HOW DO THEY KNOW?

Case Studies of Expert Knowledge Support for Elected Leaders

BY LORELEI KELLY[1], OPEN TECHNOLOGY INSTITUTE
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Here in the United States and around the world, elected leaders seem paralyzed by information overload. Despite a wealth of information at our fingertips, high-quality, unbiased facts have become increasingly hidden in our noisy, saturated world. Worse, much of the public discourse has become routinely gridlocked, as proponents on each side of a debate regularly come to the table armed with their own "facts." Faced with this deluge of information, the role of congressional staffers is increasingly one of fact-checking rather than fact-finding. Now more than ever, Congress needs reliable, unbiased mechanisms for separating fact from fiction, especially during the policymaking and oversight process of the legislative branch.

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. The following case studies represent possible solutions to this problem of curating information. While not necessarily prescriptive in themselves, each has something to offer in helping Congress to cope with the new realities of the information age.

Introduction

The United States Congress is stuck. That is not news, and although the causes are many and subtle, the purpose of this article is not to resurrect that particular debate. Instead, we focus on the absence of expertise—agenda-free facts to drive analysis and policy formulation—and creating an accessible and symmetrical knowledge environment for decision-making.

Across the globe, a profound shift is underway. Demands for self-determination are redistributing power from hierarchies to individuals and communities. Meanwhile, old institutions struggle to adapt to and often resist the modern requirements of participatory government. Transparency is increasing, data is abundant, but systems that enable public accountability lag behind. What is the role that experts can play in building the tools of modern, accountable government? How is technology leveraging participation to build this new public space? Will civic technology be able to bridge the gap between demands for inclusion and today's mostly obsolete governing systems?

The global trend toward open government, transparency and mass participation presents new challenges for all policymakers. Much of the impetus for open data, open participation and policy engagement comes from the executive branch. For example, President Obama made open government his first presidential directive in 2009. Yet it is legislatures and their elected members who govern closest to the people and who therefore also need dedicated resources for expert knowledge and advisory methods. The impetus versus need gap is becoming increasingly clear. Legislatures often have far less fire-power than the executive when it comes to credible knowledge, staff and readily available resources for high quality decision support.

Emancipated data is now analyzed with new and unconventional perspectives, and multiple voices are conveyed to leaders through mass participation methods. A look through house.gov and senate.gov member sites will illustrate how Members of Congress are increasingly using social media like Facebook pages, visual data and video channels. Some members and committees include interactive input templates and only three members of the new freshman class in the House and Senate are not on Twitter.[1] Yet while crowdsourcing input for elected leaders is an important development, it is uneven and not a refined method for sorting sentiment from substance. Policy formation requires technology adapted for process. And, because not all information is created equal, knowledge management for legislatures requires nuanced and sophisticated filtering. Drawing from the civic technology lexicon, "curation" is perhaps a better label for this type of information. Curation means discovering, gathering and presenting content. This kind of process input is nascent. Two recent attempts are Rep. Darrell Issa's (R-CA) Madison Platform[2] which he set up to broaden discussion around legislation, and Rep. Zoe Lofgren's (D-CA) attempt to include many voices in writing the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act through the website Reddit.[3] This paper takes the position that it is in the best interests of legislative systems everywhere to embrace openness and the potential for broader engagement from experts distributed across the country. In so doing, democratic governments should simultaneously update and modernize knowledge management in order to curate the highest quality and most methodologically rigorous information available.

The audience for this paper is those who are working in the open government, civic technology and transparency movements as well as other foundations, think tanks and academic entities.

The 2012 Global Parliamentary Report notes that legislative bodies are facing many challenges in coping with today's modern communications environment:

The landscape in which they operate is now more complex and faster moving than ever before. The challenge is to keep up with the public by displaying responsiveness and resilience and continually renew that relationship with citizens.[4]

Why shouldn't one of these relationships be a more open and decentralized method of gathering expert input for policy? Although today's US Congress might not seem to be an apt role model for effective knowledge management practices, it was a premier example of expertly informed deliberation in decades past. Not long ago, the US Congress maintained the world's leading system of legislative policy expertise in the form of the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) and Legislative Service Organizations (LSOs), also known as "the caucus system." Members also had access to deep pools of expertise through shared committee staff, most of whom were dedicated to the common purpose of benefiting the institution of Congress and the larger public interest. With a few exceptions, they were inclusive of both parties and committed to providing "on the ground" consultation and research. They were constantly available to answer questions about policy proposals, worked with Members and staff during the course of legislating, and helped Members forecast and understand trade-offs within the process of policymaking.[5]

Since these expert entities were dissolved in 1995, lobbyists, advocacy groups and partisan political leadership have sought to fill the vacuum. Expertise that does exist is uneven and hoarded rather than shared. Today, instead of a thoughtful and deliberative process, we have a crescendo of talking points, often based on sentiment or vested interests rather than high-quality substance. Member offices receive around 800 percent more incoming communications than they did in 2000.[6] Congress' lack of credible knowledge capacity, plus its obsolete processes for sorting and filtering information, results in a legislative branch that does not serve the needs of 21st century democracy.

