World Wide Web Foundation

Web Foundation Tech Policy Design Lab
Concept Note

Introduction

We urgently need more collaborative and innovative ways to tackle the significant technology policy challenges we face, from privacy and online safety, to misinformation, discrimination and internet fragmentation, to name only a few. At present we don't have enough spaces where companies, governments and civil society can work together constructively to create product and policy solutions that can shape a better, fairer, safer web.

The Tech Policy Design Lab, the flagship initiative of the Contract for the Web, will help change this. We aim to bridge the gap between companies, governments, civil society, and those who use online services — applying the right mix of expertise and real experiences to create effective, workable product and policy solutions to some of the biggest technology challenges of our time.

The Contract for the Web calls on companies, governments and civil society to develop technologies that support the best in humanity and challenge the worst. The Contract sets the model to help forge a new phase of tech policy development: where solutions are developed on the basis of sound evidence; where there is meaningful multi-stakeholder participation; where people's experiences drive policy and product design; and where solutions take into account the full diversity of those who use digital tools.

<p align="center">**The Tech Policy Design Lab Concept**</p>

Mission: The Tech Policy Design Lab will bring together governments, companies and civil society in a collaborative environment and use human-centered design and design thinking to develop policy and legal frameworks and products and services that address the most challenging tech policy issues of our time.

Guiding values

- **We are human:** Everything we do is to make the internet a better place for people. That's why human-centered design and a human rights lens are at the heart of our approach. We make sure that the voices so often left out of tech policy debates and decision-making are heard and shape technology that works better for everyone.
- **We are open and collaborative:** Good technology policy isn't built in silos. To solve the biggest tech challenges of our time, we need to harness the collective expertise of people with a range of skill sets and from a diversity of backgrounds, including from government, the private sector, civil society and those using technologies. We share our processes, deliberations and outputs, and we encourage feedback to help make them better.
- **We are solutions-focused:** The problems we take on are difficult. That's the point. But they're not impossible. We believe that the right mix of people with the space to experiment and innovate can deliver concrete, practical solutions to the most thorny tech challenges. We help governments and tech platforms find solutions that can improve online life for billions of people. That's the scale of our ambition.

What will the Web Foundation Tech Policy Design Lab do? How will it operate?

Overview: The Lab is focused on producing concrete solutions, using human-centered design and design thinking, and covering a range of topics. Each Lab project may take a different format, according to the topic and stakeholders involved. While the Lab itself is a concept rather than a concrete space or building, sessions for each project can be held virtually or in-person around the globe when travel is feasible. Projects could run sequentially or simultaneously, depending on funding and capacity. We envision "wings" of the Lab housing projects under broad topic areas, such as gender equality, internet access and connectivity, content moderation, internet fragmentation, privacy, AI ethics, and more.

Broad stages:
1. **Generating evidence:** We will gather evidence to inform the solution-development phase, through a combination of desk research, research by partners, or the Web Foundation's own original research (including multistakeholder consultations and qualitative and quantitative research).

2. **Building alliances**: The Lab is multistakeholder, meaning we will invite participants to join in the process from the beginning: by contributing research, recommending other participants, co-creating solutions, testing and adopting the solutions (governments, companies) or advocating for decision-makers to adopt the solutions (civil society).
3. **Developing solutions:** By convening stakeholders with a range of expertise and experiences, and employing a policy development approach informed by design thinking and human-centered design, we build solutions that are more effective, credible and ultimately more likely to be adopted by decision-makers.
4. **Catalyzing action:** Our job isn't done when the solutions are created. We will work with governments and companies to identify opportunities for them to test, refine and (where appropriate) adopt the solutions we've co-created. If decision-makers don't think our specific solution will work, we will invite them to develop and propose alternatives that still solve for the problem we explored during the Lab.

Outputs:
- We envision a range of potential outputs, from product-oriented to public policy frameworks. For example:
  - Labels (e.g., trust marks)
  - Features (e.g., what standard features should a social media control panel display?)
  - Products and services (e.g., building data portability services)
  - Standards (e.g., what's the best standard to measure online harms on platforms?)
  - Governing frameworks (e.g., codes of conduct, legal frameworks, corporate or public policy frameworks)

