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LA County's Open Design Search: Re-imagining Voting Systems

Submitted by:

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY'S OPEN DESIGN SEARCH: RE-IMAGINING VOTING SYSTEMS

Los Angeles County is charting a new course in the process of designing voting systems with its Open Design Search. This initiative is a part of the County's Voting Systems Assessment Project (VSAP). This innovative project envisions implementing a voting system through a transparent and participatory process that takes into account the needs and expectations of current and future Los Angeles County voters. The VSAP and its Open Design Search breaks the mold of the traditional acquisition model in which jurisdictions select a voting system based on what is available on the market, not on the specific needs and expectations of their community.

The VSAP is now at the stage of envisioning and designing what a new voting system for its voters will look like based on the Voting System Guiding Principles. In an effort to remain aligned with the values of transparency, citizen participation, and utilizing sound data as the project moves forward, the VSAP launched an "Open Design Search" in January 2012. The Open Design Search is an innovative initiative that seeks to engage a broad range of experts, designers, and the general public to design a voting system that will meet the unique needs of Los Angeles County's large and diverse electorate. There are two primary components to Open Design Search: 1) Open Innovation Challenge and 2) Voter Experience Brainstorming Workshops.

To ensure an accurate understanding of stakeholder preferences and needs, the VSAP has engaged the public since its launch in September of 2009. The general public was engaged through focus groups and surveys as well as through a formal Advisory Committee composed of community leaders. In addition, to ensure that the preferences and needs of voters are used as a guide in the acquisition of a new system, the VSAP Advisory Committee established a set of Voting System Guiding Principles. This process not only established a strong foundation of public opinion data, but also firmly reinforced the importance of transparency and citizen participation.

Open Innovation Challenge

In partnership with the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation (ITIF) Accessible Voting Technology Initiative (AVTI) and OpenIDEO, the VSAP launched the first portion of its Open Design Search, an Open Innovation Challenge in January 2012. The public at large was invited to participate in this challenge which aimed to provide new approaches to the County's aging voting system. The voting challenge asked the question "How might we design an accessible election experience for everyone?" and ran from January 24th – March 28th.

The Open Innovation Challenge was funded by a competitive grant received by ITIF from the U.S. Elections Assistance Commission for its Accessible Voting Technology Initiative. The goal of the initiative is to make the voting processes and technology more accessible. OpenIDEO ran the challenge on its open innovation platform run by design and innovation firm IDEO. Individuals from around the world submitted innovative solutions and concepts around making the voting experience more accessible to everyone. Engaging anyone with an interest and idea in the process, not just election technology experts, provided a process that cultivated design ideas for an innovative voter experience that may not have been envisioned when working with a more traditional model of exclusively working with voting system vendors.

This process resulted in the submission of 154 concepts. The OpenIDEO, ITIF and Los Angeles County team, with the community feedback and comments as a guide, identified eleven

concepts that have the most potential to redefine what voting looks like for people with disabilities, language or literacy concerns, or other limitations that might exclude them from the voting process today.

Voter Experience Brainstorming Workshops

The RR/CC launched the second portion of the Open Design Search with a series of workshops which provided for more refined and focused discussions. The workshops continued the open process by engaging stakeholders and gathering additional ideas and concepts that the RR/CC can utilize as it continues envisioning an ideal voting system design. The workshops targeted different stakeholders and focused on different elements of a voting system. Workshop participants were led in a moderated discussion to design a more effective voting system and were invited to draw images of their ideal system and/or list features they would like to see incorporated in the new system. The workshops resulted in 17 concepts for the consideration of the RR/CC.

The RR/CC hosted and/or participated in a total of four workshops. The first workshop was held at the Election Verification Network Annual Conference and focused on discussing important elements for an effective tally system. The RR/CC then held two workshops that gathered RR/CC staff to brainstorm and share their thoughts for the design of an ideal voting system. In addition, RR/CC participated in brainstorming workshops hosted by the ITIF Accessible Voting Technology Initiative, which also sought to reveal ideas for an improved voting experience.

Conclusion

This open and collaborative process provided innovative concepts and for the RR/CC to consider as it envisions the design of its new voting system—ideas that would not have been obtained if utilizing a traditional model. In addition, the open, transparent, and collaborative process has also worked to increase public trust and ownership in the process.

The Open Design Search engaged a varied group of stakeholders. The Open Innovation Challenge site had over 91,000 unique visits, and the Brainstorming Workshops engaged approximately 114 participants. The Open Innovation Challenge and Brainstorming Workshops engaged staff that has a unique expertise gained from years of running elections. It also engaged stakeholders, such as voters, academics, designers and advocates that interact with elections in a very different manner. Engaging these various stakeholders provided the RR/CC with an outside perspective and insight that will help ensure the voting system design considers the diverse needs of Los Angeles County voters.

