Toward the Next Phase of Open Government

A Report of the 2013 Aspen Institute Forum on Communications and Society

Panthea Lee, Rapporteur

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

FOCAS

Forum on Communications and Society

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Communications and Society Program
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Words From Charlie

The Forum on Communications and Society (FOCAS) is one of the premiere roundtables that the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program convenes in a given year. This year's Forum, "Beyond the Tools: Connecting Citizens and their Governments," is the second gathering in a three part series on the topic of open governance. Participants of the Forum set out to accomplish two main objectives:

- Enhance the relationships among localities and their publics in advancing participatory government;

- Find ways to institutionalize and measure the innovative techniques and talents for open governance.

The 2013 FOCAS report is a series of blogs written by Reboot Principal and Co-Founder Panthea Lee. The document provides the discussions, ideas and outcomes of these main objectives. This compilation of blog posts, along with future iterations of this series, advances the thinking and implementation of creative open governance solutions.

With this convening and others we aim for new insights on our topics, but also for significant impact. This is difficult for a single conference to achieve, but we are proud that the 2013 FOCAS Forum has already resulted directly in the formation of ODI USA — the Open Data Institute of the United States. Emulating the UK-based Open Data Institute model, ODI USA will pull together disparate players at the federal, state and local levels to advance the cause of open data and open governance.

Acknowledgments

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We also express our gratitude to our rapporteur, Panthea Lee, for her engaging and intelligent accounts of the content and ideas discussed by Forum participants; and to the FOCAS participants for their input and expertise on this important topic. Finally, I would like to thank Sarah Eppehimer, Senior Project Manager, for getting the project off the ground and producing and editing this report; Rachel Pohl, Program Associate, for researching and producing the Forum materials; and Tricia Kelly, Assistant Director, for managing the FOCAS conference.

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Chapter 1

Open Government and Its Constraints

"Open government" is everywhere.

Search the term and you'll find OpenGovernment.org, OpenTheGovernment.org, Open Government Initiative, Open Gov Hub and the Open Gov Foundation; you'll find open government initiatives for New York City, Boston, Kansas, Virginia, Tennessee and the list goes on; you'll find dedicated open government plans for the White House, State Department, USAID, Treasury, Justice Department, Commerce, Energy and just about every other major federal agency. Even the departments of Defense and Homeland Security are in on open government.

And that's just in the United States.

There is Open Government Africa, Open Government in the EU and Open Government Data. The World Bank has an Open Government Data Toolkit and recently announced a three-year initiative to help developing countries leverage open data. And this week, over 1,000 delegates from over 60 countries are in London for the annual meeting of the Open Government Partnership, which has grown from 8 to 60 member states in just two years.

Fair to say, "open government" has entered the big leagues. However, just as the global movement is gaining momentum, those of us in the open government community seem to be plowing forth without a clear game plan.

Many of us have no consensus or clarity on just what exactly "open government" is, what we hope to achieve from it or how to measure our progress. Too often, our initiatives are designed through the narrow lenses of our own biases and without a concrete understanding of those they are intended for — both those in and out of government.

If we hope to realize the promise of more open governments, let's be clear about the barriers we face so that we may start to overcome them.

Barrier 1: "Open Gov" is…?

Open government is… not new, for starters.

A product of the Enlightenment and freedom of press movements, the enshrining principles of open government — such as transparency, accountability and participation — have been the hallmarks of modern democracy since its inception. The contemporary use of the term stems from the global push for freedom of information legislation beginning in the mid-20th century.

More recently, the ideas and activities known as "open government" have ballooned with enabling trends in technology usage, such as the growth of social media, mobile phones and Big Data. And that's precisely the problem: "open government" has become incredibly ambiguous.

There is much spoken about empowering citizens to hold their governments accountable. Yet many initiatives under the open government umbrella focus on obtaining information about public services or resources: when my street will be swept, whether my car was towed or where the nearest parking spot is.

Part of the challenge is that we are using the same term to describe too many different and distinct initiatives. Are we trying to make public agencies more efficient, hold elected officials accountable, tackle corruption, influence policy, or achieve any number of other objectives that we associate with open government?

As much as we are working toward "open government," we need a coherent vision of what exactly that is and how we hope to achieve it.

Barrier 2: Open Gov is Not Inclusive

The central irony of open government is that it's often not "open" at all. Conversations on open government are dominated by those with the means to participate. Studies — including those from Turkey, Japan and Italy — show that participants in open government and civic engagement initiatives are often more privileged members of society. Demographics differ in context, but over-represented groups include: the young or educated, who know how to use the technologies that enable many open government initiatives; those already politically

active individuals who have another channel to push their agenda; and the relatively wealthy, who can afford both the time and the tools to participate.

The practical result of those with power, privilege and access tinkering for solutions, while large citizen segments remain uninvolved, is that open government initiatives are clouded by our own biases and tunnel vision. As advocates of open government, we assume that citizens and governments are eager to join the movement. As technologists, we assume everyone is an enthusiast and early adopter.

So when there's low uptake on a new app, site or other initiative, we scratch our heads and say, "the space is too young," "citizens just don't care enough," or "governments are so outdated."

"Why don't *they* get it?" we ask.

"Why don't *we* get it?" is the better question.

We want open government of the people, by the people, for the people — not open government by some people, for some other people. To ensure open government does not become a hollow buzzword and lives up to the promise of its name, we need to overcome our biases.

Barrier 3: Open Gov Lacks Empathy

Open government practitioners love to speak of "the citizen" and "the government." But who exactly are these people? Too often, we don't really know. We are builders, makers and creators with insufficient understanding of whom we are building, making and creating for.

No company worth its salt hawking a new product would claim "the consumer" is its market. And with good reason. A company has clear incentives to ensure it knows exactly which consumers are going to buy which products. No market intelligence means no sale and no company. Granted, government agencies are obviously without these same incentives. But the absence of market intelligence on the citizens that may use or benefit from an open government initiative yields the same results: no uptake and no open government.

On the flip side, who do we mean by "the government?" And why, gosh darn it, is it so slow to innovate? Simply put, "the government" is comprised of individual people working in environments that are

not conducive to innovation. Management professor Sandford Borins explains:

> Innovations developed by public servants in the employ of government are generally government property. Public sector organizations are funded by legislative appropriations; there are no venture capitalists to seed public management innovations. There is no share ownership in the public sector, and public servants are paid fixed salaries, with bonuses that, at best, are minuscule in comparison to those in the private sector. In other words, the rewards for successful innovations in the public sector are meager.

If we hope to get beyond a world of perpetual pilots with few success stories, we need to move beyond "the citizen" and "the government," and toward sophisticated and informed understanding of the people we seek to serve and influence.

