

Social Innovation in Digital Democracy Era. Towards Synergies between Citizens and Governments.



DIGITAL
SOCIAL
INNOVATION



ePaństwo
Foundation

Table of Contents:

Introduction	2
Collaboration as an immanent factor of the modern democracy.	3
The Hard Task of Identifying Examples of Collaboration	4
Collaboration as a Process.	6
Who is Collaborating?	8
Origins of Collaboration. Why we choose to collaborate?	11
Collaboration as the Tool for Mutual Understanding.	13
Models of Collaboration	15
Let's Dig into Details. Case Studies on Models of Collaboration.	18
The Future of Collaboration	22

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Introduction

When we were discussing among ourselves and with participants of events we organized under DSI4EU project what are the main challenges for them while developing Digital Social Innovations on democracy some words were always repeated: impact, co-creation, synergy and cooperation. They were often followed by disappointment of the level of interaction with governments and actual influence on public good. At the same time participants were eager to share their successful experiences on finding their way to counteract civic apathy and disinterest from the side of governments' representatives which, at the end resulted in improving democracy. Sometimes it was a small step, another time, a more systemic change. Other participants showed their hunger for getting more knowledge on those positive examples and were asking about processes that led to them.

Based on this collective needs, at some point of facilitating Digital Democracy Cluster, we have started to focus on processes of cooperating with citizens and authorities to foster effective innovations in the field rather than limit to share information on technical aspects of tools. We have discovered that the process of making a change may be more important than only describing the actual effect. We used the opportunity of working in diverse environment with various political systems and specific operational practice of activists - to develop a guide on different models of collaboration between civic tech and public authorities.

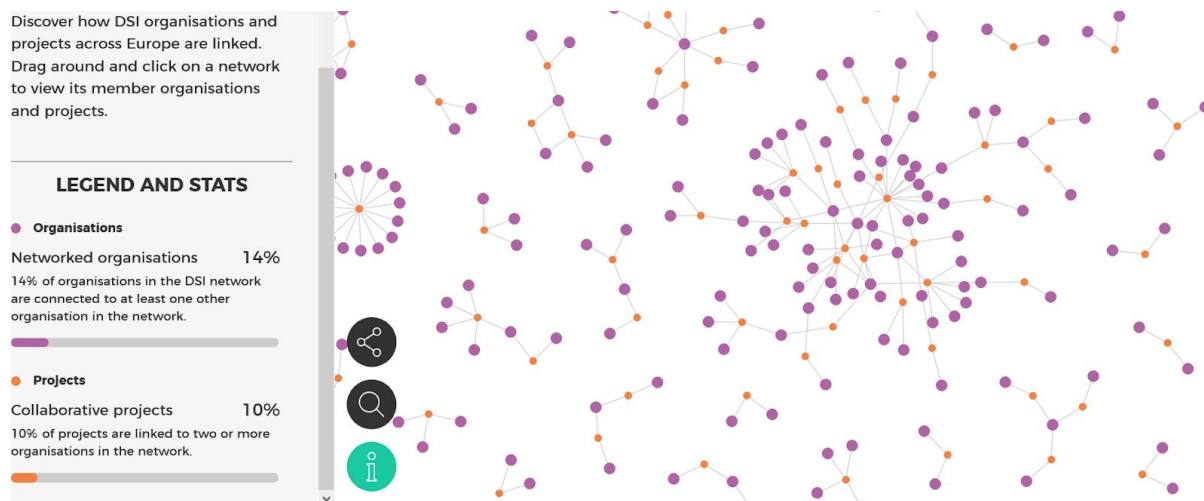
The guide which we are presenting below can be used both by governments' representatives and civic tech organizations - ideally when performing activities together. But it is also a good starting point for all reformers and innovators from both sides to establish a trustworthy and effective collaboration for public good.

Collaboration as an immanent factor of the modern democracy.

For years, collaboration in democratic system was restricted to the process of electing representatives, sharing income by paying taxes later spent on providing services and goods to citizens and, only in some cases, was also visible in the process of public consultations and informing on their results. This left many citizens with the feeling of being detached from decision making processes and being governed by autocrats who were blind for people's needs and expectation. At the same time we have witnessed the number of "digital revolutions" for example during Arab spring or partially in Occupy Wall Street and Yellow Vests protests. Technology has proven that it is an effective tool of protest, but we also believe that it is, first of all, a great mean to support the improvement of democracy and reconnection of divided communities.

