

**Better governance through
direct engagement
Get the gist on using IT to consult citizenry**

2015

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WHAT IS A GIST REPORT?

Gist reports provide a brief overview of the current and future status of each topic and are intended to help readers quickly and conveniently appraise the future of an issue. Each 5 to 10-page Gist report includes an introduction to the topic, a literature review using our auto-extracted Forecasts, and our own method of analysis. The Gists quickly and conveniently get every team member on the same page so that meetings may be conducted more efficiently and with deeper insight. The Gists then become a launching pad for organizations to develop their own analysis and strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Recent advances in technology have dramatically transformed—and will continue to transform—the relationship between individuals and organizations. Information and communication technologies (ICT), in particular, are increasingly facilitating the ability of individuals to have dialogues with organizations across all sectors (i.e. private companies, government agencies, NGOs, civil society organizations). The public sector in several nations is exploring the adoption of ICT for e-government that would enable the direct engagement of its citizens.

The public sector has been slow to adopt these new tools, but some agencies have experienced a modicum of success. One example is The US Center for Disease Control (CDC) who brought emergency preparedness to a mainstream audience with a blog post about preparing for [a zombie apocalypse](#)¹.

Using zombies as a metaphor paid off with a massive viral campaign. Overnight their Twitter followers jumped from [12,000 to 1.2 million](#)², and the CDC website enjoyed so much attention that it crashed. That interest began to wane perhaps because the readers saw the underlying intentions of the post (i.e. alerting the public to the importance of emergency preparations). Whether readers actually prepared for hurricanes and other realistic emergencies as the author encouraged is uncertain, but the blog post spread the message of emergency preparation to more people than they had reached with previous campaigns.

More than informing the public, internet tools could initiate a dialogue between governments and individuals. One example is online voting which multiple organizations are exploring. Online voting is a popular topic in the United Kingdom (UK) especially since the UK's Labour Party used it for the internal election of the National Executive Committee in 2014. The goal of [WebRoots Democracy](#)³ is to bring online voting to General Elections in the UK by 2020, and they estimate that online voting could boost overall [turnout to 79% with up to an extra 9 million voters](#)⁴ while reducing the costs of General Elections by £12.8 million.

Online voting could be just the beginning. In the private sector, dialogue between organizations and individuals through social media and other online platforms has become a means of gathering feedback on products, services, policies, and programs. This direct feedback allows for real time assessments of what's working and not working: what needs acceleration and expansion, what needs to be changed, and what needs to be completely discontinued.

¹ Khan, Ali S. 2011. "Preparedness 101: Zombie Apocalypse."

<https://blogs.cdc.gov/publichealthmatters/2011/05/preparedness-101-zombie-apocalypse/> [Accessed 27 August 2018]

² Bell, Melissa. 2011. "Zombie apocalypse a coup for CDC emergency team." *Washington Post*.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/blogpost/post/zombie-apocalypse-a-coup-for-the-cdc-emergency-team/2011/05/20/AFPj3l7G_blog.html?noredirect=on [Accessed 27 August 2018]

³ <https://webrootsdemocracy.org/>

⁴ Chowdhury, Areeq. 2015. "Online voting is the 21st century answer to poor voter turnout in the UK."

<https://webrootsdemocracy.org/2015/05/15/online-voting-is-the-21st-century-answer/> [Accessed 27 August 2018]

In the public space, [NYC311⁵](#) is a great example. New York City residents can call 311 for non-emergency government services, but with more than 100,000 followers, NYC311 answers their Twitter account regularly to directly address citizen complaints about everything from graffiti to after hour city construction noise. NYC311's Twitter account also requests that citizens provide feedback on their experiences in a convenient manner and a time that suits them. This direct contact with constituents and consumers benefits organizations by providing a more granular understanding of the individuals they serve and allowing the tailoring of offerings to more closely match individuals' unique characteristics.

Engagement with individuals is also increasingly serving as a new pipeline for innovation. Private organizations are employing social media and other online platforms to communicate with the public—to find out what their stakeholders want and need, to gauge the market for new offerings, and to solicit and assess new ideas for products, services, and programs.

Given the value of these interactions, many organizations no longer wait for individuals to reach out to them. Instead, they are initiating contact and outreach efforts, and offering new and innovative platforms that invite individuals to share their ideas and experiences. A prime example from the public sector is the US [President's SAVE Award⁶](#) that ran from 2009 to 2013 to directly request suggestions from government employees. The annual awards generated tens of thousands of cost cutting ideas that are still being explored and adopted.

