

IMPACT CASE STUDY

Civic Engagement Abroad: A Case Study

[The Aspen Institute's Policy Academy](#) turns professionals into policy advocates. We offer innovative training programs to equip leaders across sectors – from tech to climate, science to social impact – with the practical policy skills to craft solutions for society's most pressing challenges. Based in the Bay Area, the Policy Academy is the first comprehensive nonpartisan and non-university training program in the United States offering a step-by-step process to learn practical strategies for policymaking. The Academy's predecessor, the Aspen Tech Policy Hub, has helped more than 500 alumni and staff gain government experience and seek policy impact.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aspen Policy Academy fellow Hilary Braseth credits her Aspen Tech Policy Hub experience with helping her impact policy through a Hub project and making a major career shift as a result. Beginning at the Hub, Hilary spearheaded a project aimed at improving the voting process for US citizens living abroad, who often face challenges with accessing and mailing in their ballots. By using an online wizard to help overseas voters navigate their state laws and leverage technology to more clearly communicate about how to vote, Hilary helped state election officials better inform overseas voters about the absentee voting process. After her fellowship, Hilary transitioned into the public sector, continuing her work helping voters as the Executive Director of OpenSecrets, an organization seeking greater transparency about elections funding.

BACKGROUND

Despite [federal legislation designed to support overseas voting](#), in the 2020 general election [only 7% of overseas voters voted](#) – a rate that was nearly [10 times lower than the domestic population](#). Hilary had personally experienced the difficulties of voting abroad during her time in the Peace Corps, when she was stationed in West Africa and didn't have access to a postal service to mail in her absentee ballot. Drawing on her

private-sector background in election technology and her direct work with overseas voters, she recognized the need for innovation in the absentee voting process.

As Hilary more thoroughly researched the issue and spoke with stakeholders during her Hub fellowship, she began to understand the challenges presented by overseas voting. Not least, overseas voters have to adhere to the election laws of their home state. Hilary decided to create actionable steps that state elections officials and the Federal Voting Assistance Project (FVAP) could take to safely integrate technology and help overseas voters participate in the election process.

IMPACT

As part of her fellowship final project, Hilary designed an online wizard to facilitate overseas voting and created a playbook that lawmakers and the FVAP could use to more clearly communicate with overseas voters. Hilary presented her findings to state officials and received positive feedback and gratitude for the insights shared. The FVAP adopted one of Hilary’s recommendations; it now offers an online assistant to help overseas voters access and submit their ballots. Hilary is excited to see whether these improvements helped to boost the overseas voter turnout in the 2024 general election. To learn more, [see the Voting from Abroad project here](#).

Motivated by the fellowship, Hilary completed a public policy graduate program and moved to DC, where she now [runs a nonprofit](#) that tracks the flow of money into US politics and its effect on elections and public policy. Hilary credits the fellowship program with helping her make this career move. She commented “The Fellowship made me a lot more structured and clear about how to be strategic and focused in pursuing policy change.”

“The Fellowship was clearly life-changing for me and I don’t think you can say that about many fellowship programs.”

Hilary Braseth