ASPEN TECH POLICY HUB

PROJECT

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THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

DemDoc:
Democratically Editable Policy Docs

A tool to help large groups democratically co-author policy documents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Policy is most representative and effective when it has buy-in from the people. People buy in when they have their voices heard in the crafting of policy. However, based on the tools available, the actual crafting – the authorship– of policy documents has rarely been an exercise for more than one or two authors.

DemDoc is an online collaborative document creation tool, like Google Docs, but with votes of co-authors being the deciding factor as to whether each author's edits are accepted or rejected. By allowing users to comment and vote on each suggested change, DemDoc embeds democratic values into creating policies. With each sentence crafted through a democratic process, organizations interested in equitable representation will better reflect the ideas of many.

THE PROBLEM

Representative organizations (governments, cooperatives, associations, movements) require buy-in from their members in order to uphold the ruling mandate of their people. However, because it is difficult using existing tools to develop collaborative, democratic documents, most policy documents have only a small number of authors. Currently, there are no effective tools to collectively craft documents that give authors democratic editing control. While other tools such as Google Docs are widely used, members can only either suggest or overwrite others' suggestions, not vote on alternatives or comment on others' suggestions.

> *DemDoc is a tool enabling democratic co-authorship of policy documents: by allowing users to explain and vote on suggested changes, it embeds democratic values into policymaking.*

THE SOLUTION

DemDoc is a democratic authorship tool that enables vote-based collaborative doc editing. Members of an organization are able to view alternatives, propose a new alternative, and collectively decide on the preferred option through open democratic voting. Additionally, DemDoc encourages open discussion, another key tenet of collective action and democratic participation, by allowing for participants to explain and comment on individual alternatives. By embedding key democratic values into the practices of collaborative document writing, DemDoc allows organizations and collaborative groups to meaningfully put values of equality and participatory action into practice.