls for "liberating 990 data" in her blog entry on the report. If Form 990 data is opened, potentially valuable information on 1.5 million registered tax-exempt organizations in a sector that pays $670 billion in wages and benefits would be made public. They argue that, "in principle, the best way to provide more information about the nonprofit sector could be to work with the data federal and state governments already collect from nonprofits."

As it stands, Form 990 data *is* public—"the IRS creates image files of Form 990 returns and sells compilations of them to the subscribing public for a fee." Noveck and Goroff argue:

> *"Like other important data collected by governments, information contained in the 990s could potentially be far more useful it were not only public but 'open' data…Making the Form 990 data truly open…would not only make it easier to use for the organizations that already process it, but would also make it useful to researchers, advocates, entrepreneurs, technologists, and nonprofits that do not have the resources to use the data in its current form."*

Consistent with arguments for open data in government, the researchers argue that making nonprofit data open through the wide release of Form 990 data would serve to both increase the sector's transparency by introducing public scrutiny and unlocking new innovations and insights through the efforts of third parties that did not previously have access to the data. So in addition to the obvious benefit of "making it easier for state and federal authorities to detect fraud" in nonprofits, open data in the nonprofit sector could be transformative through the creation of "new analyses, visualizations, and mash ups that transform raw data into knowledge." Tapping third party innovators is essential, they argue, because:

> *"Solving complex challenges requires many people with diverse skills and talents working together. When experts of all kinds have access to open data, it becomes a catalyst for creative problem solving and community innovation."*

The researchers go on to list a number of new capabilities that would be possible with the creation of a comprehensive Form 990 open data resource:

- Do more extensive, in-depth empirical research on the sector as a whole, including sector-wide issues such as the impact of the economic downturn on nonprofits, the geographic distribution of nonprofit services, and the efficiency of the nonprofit sector in delivering services;
- Combine the 990 data with other datasets, such as those on government spending, to better understand the relationship between public and private dollars in providing social services;

- Query the data to address issues relating to specific nonprofits, such as gaining greater insight into 501(c)(4) organizations that engage in lobbying or finding trends and outliers in executive compensation;
- Recognize fraud early, anticipate abuses, and target enforcement more efficiently and effectively;
- Enable more people and organizations to analyze, visualize, and mash up the data, creating a large public community that is interested in the nonprofit sector and can collaborate to find ways to improve it; and
- Spot issues of both data currency and data quality, and evaluate their impact on our understanding of the sector.

The report explores four potential avenues for creating an open data system for 990 data: a legislative mandate, an IRS initiative, a third-party platform and an a priori electronic filing system. After studying the advantages and disadvantages of each, they determine that a two-track strategy would be best. This strategy would pursue "the longer-term goal of legislation that would mandate electronic filing to create open 990 data," as well as "a shorter-term strategy of developing a third-party platform that can demonstrate benefits more immediately."

The Aspen Institute event (see previous blog entry) introducing the report featured a panel discussion, moderated by **Jane Wales**, vice president of Philanthropy and Society at the Aspen Institute, with **Jonathan Greenblatt**, special assistant to President Obama and director of the White House Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation; **Cindy Lott**, senior counsel of the National State Attorneys General Program; **Darin McKeever**, deputy director at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; and **Stacy Palmer**, editor of *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*

Collective Intelligence – The Crowd as an *asset*

DESIGNING PARTICIPATORY BUDGET PROCESSES

By Stefaan Verhulst

April 6, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/designing-participatory-budget-processes/

Participatory budgeting has gained much traction the last few years across borders and demographics (see US map from Intellictis). Consider, for instance, the recent announcement by Boston's Mayor Thomas Menino to "set aside $1 million in the City's budget for youth to allocate through "Participatory Budgeting," in an effort to educate youth on how the budget works and allow them to decide how funds should be invested". (for other examples see: http://www.participatorybudgeting.org/)

But what it is it? And how does it work? Several readings have tried to define and explain the value of participatory budgeting (PB) from a participatory democracy, fair budgeting or trust perspective.

Tim Bonnemann, of Intellitics, has recently written a blog (What Is Participatory Budgeting?) providing an anthology of different definitions. He explains that "two ways have emerged how the term is being applied:

- "Narrowly, referring only to processes that give participants decision making power, e.g. by way of voting on their preferred projects/investments;
- Broadly, referring to any participatory processes that have to do with budgets, including budget consultations."

A new publication (accepted manuscript) in the European Journal of Operational Research focuses "On deciding how to decide: Designing participatory budget processes". Written by a team from several universities in Madrid (J. Gomez, D. Rios Insua, J.M. Lavin, and C. Alfaro), the paper indicates that in most cases of PB "both its design and implementation are carried out in an informal way". The authors therefore propose a methodology to design a participatory budget process based on "a multicriteria decision making model". Of particular interest is their analysis of the many variants of PB processes based on a sequence of common tasks (reflecting similar citizen engagement tasks) such as:

1. "Participant sampling. In many processes, participation of all citizens is impossible for logistical or physical reasons. Thus, a sample of citizens is chosen to represent the whole population. This sample could be purposive, random …, depending on the proposed issue or problem.
2. Election of representatives. For the same reasons, the participants might alternatively elect representatives to take part in the PB process.
3. Use of questionnaires. They aid in focusing on the main issues of interest, revealing what is of most interest to citizens.
4. Preparation of documents. There are two types of documents: preliminary, which contain information about the problem, and final, which contain the results of the process. The documents are usually proposed by representatives and/or experts.
5. Distribution of information. A key element in decision-making is providing the best possible information to participants. Similarly, participants should be able to share the information they might be able to gather.
6. Problem structuring. A problem might not be clearly formulated and participants would spend time structuring it, dividing it into parts so as to better apprehend it. In PB processes, these include determining criteria for

choosing between proposals and elaborating an initial list of alternatives, together with their associated costs, technical features and constraints.

7. Preference modeling. Participants are sometimes required to express their preferences, usually through pairwise comparisons, goal setting or value functions. These preferences aid participants in finding their most preferred alternative and support them in negotiation.
8. Debate. Whether regulated or spontaneous, the exchange of ideas is vital for citizen participation. Participants can express and discuss their opinions.
9. Negotiation. When individuals disagree on their preferred alternative, they may try to deal with the conflict through negotiations, in which participants exchange offers, ideas and arguments so as to try to reach a consensus…
10. Arbitration. Through debate and negotiation, we may find that the parties involved cannot be satisfied and refuse to budge from their positions. To avoid this, some mechanisms include the figure of an arbitrator who makes the final decision, once the opinions and reasoning of the different parties have been presented…
11. Voting. Many times, it is used as a last resort, particularly if achieving consensus is not possible. Voting can be done with different rules, such as simple majority, approval voting, Borda count, etc. …"

The authors subsequently explain the various variations and their impact according to different priorities and objectives (such as, for instance, maximizing transparency).

CROWDSOURCING THE MONITORING OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

By Stefaan Verhulst

March 26, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/crowdsourcing-the-monitoring-of-human-rights-violations/

Much attention recently has been paid to how the proliferation of cheaper technologies has enabled crowdsourced monitoring and crisis mapping through organizations and platforms like the Standby Volunteer Task Force (SBTF), Ushahidi and Lord's Resistance Army Crisis Tracker.

Contributing to this debate, Todd Landman and Jonathan Crook, both from the University of Essex, are scheduled to present a paper on the Democratization of Technology and Conflict Analysis at the forthcoming Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, which will focus on the Politics of International Diffusion: Regional and Global Dimensions, (San Francisco, California, April 3-6, 2013).

The paper "outlines the main developments in new technology that can assist conflict researchers and analysts in mapping conflict patterns, behaviours, and networks from open source data". Importantly, the authors indicate that despite the growth in big data and technological sensors…

> *"The need for subjective human contribution is likely to remain and hopefully beyond the time of technological singularity when the cognitive abilities of a computer surpass those of a human many times over. For human rights communities, the absolute requirement for accuracy of information seemingly does not sit well with large scale automated processes and places further*

emphasis upon having trained and empowered personnel involved in the process of information management and exploitation, as well as in the legal categories and vocabularies associated with human rights".

They subsequently explain how they developed a Human Rights Violations Portal by using software that scraped "the web, fuses data and then links these data on violent events to stylised icons for human rights violations committed by state and non-state actors".

The paper ends optimistically:

"The deluge of information in the data age presents opportunities for greater accountability of Governments and most likely more awareness of the importance of facts and evidence. Efforts to embrace and exploit citizen, public and open source data will become the norm over the forthcoming years. Academic and commercial partnerships are one route to harnessing the power of the new technologies for research and analysis in the conflict and human rights arena… In either case, there is a ready supply of information, a growing demand for solutions to harness the information for valuable deployment across a range of pressing policy areas, and the need to think more systematically about how to structure and organise the information in ways that yield significant added value."

THE POTENTIAL AND CHALLENGE OF CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT, OPEN INNOVATION, AND CROWDSOURCING FOR URBAN PLANNING PURPOSES

By Stefaan Verhulst

March 20, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/the-potential-and-challenge-of-citizen-engagement-open-innovation-and-crowdsourcing-for-urban-planning-purposes/

A new paper in the *Journal of Planning Literature* by Dillon Mahmoudi and Ethan Seltzer, scholars in Urban Studies at Portland State University, reviews the current literature of open innovation – especially as it relates to online participation and crowdsourcing – and compares it with existing participatory practices for urban planning purposes. Planning in many ways relates to similar processes of policy making and as such the paper provides great insights also applicable to the broader field of opening governance.