The development of digital technologies enables, apart from better forms of communication between authorities and citizens, the actual cooperation between civic groups, governments and the business sector to increase a positive impact on the common good. For the need of the report by "civic groups" we mean formal or informal Civil Society Organizations which use technology in conducting their activities to increase the efficiency and transparency of governments, empower and include citizens into decision making process or solve other emerging problem in the field of democracy. We refer to them also terms like "civic tech" or "digital democracy" communities.

Processes of collaboration are in most cases transparent. They are generally available for external evaluation but that they are rarely visible only by gathering qualitative data. The mapping performed for DSI4EU shows that there are at least 10% of collaborative projects within the digital democracy social innovations community, but models of collaboration are not only limited to working with other organizations from the DSI crowd (see graph below). In this document we will discuss examples of different forms of collaboration within the Digital Democracy area.

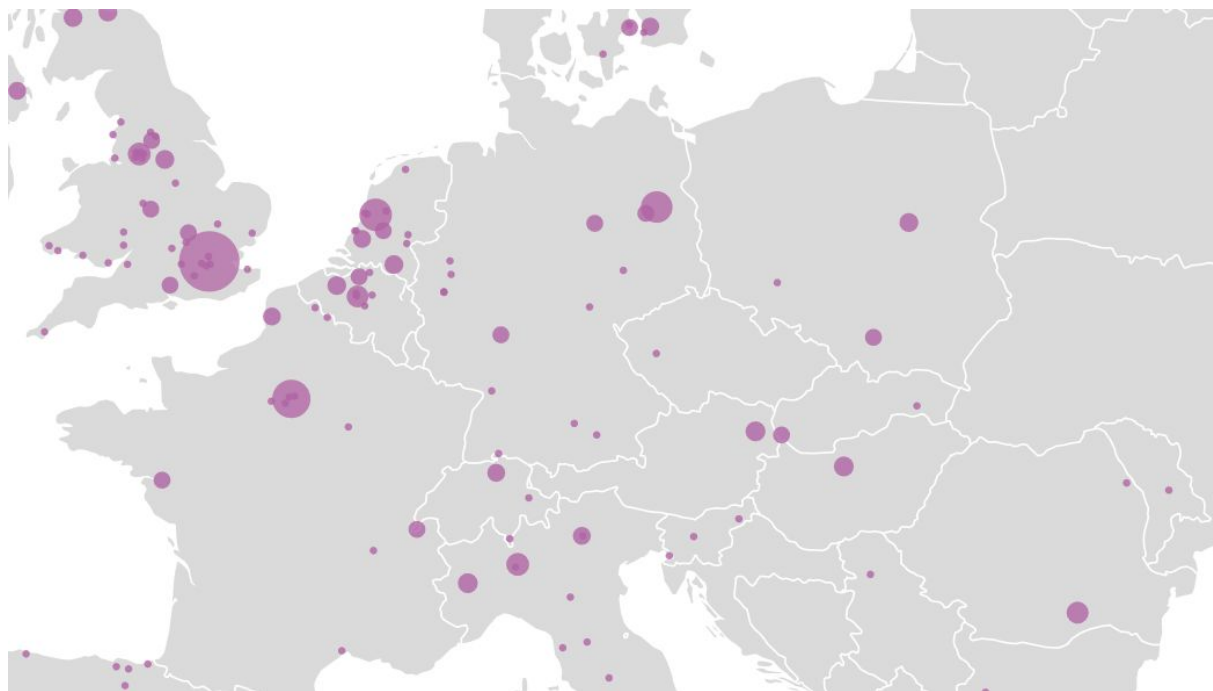


The Hard Task of Identifying Examples of Collaboration

As stated above, it is an uneasy task to identify and categorize all existing models of collaboration between digital social innovators and governments. What we were able to find through analysing examples placed in the Digital Democracy Cluster is that activities aim at making a positive impact on democracy and society can take **direct** or **indirect** form. Direct influence, or direct collaboration assumes that there is a concrete and open cooperation between governments and civil society actors. Indirect collaboration involves initiatives when civic organizations are cooperating with each other to increase their impact on authorities, and, what is even more important, on the public good. The latter form is often a response to less responsive governments where the positive change can only be introduced via activities of civic tech groups bringing citizens alternative ways to control public institutions and participate in public life.

