Independent Demonstration Projects

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• Standard advice to government innovators: “First make sure you have the support of agency officials.”

• That’s like advising soldiers: “First make sure the enemy has run out of ammunition.”

• It would be great, but if you wait for it to happen then you may never act.
Independent Demonstration Projects

- A strategy to innovate in government without prior approval of officials.

- The innovator implements her idea as a minimum viable product, using whatever resources are available to her.

- Once the innovation is implemented, it creates pressure on officials to sustain or expand it using government resources.
  - Proves the innovation is feasible.
  - Builds constituency of users.
Case study: Virginia Corporate Registration Records

Problem, as the innovator described it:

“...on the State Corporation Commission’s website...you can search for a business by name. But if you want to get a list of all businesses in your county, all businesses that have been formed in the past month, all businesses located at a particular address, etc., then you’re just out of luck.”

“[They] will sell you their database of all 1,126,069 companies. It’s not cheap, at $150/month, with a minimum three-month commitment. You have to sign a five-page contract, and the data is a hot mess, of no value to anybody other than a programmer.”

- Waldo Jaquith, 2014
Case study: Virginia Corporate Registration Records

• Innovation
  • The State Corporation Commission should provide free on-line access to the records in a usable form.

• Independent Demonstration Project strategy
  1. Implement the innovation on a temporary basis without government.
  2. Motivate government to adopt the innovation on a permanent basis.
Case study: Virginia Corporate Registration Records

Innovator implemented on a demonstration basis:

• Bought a subscription to the database from the State Corporation Commission.

• Created software to clean the data and convert it to CSV files for spreadsheets and JSON files for web applications.

• Created a website for users to easily search and download the data.

• Put this all on the internet for anybody to use for free.
Case study: Virginia Corporate Registration Records

Publicity was important to every stage of the strategy.

While implementing the demonstration project:

• Personal contacts, Social media, Blogs
• Attracted collaborators
  • Coders
  • Legal advice
• Attracted resources
  • Grant funding
  • Web site hosting
Case study: Virginia Corporate Registration Records

Publicity was important to every stage of the strategy.

Once demonstration project was implemented:

• Personal contacts, Social media, Blogs, *plus* Newspapers

• Attracted users
  • Prove value of the innovation
  • Be a constituency who will want government to continue the service

• Pressured government to adopt the innovation
Virginia website of SCC data tries to pin down unlicensed businesses

The State Corporation Commission’s data on businesses indicate local governments may be missing out on revenue.

By Nate Delesline III The (Charlottesville) Daily Progress   Feb 15, 2015  

A jumbled digital data file of Virginia’s incorporated entities could be the foundation for sustainable revenue improvement for local governments, according to the head of a Charlottesville-based nonprofit.

Waldo Jaquith, founder of U.S. Open Data, recently spent most of the past year trying to decode digital data records for about 800,000 registered...
Happy 2nd anniversary
me buying of your data
giving it away for free!

Love, Waldo
Case study: Virginia Corporate Registration Records

• Results
  • In August 2016, the State Corporation Commission started providing the data for free download from its website in CSV format (spreadsheet compatible).
  • This was 2 years, 4 months after the innovator started posting the data.

• Causality?
  • In press interview, Commission said, “there’s been lots of requests for making the [databases] more accessible.”
  • Also declined to acknowledge any recollection of the sheet cake.
### Sample of Independent Demonstration Projects

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<td>1994 - Securities and Exchange Commission filings (Carl Malamud)</td>
<td>2014 - Changes to US Supreme Court opinions (Dave Zvenyach)</td>
<td>2021 - Historic Lighthouses, Gov’t IT Modernization (Omid Ghaffari-Tabrizi)</td>
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<td>2007 – California Building Code (Carl Malamud)</td>
<td>2015 – Virginia Courts Data (Ben Schoenfeld)</td>
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<td>2016 – Congressional Research Service reports (Schuman, Tauberer, Kosar)</td>
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An Independent Demonstration Project that is not about opening government information

Forest Service Diversity & Inclusion Coalition for Empowerment (DICE)

By Amber Watson, US Forest Service

US Forest Service employees Kristin Merony, Amber Watson, and Michelle Tamez were complete strangers until they met on a road trip while attending training. During the ride they discussed their mutual passion around topics of Diversity and Inclusion, and employee recruitment and retention.

They convened a discussion with colleagues across the Washington Office about the meaning of Diversity and Inclusion, and they talked about the challenges, the opportunities, and bold steps the agency might take.

Since that initial conversation in November of 2014, they have engaged over 200 employees in the Yates building.

Innovator: Amber Watson, 2014
• In other forms of dissent and guerrilla government, innovators try to *persuade in order to implement*.

• But in Independent Demonstration Projects, innovators *implement in order to persuade*.
My request to you

• Please let me know about examples of Independent Demonstration Projects, especially:
  • Projects whose goal is something other than making government information more transparent to the public
  • Projects outside the United States

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