

Helping Older Adults Report Cybersecurity Scams

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aspen Tech Policy Hub fellows, led by Ginny Fahs, teamed up with the Cybercrime Support Network (CSN) to help create a single, easy-to-use system to report online fraud and cybercrime directly to appropriate law enforcement agencies. By making it easier for older adults to report when they have been scammed, law enforcement officials will be better able to perform investigations into past crimes, see patterns of fraud, and take precautions as a result.

BACKGROUND

Every year, it is estimated that [one-third of American adults are victims of cybercrime or online fraud](#). Older Americans are disproportionately affected — [cybercrime against US seniors cost victims \\$1.2 billion in 2023 alone](#). After a family member of a fellow experienced a scam, Aspen Tech Policy Hub fellows [Ginny Fahs](#), [Steven Buccini](#), [Anil Dewan](#) and [Ora Tanner](#) decided to investigate how to protect older adults from being scammed online.

In researching this critical issue, including through workshops with older adults, the Hub fellows found that existing government reporting systems are too complex for elders, their families, and even professionals focused on elder services and elder fraud prevention. The team thus decided to develop recommendations to simplify the fraud reporting process.

“I’m proud that our project helped improve federal scam reporting tools, making it easier for older adults to report crimes and enabling law enforcement to take action faster.”

Ginny Fahs

IMPACT

The fellows [published recommendations](#) that federal agencies centralize and redesign reporting systems. They also built and tested a [working prototype](#) of a new reporting form. The Hub fellows then shared the materials they developed with relevant nonprofits and government agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), even letting the stakeholders play around with the new form prototype themselves.

As part of their research, the fellows uncovered that the Cybercrime Support Network had already received a contract to build a new scam reporting form. They then [partnered with CSN to ensure that their source code and form prototype](#) became a starting point for CSN’s work to build a new form. Their usability testing and design recommendations also helped facilitate CSN’s work across government agencies to streamline cybercrime reporting systems.

Through this work — completed in only six weeks — the Hub team helped ensure that older adults would have an easier time sharing when they had been scammed, thus helping law enforcement to put better preventative measures in place.

To learn more, see the Older Adults Hub project here:

<https://www.aspenpolicyacademy.org/project/protecting-older-users-online>.