**Helping Australians
to participate in
democratic processes**

2023

**COMPANY
ANNUAL
REPORT**

Democracy Developers Ltd was established in January 2022 in Victoria by a group of Australians passionate about the future of our democracy.

Our mission is to make political participation accessible to all, guided by our core values of engagement, openness, privacy, and inclusiveness.

We are committed to developing transparent and trustworthy digital technology that genuinely promotes democracy.

We are currently developing *Ask Parliament,* a dedicated mobile phone app that provides an easy way for Australians to direct questions to parliamentary representatives. *Ask Parliament* also allows MPs to better understand and respond to their constituents' concerns within parliament.

In addition, we have been engaged to provide expert consultancy services to several organisations. This work involves the development of open-source software for election auditing and verification.

OUR VISION

A free and open democracy for the benefit of all Australians.

OUR MISSION

To support all Australians to engage and participate in democratic processes.

Our company

ABOUT US

Democracy Developers promotes the everyday exercise of democratic rights. We aim to improve democratic participation by providing clear channels of communication between the electorate and members of parliament so they can more effectively represent the people.

OUR APPROACH

Research and development
We build privacy-respecting open-source software as a free resource and encourage the public to develop, adapt and reuse secure software. We also conduct research and provide technical analysis for government and the public on electronic forms of democratic participation including risks, potential benefits, security and effectiveness.

Education
We believe all Australians have a right to be heard and contribute to our democracy. We provide resources to help inform the public about the functions of Australian parliamentary democracy and how they can actively participate in democratic processes.

Advocacy
We speak up about what we care about - privacy and a strong democracy. We encourage every Australian to be actively involved in our democracy to ensure the strength of our political system. We are enabling easy, secure and effective communication between people and their political representatives.

OUR VALUES

Non-partisan
We support all forms of improved democratic participation that are inclusive of all Australians regardless of political alignment. We are politically unaffiliated and non-partisan, and do not accept donations that would compromise our independence.

Open and transparent
We are concerned about the vast amounts of data collected on all of us. We collect minimal data from participants, and do not sell or share it without consent. Our software is designed to protect privacy and empower everyone to make choices about their own data. All of our software is open-source and freely available.

Human rights
We believe in democracy as a form of government is a universal benchmark for human rights protection. We are concerned that weakening the questioning of government, the lack of democratic participation and the lobbying power of interest groups will negatively impact people's right to be heard.

Freedom of speech
We support freedom of expression, ideals of citizenry, and civility of discourse as fundamental to societal growth. Encouraging respectful discourse is a process that requires a continuous active commitment to promoting a healthy democracy.

Diversity and inclusion
We foster a culture of open-mindedness, compassion, and inclusiveness among individuals and groups in all that we do. We are building an online community that welcomes members with diverse backgrounds including, but not limited to: race, ethnicity, culture, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, national origin, and religion.

VOLUNTEERS

Our volunteers have been the lifeblood of Democracy Developers. Their passion, dedication, and expertise have been vital to delivering our democratic participation initiatives. They have enabled us to make significant strides in our mission.

Our team

OUR TEAM

As we approach our second year of operation, the Board extends its profound gratitude to everyone who has played a part in our journey. We deeply value the engagement of MPs and their staff for user design feedback, the invaluable advice from IT professionals on software design methodologies, and the essential support in establishing critical resources and policies. Each of these contributions has been pivotal to our charity's success, and we are immensely grateful for everyone's role in shaping Democracy Developers.

A/Prof Vanessa Teague
BOARD CHAIRPERSON & FOUNDER

Vanessa is an Adjunct Associate Professor at the Australian National University, specialising in cryptographic protocols that support a free and democratic society. She works on openly-available research and software for supporting democratic decision-making and empowering ordinary people to make choices about their own data. Vanessa has researched security problems in e-voting and e-counting systems and developed new tools and techniques for auditing complex elections.

Rosey Conway
BOARD MEMBER & COMMUNICATIONS

Rosey has 30 years of experience as an educator, specialising in executive sales, marketing, branding, strategy, management and communications. Her BA in the humanities & social sciences has inspired a career that thrives on building creative solutions to achieve great outcomes. Rosey is passionate about improving democratic involvement and communication, and she hopes to inspire more Australians to become politically engaged and have their voices heard.