Toward the Next Phase of Open Government

For open government to realize its potential, we must overcome these barriers.

This is the first post of a six-part series that grew out the 16th Forum on Communications and Society (FOCAS 2013) held earlier this year at the Aspen Institute. Titled "Beyond the Tools: Connecting Citizens and their Government," and sponsored by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, this year's Forum aimed to advance participatory governance by improving the interactions between citizens and government. As Charlie Firestone, executive director of the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program, framed the opening session, "How can we encourage citizen demand of open government? How do we institutionalize projects? How do we evaluate successes?

> **"Let us take these ideas from the edge to drive change within and outside of government."**
> *-John Seely Brown, Deloitte Center for the Edge*

Participants at the 2013 Forum on Communications and Society

The discussions at FOCAS balanced the need for reflection with the need for action. Participants deliberated on the current state of open government and barriers preventing the movement from fulfilling its promise. And they proposed — and, in some cases, moved forward with — concepts to represent the next phase of open government.

"[The participants here] are not just edge thinkers, but edge builders as well," remarked Deloitte Center for the Edge's John Seely Brown at the Forum. "Let us take these ideas from the edge to drive change within and outside of government. Let us think bigger in terms of what we can achieve with open government."

Chapter 2

What is Open Government and is it Working?

What is "open government"? The question is deceivingly difficult to answer.

New York University's Governance Lab recently listed 30 definitions of the term. Author Justin Longo explains: "Defining what open government means is complicated by the range of definitions, meanings and motivations that exist."

And that's precisely the problem: "open government" has become incredibly ambiguous.

The participants at FOCAS 2013 agreed. "Can we break down what open government actually means?" asked Phil Ashlock of Civic Agency. "Is *open data* the fundamental part of open government? That's a technocentric view. Where does policy fit into this? [...] We need standardization in our use of language so we understand what it is we are talking about."

More to the point, if we lack consensus and clarity on what "open government" means, how do we know if it is working? The short answer: we don't.

The Issue: Muddled Objectives

That the open government umbrella has come to include a range of initiatives is not itself a problem. The problem is that too many open government conversations take place in the context of us all working toward the same goals, which we are not.

Yes, a Congressperson seeking to enact legislation that enables citizens to request information from government, and a software engineer developing a tool that helps citizens understand when their streets will be swept are both, broadly, working toward greater transparency, accountability, and participation in government. But they are working

toward fundamentally different goals. The former is focused on democratizing access to public records, while the latter is facilitating public access to government service information.

Too often, this level of specificity is lacking in open government conversations, muddling our understanding of what we are trying to achieve through different and distinct initiatives. At the end of the day, are we trying to make public agencies more efficient, hold elected officials accountable, tackle corruption, influence policy, or achieve any number of other objectives that fall under the open government umbrella? Let's be clear about what exactly it is we are working toward.

Concepts that cover multiple definitions are tough to operationalize and their results even tougher to measure. Inasmuch as we are "working toward open government," we need a coherent vision of the goals implicit in that statement. Once we are clear about what we want change to look like, we can then develop appropriate means to evaluate if and how we are making progress.

The Solution: Rethinking Evaluation Can Add Clarity

Rethinking how we evaluate open government initiatives could move us in the right direction.

In the United States, the Obama administration has both pledged to enable an "unprecedented level of openness in government" and heavily restricted the classification and release of government information. Across Africa, countries are opening up about how they plan to spend their budgets, but keeping mum about how they actually spent them. Public finance expert Matt Andrews has shown that across 28 African states, 63 percent of governments are more transparent in budget formulation than in budget execution.

Have these governments succeeded in achieving "open government"? And beyond evaluating their holistic records on transparency and accountability, how do we assess individual projects?

Our current frameworks for evaluation typically equate scale with success. In other words, the more people engaged in an open government initiative, the more "open" government has become. Scale alone, however, is a crude and often inaccurate measure of success.

There's more than one million government datasets online today. As of November 14, 2013, the US government alone has released more than 87,000; at one point, it was releasing four datasets a day. Impressive? Sure. But what does this tell us about how this data is affecting people's lives or government policy? Studies that link the number of Twitter followers a government body has with its success in open government also miss the point.

"When assessing the success of consumer applications, you don't just measure the number of users it has," said FOCAS participant Michelle Lee of Textizen. "You measure other factors, such as the people returning within seven days, or 30 days, to understand what is happening."

> ## To assess the impacts of open government, we must stop measuring outputs and start understanding experiences.

In short, the number of users downloading a civic tech app doesn't tell us how that app is changing attitudes toward civic engagement or the culture of governing. To assess the impacts of open government, we must stop measuring outputs and start understanding experiences.

Ideas in Practice: 100 Worst

At FOCAS, participants proposed a concept called 100 Worst to spur better public service delivery through competition. Citizens could rank government offices or services in distinctive categories, and the desire to not be labeled one of the "100 worst" in each category could, in theory, motivate offices to improve their operations — particularly those notorious for inefficiency, such as the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV).

Now, the concept of "Yelp for government" is hardly new, but what was interesting about the conversation at FOCAS was the keen focus on evaluation. Participants didn't want to build 100 Worst just to build it, they wanted to the use data it generated to assess what effect the project would have on public service delivery (aka "impact evaluation"), and

how they may be able to increase the chances that government offices used the data to improve their offerings (aka "process evaluation"). By combining both types of evaluations, we can then see what procedures, strategies and activities lead to desirable outcomes and why. If, for example, they found a correlation between close collaboration with government officials and improved service delivery, we could structure future implementations to improve the potential for impact.

Data collected could also provide other interesting analyses. Mapping user or demographic data against user ratings, for example, may provide insights into how factors such as race, gender and average income impact service delivery.

"We need to measure what works. And we need a shift towards evidence-based evaluations," said Stefaan Verhulst of GovLab (pictured above). "Otherwise, these will remain faith-based undertakings."

Putting Evaluations in Context

Of course, evaluations can mislead, as they often seek linear, cause-and-effect relationships for complex change processes. Governments, for example, may have very legitimate reasons for poor performance — staff, for example, may lack sufficient technical training to use new systems. In these scenarios, citizen ratings can identify poor performance; applied ethnography and other qualitative research methods can surface the factors that contribute to poor performance. By blending the approaches, we can ensure government offices are not unfairly judged.

Negative evaluations should be used not just to point fingers at government, but to help it improve. Alissa Black of the New America Foundation noted that an office could leverage a low ranking for its advantage, as the New York Parks Department once had. The Parks Department used negative feedback from 311, the city's information hotline, to demonstrate that the breadth of its mandate was unachievable given its resource allocations. The department was granted more funding.

