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## Neil

This is a really interesting entry that I like more the more I think about it. I have a few questions for y'all though:

- In my experience, the more sophisticated the topics, the more facilitation has to be done to frame the conversation taking place (so it's not errant, abrasive, pointless, etc.). How would y'all facilitate and setup how the conversation is framed / structured, and do that in a way that doesn't constrain open dialogue? Would users need to be educated on how to have open dialogue or what the values of the community are?

- Once a stance is determined, how does it get converted into action/impact? I'm not sure if your idea compels action (because the information analysis is a huge value-add), but if it were to compel action, how would you do it?

- I'd like to echo Ethan's comment - how do you manage membership? On the one hand, crowdsourcing requires openness. On the other hand, trolls could squash this idea. Also, having total openness (and not having to make a trade-off to participate) probably gets people who aren't so thoughtful...because it's cheap to post things up. Anyway, that's a bit of a digression...what are the parameters, as you see them, about being a "member" of the Information Party?

### Cory Suter's reply to [Neil Tambe's comment](https://www.newschallenge.org/open/open-government/submission/the-information-party/#c-ffa2028636c045308f85fdcf213fee09)

### [Cory Suter](https://www.newschallenge.org/profiles/7811975/)

Neil, I can't speak for Sam's vision of the information party, but I can introduce you to how our similar political initiative, DirectCongress.org, is tackling your important concerns.

Direct Congress builds off the successful PolicyMic.com model, of giving users more privileges as they contribute submissions that are "mic'd" or up-voted by other citizens. Direct Congress encourages users to rank others ideas and build up their own online reputation within the Direct Congress community. See: <http://directcongress.org/stars/>

To convert online action into impact, Direct Congress regularly updates members of congress about their constituent's decisions online, and encourages representatives from any political party to vote the way the people they represent ask them to vote online.

Finally, we use public lists of voter registrations to verify the identity of participants. If you and/or Sam would like to converse more about this idea, visit us at:<https://www.newschallenge.org/open/open-government/submission/directcongress.org-we-the-people-can-direct-our-congress-by-selecting-america-s-laws-/>

## Response (Scott)

Member of the team here. Neil, thanks for your feedback! As a disclaimer, know that while we’re all really happy with our current consensus on major components of the site such as Users, Views, Comments, and Stances, we’re still pretty early in the design process when it comes to details. Fortunately, that means that you can help us work through some of the issues we haven’t addressed yet. :)

How would y'all facilitate and setup how the conversation is framed / structured, and do that in a way that doesn't constrain open dialogue?

We’ve had a few discussions about this. Currently, we’ve built a Reddit style comment system into the design to ensure that the best comments rise to the top. This is accomplished by asking users to vote comments up when they are informative or useful and to vote comments down when they’re not. This system should curate and structure discussions on the site as the user base grows and the most informative and useful comments rise to the top, but every comment is accessible so there’s no constraint on open dialogue. Finally, preserving the reply structure of comment threads will provide some additional structure so that conversations are easy to follow.

Once a stance is determined, how does it get converted into action/impact?

Great question! The long term vision for The Information Party is to elect candidates from within the community to public office like any other political party. We chose this approach over Mr Suter’s model because we believe that it is highly unlikely that the politicians who are already indoctrinated into the current political climate will be persuaded by web platforms like we’re talking about now. In my opinion, the problem is not that the politicians do not know what their constituents think, it’s that they don’t care. For that reason we’ve chosen to take the more aggressive path of organizing as a political party and aiming to elect candidates to public office.

what are the parameters, as you see them, about being a "member" of the Information Party?

The team agrees that only US citizens (note that the Information Party platform could be expanded to other democratic governments if proven successful in America) should be allowed to vote on Views, but anyone should be able to join the site and engage in the discussions through the comments. Verifying membership is something we’re still struggling with, and Cory’s solution of verifying through public voter registration lists is genius! We’re set on having users' current Votes public to encourage voter accountability, and requiring a login through a public account such as facebook is still on the table. Cory, I think there is a lot of similarity between our ideas and a lot of room for synergy! If you’d put our heads together and learn from each other, you can reach me at me@scottdlowe.com

## Tim Dingman

First, a quick note: the name of the site is Stack Overflow, not Stacked-Overflow.

I agree that increased access to information is almost always a good thing, especially in political discourse. I also value the dual commitment to open processes and private reconsideration of previous views.

