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# The Future of Governing in Hawai'i:

*Distributed Democracy*

December 15, 2009

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## INTRODUCTION

The Future of Governing in Hawai'i is a set of four scenarios, each of which explores a single possible future for government and governance in Hawai'i over the next fifteen years. Each scenario assumes a particular timeline of technological change interacting with different drivers and issues. As a set, the scenarios are concerned with exploring how and why Hawai'i may experience significant changes in the way it makes decisions in the public interest.

Set against a real-world backdrop of growing interest in “government 2.0,” transparency, accountability, and citizen participation, and amidst rising concerns over the ability of traditional governments to continue to ensure security and prosperity in a global world, these scenarios provide Hawai'i with a much-needed advance look at very real challenges and opportunities arising in the way we govern.

This report presents one of the four scenarios in the project: Distributed Democracy.

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## SCENARIO MAP

Scenarios are often written stories, 1 – 3 pages of text narrative. For this project we've chosen a new method for constructing and *illustrating* the stories: the scenario map. A visual approach to scenarios, the map better highlights the *flow* of events and developments, calling the reader's attention to how things interact and drive each other.

This scenario map illustrates the flow of events in Hawai'i over a fifteen year period. The top layer provides a timeline of important technological developments, while the main layers focus on the major perspectives of the scenario. The bottom layer provides a brief running narrative of the events throughout the scenario.

### Summary of “Distributed Democracy”

Distributed Democracy illustrates a future in which the traditional, central government is overwhelmed in dealing with the complex and increasingly globalized challenges to public safety and prosperity. Citizens, faced with the need to address the pressing challenges in their daily lives, make use of new mobile and information technologies to self-organize. Foreshadowed in “social media” and given life through an explosion of mobile devices and location and context-based information, these technologies offer ordinary citizens the tools to connect, organize, prioritize, and solve pressing issues.

These distributed but organized groups of citizens are often much faster and more effective at connecting with each other, generating critical information, proposing innovative ideas, and mobilizing action than the agencies of the government. Pockets of citizen governance appear across the state, communities mobilizing individuals to directly govern critical issues. Over time the government not only accepts the existence of these little democracies, it comes to rely on the speed, power, and insight that arises from the disaggregated actions of dozens of organizations and thousands of citizens.

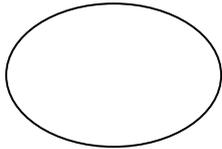
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## Map Key

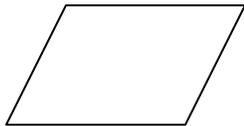
The following key explains the symbols and colors used in the scenario map.



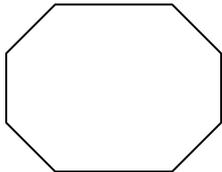
Event or development



Outcome



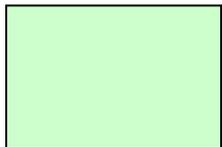
Turning point



Watershed event



Something over which there is significant disagreement or conflict



Something for which there is significant collaboration or support by all parties



Relatively neutral action or development

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## KEY TECHNOLOGIES

While the “Tech Timeline” layer at the top of the scenario map seems to play a relatively muted role, the technologies that it identifies are critical for enabling the events that unfold in the scenario. Here is a brief explanation of the items found in the Tech Timeline.

Year	Technology	Description
2012	P2P money transfers	The seemingly simple ability for two individuals to transfer money to and from each other through simple and easy to use applications, typically on their mobile devices.
2014	Augmented reality	Like an “overlay” of information on the physical world. Individuals can use the camera in their mobile device to “see” the physical world in front of them; software adds contextual and educational information to the screen so that users have a “heads-up display” like that of a fighter pilot.
2015	Civic media platforms	Similar to the Web-based social networking platforms of the early 2000s such as FB, Ning, and Groupsite, these DIY sites allow groups to connect and organize, but they specialize in a variety of group decision-making and commitment-management processes. Most are designed to incorporate government data and to seamlessly connect with government officials, agencies, and processes.
	Mobile civic “apps”	Applications that enable users to post ideas, complaints, and suggestions for social and community norms for their neighborhoods. Relying on GPS location data from mobile devices, these apps inform visitors or passers-by of the current issues under discussion by local residents and alert

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users/visitors to any important social norms and suggestions. Initially created as humorous novelty apps, they quickly evolve and are adopted by homeowner associations, neighborhood boards, and other community organizations.

