

Open Forum Foundation

EIN: [26-4736025](#)

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Part IV. Narrative Description.

BACKGROUND

The freedom to express one's opinions, values and beliefs is central to our notion of liberty, and the opportunity to communicate that information with each other and with those that make decisions on our behalf is central to our faith in a democratic society. In an era of mass communication and technological innovation, the exchange of ideas and information has never been more rapid, and yet it has also never been more disconnected.

There is simply no effective means of aggregating public opinion in a meaningful and useful way. In no situation is the frustration of this reality felt more strongly than by average citizens who are trying to communicate with their elected representatives. As the population of the United States has increased and technology has simplified communication, the number of messages sent to elected representatives has become overwhelming. The result is a leadership that is increasingly disconnected from constituents. The Open Forum Foundation (the "Foundation") seeks to remedy this by providing a forum for the next phase in civic engagement, a web-based platform created to simplify civic responsibility for citizens, enable advocacy groups to raise awareness of their issues, and give representatives the ability to understand their constituents and focus on the creation of legislation that reflects the wants and needs of the American people.

ACTIVITIES

To accomplish this, the Open Forum Foundation will develop and maintain a free, open, non-ideological, web-based solution that engages representatives and constituents in the same debate. It will provide a forum for sharing, learning, and discussion, and although it will not contribute any of the content, the Foundation believes that this project will yield innovative and practical ideas for solutions to real-world issues. The initial focus for the project will be the United States Congress, though the Foundation anticipates that other organizations and individuals will find this web strategy useful and it will expand in the future to meet their needs.

Development

The system is specifically designed to be attractive to congressional representatives by solving the frustrations that they experience with the current system and to citizens by giving them access to their representatives. Congressional representatives and their staffs are currently overwhelmed by input from constituents and they have no effective means to evaluate how representative any given opinion is of the constituency. Conversely, citizens are unable to communicate their opinions to their representatives with any certainty of them being heard and respected.

While developing a blueprint for the system, the Foundation has reached out to congressional staffers and others familiar with the workings of Capitol Hill, advocacy

groups, and designers and developers of online social networking sites. With input from these valuable sources, the Foundation will create a system that is engaging and accessible so that it will welcome a large and diverse network of users. Its effectiveness will depend, in large part, on its usability, so the system will be created and maintained with the needs and preferences of its users at the forefront.

Functionality

The system will function by providing a free online forum via a website and web-based tools that can be used to collect, aggregate, and display the opinions of verified constituents from websites, blogs, and social networking sites. It will provide representatives with a dashboard view of constituent opinions with both a broad overview by issue area as well as full access to the detailed opinions of constituents from their electoral district. Representatives will also be able to make general statements by issue area or respond directly to specific opinions, thus opening legitimate and reliable communication between citizens and representatives.

In order to facilitate open communication, the website will feature the following tools:

- *Opinions*: Constituents, decision-makers, and advocacy groups may create Opinions, each of which will have its own page. Constituents may create Opinions anonymously, but decision-makers and organizations will have their names associated with the Opinions that they create.
- *Issue Areas*: When creating an Opinion, the user will tag it with relevant Issue Areas. Each will have a definition of what agreement and disagreement mean within the context of the issue. Issue Areas will be used to aggregate user opinion.
- *Discussion Forums*: Each Issue Area will also have its own discussion forum. The forums will be designed to encourage communication between those on opposing sides of the Issue Area.
- *Agreement/Disagreement*: Only constituent users will be able to express agreement or disagreement on Opinions. This will be registered on a sliding scale from 1 to -1, which allows for the expression of neutrality as well as varying levels of disagreement.
- *Educational Resources*: Clicking through on any of these arguments will lead to a “wiki”-style¹ explanation, detailing the rationale for the argument with links to further resources that support it.
- *Dashboard*: The dashboard will be a graphical, intuitive interface designed to make it easy for anyone to learn about the opinions of people by electoral district, issue area, party affiliation, and other demographic data as is appropriate.