Information? Or *Knowledge*?

Before exploring the cases in this report, a key point to consider is the fundamental difference between "information" and "knowledge." For the purposes of this paper, information is what humans acquire through reading, communicating and having practical experience. Information is often unorganized and unrelated. It can even be harmful to achieving long-term, sustainable policy goals. Anyone with an agenda can trot out massaged statistics, anecdotes or showcase poorly-sourced research. Information can corrupt discourse by misrepresenting a situation. It can be cheaply and easily produced, which leads to the overwhelming volume of information now bombarding our policymakers.

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Knowledge is different. It is a good-faith representation of the truth as we know it. Knowledge results from the skillful implementation of the empirical process. In other words, a method that strives for accuracy, quality and integrity. Though different people may interpret outcomes differently, knowledge accurately represents consensus among accredited stakeholders. Arming policymakers with curated feedback that is informed by our best understanding of the facts enriches deliberative decision-making and enables durable policy solutions. Knowledge, when clearly represented as choices and tradeoffs, creates accountable democracy and must be superior in the process of policymaking.

A goal of this paper, and the Smart Congress initiative more broadly, is to increase the proportion of knowledge in our public discourse. Indeed, the thorny problems we currently face as a nation,

Information	Knowledge
May carry an agenda, or reflect only part of the story	May not offer easy answers, but reflects the complexity of the issue at hand, poses tradeoffs
Easily produced en masse, contributing to information overload	Takes time and resources, but quality knowledge is worth more than facile information
Not peer reviewed, not comparative	Reflects best empirical practices, including rigorous and transparent methodology and sober reporting of the facts
Often designed to corrupt or stop discourse	Enhances shared base on which discourse relies

changing weather patterns, scarce resources, financial instability, the fate of the global Internet, the limits of military force, and so on—require expert knowledge and a capacity for understanding the long-term implications of decisions made today. And, decisions on these issues often demand real-time expertise within the process of policymaking itself.

The following case studies offer an overview of different methods for providing knowledge to legislative bodies. They are not meant to be comprehensive, but rather to provide a cross section of possibilities that may be drawn on to improve symmetrical and accessible expertise for legislators and their staff.

Current Institutional Expertise

Congress does have some important expert resources at its disposal. The Congressional Research Service (CRS), Government Accountability Office (GAO), and Congressional Budget Office (CBO) all support policymakers and their staffs with robust and politically agnostic information. But they are limited in important ways.

Consider the CRS. This understaffed agency produces prodigious research and information, but its reports lack the sort of innovative policy thinking that might helpfully reframe the terms of debate on a difficult

issue. Forbidden to advocate and discouraged from communicating with the media or the Executive Branch, CRS employees can rarely get in front of issues. They also err on the side of caution so much that their research often fails to explore the kind of tough tradeoffs that are vital for policymaking. The process also lacks transparency: despite being paid for by taxpayers, reports are unavailable to the public. Like many academic documents, CRS and GAO reports are dense and text-heavy even as the demographic of congressional staff gets younger, more tech-dependent and more expectant of tweet-sized input.

Members of Congress and their staff do not lack access to information. Yet information backed by partisan leadership, financial interests and high-decibel advocacy is disproportionately represented. Most importantly, staff lack the institutional wisdom that can be built via a deliberate system that feeds broadly inclusive information through defined processes of review, context, comparison and evaluation of the implications for the nation as a whole. In other words, information filtered through a process of institutional wisdom.[7]

The status quo may seem grim, but Congress has functioned much better in the past and can do so again. For two successive sessions, House leadership has passed transparency-enhancing rules that take significant steps toward updating and modernizing

the institution. The Senate is also making progress. Individual members have added specialized staff and continue to work individually to move open government forward. Yet restoring Congress to the ranks of premier modern democracies will require, at a minimum, recreating knowledge systems that give Members and their staffs higher-quality information when they need it.   Better sourced data and advanced information management tools would help policymakers sort and filter their noisy environments and make more-informed decisions.

