

The Governance Commons

A Common Place for Those Working to Improve the Systems of Governance upon Which Our Common Future Depends

Prospectus

March 17, 2011

Governance Commons Contributors and Beta-Testers Wanted

The initial Governance Commons (www.governancecommons.org) system is now available in beta test form with a great deal of useful information, but also a significant number of not yet completed sections. In conjunction with this preliminary release, we are seeking reviewers to help us evaluate the system, and initial partners who would like to help develop the system and use it to help publicize their work. Anyone interested in taking part should contact Commons project co-directors Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess at burgess@colorado.edu. A new version of Beyond Intractability which integrates Commons features will also soon be available.

The Governance Imperative

The Governance Commons is based upon the realization that the ability of human society to surmount the big challenges that it faces is ultimately limited by problems with our systems of governance--problems which make it difficult for society to wisely develop and equitably choose between alternative courses of action. All of our pressing economic, environmental, security, health, and social challenges can, therefore, also be seen as governance challenges.

Our ability to solve society's big problems is limited by the problems we have in our systems of governance.

Although many people and organizations have already made important progress toward tackling society's tough problems, those making key governance decisions are often either unaware of these new ideas, or are unable or unwilling to implement them. The result is often the continuation of inadequate, "business-as-usual" policies; frequent, and often unsuccessful, efforts to "reinvent the wheel;" and the general failure to build on existing knowledge in ways that advance governance or solve a particular problem.

The Governance Commons utilizes the latest information and networking technologies to provide a "learning curve accelerator" capable of helping overcome these problems. The Commons also demonstrates that solutions are possible and that widespread cynicism about governance is unwarranted.

The Governance Challenges

The Governance Commons is organized around a series of "frontier-of-the-field" challenges, which we believe must be

One Earth Future / Conflict Information Consortium

The Governance Commons is a partnership between One Earth Future (OEF) and the University of Colorado, Conflict Information Consortium publishers of Beyond Intractability--the website of the Intractable Conflict Knowledge Base Project (www.beyondintractability.org) and CRInfo--The Conflict Resolution Information Source (www.crinfo.org). The Commons synthesizes governance-related content from these and other Consortium projects with new capabilities developed as part of the Commons initiative. Commons content is also being made available through existing Consortium sites.



considered as part of any comprehensive effort to address the inadequacies of our governance processes. While others might conceptualize the governance problem in different ways, we have found our approach, which is built around three major challenges and nine subsidiary challenges, to be especially useful.

Challenge #1: **Improving Security**

Good governance requires basic security--it is very difficult for people to engage in peaceful problem-solving when their security is constantly under threat. Therefore, the Commons supports efforts to promote security in three key areas:

- *Limiting Violence and Intimidation* by strengthening the ability of police and military forces to protect the public from inter-

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and intra-state violence, while, at the same time, not taking unfair advantage of their powerful positions within a society.

- *Protecting Individual Rights* from illegitimate uses of state power and from structural violence through effective national and international judicial, political, and social mechanisms.
- *Providing Basic Human Needs* by promoting sustainable economies capable of limiting both the humanitarian tragedies of

- *Fostering Legitimate Governance* through transparent and accountable processes that build public trust by demonstrating that the processes are, in fact, worthy of the public's trust.

In addition, The Commons expects to produce a series of Special Editions focused on specific governance-related topics such as genocide, civility, religion and governance, or maritime piracy.

Commons Content / Information Access Tools

The Governance Commons Goals

- Provide those in governance-related roles with easier access to the best available information on strategies for dealing with particular problems,
- Enhance the visibility of those doing quality governance related work,
- Provide a virtual "place" where people interested in improving governance can share ideas about better ways of doing so,
- Collaboratively identify research and development challenges at the frontier of the governance field and help people meet those challenges,
- Provide students and educators with easier access to quality governance learning materials,
- Facilitate collaboration among those working to improve governance, and
- Promote general awareness of governance-related problems and possible solutions.

hopeless poverty and the security threats which can arise when people become truly desperate.