Lillian McCann
BOARD MEMBER & TECHNOLOGIST

Lilli is a software engineer in the Identity and Access Management space. After completing a BA in politics & international studies and a Diploma in Computing, she began a career in software engineering to develop the skills needed to build technology for a better world. She is passionate about the potential for e-democracy to improve democratic processes and representation and advocates for protecting digital privacy. Lilli is committed to advancing democracy through her role in Democracy Developers.

Mark Pinoli
GENERAL MANAGER & COMPANY SECRETARY

Mark has over 12 years of experience managing charities, including 10 years delivering community empowerment projects in rural Nepal. His leadership roles include serving as a Board Member & International Services Director at Rotary Melbourne and Assistant Director of Research & Policy at the Academy of the Social Sciences. Mark is also a consultant, having worked with not-for-profits and universities for over 23 years. Currently, he lends his expertise as a member of the ACNC Consultation Panel and RMIT's Human Research Ethics Committee.

Technical expertise & management teams

Ben Harnett, Andrew Conway, Chris Culnane, Chuanyuan Liu, Dana McKay, Tim McCann, and a wonderful team from Thoughtworks who donated their UI design and software development expertise. Special thanks to Dan Cameron who is providing ongoing administrative support.

ASK PARLIAMENT

ENCOURAGING DEMOCRACY

✓ Publish questions directed to an MP to answer in-app.

✓ Search for existing questions, up-vote or down-vote them, enabling MPs and the public to identify the top issues within an electorate and across Australia.

✓ Request questions to be raised in state or federal parliament by a particular MP or committee, directed to another MP, Minister or public authority to answer.

✓ Subject matter experts and those with lived experience can contribute their valuable knowledge, equipping change-makers with the most relevant information to effect positive change.

✓ Ditches the traditional back-and-forth commenting of conventional social media for simple, clean, and uncluttered political communication.

The primary aim of *Ask Parliament* is to facilitate a seamless flow of meaningful information between people and their parliamentary representatives.

Visit our open-source software repository at:
https://github.com/RightToAskOrg

Reports

CHAIRPERSON REPORT

2023 saw two major achievements for Democracy Developers. The first was to bring *Ask Parliament* to a MVP stage suitable for closed release. Many thanks to the employees, contractors and volunteers whose intelligence, thoughtfulness and creativity has made the app, and its aspirations, so much better.

Ask Parliament will be a constant process of education and improvement, but we have now passed a critical threshold where we can ask real people what they think of it, and iterate in order to make it even easier and more effective.

Special thanks to Mark Pinoli, who, as Democracy Developers' General Manager, has brought a new level of organisation and structure that helps us meet our goals. Our board members, Lillian McCann and Rosey Conway, got constant new ideas and critical thinking and made improvements across the board, including the app, the website, and our strategy. Andrew Conway and Chris Culnane contributed code, technical insight and valuable technical solutions to challenging problems. Thanks to the Open Australia Foundation for ongoing support and useful advice, and to Thoughtworks for their excellent work and in-kind donations.

Our second major achievement was to win a contract to enhance the state of Colorado's open-source Risk Limiting Audit system by incorporating instant runoff voting (a.k.a. Australian-style preferential voting). This project will implement research done with colleagues at the University of Melbourne (Dr Michelle Blom and Prof Peter Stuckey) and Berkeley (Prof Philip Stark). We chose the research problem because we hoped that Australian electoral authorities would adopt Risk-Limiting election Audits. Though that has never happened, the research solutions have found an application in the opposite direction: a US state with existing Risk-Limiting audits has adopted preferential (instant-runoff) voting, and engaged us to ensure that their Risk Limiting Audits extend to their new voting method. Our solution will mean that Colorado can maintain the high standard of transparency and auditability of their electoral process, while adopting a more expressive voting method. And we still haven't given up hope that the techniques might be applied in Australia too.

We look forward to developing more code, and more understanding of how to support democracy in Australia and overseas.

A/Prof Vanessa Teague
Chairperson & Founder

CONSULTANCY SERVICES

We offer consultancy services to organisations that share our values and a dedication to enhancing democracy. This arrangement helps us secure the funding to pursue our charitable goals.

We have expertise in a number of areas, including:

✓ Identifying vulnerabilities in e-voting and e-counting systems.

✓ Developing new tools and techniques for auditing complex elections.

✓ Developing open-source software to ensure that our tools are transparent and accessible to all.

We are committed to security, transparency, accessibility, and ethical principles. We trust that digital technology, when used responsibly, can substantially contribute to the advancement of democracy.

We also believe that by providing high-quality research and tools, we can help governments build stronger, more resilient democracies that serve the needs and interests of the public.

