

Online Consultation and Public Policy Making

This paper proposes creating an International Working Group (IWG on Online Consultation and Public Policy Making). The overarching questions motivating its research will be (a) how to evaluate the policy and other social impacts of online citizen consultation initiatives aimed at influencing actual government decision making, and (b) how the optimal design of such initiatives is affected by cultural, social, legal and institutional context.

In addition to its report, the group's most ambitious aim will be to produce a book on identifying and measuring successful e-consultations, and describing how the approach to process design and evaluation should be tailored to the legal, political and cultural contexts within which online consultation is occurring. Research reports that will form the basis of the book's chapters are expected to emanate from four sub-groups that will consider, respectively, the impact of online consultation on government agencies and policy makers, the impacts of online consultations on public participants and civil society organizations, the relationship between the design of consultation and the kinds of impacts identified, and the ways in which legal, political and institutional context shape prospects for success.

The inquiry will be multidisciplinary and comparative. Team members will be based in Australia, England, France, Israel, Italy, Slovenia, and the United States, but various team members are conducting research or participating in significant relevant professional networks in Canada, China, the European Union, Hungary, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Libya, and Morocco, as well. Our work would be conducted through five face-to-face meetings, along with the support of online meetings, both asynchronously and in real time, and a web presence we would create to support our (and other's) research on e-consultation.

In addition, one of our face-to-face meetings would be a spring, 2008 conference at Ohio State University, at which members of the working group will present papers based on their individual research projects. Ohio State would fund the international participants' travel and expenses, and papers would be published in a special issue of *I/S: A Journal of Law and Policy for the Information Society*.