And what of citizens? How might participating in such an initiative shift citizen perceptions of government accountability? If a 100 Worst user sees that their actions have an impact on government performance, the positive feedback may shape how they engage with their community. And if they don't, the lack of feedback may lead them to disengage from 100 Worst, and be more skeptical towards open government initiatives in the future.

The success of an open government initiative is not simply a question of who and how many showed up. Real success will come with shifts in citizens' sense of agency over the processes of governance that affect their lives, and government's willingness to work with citizens in revising and implementing these processes. By exploring both sides' experiences with open government initiatives, we gain a rich understanding of who became engaged and why. We have insight into the specific pain points. And we have a better understanding of real-world impact, and how we can achieve it.

Chapter 3

The Biases in Open Government that Blind Us

The central irony of open government is that it's often not "open" at all. For all the talk of technology's broad and inclusive reach, conversations on open government are dominated by those with the means to participate. In one Italian parliamentary monitoring project, participants were mostly men (84 percent) and 3,500 times more likely to hold a PhD than the average citizen. The priorities raised, as a result, represent the views of a narrow and elite group of citizens.

At FOCAS 2013, Kelly Born of the Hewlett Foundation (pictured below) asked attendees, which included senior executives from the Sunlight Foundation, the White House, and the Open Data Institute, "Is this [group of FOCAS participants] the right group of people to set goals for open government? Where are the citizens in this process?"

The practical result of those with power, privilege, and access tinkering for solutions while large citizen segments remain uninvolved is that open government initiatives are clouded by our own biases and tunnel vision.

We seek open government of the people, by the people, for the people — not open government by some people for some other people. To ensure open government does not become a hollow buzzword and lives up to the promise of its name, we need to recognize and address our biases.

The Issue: Biases Lead to Short-sighted Solutions

With technology as such an obvious and visible driver of open government, the space is dominated by technologists with novel and creative ways to use their skills in the service of the public good. Gaps in their logic are given short shrift, as catapulting towards innovation is far more exciting than deliberating about unintended consequences. Hype-mongers and innovation-hawkers don't help. And so government officials and civil society groups have been seduced by technology, by its novelty, and its capacity to relieve them from the hard work they have typically done towards social change.

While technologists' passion has energized open government efforts and given them purpose, it also left them willfully blind to alternative viewpoints. Do citizens and governments actually want this stuff?

"There seems to be an underlying premise [among the open government community] that government is open to being open," said Mark Meckler (pictured left) of Citizens for Self-Governance at FOCAS. "But many governments are reluctant. We need to recognize this."

Instead, technologists have often equated embrace of technology with embrace of open government.

Take Kenya, oft-celebrated as an open government success. Two years ago, the government launched the Kenya Open Data Initiative. At the launch, President Mwai Kibaki said, "I also call upon Kenyans to make use of this Government Data Portal to enhance accountability and improve governance in our country. Indeed, data is the foundation of improving governance and accountability. ... This way the people can hold government service providers accountable for the use of public resources."

The Initiative has neat apps, a Twitter account, a Facebook page, and has enabled the Code for Kenya program. In 2012, Kenya joined the Open Government Partnership.

In that same year, however, at least 28 journalists were threatened or attacked by government bodies for their coverage of state corruption. And today, the country is considering legislation that would further tighten media regulation — already described by local journalists as "emasculating."

A technocentric view means that as long as a government embraces new technologies, releases some datasets, and makes high-profile commitments to the international community, it is a card-carrying member of the open government community. Whether the government actually allows its citizens to freely and openly use open data is apparently irrelevant.

The Solution: Refocus Our Thinking on Incremental Innovation

So what does it mean that 62 countries have joined the Open Government Partnership? On its own, not much. To move beyond our biases, we need to stop chasing white whales and refocus our thinking toward a more humble target.

"New techniques, not just new technologies, are important in advancing open government innovation" noted Andrew Stott (pictured below) of the UK Transparency Board. He should know. Stott led the work to open up UK government data and create Data.gov.uk. And in his experience, the means are just as important as the ends.

Innovation is, very simply, "a new method, idea or product." Approaches to innovation should differ based on when, where, and how that innovation is expected to have an impact. Leading CEOs advise against blindly pursuing breakthrough innovation — in many contexts, incremental innovation is the better option.

According to Karl Ulrich, Wharton's innovation guru: "A lot of companies suffer from intense organizational angst that they are not

pursuing radical innovations, the seeds of future growth. This angst is largely misplaced. Most investment in innovation can and should be made in incremental innovation — delivering solutions to customers that are better, faster, and cheaper."

> **"New techniques, not just new technologies, are important in advancing open government innovation."**
> *-Andrew Stott, UK Transparency Board*

In the context of risk-averse governments, slow-and-steady innovation indeed seems like a better option.

Incremental innovation demands a more grounded look at a system as it currently exists and an understanding of where concrete wins can occur within that system. In a nutshell: let's stop trying to build the open government house of the future and refocus our efforts toward fixing the plumbing in the house that we have.

As Michael Maness of the Knight Foundation reminded FOCAS participants, "A lot of the most important opportunities in open government are detailed or mundane. How can we focus on energies towards seizing those opportunities?"

Ideas in Practice: OpenGov4Us and GitMachines

The winners of the recent Knight News Challenge on Open Gov are indicative of the kind of innovations we need: Those that look beyond technology and those that focus on the "plumbing" of open government. Open Gov for the Rest of Us is an engagement campaign that helps enable Chicago's low-income communities to take advantage of open government tools, by providing training on computer skills and data literacy.

At FOCAS, Taryn Roch of OpenGov4Us explained her team's motivation to found the program: "We were frustrated by the open government's movement on technologists, and asked 'Can citizens be at the center of this?' OpenGov4Us is about citizen engagement. Technology was just a starting point."

The campaign hopes that its work will allow diverse and often under-represented communities to help shape Chicago's open government priorities. Its users, for example, have surfaced unmet data needs that are relevant to them — datasets on immigration and foreclosure. And as most of OpenGov4Us participants are Latino or African-American, who rely on mobile internet more than white Americans — they also seek tools that are mobile-friendly.

On the government side, GitMachines is building infrastructure to enable open government. A lot of open government software is under-adopted because installation is too difficult for public sector agencies. "We are trying to establish digital, networked bureaucracies, but the regulations and policies they must follow were written before we actually knew the potential of open data," said founder Greg Elin at FOCAS. "The open government community must first develop systems that lower the barrier to entry so that governments and more people can participate."

Procuring, installing, and running the secure servers necessary for any open government initiative is both a challenge and a risk, and many government IT staff have neither the expertise nor the administrative authorization to do so. As the CIO of the US Federal Communications Commission, Elin saw these challenges firsthand. His solution, GitMachines, allows government agencies to download pre-configured virtual machines tailored to open government projects. This can dramatically lower the IT operational costs of open government projects while also making them more robust in terms of security and compliance.

