



Stanford eCorner

Centrality of Civic Technology

Jennifer Pahlka, *Code for America*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/3445/Centrality-of-Civic-Technology>

Code for America's Jennifer Pahlka describes how government leaders must understand technology as well as they do economics and law in order to successfully run a country and implement policies. She urges technologists to bring their skills to bear on a government so it is truly "for the people" and "by the people."



Transcript

Because government has not thought about the digital as a core part of what it does for far too long and we're paying the cost of it. When healthcare.gov shipped and failed on October 1st, most probably a couple of days afterwards, when I was getting my head around what that meant, I thought back to a blogpost that my colleague Tom Steinberg in the U.K. had published and this is back in February 2012. He had written a post memorializing a colleague of his who had died five years earlier, who was a genius and a polymath and could have done anything in the world with his skills, but had chosen to use his talents on essentially civic technology. mySociety is kind of like the Code for America of the U.K. And he wanted people to understand what that meant. So that his passing - that his life still had meaning to the community around him. And when Tom was writing about it, he said what Chris fundamentally had right was the understanding that you can no longer run a country properly if the elites don't understand technology in the way that they grasp economics or ideology or propaganda. And his analysis and predictions about what would happen if the elites couldn't learn were savage and depressingly accurate. He wrote that in 2012 before healthcare.gov failed and before we all realized that if we passed immigration reform, it too would probably fail on implementation, because of our systems.

Because we have fought for so long that the people who should go into government are lawyers and economists essentially. We must have a native digital capability in order to govern. I know I'm preaching to the choir here, but I do think it's - we all have a duty to explain this to others, it's not just technology, right? The good - what good governance and a good society look like is now inextricably linked to an understanding of the digital. And I think that is a burden that your generation bears to explain that and to bring that into this one institution that is designed to serve, not some of us, but all of us. Let's see, so another way of saying this is not just the government can work for the people, but that government can work, but only if we make it so.