The paper "Citizen Participation, Open Innovation, and Crowdsourcing. Challenges and Opportunities for Planning" examines in particular how online participation can serve the four primary purposes for citizen participation as it relates to planning:

- "identification and collection of data known best or only to community members,
- establishment of legitimacy for the planning effort due to its development in consultation with key stakeholders and community members,
- addressing the ethical and moral commitment of planners to ensuring that those most directly affected by a plan have a hand in making it, and
- the development of robustness by bringing the broadest possible set of views to the table in the process of plan making."

Following a detailed analysis of the open innovation literature, the authors point out that there are several things to keep in mind (some applicable to governance in general):

1. "Firms and planning agencies are not the same thing. What makes the open innovation model relevant to planning, however, is the notion that both processes look beyond the confines of the sponsoring entity. Framed another way, Alexander (1993) suggests that planning can be viewed as a coordination problem among numerous institutional and other interests, both for making plans and subsequent plan implementation. Planning is portrayed as a network-based activity, much as open innovation pursued through crowdsourcing is portrayed as a means for engaging a diverse and heretofore diffuse crowd and the knowledge and creativity of crowd 'members.'"

2. "Citizen Participation and crowdsourcing share some but not all of the same aims. Both seek greater robustness. Both seek information and insights that only members of the crowd possess. However, crowdsourcing does not rely on the attitudes of any but the sponsors for conferring legitimacy on solutions. Further, whereas citizen participation is expected to give voice to those most affected by plans and planning decisions, and to provide a means for those likely to be excluded, intentionally or not, from making plans, crowdsourcing has no such brief."

3. "By depending on a well-developed problem statement, crowdsourcing as a technique can arise in direct conflict with the expectation that citizen participation is, in fact, the process through which problems are identified, visions crafted, and goals and objectives specified. This is not so much a disqualification of crowdsourcing as a vehicle for citizen participation, but a caution that it is good for addressing some but not all requirements for citizen participation in planning. When there is a well-defined problem in need of solving, and the expertise of planners and institutions could benefit from engaging a creative and motivated crowd, then crowdsourcing makes sense. When, however, the purposes and aims for planning remain vague, crowd-sourcing may be more manipulative than constructive."

The paper ends by reflecting on some of the emerging questions associated with the use of big data (without calling it that) and new information flows.

"Simply the rapidly advancing practice of utilizing urban information flows to inform both decision makers and citizens represents an explosion of new work and opportunity. The roles that citizens can and do play as "sensors" in the urban environment carry with them both promising and unsettling visions. There are great opportunities for research and practice in these fields in the future and that future is only beginning to unfold in the literature and in practice."

TOWARD A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF CROWDSOURCING

By Stefaan Verhulst

March 7, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/toward-a-conceptual-model-of-crowdsourcing/

A recently published paper produced by various authors from the University of Nebraska in Omaha aims to review the existing literature of crowdsourcing (defined as "a collaboration model enabled by people-centric web technologies to solve individual, organizational, and societal problems using a dynamically formed crowd of people who respond to an open call for participation").

Based upon their survey, they provide a conceptual model "for guiding future studies of crowdsourcing" that has the following components: Problem, People (Problem Owner, Individual, and Crowd), Governance, Process, Technology, and Outcome (figure below).

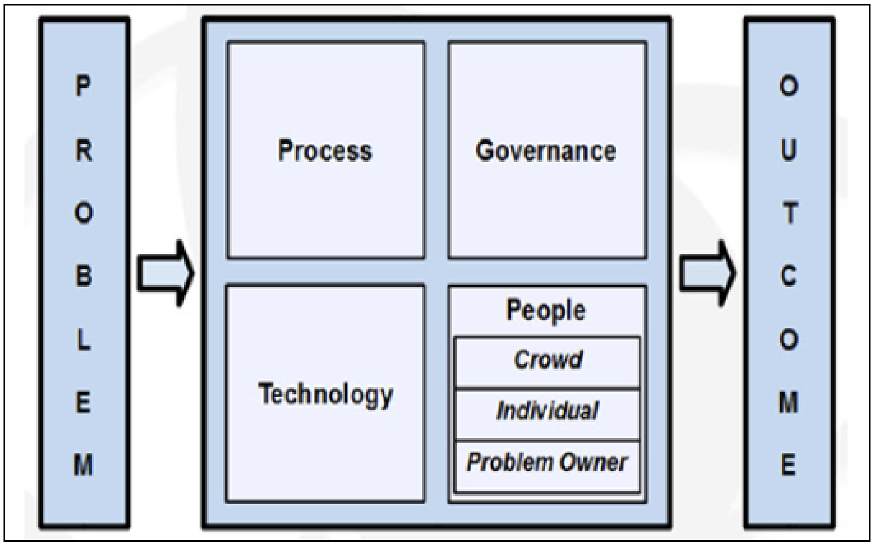


Figure 1. Conceptual model of crowdsourcing

The authors acknowledge that this just a first step toward "a Theory for Analyzing, useful for classifying and summarizing discrete findings". Perhaps more importantly are the gaps the authors identified in existing research. Using the model they list a set of areas were more study is required. For instance, as to the "people" component:

> *"More insight is needed into what drives [problem owners] to consider crowdsourcing, as well as their positive and negative experiences with this approach. The rapidly expanding use of crowdsourcing provides clues, but more hard evidence is needed. The individual is also a key member of the crowdsourcing solution, and more research into what motivates them is important. Better understanding of motivation in terms of intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivators, how best to mix them, how that varies with problem type, and how those motivators affect composition of the crowd is needed. More knowledge about this crowd, the collective group of individuals, is needed as well. Their needs vary from problem to problem, based primarily on the problem type and governance employed, but little is known definitively in this area. Trust and privacy issues need additional research as well."*

CROWDSOURCING CYBERSECURITY: DECENTRALIZED RESPONSES TO DECENTRALIZED THREATS

By Sean Brooks

February 25, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/crowdsourcing-cybersecurity-decentralized-responses-to-decentralized-threats/

Dr. Gary Shiffman, Professor at the Center for Security Studies at Georgetown University, and Ravi Gupta, co-founder and CTO of data analysis and behavior modeling firm Eniku7, recently published an article in the *International Journal of the Commons* on crowdsourcing cybersecuirty. Shiffman and Gupta use the concept of "the commons" to illustrate the problems with identity-dependent cybersecurity strategies, and propose an alternative model with roots in social science research on shared public resources. They propose that, since the internet functions as a commons, securing equitable and consistent access to the resources it provides requires a bottom-up, voluntary system in which invested community members actively protect their shared assets. If decentralized, voluntary input can help resolve a variety of challenges in fields like finance and public decision-making, there are surely lessons for security.

Shiffman and Gupta illustrate that research has shown that such privatization of the commons "fails to secure and enhance the commons" and that "privatization of a commons often diminishes the value of the commons." Their particular concerns are related to how the Internet functions differently than most resources considered as commons. Since the information on the Internet is non-rival, grows with more users, and can be sub-divided into smaller commons, traditional private property mechanisms are not required for the internet's resources to be equitably distributed. Therefore, Shiffman and Gupta contend, a model for improving secure and continual access to the internet's information should come from successful shared commons models – not from privatization.

As evidence to support this concept, Gupta and Shiffman review the work of the Conficker Working Group's voluntary action to stem the outbreak of the virulent malware between 2008 and 2010. They state the strength of the CWG came from its organic, decentralized roots:

> *"…volunteers who were not associated with the proper authorities were the most successful in combating the virus. Like when the shopkeepers and residents of Jacob's neighborhood spontaneously protected the girl against an unknown attacker, a small group of experts from around the world saw the threat, and chose to come together with the help of some major organizations and voluntarily organized into a cyber enforcement squad. Many members of the CWG believe that government law enforcement agencies were slow to respond to the virus* [*New York Times, March 18, 2009 (Markoff 2009)*]. *Experts from various organizations can organically organize and respond to future cyber attacks."*

While Gupta and Shiffman recognize that this model may not translate to security threats facing more centralized targets (like national critical infrastructure), this model provides a responsive, invested, and incentivized participatory framework for responding to security threats. Outside of these exceptions, Shiffman and Gupta suggest that the government and centralized organizations' roles may be in providing "remote interaction and provide the space where security experts and others can build trust relationships that foster coordination and communication." While this paper's analysis does not address preventative security measures, groups like Shadowserver, which has been voluntarily active for over a decade, provides a large amount of cybersecurity research and analysis to the public, for free. Between models like those presented in this paper, and recent government efforts to improve information sharing between the private and public sectors, the future of governments' role in cybersecuirty may have more to do with conversation facilitation than provision.

PROOF: CROWDSOURCING SOLVES PROBLEMS FASTER AND MORE ACCURATELY!

By Stefaan Verhulst

February 12, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/proof-crowdsourcing-solves-problems-faster-and-more-accurate/

Researchers from Harvard Medical School, Harvard Business School and London Business School recently collaborated on a study using crowdsourcing as a problem-solving tool for complex biological issues. Study partner TopCoder, a crowdsourcing platform with a large global community, joined the research team in an effort to capture the potential value of open innovation for conducting basic scientific research.

Opening the challenge of creating a system (that can analyze a wealth of data to predict genetic configurations in the immune system) to the community yielded a program with unprecedented accuracy and results. Two weeks after the contest was opened, 122 different individuals posited solutions. From there the viable options were narrowed to 16, which were more accurate and up to 1,000 times faster than either Arnaout's or the NIH's BLAST algorithm. The top five were released under an open source license.

The experiment and study found that bringing different knowledge pools together from social science, economics and computational science developed new, innovative approaches to medical research processes at a fraction of typical costs.

