



Tech Policy Primer

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Smart Reporting Channel for FTC Informants

A Guided Privacy-Preserving Tool for Reporting Antitrust Violations

BACKGROUND

As part of their 10-week policy training, the scholars of the Tech Policy Primer program spent 6 weeks working on public sector challenges. In teams of 4-5, the leaders either proposed their own projects or worked with a real-world government client on a public sector problem. Below is an overview of one team's project to help the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) augment its investigations capacity.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) should deploy a smart and secure reporting channel that improves the collection of reports from informants regarding anticompetitive corporate behavior. Our proposed user interface would identify the category of violation, educate the informant, and expedite report processing and authentication. The underlying code, particularly the communication channel between FTC staff and informants, should be made open source and publicly auditable to minimize fears of deanonymization or retaliation from employers or industry.

To learn more about
this project, please visit
aspenpolicyhub.org.





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PROBLEM BACKGROUND

Currently, the FTC processes all informant submissions by [email](#). This approach has several flaws:

1. **Inefficiency.** Without structured form fields, case teams cannot perform basic queries to organize and route inbound reports.
2. **Insufficient user support.** The process for submitting complaints lacks assurances, complex jargon, violation-specific guidance, and contextual information.
3. **Privacy risks.** An informant's identity could be exposed through unencrypted email correspondence with FTC teams.
4. **Inhibited use.** A [study](#) found that specialized reporting channels are more likely to receive relevant reports than simpler ones.

For these reasons, the FTC should modernize its informant tools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The FTC should develop a smart reporting channel with open source software to modernize its informant tools. A [smart workflow](#) component would improve the way submissions are categorized, helping both informants and FTC case teams. The underlying open source code would further guarantee the privacy and security of submissions and any subsequent communication.

By developing a dedicated system for submissions, the FTC would better be able to educate informants on both antitrust violations and their rights; help informants gather stronger evidence for their claims; save FTC case teams significant time spent on filtering, segmenting, and evaluating reports while reducing the number of inadmissible submissions; and enable automated routing of reports to reviewers with specific domain expertise. This approach is also in line with the legislative direction of the FTC, including the [FTC Whistleblower Act of 2021](#).

For more information about this proposal, please see: (1) a [policy memo](#) explaining the reporting channel proposal; (2) a [sample workflow](#) for reporting an FTC antitrust violation; and (3) a [video demo](#) of the working prototype.

ABOUT THE TECH POLICY PRIMER

This project was completed as part of the Aspen Tech Policy Hub's Tech Policy Primer program, a 10-week, part-time program that trains science and technology experts on the policy process. Learn more at aspentechpolicyhub.org/primer.

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