Let me outline a scenario in which the site as it stands now is vulnerable to a rapid descent into irrelevance:

1) The site acquires a small group of users

2) The users vote on Views and come up with their first few Stances

3) New visitors come to the site and look at the established Stances

4a) The new visitors who agree with the established Stances stick around to work on refinement

4b) The new visitors who disagree with the established Stances see that the Party already has a platform they disagree with, causing them to leave the site and never come back

In this way, the first group of users determine the entire character of the site. The Party becomes insular, only attracting new users who are similar to old users. Depending on the initial composition of users, the Party may adopt platforms too radical for the vast majority of Americans, becoming yet another fringe 3rd party.

I suspect there are ways to combat such groupthink, but as it stands now I feel the site may be vulnerable.

## Response (Scott)

This is definitely a huge concern of ours, and we've put some initial thought into how to mitigate that risk.

First, we've designed the landing page (page you land on at our domain before signing in) to display the party's Stances. Users will be able to click the "Endorse" or "Protest" buttons, and are encouraged to weigh in (they'll be taken to the login/signup page if they click either button). By advertising a culture where everyone's voice matters, we're attempting to keep the community from becoming exclusive to anyone.

Second, we'll aim to attract a diverse group for our initial beta. This should encourage discourse and help to prevent overwhelming groupthink.

We've also adopted the following motto: The Information Party, everyone's invited. :D

## Ethan

It's a great idea, but my cynical side says it will end up being exclusive. Yes, in an information age, we have the tools necessary to engage the voting public more in the political process, increasing transparency and reducing corruption. **What we don't yet have is a voting public that has any capacity to sort good information from bad or logic from emotional appeal.** And the mainstream media keeps them drunk enough on half truth to sell themselves that they never have to go looking. **The propaganda machine has a lot of money behind it**.  
Even if, through a Reddit-esque voting system, you manage to cultivate a community that truly values reason and can engage with the issues in a meaningful way, and even if you manage to keep such a community accessible, **you still alienate anyone coming in "ignorant" and unwilling to challenge their existing paradigm**. Which, sadly, accounts for an overwhelming majority of the American populace, I believe, liberal and conservative.  
That said, one could optimistically argue that if you create greener pastures, people will flock to them. Perhaps if the bar is set high, it will create a top-down cultural shift, or at least pull the entire political environment a little higher.

## Response (Sam):

Thanks for your honesty Ethan, your cynical side shouldn’t be discounted and the points you mention are definitely valid. I think you accurately touched on some of the first hurdles we will come across as well as our main concept. I’m going to break down your thoughts - please tell me if this is a just interpretation.

what you think is currently in our favor:

* We have all the tools to achieve this goal - to engage the voting public,increasing transparency and reducing corruption.

hurdles you see that we will encounter immediately:

* Currently, we don't have a voting public that can sort good information from unfounded opinion
* the mainstream media has a lot of money behind it and feeds people half truths which makes them ignorant and deters us from our cause.

I personally feel that with the technology we have now, we can help the voting public sort out the good information from the bad - however if we approach this problem purely with technology, then the public has no incentive to use it and we will face the same hurdles you mentioned. For that reason the information party can’t simply be an online platform for discussion, it has to be taken a step further to show that these discussions will be actively used and somehow be integrated into our government. The route we have decided to take is a cut-out-the-middleman-approach where we form a political party and the public’s Views will have direct and immediate impact.

It’s also good to keep in mind that money is a relevant factor. The mainstream media has their own constituents they represent and their funding allows them to have further reach and influence. With the power of the internet you can also reach a significant audience, however even with a shoestring budget this is unsustainable without funding and makes institutions like the Knight Foundation so beneficial in incubating these kinds of positive impacts. To this point, we’re looking.

what you think is in our favor father out:

* If we achieve success then we have set a high bar and it will create a top-down cultural shift.

hurdles you see for us father out:

* This has potential for exclusivity
* To that point, if we achieve success we will alienate anyone coming in "ignorant" and unwilling to challenge their existing paradigm

Success for us means that we are able to foster an open community which will contain deep, meaningful and informed discussion of politics which will ultimately be represented in the government. So yes, we’re setting the bar high and pushing for that cultural shift. We’re also trying to create a true democracy where everyone is a part of these discussions or is informed of them, however even if we achieve our success this will still be representational only to those who have access to technology and are aware of this site.

We’re trying to overcome exclusivity by allowing people to upvote or downvote a View or Stance and needing to posting their own reasoning if they think that their perspective is not fully addressed. However I think at a deeper level, this touches on the issue of structure which we start to address by saying that we’re working with a “reddit and stack overflow” style. It’s still an ongoing discussion and it’s an area I’d love to see some discussion around.