As citizen expectations rise, especially from the younger generations who do not remember a time before the internet, government entities will need to more seriously appraise their options for direct engagement. Citizens are growing accustomed to the manner in which private corporations are engaging with them even if this means a loss in privacy. If public organizations cannot engage in a similar manner albeit one that more highly protects privacy and anonymity, they risk losing the interest and even the support of their constituents who may come to view the methods of the public sector as antiquated. Citizens may feel increasingly disconnected from their own government, and that feeling could lead to dissatisfaction with the government as a whole.

Nonetheless, the benefits outweigh these concerns. At the very least, direct engagement will enable the contribution of citizens who ordinarily would not or even could not participate in elections and other public events. However, the ideal is that ICT could lead to a purer democracy through direct engagement with increased rates of participation and satisfaction.

So far, the internet initiatives of government entities around the world have been slow and experimental. Few nations have embraced the idea that ICT could open government more fully to the people. So, the public sector will need to follow the lead of the private sector to innovate their own balance of existing engagement models and regulatory demands.

JRC'S SCENARIOS OF ENGAGEMENT

The [EU's Joint Research Centre \(JRC\) in 2010⁷](#) identified possible futures of public engagement in governance based on two critical uncertainties: the degree of openness and transparency; and the

⁵ New York 311 is the Twitter account for New York City's non-emergency government services.

⁶ The President's SAVE Award: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/save-award>

⁷ Misuraca, Gianluca, David Broster, Clara Centeno, Yves Punie, Fenareti Lampathaki, Yannis Charalabidis, Dimitris Askounis, David Osimo, Katarzyna Szkuta, Melanie Bicking. Editors: Gianluca Misuraca and Wainer Lusoli. 2010. "Envisioning Digital Europe 2030: Scenarios for ICT in Future Governance and Policy Modelling."

https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/researchcentres/csgr/green/foresight/scienceinnovation/2010_ecjrc_envisioning_digital_europe_2030.pdf [Accessed 27 August 2018]

degree of integration in policy intelligence. They identified four scenarios that could emerge over the next two decades.

Leviathan Governance

The Leviathan scenario (low openness/ transparency and high integration in policy intelligence) assumes the emergence of an “enlightened oligarchy” that will use high-tech tools and systems to collect and manage public information and services. Policy would be decided by an elite group of bureaucrats and passive citizens would attempt to implement these policies under the guidance of the elites. Traditional deliberative democratic systems would no longer be required. Machine intelligence (based on the collection and use of big data) would allow public service delivery to be personalized without people having to ask. As a result, citizens would trust their governments and willingly delegate their right of initiative.

Privatized Governance

The Privatized scenario (low openness/ transparency and low integration in policy intelligence) envisions a society shaped by decisions taken by corporate business representatives. As the gap between rich and poor widens and wealth becomes more concentrated, self-concern characterizes most of society. As citizens would largely serve as pawns of large corporations that manage their needs and desires, interactive and participatory governance—and participatory democracy—would essentially fall by the wayside. Decisions on social issues would depend on highly developed ICT-enabled modeling and decision-support systems. The growing role of large corporations in implementing autonomous policy mechanisms based on proprietary ICT-enabled systems would make it increasingly impossible for citizen involvement in any roles other than as employees or consumers. Both participation and governance itself would deteriorate, allowing established actors to take power and create a clientelistic⁸ polity.

Self-Service Governance

The self-service scenario (high openness/ transparency and low integration in policy intelligence) involves citizens empowered to play the role of policy makers. Self-organized and self-governing communities of citizens, based on online reputational management systems, replace most institutional governments. DIY-style, citizens would choose their own service options, and responses to emerging problems may develop quickly. Yet a lack of engagement culture would result in disinterest in participating in governance on the part of the majority of citizens. And a lack of social cohesion would make discrete communities increasingly insular and deepen existing divides. Migrant and ethnic minorities, who may lack local social networks, may become more isolated and powerless.

Open Governance

The Open scenario (high openness/transparency and high integration in policy intelligence)—the scenario preferred by advocates of participatory governance (including the JRC)—envisions a society with unprecedented access to data and knowledge—and new ICT-enabled opportunities for people to interact with and influence governance and policy-making processes and make progress in solving

⁸ Clientelism is the exchange of goods and services for political support, often involving an implicit or explicit quid-pro-quo. ... Moreover, clientelism is typified by "exchange systems where voters trade political support for various outputs of the public decision-making process".

societal problems and global challenges. ICTs would open up possibilities for the provision of personalized and real-time public services.