¹ A “wiki” is essentially a computerized publication to which anybody is able to post content, edit the content of others and even delete the content of others.

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- *Decision-Maker Communications:* The system will provide a number of unique ways in which decision-makers can communicate effectively with a large number of constituents. They can post statements to specific Issue Areas and Opinions, directly respond to an Opinion that constituents have ranked as important, express support and rationale for their belief in the Opinion and link to resources that support their perspective, share their accomplishments on the issue, and/or call for support for their position on an issue.

All of these tools are but means to the end goal of providing a mechanism for more effective and meaningful communication between individuals, organizations, and decision-makers. The tools will allow for the presentation of nuanced opinions and ideas, which enables discussions to move away from traditional polarized perspectives and encourages debate on the full scale of available solutions.

Because the Foundation is committed to providing a resource for the individuals and organizations that use the software rather than making profits for shareholders, the entire web system will utilize open-source software. That means that anyone can download the software that the Foundation has created at no charge and may modify it to meet their own needs.

Benefits

The Open Forum Foundation will provide the means for constituents to be engaged in a social network – or online community – with their elected officials, encouraging greater transparency in the way government does business. The Foundation will not itself contribute any content, take positions or promote ideas, but it will emphasize the value of active dialogue and the exchange of information. This system will allow citizens to be heard, and by extension, to exercise their basic duty of civic engagement. For their part, congressional representatives will be presented with a meaningful way to gauge public opinion, evaluate support or opposition to policy proposals, and reach out to constituents to explain their positions and solicit feedback. Improved interaction between these two groups will contribute to a more active and engaged citizenry, as it will counteract the passivity that constituents demonstrate as a result of frustrated attempts to communicate with their representatives. It will also lead to legislation that is more reflective of the ideas and needs of the American public.

Application for Other Uses

~~Using the technology developed for governments, the platform may then be opened to allow other organizations to connect with their constituents, customers, and employees. This will further engage advocacy groups, as well as other nonprofit organizations and potentially some for-profit companies. It may be used to determine the will of their constituents, for feedback from employees and customers, and in any other ways that will encourage the free exchange of ideas. Organizations may maintain a list of valid constituents or allow open-posting of opinions. This will enable member-based~~

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~~organizations to limit the input to constituents and companies to receive customer feedback from anyone who has an interest in their products.~~

~~Use of the Foundation's system will be freely available to any organization that wishes to utilize it, in the hopes of facilitating communication between disconnected groups. As with the government model, the goal of the system is to promote greater transparency by organizations and increase their accountability to their constituents and those affected by their actions.~~

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Part V. Question 1(a).

Director

Compensation

Carolyn Kissane, Director

\$0

37 West 72nd Street, Apt. 5C

New York, NY 10023

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Part V. Question 3(a).

Name: Shadee Malaklou, President & Director

Qualifications: Ms. Malaklou graduated in 2007 from Duke University with a double major in Cultural Anthropology and Women's Studies, with a focus on female agency in the Islamic Middle East. She has studied in Istanbul, Turkey and Cairo, Egypt, where she conducted fieldwork on the Islamic veil and the Islamic revival. She currently resides in Washington, DC, where she has worked with a variety of nonprofit organizations to manage marketing and PR, as well as logistics for State Department-funded programming. Her long-term professional interests include graduate research in new media. Her interest in the Open Forum Foundation stems from a desire to understand foreign governments, especially in the Middle East, and to enable voters in those countries.

Duties: As President, Ms. Malaklou presides at all meetings of the Board of Directors, performs all duties customary to that office, and supervises and controls all of the affairs of the Corporation in accordance with the policies and directives approved by the Board of Directors. As a Director, she oversees and reviews the activities of the Open Forum Foundation and makes policies that further the purposes of the organization, pursuant to DC and federal law.

