



DSS LLC

Making Democracies More Democratic!

Executive Summary

Visit our public site at www.e-democracy-now.com



The Problem

Without a doubt, resident participation rates in local policy dialogues are abysmal. For the vast majority of Americans, the extent of their participation in local politics ends at the ballot box. They cross their fingers and hope that their elected leaders have their best interests in mind, effectively guided by some quorum of community input. Unfortunately, local politics does not work this way. In a nationwide survey¹ published in 2014 by the National Research Center, only 19% of local residents contacted their elected representative (in-person, phone, email or web) to express an opinion while 76% never attended a public meeting in the last year. Moreover, the voices of minorities, young voters and low-income individuals continue to be the least represented segments. This lack of inclusivity results primarily from overly-cumbersome municipal processes that favor residents who have more time, resources, knowledge and influence (power) within their communities, allowing them to more effortlessly input into the policy-making machinery than others. Regardless, with such low participation rates, it goes without saying that local politicians ultimately approach policy decisions through the lenses of personal preferences, ideological biases, political party marching orders, special interest influences and the opinions of the loudest activists in their chambers, effectively circumventing the Public Will and its byproduct, the Public Good, which remain unsolicited. This is a serious flaw in our governmental institutions and why local problem sources are frequently ignored ... while resident apathy, frustration and political impotence perpetuate.

The Opportunity

In its 2021 publication², the U.S. Census Bureau reported that most U.S. households had at least one type of computer (95%) and had a broadband internet subscription (90%). Of those devices, Smartphones were the most common computing device in U.S. households (90%), followed by desktop or laptop computers (81%) and tablets (64%). Meanwhile, public libraries, schools and community centers offer free access to these technologies for those lacking it in their homes. This near-universal access to technology among diverse segments of the population creates an opportunity to fundamentally change the way a community interfaces to its municipal institutions and its leaders in ways that can yield greater inclusiveness and equality of voices in the policy-making forum.

¹

<https://www.governing.com/archive/gov-national-survey-shows-citizens-most-vocal-active-in-local-government.html>

² <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2024/computer-internet-use-2021.html>



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The Proposed Solution

With a statistically insignificant fraction of voices ever expressed, let alone tallied, through local government channels, distilling a community consensus on policy issues is impossible without leveraging more sophisticated tools. Enter **ECHO**—a first-generation software platform that provides easy-to-use, purposeful, convenient, inclusive and cost-free avenues for residents of a broad and diverse make-up to participate in the choices made for their local community via proprietary, consensus-modeling tools and direct voting mechanisms. Such avenues are only made possible through the leveraging of state-of-the-art technologies which, as of today, are utilized and advanced in nearly every sector of modern society except in our democratic systems. ECHO is about to change all that.

The Value Proposition

Greater inclusivity of resident voices allows local communities to steer toward policy choices that better reflect the composition of the community itself and to address its unique set of needs rather than simply those of a small core who have disproportionately and exclusively participated in the policy-making processes of the past and present. ECHO's core value is as a highly-visible **influencing tool** for the residents of a community, allowing them not only to participate in, and even steer, the policy formation dialogue, but also to transmit, in the most visible way possible, their Public Will to their elected leadership as a critical consideration in overall policy strategy.

The Target Users

An ECHO jurisdiction, or district, supports four target user types: (1) registered CA voter residents, (2) stakeholders (unregistered CA voter residents; non-resident local business owners and employees, educators, government employees, etc.), (3) visitors and (4) an elected representative. Each user type has a set of roles described on the public website.

The Business Model

While ECHO will be offered at no cost to user communities (jurisdictions), its user reach will remain limited. That limited reach can be unlocked when municipalities and their residents recognize the value proposition of the software and decide to activate it for broader community use via a per user subscriber model funded through city budgets. Furthermore, a Software Developer Kit (SDK) will be offered in the future so municipal partner IT departments can capture and customize the ECHO data, whose access is currently restricted to the ECHO software environment only. Such a toolkit would be offered through a Developer Agreement license with DSS LLC. Additional consulting services will also be made available.

About Democratic Software Solutions, LLC (DSS)

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