As connectivity increases, more people would participate actively in online political, educational, and social activities—and the relevant information needed to make informed choices would become more accessible. As ICTs increasingly function as an extension of individual and collective human intelligence, citizens would be increasingly well-informed, empowered, and enthusiastic—as both individuals and members of social networks and third-sector organizations—about taking part in networked cooperation with both the public and private sectors.

Widespread accessibility not only to online sources but to ICT skills would enhance the inclusivity of governance, inviting and enabling the participation and integration of senior citizens, migrants, and ethnic minorities alike—facilitated through the creation of ICT-enabled diaspora networks.

A new participatory model of governance would fully integrate online citizen engagement, co-creation, and feedback loops into policy and decision making. Decentralized agencies would involve citizens directly, closely cooperating with private actors and social movements to perform public services—making governance processes more user-centric and cost-effective. Governments would make better and more transparent decisions.

By improving personalized service delivery and increasing individual's freedom, ICT-enabled applications would enhance social cohesion. This would help create a strong civil society that supports the representative model—and new types of alliances between citizens, private companies, and government.

INDICATIONS OF CHANGE

The advent of new technologies is heightening consumer and citizen expectations, especially those regarding access to ICT. Individuals expect to quickly and easily find the information they want online no matter where they are or what time it is. They are also increasingly demanding to communicate their unique wants and needs to companies and government agencies for the sake of improved services. Thus far, the private sphere has made better use of new technologies to further consumer engagement than the public sphere. The general public has grown comfortable with this kind of engagement, and the public sector will need to follow the lead of the private sector to reach citizens in the manner in which they are the most familiar and comfortable.

New Expectations

As the private sector engages consumers, citizens are expecting government leaders to open as well. However, not citizen will be ready for such measures either technically if they cannot use the technology or philosophically if they disagree with what the government is attempting. Governments may need to educate those citizens who wish to participate in the creation of policy, and they will need to communicate in a delicate manner to avoid scaring their citizens.

Public Demand for Engagement

Since technology has enabled convenient engagement at an individual level, consumers and citizens expect organizations to be equally engaging.

- Consumers increasingly expect new levels of digital engagement, forcing those who want to serve consumer or citizen needs to establish a digital presence, and to provide consistent information, services, and brand experience across all channels. (Tech Trends 2014)

- Individuals—especially Millennials and other young people—increasingly want to be engaged. In the private sphere, for example, Gartner determined in 2015 that 89% of companies—up from 36% in 2011—believe that customer experience (including personalization, engagement, etc.) will be their primary basis for competition by 2016. ([Digital Business Era](#))
- As a result, greater efforts to engage increasingly sophisticated and tech-savvy consumers will soon become even more essential for companies—and other agencies—that want to serve tomorrow’s consumers. ([The Five Mega-Trends Shaping Tomorrow's Consumers](#))
- Public-interest charities such as Samara Canada—“dedicated to reconnecting citizens to politics”—are encouraging greater political participation and civic engagement from all citizens to build better politics and a more democratic Canada. ([The politics of distrust: Samara paints a disengaged picture](#))

Educating and Empowering Consumers and Citizens

In order to empower citizens, governments will need to educate them on how to participate effectively, and libraries will play a key role.

- The World Economic Forum projects that improved collaboration and knowledge sharing, facilitated through hyper-connectivity will pave the way for a participation society, in which engagement in societal endeavors becomes essential to its citizens. ([Living in a Hyperconnected World](#))
- However, the skills of media literacy and digital citizenship—the ability to access, search, and evaluate information and produce and distribute content—will become increasingly essential to participate in the social, educational, economic, and political benefits of society. ([Digital Life in 2025](#))
- Libraries and other institutions will have a growing responsibility to help students gain appropriate levels of digital access, engagement, and critical understanding, allowing citizens to acquire deep digital literacy. ([Living and Learning in 2034](#))
- Libraries will continue to be valued by citizens as safe, democratic places that offer opportunities to meet in free public spaces, resources and expertise to support the activities of users, and a virtual presence that social networking and links to other online resources. ([The Library of the Future](#))

Crowdsourcing and Co-Creation

The wisdom of crowds is already utilized for creating the online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, and many other public goods. The same may extend to different aspects of government works.