Average hours worked: 10 hours/week

Name: Ellen Williams, Vice President & Director

Qualifications: Dr. Williams holds a B.A. in Clinical Psychology from the University of Florida and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the University of Memphis. She has broad range of professional experience, with over 15 years in the public and private sectors that spans government, business, and nonprofit organizations. Dr. Williams is currently the Director of Behavioral Health Services at a not-for-profit, community-owned and operated hospital system in Jacksonville, Florida. Prior to this, she worked in the public school systems in Hawaii and New Mexico, and served as Vice President of Clinical Services for a nonprofit community mental health center. In this role, she procured grant funding from SAMHSA for children's prevention services. Her efforts have developed into a nationally-recognized model program. She brings the same passion and dedication to the Open Forum Foundation.

Duties: As Vice President, Dr. Williams performs the President's duties in the President's absence and other duties as delegated by the Board of Directors. As a Director, she oversees and reviews the activities of the Open Forum Foundation and makes policies that further the purposes of the organization, pursuant to DC and federal law.

Average hours worked: 2 hours/week

Name: Kristen Guskovict, Secretary & Director

Qualifications: Ms. Guskovict holds a B.A. in International Relations and Human Rights from Webster University and an M.S. in Global Affairs, focusing on humanitarian

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relief, from New York University. Ms. Guskovict has over 10 years of nonprofit management experience. Having developed and implemented poverty relief programs both internationally and domestically, she has first-hand knowledge of how important trust and transparency in government really is. Ms. Guskovict is the Assistant Director for Safe Haven with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. In that role, she serves as project manager for a unique partnership with the federal government, wherein her agency is entrusted to help inform government decisions in child welfare cases. Her professional experience includes, amongst others: Peace Corps service from 2000-2002 and Operations Manager, Save the Children, US- US program.

Duties: As Secretary, Ms. Guskovict attends all meetings of the Board of Directors, records all the votes of the Directors, and keeps the minutes of board meetings. She also sees that all notices are duly given, serves as custodian of corporate records, and maintains a register of the post office address of each member. As a Director, she oversees and reviews the activities of the Open Forum Foundation and makes policies that further the purposes of the organization, pursuant to DC and federal law.

Average hours worked: 4 hours/week

Name: Patrick Benz, Treasurer & Director

Qualifications: Mr. Benz holds a B.A. in History from Georgetown University and an M.S. in Global Affairs, focusing on Private Sector Sustainable Development, from New York University. He is currently working as a project manager at a firm in New York City specializing in the field of economic development, particularly as-of-right and discretionary tax incentives for businesses operating in the New York metropolitan area. With over five years of experience in the economic development field, Mr. Benz understands that more open and constructive communication between government and citizens fosters stronger economic and social conditions within a community.

Duties: As Treasurer, Mr. Benz exercises responsibility for the organization's funds, maintains records of receipts and disbursements, and deposits money into a bank account in the name of the organization. As a Director, he oversees and reviews the activities of the Open Forum Foundation and makes policies that further the purposes of the organization, pursuant to DC and federal law.

Average hours worked: 2 hours/week

Name: Carolyn Kissane, Director

Qualifications: Dr. Kissane holds a B.A. from Denison University, an M.A. from Teachers College at Columbia University, and a Ph.D. in Comparative and International Education from Columbia University. Dr. Kissane is a scholar, practitioner, author, community advocate, and dedicated educator. She serves as Clinical Associate Professor at the Center for Global Affairs at New York University, where she teaches graduate level courses examining civil society, philanthropy and international and national nongovernmental organizations, the Central Asian region, transformations in China, the geopolitics of oil, and women's movements. She has also taught courses in the areas of international affairs, education, and international development at Columbia University,

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CUNY Queens College, Colgate University, and New York University. Trained as a specialist in comparative educational policy, Dr. Kissane has applied her expertise globally as a researcher and consultant in Kazakhstan, Russia, Mongolia, Japan, Sweden and the United States for educational and nongovernmental organizations including World Teach, The Academy for Educational Development, Soros Foundation, United States Institute of Peace, U.S Department of Education, the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) and the United Nations. She has also worked with CIMERA, an NGO which specializes in political governance in the Balkans, Caucasus and Central Asia. Art for Refugees in Transition, an NGO helping to rebuild community identity for refugees worldwide, engages Dr. Kissane as a member of its Advisory Board.