Tools and Format (illustrative list):
- **Gathering evidence:**
  - Consultations: Convene one or more consultations with the goal of gathering qualitative evidence and building relationships among stakeholders
  - Desk research
  - Quantitative research
  - Qualitative research
- **Developing solutions:**
  - Policy design workshops: Host multistakeholder workshops where participants are guided in human-centered design and design thinking to co-create solutions
  - Asynchronous policy development: Allow participants to brainstorm and create solutions in an asynchronous format (using online collaborative tools like Mural or Miro)
  - Tabletop/role playing exercises: Host tabletop exercises to test and "game out" policy frameworks proposed in external forums (eg., draft laws), and help stakeholders develop empathy for each others' perspectives

- ○ Regulatory sandboxes: Partner with a government to establish a "regulatory sandbox" where innovative solutions can be tested in a "safe space" with oversight from a regulator

Considerations for selection of topics:
- Topics included in the [Contract for the Web](#)
- Informed by feedback from Contract for the Web endorsers and other stakeholders
- Include an intersectional lens/approach
- Consider topics that are not "oversaturated" in the tech policy space, or a fresh angle on an existing topic (e.g., from a gender/intersectional approach)
- Amenable to a multistakeholder, human-centered design and design thinking policy development process

Sample process (one of several possible approaches):
- **Step one - Consultations:** Build trust and relationships among stakeholders and gather evidence from experts in government, the private sector and civil society.
- **Step two - Synthesis of consultations:** Digest results of consultations and determine the most appropriate subject matter for policy design workshops. May include continued external consultation with some or all of the participating stakeholders.
- **Step three - Design workshops/prototyping sessions:** The goal of the policy design workshops is to produce tangible outputs that provide potential product or policy solutions to the subject matter identified. They reconvene stakeholders to work together, using creativity to break out of traditional modes of developing policies or technological solutions. At the end of the session, there will be a minimum viable product or service (MVP or MVS), or prototype, to be tested and put into practice.
- **Step four - Publication**: Publish the workshop results online in an open-source database, with open feedback on the process, tools and results.
- **Step five - Solutions to Action:** Those who have the power to make change (governments and companies) will be asked to test, refine and (where appropriate) implement the co-created solutions. If decision-makers don't think our specific solution will work in their context, we will invite them to develop and propose alternatives that still solve for the problem we explored during the Lab.

Who will be part of the Tech Policy Design Lab?

- **Diverse perspectives:** We will include stakeholders who represent the diversity of those who use the web, as well as those who are not yet online, with a particular focus on diversity of geography, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, and accessibility, among others.
- **Stakeholder groups:**
  - ○ **Governments:** Governments who are interested in crafting policy frameworks that are evidence-based, created with input from a diversity of constituents.

- ○ **Companies**: Large companies and SMEs, where appropriate, including startups. Tech companies as traditionally defined, but also companies from other sectors whose businesses impact human rights in the digital sphere (e.g., retailers who collect and use millions of customers' personal data).
  - ○ **Civil society:** We use civil society as a broad term, including civil society organisations, academics, independent experts, individuals, and more.
- ● **Partners:**
  - ○ We will explore running Lab workshops with other civil society organisations who share our vision and values around developing concrete, evidence-based solutions at the intersection of tech and human rights.

Why do we need a Tech Policy Design Lab? What problem is it trying to solve?

- ● Current efforts at regulating technology aren't as inclusive as we need them to be. Too often, policymakers and tech company leadership do not reflect the diversity of the individuals who are constituents and customers. Policies and products need diverse creators and input — it matters who is in the room making decisions.
- ● Technology evolves so quickly, and it's critical that governments, companies and civil society work together openly and transparently to address the human rights impacts of new developments.
- ● We need better evidence and data. Policies and products need to be built on sound data and evidence, which means that governments and companies need to be more transparent in sharing data in a privacy-protective way.
- ● We need to see a more concerted focus on the policy development/policy solutions phase. Even where there is evidence and data available, we need to see a more thorough process of turning that research into sound policy solutions which account for downstream consequences of policy choices.

How is the Tech Policy Design Lab different from other policy labs?

- ● **Civil society-led:** Convened by a civil society organisation, rather than an academic institution, government or private sector organization.
- ● **Multistakeholder and collaborative:** We believe that meaningful, long-term change will happen when we bring a diversity of perspectives, sectors and industries together to focus on developing concrete solutions. We also believe that the outputs — whether product prototypes or policy frameworks — will have a much higher chance of being supported and adopted if stakeholders participate in their creation from the beginning.
- ● **Outputs:** Concrete, practical policy solutions.
- ● **Human-centered design and design thinking:** We will use human-centered design (HCD) and design thinking as some of the primary (but not exclusive) approaches. We will explore other frameworks such as systems mapping as our work progresses.