- Crowdsourcing platforms and social media offer tools for organizing collective intelligence and participatory problem solving. ([Developing a Policy Roadmap for Smart Cities and the Future Internet](#))
- Digital tools and crowdsourcing approaches can allow citizens to become more informed about issues, budgets, and upcoming decisions—and thereby increase and improve both government transparency and citizen voice. In addition, crowdsourcing methods may increasingly become tools for gathering data, ideas, and perspectives in useful ways—providing groups with both voice and accountability. ([The Future of Knowledge Sharing in a Digital Age](#))

- Co-creation may involve deployment at large scales of digital social platforms for multi-disciplinary groups developing innovative solutions to societal challenges, encouraging bottom-up participatory innovation paradigms and the development of collective awareness and knowledge. (Horizon 2020)
- In green businesses, for example, open innovation and crowdsourcing approaches are being used to co-create new businesses that rely on collaboration and partnership, helping to break down impediments to establishing innovative businesses, and enabling those who have ideas to reach people more quickly. (6 Sustainable Innovation and Design Trends)

The Challenge of Measuring Success

Evaluating the worth of crowdsourced ideas and policies and measuring their impact may pose a challenge, but effective metrics are being tested.

- Without developing and implementing mechanisms that evaluate and separate the good ideas from the bad and transform online enthusiasm into policies with real-world impact, crowdsourcing and social media could lead to what Laura Arrillaga-Andreessen, board chairman of the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, calls “over-innovation”: the constant introduction of new and unproven ideas that draw attention away from scaling up proven solutions and achieving measurable change. (Disruption for Good)
- Because not all social actions are equal in impact, it will become increasingly important to establish a weighted engagement metric (in terms of such consumer social responses as shares or retweets, likes, and comments or replies) to provide a more accurate measure of content performance. (Social Media Trends for Tourism Boards)
- Since 2003, the UN E-Government Survey has assessed the development of e-government, including e-participation, on a country-by-country basis. Assessment of e-participation has steadily expanded to include e-consultation and e-decision-making initiatives—i.e., engaging citizens in public policy-making and implementation through such tools as social media and online bulletin boards, polls, petitions, discussion forums, and voting tools. In 2013, the countries achieving the highest scores on the e-participation index were South Korea and the Netherlands. (The Global Information Technology Report 2015)

New Tools

ICT is growing in importance around the world, and Canada is the second heaviest user of internet tools and services in the world with an average of 41.3 hours online⁹ per month. Canada also ranks number 16 globally for internet penetration with 86.8% of its citizenry¹⁰ connected to the internet. The growth in the number of devices and connected citizens is intensifying the benefits and the need for organizations to utilize them as communication channels. Four of the most important tools for the public sector when considering direct engagement are the continual increase in ICT, social media networks, growth of data for analytics, and gamification.

⁹ Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA) Factbook. 2014. <https://cira.ca/factbook/2014/the-canadian-internet.html> [Accessed 27 August 2018]

¹⁰ Ibid.

ICT Explosion

The growth of ICT among citizens will continue likely until near full saturation, and ICT will be a primary avenue of communication for an ever increasing segment of society. Governments which do not actively pursue online direct engagement will risk being the only organizations left not participating effectively.

And the number of devices each citizen uses will also continue to proliferate. So, governments will need to look beyond desktop engagement and meet their constituents where they can be engaged.

Otherwise, the benefits will be missed by the demographics that have already ceased using desktop computers.

- Global Internet access is projected to reach almost 5 billion users by 2020. (Emerging ICT and Technology Mediation Social Developments)
- Growth is especially strong in mobile devices. In 2015, the mobile Internet will connect 15 billion devices and 2.5 billion people throughout the world. (Innovation in Technology Based Companies)
- By 2017, 80% of consumer engagement with brands will be on mobile devices. (Advance Your Mobile, Cloud, Analytics and API Capabilities) *And citizens will be expecting to engage with their governments in a similar manner to their preferred brands.*
- Wireless technology enabled by advancement in cellular networks, satellite networks, RFID, Wi-Fi and WiMax will lead to IT infrastructure and other services to be 80% wireless on a single integrated platform in 2020. (World's Top Global Mega Trends to 2020)
- Digitization of services, processes, and interactions is anticipated to continue at a rapid pace in coming years, becoming even more pervasive, which will lead to disruptive effects on lifestyles, governance, and policy making. (Envisioning Digital Europe 2030)
- Devices are increasingly interconnected, making it incumbent on business and government leaders to rework their offerings and processes accordingly. (Digital Business Era)
- As connected devices, sensors, and smart machines continue to proliferate, customers, employees, and citizens alike will become engaged principally through digital means. (3 Big Data Trends for Business Intelligence)

Social Networking

Information shared directly with government agencies through social networks (e.g. posting to agency Facebook page, replying to agency tweets) will be invaluable for the agencies especially in identifying their constituents' needs and motivations.