"In a traditional setting, a life scientist who needs large volumes of data analyzed will hire a postdoc to create a solution, and it could take well over a year," explains Karim Lakhani, of the Technology and Operations Management Unit at Harvard Business School, and one of the authors. "We're showing that in certain instances, existing platforms and communities might solve these problems better, cheaper and faster." Eva C. Guinan, HMS Associate Professor of radiation oncology at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and Director of the Harvard Catalyst Linkages Program adds:

> *"This is a proof-of-concept demonstration that we can bring people together not only from different schools and different disciplines, but from entirely different economic sectors, to solve problems that are bigger than one person, department or institution."*

Extending problem-solving to the crowd of 450,000 specialists and developers at TopCode exhibits the potential of alternative organizational procedures for increasing cost-effective productivity.

For the full report on the project, more information can be found here.

THE WISDOM OF CROWDS IN OPENING GOVERNMENT

By Stefaan Verhulst

December 22, 2012

http://www.openinggovernment.org/the-wisdom-of-crowds-in-opening-government/

In response to the widespread utopianism regarding the ability of crowdsourcing to provide solutions to difficult problems in both the public and private spheres, Maggie Koerth-Baker warns in this week's *New York Times Magazine* that treating crowds, real or virtual, like sentient beings is misguided. With Wikipedia's success and inescapability playing a large role, Koerth-Baker notes that, "over the last decade, we've come to think of virtual crowds as sources of wisdom that can't be found in individuals." Similarly, in the non-digital world, crowds are often treated as singular entities that, if mishandled or left to their own devices, are prone to irrationality and panic. Beyond questions of how technological mediation could possibly shift the character of a crowd from one defined by thoughtlessness and irresponsibility to one of intelligence and innovation, the underlying conceit, that crowds are entities, rather than groups of individual people, is "deeply flawed."

Koerth-Baker believes that this misconception at least partially derives from the belief that a crowd behaves like a herd of animals, and that, "at some point, it reaches a critical mass and the will of the crowd overrides individual intelligence and individual decision making." In reality, a crowd can be smart or dumb, helpful or dangerous, but, "a crowd's behavior depends on what individuals are thinking and how they interact with one another—not some overpowering collective consciousness."

While Koerth-Baker does not discount the unprecedented collaborative capabilities created by new information technologies, she highlights the importance of not only the individuals within groups, but the information that is being shared by groups, which, necessarily, determines the direction of any collaboration. Essentially, Koerth-Baker argues, while many put faith in crowdsourcing exclusively based on faith in technologically mediated crowds, what really matters for the success or failure of a given collaborative project depends on three things:

- who makes up the crowd,
- the information they share and
- how they interact.

Based on Koerth-Baker's article, it would be easy to question the ability of crowdsourcing in the government arena to address the problems that inspired their creation. However, in an article about the many types of crowdsourcing in government and their potential, Justine Brown helps demonstrate why painting all public sector crowdsourcing projects with the same brush would be reductive.

In the article, Brown lists five central types of crowdsourcing in government: crowd competition, crowd collaboration, crowd voting, crowd funding and crowd labor. This list shows that not all types of crowdsourcing depend on some elusive mass knowledge. For some open government projects, engaging the crowd is done to widen the search for individuals with innovative ideas or insights. A crowd competition, for example, does not place excess faith in the abilities of an undefined crowd entity; rather, it provides incentive and opportunity for an individual or small group of individuals to solve a problem that has eluded more traditional government problem solvers.

The government website Challenge.gov provides a number of crowd competition opportunities for citizens. Challenges like "Non-invasive Measurement of Intra-cranial Pressure" from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration demonstrate that government crowdsourcing projects are often initiated in the hopes of finding a uniquely capable individual, not in the interest of obtaining insight from the crowd as a whole.

U.S. Chief Technology Officer Todd Park, whose Health Datapalooza is one of the more well-known examples of crowd competitions, highlights why they are effective tools for governments: "I think [prizes and competitions] are a very exciting new tool that government has in its toolkit to get better results at a lower cost. You can greatly broaden and deepen the range of players that can help solve the problem. You draw in unusual suspects along with the more usual suspects."

Crowd labor also does not rely on any innate ability or intelligence in the crowd that does not exist in individuals. Instead, it, again, widens the net, but this time instead of doing so in an attempt to find a uniquely capable or insightful individual, the government engages the crowd in the hopes that a large enough group of people will be willing to take up a tedious task so that the task's completion is not left to paid government employees. One such example comes from the Library of Congress, where they are asking the crowd to aid in tagging photos with metadata. While there is no reason to believe that an online crowd is uniquely capable of handling the task, in comparison to paid employees or a real life mass of people, and there is every opportunity for unreasonable individuals within the crowd to attempt to sabotage the project by providing incorrect information, engaging a willing mass of people to undertake necessary but tedious projects within government helps to move more projects to completion while minimizing the time and resources expended by the government itself.

Crowd voting programs, on the other hand, do rely on the masses exhibiting some type of intelligence and reason, but, at some point, even if the outcomes could prove dubious, public opinion must be drawn upon as part of a functional democracy. Similarly, crowd collaboration requires some amount of faith in the crowd, but, for the most part, the reason why many believe that these programs will have success has less to do with an unreasonable faith in crowds than with the hope that the destruction of "sectorial boundaries" will allow previously separated but similarly capable individuals from different areas of interest to work together and engage problems in new and innovative ways.

Some recent high profile examples of crowdsourcing within governments have come from Europe, and, for the most part, they do not fall into the trap that Koerth-Baker warns against. In Estonia, in response to high-profile cases of government corruption, citizens were called upon to provide policy suggestions to be debated on by government officials and possibly implemented. In Iceland, citizen input from Facebook and Twitter was used to help guide officials in crafting a new constitution for Europe's most sparsely populated state. The final document was put together by a 25-member Constitutional Council that drew upon citizens' social media input. Finally, in Finland, any policy petition that obtains 50,000 citizen signatures automatically elicits a vote by the Eduskunta, the Finnish Parliament. Similar programs also exist in the U.K. and U.S., but the U.K. initiative requires 100,000 signatures for Parliament to *consider* debating the issue, and the U.S. We the People site guarantees only that the administration will "review" and "respond to" petitions that gain at least 25,000 signatures in one month.

Each of the above programs mitigates the power of the people by ensuring that crowdsourcing only serves to set the agenda for the traditional powers that exist within government. While some might argue that this serves to entrench the status quo and traditional power dynamics, it also keeps the government from placing excessive faith in the capabilities of a singular crowd, as Koerth-Baker warns against, and ensures that public funds will not be utilized in the construction of a Death Star. Moreover, while many point to Wikipedia as the ultimate example of the wisdom of the unorganized crowd, it is actually the product of a similar system. Though much of the original content on Wikipedia comes from tens of thousands of outsiders, "the bulk of the *changes* to the original text…are made by a core group" of around 1400 heavy editors that make thousands of small changes to increase the accuracy of postings. In other words, the masses are relied upon to do much of the grunt work, just as in government crowd labor projects, and to increase the visibility of relevant topics, but a smaller, more trusted group is responsible for shaping the input of the crowd into the final—though, of course, constantly evolving—product.

The German Pirate Party's Liquid Feedback system, on the other hand, essentially sets the party's platform through crowdsourcing. One of the party's defining characteristics is its sliding scale of direct and representative democracy. In this system, party members can vote on any and every issue, if they so choose, or they can delegate their vote on any given issue to their elected representative. On the Liquid Feedback system, proposals are revised and voted upon, and, no matter the opinions of elected representatives, proposals accepted by the crowd become the party's platform. This is certainly the purest example of direct democracy out of the recent crowdsourcing programs, but it also puts the most faith in the wisdom of a singular crowd.

Faith in the transformative power of crowdsourcing in government is not limited to the developed world, however. In parts of Africa, where mobile networks have bypassed all other forms of infrastructure development in terms of speed and usage, "crowdsourcing is increasingly viewed as a core mechanism of new systemic approaches to governance addressing the highly complex, global, and dynamic challenges of climate change, poverty, armed conflict, and other crises." Whether or not the crowdsourcing programs put into place to address these crises correctly characterize what a crowd is and what it is not, of course, remains to be seen.

FINLAND IS ABOUT TO CHANGE WHAT WE MEAN BY "LAW-MAKING"

By Stefaan Verhulst

September 28, 2012

http://www.openinggovernment.org/finland-is-about-to-change-what-we-mean-by-law-making/

From October onwards, Finland will use a "citizen's initiative" that requires the Eduskunta (Parliament) to vote on any citizen-drafted law that garners 50,000 votes of support through the Open Ministry platform – which is open-source and available on GitHub. The initiative is the latest effort to incorporate more popular participation into the the law making process through crowdsouring – allowing for the widest range of input, viewpoints and ideas. It provides yet another example of what Steven Johnson calls "Peer Progressive" in his latest book.

Most efforts start from the assumption that the quality of the laws we create and presumably the legitimacy of their eventual implementation would benefit from more diverse participation from a wider array of non-professionals. In his recent TED talk, Clay Shirky called for creating such a "Git Hub" for lawmaking to transform the legislative process and enable ordinary citizens to have direct input.

Till date, the "crowdsourcing law" experiments have focused on more bottom up approaches to the work of lawmaking, including: 1) proposing topics for new laws; 2) writing drafts of law; 3) commenting on drafts; 4) expressing support or dislike of proposed laws.