Additional Information

Full reports of research findings can be found at:

http://lavote.net/Voter/VSAP/PDFS/VSAP_Project_Report_070910_FINAL.pdf

http://lavote.net/Voter/VSAP/PDFS/Open_Design_Search_Report.pdf



DEAN C. LOGAN
Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk

PRESS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 24, 2012

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CITIZENS WILL HELP INSPIRE THE DESIGN OF COUNTY'S NEW VOTING SYSTEM ***Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk Changes the Game with Open Innovation Challenge***

Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (RR/CC) Dean Logan announced today the Department's participation in an open innovation challenge aimed at providing new approaches to the County's aging voting system. Asking the question, "How might we design an accessible election experience for everyone," the voting challenge will run from January 24th – March 22nd. The public at large is invited to participate in this challenge on the OpenIDEO website: www.openideo.com.

The challenge is being conducted in partnership with the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation (ITIF) Accessible Voting Technology Initiative and is funded by a competitive grant from the U.S. Elections Assistance Commission. The challenge will run on OpenIDEO, the open innovation platform run by design and innovation firm IDEO. OpenIDEO's online community will submit inspirations and concepts around making the voting experience more accessible to everyone. "Our goal is to generate innovative solutions that will improve the election experience for as many voters as possible regardless of age, ability or situation. We are thrilled that LA County will be working with us to make sure all citizens can vote privately and independently. This is e-government at its finest", said Daniel Castro, Project Director of the ITIF Accessible Voting Technology Initiative.

This initiative aligns with the County's broader effort to modernize the current voting system through a collaborative, participatory, and transparent process. The underlying goal of the initiative is to design, acquire, and implement a new voting system that meets the needs of current and future Los Angeles County voters. The County launched its Voting Systems Assessment Project (VSAP) in 2009 and since then has been working with community groups to learn about voter needs and preferences. Working with a project [advisory committee](#) representing a broad spectrum of interests, in 2011 the Department adopted a set of [general voting system principles](#) that serve as the foundation for the development of the new system. The County now seeks to engage the genius and talents of the best and brightest designers,

(MORE)

academics, and experts in various fields to help envision how this new system might look. "As we look to the future of voting in Los Angeles County, we want to craft a vision that encompasses the diversity, creativity and desires of the community we serve. The online crowdsourcing challenge is an exciting and innovative approach aimed at inviting broad participation in the ongoing discussion and design of our future voting system", said RR/CC Logan.

The use of open innovation as a way to improve the voting experience is unprecedented, not only in Los Angeles County, but also nationally. These types of online crowdsourcing challenges have been used by many corporations, government entities, and non-profit organizations as a way of gaining access to the skills and expertise that exist outside of their organizations, but which may be helpful for problem solving. Some organizations that have used this strategy to find solutions include: General Electric (GE), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), NOKIA and Proctor and Gamble.

Participate in this challenge by going to <http://www.openideo.com/open/voting/brief.html>

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Persons requiring multilingual assistance in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog/Filipino, or Vietnamese can call (800) 481-8683.

ABOUT THE REGISTRAR-RECORDER/COUNTY CLERK

The mission of the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk is to serve Los Angeles County by providing essential records management and election services in a fair, accessible and transparent manner.

ABOUT THE ITIF ACCESSIBLE VOTING TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVE

The Information Technology and Innovation Foundation (ITIF) is a non-profit think tank at the cutting edge of designing policies that will boost economic growth and improve quality of life in the United States and around the world. The ITIF Accessible Voting Technology Initiative is a project funded by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) to make voting processes and technology more accessible. ITIF is partnering with researchers from universities across the United States and the National Federation of the Blind. This challenge is one way we are exploring new ideas for improving elections. For more about our project, go to <http://elections.itif.org>.

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LA County crowdsources ideas for new voting system

March 9, 2012 | By [Jerry Gorin](#)

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Mark Logan/flickr

Los Angeles County is by far the biggest election jurisdiction in the U.S., but if dealing with 4.5 million voters isn't enough, the county is also hampered by an outdated voting system. The registrar says it's due for a major facelift, and he's looking to the public for answers.

Logan says a countywide election can mean organizing up to 5,000 polling places and 25,000 poll workers on election day.

"Election day is equivalent to a military operation. We literally have helicopters bringing the ballots back to our headquarters, we have people deployed all over the county — it's a mega operation," Logan says.

For a county so big, it's never an easy task, but Logan says the voting technology has also become a big problem in recent years; those ballots sprayed with ink dots, the infrared scanners, the tally machines — they aren't cutting it.

"The issue is not that the software is bad," says Logan, "but that it isn't flexible - there aren't people going to school to learn that software anymore. Same thing with the hardware; the card readers are retrofitted IBM punch card readers, and while they count really fast, it's hard to get parts for them."

Logan saw this coming from a mile away, but he could never have anticipated his biggest obstacle: there isn't a voting system on the market that he can switch to. Most counties across the U.S. use large-sized optical scan ballots, a system that's not scalable to L.A. County. The printing and storage costs would not be sustainable.

