

## **Introduction:**

It is now clear that the next President-elect will be inheriting more crises and challenges than any other in the history of our nation, and will be hard-pressed to address all of them. In order to get a head start to solve the crisis at hand, we envision the next President-elect and his team of experts taking full advantage of "the crucial 77 days" – which is the period from November 5th through January 20<sup>th</sup>. During this period, as team of President-elect's experts gather to achieve detailed and prioritized post January 20<sup>th</sup> plan, a key burning question is how to engage citizens in a meaningful way. This can be achieved through creating online tools and deploying suitable technology to allow the citizens to give input to the expert teams directly. Such use of technology would enable millions of constituencies to participate in the change planning process. Our recommendations will increase the President's ability to begin execution on well-planned strategic transformations on day one, first 100 days, and the first year.

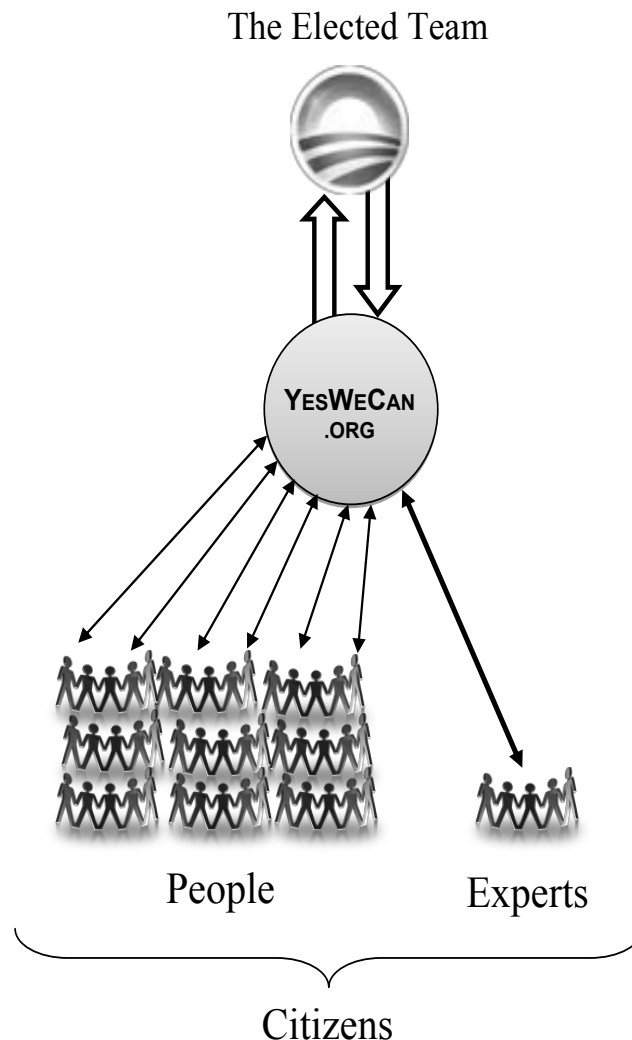
## **Welcome to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Government 2.0**

Our system of government, especially during the last 8 years, has been a particularly closed system that not only did not provide full transparency, but also did not welcome outside opinions from our citizens. In a truly democratic system, it is imperative for government to engage our citizens into the political arena. Although creating a system that would foster a two-way communication between the government and the people is a very complex task, but using the technology at hand we believe it can become a reality today. The notion of a government that listens to its people on individual basis is no longer just a dream and it can be achieved once we embrace the use of today's technology and the power of the Internet.

**What this proposal provides:** A plan of transformation from a closed government system to an open, connected, and transparent system of government. The proposal is broken up into two phases. Phase-I lays out a detailed description for an online system that would serve as a communication and a collaboration portal. Its primary objective is to engage ordinary citizens and experts in a constructive discussion to plan and prioritize the policies and programs of the next administration. Phase-II investigates a long-term grand vision so that the aforementioned system can evolve and integrate into the core of the Federal agencies and IT infrastructure, creating an unprecedented level of transparency while reinvigorating the democratic process to keep citizens involved in the progression of government policy and decision making.

**Phase-I Initiative: Rapid Response, Rapid Engagement**  
**YesWeCan.org**

YesWeCan.org is a natural evolution of BarackObama.com that needs to be deployed right after the Election Day.