This paper highlights some initiatives from across the country and around the world that have worked to enhance democracy through innovative decision-making, engagement and information-management programs. It is part of a series brought to you by the Smart Congress pilot project at the New America Foundation's Open Technology Institute. Smart Congress looks at ways to re-engineer how knowledge is shared with and within the United States Congress, including the adoption of new technologies and innovations for local civic engagement.

India: PRS Legislative Research Service

Monitoring and strengthening the Indian Parliament

India is the world's largest democracy. Its steady economic growth is matched by popular trends toward civic engagement and self-determination. With over a billion people, its citizens are represented by a parliament that includes over 20 parties, with 718 members in the bicameral body. Each MP represents between 1.5 and 2 million individuals, yet has scant resources for any staff support, much less expertise. It does have a parliamentary library—which acts more like a news clipping service than a research arm. MPs have a few administrative staff and typically no policy staff. The PRS Legislative Research Service works to fill this gap by serving both the people and

Crowdsourcing vs. Curation

Distinguishing between crowdsourcing and curation is an important step for improved citizen engagement and rigorous policymaking in Congress.

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 Parliament. This independent non-profit has two missions—helping the public better understand the legislative process and assisting parliamentarians to make informed decisions through research assistance.

In 2005, PRS began providing non-partisan research in a user-friendly format and language. It supplies traditional research as well as background fact sheets on existing law, including a contextual explanation of relevant precedents. It maintains a rigorous, internal peer review process for all outgoing information. PRS issues briefs on pending legislation so that members of the public can track legislation and make contact with their Member of Parliament. The organization is also experimenting with academic partnerships via recent deals with Indian business and public policy schools.[8]

PRS does not have an institutional relationship with parliament. Rather, it focuses on individual MPs and initiates contact with hard copies of material, while also putting the documents online. The organization has cultivated a "pull" relationship with members, reasoning that too much publicity and pushing could be a turn-off if construed as too pushy. In total, 325 MPs use the service, an impressive number for an organization only founded in 2005.

Unlike many legislative knowledge-sharing entities, PRS does talk to the media. The organization has

a communications team and is quoted more than a thousand times per year in the press. PRS is proficient at placing its columns as articles in news sources as well.

This media relationship is a centerpiece of the monitoring and accountability aspect of PRS. For example, the paralysis of the September 2012 concluding session of parliament was exposed with solid statistics:

> Parliamentarians have deliberated on legislation for just 25 out of a possible 120 hours during the monsoon session which began on August 8, according to PRS Legislative Research, a New Delhi-based independent study group.

> Only four bills were cleared by both houses, despite as many as 30 being listed for consideration on issues such as pensions, land acquisition, tax reform and corruption. Three of them were cleared inside 20 minutes on Monday without any discussion, in line with a trend since 2009 according to which one in every five bills is passed after a debate of less than five minutes, PRS says.[9]

Its website also includes many criteria that meet global transparency norms: MP tracking, bill tracking, days in session and reports published. It also features a continually updated news feed of legislative coverage. On the social media front, it has the modern requisites: an active Twitter feed, Facebook presence, blog and Youtube channel.

Yet PRS seeks more than transparency and watchdog status. Its website includes helpful engagement advice for outside organizations wanting to interact with parliament. It also offers hands-on workshops for engagement, internships, parliament tracking media workshops and is experimenting with early session induction and education courses for MPs themselves.

> **For more information on PRS Legislative Research Service, see:**
> **www.prsindia.org**

United Kingdom: Hansard Society

Connecting citizens and institutions to benefit democracy

The number one civil society priority on openness and transparency within the UK's new National Action Plan for Open Government Partnership is:

> The public must be provided with easy access to accurate, credible, high value information in a format that can be easily read and understood, so as to ensure that key actors across the public, private and voluntary sectors can be held to account.[10]

Over the past few years, the UK government has initiated an impressive roster of open government activities with the aim of bringing civil society more fully into the governing process. Yet one British organization has been focusing on participation through the legislature for over 70 years. The Hansard Society is the UK's leading non-partisan political research and education organization. It was formed in 1944 to address the needs of the post-war and post-colonial world, and its research with the UK Parliament represents an informed model of democratic practice. Outreach and education comprise the other half of its mission, and it spends the lion's share of its effort on engaging with young people. Today, it is immersed in the questions posed by technology, transparency and the potential to reap the benefits of collective expertise.