Unfortunately, these groups are heavily dependent on external funds and enthusiasm of their initiators. Lack of direct government engagement is disappointing for many citizens and these initiatives very often are losing popularity. In any case – in most of the researched projects and activities – to achieve a positive change a ‘collaboration model’ is a must. From the experiences gathered in DSI4EU’s Digital Democracy cluster, we see that the most successful initiatives are those performed in collaboration with governments as well as with other civic tech groups.

In this report, we will review those types of (democratic) collaboration between CSOs, governments and other stakeholders. We will analyse who initiated collaboration and what kind of influence it may have on the success of initiatives. For example Latvian [ManaBalls.lv](#) or Ukrainian [ProZorro](#) projects started as non-governmental concepts of improving public participation and transparency and soon became tools which are used by and with the support of governments themselves. On the other hand, the participatory platform Consul was created by the municipality of Madrid and has been lately “transferred” to [Consul Democracy Foundation](#) established by NGOs’ active in the field of participatory democracy.



During our work in the DSI4EU project, not only we mapped various examples of collaborations and described some of them in the form of case studies published on the DSI website and the [report released in October 2018](#), but we were also able to discuss them in details with different stakeholders including governments representatives and the Code for All Network activists during [Heroes of Tech Conference in Bucharest in October 2018](#), [TicTec in March 2019](#) and [Personal Democracy Forum CEE in April 2019](#). We also have experiences on models of collaboration between different CSOs coming from our activity in [TransparenCEE](#) and [Code for All](#) Networks. One of the outcomes of above mentioned discussions

between governments and civic tech was a blog post on [Models of Collaboration](#) describing key challenges in this area.

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DIGITAL DEMOCRACY

If you're working on a digital democracy project or know about one being developed in EU - let us know!

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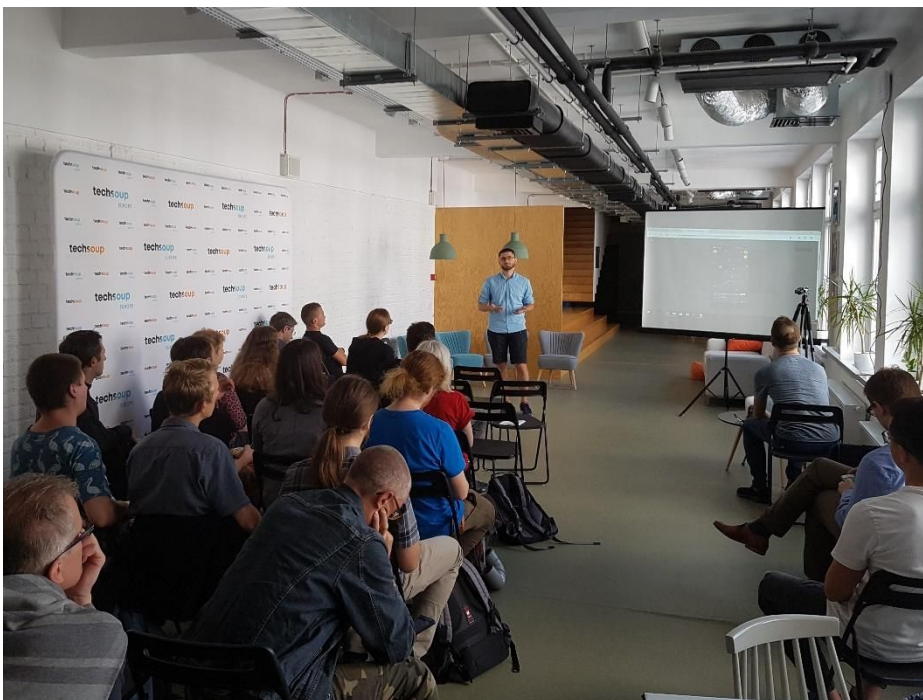
Collaboration as a Process.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines collaboration as *the act of working together with other people or organizations to create or achieve something*. Initiatives in the civic tech or digital democracy communities engage in collaborations to work together to create a tool or a wider solution, aimed at achieving a more inclusive democracy, broader public participation or the increase of transparency of public life.