Consider for instance these example :

- The German Pirate Party uses open source software called Liquid Feedback to facilitate direct democracy 2.0 by empowering citizens to quickly poll online as to inform their representatives about their preferences.
- Following Internet users' concerted efforts against the Stop Online Privacy Act (SOPA) and Protect Intellectual Property Act (PIPA), Reddit users created r/fia, a collaborative space for drafting "The Free Internet Act." Also inspired by the SOPA and PIPA protests, Representative Darrell Issa is encouraging citizens to collaborate on the Online Protection & Enforcement of Digital Trade Act (OPEN) and Digital Citizen's Bill of Rights on his Keep the Web Open website.
- Iceland's Constitutional Council, tasked with creating a more modern constitution, solicited citizen feedback throughout the drafting process. Each week, the council posted a new proposed clause online, allowing citizens to comment or wholly rewrite the selection. The completed constitution also stipulates that any future changes will be put to a vote among all eligible Icelandic voters.
- Latvia's Mana Balss (My Voice) gives citizens a chance to set the debate agenda for their representatives. Latvian politicians agreed to debate any citizen-created petition submitted to Mana Balss that receives over 10,000 votes of support from other users.
- WikiVote!, a Russian initiative, includes citizens in the drafting of laws and development strategies. To avoid simple, unproductive commenting, WikiVote! breaks each document into smaller components and encourages users to draft their own improved versions of each selection. The different versions are then voted on by the community.

- Brazil's e-democracia portal is dedicated to creating discussion and finding solutions to public problems. Citizens have the opportunity to call attention to an issue that should be addressed by the government, propose possible solutions, debate with other citizens and even draft bills.

Unlike Latvia's Mana Balss, which only requires lawmakers to debate widely supported issues, or the United Kingdom's Direct Democracy program, which could lead to the discussion of an issue in Parliament, Finland's program forces representatives to officially take a stand for or against proposals demonstrated to be important to a large portion of the population.

As such, Open Ministry could lead to not only more immediate direct democracy, but greater accountability for government representatives. Despite the promise of crowdsourcing towards more participation, transparency and accountability of the law-making processes several challenges remain. More importantly, broader questions exist on whether these efforts aim to fix a process designed for a previous era or should go beyond what we currently mean by legislation.

Matthew Ingram at GigaOm concludes that "the laborious process of putting together a comprehensive piece of legislation — which would require hundreds of pages, legal footnotes and cross-checking with existing laws if it is to succeed in any real way — may simply not be compatible with existing crowdsourcing methods". Much more experimentation and research is needed to turn crowdsourcing into a tool that can improve or even transform the legislative process. New interfaces are needed. The development of tools such as IBM's Many Bills which focuses on offering an easy way to reading legislation could provide for improve the public's understanding of key components of a bill and and subsequently have them weigh in on the issues they care about most. Stay tuned.

Citizen Engagement – Decentralizing Governance

DESIGNING PARTICIPATORY BUDGET PROCESSES

By Stefaan Verhulst

April 6, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/designing-participatory-budget-processes/

Participatory budgeting has gained much traction the last few years across borders and demographics (see US map from Intellictis). Consider, for instance, the recent announcement by Boston's Mayor Thomas Menino to "set aside $1 million in the City's budget for youth to allocate through "Participatory Budgeting," in an effort to educate youth on how the budget works and allow them to decide how funds should be invested". (for other examples see: http://www.participatorybudgeting.org/)

But what it is it? And how does it work? Several readings have tried to define and explain the value of participatory budgeting (PB) from a participatory democracy, fair budgeting or trust perspective.

Tim Bonnemann, of Intellitics, has recently written a blog (What Is Participatory Budgeting?) providing an anthology of different definitions. He explains that "two ways have emerged how the term is being applied:

- "Narrowly, referring only to processes that give participants decision making power, e.g. by way of voting on their preferred projects/investments;
- Broadly, referring to any participatory processes that have to do with budgets, including budget consultations."

A new publication (accepted manuscript) in the *European Journal of Operational Research* focuses "On deciding how to decide: Designing participatory budget processes". Written by a team from several universities in Madrid (J. Gomez, D. Rios Insua, J.M. Lavin, and C. Alfaro), the paper indicates that in most cases of PB "both its design and implementation are carried out in an informal way". The authors therefore propose a methodology to design a participatory budget process based on "a multicriteria decision making model". Of particular interest is their analysis of the many variants of PB processes based on a sequence of common tasks (reflecting similar citizen engagement tasks) such as:

1. "Participant sampling. In many processes, participation of all citizens is impossible for logistical or physical reasons. Thus, a sample of citizens is chosen to represent the whole population. This sample could be purposive, random …, depending on the proposed issue or problem.
2. Election of representatives. For the same reasons, the participants might alternatively elect representatives to take part in the PB process.
3. Use of questionnaires. They aid in focusing on the main issues of interest, revealing what is of most interest to citizens.
4. Preparation of documents. There are two types of documents: preliminary, which contain information about the problem, and final, which contain the results of the process. The documents are usually proposed by representatives and/or experts.
5. Distribution of information. A key element in decision-making is providing the best possible information to participants. Similarly, participants should be able to share the information they might be able to gather.
6. Problem structuring. A problem might not be clearly formulated and participants would spend time structuring it, dividing it into parts so as to better apprehend it. In PB processes, these include determining criteria for

choosing between proposals and elaborating an initial list of alternatives, together with their associated costs, technical features and constraints.

7. Preference modeling. Participants are sometimes required to express their preferences, usually through pairwise comparisons, goal setting or value functions. These preferences aid participants in finding their most preferred alternative and support them in negotiation.
8. Debate. Whether regulated or spontaneous, the exchange of ideas is vital for citizen participation. Participants can express and discuss their opinions.
9. Negotiation. When individuals disagree on their preferred alternative, they may try to deal with the conflict through negotiations, in which participants exchange offers, ideas and arguments so as to try to reach a consensus…
10. Arbitration. Through debate and negotiation, we may find that the parties involved cannot be satisfied and refuse to budge from their positions. To avoid this, some mechanisms include the figure of an arbitrator who makes the final decision, once the opinions and reasoning of the different parties have been presented…
11. Voting. Many times, it is used as a last resort, particularly if achieving consensus is not possible. Voting can be done with different rules, such as simple majority, approval voting, Borda count, etc. …"

The authors subsequently explain the various variations and their impact according to different priorities and objectives (such as, for instance, maximizing transparency).

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT TO CO-DELIVER PUBLIC SERVICES

By Stefaan Verhulst

April 3, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/citizen-engagement-to-co-deliver-public-services/

An emerging innovation in how we provide public goods involves the concept of "co-delivering" government services. To improve the development, production, and delivery of public services, governments are increasingly seeing the input and co-operation of citizens to help out. A new report from the IBM Center for The Business of Government, called, "Beyond Citizen Engagement: Involving the Public in Co-Delivering Government Services" aims to document this new phenomenon.

Authors Dr. Ai-Mei Chang and P.K. Kannan, both from the University of Maryland, start by contextualizing the opportunity:

"today there is an opportunity to go beyond traditional forms of citizen participation such as voting and testifying at public hearings. The rise and increasing pervasiveness of digital social media—Facebook, Twitter—have dissolved the many technical barriers to widespread and sustained citizen involvement in actually co-producing and co-delivering public services.

Pioneering initiatives, in turn, are also thawing the cultural barriers among professional public administrators to engaging and co-designing public services with non-expert citizens."

The report subsequently highlights three different types of co-delivery initiatives "that can increase citizen engagement, each offering different roles and opportunities for citizens to engage in public services". They include:

*"**Co-design initiatives**. A co-design initiative allows citizens to participate in the development of a new policy or service. These kinds of initiatives typically are time-bound and involve citizens either individually or as a group. For example, the development of the Obama administration's Open Government policy in 2009 engaged citizens via an open electronic platform where citizens could be actively involved in the drafting of policy guidance.*

***Co-production initiatives**. A co-production initiative involves citizens—as individuals or in groups—in creating a service to be used by others. These can involve either short-term or long-term participation. For example, the Youth Court of Washington, D.C. engages first-time, non-violent offenders to serve as a jury and try other offenders as a teaching tool to reduce the chances of recidivism. Similarly, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office engages individual outside experts in the patent application examination process to speed patent issuance. In contrast, the Library of Congress engages large groups of citizens via crowdsourcing to classify and categorize content and facilitate appropriate information retrieval for all users.*

***Co-delivery initiatives**. The co-delivery approach involves citizens—as individuals or in groups—in delivering a service to others. It can be premised on either short-term, transaction-based or longer-term relationships. The United Kingdom has been a pioneer in co-delivery of health and mental health programs, including family intervention programs and community support programs."*

A large portion of the report is dedicated to guiding government executives, including insights on introducing and implementing co-delivery initiatives. The guide starts with the following important warning (applicable across citizen engagement efforts):

"Start any initiative with the right motivation. Co-delivery initiatives are all about successful service outcome that benefits the citizens, leading to significant improvement in outcomes through innovative, creative sparks. The primary motivation for a government agency should be improvement in service outcome, and not cost-cutting. If the service outcome is successful, it also will ensure that the process has been an efficient one, with reduced costs and government input and increased return on investment (ROI) manifesting themselves as by-products. A singular emphasis on cost-cutting is likely to lead to failure."

IF ONLY POLITICIANS WANTED TO LISTEN…

By Stefaan Verhulst

April 2, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/if-only-politicans-wanted-to-listen/

This week's *Economist* focuses on the promise and peril of participatory politics. The article "The Internet Helps Politicians Listen Better to Their Electors. If They Want to" starts its analysis with a skeptical perspective:

"Digital politics carries high hopes. Many think it will help citizens govern themselves more effectively than via a professional caste of politicians. But just as putting cameras in parliaments did not usher in an era of teledemocracy, so digital politics has failed so far to displace the baby-kissers."