The British Parliament has two branches. The House of Commons' 650 members are democratically elected while those in the House of Lords earn their titles through appointment or inheritance. Together, they number around 775. Each House has its own administrative support, but given the large number present in this legislative body, the institution has sparse expert resources dedicated to policymaking and is understaffed throughout. Members have at

most one administrative staff member in London and perhaps two more in their district. The latter focus on constituent service and case work, not policymaking. Despite ongoing initiatives in open government and transparency, budget cutbacks of 15 to 17 percent will doubtless limit additional resources for improving expertise.

Committees in Parliament provide a space for specialization during the process of legislation. Since 2002, Parliament's 14-staff Scrutiny Unit has specialized in intake of evidence and assistance—mostly on accounting matters. It was set up especially to help the select and bill committees in the House of Commons. These committees are the workhorses of Westminster. They are charged with overseeing government departments, topical issue areas and introduced bills—they do have staff with subject matter expertise and also receive help from the Commons Library. The House of Lords also includes committees, though they deal with more general and "big picture" issues. Westminster has other varieties of committees. Grand committees have regional membership, Joint committees include members from both the Lords and the Commons. Yet in all cases the numbers of expert staff are low given the volume of activity and potential for legislative engagement with experts outside of the official system. For example, when it comes to communicating with the outside world, there are only six media officers for 39 committees.

Recent public discussion over reforming the House of Lords has highlighted the issue of expert knowledge in Parliament. This unelected body channels immense expertise into the legislative oversight capacity of Westminster. The House of Lords deals more with thematic issues—and many Members are themselves scientists, academics or experts in their own right. The extent to which their specialized expertise is leveraged in the duties of Parliament is a live contemporary issue that deserves more attention.[11] Developing innovative ways for the UK's expert knowledge community to help inform and improve policy is a process worth exploring, as Members of the House of Commons are not taking advantage of local or distributed expertise nearly to the extent that it is available. The UK government has become increasingly decentralized over the past decade, as well. Since 1997, power sharing has increased with the devolution of specific lawmaking areas from Westminster outward to the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies. This new arrangement, in part created by referendum, has generated more space for participation and experimentation with modern representation. These bodies are also in a position to evolve and improve the informed practice of democracy throughout the country, as these regional bodies often act as incubators of incipient ideas.

Hansard is the only institution of its kind. It maintains its long standing and trusted relationship with the House of Commons and House of Lords by focusing on the processes of Parliament. Throughout the UK, it provides thought leadership on democratic process reform. Much of Westminster's recent steps toward greater openness (televising parliament and creating online forums, for example) originated in Hansard research. Today, Hansard is tackling the challenges that come with transparency, like large amounts of newly available data and greater perceptions of corruption. It works directly with Members to provide training and assistance for their institutional roles.

The recent global financial crisis may well spur on the institutional introspection needed to boost the search for more expert knowledge, judgment, and ability to forecast implications during the policymaking process. While other institutions, including the Bank of England and the Treasury, have been subject to post-crisis investigation, the Parliament has not. This has exposed a critical weakness in its oversight ability.[12]

The Hansard Society is situated to play a key role in the evolution of expertise within the processes of Westminster. How this change will leverage or be leveraged by technology is an open question. The United Kingdom today needs to utilize resident knowledge in the House of Lords, increase capacity and effectiveness of the expert resources already available to Parliament, and help the House of Commons develop accountability, scrutiny, and policymaking tools. Indeed, the Prime Minister's Open Government Partnership has noted the need to bring Parliament more fully into its next steps.[13] These considerable but entirely doable tasks suggest that Hansard will continue to be a key link between elected leaders and opportunities to leverage knowledge and govern in the public interest.

> **For more information on the Hansard Society, see:**
> **www.hansardsociety.org.uk**

Washington State Institute for Public Policy

Rigorous research as investment portfolio for policymakers

Similar to the federal government, the process of policymaking at the state level is complex and most leaders have no systematic way to discover or share the best knowledge available. Washington state is the exception.

Since 1983, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) has furnished legislators with the highest-quality policy research and analysis available. WSIPP is inherently non-partisan. The Washington State Legislature created WSIPP for itself to maintain shared expert advisory capacity. Washington has a part time legislature with limited staff capacity—typical in states across the USA. The WSIPP receives its assignments through the legislative process:

the legislature passes a bill that requests a series of topical studies, which the governor must then ratify. Its hallmark research style is to present policy options in a portfolio investment format so that values, quantities and tradeoffs are obvious. The prevalent issue areas thus far are social services, health care and criminal justice.