Challenge #2: Promoting Cooperative Relationships

For governance to work, inevitable and, in many ways, constructive intergroup competition must be tempered by a willingness to work together to advance mutual interests. This is why the Commons supports relationship-building efforts in three areas:

- *Broadening the Sense of Community* by overcoming hateful divisions and histories of unrightable wrongs that often prevent communities from recognizing their common interests. In short, we seek to reframe relationships from "us versus them" to "we."
- *Fostering a Sense of Fairness* by encouraging development of a moral basis for balancing individual freedom and the pursuit of self-interest with reasonable obligations to others and to future generations.
- *Encouraging Joint, Agreement-Based Problem Solving* through public- and private-sector approaches that focus on identifying and then pursuing mutually beneficial solutions.

Challenge #3: Assuring Efficiency and Effectiveness

Good governance requires more than security and willingness to work together. It requires governance processes that allow the many sectors of society to effectively work together in three critical areas:

- *Dealing Wisely with Technical Issues* by mobilizing the available scientific expertise to effectively identify and assess options for dealing with complex contemporary problems.
- *Making Politics Work* through institutions that are capable of making tough but equitable decisions in complex political environments and in cases where consensus is impossible.

While the Governance Commons is still in the early, "beta" stage of development, the system now has a great deal of useful content with much more planned for the coming months. Current content includes:

- Essays / Articles on 350+ topics
- Interviews with 70+ experts: 100+ hours of audio, plus transcripts
- Case Studies, Peacebuilder Profiles, and Personal Reflections
- Summaries of 500+ books and articles
- Searchable Citations to 4000+ Web and print resources
- News on many governance related topics
- Exercises and simulations

The Governance Commons also offers a full range of tools for accessing information. on more constructive approaches to difficult governance and conflict problems. While the system is not yet complete, current plans call for offering a wide range of information on each of the hundreds of topics covered by the Commons, including: 1) brief, easily understandable summary articles on key topics; 2) short lists of recommended resources on those topics; 3) comprehensive lists of in-depth resources related to each topic from the principal types of information producers including practitioner reports, academic literature, and news media; 4) user comments on the usefulness of particular resources; and 5) publications written specifically for the Commons.

Available tools for accessing this information include:

- *Search* – For users who know what they're looking for, we offer the ability to conduct simple and advanced searches of all of our information sources.
- *Browse* – For users interested in a general topic but not sure exactly what the search for, we offer a variety of category-based browsing options that are similar to browsing the topic-organized shelves of the library or bookstore.
- *Portals* – For users who feel a need for more assistance and especially those who may be newcomers to a particular aspect of the governance or conflict fields, we offer portals – similar to annotated syllabi with links to key resources likely to be especially useful to: 1) newcomers to the field needing basic educational materials, 2) practitioners looking for online training materials capable of expanding their skill set to enabling them to better address their immediate problems, and 3) researchers and developers seeking to improve governance and conflict-handling strategies.

While the Commons is a very comprehensive system, our intention is not to simply list available resources. That would produce a debilitating case of information overload. Instead, our primary focus is on identifying and highlighting a relatively small number of

exceptionally useful resources. (We, of course, also provide access to the full collection of resources identified by the Commons.)

The Governance Commons Portals

The Governance Commons offers a comprehensive array of Web-based reference and collaboration tools to advance the efforts of those who are working to improve governance processes. We do this by providing our four principal constituencies (practitioners, researchers, educators/students, and the general public) with portals tailored to their specific needs.

- **Education Portal**

For students working to master the core ideas relevant to anticipated governance roles (and their instructors), the Commons provides access to foundational learning materials which serve as a kind of prerequisite for our other two, more advanced portals. The Education Portal is being organized into a variety of primary and supplemental online readers, courses, mini-courses, and learning units that can be used directly by students or by instructors for teaching.