It subsequently features several tools and experiments aimed at increasing citizen's input (including Germany's LiquidFeedback experiment, America's "We the People" initiative and Finland's initiative in which successful e-petitions bring about a parliamentary vote) highlighting their limited nature:

"Platforms rarely enable users to discuss issues or fine-tune their demands….Crowds of citizens are good at tabling proposals and then voting on them; less successful at the horse-trading required to produce consensus—let alone a law that actually works. The idea of writing legislation collaboratively using "wiki" software (which anyone can edit) has generated headlines but few results. Madison, one such platform released in 2012 by campaigners battling anti-piracy laws, helped American politicians weed out errors in a draft bill but has not been much used since."

The article quotes Dr. Beth Noveck, co-founder of the Governance Lab saying " In one year Congress passes just a few hundred laws (when not hobbled by partisan mudslinging), whereas American government agencies pump out up to 8,000 new regulations" illustrating the potential for engaging with citizens to collect ideas on how to improve solutions, spend money and provide for services.

Several members of the Open Government pre-research network are quoted raising the need to improve current experiments so as to prevent a public backlash:

- "Tiago Peixoto …worries that poorly planned participatory exercises could risk creating 'a new generation of disillusioned citizens'";
- "… handing citizens oodles of data without providing better means to respond is like offering 'a dashboard without a steering wheel', says Clay Shirky, a technology writer."

The article ends with a cautionary note:

"That may not be the direct democracy that Utopians covet, but more modest ambitions are in order. Cool-seeming digital tools can narrow participation by excluding poor, old or disabled people. Researchers in Germany report that e-petitions are mostly created by the same well-educated males who create and sign paper ones. "Move fast and break things" may be a good motto in Silicon Valley, but it is a poor prescription for politics."

HOW DO LEGISLATORS FIND EXPERTS? CROWDSOURCING VS. CURATION

By Stefaan Verhulst

March 28, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/how-do-legislators-find-experts-crowdsourcing-vs-curation/

A new report released today from the New America Foundation discusses several case studies to solve "Congress' Information Crisis". Research Fellow Lorelei Kelly, author of "How Do They Know?" describes the challenge at the outset of the report, making the case for expert advice while embracing open and decentralized ways of policymaking, as follows:

"At this stage of the global information revolution, we need a clear distinction between crowdsourcing and curation for policymaking purposes. Not all information is created equally. Mass and volume are inadequate criteria for lasting solutions. Crowdsourcing input to Congress often lacks quality control. It can be characterized by sentiment rather than substance. Curated input, on the other hand, seeks a more rigorous and peer reviewed method of participation in policymaking. It requires accredited or experiential knowledge. Experts have a special role."

Dr. Kelly subsequently defines both as follows:

*"**Crowdsourcing:** the open and all-inclusive practice of soliciting input, opinions, ideas or services from a large group of people and especially from the online community*

***Curation:** a selective and custodial process of discovering, gathering and presenting expert content"*

The report subsequently highlights several initiatives from across the US and around the world that have worked to enhance democracy through innovative decision-making, engagement and information-management programs. They include for instance:

"Iceland in 2010 opened its constitutional rewrite to mass participation, offering citizens the chance to use technology to update and modernize their founding document. This process exemplifies effectively managed crowdsourcing.

Arizona State University's Decision Theater is a technologically enabled system for predictive modeling whereby participants see the tabular data behind complex problems configured on screens with visual data and in terms of simplified policy tradeoffs.

***Germany** developed an online experiment called liquid feedback, which is a collective text editor that broadens input into policymaking."*

The author concludes:

"Who has access and what sources have influence are important subjects of scrutiny and debate, as they often determine the destiny of nations. Today's information revolution combined with the level of unprecedented transparency has created both a crisis and an opportunity for the United States and for many other countries around the world. Lacking a modern knowledge management system, stymied by obsolete processes and missing capacity, the US Congress is nevertheless a mining camp of possibilities for improved civic engagement, especially for the provision of expert knowledge."

IMPROVING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN RULEMAKING

By Stefaan Verhulst

March 24, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/improving-public-participation-in-rulemaking-2/

Open government scholars Cynthia R. Farina and Jackeline Solivan recently released a paper in Proceedings on " How the Internet Improves Public Participation in Rulemaking".

The paper takes stock of the lesson learned from "Regulation Room", a pilot project from the Cornell e-Rulemaking Initiative that "provides an online environment for people and groups to learn about, discuss, and react to selected proposed federal rules".

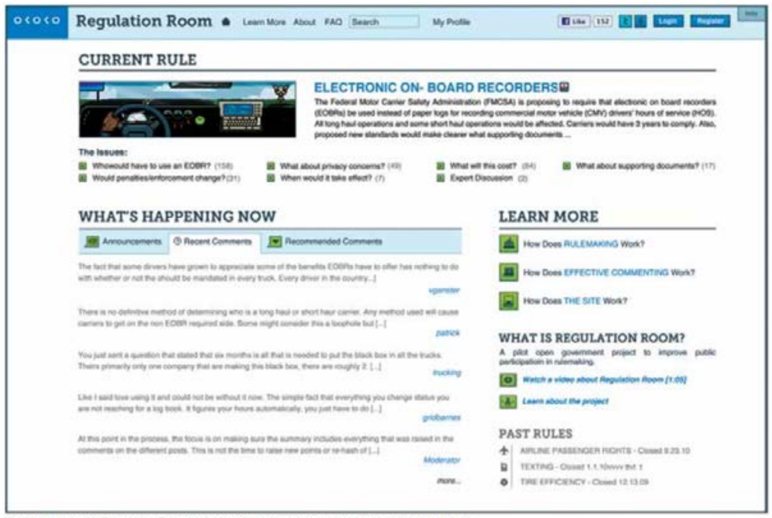
"Regulation Room" is based upon the hypothesis that a successful public participation system must address three barriers to citizen engagement in rule-making.

- Lack of awareness ("people rarely know they can take part in the process by commenting")
- Information overload ("voluminous and complex rulemaking materials" with limited readability)
- Unfamiliarity with how to participate effectively.

The goal for Regulation Room is thus "to discover how human effort and Web 2.0 technologies can lower these barriers to elicit a broader range of public participation that has value to rule makers".

The paper subsequently describes some of the techniques applied to broaden the participation of citizens including "targeted" commenting (the ability for users to attach their comments to specific segments of text); Triage of the information new commenters will most likely be interested in; Employing plain-language writing principles; and Layering (Web 2.0 hyperlinks to allow users to go deeper or to find help).

Below, the design of Regulation Room's interface:



The home page for Regulation Room is designed to encourage and support user engagement.

While the authors conclude optimistically, they do "believe Regulation Room's most important lesson is that broadening effective public participation requires considerable investment from the citizen participants and from their government".

CONVERSATIONS ON CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

By Stefaan Verhulst

March 13, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/conversations-on-citizen-engagement/

The World Bank has just launched a new crowd sourcing initiative called "The Striking Poverty" aimed at empowering innovators to end poverty. In essence, 'The Striking Poverty" is an online space is designed for "striking up interactive discussions and debate among a global community of stakeholders." Each discussion is scheduled to last two weeks before it is archived.

"By sharing ideas, we hope to showcase what works and provide inspiration to fill in gaps and use solutions in new ways."

The current conversation on citizen engagement, focuses on innovative participatory practices that promote the effectiveness of governments and development projects. It is initiated and hosted by Tiago Peixoto, World Bank's Open Government Specialist.

Shedding light on the question of when, why and how participation works is precisely the objective of this initiative. The outcomes of this open dialogue are expected to:

1. Inform how the Bank approaches the issue of citizen engagement, and
2. Support the development of an evaluation framework for Bank projects on ICT mediated citizen engagement.

You can join the conversation by signing-up and logging-in at https://strikingpoverty.worldbank.org/.

BOOK REVIEW: *CITIZENVILLE*, BY GAVIN NEWSOM – THE SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

By Beth Simone Noveck

March 4, 2013

http://www.sfgate.com/books/article/Citizenville-by-Gavin-Newsom-4321331.php

Citizenville: How to Take the Town Square Digital and Reinvent Government, By Gavin Newsom with Lisa Dickey

When I started work in the White House in 2009, I had been brought in to help implement the Obama administration's commitment to making government more transparent, participatory and collaborative. At the time, the federal government, like governments worldwide, was anything but open. The White House didn't have a blog, Twitter accounts or a social media site. To make matters worse, we were running Windows 2000.

As a colleague described the situation: "We have a nearly obsolete infrastructure, so a lot of things have to be done 'by hand.' Don't think Google server farm. Think gerbil on a wheel."

Things have gotten better since those early days, but they're not yet good enough. Approval rates for government are at an all-time low. We need more open, innovative government to connect with citizens and win their trust. But it can be hard to know how to talk about government innovation in a way that is exciting and inspiring. Through lively stories and engaging quotes from famous digerati and less-famous policy entrepreneurs, Gavin Newsom's new book, "Citizenville: How to Take the Town Square Digital and Reinvent Government," does just that.

Co-authored by Lisa Dickey, "Citizenville" focuses on the fact that government is not making optimal use of modern technology, and proposes some creative, engaging solutions. Dickey and California's lieutenant governor declare that "government right now is functioning on the cutting edge - of 1973."

Upgrading the operating system of our democracy and making town hall as easy to navigate as Twitter has real potential for improving people's everyday lives. "Citizenville" offers both an impassioned plea for more tech-enabled government and a *tour d'horizon* of the ways some governments have begun using technology to good effect. Newsom and Dickey catalog an impressive list of private-sector tech platforms that could improve how we work in the public sector. The overall effect is breathless and dizzying (and often disconnected), but ultimately powerful.