WSIPP has evolved and refined its policy research mechanism over the years, yet its point of departure is guided by two basic questions: What works and where? The rigor of its method happens in three steps:

1. Staff conduct a formal review of subject area comparative research—most of which comes from academia and other states.
2. Staff then broaden the outcome values both quantitatively and qualitatively. The results offer a cross section of information. For example: How much is it worth to the state of Washington to have five more kids graduate from high school? Where does this benefit accrue value across the society and economy?
3. In order to convey policy choices as future-oriented outcomes, staff present research as an investment portfolio. Legislators can then combine the options to achieve their own preferred optimal outcomes.

After the data scan, staff assess the quality of the methodology and treatment, then weight each study. Using complex statistics, they combine the findings of multiple studies to present evidence-based policy options. The researchers then use cost-benefit analysis (CBA) to quantify the budgetary impact of each alternative to answer questions such as, "What is the immediate cost of decreasing juvenile recidivism by 10 percent, and what might the long-term savings be?" Legislators may then use the CBA to compare policy options and decide programmatic funding levels across the state budget. WSIPP is not determining policy; instead it clarifies options for

policymakers, and enhances the political process by making the costs and benefits of each option transparent.

Other states, and even other nations, have contacted WSIPP to build a similar model.

New Jersey Office of Legislative Services

Confidential research support for policymakers using dedicated staff

New Jersey legislators luxuriate in staff resources in comparison with other American states. The state includes 40 districts, each with one Senator and two assembly members. Most district offices have three staff members and the option to share these staff as needed regardless of party affiliation. Because of these resources, case work and constituent needs are well served.

New Jersey provides a common pool of expert knowledge for its legislators as well. The New Jersey Office of Legislative Services (OLS) provides unique assistance to legislators. Like other legislative services departments, OLS provides non-partisan assistance in reviewing bills and staffing specialty committees. But what sets its apart is its confidential research assistance program. Legislators may request fiscal or policy analysis on any topic and receive qualified answers in confidence. The service has 10 different subject areas, each with seven or eight staff, and the staff are cross-sectional collaborators who also team up to divide overlapping responsibilities into sub-

topics (i.e. beaches and tourism). By mandate, OLS staffers maintain strict confidentiality with regard to all research assistance requests—they may not disclose who has requested information, or on what topics.

OLS is a low profile, internally-focused organization. Staff contact with the media is limited to subject matter expertise and, in fact, the organization does not have a communications staff. They may not be quoted, nor are they to engage in promoting any kind of larger policy discussion. This strict confidentiality allows legislators to ask candid questions that, if publicized, might appear impolitic. The downside is that it has difficulty with simple items like correcting a press release or larger issues like defending itself when its research gets caught in political crosshairs. This happened recently when the OLS budget officer was labeled "Dr. Kevorkian" by the sitting governor for releasing budget numbers that diverged from the executive's plans. However, the OLS belongs to the legislature exclusively and only interacts with the executive branch at the request of a legislator. Other public interest benefits exist because of the presence of OLS. For example, its dedicated staff can quickly access detailed information and context on behalf of constituents. It can also do a cross sectional quick survey if a legislator gets a request from a lobbyist or other narrow interest groups.

OLS staff are well connected to New Jersey higher education institutions, particularly New Jersey's public land grant school, Rutgers University. This inclusion is significant, as academic expertise is often sorely lacking with the process of public interest policy making. OLS is a model in the way that it includes local research and facilitates expert input into public deliberations.

Arizona State University: Decision Theater

Predictive modeling presents real time tradeoffs for policymakers

Arizona State University has made a name for itself as an academic innovator. It boasts one of the largest enrollments of students among US public universities and it has made public interest research a primary mission. Its Tempe campus hosts a cluster of creative projects seeking to create a new type of American university. Reaping the benefits of modern technology is a high priority.

The Decision Theater is a technologically-enabled system for visualizing and integrating the data behind complex problems and test-driving different courses of action and solutions. It sets the stage for systems thinking using technology—seven large screens that are both sequential and simultaneous—surround the audience of decision makers. Video and graphics then tell the story behind the tabular data. Lists of numbers become pictures of policy tradeoffs. For example, for a policy discussion about Arizona water scarcity (a regional issue), data input would include information about Colorado River allocations, utility bills, geographic usage records, agriculture and historic climate patterns. Using matrix computing, this information is transformed into pictures of the actual items for policy tradeoffs: swimming pools, golf courses, cities and public use, lawns and households, for example. Even more broadly, it brings in the power needs of Las Vegas and Los Angeles, plus the upstream and downstream users of the Colorado River.