**Fundamental Goals:**

1. Become a portal in which the next administration's cabinet and team of experts can communicate directly to people about their plans and specific proposals.
2. Create a two-way communication system between people and the next administration's team so people's voices and opinion can be heard.
3. To foster an environment in which people can exchange ideas with each other and to discuss issues that matter to them the most.
4. An environment for experts of the field to not only provide proposals, but also to educate people on complex matters.

5. Provide a system in which people can obtain data provided by various government agencies and also to assist with visualizing the results to draw better conclusions<sup>1</sup>.

**The Basic Requirements for the System:**

1. Be only available to people who live in United States (e.g. would do geo-ip scanning)
2. Be secure and protect privacy of the users (e.g. use minimum of 128-bit encryption with SSL connections).
3. Be simple and easy to use for EVERYONE
4. Be fair and non-discriminatory against party affiliation, gender, sexual orientation, etc.
5. May verify identity of the users
6. Provide an incentive system for participation
7. Be scalable for future developments

**Types of content available on the site:**

1. Issues at hand with priorities for each one to be solved.
2. Proposals by the elected candidate's team and experts of the field to solve the issues
3. Discussions, opinions, and educational notes by the experts of the field
4. Latest news about the team and the progress of the elected cabinet members
5. Discussions among people about issues & proposals
6. Data provided by various government agencies (e.g. population data points, economic data points, etc.)<sup>2</sup>.
7. Visualization tools to make sense out of data provided by various government agencies<sup>3</sup>.
8. Dynamically created polls created by government, experts and users.

**Proposed distribution methods:**

1. Email the existing members of the Obama and McCain (if possible) campaigns
2. Advertise heavily on the homepage of barackobama.com.
3. Discuss it in mainstream media.
4. Publish articles about the site on online outlets: Reuters, TechCrunch, CBS.com, CNBC.com, NY Times, Washington Post, LA Times, Chicaco Tribune, etc...
5. Get the word out via Social Networks such as Facebook, Myspace, etc...
6. Develop & distribute the iPhone App specifically for this site.

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<sup>1</sup> This is rather an advanced system in which requires access to various government agencies. The visualization aspect of the data is assisted by 3<sup>rd</sup> party systems such IBM's "manyEyes" project. For more on this matter please visit: <http://services.alphaworks.ibm.com/manyeyes/home>

<sup>2</sup> Due to complexity of communications between various government agencies, this may be delayed until phase two of the project and may not be available right away.

<sup>3</sup> Assisted by third party tools such as IBM's "ManyEyes" project. For more on this matter please visit: <http://services.alphaworks.ibm.com/manyeyes/home>

**Expected participants of the site:**

1. President-elect team
2. Invited experts & pundits on each issue
3. General public at large:
  - a. Those who are enthusiastic about solving the issues facing the future of our country.
  - b. Internet savvy and young people especially students

**System's Feature List:**

1. **Secure environment:**
  - Secure login sessions
  - Geo-ip address check to ensure the users are all in United States
2. **Latest news & media coverage**
  - Reports the progress of the elected candidate's team
3. **Customization of issues tabs**
  - Offer ability to users to customize their view to only see/interact with the issues (tabs) that they care about the most.
4. **Experts/cabinet members offer proposals:**
  - Ability to post proposals & solutions under each tab.
5. **Experts opinions:**
  - Experts can post opinions about the proposed solutions under each tab.
6. **Experts/President-elect team members respond back to users:**
  - Ability for experts/cabinet members to offer their perspective on people's responses right next to each proposal to further clarify.
7. **Users can engage in discussions with experts and the cabinet members:**

Users have the ability to respond to each proposal/solution via:

  - Polling options such as "Agree", "Disagree", "Neutral", etc.
  - Writing a paragraph (500 words max) in response to the solution
8. **Iterate and repost the proposals:**
  - Ability for the experts/administrators to iterate through proposals and offer updated versions.
9. **Users discuss matters among themselves:**
  - Discussion groups (forums) for the users.
10. **Users create and posts proposals on Federal Level, State level or Regional Level:**
  - The user-created proposals would allow others to post their response in a form of "Agree", "Disagree" or "Neutral" to the poll. Additionally people would be able to provide a paragraph to respond to the proposal (limited to [250] words)
  - The system monitors the user response to these proposals by the community. If the user responds gets passed a certain threshold (e.g. 80% of the population of the system agrees/disagrees with the given proposal) then the system would trigger a notification to the expert of that topic.