No doubt, this is work that lacks the marketing value of popular app contests, the adrenaline rush of hackathons, or sex appeal of nation-states joining hands in a 21st-century League of (Open) Nations. New tools, collaborative innovation, and visionary ambition are all necessary. But so are the building blocks required to enable their adoption and realization.

As Code for America's Max Ogden reminded participants at FOCAS, "Technologies can help collaboration [between people] and catalyze other innovations. They are not ends in themselves."

For open government to succeed, we must look beyond our own biases to the world outside of open government advocates and technologist dreamers. Let's not forget about the mundane in our drive toward the divine.

Chapter 4

Open Government Needs to Understand Citizens

Among open government practitioners, "the citizen" is a beloved topic of conversation. We love to talk about how "the citizen" is frustrated, how "the citizen" should be empowered, and — our favorite — how "the Citizen" will rise up to solve "the challenge." But who are these mythical citizens? And, more importantly, what are they frustrated about, how will they be empowered, and why on earth do they want to rise up to solve this undefined problem?

At FOCAS 2013, Bryan Sivak of the US Department of Health and Human Services (pictured left) advocated for a more nuanced definition of "citizen."

Indeed, "citizens" and "communities" are not homogeneous groups. Each citizen or community has distinct aspirations, capacities, and constraints. To develop open government initiatives that citizens find useful, we must start with a more sophisticated understanding of those we seek to serve.

The Issue: We Think We Know Citizens

Open government, at its core, believes that citizens care about shaping the processes and outcomes of governance. Is this true?

A study on political engagement in the UK found that 90 percent of respondents believed political processes were in need of reform. Yet, of

the reform ideas they proposed, only 16 percent gave regular people a greater say in politics. While people want improved governance, they don't necessarily want to be involved in improving it.

To develop open government initiatives that citizens find useful, we must start with a more sophisticated understanding of those we seek to serve.

Around the world, evidence of citizen appetite for open government values is spotty. Recent Globalbarometer surveys show declining support for democracy throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, and the former Soviet Union. Even in Latin America, often touted as a hotbed of civic innovation, surveys found that 54 percent of respondents in the region preferred democracy to other forms of government, and only 28 percent were "fairly" or "very satisfied" with democracy. In many countries, including Open Government Partnership countries Colombia, Peru, Brazil, and Mexico, either a minority or a small majority of people believe democracy is preferable to other forms of government.

Of course, variable faith in democracy does not mean a lack of support for democratic principles. But it does call into question our assumptions about citizen engagement in open government initiatives.

As Frank Hebbert of OpenPlans asked, "why aren't we building tools that transform the experience of being an engaged citizen?"

Surely plenty of organizations have tried, but often they leave something to be desired.

Take the World Bank, for example, which has been committed to open data initiatives since its first Apps for Development Challenge three years ago. Then-President Robert Zoellick urged entrants to "help change the world by using the World Bank's data collection to help find solutions to today's development challenges." Bank staff wanted to "build really useful applications addressing local problems."

The winning app produced interactive visualizations of World Bank data. Second place was an app that measures progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and shows how events such as war impact such progress. And taking third place was a tool that enabled people to rank different countries by their personal prioritization of development indicators. While the tools were useful, it's unclear how they would "address local problems" for citizens in developing countries.

The Bank has tried to improve the accessibility of its tools to diverse user groups. One example is its flagship mobile apps, which lists the World Bank's portfolio of projects, finances, and procurement data. The app is free, works without a data connection, and is available in nine languages on both the iOS and Android platforms.

That's the good news.

The bad news? It is 30MB. In Nigeria, a country where more than 60 percent of the population lives on less than $1 a day, the app would cost about $3 USD to download. Accessibility is also limited by the fact that projects are listed by their Bank code, rather than program name. If a user searched for "Fadama," an agricultural subsidy program with signs all over Nigeria, they would get a blank screen. Only by scrolling through all of the Bank's listed projects in the country can a user find Fadama. And project finances are categorized as International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) Loans, International Development Association (IDA) Credits, and IDA Grants, and without sufficient granularity to be useful to a budget monitoring activist or a community leader. In short, the apps' design limits its ability to "transform the experience of being an engaged citizen."

The Solution: Design for Citizen Engagement

In terms of user segmentation and effective design, the open government community has a lot to learn from the private sector.

No company worth its salt hawking a new product would claim "the consumer" as its market — and with good reason. A company has clear incentives to know exactly which consumers are going to buy

which products through which channels. No market intelligence means no sale and no company. Granted, government agencies are obviously without these same incentives, but the absence of market intelligence on the citizens that may use or benefit from an open government initiative yields the same results: no uptake and no open government.

Companies are also skilled in attracting and retaining users. They don't take any user for granted: they design interactions and experiences that engage and delight, and use sophisticated analytics to ensure their strategies are paying off. When they don't, they change course. Open government initiatives would do well to learn from them.

Fortunately, open government initiatives are increasingly attuned to citizen needs and behaviors. Outline, currently in beta, is a public policy simulator that allows citizens to better understand how government budgets and policies will impact them individually. For example, a household can visualize how a tax cut will affect its income, or how a new healthcare bill may impact its health insurance costs. Outline pulls data from the Internal Revenue Service, the Census Bureau, and other government agencies, and puts that data in context for regular people.

CivOmega is also trying to make open government less obtuse and more useful for people. This initiative allows people to ask questions about government in plain English — for example, "what bills did Eric Cantor sponsor?" — and provides users with answers, pulled from multiple open government datasets.

It's no Siri just yet, but it's a start.

Usability challenges include rigid syntax requirements for user queries. "What bills have Eric Cantor sponsored?" is incomprehensible. But the CivOmega team hopes to change that soon by incorporating natural language processing to enable a more intuitive user experience.

Ideas in Practice: The Public Experience Network

The Public Experience Network (PEN), a concept proposed at FOCAS, is a step in the right direction. The premise: many of today's problems require collaboration beyond government, and every citizen has some untapped expertise. So let's bring citizen expertise into government to help tackle public sector challenges.

This idea itself is not revolutionary. More interesting, however, was that not once were the words "crowdsourcing" or "new platform" uttered in the concept development conversation. Rather, FOCAS participants spoke of people they knew who might participate in such a program. They wanted to know why and how they might participate, and how government could keep them engaged.

Mark Meckler of Citizens for Self Governance described a friend who was passionate about mountain biking and would be eager to help design and maintain state parks. Alissa Black of the New America Foundation shared the story of an elderly African American woman in California who had despised government all her life, but when asked to join in a citizen consultation program by her city, she became its most enthusiastic participant. Turns out all she had wanted was for government to ask for her opinion.