First, there's YouTube. We can use social media to broadcast and democratize town hall meetings and make government more interactive in how it communicates with citizens, changing the relationship between government and the governed.

Next come Google and other information-based platforms. When we open up the information government holds and make it available to the public, innovators of all kinds can create empowering applications. When the federal government released data on hospitals, big companies like Google and Microsoft upgraded their search engines to provide potentially lifesaving information on patient satisfaction and infection rates through user search. And a small entrepreneur, Stamen Design, used local crime data to build the Crimespotting map that enables Oakland residents to understand (and hopefully reduce) crime in their neighborhoods.

Newsom and Dickey celebrate Salesforce, the cloud-computing giant that helped San Francisco track the impact of its homelessness programs and deliver better and cheaper services. Using up-to-the-minute data, San Francisco was able to find housing and shelter for many of its homeless. "The democratizing influence of the cloud," the authors posit, "leads to a stronger, more stable commonwealth."

Inspired by the Apple App Store, Newsom and Dickey suggest that government could reduce corrupt procurement practices, bring down costs and foster entrepreneurship by inviting those outside of government to develop tools and solutions instead of relying only on bureaucracy to procure goods and services.

For example, they write about Donors Choose, an organization that pairs classrooms and teachers with those willing to purchase much-needed school supplies. Much more than a Match.com for education, this kind of partnership website also gets people engaged in their communities.

The company at the center of the book is Zynga, creator of "FarmVille." In the game, players work with their friends to tend farms and animals to advance to the next level. It's addictive - much more engaging, Newsom and Dickey suggest, than participating in the dull life of our democracy. If more of government involved play and prizes, Citizenville would be just as engaging as "FarmVille."

"We could combine the fun of a game with the social good of solving real problems," write Newsom and Dickey. If people are willing to spend real money on virtual tractors, then why wouldn't they clean up the local park if their efforts were recognized and rewarded using new technology?

But the authors of "Citizenville" don't acknowledge that getting to this kind of decentralized, participatory, tech-enabled democracy is a long and uncertain path. In "FarmVille," residents are motivated because they can decide how to spend their virtual dollars. But after you finish cleaning up the local park in Citizenville, what can you really do? Other than a brief aside on citizen-budgeting experiments, "Citizenville" does not explain how technology can empower people to make consequential decisions about how to solve our collective problems. It doesn't address who will participate and why, and who will be left out.

A classic bureaucratic model won't drive the new participatory technology: If Zynga were to create a department of agriculture for the purpose of fostering virtual agricultural productivity, everyone would quit! Whether in "FarmVille" or Wikipedia, people collaborate online to tackle challenges and for peer approval. In our real-world communities, people often pitch in where government is absent. (Think barn-raising.) But in a world where real people pay real taxes, we don't yet know why most people, when invited to spend time and effort to solve public problems, won't just say, "That's the government's job, not mine."

There are two different challenges to achieving greater self-governance. First, we have to create incentives for people to engage more. Second, we have to create incentives for government to let them do it. Zynga wants players to create their own farms because the company gets rich if they do. Newsom and Dickey suggest that if we make self-government fun, people will sign up.

Maybe. But we also need to make enabling self-government a positive for the majority of politicians and civil servants who currently lack the incentive.

Although "Citizenville" is a fast-paced and engaging read, it's telling that the book includes almost no voices and views of real people. We never hear from San Franciscans about whether the city is a better place to live since the adoption of tech-enabled innovation. We are left wanting but not knowing how to make Citizenville work in reality.

"Citizenville" might not give us the evidence that its proposed solutions will work. But it surely gives us the faith that open government - namely, more participatory, decentralized and agile institutions, enabled and supported by advances in technology - could lead to better solutions for citizens and more legitimate democracy. And, thankfully, if we are looking for a politician who claims he knows how to get out of the way and catalyze bottom-up democracy, we know where to find him.

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PARTICIPATION, SOCIAL MEDIA AND EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE – COMPILATION OF RECENT FINDINGS

By Stefaan Verhulst

March 2, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/participation-social-media-and-effectiveness-of-governance-compilation-of-recent-findings/

Some recent quotes on the issues of participation vs. effectiveness and the potential of social media to transform governance…:

Allissa Black reviews the City of Oakland's Sunshine Ordinance and concludes:

> *"The current legal and policy framework for participation does not match the expectations and capacities of residents; it pre-dates widespread use of the Internet, by requiring only that meetings, agenda, and minutes be put online, and it does not reflect the current practices for participatory decision making and problem-solving."*

Susan Rose-Ackerman and Thomas Perroud's "Policymaking and Public Law in France: Public Participation, Agency Independence, and Impact Assessment," from the *Columbia Journal of European Law* examines the following question: "How can policymaking inside the executive remain true to democratic values?" In answering the question, they make the point that:

> *"Although rulemaking may require scientific and economic sophistication, that fact does not negate the responsibility to consult. Policymakers are not simply making purely expert judgments that citizens ought to respect…. a more open and well-justified process does not imply that officials give up their mandate to further the public interest. Rather, it can produce a more informed choice because decisions are not isolated from public input."*

Elliot Schrage, Facebook's Vice President of Communications and Public Policy. Schrage, was a panelist at a Social Media and Behavioral Economics Conference at Harvard Law School, making the following intervention (according to the coverage of the event):

> *"We see extraordinary opportunities for public institutions to leverage this technology to advance public and collective goods,"…, with existing institutions of government incorporating "these tools into their day-to-day functions and operations in a way that hasn't even really begun." (watch video of panel)*

Ines Mergel from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs and The Information Studies School (ischool) at Syracuse University just published a paper in *Government Information Quarterly* that aims to identify the factors that affects adoption of social media within the US Government. According to Professor Mergel, three distinct factors influence the adoption of social media by government officials:

> *"Information about best practices in their informal network of peers, passive orations of perceived best practices in the public and private sector, and "market-driven" citizen behavior."*

Her recommendations point toward the need to develop social media tactics for different organizational purposes in government.

MAPPING AND ANALYZING PARTICIPATION USING SCHEMAS

By Stefaan Verhulst

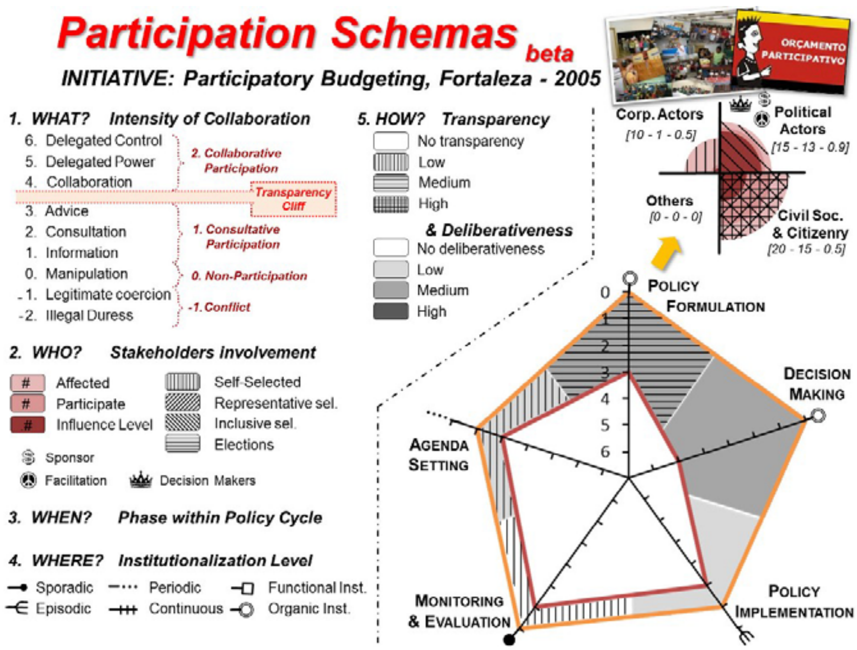
February 24, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/mapping-and-analyzing-participation-using-schemas/

In a recent blog entry and presentation at a European Commission meeting on collaborative production of eGov Services, Pedro Prieto, founder of the Asociación Ciudades Kyosei stated that:

> *"after half a century of research on "Participation" we do not have yet clear concepts and typologies that allow fruitful discussions and analysis.… Our model thus aims to provide some basic "vocabulary" on which to build such a 'common language'. It aims to establish a series of 'shared concepts' that facilitate analysis and communication in this area, and promote especially the exchange of experiences and good & bad practices."*

A picture of their attempt to develop a Participation Schema (which Pedro Prieto is eager to expand).



TWO DIFFERENT CASE STUDIES OF CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

By Stefaan Verhulst

January 25, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/two-different-case-studies-of-citizen-engagement/

In its first week, Estonia's People's Assembly citizen petition platform received around 500 proposals, and over 1,000 people registered with their national ID cards to make or comment on proposals. The site is run by a group of volunteers from a number of Estonian NGOs—including the Estonian Cooperation Assembly, the Praxis Center for Policy Studies, the Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations (EMSL), the e-Governance Academy and the Open Estonia

Foundation. Of the proposals posted in the first week, 248 are aimed at reforming electoral law, 97 deal with party financing, 65 are focused on local participation in politics, 50 seek to amend internal democracy in political parties, 27 concern the politicization of public offices and the rest were categorized under "miscellaneous." The public proposal and commenting process is the first stage in the initiative and will run through the end of January. Analysts will then review the proposals and group them into bundles in February, and in March, "the proposals that win enough support will be debated at public meetings and presented to Parliament by the president."