Duties: As a Director, Dr. Kissane oversees and reviews the activities of the Open Forum Foundation and makes policies that further the purposes of the organization, pursuant to DC and federal law.

Average hours worked: 2 hours/week

Name: Wayne Moses Burke, Executive Director

Qualifications: Mr. Burke holds a B.S. in Engineering from the University of Michigan and an M.S. in Global Affairs with a concentration in International Relation from New York University. He has over ten years of experience in management and entrepreneurial activities in both the private and nonprofit sectors, including a great deal of experience in information technology and government relations. Most recently, Mr. Burke served as Director of Online Dialogue for the Project on Middle East Democracy and as a Research Intern with the New Mexico Office of International Trade. Before that, he worked for several nonprofit organizations, including New Mexico Voter Action, United Voters of New Mexico, and Help America Recount. His experiences helped him to garner valuable communication skills and insight into government operations. He has also served as an Information Technology Consultant specializing in web design and coding, and he has worked with a number of commercial and open source software programs.

Duties: As Executive Director, Mr. Burke serves as the chief executive officer of the Open Forum Foundation and is primarily responsible for carrying out the organization's strategic plans and policies, on behalf of the Board of Directors.

Average Hours: 40 hours/week

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Part V. Question 5(a).

The Open Forum Foundation has adopted a Conflict of Interest Policy similar to the sample policy found in Appendix A of the 1023 Instructions as part of its Bylaws (Article 8). A copy of the Open Forum Foundation's Bylaws is enclosed.

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Part V. Question 6(a)-(b).

While the Foundation does not anticipate that any non-fixed payments will be made during the 2009 fiscal year, the organization intends to introduce these in the future. The opportunity for performance-based bonuses will be available to employees, including the highest-compensated employees, and to officers if they are also employees of the organization. No directors will be eligible for these bonuses.

To ensure that such payments are reasonable and legitimate, the Board of Directors has adopted guidelines to be used when all compensation decisions are made. Please see the attached “Executive Compensation Guidelines” for full details.

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Part VI. Question 1(a)-(b).

As described in Part IV of this application, the Open Forum Foundation will create a website that allows users to communicate and engage with each other through an interactive online community. The Foundation's first goal is to connect constituents with their elected representatives in Congress. However, this service, and the use of the site to engage in other types of dialogue, will be made freely available to all interested individuals and organizations.

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Part VIII. Question 2(a)-(b).

In the future, the Open Forum Foundation may decide to engage in direct or grassroots lobbying regarding freedom of information or access to information issues, but it has no current plans to do so. Therefore, the Foundation has filed with this application form 5768, electing to be governed by the lobbying rules set forth in section 501(h) of the Code and the corresponding Treasury Regulations. If the Foundation later decides to engage in efforts to influence legislation, it will monitor its expenditures to ensure that its lobbying activities are conducted within the applicable limits.

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Part VIII. Question 4.

The Open Forum Foundation plans to undertake fundraising using mail, e-mail, phone, and personal solicitations. It will also apply for foundation and government grants and accept donations on its website, and it may accept contributions on the websites of other organizations such as Facebook if such opportunities arise. —Although the Foundation has not yet begun its fundraising activities and has not yet identified specific states in which they will occur, these activities may take place throughout the United States. The Open Forum Foundation is aware of state laws requiring registration and reporting of charitable solicitation activities and intends to comply with all such applicable laws.

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Part VIII. Question 10.

The Open Forum Foundation will own the copyright to the software that it creates to develop its web platform. However, as described in Part IV above, all software created by the organization will be open source and it will be made freely available to the public.

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Part IX (A). Line 23.

Expense	2009	2010	2011
Design	25,000	5,000	5,000
Development and Programming	150,000	50,000	50,000
Hosting	15,000	60,000	60,000
Travel Expenses	10,000	60,000	60,000
Marketing	0	30,000	30,000
Conferences and Networking	10,000	10,000	10,000
Total	210,000	215,000	215,000