Analysis

We provide objective technical analysis for government and the public of electronic forms of democratic participation, including risks, potential benefits, security and effectiveness.

Research

We conduct and support high-quality, openly available research into electronic forms of democratic participation, their security and effectiveness.

Development

We build privacy-respecting, open-source, and well-documented software for agencies and teach the public how to develop, adapt and reuse secure software for public good.

Reports

ACHIEVEMENTS

We are committed to responsibly leveraging technology to support democracy through our *Ask Parliament* initiative, research collaborations, consultancy work, and community outreach. As we strive for growth, we prioritise aligning technological efforts with democratic values, ensuring they serve and empower the public.
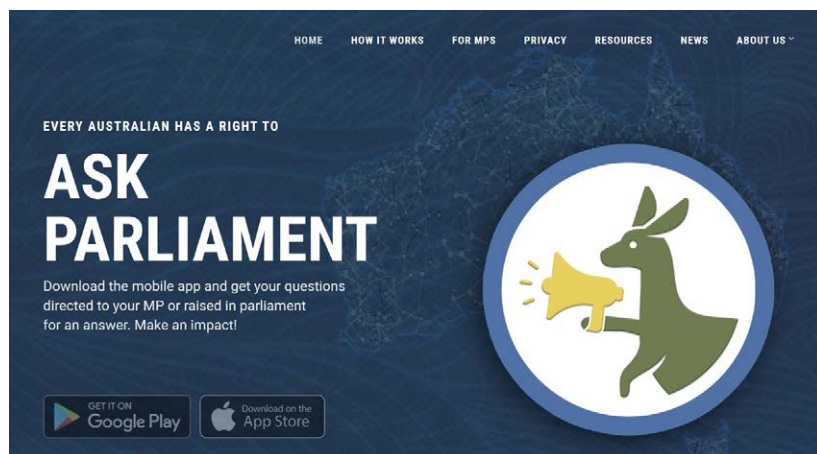
This policy emphasises our commitment to political impartiality and transparency. In alignment with Australian political donation disclosure standards, contributions exceeding $10,000 in a single financial year will be disclosed in our Annual Report. Additionally, we reserve the right to decline or return donations that could compromise our integrity or risk the reputation and operations of our organisation.

NEW WEBSITE

In light of our continuously evolving objectives and the introduction of new initiatives, we have redesigned our website. The site prominently displays our recent programs and provides a comprehensive insight into the functionalities of the *Ask Parliament* app. Moreover, it is structured to promote our mission and values, ensuring they resonate with our audience.

Website enhancements include:

- Revitalised branding, bringing a fresh and contemporary look to the website and our publications.

- A dedicated news section, ensuring our followers stay updated with our latest projects, research findings, and community engagements.

- An expanded 'About Us' page that includes our mission and vision statements, core values, the people behind Democracy Developers, and an overview of our research and consulting services.

Donation initiative

We've launched an online donation page on GiveNow to foster community involvement and support. In addition, our Donation Policy has been introduced to ensure the integrity of our mission and values.

Visit our website:
https://www.democracydevelopers.org.au

Donation platform at:
https://www.givenow.com.au/democracy

Our Donation Policy is at:
https://www.democracydevelopers.org.au/donation-policy

ASK PARLIAMENT UPDATE

In an important update, we transitioned the name of our app from 'Right To Ask' to 'Ask Parliament.' The decision for this rebranding was necessitated by the introduction of a domestic violence history disclosure program by the New South Wales Government in early 2023, also named 'Right to Ask.' The high online visibility of this program prompted our name change to maintain distinctiveness and ease of search for our app.

In 2023, we focused significantly on refining *Ask Parliament* by implementing critical improvements to the prototype. These enhancements were informed by insights from an exploratory engagement with Thoughtworks, a technology consultancy firm, technical advisers and a former federal MP.

Consequently, we entered into two separate agreements with Thoughtworks, where they undertook successive rounds of software delivery work. These iterations aimed

to refine the user interface and app functionality, progressing *Ask Parliament* towards achieving its Minimum Viable Product stage.

The work was undertaken by a dedicated team comprising developers and experienced designers from Thoughtworks, supported by our project leadership and expertise. The project began on 28 November 2022 and concluded on 10 March 2023.

Thoughtworks navigated through a backlog of enhancement suggestions, helping to prioritise the ones that promised the most substantial value. We ensured project management and direction and collaborated in identifying stakeholders and experts for input and feedback. Moreover, we upheld our commitment to fostering a spirit of collaboration, containing our project expectations within the scope of technical feasibility and establishing an appropriate test environment for the software.