- In Addition to (b), the system would also run analytics calculations on the responses that people wrote toward that proposal; this would provide an additional data point to the expert to better understand where people stand in their own writings with regards to the given proposal (as opposed to actually reading posts by the users).
- If the triggered proposal is in the realm of possibility to be executed, then the expert would provide an official proposal and would post it under its relevant topic; if otherwise, the expert would post a note on why the given hot proposal can not be implemented at the moment.

**11. Analytics system<sup>4</sup>:**

- Semantic analyzer that would produce the sentiment results for the comments that people left under each proposal/solution.
- The results would allow Experts/Administrators to understand what users are saying in their responses as opposed to reading each individual's note.
- The analyzer would also bring to attention of the experts/administrators the posts that generated the most negative or the most positive responses (the ones that the system would flag as "note worthy").

**12. Customizable RSS feed:**

- to deliver latest developments under each topic and each proposals

**13. Users referral/incentive program:**

- A system in which users are encouraged to invite others to the site
- Extra incentive if they bring in users from other parties

**14. Users "Involvement Meter" that changes based on their level of engagement**

- Number of proposals read
- Number of "useful" comments left under each proposals (people would tag each others comments as "useful", "irrelevant", "misleading", etc...)
- Number of user referrals to the site

**15. Experts/users generated Polls:**

- Polls can be created both by experts and users to get a better understanding of where people stand not only with regards to issues, but also the solutions offered for each issue.

**16. Notion of community:**

- Users can create communities in which others can join: e.g. Teachers community, plumbers' community, mechanics community, etc...
- Users can announce their community affiliations
- Communities can designate "community ambassador(s)" to also endorse/oppose certain proposals on behalf of the community
- Communities can create proposals and have others at large to respond to it before bringing them to the attention of the experts of the topic.

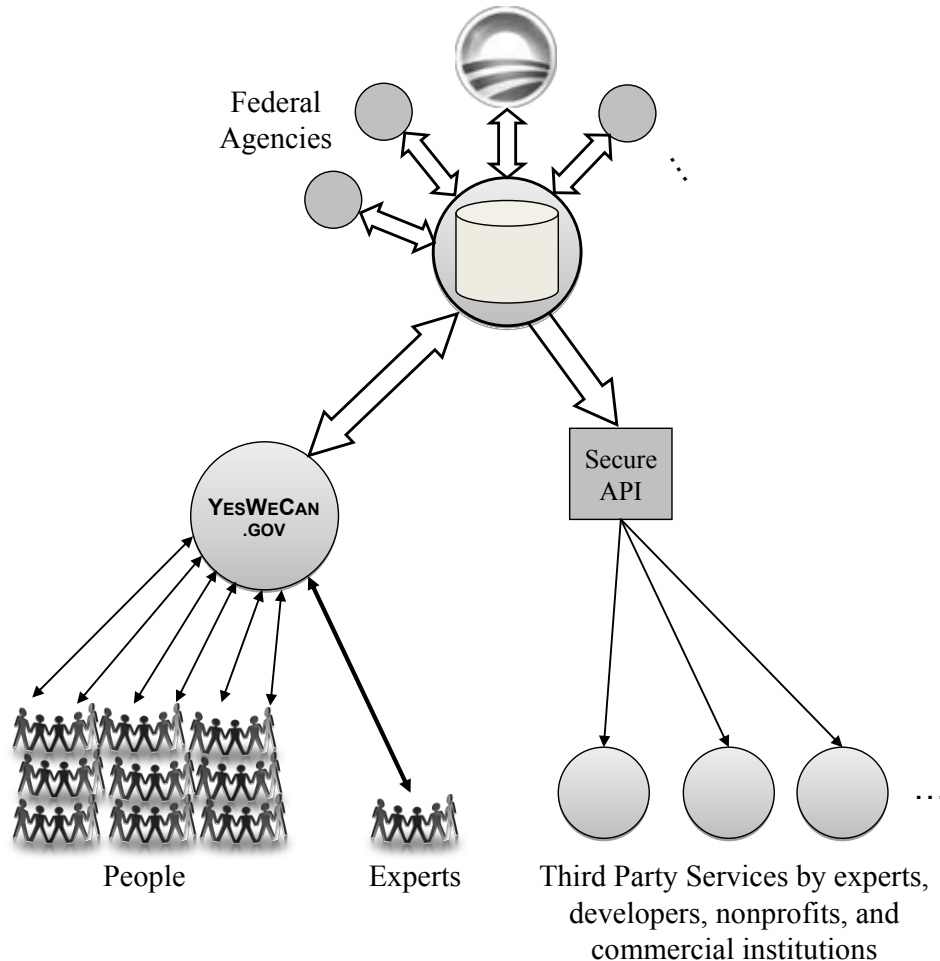
**17. Site's mobile iPhone App:** to be distributed directly on Apple's app store (also considered a distribution channel to sign up users)