- New communications technologies, especially social networking, are broadening individuals' sense of community, allowing them to bridge national, regional, ethnic, and gender divides. (Alternative Worlds)
- Social media will reshape the citizen experience, and force governments to adopt social media etiquette or standards of engagement. (Social Media and CRM to Further Expand in 2015)
- Social networking technologies can serve as an important tool for both corporations and governments, providing them with valuable information about individuals and groups and facilitating development of robust predictive models with applications in everything from targeted advertising to counterterrorism. Social networks can also introduce new classes of

services resistant to centralized oversight and control that could displace services currently provided by corporations and government. (Alternative Worlds)

- A European Commission FP7 project called WEGOV is developing a toolset to allow governments to take full advantage of a wide range of social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Bebo, and others to engage citizens in a two-way conversation that is integrated into policy-making and governance processes. The platform will allow policy makers to efficiently collect citizen opinions as soon as they are created. And it will allow policy makers to make full use of the high levels of participation and discussion that already take place in existing social networking communities, helping to close the loop between policy makers and citizens. (Envisioning Digital Europe 2030)

Big Data Analytics

Big data analytics has some potential for the public sector for improving citizen services and tailoring messages, however, there are parameters for the uses of data in this context, unlike in the private sector. The public sector should realize that in most areas, businesses are tailoring their offerings to consumer needs, and citizens will likely come to expect some degree of customization from the public sector, even if subconsciously.

The question of privacy in the private sector is most concerned with the benefits provided in exchange. So too, government agencies have a great many benefits to offer citizens who opt in to data sharing if the agencies can find an ethical and legal balance in which to offer the benefits.

- Using big data allows providers to shift customer engagement models from reactive to proactive. T-Mobile, for example, is using an individual's personal history to better understand, predict, and mitigate potential customer issues before they occur. (Tech Trends 2014)
- According to the chief executive of Nesta, an "innovation agency" in the UK, many governments still haven't scratched the surface of what's possible with predictive analytics and machine learning. The public sector, he suggests, should pay more attention to such private sector best practices as consumer segmentation. (The Digital Governance Dilemma Canada's Public Sector Must Confront)
- The public will easily become fearful of big data and its potential because big data is most useful when enabled to improve customer service, i.e. when the experience delights and surprises users at the most convenient point of contact. (Big Data Jargon We All Need to Reign In, Right Now)

Gamification

Gamification involves the incorporation of game mechanics, feedback loops, and rewards to spur interaction and boost engagement, loyalty, fun, and/or learning. It has been demonstrated to cause feel-good chemical reactions and in certain situations to improve learning, participation, and motivation (Gamification)¹¹. Engaging citizens using gamification strategies could increase participation more than small offers of personal benefit. If governments want to increase their citizen participation rates,

¹¹ Quitney Anderson, Janna (Elon University) and Lee Rainie (Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project). 2012. "Gamification: Experts expect 'game layers' to expand in the future, with positive and negative results." http://www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media/Files/Reports/2012/PIP_Future_of_Internet_2012_Gamification.pdf [Accessed 27 August 2018]

gamification could be a solution. Showing voters the percentage of elections they have voted in versus the overall number of elections could spur them into voting more often to either maintain their current level or increase it.