Although the specific collaboration may be dedicated only to a concrete project or solution, we always see it as a complex process with clearly described roles of

various partners. The collaboration between ePaństwo Foundation, Code for Romania and Responsible Politics Foundation (PL: Fundacja Odpowiedzialna Polityka) was only limited to scale and use [Monitorizare Vot](#) tool during the local elections in Poland in October 2018. But to perform this activity successfully, collaboration had to be synergically implemented on the technical level, combined with expert knowledge on election laws and practice and cooperation with external volunteers conducting actual monitoring in the field. We can compare effective collaboration to a well oiled machine where all cogs have to work in synergy.

[According to G. Bell representing UK based IT company Civica, which often collaborates with local governments](#) “Many [public sector teams] are still playing catch-up due to capacity shortages and a general lack of digital skills and training,” (...) “The other issue is the approach to transformation projects. Digital disruption isn’t a single project, **it should be viewed as an ever-evolving strategic journey that all parties should collaborate on;** however, too often this is not the case as organizations get bogged down with business-as-usual operations and so innovation stalls.”



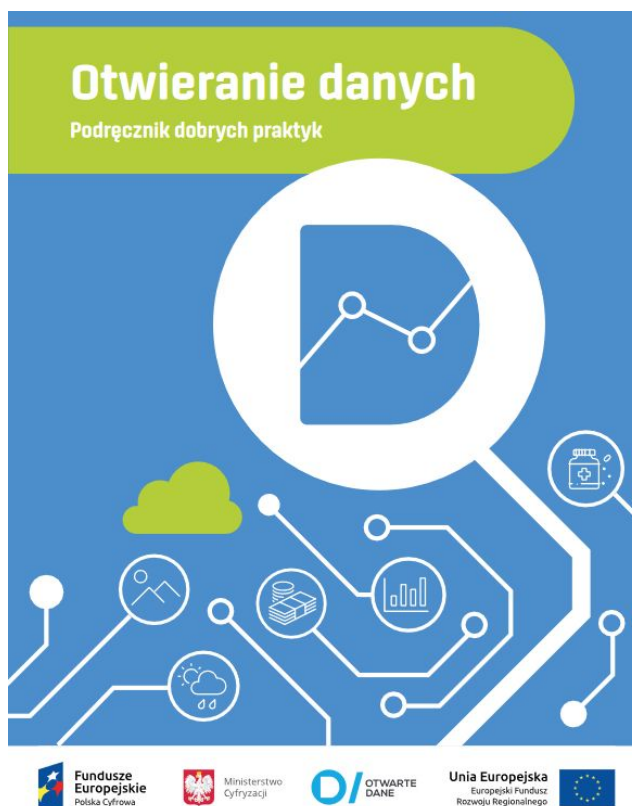
In fact, we can observe that collaboration can take different forms at the time and evolves from stage to stage. Several years ago we witnessed a huge movement around building open data policies and implementing data standards which resulted in working on specific services that could be only effective when involves clean data, like monitoring corruption risks in public procurement, providing information on government expenses or making fiscal data more understandable for wider public. This was, among others, the case of open data activists collaborating with the French state agency Etalab which facilitates [hackathons around using open data to build and to improve public services](#). Thanks to this, civic activists have built models of open legislation or open budget standards. Now we can witness a rising movement around building connections between governments and citizens as shown also in France in the recent process of public consultations - [Grand Debat](#).

Who is Collaborating?

The simplest answer is that everyone involved in the particular project. This is not only limited to those directly working on the innovation but also those who are the main target, so citizens or governmental representatives. Some donors “enforce” the cooperation by setting the obligation to build consortia. This is primarily visible in European Union funded projects like Horizon 2020, Citizens for Democracy or Internal Security Fund but we can identify some private donors including Civitates or Luminate (Omidyar Network) who encourage cooperation between various organizations and institutions. For example, [Digital Whistleblower](#) which is Horizon 2020 funded project on public procurement involves representatives of NGOs, academia and research institutes. [RECORD](#) project financed from EU Internal Security Fund, apart from the strong NGO representation consist of networks of journalists which will be trained in working with public procurement data to deliver investigative stories on irregularities in the field. [Red Flags](#) - another project on public procurement run by K-Monitor and Hungarian Helsinki Committee would not be successful if not for collaborating with private IT company which has capacity to develop complex procurement monitoring tool.

Participation platforms as [Consul](#) and [Decidim](#) are an example of direct cooperation with local governments which invites selected organizations and institutions to work on the usage and development of tools. Services like [Frag den Staat](#) or [Ask the EU](#) are “forcing” governments to cooperate with CSOs’ and citizens to deliver answers for Freedom of Information requests.