- 2016 Ad hoc P2P wireless networks Aside from traditional Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, and 3G wireless capabilities, new handhelds can transmit their own ad hoc wireless network out to about 200 feet. In densely populated areas all mobile users can communicate with each other without the need for cellular or Wi-Fi internet access.
- 2021 Civicware A layer of software that operates between civic media and civic infrastructure. Civicware manages the interactions between an individual's membership in specific civic communities, acting as a sort of individual constitutional conscience or agent. Civicware ensures that your commitments and privileges follow you and attempts to reconcile competing or contradictory governance issues.
- 2024 Membership exchanges Due to the proliferation of civic communities, citizens join and leave civic communities with greater frequency, creating challenges for managing the rights and obligations individuals obtain and lose as they move. Membership exchanges emerge to "clear" the debit and credit of responsibilities and rights as individuals move across communities, ensuring a measure of continuity and fairness and limiting free-riding.

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## SHOWCASES

While the scenario map is necessarily brief, there are several items from the scenario that we would like to highlight and describe in more detail. Together these showcased items provide readers with more nuance and a better sense of the “flavor” of the scenario and all that it tries to convey.

- Open Policy Forum** Created with the motto “The Policies *We the People* Would Make,” the Forum is a collaborative website within which Open Party candidates “elected” in the WeVote Campaign propose and actively debate policies. Registered members of the Forum periodically vote on policies and winning policies are actively promoted by Open Party and actual Democratic “3<sup>rd</sup> column” representatives.
- WeShelter** A site and mobile app that enables individuals to upload and geographically map information concerning homeless individuals and families. The site makes it easy for users to connect with and track the efforts of social service agencies as well as mobilize ad hoc efforts to assist in various ways. Overall the site generates sometimes very detailed and timely data and acts as a state-wide tracking and evaluation service.
- United Community Board** Inspired by the WeShelter and WeWork sites, as well as the WeVote Campaign and the online budget and policy simulators, the three neighborhood boards decide to use civic media platforms and social lending applications to directly solicit funds (“suggestive taxing”) and increase resident participation in directly governing pressing local issues.
- WeFund** A website/service that uses social lending and collaborative investing to support local small businesses through the economic downturn. The site tracks and illustrates the potential impact of support/no support on actual employees and the

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estimated downstream impacts.

**Public Data Initiative** A much larger, government-sponsored version of the earlier Citizen Data Service. PDI makes virtually all government data, from voting data to government expenditures to research data available in easy-to-manipulate forms. The site provides for public debate and the sharing of original analysis and information. Individuals can upload and share information and data about events and issues not already tracked by the government, creating new databases of knowledge.

**WeNews** A semi-automated site/service that constantly scours civic media sites and social network posts/traffic to identify and construct the “news” based on the issues citizens are actually working on. Draws on PDI feeds to build measures and data around these news stories and enable further action.

**Laulima** Designed by a group of UH students within a few hours of Hurricane Xander hitting Hawai‘i, this service was designed to make it almost effortless for victims of the hurricane to communicate and coordinate without normal electrical power or cell service. Using the ad hoc wide area P2P networking that is mainstream on cell phones by 2016, the app uses the GPS and Augmented Reality data from mobile phones to map the locations of individuals, their status, and their needs. Victims can search for loved ones, coordinate local responses, transfer funds, and generally stay in touch. When internet access is available, Laulima connects with sites such as PDI, WeShelter, and WeNews.

**Downtown Revitalization Community** Built around the popular Laulima platform, DRC is a civic community of landowners, tenants, residents, and people who work in downtown

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Honolulu organized to rebuild the downtown district in the aftermath of Yolanda. Members map problems and issues they see, help raise a community fund for rebuilding, list and share resources and personal efforts, participate in deciding how reconstruction funds are allocated, collaborate on establishing new social norms, and participate in prioritizing issues and problems to be sent “up” to the City and State governments.

**Citizen-sourcing**

Originally described in a “green paper” by a UH student taking the Virtual Policy 610 course, “citizen-sourcing” embraces the increasingly effective civic media, collaboration, and “crowd-sourcing” tools to outsource certain public issues to civic communities. The state government leads the movement and provides matching funds for policies and actions approved by recognized civic communities.