- In today's engagement economy, in which time and attention are at a premium, people have been shown to gravitate to activities that make them feel rewarded and respected for their opinions and support. ([How Gamification Is Reshaping Business in the Engagement Economy](#)) Gamification is also becoming an important means for organizations to engage more deeply with audiences. It allows organizations to engage a target audience and then leverage the collective intelligence of the crowd to solicit ideas, develop those ideas, and then use predictive market mechanisms to forecast how those ideas will be received. By 2016, Gartner forecasts, gamification will be an essential element for brands and retailers to drive customer marketing and loyalty. ([Gamification 2020](#))
- More and more businesses and governments will introduce game mechanics (and human psychology) into marketing messages, services, and situations because businesses and government want to understand and influence consumers and voters. ([Gamification](#))
- Daren C. Brabham, a University of North Carolina communications professor, anticipates that "gamification will continue to penetrate every aspect of our lives. Gamification will even shape our interactions with government. Crowdsourcing and incentivized models for engagement will drive public participation programs for public issues (policy design, the planning of public space, etc.)." ([Gamification](#))

More Participatory Governance

Although difficult, opening the policy process to citizenry will increase participation and empower citizens while potentially reducing or at least controlling social unrest.

Digital Engagement as a Tool for Good Governance

Both the EU and the UN promote multilateral engagement with stakeholders for reasons ranging from good governance to security. In this context, ICT advances, social networking, gamification, and crowdsourcing—by increasing participation, transparency and broadening inclusion—will become key tools.

- UN millennium goals establish that good governance must be based on principles of inclusion, stakeholder engagement, and the participation of all groups in society. ([Realizing the Future We Want for All](#))
- The EU's Joint Research Centre (JRC) likewise urges the EU to adopt policies—based on education, dialogue, and new ways of communicating and interacting with different stakeholders—that foster e-participation and e-democracy that ensure greater inclusion, embracing the multicultural and social diversity of the EU. ([Facing the Future](#))
- Strengthening urban governance by involving and empowering citizens and building partnerships with civil society and the private sector, for example, is seen by the UN as perhaps the single most important factor in addressing urban risk. ([Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction](#))
- The e-governance strategy of the EU, for example, aims to ensure universal access to information, openness and transparency, participation, and equity. ([Review of Science and Technology Foresight Studies](#))

- In the EU, the JRC holds that ICT tools for governance and policy will ultimately force changes in institutions, even if they resist change. By 2030, barriers will no longer exist that prevent citizens and businesses from participating in decision making at all levels. All institutions—whether public, private, or third sector—will start to listen more carefully to their stakeholders. ([Envisioning Digital Europe 2030](#))

The Future of Governance

Governments around the world are responding to 21st Century technology and the resulting expectations citizens are placing on government leaders. In the future, a system much closer to true democracy may arise.

- Governments face challenges in adapting to technological developments. The trend toward “made-for-me” service delivery and citizen-led co-creation, for example, will stress the capabilities of many governments. ([Cognitive Government](#))
- Yet increasing access to technology could usher in an era of open governance, heightened transparency, and crowdsourced decision-making. ([The Future Role of Civil Society](#))
- The 2015 UAE Government Summit on “Shaping Future Governments” determined that a commitment to co-creation is one of the essential requirements needed to achieve truly fundamental changes to the architecture of government. ([Cognitive Government](#))
- Technological progress may afford citizens opportunities to exert control over their governments—facilitating bottom-up, user-driven, and massive collaboration that may influence policy formation and e-governance decisions—while at the same time opening up the organizational cultures of governments. ([Facing the Future](#))
- ICT tools will allow a shift from expert to non-expert knowledge, making the decision-making and governance processes more horizontal and participatory. Locally based activities will promote and facilitate the reuse and linking of public data and information, making that knowledge available and visually user friendly to the vast majority of users. ([Envisioning Digital Europe 2030](#))
- In the long term, the EU’s Joint Research Centre (JRC) has concluded, governments will embrace networked governance structures—but only following a struggle between traditional bureaucratic systems and network-based mechanisms over which offers the best way to organize people, knowledge, and service delivery. Ultimately, governance actors will become increasingly aware of the needs and desires of citizens, businesses, and administrations for more choice. And the principles of facilitating greater participation, more user-created content, deeper user engagement, and ownership of public services will exercise a powerful influence on governance and policy-making mechanisms. ([Envisioning Digital Europe 2030](#))
- Digital technology can bring new voices into policy making, and rapid, digitally enabled feedback on how policy is working has the potential to lead to more agile governance. ([Why Greens Should Embrace Digital Technology](#))
- In establishing platforms that enable users to design, create, and self-direct services to their own personal requirements, governments will provide more individualized services. Governments will in this way become more open, participative, and democratic—welcoming inputs and interests from all segments and all levels of society. ([eGovernment of Tomorrow](#))

- An exemplary 21st century government that embraces a client-focused organizational culture and uses the latest technology for citizens could invite and induce citizens to develop a modern relationship/contact with “their” government. ([Destination 2020](#))

Making it Happen

The idealism of technology enabled true democracy is justified. Cities and nations alike are pursuing different methods of engagement, and these locations provide benchmarks for new ways of attaining policy goals.