As we can see from experiences of organizations working in the field of Digital Democracy the biggest challenge while working with the government is to find the right person within its structure. In mature models with already existing open data policies, the collaboration often starts with engaging an actual decision maker and a person responsible for the process of opening data. These people have already experience in collaboration with various stakeholders, as one of the golden rule of [successful open data policy](#) is to “foster external support within industry, civil society and academia to drive continued demand for open data. External support can help to maintain political will to support open data, and be a source of ongoing learning and dialogue”.



What we have learnt during peer learning events is that finding right people to collaborate with is always crucial and should be performed from the very beginning.

Therefore, it is worth to create an opportunity to get to know the environment and look for allies of the project. Start with partners or people you know who are doing similar work or share common interest. Try to remind yourself about people you have met during conferences or you came across their activities. Involve various groups as business or scientists who are already performing similar activities but from the different angle. It is worth being present at events and meetings in order to see who might be interested in collaboration and what are emerging topics.

According to the public officials using the experience of external partners can be a source of knowledge and inspiration. Also Inviting people who are outside office structures to coordinate projects improves office performance, as these people often have more courage to propose solutions that are untypical for the office, because, for example, they are not limited by the hierarchy of official dependencies, and thus have the potential to destroy official silos.



Origins of Collaboration. Why we choose to collaborate?

According to the [recent study of civic tech researcher J Carbonnell](#) the most representative fears among civic tech activists come from disinterest of the public, the government or the partners (**27%**). We understand this as an important reason in shifting from individual to more collaborative approach in conducting activities in the digital democracy field.



Depending on the purpose or the stage of collaboration we can see also other motivations standing behind stakeholders decisions to join forces. They can refer to:

- **Finances**, where replicating a tool or dividing costs of activity make it easier to fund the initiative.
- **Organizational aspects**, which are often connected with the financial motivation but emphasize the lack of sufficient capacity or even impossibility to perform certain activities alone. For example, it often occurs in the various “smart city” projects, where technological partners works with sociologists, public officials and local activists as in [innovative urban planning in UK](#).

- **Sustainability** as [it's crucial to map your stakeholders and directly involve them on various stages of work. This creates a sense of ownership and helps to creatively and accurately develop different aspects of your project.](#) This was one of the biggest motivations for TransparenCEE Network, which is a civic tech consortium of ePaństwo Foundation, Techsoup Europe, Action SEE, K-Monitor and Civic Network OPORA. Even without dedicated funds members of the consortium feel the sense of ownership and include the network aims and project into their day to day activities.
- **Quality of the project** as there is a need to connect different actors with different abilities and potentials. This is especially important when complex projects need complex solutions and the involvement of users. The latter is extremely important as lack of collaboration with potential users is often the main reason of the project failure. According to A. Ostling [study of civic tech failures](#) in Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans and Russia “organizations are struggling with involving users into the design and implementation of products, and of maintaining a fruitful relationship with public officials, who are often the key data providers or the target of the project. Surveys show that only a minority of civic tech organizations do any user research before choosing a tech tool and even fewer test the tools with potential users.” We can see the growing trend of including users into civic tech activities (i.e crowdsourcing) for example in [luftdaten](#).info project which involves coders, environmental activists, policy makers and public officials and city activists. This may be also connected with the fact that growing interest in DIY solutions is connected with less trust in data produced by companies or public entities.
- **Impact of activities.** It is obvious that every digital social innovator creates tools and solutions with the belief that will achieve desired influence on public policy but not everyone built collaboration with stakeholders based mostly on the motivation of increasing the impact. This type of motivation is first of all visible in the direct collaboration with governments, as they are likely to be the most effective transmission belt of improving public services. For this reason organizations aiming at creating systemic

solutions reach out and cooperate with governments. This is, for example the case of [Open Contracting Partnership](#) which works in the area of open public procurement and which built its collaboration around governments (central and local) as well as intergovernmental organizations like World Trade Organization or European Bank of Reconstruction and Development.

The above mentioned motivations are only examples and can appear separately or – in most of the cases – jointly. The motivation is connected with the chosen strategy, as well as it is dependent on the aim of the particular project. Being aware of the motivation for collaboration allows for its better preparation including reasonable sharing of responsibilities and expectations from each other. In any case collaborations have to be constructed on the mutual understanding and consciousness that good collaboration hurts as it may involve compromises, adapting to the needs of the partner or changing the habits.