In regards to people who are unwilling to change their views we’re not trying to force them to - thank you for this comment, we’ll have to be more clear on this. While we want everyone to be open minded and take into account logic and reasoning, the two are not mutually exclusive and - at an extreme - everyone has their own logic framework which leads them to their decisions. The idea is not necessarily to change this, only to bring about discussion which takes all of these frameworks into account and allows everyone to be able to evaluate them on a personal level make those decisions more informed.

Great comment - we’ll have to add more clarity to the submission. Let me know if I didn’t address your issues fully or if you have more input we’d love to hear it!

BACKUP:

**How It Works**

[The Information Party](https://www.newschallenge.org/open/open-government/submission/the-information-party/www.theinformationparty.org) is a political party whose platform is developed through crowdsourced discussion and whose ultimate goal is to work within the structure of the United States government and increase the representation of democracy. Constituents will submit their Views, an opinion still needing to be discussed, and vote on the Views of others. All current votes are public; however, users can change their votes on Views at any time. If they are compelled to change to a different opinion, past Views will not be publicly displayed so that there are never any repercussions for having an open mind.

Each View has a comment thread for each side of the debate, and users can vote comments up or down so that the the strongest arguments rise to the top. These comments will consist of their position and, ideally, contain links to informative sources such as videos, news articles, or research studies. By submitting Views that become Stances or comments that the community appreciates, users will earn Reputation (our point system) so that the most valuable members of the community can easily be identified.

When a View receives enough support from the community, it is promoted to become an official party Stance. We will display the most recently promoted Stances as well as the most controversial Views on the homepage so that your voice is always heard. Together, we can create a truly democratic political party with the potential to have a profound impact on American politics.

Preregister at [www.theinformationparty.org](http://www.theinformationparty.org/) and we’ll let you know when the beta launches!

**Background**We live in the information age - an era with an abundance of information and data. Despite our breakthroughs in communication technology, our government still uses an antiquated system. The founding fathers could only dream of the opportunity that we have before us - to connect congressmen and constituents with the click of a button. Our outdated system has resulted in an ineffective congress, and we believe their views do not accurately represent those of the people. The Information Party uses an online platform to facilitate civil discourse which will lead to better representation of the American people.

GitHub is the largest open-source repository for software development on the internet. In January, they announced they had passed the million user mark with more than 5 million projects online. Open source programmers use GitHub to self organize, with some projects having thousands of users simultaneously working together towards one common goal. Clay Shirky [argues that](http://ed.ted.com/lessons/clay-shirky-how-social-media-can-make-history), thanks to the internet, we are now seeing “the largest increase in expressive capability in human history.” Although it is mainly used for software development today, at its core GitHub is a highly functional and scalable form of democratic progress.

One of the greatest traits of America is our diversity. That said, we’re also a country which largely divides the majority of our 300 million citizens into two categories: Republican and Democrat. With the advent of the internet, we’ve reached a time when information sharing has become more accessible than ever. We know the capability and the motivation exists for people to band together for social good projects on websites like kickstarter and crowdrise. Why can't we band together with the goal of creating and improving all legislation for social good?

Actually we can, and have. After the death of Aaron Swartz, co-founder of reddit, the internet community united to fight for legislation that would lift vague laws regarding the internet and the right to access publicly funded research. This is extremely significant because it shows us that, behind the cat memes and witty puns, there are those of us who care about the progress of America. Those views are not being addressed in today's debates and are, instead, scattered across the web.

The Information Party is an online community and a political party where voices can be heard and issues responded to in a meaningful, actionable manner. With the virtue of complete transparency and a flat hierarchy, we give our constituents the opportunity to build the party’s platform by submitting their views, voting on views others’ have submitted, and participating in the discussion through comments. We are a party aimed at giving every voice the ability to see their words put to action.

**Our Values**

* To maintain a community which promotes transparency and open minds
* To have constituents treat each other with respect.
* To have constituents be humble if they overstep their sphere of knowledge.
* To encourage the sharing of relevant data and information to create a more robust platform which which to make decisions.
* to hold logic and reasoning in the highest regard when making decisions.

**Our Purpose**

* To improve the representation of the American people and the efficacy of their government

***Now it’s up to you***

This challenge is the perfect incubator to see whether or not people will rise to this call-to-action. There are many details that still need to be worked out. For instance, how do we define “enough support” to promote a View or Stance?

Leave us your thoughts, applause or concerns. We appreciate your help!