

Researchers studying 10,000 Solutions participatory online platform

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What are the conditions that increase and sustain collective action?

Arizona State University researchers are working to answer this question through a National Science Foundation RAPID research grant that will study participation in 10,000 Solutions, a [problem solving](#) participatory Web site initiated by ASU that addresses local and global challenges.

10,000 Solutions is a newly launched project that releases the power of collaborative imagination to create solutions to issues. The project seeks input from the ASU community and the public for solutions to the world's greatest challenges on topics ranging from education to technology and from health to human rights.

Participatory challenge Web sites where citizens contribute to problem solving are an increasingly popular tool that governmental organizations are utilizing.

"Challenge Web sites are a new approach to utilize information from the public. We anticipate learning about this new medium's effectiveness and potential during this study," said ASU President Michael M. Crow.

Researchers are in the advantageous position of being able to study the ASU community, unique as a student body in both diversity and size. Part of the research will use current governance studies to guide the design of the 10,000 Solutions Web site.

"This is the first large-scale study of the online participatory platform's effectiveness that we're aware of," said Erik Johnston, one of the [principal investigators](#) for the study and an assistant professor in ASU's School of Public Affairs in the College of Public Programs. "Challenge online sites will be part of the next wave of governance, but to realize their potential, systematic research is necessary."

Rounding out the research team are: Marty Anderies, associate professor in the ASU School of Human Evolution and Social Change in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Marco Janssen, associate professor in the ASU School of [Human Evolution](#) and Social Change; Spiro Maroulis, assistant professor in the ASU School of Public Affairs in the College of Public Programs; and Hari Sundaram, associate professor in the ASU School of Arts Media and Engineering in the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering.

The National Science Foundation grant for \$200,000 during the first year will support three stages of the program. During the first stage, researchers will map how participation spreads as the community proposes solutions to the world's challenges. Real-time feedback will be tested to find out how being aware of one's place within a community influences network dynamics such as who is communicated with, collaborated with and the degree to which people participate.

"We're interested in finding out what happens when we provide information about the networks they are in and how this encourages increased participation," Johnston said.

The second stage will examine different voting mechanisms and how those change community dynamics, perceptions of accountability and legitimacy and how ongoing participation is encouraged.

"We're hoping that when people know their ideas are earning the

attention of the community, they feel like they are part of a collaborative community, invest time in developing their ideas, and therefore are less likely to drop out," Johnston said.

During the third phase of the research, participant teams interested in similar solutions will be combined to develop improved solutions and figure out how to implement their vision.

"That's where the rubber hits the road. We want problem solving," Johnston said.

Researchers will also study how the quality of solutions generated varies depending on how teams are formed, the structure of the teams and diversity of participants within teams. Since this aims to be a multi-year project, researchers can also study how participant's behavior and attitudes change over time and how next year's class learns from this year's experience. The research team will utilize the Elinor Ostrom Multi-Method Lab in the ASU Center for the Study of Institutional Diversity to study specific aspects about teams working together.

Research could provide valuable feedback on the viability of participatory online sites in government and other organizations.

"We need to rethink and rebuild the relationship between individuals and their government at every level. In the last 20 to 30 years, people have largely thought of government as a distant organization that will take care of issues. Anyone following the news can see that model is not sustainable," Johnston said.

Provided by Arizona State University

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