Collaboration as the Tool for Mutual Understanding.

Digital Social Innovations are trying to address complex challenges which have to involve different stakeholders. The ideal collaboration includes civic tech and governments representatives, users (citizens) and amplifiers like journalists or influencers. But the collaboration journey starts from the very beginning of designing the tool or service – with first discussion between civic activists and coders. During some peer learning events organized under Digital Democracy Cluster we have noted that people are willing to collaborate but are very often afraid to do so “because of the lack of technological skills” or “problems with finding common language with coders”.



Iva Nedanic noted in the study [When civic meets tech: How do they get along with each other?](#) that “there is a lack of understanding between civic activists and coders. It is sometimes hard to understand what are the potential areas of cooperation, and even when they find a common ground a misunderstanding occurs during the implementation. On the civic side there is a lack of understanding of the technology and its application, while the coders are often not aware of the scope and complexities of social and political issues.” This is still one of the most important aim of the TransparenCEE and Code for All networks to connect civic and tech activists and to facilitate their cooperation. That includes challenges but also opportunities connected with the fact, that very often the collaboration within civic tech community is international. According to S. Lederer from K-Monitor when he commented the [Working Group model of the TransparenCEE Network](#), “local problems can be solved more easily, if activists are not afraid to ask for help from those who already dealt with the same challenges somewhere else.”

In the context of the need of convincing authorities to introduce changes, Nedanic makes us aware that “many people working for the state or in the public sector understand even less how technology works, what is needed to make it work, what issues it can solve, and how to address it. (...) To make open government really open requires not only a political will but also capacity building of administration and officials who are directly involved in the exchange and cooperation with civil sector”. For this reason we still see the significant importance of conducting trainings for public officials, involving them in hackathons and convincing them to built diverse teams consisting of IT specialist and other public officials working on specific topic within the institution, as recommended by most of [open data policies](#). Building the mutual understanding

between various actors is also visible in building the community around participatory platform. The creators of [Decidim platform](#) invites citizens, developers, researchers and institutions to work together on different aspects of the solutions underlining that this kind of innovations cannot rely only on selected categories of stakeholders. We have also witnessed the growing interest in involving UX designers as their engagement tools are shaped around the needs of users. Involving UX designers is also underlining “civic” in civic tech by helping to understand the target group and when the tool is designed to support government-citizens relations provides public officials with better orientation on citizens needs.

Models of Collaboration

While working on this paper, we have identified following models:

- **Fellowships/internships.** These are periodical collaborations between IT/civic tech activist and government on tools/user experience analysis/process of opening data/creating public services. See examples from [Code for America Fellowship Program](#) or experiences from [Code for All Fellowship Program](#).

Recommendation:

You should put attention to:

- The willingness of the fellow and their supervisor, as this model of collaboration needs to be driven by enthusiasm and openness towards innovation.
- Sustainability of the project, as fellowships end after a fixed period of time (often only a few months), and government officials should be prepared and trained to carry on with the work.
- Preparing the work for a fellow, as a fellowship starts long before the day of its official launch. If the government is committed to run a fellowship, it should invest in informing fellows on possibilities, priorities and challenges beforehand.

- **Providing services to governments** (in different legal forms including public procurement) which it's about using regular procurement channels for civic tech projects. [Some articles](#) show that for procuring IT projects governments need flexible procuring rules as “complex requirements cannot be fully identified at the beginning, so instead focus on continuous collaboration with suppliers to solve problems.” See also example from [UK \(p.15\)](#)

Recommendation:

Be aware that very often when governments want to purchase product they are not looking for the “increase of democracy”. Therefore, you have to behave more as business entity. There is also an existing challenge in combining the role of advocate or watchdog with providing services.

- **Hackathon**, as [defined by J. Tauberer](#) is any event of any duration where people come together to solve problems. According to opinions gathered in the course of our peer learning meetings, hackathons very often do not generate sustainable solutions for different reasons including the lack of capacity on the side of the government to absorb the solutions.

Recommendation:

It is important to have a plan beforehand for how to engage government officials after the hackathon. They should bring real problems and challenges letting attendees to “come up” with the solution. It is also important to evaluate the impact of the hackathon by asking public officials what they got out of it. It is crucial to do monitoring and evaluation of hackathons. Think also about organizing [Design Sprints](#) which concentrate less on the technical side of the project.