While People's Assembly uses a sequential petition and response process, the United States' official public petition platform, [We the People](), promises an official response from the administration once a petition passes a signature threshold. [A recent analysis]() found that, on average, it took White House officials 54 days to respond to petitions that crossed the 25,000-signature threshold. There has been great variation in response time, however—a December 2011 petition asking the White House to oppose the Stop Online Piracy Act received a response in 23 days, while a January 2012 petition asking the president to nominate new commissioners to the Federal Election Commission did not receive a response until around 10 months later.

Currently, petitions that have already crossed the signature threshold but have not yet received a response have been waiting 61 days on average. That includes three petitions—one seeking Palestinian membership in the United Nations, another asking for legal protections for atheists and agnostics in the military and one focused on placing mandatory labels on genetically modified foods—that have been waiting over 15 months, since the week of the platform's original launch. In the interest of providing "timely and meaningful" responses, the White House raised the signature threshold to 100,000 on January 16. While this higher threshold is likely to lessen the wait time for qualifying petitions, "only a handful of petitions have received more than 100,000 signatures since We the People was first launched in September 2011."

LACK OF MEANINGFUL METRICS AND EVALUATION LIMITS THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

By Stefaan Verhulst

January 23, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/lack-of-meaningful-metrics-and-evaluation-limits-the-effectiveness-of-civic-engagement/

"A critical analysis of EU-funded eParticipation," a piece written by Pedro Prieto-Martín from the book *The e-(R)evolution will not be funded* by Prieto-Martín, Luis de Marcos and Jose Javier Martínez, lists a number of problems with government-sponsored eParticipation programs and provides recommendations for creating digital spaces that allow for more meaningful and relevant collaboration among citizens. Prieto-Martin is the founding president of the Association "Symbiotic Cities" which aims to empower civic engagement through the Internet.

Prieto-Martin begins by calling attention to the fact that citizen participation—"understood in the broad sense of 'engaging with public authorities to assist them in the development of policies that promote social justice"—is a dangerous activity in many modern democracies (where non-democratic forces may resist participatory democracy), but, in more developed countries, the public rarely takes advantage of available paticipatory opportunities. Part of the cause of this, he argues, is that representative democracy, by definition, rarely calls on citizens for direct decision-making, and, traditionally, a country's elites only incorporate previously excluded groups into the decision-making process out of a realization that it is in the elites' best interest. The proliferation of ICTs, however, is creating new opportunities to diverge from the traditional path of unsuccessful citizen participation programs.

A natural evolution of citizen participation, "eParticipation can be defined as the use of ICT to enable, broaden and deepen people's capacity to influence the decisions and get involved in the actions that affect their lives." While few would argue that eParticipation programs do not have a worthwhile goal or dedicated people invested in their success, many projects have had relatively modest impact due to "political, organizational, technological, legal, economic, social and cultural hurdles."

Of interest, according to Prieto-Martín, one of the central issues limiting the effectiveness of eParticipation programs is the lack of a meaningful evaluation methodology. As it stands, "no clear demarcation has been established between the conduct of eParticipation and its study: the same team that designs, promotes and manages a project is often responsible for observing, researching and reporting on it." As such, the frameworks constructed to analyze eParticipation programs remain exploratory and difficult to apply to "real world" initiatives. While there is wide interest in optimizing existing eParticipation programs and creating new, improved initiatives, there is little understanding of what works and what does not in existing programs. For programs to reach their potential, "new data-driven evaluation models need to be devised, that go beyond the benchmarking strategies used to date in the e-Government domain" and are better able to "capture and judge the goals and achievements obtained."

Prieto-Martín also argues that the "e" in eParticipation is the subject of more focus than the "Participation." He contends that the weaknesses attributed to eParticipation programs — "conceptual vagueness, dominance of descriptive approaches, lack of theoretically grounded contributions, etc. — are at best explained as resulting from a poor understanding of the problems and dynamics associated with traditional 'offline' Participation." In his view, a "romanticized and rudimentary" understanding of citizen participation has led to unrealistic assumptions from technological utopists. Consistent with this view, he believes that the EU will have more success in their projects when they stop considering Participation and eParticipation to be two separate things. Moreover, the influence of e-Government programs—namely their top-down, technocratic nature—has had a negative effect on eParticipation initiatives. He argues that most EU programs did not promote a "citizen-oriented / people-empowerment-centred" bottom-up eParticipation program; and rather adopted a "government-oriented / tools-centred" approach that "did not succeed in devising 'analytical frameworks that took into account the values and preferences of the various stakeholders and civil society groups involved in eParticipation." To reach their citizen-empowerment potential, programs should be built around fostering democracy, not making the most of available technology.

Prieto-Martín's recommendations, in addition to the aforementioned decreased focus on technology and the need for improved evaluation models, are largely based on government's role in eParticipation receding. He argues that government should be the catalyst of eParticipation programs, not the main driving force behind them. As such, he believes that the "Facebook of civic engagement" is going to be created soon, and likely at negligible cost and with little official support. Consistent with his criticism of the top-down nature of many eParticipation projects, he believes that governments should "be proactive in order to integrate, and eventually support, bottom-up social innovation" through the engagement of "individuals, formal and informal civil society organisations, start-ups, and civil servants." Moreover, while resisting the urge to directly control projects, governments should work to keep individuals engaged, and, unlike most current programs, governments should strongly consider incorporating individuals' input into policy decisions.

Behavioral Economics – Leading through Nudging

KEEP IT SIMPLE

By Stefaan Verhulst

April 4, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/keep-it-simple/

As contemporary society gets more complex, several actors are trying to re-establish a certain simplicity that allows for clarity and control. For instance, John Maeda, President of the Rhode Island School of Design, wrote a few years ago the "Laws of Simplicity" reflecting on ways to pair down to basics..

Two new books (to be released almost simultaneously) pick up the importance of establishing "simplicity" in society and government:

Irene Etzkorn and Alan Siegel, from Siegel+Gale, describe how organizations can successfully achieve simplicity in their new book *Simple: Conquering the Crisis of Complexity*. The book focuses on how to realize the three fundamental principles of simplicity:

1. Clarity (expressing meaning clearly and simply),
2. Transparency (laying bare the underlying truth whatever it reveals) and
3. Usability (making something fit for purpose)

It starts by outlining how complexity undermines "government and business, and putting our health and even our lives at risk". Consider the following examples of common complexity:

- "**Marquis Dunson died in 2002 after his parents gave the one-year-old Infants' Tylenol** for three days to treat his cold symptoms. In the subsequent lawsuit, which resulted in a $5 million award, the plaintiffs argued that the warning labels and directions on the Infants' Tylenol label did not make clear that an overdose of acetaminophen, Tylenol's active ingredient, could lead to liver failure. The FDA estimates that an average of 458 deaths each year are due to acetaminophen overdoses.
- *Southern Medical Journal* published a study that estimated **a dermatologist signs his or her name 29,376 times a year.** Can someone do anything thirty thousand times a year with focus and certainty?
- The United States was founded and governed for over two centuries on the basis of a document that is six pages long. **That is 0.1 percent of the length of the current income tax code, which currently runs a whopping fourteen thousand pages."**

The book subsequently explain the wide-ranging applications of simplicity—how it works and why it benefits us, hoping to develop " a movement toward reduction of societal, governmental, and corporate complexity".

An advocate for the movement toward simplicity can also be found in Cass Sunstein, whose new book focuses on *Simpler: The Future of Government*", (to be released on April 9 – Read FT review), reflecting on his time at the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA). In a recent article on "Regulatory Moneyball" in Foreign Affairs, he reviews the book's main findings. Sunstein argues for a more disciplined and "simple" approach to limit the complexities of governance and rule-making:

> *"[E]xcessive regulation is a genuine concern, and agencies should not use their authority to consider qualitative factors as a license to do whatever they like. While I was at OIRA, the Obama administration took a number of steps to ensure a disciplined approach. The first step was to promote accountability by recommending that all significant regulations be accompanied by a*

simple table that offered three things: first, a clear statement of both the quantitative and the qualitative costs and benefits of the proposed or final action; second, a presentation of any uncertainties; and third, similar information for reasonable alternatives to the action. In a related step, OIRA required agencies to include a clear, simple executive summary of any new rules, explaining what they were doing and why and offering a crisp account of the costs and benefits, both quantitative and qualitative. Many federal rules are extremely long and complex, and it is hard for people to know what they are trying to do and why. A clear summary can help a great deal."

THE FUTURE OF GOVERNANCE

By Stefaan Verhulst

March 26, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/the-future-of-governance/

Cass R. Sunstein, President Obama's "regulatory czar" who oversaw the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs for three years, is about to release his new book "*Simpler: The Future of Government*" that documents lessons learned in applying behavioral economic principles to governing. In a preview (below) Prof. Sunstein, now at Harvard, reflects on the core messages of the book, and its relevance to change the way we govern.

GOVERNING THROUGH OTHER MEANS: BEHAVIORAL ECONOMICS AND CHOICE ARCHITECTURE

By Stefaan Verhulst

March 10, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/governing-through-other-means-behavioral-economics-and-choice-architecture/

Cass Sunstein's essay in the *New York Review of Books* about Sarah Conly's new book "*Against Autonomy: Justifying Coercive Paternalism*" has generated a wide public debate on the pros and cons of behavioral economics, choice architecture and so-called expert or liberal paternalism.

In the meantime, several new papers have been published this month that deepen our understanding of alternative means of regulating behavior, including the value of behavioral economics to governance.