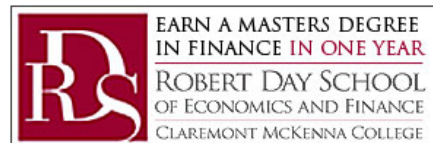
So in 2009 Logan decided to start from scratch. He began by talking to thousands of people, from longtime voters to soon-to-be voters still in high school, to figure out what an ideal voting experience might look like. He asked questions like, "If voting was available at multiple locations, during a longer period of time, would you be more likely to participate?" or "If you could access information about candidates and measures online through some app, would that encourage you?"

The answers helped Logan draft a set of guiding principles, but he didn't have the money to research and design a brand new system. So he went to a Bay Area company called OpenIDEO which does design-oriented crowdsourcing. They generally partner with sponsors to tackle a problem — say, designing a new voting system — and pose a challenge. Then IDEO's unique online community takes over. A global network of users share stories and experiences, pitch ideas, give each other feedback, and eventually - according to co-director Nicholas Waterhouse - they collaborate to develop the stronger ideas into full-fledged designs.

"We've got university professors, students, farmers, nurses, doctors, a broad range of society," says Waterhouse. "The one thing they really share in common is that they're passionate about these causes."

OpenIDEO's website is currently dedicated to the voting system challenge, and it is teeming with activity. There are over a hundred concepts so far. One of them outlines an easy voting app for smart-phones. Another suggests coupling polling places with banks or healthcare centers, and still another offers a plan to improve the voting lines by offering pre-booking vote time and informational videos in the wait area. Some ideas will grow, others will not, but it's all up to the people.

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"It's a very self-selecting process," says Waterhouse. "Bad ideas kind of get ignored."

Apparently it's also a lot of fun.

"Facebook and Twitter are addictive because of the constant social interaction," he says. "When you receive an e-mail on OpenIDEO that someone's just built off your inspiration, people describe the response of wanting to get back on the platform as being addictive."


It's hard to know whether a highbrow social network can solve a major metropolitan issue, but OpenIdeo has tackled big ones before. One of their most recent projects asked users to design cheap sanitation for a poor city in Ghana. They designed a prototype, and now their sponsor, Unilever, expects to see up 10,000 sold by the end of next year.

Registrar Dean Logan would love to see a prototype emerge over the next few months. But he's also just happy to get the creative juices flowing.

"What's great about this is that traditionally in the procurement world you have to pick 1 concept, whereas in this crowd-sourcing environment we can pick and choose. If there's a nugget of an idea in one concept that goes really well with another piece of a concept, we can partner those people together and refine that concept."

Within the next week Logan and OpenIdeo will have evaluated the concepts and on March 22, a winner — and likely more than one — will be announced. And hopefully they won't need to do any recounts, either.

Web Resources

-  [Story from Zev Yaroslavsky's Blog](#)
-  [OpenIDEO Challenge](#)

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In-Person Voting

VOTING AT POLLING PLACES & VOTE CENTERS

Sample Ballot & Information Transfer System



DESCRIPTION

Our design solution is a system to better prepare voters for going to a polling center, and create a more enjoyable voting experience. Ballots are available on paper or in digital form, they're filled out by the voter, then brought to the polling center. Eliminating polling times, discomfort, and anxiety—the polling machine scans the sample ballot and preselects your choices on-screen. You can confirm the selections and cast your vote. The machine itself is an accessibly designed polling machine equipped with a camera.

ADVANTAGES

- + Increased voting participation
- + Increased voter accuracy: more informed choices with less in-person anxiety
- + Increased device flexibility (iPad, phone, etc.)
- + Reduces paper cost with more targeted ballot printing
- + Modular interpretation of machines (adding printer & scanner to electronic voting machine)

1. SCAN BALLOT

- + Camera digitizes and loads the voting machine with your choices

2. CONFIRM ENTRIES

- + Browse your vote, and double-check your choices..

3. CAST VOTE

- + Vote is cast electronically, with a paper copy printed for paper-trail purposes.

7 Principles of Universal Design

① EQUITABLE USE

- + Sample technology is publically accessible
- + Voting machines are accessible

② FLEXIBILITY IN USE

- + Facilitate more accurate choices
- + Access in comfort of home (while using assistive technologies)
- + Ability to confirm choices
- + Make ballot verification into reasonable partitions

③ SIMPLE & INTUITIVE USE

- + Need human verifiable code
- + Relies on using current best practices towards usability design.

④ PERCEPTIBLE INFORMATION

- + Internet access enables higher technology
- + Allows use of personal assistive technologies
- + Safe space

⑤ TOLERANCE FOR ERROR

- + Error handling in process
- + Multiple chances to examine answers

⑥ LOW PHYSICAL EFFORT

- + Major actions and thoughts can be made in comfort of home (with existing AT)
- + Minimize time spent in voting location

⑦ SIZE & SPACE FOR APPROACH AND USE

- + Majority of time and use can be spent in comfortable environments

