

Hi, this is Beth Simone Noveck.

Bill Clinton famously said, "Nearly every problem has been solved by someone somewhere. The challenge of the 21st century is to find out what works and scale it up."

The public problem solver should not just ask what solutions are out there, but who is out there.

Informed people are the fastest and shortest way to learning what has been tried and what is working.

Complex and interdependent problems like a pandemic demand urgent access to expertise – expertise is widely dispersed – and the ability to translate that expertise into concrete action.

Smarter Crowdsourcing is a process for convening global experts online and developing their insights into problem statements, and later fleshed out solutions with implementation plans.

Crowdsourcing refers to the use of the Internet to solicit help from a distributed audience, or the so-called crowd.

But crowdsourcing can be hit or miss since it relies on the happenstance of having the right people learn about the opportunity to participate and wanting to do so.

It may not attract the people with the right know-how quickly enough. Typically crowdsourcing works well when small tasks without a high degree of complexity need to be performed – situations where it almost does not matter who participates.

But in the case of serious and time-sensitive challenges like coronavirus response, it's necessary to marry the agility and diversity of crowd sourcing with curation, to target those with relevant know-how and bring them together in a format designed to produce effective and implementable outcomes.

Instead of a handful of people meeting once, at great expense, in a conference room (something we can't do today during a pandemic), we use technology to get hundreds to lend their time and know-how and bring them into conversation with one another to identify, design and iterate upon good ideas.

Smarter Crowdsourcing targets those with relevant know-how and brings them together in a format that's really designed to present and produce implementable solutions that you can use quickly.

It enables ongoing systematic and useful exchange of expertise among dozens or even hundreds of global specialists.

The goal is to solve policy challenges by combining rigorous problem definition, research, and curation with crowdsourcing in order to attract not just diverse ideas, but also the ability to render them useful and usable.

This more targeted form of crowdsourcing makes it possible for institutions to get more diverse help systematically, and for more members of the public to participate in problem solving by sharing their knowledge, skills and experience.

In our experience, Smarter Crowdsourcing involves five steps.

The first is really identifying partner institutions. This is a process optimized for providing specific and concrete assistance for partners who are prioritizing the problems to which they need solutions, and who are committed to implementing the solutions. It's really important to have an audience who's going to use the suggestions that are made in order to encourage people to participate. Second is the process of problem identification.

The second step focuses on engaging with partner public institutions and experts to narrow a broader issue. So in other words, we don't start with an issue like COVID-19 – much too broad – but we narrow it into evidence-based problem definitions, such as a more specific question like, "How do we create a better ventilator?", or "How do we source more personal protective equipment?", or "How do we stand up an effective testing facility?", or "How do we feed children when schools are closed?", etc etc. We need to go from a broader issue to a more specific and narrow problem definition.

The third step is curation and it involves identifying invited self selected or recommended participants from diverse backgrounds who have relevant expertise. The rapid evidence review informs this process. You have to really search the literature, talk to people, look at what is out there, in order to think about whom to invite. Guests should be those with academic and practical experience, subject matter and also related data technology innovation or methods expertise. And above all, people who have a demonstrated track record at solving similar problems.

The process is more than just an online dialogue. Participants are asked to recommend other invitees, making it possible to grow the group beyond just the usual suspects. The usual suspects bring similar viewpoints and reinforce one another's biases. What we're looking for is a diverse audience that will be able to debate and deliberate and help refine novel ideas into useful and implementable proposals.

The fourth step is the deliberative step. That involves convening a series of online deliberative conversations among participants using a web conferencing platform such as Zoom. Each online discussion lasts two hours and is focused on a specific problem.

Finally, the last step is going from ideas to implementation. What we then try to do is to distill the learnings from the online session, conduct follow-up research and develop implementation memos that can be used by institutions, laying out specific next steps, actions to take, timeframes, costs, and other practical information.

It's really important to have a small but talented group of people who can take the many ideas that are proposed – often proposed by smart thinkers but people without field experience delivering solutions – that who can really distill those good ideas into things that you can do with very concrete next steps.

For example, in 2016 the Inter-American Development Bank ,working with the Governance Lab, used Smarter Crowdsourcing to address the Zika epidemic. We first started by partnering with the City Government of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil and the national governments of Argentina, Colombia, and Panama to look for solutions to the Zika challenge.

The GovLab team broke down the issue of Zika into 15 more specific problems and partner governments selected six to address. Those were assessing public awareness, communication and behavior change, predictive analytics, trash and standing water, information collection and data governance, and long-term care.

The team then organized six online dialogues over two months in response to each problem, attracting more than a hundred global experts who deliberated online too deepen understanding of the problems and their root causes, and to identify solutions.

The small team that worked on the project then took those discussions, did the additional research, and refined the ideas into a playbook of 20 implementable proposals to the six problem statements.

Global and complex public health emergencies such as coronavirus ,like zika, dengue, and ebola a few years ago, threaten health and well-being. They disrupt global and regional trade and economic stability and cause widespread uncertainty and concern, as we have seen.

People are looking to traditional institutions to act effectively and quickly to respond to problems, and they get frustrated by the inability of our institutions to find, evaluate, and implement effective and especially innovative and tech enabled approaches to such hard problems.

The expertise exists out there to help take an overwhelming challenge like coronavirus and identify the constituent problems at a granular level, as well as develop approaches to overcoming them.

For example, the U.S. Digital Response, a coalition of former senior government officials, is coordinating and placing over a thousand programmers and designers in technology roles and projects at the state and local level.

There's a need for similar coordination efforts for policy. By mobilizing diverse and distributed expertise, both credentialed know-how an experiential wisdom, we can actually get things done faster, bringing the best thinking to bear and translating good ideas into actionable proposals backed by evidence.

If you would like more information about Smarter Crowdsourcing, please visit www.smartercrowdsourcing.org.

There, we've laid out the methods, processes, and an entire guide and

template for how to run your own Smarter Crowdsourcing project. You're also welcome to contact us at the Governance Lab at info@thegovlab.org and we're happy to help you stand up a Smarter Crowdsourcing project and advise you on how to do it for yourself in partnership with other actors

But I can't emphasize enough how, in this time of crisis and difficulty, whether it's the choice of an app or the choice of a policy, you need good advice and expertise quickly.

None of us have time at the moment to search extensive research and literature. Instead what we need to do is to contact those people who've already done the research, who've already explored the solutions, who already know what else is out there, and leverage them to help.

Using Smarter Crowdsourcing we can actually get at those good ideas and turn them into actionable solutions.

And just to give you one really heartening, I think, concluding note, one of the experts that we used for our Smarter Crowdsourcing for Zika challenge back in 2016, a professor who educated us about the use of predictive analytics and uses of big data, in those days to fight dengue in Pakistan, which we were then able to apply his expertise to help with the pandemic challenge of Zika back in a few years ago. We then were able to turn to him again during the current pandemic of coronavirus, not only leveraging the ideas that he suggested, but contacting him and using this person who was in the network we had established to help us now respond to coronavirus.

He's become an integral part of our team, working day to day, shoulder-to-shoulder in actually running predictive analytics and allowing us to respond to the current crisis.

So don't forget that when you do Smarter Crowdsourcing, not only does it help you with the challenge you have immediately in front of you. It allows you to build a network – a Rolodex if you will – of experts and practitioners who can help you in the challenge you face immediately and in the challenges to come.

Thank you.