In a recent paper, Ryan Calo compares three methods that have "captured the imagination of scholars and officials":

"The first alternative method, known colloquially as architecture or "code," occurs where regulators change a physical or digital environment to make undesirable conduct difficult. Speed bumps provide a classic example. The second method, libertarian paternalism or "nudging," refers to leveraging human bias to guide us toward better policy outcomes. For instance, the state might attempt to increase organ donation by moving to an opt-out system because people disproportionally favor the status quo. Finally, mandatory disclosure or "notice" works by requiring organizations to provide individuals with information about their practices or products. Examples include everything from product warnings to privacy policies".

Throughout the essay, Calo argues that "regulators should choose "facilitation" over "friction" where possible, especially in the absence of the usual safeguards that accompany law".

The (forthcoming) *Oxford Handbook of Behavioral Economics and the Law* (edited by Eyal Zamir and Doron Teichman) contains a chapter by Cass Sunstein that focuses on Nudges.gov: Behavioral Economics and Regulation.

In the chapter, Harvard Law Prof. Sunstein discussed the theory and application of so-called "choice architecture — including default rules, simplification, norms, and disclosure — " that "can affect outcomes even if material incentives are not involved". A general conclusion of Sunstein's article involves that:

"While material incentives (including price and anticipated health effects) greatly matter, outcomes are independently influenced by choice architecture, including (1) the social environment and (2) prevailing social norms. When some people, cities, and nations do well and others less so, it is often because the former, and not the latter, are able to benefit from aspects of the environment, and from prevailing norms, that enable them to take for granted, and perhaps not even to think much about, a set of practices that serve them well. And as we have seen, some behaviorally informed tools, such as automatic enrollment, can have very large effects – larger, in fact, than significant economic incentives."

Finally, a paper by Thomas Price in the *Annual Review of Public Health* (Volume 34) focuses on "The Behavioral Economics of Health and Health Care". According to Price:

"People often make decisions in health care that are not in their best interest, ranging from failing to enroll in health insurance to which they are entitled, to engaging in extremely harmful behaviors. Traditional economic theory provides a limited tool kit for improving behavior because it assumes that people make decisions in a rational way, have the mental capacity to deal with huge amounts of information and choice, and have tastes endemic to them and not open to manipulation. Melding economics with psychology, behavioral economics acknowledges that people often do not act rationally in the economic sense. It therefore offers a potentially richer set of tools than provided by traditional economic theory to understand and influence behaviors."

CHANGING THE WAY WE SOLVE PUBLIC PROBLEMS BY CHANGING THE WAY WE FINANCE

By Stefaan Verhulst

February 23, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/changing-the-way-we-solve-public-problems-by-changing-the-way-we-finance/

In a new paper published in the academic journal *Business Economics*, Yale economist Robert J. Shiller (and author of the book on *Finance and the Good Society*) develops further his argument that society needs financial innovation where investment is aligned with societal goals. In "Finance Contributing to the Good Society," Shiller explains his new finance paradigm that embraces a wide spectrum of human goals (see also his presentation at the London School of Economics on the subject).

Traditional accounts of finance emphasize maximizing income. Shiller, by contrast, observes that individuals in fact pursue "a mixture of self-interest and public interest" goals. He seeks to redefine the concept of finance in order to account for this observed desire to maximize the public interest. Because "very few human goals can be attained by one human in isolation," he claims that financial systems can be used to coordinate action and thus help individuals achieve their real goals.

According to Shiller:

> *"Financial innovation and advances in behavioral psychology together with information technology make it possible to work on diverse goals of a good society, such as reduction of crime, facilitating small investor participation in entrepreneurial enterprises, and mobilizing resources for enterprises whose success is not defined by conventional bottom lines."*

In the paper he provides three examples of creative finance innovations that seek such benevolent ends: 1) social impact bonds, 2) crowdfunding, and 3) the benefit corporation. Each model makes use of mathematical finance frameworks and modern behavioral economics to further public welfare. While it is too soon to say whether these innovations have been successful, each experiment "sets the stage for further, future, experiments" in pursuit of a diverse set of goals.

Civic Technology – Supporting Public Technical Innovations

SXSW AND OPENING GOVERNMENT

By Stefaan Verhulst

March 9, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/sxsw-and-opening-government/

The annual South by Southwest (SXSW) Conference on emerging technologies is on. Among the avalanche of presentations and panels, three panels may be of particular interest to the opening government and civic engagement community:

- **Erhardt Graeff** from the MIT Center for Civic Media has organized a panel on Bots for Civic Engagement. Among the questions it seeks to address: "What would a future look like where instead we see a proliferation of bots for positive civic engagement? Could we automate the distribution of civic information and education? Manipulate information flows to improve our welfare? Engineer reverse-Distributed-Denial-of-Service attacks? Should we?"
- **Shannon Dosemagen** from the Public Laboratory for Open Technology and Science has gathered a panel focused on Empowering Communities with Civic Science and Data. The panel starts from the following questions: "In a data driven world, how do individuals contribute? Do you question where your data comes from and who owns it?"…and perhaps more importantly: "When building a community, is it the goal, technology, core values, or something else entirely that attracts active and consistent participation from a group of people?"
- **Gadi Ben-Yehuda** from the IBM Center for the Business of Government 's panel will look at Engaging Government For Fun, Profit, and Meaning trying to answer the question: How can ordinary citizens use tools and data currently offered by federal agencies to start their own businesses or make better daily decisions?

WHITE HOUSE CALLS TO "ROLL UP YOUR SLEEVES, GET INVOLVED, AND GET CIVIC-HACKING"

By Kevin Hansen

January 23, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/white-house-dubs-june-1-2-national-day-of-civic-hacking/

In Brief:

- June 1-2, 2013 have been declared by the White House "National Day of Civic Hacking", with the event receiving support from numerous organizations such as Code For America and Random Hacks of Kindness.
- Software developers, technologists and entrepreneurs will be asked to use open government data to volunteer their time coding solutions for various levels of government.

The U.S. White House announced yesterday that June 1-2 have been dubbed the "National Day of Civic Hacking," or "Civic Hacking Day." Brian Forde of the White House and Nicholas Skytland of NASA's Open Innovation Program describe the event as follows:

Civic Hacking Day is an opportunity for software developers, technologists, and entrepreneurs to unleash their can-do American spirit by collaboratively harnessing publicly-released data and code to create innovative solutions for problems that affect Americans…A coalition of leading organizations, companies, and government agencies have banded together to issue this challenge with the goal of promoting transparency, participation, and collaboration among governments, startups, and citizens.

The National Day of Civic Hacking promises to be among the largest and highest-profile civic hackathons to-date, drawing in numerous public, private and non-profit sector partners:

The event is taking place in conjunction with Random Hacks of Kindness and Code for America's Brigade meetings and is being modeled after the Innovation Endeavors' Super Happy Block Party. A number of Federal agencies, including NASA, the Census Bureau, and the Department of Labor, are participating by offering specific challenges for hackers to work during the event.

For more on the event, check out Hack for Change.

REFORMING GOVERNMENT BY CROWD INNOVATION

By Stefaan Verhulst

January 23, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/reforming-government-by-crowd-innovation/

In their essay "Managing Crowd Innovation in Public Administration," Alexandra Collm and Kuno Schedler examine how governmental adoption of social media can be used to reform public administration. Though public servants have attempted to reform many times, improvements often take place only at a rhetorical level. Collm and Schedler contend opening the reform process with help from crowd innovation will help identify and resolve issues of public management directly and indirectly. Their essay provides an overview of how to move beyond previous patterns and maximize innovative potential. It defines how crowd innovation works, the necessity for innovation in government, and how public managers need to address deficits and plan for the future.

In order to cultivate the best practices for increasing openness and transparency, and in doing so increase legitimacy, Collm and Schedler conclude that greater attention to internal environmental factors, external participant engagement and management, consistency and implementing a guiding legal framework.

> *"The process of crowd innovation requires a legitimatory element that is in conformity with the system. What is necessary is a reduction in the complexity of the crowd and its activities: the systemic opening-up of innovation must also be balanced by a closure since otherwise the further progress of the innovation process would be in jeopardy."*

A reduction of complexity and a built-in system of reflexivity is also necessary according to this perspective. There must also be a utilization of different channels and Web 2.0 technologies to inform and engage with the crowd.

> *"The implementation of crowd innovation is a break with previous processes and practices; for the establishment of its acceptance, however, it must still be compatible with superordinate structures and values. For this reason, public managers have to strike a balance. The implementation of an open innovation process must therefore go hand in hand with a reduction in complexity in order to guarantee the legitimacy of the process. Reflexivity is necessary when dealing with ambiguity so as not to perceive the open innovation process as a danger. Trust in the crowd is preceded by an altered view of the crowd as a problem solver rather than a problem."*

PRESIDENT OBAMA'S CALL FOR COLLABORATIVE AND SMARTER GOVERNMENT

By Stefaan Verhulst

January 21, 2013

http://www.openinggovernment.org/president-obamas-call-for-collaborative-and-smarter-government/

From President Obama's 2013 inaugural address:

> *"But we have always understood that when times change, so must we; that fidelity to our founding principles requires new responses to new challenges; that preserving our individual freedoms ultimately requires collective action. For the American people can no more meet the demands of today's world by acting alone than American soldiers could have met the forces of fascism or communism with muskets and militias. No single person can train all the math and science teachers we'll need to equip our children for the future, or build the roads and networks and research labs that will bring new jobs and businesses to our shores. Now, more than ever, we must do these things together, as one nation, and one people….*
>
> *"We understand that outworn programs are inadequate to the needs of our time. We must harness new ideas and technology to remake our government…"*