Cities as Test Centers

In many ways, cities provide optimal testing grounds for new ICT engagement strategies since they operate on a large contained area that is much smaller than most nations.

- More and more cities are tapping into growing public calls for more local control and decentralized government. ([Alternative Worlds](#))
- New forms of governance for an online world—employing new forms of online participation making use of the latest ICT—are being employed to achieve the increasingly urgent goal of re-engineering cities to make them smart, competitive, equitable, and responsive. ([Smart Cities of the Future](#))
- A growing number of cities, for example, are introducing proactive programs—smart parking, smart lighting, energy and waste management—that provide greater engagement with their citizens. ([How the Internet of Things is Affecting Urban Design](#))
- Social networks will further empower both consumers and businesses to communicate more transparently—and ultimately help shift the balance of power toward consumers. ([Insurance 2020](#))
- In coming years, ICT will increasingly be used to ensure that citizens are aware of municipal activities and to provide opportunities to participate in the democratic decision-making process. ([Smart Cities](#))
- IBM predicts that by the end of the decade, learning systems, mobile devices, and social engagement will create “sentient cities,” with computers anticipating and understanding what people want, need, like, and do, as well as how they move from place to place. Mobile devices and social engagement will enable citizens to establish relationships with city leaders, allowing their voices to be heard. ([IBM's Predictions for Next Five Years: Everything Will Learn](#))
- Ultimately, city leaders will be judged by their achievement in transforming their cities, and integrating citizen feedback into operations through ongoing engagement and stakeholder management will play a key role in overcoming infrastructure challenges. ([Urban Infrastructure Insights 2015](#))

Scaling It Up to the National Level

Some national governments are also attempting experiments that harness ICT and social networking in order to create more inclusive and participatory governance. These experiments will provide benchmarks for the growing list of nations looking to transition to more participatory government.

- Recognizing the need for 21st century agencies to embrace the power of social networking communities, the US Patent and Trademark Office was one of the first US agencies to embrace

blogging and tweeting and hire staff skilled in social networking. They also use wiki-style tools to enable various stakeholders to contribute to important agency documents. ([Building a Service-Oriented Agency](#))

- More than three million responses received in a public consultation helped influence the FCC to preserve net neutrality (the principle that Internet service providers should enable access to all content and applications regardless of the source, and without favoring or blocking particular products or websites) in the US. ([The US Net Neutrality Saga Is a Lesson to the World](#))
- “The release of the comments as Open Data ... will allow researchers, journalists, and others to analyze and create visualizations of the data so that the public and the FCC can discuss and learn from the comments we’ve received,” announced an FCC blog post. ([FCC Gives Data Geeks New, Exciting Way to Show Public's Hatred of Net Neutrality Plan](#))
- And as the share of women and minorities among US veterans continues to rise, the US Department of Veteran Affairs is recognizing that increases in the diversity of the veteran population will heighten the need for more diverse services, outreach, communications, and engagement efforts. ([FY 2014-2020 Strategic Plan](#))
- The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency is currently developing a social media strategy that will enable meaningful engagement and communication with both the public and partners about the projects it regulates. ([Destination 2020](#))
- In the UK, the Public Administration Select Committee has recommended a wiki approach to policy making, using digital technology to open up the process, and seeking and valuing public opinion and ideas at all stages—from identifying problems to developing solutions. ([Report Published on Public Engagement in Policy-Making](#))
- “Citizens will be most likely to engage with Government if they believe they can make a real difference,” explained Bernard Jenkin, MP. “I would like to see advances toward more direct, real public involvement in policy making, whether via the Internet or other means,” added Robert Halfon, MP. ([Report Published on Public Engagement in Policy-Making](#))
- In an experiment in democracy intended to provide all citizens the opportunity to participate digitally in Swedish democracy, the Swedish government is giving control over Sweden’s official Twitter account to a different Swede each week, allowing them to share daily local experiences. ([Digital Scotland 2020](#))
- Scotland also employs technology to offer parents the option to make a variety of school payments—including those covering lunches and school trips—through a simple online system linked to the young Scot Entitlement Card. ([Scotland's Digital Future](#))

Concerns to Remember

While potentially facilitating more responsive, efficient, and effective governance, ICT advances and social networking also pose threats that may challenge governments.