Once we understand who the users are, what they care about, and what their lives are like, we can then understand how to work with them. PEN would start by building a network of citizen experts through referrals who would be engaged in specific and discrete tasks relevant to their stated expertise. Participation incentives would be tailored to citizens' unique motivations. Once the pilot is successful, PEN would experiment with how technology may support or extend existing processes. For example, both government offices and citizens could rate interactions they have with each other so reputations can be a part of structuring assignments.

Going *Beyond* Citizens?

So we've agreed to design solutions that suit citizen needs. But should average citizens be our target user? It depends.

Citizens don't always have the means, technical skills, or motivation to participate in an open government initiative.

Take, for example, the Freedom of Information (FOI) legislation. Nearly 100 countries have implemented such laws, but their utility and impact have been hard to measure. Filing requests can be cumbersome and time-consuming, meaning citizens often tire of trying. Well-resourced corporations are instead the beneficiaries of FOI. Would resources be better spent helping the average citizen navigate FOI procedures, or would they be better put towards enabling journalists who have the professional motivation to chase hard-to-get data, as well as the technical training to put it into context?

"It's not enough to give people access to information," said Evan Smith of *The Texas Tribune* at FOCAS. "We need intermediaries, such as journalists, to help citizens interpret information, and to enable them to be able to act on information."

Pierre Omidyar agrees. The eBay and Omidyar Network founder launched the Civil Beat Law Center for the Public Interest after he learned that government agencies routinely rejected journalists' requests for reports, documents, and other information. The Center provides free legal help to journalists seeking to advance open government. His recent investigative journalism venture — founded with Glenn Greenwald, Laura Poitras, and Jeremy Scahill — is another vote for the role of journalists in ensuring citizens are able to benefit from open government, and governments are held to account for their promises.

Chapter 5

Open Government Needs
Empathy for Government

Bemoaning government ineptitude is a popular pastime. There are times when it feels justified, but usually, it just reveals our lack of understanding on how government works.

"Where are the public sector Foursquares and Twitters?" we ask. "Why hasn't anyone developed a Kickstarter for government?"

The way the public sector is structured hugely constrains government's ability to do so.

Rather than assuming what government officials are like and pontificating about why they are resistant to change, FOCAS 2013 participants — which included US and former UK government officials at the national, state, and local level — sought to understand their unique challenges.

The Issue: Government is Designed to Avoid Risk

"[In the private sector], venture capital provides a dynamic and readily available source of funding to seed innovative initiatives," explains (PDF) management professor Sandford Borins, "while compensation through share ownership enables startup firms, their investors, their employees, and, increasingly, their suppliers to reap large financial rewards from this activity."

Compare this with the public sector where funding comes from legislative appropriations, civil servants don't receive equity, and bonuses are comparatively tiny. Also in the public sector, the costs of failure — so often hailed by the private sector as a necessary step towards success — are unbearable. In a cutthroat political climate and unforgiving media culture, one misstep can end a career.

In short: the carrots are non-existent and the sticks are omnipresent. Put in their shoes, would you be able to 'innovate?'

"We need to recognize the constraints that [civil servants] face and the culture that has been drilled into them: Minimize risks. A procurement officer's job is to dot i's and cross t's," said Clay Johnson (pictured left) of The Department of Better Technology. "Government is risk-averse for good reason. We've given it the responsibility of protecting taxpayers' dollars."

The Solution: Understand Institutional Culture

Despite the norms of conservatism, there are ways to enable new ways of thinking and doing. To do so, we must first understand how each government culture works. Just like with "citizens" and "communities," "government" is not homogenous either.

The Boston Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics, recognized to be among the most innovative city governments in the United States, is a unique case. Susan Crawford, a professor and Roosevelt Institute fellow, recently studied the Office to try and dissect what made it so successful.

What is the secret sauce? It's the leadership and people.

In an era where governments are eager to embrace the latest civic app, Boston Mayor Tom Menino favored human touch over high tech. He long refused to permit voicemail use in City Hall, because he didn't want Bostonians to get an automatic response when they called. He opted out of adopting the standard, three-digit "311" number for his city services hotline — instead staying with the ten-digit 617-635-4500 — because "311 sounded too bureaucratic...faceless."

But each government institution has its own personality, dynamic and idiosyncrasies. What works in one place may not work in another. FOCAS participant Story Bellows of the Philadelphia Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics said her Office only gained credibility among other city agencies when it was selected as a winner in the Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayors Challenge. While it had always had the support

of the mayor, the internal institutional validation that was needed to get other agencies engaged only came with this badge of external recognition.

"Buy-in at the top was necessary but insufficient," said Bellows. "Given the risks associated with doing things differently, we needed external validation of our ideas."

Of course, not all cities are lucky enough to have Offices of New Urban Mechanics or chief innovation officers. Some cities, as Caitria O'Neill of Recovers.org reminded us at FOCAS, only have Earl the Webmaster. And even if Earl had the time and technical skills, what would be his incentive to try and "open" his local government?

"In small communities, nothing hinders them from implementing open data," said O'Neill, "but nothing encourages them or facilitates it, either."

Ideas in Practice: Government Innovator Cohorts

At FOCAS, John Bracken of the Knight Foundation noted that several participants were "insider/outsiders." These are individuals who had worked in government but were now outside, or former corporate or nonprofit types that had recently joined government. He encouraged the group to use these unique perspectives to understand how we can enable government innovation. But given the diversity of institutional environments, political will, and resource availability, perhaps we should stop trying to create the perfect conditions for innovation. Rather, perhaps we should empower individuals within government to shape their environments to be more conducive to innovation.

> **As we work toward equitable, accountable governance, we need to balance between demanding transparency and participation and allowing our governments to do what we elected them to do.**

"We haven't yet had a conscious effort toward helping those working on the inside," he observed. "How can we find mid-level managers

and highlight their work? Can we help accelerate what they are doing by providing support and activating our and their networks?"

With these thoughts, the Government Innovator Cohorts concept was born. The program would support civil servants with a track record in driving public sector innovation. Ideally, fellows would be long-term civil servants that have both executive visibility and operational resources. Short-term political appointees would not be eligible, as they are typically installed to implement a new policy or mandate, and therefore likely to already have high-level support and ready resources.