Decision Theater will exist in two places. The original site is on the ASU campus in Tempe, Arizona. The second will be at the McCain Institute in Washington, DC just blocks from both Capitol Hill and the White House. The creators of Decision Theater intend for the facility to create an immersion experience that will help decision-makers, policy analysts, government officials, civil society actors, and academics build the strategies and decisions needed to solve complex and connected real-world problems.

One challenge for leaders everywhere is understanding the context of a decision. Likewise, citizens rarely have leadership accountability mechanisms based on data input and projected implications. What are the possible tradeoffs tomorrow because of a decision made today? Governing institutions worldwide struggle with how to filter the high quality knowledge that is available, but lost in the sea of noise brought about by the communications revolution.

"Situational awareness" is a helpful military term for gathering information, improving the signal to noise ratio and developing a course of action in a complex environment where every decision has serious consequences, both short and long-term. Decision Theater has a similar goal for civilian policy makers—a state of the art high quality information environment that can tabulate inputs and recalibrate instantly.

> **For more information on the Decision Theater see:**
> **www.mccaininstitute.org and www.dt.asu.edu**

Germany: Liquid Democracy

A new, technology-driven force in politics

The liquid democracy platform is a concept that represents the free flowing nature of open government movements. It is embodied by an online experiment called liquid feedback, which is a collective text editor that broadens input into policymaking . The idea is embraced by the Pirate Party, a tech savvy upstart political party in several democratic countries, with the intent to expand democratic participation and deliberation. Individual pirates campaign for their policy ideas via social media and by garnering delegated votes.[14] Proxy voting is a key element of

liquid democracy—whereby members delegate their vote to another individual, often to a trusted person who is known to have more expertise in the subject at hand. The party has gained street credibility by live streaming committee meetings and parliamentary group discussions. The pirates and their civic technology rose to prominence in Germany over the past year and a half with a message of Internet freedom, civil rights, political transparency and citizen participation. The pirate's technical platform is also one for the digital age.

Often derided as a mere protest movement for computer hackers and disaffected youths, the Pirate Party has avoided conventional issue-oriented politics and opted instead for new and less understood issues like transparency in government and a more inclusive form of decision making. Their policy platform includes several digital rights issues—including protections for online file sharing and privacy—that other parties have ignored. Party members also use social media tools to collaborate and debate issues and hash out their platform.

The Pirate Party movement started in Sweden but gained international attention in 2011 when it began winning seats in Germany's state-level legislative bodies. As of June 2012, the Pirates have seats in four of Germany's 16 local legislatures and claims 35,000 members. The party wants to play a major role in the 2013 federal election, and might win representation in Germany's legislature, the Bundestag. This possible step forward is dimming and was significantly diminished in early 2013, when the Pirates produced a dismal showing in the Lower Saxony state election. They also continue to fall in popularity in the polls. Part of the reason is that the party is male-dominated and has trouble attracting female participants. Some of their proposals are deemed outlandish and so distract the public from more serious goals—for example, the demand that all public transportation be free of charge. The Pirates' appearance of infighting, lack of any consistent strategy or detailed subject matter policies appears to be hurting their public image. Their mandate for inclusion also comes with a huge organizational challenge; 700 proposals were put forward at the platform convention.

Why is the Pirate Party phenomenon relevant to the provision of expert knowledge in this case? The jury is still out about how rigorous the knowledge curating process will be for policy input among the pirates and their open platform collaborators. At the moment, its plan for a broadly inclusive policy process is still in its infancy, and the organization is dominated by a handful of key players. As with many grass-roots generated concepts, putting boundaries on policy input is controversial. Yet some sort of qualifying process will be required to separate sentiment from substance and to present a rigorous set of policy options to the public. Its unique combination of direct and proxy voting to move policy formulation is intended to move policymaking away from narrow or vested interests towards a more inclusive outcome. This goal alone is admirable and the pirates will hopefully have many best practices to share in the near future.

For more information, follow @ppinternational, the English-language Twitter feed for Pirate Party news around the world. For more information on the technologies that make Liquid Democracy work, see: www.liquidfeedback.org

Dartmouth College: Policy Research Shop

Robust comparative research for two state legislatures

Helping public leaders get access to the resources inside of academic entities seems to be a natural next step in the movement toward better informed and more open government. Yet many obstacles stand in the way. Different communication styles, bad timing

and difficulty navigating complex institutions goes both ways in the relationship between academia and elected leaders especially in the legislative branch.