- “A number of clear dangers remain, chiefly, the abuse of social media to promote populist and disruptive agendas and ideologies; the increasing corporatization and astroturfing of social media spaces; the exploitation of personal information made public through social media by criminals and overzealous law enforcement agencies. On balance, social media spaces and communities have, to date, remained remarkably resistant to such interference, but there are no guarantees that this will continue. But social media also enable their users to organize to

combat infringements and interference, and this is a cause for optimism.” —Axel Bruns, associate professor of media and communication, Queensland University of Technology, and general editor of Media and Culture journal ([Imagining the Internet](#))

- Global communications could help fuel future radicalism. Increasing interconnectedness enables individuals—including cohorts of the downtrodden, disenfranchised, and angry—to coalesce around common causes across national boundaries. ([Global Trends 2025](#))
- Social networking technologies also allow groups to communicate easily outside traditional media and government channels, and therefore may enable groups to pursue disruptive and even criminal agendas with potential impact across geopolitical boundaries. ([Alternative Worlds](#))
- Social networking may therefore enable citizens to coalesce and challenge governments, as has already been seen in the Middle East. ([Alternative Worlds](#))

THE FUTURE OF DIRECT ENGAGEMENT: IMPLICATIONS

The scenarios developed by the JRC paired with the rapid development of ICT facilitating direct engagement and suggest a number directions/suggestions to explore for governments that want to develop direct engagement strategies to enhance citizen engagement in governance. With these guidelines and cautions in mind, e-government could pave the way for a more inclusive participation society by harnessing the power of ICT and social networking to enhance direct engagement with citizens.

- Previously citizens primarily communicated with governments through their votes, but now governments around the world have the opportunity to engage their citizenry through more direct means. However, if governments do not take this opportunity and engage their citizens who are increasingly accustomed (i.e. using ICT), the governments risk losing the attention and participation of their constituents.
- Establishing a social media presence—as the EU is doing with WEGOV—can improve a government’s outreach efforts, access to feedback, provision of services, and crowdsourcing of new ideas.
- The use of analytics and predictive tools can dramatically increase the efficiency of services.
- Any successful public engagement initiative should involve give and take on the part of both governments and individuals—clearly demonstrating the two-way nature of the dialogue. Governments could use such initiatives to educate, inform, and serve the people, but at the same time take in ideas, opinions, and feedback.
- Communication and engagement efforts should be consistent across multiple platforms—offering the same information and equal opportunity to provide feedback, whether engaging through the Internet or in person.
- To ensure equal access to digital platforms and other digital engagement initiatives, governments may want to consider educating the public—especially seniors and minorities—in digital communication through (multi-lingual) classes.
- To expand outreach efforts, governments should explore all possible touch points—e.g., homes, workplaces, communities—while being sensitive to citizens who might find some attempts at contact unwanted or intrusive.
- Making effective use of big data presents more of a challenge to the public sphere than the private one. Many individuals do not trust the government to properly use—and protect—their personal data. So governments may need to begin gathering data with small initiatives that

allow them to gain the trust of the governed. Individuals will respond more favorably to data gathering efforts if it can be clearly demonstrated that they will receive better (faster, more personalized) service through the sharing of data (as private companies have shown with such measures as loyalty cards). Governments of smart cities, for example, have won the cooperation of their citizens through clearly evident service improvements.

- Governments might want to explore adding small gamification elements to public consultation platforms—e.g., the awarding of participation badges or status “upgrades” (perhaps in the form of a change in title, from contributor to frequent contributor to policy originator) to reward frequent participants. Governments should take care to tread lightly, however, mindful of the possible public suspicion of gamified government.
- To invite public consultation on policy making, governments will need to establish crowdsourcing and co-creation platforms. Just as important, however, will be the implementation of evaluative mechanisms (including feedback obtained through social networks) that help sort out the good ideas from the bad, and then prioritize which ideas to actualize.
- Governments face a difficult challenge in their attempts to balance the important objectives of protecting against threats (e.g., fueling disruptive radicalism) and avoiding unnecessary intrusions on private citizens’ lives.
- Given the ubiquity of the Internet and mobile devices, digital formats—especially mobile ones—must be an essential element of any effective engagement strategy. As many processes and offerings as possible should provide citizens both digital and real-world options for access and implementation