Selected fellows would be given skills training in technical (e.g. how to design effective programs), institutional (e.g. how to gain political cover), and managerial (e.g. how to implement public sector change) areas. The curriculum, however, while useful, may not be the key benefit of the Cohort program.
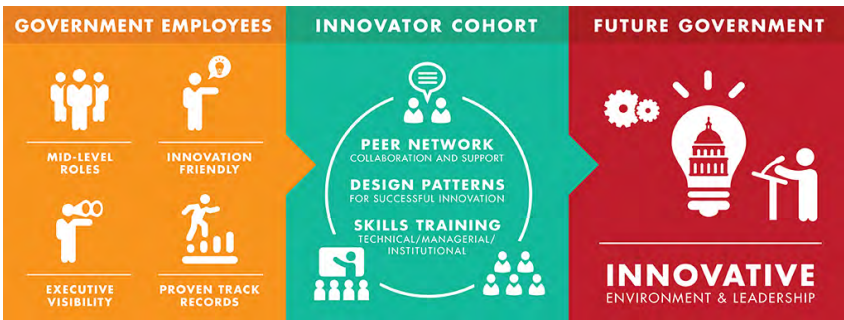
Several FOCAS participants had been involved in similar programs. Andrea Sáenz of the Chicago Public Library is a Broad Residency alum, and Jessica Lord of Github, and Max Ogden are both former Code for America fellows. All confirmed that the greatest value of their respective fellowship programs was the peer support networks they gained. As Cohort fellows continue in their public service careers, having a network of like-minded peers with whom they can brainstorm, celebrate, and commiserate, could be invaluable.

Understand Government to Enable Open Government

Many open government initiatives are driven by empowered citizens and civil society. This, in itself, is not a bad thing. But there is often an implicit negative bias against government in these initiatives.

In Dave Eggers' "The Circle," the main character, Mae, creates Demoxie, a platform where critical society questions are decided by citizen votes. She reflects on her creation:

> "[Mae] thought of that painting of the Constitutional Convention, all those men in powdered wigs and waistcoats, standing stiffly, all of them wealthy white men who were only passably interested in representing their fellow humans. They were purveyors of an innately flawed kind of democracy, where only the wealthy were elected, where their voices were heard loudest, where they passed their seats in Congress to whatever similarly entitled person they deemed appropriate. There had been some incremental improvements in the system since then, maybe, but Demoxie would explode it all. Demoxie was purer, was the only chance at direct democracy the world had ever known."

The prose is eerily reminiscent of some of the narrative surrounding open government, rhetoric that serves demand-side goals well. This is a narrative that unites organizers, motivates citizens, and attracts funding. This is also a narrative that can ultimately undermine open government.

In democratic societies, citizens select leaders for their vision and their perceived ability to implement those visions. In electing these leaders, citizens also entrust them to act in their best interest over the course of their term. Open government initiatives have the potential to displace a leader's medium- and long-term plans for the needs of a loud and organized few.

In Uganda, the monitoring of elected community leaders has shown mixed results. On the one hand, some monitoring incentivizes leaders to work harder for their constituents. Too much, however, and competent, effective leaders quit.

As we work toward equitable, accountable governance, we need to balance between demanding transparency and participation, and allowing our governments to do what we elected them to do. And we need to ensure our push for "open government" does not lead us down a path where competent leaders with technical expertise and long-term vision are upended by the immediate whims and desires of a small, elite faction. Otherwise, we're right back to the image of the Constitutional Convention described by Eggers' protagonist.

Chapter 6

Toward An Accountable
Open Government Culture

Despite the great many initiatives taking root worldwide, the open government movement has yet to achieve its potential. Open data has been used toward civic ends for nearly a decade, yet its current focus appears disproportionately targeted towards improving the quotidian details of our lived experience. I'll be the first to applaud the streamlining of public services, but a more efficient e-government is not the same as a more accountable open government.

In other words, enough with the gateway drugs. Let's get to the hard stuff.

Let's employ open government initiatives instead of scrutinizing special interests that undermine democracy. Let's bring open government to bear on how campaign finance and electoral systems are considered by government. Let's close the gap between what could be done in open government, and what is being done.

The Issue: Limited Understanding, Limited Investment

To realize open government's full potential, scale of adoption is required from both governments and citizens. To achieve scale of adoption, both sides require greater understanding of the full potential of open government.

It's a classic chicken-and-egg challenge.

FOCAS 2013 participants agreed that establishing larger awareness of open government's benefits among both government and citizens is a critical next step.

"Government officials need more success stories," said Kathy Conrad of the US General Services Administration. "Before they invest, they want more proof beyond the same examples they hear all the time."

Still, given the relative youth of open government, many initiatives struggle to demonstrate the kind of cost-benefit that public agencies or international donors seek. According to Tiago Peixoto of the World Bank, "[Public sector] funders may think a certain open government initiative shows promise, but they need to first understand the return on investment."

Here, civic entrepreneurs have a role to play. "There are many conversations in government about what's possible [in open government], and prototypes can help crystallize those opportunities," said Nick Sinai of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. "That's where outside partners can add value."

Ellen Miller of the Sunlight Foundation agreed. She stressed the value of civic entrepreneurs who, compared to government, are more nimble, and have greater freedom to experiment — critical factors in creative problem solving.

"In the early days [of open government], we didn't fully recognize the importance of entrepreneurs to advancing open government. Today, it's clear. The depth of [civic entrepreneurship] will be the source of innovation."

But mission-driven entrepreneurs often have a tough time attracting funding, given private investors' limited understanding of the open government space.

> **"In the early days [of open government], we didn't fully recognize the importance of entrepreneurs to advancing open government. Today, it's clear. The depth of [civic entrepreneurship] will be the source of innovation."**
> *-Ellen Miller, Sunlight Foundation*

"Venture capitalists and others that fund small companies need to be educated about the potential of open data," said Caitria O'Neill of Recovers.org. "They want proprietary data, and the concept of open data is anathema to them."

For open government to move forward, perceptions need to change.

The Solution: Driving a Culture of Open Government

The work of the Open Data Institute (ODI) may prove instructive. ODI is a UK-based nonprofit that seeks to engage diverse communities in catalyzing open data culture.

"Part of our work is changing perceptions of what open data is and what it can do," said ODI's Gavin Starks (pictured below) at FOCAS. "We want to show how data can help solve problems — it doesn't matter the sector. We need global momentum from global stories that drive awareness about open data and push for standards."

ODI's initiatives are diverse in focus and take many forms. It established a physical hub to give London's open data community a gathering place. It curates resources to share knowledge about what works — and what doesn't — when publishing and consuming open data. It commissions open data-driven artwork. And it seeks to encourage shared standards and professionalize practitioners through certification.

To demonstrate open data's value to a wider audience, ODI's Open Corporates illustrated the complexity — and potentially dubious practices — of well-known multinational companies. It showed, for example, that Goldman Sachs consists of over 4,000 corporate entities globally, some of which are 10 layers removed from its US headquarters. Of those entities, approximately one-third are registered in tax havens. The campaign generated popular interest, including media coverage from *Wired*, the *London Evening Standard*, and *BoingBoing*. As ODI's Sir Nigel Shadbolt explained, to capture popular interest, we first need relatable narratives.