- **Practitioner Portal**

For those actively exercising governance responsibilities this portal constitutes a kind of training resource for practitioners looking for ideas that can make a difference in their specific situation. We provide a framework for assessing the adequacy of ongoing processes and identifying, evaluating, and learning how to implement alternative approaches. We expect that this portal will be especially useful to practitioners who find themselves with new responsibilities that fall outside of their "comfort zone" and who need quick, supplementary training. It will also be helpful for those who want to enhance their understanding of the field, their skill set, or their personal network.

- **Research and Development Portal**

The R&D Portal supports scholars and practitioners seeking to advance our understanding of governance-related problems and develop and test new approaches. The portal provides an overview of current research on each of TGCs nine challenges, as well as a list of areas in which new research is particularly needed. We also provide information about individuals and institutions that are doing particularly innovative and important work. We expect that those in the academic and practitioner communities seeking to develop new ideas will find our identification of frontier-of-the-field challenges and research opportunities especially useful. Even more valuable, however, will be the opportunity to participate in the refinement of the Commons's research agenda, connect with others working in the field, and publish through the Commons.

Governance is more than governmental decision-making. It is the process through which decisions affecting the common welfare are made by civilian government, the military, intergovernmental organizations, commercial businesses, and non-profits.

The Governance Commons: A CL3 Project

CL3 stands for Challenge-oriented, Long-term, Large-scale, Learning system. As a CL3 project, The Governance Commons (TGC) is a reference, education, training and networking tool that incorporates the following key features:

- **Challenge-Oriented Focus**

The system is built around the goal of finding better ways of dealing with nine difficult, but critically important, challenges that we see as being at the core of most governance problems.

- **Long-Term Focus**

While significant short-term improvements to governance processes are possible, we recognize that major progress on the big challenges will require a long-term effort. OEF and the Commons is exceptional in its long-term commitment to addressing the governance problem. It is a commitment that recognizes that new, innovative thinking will be required to challenge paradigms that aren't working and offer more constructive alternatives.

- **Large-Scale Focus**

The very large scale of modern society, along with a large number of specialized governance roles, makes governance a truly complex problem with no simple "one-size-fits-all" solution. Instead, people facing largely unique governance challenges need to be matched up with the best available ideas for meeting those challenges. The Commons facilitates this by systematically cataloguing the best available information on strategies for dealing with the full range of governance problems. This information is then provided to users through a variety of "information overload control" tools.

- **Learning System**

To improve governance, the Commons seeks to provide users with information in a format appropriate for their needs. It also supports a large-scale learning effort designed to advance the frontier of the field.

The Governance Chronicle

In addition to the portals, the Commons also includes the *Chronicle*, which provides a continually updated, online newspaper / journal with links to news and feature stories related to the principal challenges and other topics addressed by the Commons. In publishing the *Chronicle*, we recognize that much of what people learn about how to deal with conflict and governance problems comes from the daily flow of news, not from more deliberate and time-consuming research, education, and training efforts. The *Chronicle* counterbalances the conventional media which tends to foster a sense of cynicism and hopelessness. The weekly *Chronicle* updates provide articles from news, academic, organizational, and multimedia sources, which help people understand the problems we face along with options for responding constructively. The *Chronicle* also tends to broaden people's horizons by highlighting items of interest that they would not have sought out through search or browsing systems.

Each of these portals include the following:

- *Features* -- some of the more interesting resources added to the portal this month,

- *Contents* -- an easily browsable listing of information available and featured in each portal,
- *Reference tools* -- a comprehensive and powerful toolkit for looking-up information on governance-related topics,
- *Participation links* -- offering many different ways in which members of the Commons can participate (see below).

The Governance Commons Knowledge Base

The information provided through the Commons includes large amounts of material originating with Commons partners (including, for example, Beyond Intractability). Still, the core of the Commons knowledge base consists of carefully selected links to outside, Web-accessible resources. These resources are organized in ways that limit information overload and match people up with information that they can genuinely use.