Outcomes from the **first round** of development included:

- A substantially improved user interface using a redesigned colour palette.

- Improvements to the question posting functions with: a substantial change to the question posting journey; the ability to swipe left to dismiss questions; and questions to be posted undergo a full-text search to find and present similar questions for the user to choose from. This encourages users to select similar questions to upvote, increasing the likelihood of a response from MPs and reducing repetitive questions.

- An improved search function, where questions can be searched: either by keyword; or, the option of an advanced search to filter questions that are directed to a particular MP or public authority for an answer or which MP was requested to raise a published question.

- Significant improvements to the sign-up process and profile options for both MPs and the general public including: users agree to the terms & conditions, privacy, and code of conduct policies prior to signing-up; a 'search for your electorate' function, and options for showing the electorate on users' public profile.

During the **second round**, our focus was on refining the existing app framework, particularly enhancing performance and reliability and improving the user-friendliness of the UI.

Several significant fixes and enhancements were achieved during this stage. The most impactful among them included:

- Android start-up crashes: we significantly improved the app's stability on the Android platform.

- Question Detail page refinements: numerous refinements were implemented, including optimising server communication, enhanced valid data checks, and enhanced user feedback through meaningful error and success messages

- Verification: we updated server communications relating to email-based sign-up. In particular, this modification will help us streamline the MP email verification process when they use their official emails for account registration.