"From early on, we believed that demonstrating economic value was going to be important for the open data movement," said Shadbolt at FOCAS. "This, in turn, would help drive social and environmental value. For open data to gain traction in the mainstream, we needed

compelling stories to increase depth of impact, and capture people's imaginations to envision change."

So far, ODI's model seems to be working: 25 countries are seeking to establish their own national chapter, as part of ODI's vision of a Global Open Network.

Ideas in Practice: ODI USA

FOCAS participants saw the benefits of a US chapter of ODI to promote open data culture among key audiences, support professionalization of the field, and encourage dialogue and coordination between diverse actors.

Much like how Red Hat became the 'missing' salespeople for open source software, ODI USA would help prime and educate the market. Activities to help advance open government may include working closely with government officials to understand their current challenges, then design and implement initiatives that help address them using open government principles or tools. Or helping journalists understand the potential of open data for public benefit, and sharing these stories with their readers. Or educating funders about what open data is and what it can do to enable informed, strategic investments.

At FOCAS, several participants, led by open government technologist Waldo Jaquith, signed on to lead the development of ODI USA. Since the FOCAS meeting, and with funding from the Knight Foundation, they have already launched the organization and begun mapping their plans, answering questions such as: What can be adapted from the UK model, and what needs to be different? Where would the US chapter's efforts be most effectively allocated? What impact can it have on open government in America?

Towards our Own Accountability

As the open government community works to educate diverse audiences on the potential of inclusive, transparent government, we must also ensure that not only are we preaching accountability, but we are practicing it, too. Since its inception, many have questioned the viability and utility of open government. For all the tools, commitments, and initiatives, how do we ensure they actually achieve their intended impact?

In 2001, political scientist Archon Fung and sociologist Erik Olin Wright questioned the sustainability of participatory governance models. Empowered, deliberative governance is an innovative approach, they believed, but is yet historically unproven. And based on their survey of initiatives at the time, they warned of unintended consequences:

> "[O]ne might expect that practical demands on [public] institutions might press participants eventually to abandon time-consuming deliberative decision-making in favor of oligarchic or technocratic forms. [...] After participants have plucked the 'low-hanging fruit,' these forms might again ossify into the very bureaucracies that they sought to replace. Or, ordinary citizens may find the reality of participation increasingly burdensome and less rewarding than they had imagined, and engagement may consequently dim from exhaustion and disillusionment."

In 2007, civic technologist Guglielmo Celata, in reflecting on his Italian e-democracy site Openpolis, noted, "Administrators are interested in e-participation projects, but they want to reduce the possibility of issues emerging directly from citizens, and of course, they try to change the nature of the project, from a participative one into a consultative one. A kind of Poll 2.0, if one wants to be cynical."

From 2007 to 2013, a study from Spain showed that in many participatory governance initiatives, municipal governments simply cherry-pick citizen proposals that reinforce the existing positions of political parties, special interest groups, or vetted experts. Other studies have reached similar conclusions: Initiatives are often designed to prevent citizens from freely providing input, only allowing them to choose from proposals already deemed agreeable.

And, in 2013, early reflections on Liberia's Open Budget Initiative — one of its Open Government Partnership commitments — were not particularly encouraging. Under the Initiative, the Ministry of Finance had set up an electronic billboard outside its office in Monrovia as a bold symbol of openness. Yet several key aspects of the country's budgets, including government compensation, remain in closed cabinets.

Of course, in discussing open government, we must steer clear of employing false binaries: for instance, a government is open or closed, or a program is a success or a failure. But we should remember that

the way an initiative is designed can help or hinder citizens' ability to provide input on the processes of governance, a state's ability to meaningfully respond, and our collective ability to ensure the initiative's accountability. If we are to realize the potential of open government, we must be sensitive to these realities.

So as we continue to secure commitments, build tools, and launch programs, let us make sure we hold ourselves accountable for their impact on human livelihoods.

Yes, the open government community is still experimenting. But we must be thoughtful and intentional in our experimentation. We should first clearly define our goals and assess our progress towards them so that, as a movement, we can understand how to build upon our successes, and learn from our failures. We should be honest in recognizing our biases to enable our own accountability to those we seek to serve. We should be sensitive to the needs of citizens and governments alike, and design solutions that meet the needs of both, and avoid placing unreasonable demands on either. And, as noted in this post, we need more widespread understanding of the benefits of open government before we can realize its potential.

The conversations at FOCAS 2013 were positive steps in this direction. Here's to citizens and civil society, entrepreneurs and technologists, venture capitalists and international donors, and governments the world over, collaborating to advance equitable, accountable governance.

APPENDIX

The Aspen Institute Forum on Communications and Society

Beyond The Tools:
Connecting Citizens and their Governments

Aspen, Colorado · July 10-13, 2013

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Civic Agency

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  Mechanics
City of Philadelphia

Alissa Black
New America Foundation

Kelly Born
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About the Author

Panthea Lee is the co-founder of Reboot, a social enterprise working on issues of governance and global development. She specializes in the practical applications of ethnography, design, and technology in delivering services and programs.

Panthea has led initiatives to improve human development outcomes in over 20 countries, with a focus on Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and across Asia. Her experience includes work in open government, public financial management, basic education, public health, and financial inclusion. She has designed systems to deliver humanitarian aid using mobile phones in Pakistan, to address the leakage of public funds in Nigeria, to deliver distance education to rural populations in Sudan, and to support victims of human trafficking in the United States.

Prior to Reboot, Panthea was with UNICEF Innovation, where she focused on leveraging mobile technology to improve UNICEF's programming and operations. Her work has been featured in MIT *Innovations Journal, The Atlantic, Fast Company, Core77,* and *Tech President.* She has served as faculty for McGill University, the PopTech Social Innovation Program, and SVA Impact.

The Aspen Institute
Communications and Society Program

www.aspeninstitute.org/c&s

The Communications and Society Program is an active venue for framing policies and developing recommendations in the information and communications fields. We provide a multi-disciplinary space where veteran and emerging decision-makers can develop new approaches and suggestions for communications policy. The Program enables global leaders and experts to explore new concepts, exchange insights, develop meaningful networks, and find personal growth, all for the betterment of society.

The Program's projects range across many areas of information, communications and media policy. Our activities focus on issues of open and innovative governance, public diplomacy, institutional innovation, broadband and spectrum management, as well as the future of content, issues of race and diversity, and the free flow of digital goods, services and ideas across borders.