One academic program that has bridged this gap to produce a standing relationship based on high quality research comes from Dartmouth College, where the Rockefeller Center's Policy Research Shop plays a unique role in New England state level policymaking. Dartmouth students serve as non-partisan expert researchers for municipal and state legislators in New Hampshire and Vermont. Before the center existed, the legislators in these states received most of their information from lobbyists and financial stakeholders. The center was founded to redress this imbalance.

As part of a policy class for which they receive credit, Dartmouth students receive requests from the two states and then set out in teams to research best practices in policy ideas. Students spend time building relationships with the legislators, including due diligence interviews with people on the ground and face-time in state capitals.

These tasks can vary. For example, a Dartmouth team created a sustainability plan for the town of Hanover. Topics range from the municipal and regulatory to the urgent and expansive (i.e. parking, garbage disposal, stormwater runoff, criminal justice, financial literacy, high school curriculum, and pandemic response planning).

While students do use information provided by non-governmental and advocacy groups for broad perspective, the lion's share of recommendations come from the review of policy from other state governments. When information does come from a less-objective source, it is noted in the research product. Students combine and analyze policy options, and even give expert testimony before officials ranging from agency administrators to county commissions, all of whom benefit from expert knowledge and comparative context. During 2012, students presented on refugee resettlement, privatization of public entities, school lunch programs and public safety. Before appearing as witnesses, Dartmouth students first present their findings in mock hearings with experienced policy scholars who role play actual committee members. This process provides a unique peer review mechanism— especially appropriate for legislators. It provides a lesson in the political atmosphere of policymaking, but more fundamentally, it ensures that legislators benefit from highly curated comparative knowledge.

The Dartmouth program has fared well in being perceived as an honest broker and for sticking to the data.

> **For more information on the Rockefeller Policy Center, see:**
> **rockefeller.dartmouth.edu**

University of Delaware Legislative Fellows

Providing non-partisan information for policymakers with borrowed staff

As anyone who runs a large organization knows, human resources consume a considerable part of the budget. State legislatures routinely operate under constrained budgets and so paying for permanent policy staff is an extravagance they cannot afford.

Delaware is a state with a diverse population and economy. Wilmington and Newark in the north are home to major financial services employers and a large public research university, respectively. By contrast, the southern third of the state is a mix of agricultural and tourist economies.

As in many other states, policymakers must contend with changing demographics, strained budgets, and the loss of manufacturing jobs. Like many

of its peers, Delaware's legislature is part time, with limited staffing resources for the institution. The University of Delaware and Delaware State University have helped fill this staffing gap with an innovative use of university resources to benefit the public interest. Since 1982, legislators have drawn on undergraduate and graduate students from the state's two public universities for high-quality, non-partisan research assistance to serve as "Legislative Fellows." Students in public policy, political science, and related fields function as more than interns or pages. Instead, fellows fill major staffing needs in the legislative caucuses. They compare best practices in other states, conduct policy analyses, and manage administrative tasks such as scheduling committee hearings and writing committee reports. In this way, fellows provide on-site *process* support and *knowledge* curation.

The Legislative Fellows program benefits extend beyond the official hallways in Dover, Delaware's capital city. Like the Rockefeller Policy Center at Dartmouth, the Legislative Fellows program has trained a generation of leaders in public service. Previous fellows serve the public and nonprofit sectors across Delaware and nationally, including, most notably, Congressman John Carney (D-Del.)

> **For more information on Legislative Fellows, see:**
> **www.ipa.udel.edu/legfellows**

Iceland: Constitutional Rewrite

Managed inclusion updates a foundational document

Iceland is a volcanic island of roughly 300,000 people; it is home to an ancient culture and one of the oldest parliaments in the world. Its recent history has been fairly tumultuous, and to the extent that Iceland has received any press coverage in the United States, it

has concerned Iceland's economic problems (its economy spectacularly crashed in 2008).

Behind the headlines, though, is a nation innovating its way through uncertain times. Iceland's economic problems may have been unique, but its governance issues are familiar: low levels of civic interest, disbelief that anything will change and little participation outside of elections. Finnur Magnusson a software entrepreneur, "lean start-up" fan and citizen @ gommit, notes, "What good is it to have one of the oldest parliaments in the world if it hasn't evolved?"

That all changed in 2010 when the prime minister opened the constitutional rewrite to mass participation and offered citizens the chance to use new technology to update and modernize their founding documents. This seemed like a natural step for a nation where most adult citizens are on Facebook.