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<sup>4</sup> Various semantic analyzers can be obtained from "Stanford Natural Language Processing (NLP)" labs. For more details please visit: <http://nlp.stanford.edu/>

## Phase-II Initiative: Open Government Vision

In recent years there has been many proposals laid out by experts on how a more effective government can be established by utilizing the technologies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Here we present two of the most promising ideas toward achieving the goals stated above, and investigate some of the challenges involved in the process of transformation from the current state of the government.



### The goals

These goals follow the principles and goals outlined previously, but expand them to encompass the greater government.

1. **Enhancing Transparency:** It is the government's responsibility to facilitate access to government proposals, programs, and policies, as well as public records data from various federal agencies. This access should, directly or indirectly, enable the public, including ordinary citizens and experts, to stay informed about the implications of government's policies in their lives.
2. **Facilitating Democratic Interaction:** Effective transparency would naturally lead to informed public discussions within communities. However, a direct bottom-up

- communication medium from citizens to the core of government would not only provide potentially valuable feedback for policy makers, but also give ordinary people a sense of being heard, being involved.
3. Engaging Citizens and Communities: A balanced combination of the two elements above can catalyze participation at different levels of the society: individual citizens, local communities, nonprofit organizations, etc.

### **Federal Data Platform**

Under the Freedom of Information Act and the Electronic Freedom of Information Act Amendments of 1996, federal agencies are required to make available to the public the information that is defined to be “public records”. Many of these agencies currently maintain separate websites that fulfill the requirement of the law. However, the majority of this data is presented in ways that only serve to display the data to human viewers in one fixed format or another. This poses serious limitations on the use of this data. First, any single visual format rarely suits all applications and all users, and therefore the federal agencies' websites usually fail to serve a potentially huge set of applications and users. Second, the lack of portable standard formats for the distribution of public records makes it extremely costly for third parties (including individual researchers and organizations) to process the data, build services on top of it, and ultimately produce value from the vast amount of publicly available government data.

As Robinson et al. have recently proposed in their article “Government Data and the Invisible Hand”<sup>5</sup>, the government is best suited to fill the role of data producer and distribution platform, an enabler for third parties to tap into the real value of the public records data. Once this data is publicly available through portable machine-readable data formats such as XML, third parties including researchers, nonprofit organizations, and even commercial institutions would be able to create a platform on top of this data to produce value in ways that federal agencies would never have the capacity, resources, or speed to do on their own. The possibilities include, but are not limited to, new data visualization tools, search and data analysis services, pattern discovery, multi-data-source mash-ups, consumer-facing applications, and commercial applications.

The technologies available today are capable of bringing this vision to reality:

- Security protocols are mature enough to ensure a safe and full-proof data networks
- Digital signature technologies facilitate trust and authenticity of distributed information
- Scalable grid architectures are capable of handling virtually unlimited load
- Visualization technologies (such as IBM's Many Eyes project<sup>6</sup>) provide extensive and flexible tools to make visual sense out of huge amounts of data.

In practice, however, a successful and cost-effective implementation of such a data platform would require an incremental plan of execution. Such a plan would consist of phases, each phase transitioning a selected subset of federal agencies' data infrastructure

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<sup>5</sup> Appeared in the Yale Journal of Law & Technology, Vol. 11, 2008

<sup>6</sup> <http://services.alphaworks.ibm.com/manyeyes/home>

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into the new federal data platform, complete with testing, evaluation, and plan revision after each phase.

### **Citizens' Portal for Democracy**

A natural evolution of the Phase-I Initiative outlined earlier has the potential to become an interactive forum for exchanging ideas, staying informed, and getting involved. Such a Portal for Democracy enables citizens to choose the communities they belong to or are interested in, stay connected to everything related to their communities (such as policies, proposal, polls, etc.), and take action by participating in the online opinion polls, engaging in discussions with other community members, and even propose new plans of action at the community and individual levels. While being connected to the issues they care about, people would be more willing to stay involved and contribute to advance the interests of their immediate communities.

In parallel, as the federal data platform becomes available through public API, third party portals would be born to serve niche communities and create new applications and new forms of user experience. This has a significant potential to boost public's participation as diverse set of needs would be catered to by a host of diverse third party applications.