Most conferences employ the signature Aspen Institute seminar format: approximately 25 leaders from diverse disciplines and perspectives engaged in roundtable dialogue, moderated with the goal of driving the agenda to specific conclusions and recommendations. The program distributes our conference reports and other materials to key policymakers, opinion leaders and the public in the United States and around the world. We also use the internet and social media to inform and ignite broader conversations that foster greater participation in the democratic process.

The Program's Executive Director is Charles M. Firestone. He has served in this capacity since 1989 and also as Executive Vice President of the Aspen Institute. Prior to joining the Aspen Institute, Mr. Firestone was a communications attorney and law professor who has argued cases before the United States Supreme Court. He is a former director of the UCLA Communications Law Program, first president of the Los Angeles Board of Telecommunications Commissioners, and an appellate attorney for the U.S. Federal Communications Commission.

Previous Publications
from the Aspen Institute Forum on
Communications and Society

Road to Government 2.0: Technological Problems and Solutions for Transparency, Efficiency and Participation (2012)
Greg Ferenstein, rapporteur. Road to Government 2.0 describes the origins of the open government movement, provides a discussion of the meaningful open governance efforts around the world and then addresses a number of serious shortcomings and subsequent solutions in open government. The recommendations include measures to enhance public awareness and media engagement, modifications to the government procurement process and an emphasis on useful participatory government to help improve information flow, communication and citizen interactions.

43 pages, ISBN: 0-89843-585-4, $12.00

Networks and Citizenship: Using Technology for Civic Innovation (2011)
Jeffrey Abramson, rapporteur.

Networks and Citizenship addresses two questions: (1) What does citizenship look like in an era of digital networks? and (2) What are the emerging roles of individual citizens and institutions in this changing environment? The report details the use of information and communication technologies to enhance the public sphere, provide access to information (open-source and open-data networks), connect citizens and government, create global networks, globalize and localize citizenship, and use crowdsourcing as a self-governing process.

48 pages, ISBN: 0-89853-566-8, $12.00.

News Cities: The Next Generation of Healthy Informed Communities (2010)
Richard P. Adler, rapporteur. *News Cities* details the best and worst of times for the news business. The best being the vast expanse of online

information sources, from user-generated content to citizen journalists. The worst being the detrimental economic times. In this report, Adler concludes that society needs to encourage more experimentation with new models that provide credible information and encourage engagement, locally and nationally; ensure access to broadband services by all; and make certain people have the education in the multiple literacies they need to function fully as citizens in the 21st century.

78 pages, ISBN: 0-89853-546-3, $12.00.

Of the Press: Models for Transforming American Journalism (2009)
Michael R. Fancher, rapporteur. *Of the Press* takes a closer look at ways to save American journalism and local democratic governance in our current financial crisis. With the many technological and behavioral changes taking place, news organizations face shrinking audiences and declining advertising revenue. *Of the Press* offers four areas for improvement: transforming public-service journalism, rebuilding public trust in journalism and journalistic organizations, promoting research, and pushing experimentation and collaboration.

60 pages, ISBN: 0-89843-521-8, $12.00.

Media and Democracy (2008)
Richard P. Adler, rapporteur. *Media and Democracy* explores the role of media in enhancing social capital, civic engagement, and democratic involvement. In addition to examining the state of newspapers and journalism against the backdrop of the 2008 presidential election, the report discusses proposed projects for harnessing media to spur civic and global engagement. Among the ideas being implemented are the Online Peace Corps, Groundswell, and the American Dialogue Initiative, as well as ongoing work by the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, which stemmed from the 2007 Aspen Institute Forum on Communications and Society (FOCAS).

58 pages, ISBN: 0-89843-503-X, $12.00.

Media and Values: Issues of Content, Community and Intellectual Property (2007)

Richard P. Adler, Drew Clark, Kathleen Wallman, rapporteurs. *Media and Values* is a newly released report generated from the 2007 Aspen Institute Forum on Communications and Society (FOCAS). It suggests how the changing media affects the ability of communities to govern themselves, discusses people's concepts of property for non-physical goods, includes a set of principles for copyright "fair use," and contains a number of other policy recommendations.

90 pages, ISBN: 0-89843-488-2, $12.00.

Next-Generation Media: The Global Shift (2006)

Richard P. Adler, rapporteur. This report examines the growth of the Internet and its effect on a rapidly changing area: the impact of new media on politics, business, society, culture, and governments the world over. The report also sheds light on how traditional media will need to adapt to face the competition of the next-generation media.

76 pages, ISBN: 0-89843-469-6, $12.00.

Soft Power, Hard Issues (2005)

Shanthi Kalathil, rapporteur. In these two reports, the author explores the growing importance of soft power by looking at two crucial areas of international tension: the U.S. role in the Middle East and Sino-American relations. The role of information and communications technologies in U.S. public diplomacy in the Middle East and U.S. relations with China are central themes.

70 pages, ISBN: 0-89843-447-5, $12.00.

Opening the Realm: The Role of Communications in Negotiating the Tension of Values in Globalization (2004)

Michael Suman, rapporteur. *Opening the Realm* addresses how communications media and information technologies can be used to ameliorate or exacerbate tensions among the values of peace, prosperity, and good governance, or among the forces of security, capitalism, and

democracy. That is, can the media help a society gain the simultaneous benefit of all three values or forces? How does one prioritize how the media do that in a free society? What is the role of the new media, which have so much promise to involve individuals in new ways?

51 pages, ISBN: 0-89843-432-7, $12.00.

Media Convergence, Diversity and Democracy (2003)
Neil Shister, rapporteur. In the summer of 2002, chief-executive-level leaders from the public and private sectors met at the Aspen Institute to address the underlying the role of the media in a democratic society and policies that may improve the ability of citizens to exercise their roles as informed sovereigns in that society. This report examines concerns about the shrinking electorate in U.S. elections and the possible role the mass media play in that trend, the debate about whether consolidation in old and new media raises "democratic" as opposed to antitrust concerns, and opportunities for new media to enable citizens to communicate—both in terms of gaining new information and exchanging their own opinions with others. Shister also addresses the concern that new media will become bottlenecked rather than continue the open architecture of the Internet.

56 pages, ISBN: 0-89843-374-6, $12.00.

In Search of the Public Interest in the New Media Environment (2001)
David Bollier, rapporteur. This report examines public interest and the role of the marketplace in redefining this concept with respect to educational and cultural content. It suggests options for funding public-interest content when all media are moving toward digital transmission. The publication also includes afterthoughts from an international perspective by British historian Asa Briggs.

61 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-333-9, $12.00

Reports can be ordered online at *www.aspeninstitute.org/publications* or by sending an email request to *publications@aspeninstitute.org*.