The rewrite was not a free-for-all. It involved coordinating the input of 1500 participants. It was open but limited—a task of managed crowdsourcing. Magnusson, who was hired short term, says that one of the top priorities was to use social media to open up the mostly closed policy dialogue in between government and external groups seeking to input useful expertise. The process leaders maintained a live document, using Facebook to receive comments on live articles. They also published an iteration of the documents—all on free and open or freely licensed software.

A 25-person Constitution Council was appointed and given public engagement tools both to promote citizen collaboration and solicit public feedback. An executive from a local game company, Aðalsteinn óttarson, was brought aboard to advise on agile process. The Council held weekly online meetings for Icelanders to weigh in on proposed constitutional clauses.

Iceland's experiment offers a modern example of

managed inclusion for policy purposes. Its process-driven approach deftly combined and limited the quantity of participants and also sorted the quality of inputs. Still, this transition to technology-enabled democracy has not proceeded without obstacles.

Across the board, from left to right, those in power feel threatened by this new form of public engagement—this despite the fact that 60-70 percent of Icelanders support it. In October, 2012, Iceland's citizens voted on a non-binding referendum to adopt the new constitution and nearly 70 percent of voters answered "yes," with 49 percent turnout of the island's 235,000 eligible voters. Still, Iceland's experiment in broad engagement to update their constitution remains a work in progress. People are hopeful that the referendum results will prod the parliament forward, but the opposition party remains skeptical. Indeed, in summer 2012, Iceland had a presidential election and among the new president's first public statements was "we don't need a new constitution." As a global leader in technology and civic engagement, however, this island country will no doubt continue to have many lessons for the rest of us.

> **For more information, see:**
> **stjornlagarad.is/english**

Minnesota and the world: Climate Science Rapid Response Team

Connecting Experts with Policymakers and Journalists

"I asked a difficult question about ice cores and was impressed by the efforts the team made to find the right people to respond. The response was balanced, stating clearly what was known but also the uncertainties," wrote Ben Webster in *The Times*.

Climate change is a charged topic. The heated debates that play out in the traditional and social media are often fraught with half-truths and junk science. News coverage on this global issue often exacerbates the problem, since reporters often have a bias towards "equal time" and present peer reviewed science alongside questionable scientific-sounding claims as though both were equally valid.

Dr. John Abraham at St. Thomas University in St. Paul, MN, is a leader of the Climate Science Rapid Response Team (CSRRT). Academics like him often have both the knowledge and the relationship networks to be helpfully involved in policymaking. What they usually lack, however, is good timing. The CSRRT is working to solve this problem.

In a typical 24-hour news cycle, high quality knowledge is the loser in the shouting match. Fortunately, the CSRRT exists to provide the public with "matchmaking" to ensure that the best science enters the public conversation. This expert team of scientists, distributed around the globe, is set up to respond to legislators and the media. It has also provided expert testimony to the U.S. Congress and experimented with live fact checking in hearings. But the team's bread and butter is helping those who make and write the news. An interested journalist or policymaker can submit a scientific question online about a particular issue—such as sea level rise or deforestation—and the team connects that person to a specialist in the field. The specialists provide neutral, agenda-free information without jargon. For the general public, the team maintains a resources page with links to climate change reports and blogs.

The CSRRT provides a much needed source of high-quality knowledge for a discourse that is often starved for it. It is a model mechanism for restoring substance to policy making and public communication.

> **For more information on the Climate Science Rapid Response Team, see:**
> **www.climaterapidresponse.org**

Conclusion

A key thread in human civilization's thinking on democratic practice concerns the provision of accredited information to powerful leaders. 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 unprecedented transparency have 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. Recent policy disasters like the sequester and all too common practices like legislation that serves narrow interests have made it clear that not all information is created equally when it comes to accessing power.

Too often, the information that reaches the ears of legislators does not represent the greater good or the long term public interest. Moreover, technology devised for winning campaigns—like social media—can often make the problems of governing worse. Why? Because high quality knowledge is not guided by mass and volume. Policymaking is not as much a crowdsourcing challenge as it is a curation challenge. Gathering the best input must follow specific procedures, commonly known in academia as the scientific method. This sort of knowledge support used to abundantly exist inside Congress. Today, the lack of this rigorous sorting, filtering and sharing is the greatest knowledge deficit on Capitol Hill. What this paper points out is that the US is not alone in facing this challenge. Global innovation has taken place to begin to address it and that we would be wise to adapt best practices and learn about innovative experiments as we seek modern answers to democracy's current dilemma.

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