Hackathons shouldn't be just about developers, must have multi-disciplinary people

You cannot make user design without users present.

- **Scaling/Replicating**

This is a model of collaboration which engages civic tech organizations who decided to replicate a tool to another environment. It is not only “copying” of the tool but also requires adapting it to different legal, political or social circumstances. See lessons learnt from scaling Monitorizare Vot from Romania to Poland ([experiences from conducting the project in Poland](#) and [technical aspects](#))

Recommendation:

Check your capacity. Both in terms of IT specialists and other experts engaged and the timeframe. Scaling can take some time and you may find surprising obstacles on the way. While scaling, communicate with the team who originally built a tool and treat the collaboration also as a mean to improve the product.

- **Trainings** serve as the mean to increase competencies of public officials, build relations with them and create mutual understanding by being “on the same page”.

Recommendation:

Preferably start with the people who are excited to learn. This is a great opportunity to help “reformers” within the government by creating opportunity to acknowledge their work, for example by inviting them to co-host the training. It is also an occasion to learn about practical challenges faced by public officials for example while opening data.

- **Improving open data policies.** Open data is yet another tool to support public officials. By helping them in elaborating successful policies you are narrowing the internal obstacles and supporting public officials in their day to day work. As the result, the institution performs better with the benefit for all citizens.

Recommendation:

While building open data policies search what citizens ask about using FOI requests. This is an important indicator of what information is worth sharing in a more user-friendly way. You can also analyze other channels

used by citizens to ask for data, information or services. Based on the above analysis, select some of the most important data bases on which you will focus first. This can be a win-win situation. Public officials will have less work with responding FOI requests and citizens will have an access to timely and updated information.

- **Labs** are central or local government innovation centers which are partnership spaces where government and other organizations experiment with new ways of solving old problems. They have a different kind of membership to the rest of government. They bring public servants together with wider teams of designers, researchers and developers, just as research about innovation suggests they should. [See more in UNDP report](#)

Recommendation:

Labs are great place when you are looking for engaging with public officials and meet various stakeholders. Having a direct cooperation with public officials can increase the impact as seen for example in [Dublin](#). On the other hand its success is dependent on political decision and even once successful Labs can be closed, as shown in the case of [MindLab from Denmark](#).

Other spaces/meetups/hacknights/conferences - let them all meet!

Knowledge is the key to collaboration. People need to know you and your project. There are more and more examples of successful collaborations that started accidentally after the presentation or “backstage” networking.

Let's Dig into Details. Case Studies on Models of Collaboration.

While working on this guide and analyzing selected projects we have focused on several areas:

- What is the aim of the project?
- How are they funded?

- Who initiated collaboration?
- What is a model of collaboration?
- What are the lessons learnt and what are the biggest challenges?
- What should be done to improve similar innovations?

□ **Consul** - Consul is an open-source tool that empowers and enables all types of participatory processes undertaken by institutions around the world, including citizens' proposals, debates, participatory budgeting, collaborative legislation, interviews, surveys and voting. Consul was created by the municipality of Madrid but with its development the financial model has changed. It is funded by cities and institutions implementing the tool for their needs. Sometimes it is being done by internal providers, very often with the support of external parties.

In Poland, Consul is an example of **paid services** provided by **external actors** to boost the social innovation within governments. ePaństwo Foundation is implementing Consul in several public entities in Poland. This is done in collaboration with public participation experts, IT specialists and public officials. The biggest challenge was connected with convincing the latter to invest in analyzing users needs before actual implementation of the tool. Officials initially thought that if the tool works in other places it is easy to replicate it without assessing the needs. When the assessment was prepared, public officials saw that people expects more then they have planned and got motivation for expanding its features.

Lesson learnt: When working on the tool which supports public participation you have to include end users. Otherwise the tool may not be used as it does not meet citizens expectations.