The system systematically crawls the Web, looking for promising materials--academic publications, official reports from organizations involved in governance processes, high-quality news stories, and multimedia resources. Promising materials are then reviewed by human editors to identify those that merit inclusion in the knowledge base. Our goal is not to include everything. Our focus is on filtering out the very large number of accounts of business-as-usual governance and highlighting information that can really help improve governance. All information is full-text searchable, and also browsable by major topics and information types.

Commons Membership

Participation in the Governance Commons is being offered at a variety of levels, depending upon an individual's or organization's level of interest, background, and willingness to contribute to the Commons.

- *General Public Access* -- "read-only" access to the basic system, freely available over the Web to anyone who might be interested.
- *Basic Membership* -- available to anyone who fills out a simple online application, entitles members to take advantage of opportunities for posting comments and content throughout the site. (Contributed content is subject to review and approval by Commons moderators, and major contributions must pass a peer review process.)
- *Partner / Contributor Membership* -- available to those with substantial governance background who are willing to play a significant role in developing the site. These contributors will be publicly and quite visibly acknowledged on portions of the site reserved for this purpose.
- *Sponsorships* -- for those who help to provide the financial support needed to maintain and operate the Commons. These too are quite visibly acknowledged.

Commons Participation Options

When the Commons is fully developed, members will be able to post information in a variety of forms, including online comments, uploaded documents, links to web-based materials, and audio comments made using the Commons's "Contributing Voices" online interview/recording system. (Most of these options are

currently available.) Participation options, ranging from those that require substantial time commitments from users to those that are less demanding, are listed below. We also offer a number of easy-to-use tools that reduce the amount of time required purchase. We also have a support staffing available to reduce the amount of time required of participants.

- *Working Group Facilitation* -- For members who want to work together to advance some aspect of the Commons agenda, we provide collaborative tools for the joint authoring of documents and the solicitation of outside comments. This aspect of the site provides access control mechanisms that allow work groups to confidentially develop draft documents which can then be made available to wider audiences for review.
- *Development of the Commons Agenda* -- The Commons's efforts to improve governance are focused on advancing an agenda that seeks better ways of responding to the core challenges. The Commons actively seeks member help in refining and prioritizing this agenda.
- *Commons Editors and Moderators* -- We will recruit editors with in-depth expertise on specific Commons topics to take the lead in organizing particular sections. To minimize the amount of time required of editors, we will provide a variety of labor-saving tools and the support services of the Commons staff. As a further incentive, we will acknowledge these and other major substantive contributions in an "ever-present" contributor box.
- *Social Networking* -- The Commons is a 21st century network that will make appropriate use of online social networking sites (e.g. Linked-In and Facebook) to encourage the formation of mutually supportive groups focused around our principal governance challenges.
- *Peer Review Publication Opportunities* -- As the Commons develops, we expect to solicit, review, and then electronically publish a broad range of materials related to governance issues and, especially, materials that fill "gaps" in the existing knowledge base.
- *Feedback Opportunities* -- All resource postings will include an opportunity for members to provide constructive comments regarding the usefulness of particular materials and ways in which they might be integrated with other governance efforts.
- *"Items of Interest" Announcements / Member "Bright Ideas"* -- For members who would like to offer innovative approaches to governance problems, we provide a "Bright Ideas" section, where members can briefly summarize how they would respond to a particular challenge and then offer links to additional information. Members can also post announcements of governance-related publications, instructional programs, or datasets that are likely to be of interest. (The Commons will not formally evaluate or vouch for the quality of such information. We will, however, provide the feedback mechanisms described below.)
- *Member Challenges / Responses* -- Members struggling with specific governance-related challenges can pose those challenges to the Commons. These challenges and responses will, as they accumulate, be incorporated into the Commons's full-text searchable knowledge base.