**Office of Civic  
Accountability**

Created by the Legislature in 2024, the Office of Accountability is one of the first governmental structures that institutionalizes the relationships between the central state government and lower-level democratic communities. Partly relying on PDI, the Office monitors and reports on the follow-through, progress, and impact of the policies and actions undertaken by local civic communities.

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## CRITICAL POINTS FOR CHANGE

The value of scenarios lies less in their power to predict specific events than it does in their emphasis on exploring and understanding why change happens. For this reason we have included this section to identify some of the important moments of change in the scenario and to invite the reader to consider how (and why) things might have gone otherwise.

In these scenarios we categorize two types of important events: turning points and watershed events. Turning points (TP) are moments in the scenario where individuals or groups make choices that help steer the future onto important paths or channels. Watershed (W) events are those developments that unleash a host of changes that define the years to follow by redefining basic assumptions or practices.

**Millennials create 3<sup>rd</sup> column** (TP): The act of the Millennial generation electing some of their own to the Legislature was critical not because they represented the “youth” but rather because they consciously set out to use their candidates as conduits for new levels of transparency and participation. Their intent and success demonstrated to others that politics can indeed be *of* the masses, and their transparency agenda in government set in motion events that culminated in critical pieces of Hawaii’s future “civic infrastructure.”

**WeVote Campaign** (W): The campaign was the first big watershed event in the scenario, challenging the traditional rules about representation and engaging thousands in enthusiastic participation. The WeVote Campaign made people realize that they had in front of them the tools to self-organize and create new rules. After the example of the campaign communities in Hawai‘i began to take it for granted that they could organize themselves to effect change rather than look to the central government to make change for them.

**United Community Board** (TP): The United Board represents an important turning point in the story because it is the moment when the central government has to choose between putting it down and pretending it never happened, or face what it represents and begin to adapt. Because the City and County government chose to begin adapting, it created a precedent that other agencies and administrations followed.

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**Community crisis-mapping** (W): The Laulima application created in the midst of hurricane Xander represents a watershed event because it brought together several technologies into a powerful yet easy-to-use and easy-to-share service that connected tens of thousands of people specifically to help each other and govern themselves. This app became the foundation for many civic organizations and communities that were to follow.

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## INDICATORS

One of the values of scenario projects is that they help to identify the kinds of indicators of change that an organization should watch for as the future unfolds. Indicators are typically identified during group discussion in the scenario development process, by the turning points and watershed events in the scenarios, and by the technology timelines that are created. The following are a few indicators developed from Distributed Democracy.

- The ratio of young voters participating in online political venues vs. the number voting in actual elections.
- The percentage of residents actively participating in collective actions online vs. the percentage taking active part in politics (attending neighborhood boards, legislative hearings, voting, etc...)
- The creation of popular “virtual” political parties
- The creation of a popular mock legislature
- A UH course on virtual democracy is developed (like the Virtual Policy 610 course)
- An example of an online social network being more effective than government programs at solving a specific community issue
- Examples of government agencies citing data from citizen “crowd sourcing” websites
- Ad hoc, wide area P2P networking on mobile devices
- Survey results that show residents have more faith in their community’s ability to help them than the government

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## GLOSSARY

**App(s):** Software applications that help a user perform a specific task, like calculating numbers, tracking local bus times, or instantly transferring money from one person to another.

**Augmented reality (AR):** Information or computer-generated images layered over a view of a physical location, e.g. looking through a mobile device or car windshield and seeing written directions, icons, and links displayed on the buildings, streets, and objects in view.

**Civic media:** The use of information and communication technology to increase citizen participation in governing.

**Community:** Referring to a collective of individuals, defined by either common geography or shared identity; not always a geographic neighborhood.

**Crisis mapping:** The use information and communication technologies (such as mobile devices and websites) to enable field workers and ordinary citizens to report and track developing crises such as natural disasters, civil unrest, and public health emergencies.

**Mashups:** A website or app that combines the data and/or functions of two or more outside sources to create a new service.

**P2P:** Peer-to-peer; where individuals connect and share directly with one another without a middleman or intervening service.

**Political design:** The act of selecting a set of physical and political technologies, organizing them into a coherent architecture intended for governance, and linked them together through a political philosophy that articulates the belief that this unique architecture will provide security, stability, and prosperity.

**Social lending:** Also known as peer-to-peer lending, social lending typically involves the lending and borrowing of money between two or more individuals without the use of a traditional financial intermediary such as a bank.