□ luftdaten.info is a community-driven project for collaboratively monitoring air quality and crowdsourcing open data through a large number of low-cost DIY stations. This is an example of the **synergic net of cooperation** between groups of IT specialists, open hardware

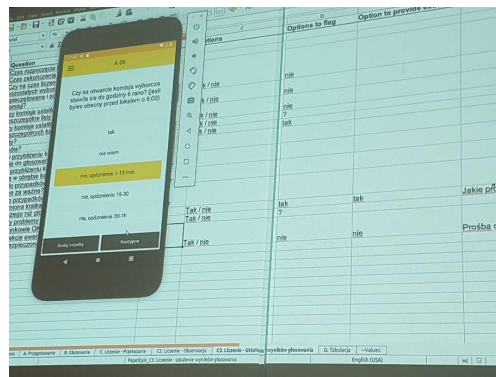
activists, ecological movement representatives, citizens and municipalities. Luftdaten.info initiated by OK Lab has become a global tool with dispersed but clear responsibility among project partners. The project started as a local initiative in Stuttgart, Germany, where citizens wanted to gather air pollution data for their friends and family. Later it was followed by successful crowdfunding campaign which supported tool development. The project was later joined by activists from other countries e.g. Bulgaria (airbg.info) covering most of European states and beyond (74 countries). It got attention from representatives of academia which increased project credibility and municipalities which are supporting the development of the network by including sensors into their antismog policy.

Lesson learnt: You have to bring people with different perspectives working together. Thanks to involving business you may look for monetization model to support the network extension but also rely on enthusiastic volunteers who are using sensor and are providing direct IT support based on their own user experience. This is possible to build the code on the idea of open source letting non digital organisations know that there are open source tools that can improve their policy work.

- **Monitorizare vot** is an app which supports persons monitoring election processes in gathering data from observations performed in electoral commissions. This is an example of **transborder initiative** with the high priority given to **volunteers/users** and huge **risks connected with the possible impact of the usage** (potential errors of the app, presenting falsified findings) on trust to governments. Errors can for example show that election were conducted in the unlawful way when in fact they were performed in the best manner. This type of collaboration needs the involvement of IT specialists, elections experts and big number of volunteers. As Krzysztof Madejski from ePaństwo Foundation wrote in [blog post](#) on his experiences from scaling an app from Romania to Poland, "Code for Romania provided the app and support, we in ePanstwo were busy

adapting it and supporting data gathering on the election day and most importantly Political Accountability Foundation has provided the 90% civic part of every civic-tech project: expertise, from recruiting and training observers, wrangling data and coming up with expert recommendations, to doing reach out via media and advocacy for change”. As ePaństwo alone we could not have done it having no election observation expertise. Political Accountability Foundation acting alone would have been hampered by data processing issues.” The project was funded from EU-Russia Partnership.

Lesson learnt: While working on scaling the tool be prepared for unexpected issues. Be prepared for them and document potential holes and gather feedback from all partners to present a broad experience. ePaństwo shared their feedback from observers, tech team and coordination committee on [github](#) to improve a tool for future collaborations.



- **Code for All Network** is the international network of civic tech organizations that drive change through digital technology, citizen participation, collaborative decision-making and good governance to deliver solutions for social challenges while improving the relationship between governments and citizens. Code for All is an example of successful informal network of civic tech organizations bringing examples of **peer learning** within the network and challenges in international/global cooperation inc **funding** and **communication**. Because of lack of sustainable funding for the Network (there is only a grant for general network activity inc.

communication, limited fellowships and coordination from National Endowment for Democracy) CfA has decided for more sectoral cooperation between partners, us working on [open legislation](#) or election monitoring tools (Monitorizare Vot).

Lesson learnt: It is hard to maintain an informal network, so a good coordination and communication is a must. The Network is constantly gathering information from its members on their daily activities and needs to receive support from others which helps to maintain the feeling of the collective ownership.

The Future of Collaboration

On our journey through digital democracy landscape we could see that the civic tech movement has made a strong and positive impact on how governments work. Often by forcing their representatives to involve more in debates with citizens and shaping public services to expectations of the modern information society. But first of all this was achieved thanks to a great number of activists and reformers within public offices who saw that wise implementation of technologies into government - citizens relation is the proper response for emerging social challenges. This could not happened without collaboration, engagement of all relevant stakeholders and openness for innovation.

With all this knowledge and opportunity to adopt most relevant models on the wider scale, it is time to implement best practices of collaboration and their effects in horizontal governmental policies. For example, the fellowship or agile procuring models can successfully work in most of public institutions. They should not be only limited to “administrative islands” of innovation but deserve a central attention in the wider context of public administration operation.

Also donors should push for more collaborative approach by encouraging civic tech organizations to replicate and improve existing tools and to concentrate and to focus more people using them rather than on technology. In other words, all

stakeholders should work on making collaboration the rule of the modern democracy, not just an exceptional model of solving current problems.