As part of our commitment to making the *Ask Parliament* app intuitive and user-friendly, we meticulously reviewed feedback from our testers. This comprehensive review allowed us to identify and address numerous concerns and issues, consequently increasing user satisfaction and improving the app's overall functionality and usability.
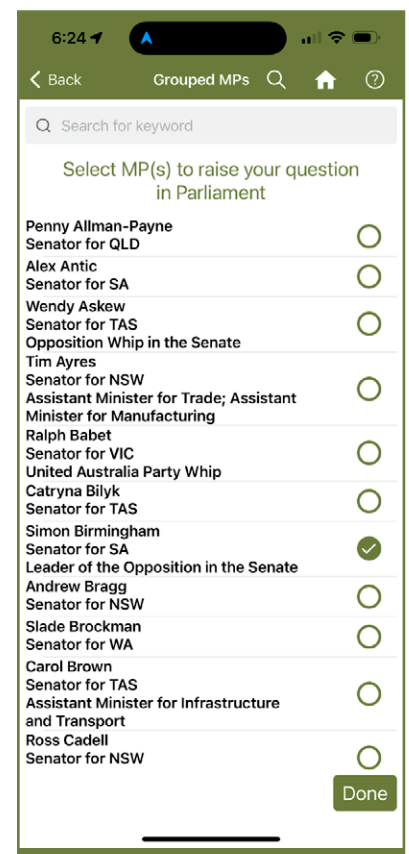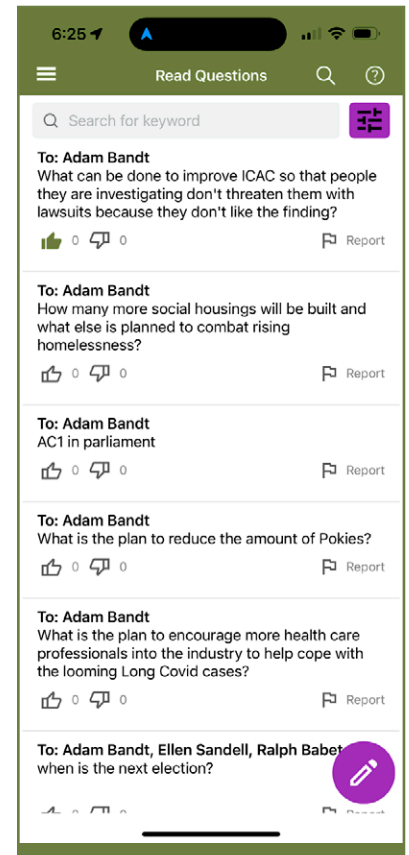
Screenshots of release 31 of the Ask Parliament app.
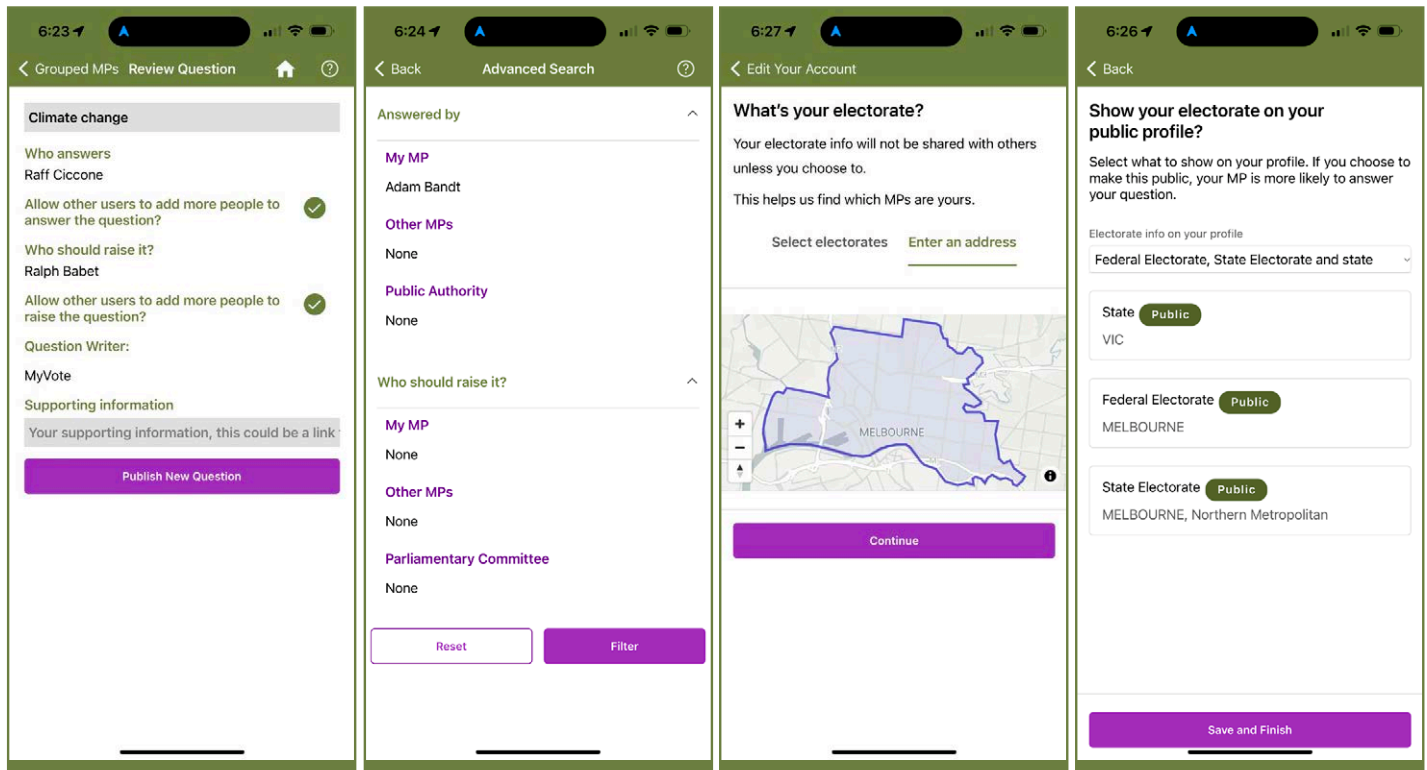
The extensive list of improvements, bug fixes, and feature additions to *Ask Parliament* included:

- UI/UX enhancements: redesigning various pages like the MP verification page, Ask Question flow, Account page, and Register Account page. More minor enhancements involve refining how the search bar, question cards, and terms and conditions pop-ups are displayed and function.

- Bug fixes: a wide variety of bugs causing issues were resolved, such as app crashes, merging errors, handling null warnings, network-related issues, and fixing the server results for empty labels.

- App flow & navigation: various app flows were simplified and optimised, including the flow between electorate selection, sharing pages, and general navigation fixes.

- Data management: we refined aspects of database architecture and updated the management of server-user information. Moreover, the client and server communication was optimised for improved efficiency and reliability.

- Account management: this area saw considerable work, with updates on the account registration process.

- Enhancements: the features of the reading page, question page, and terms & conditions page were enhanced.

- Code refactoring: this included general code clean-up, refactoring filters, unit tests, command refactoring, and removing unwanted changes.

- Performance & stability: this involved updates to the server configuration, raising TargetSDK & minSDK levels, setting HttpClient timeout, and fixing crashes.

- Documentation & compliance: efforts were made to improve the readability and maintainability of the project, such as updating readme files, creating decision records, and adding licenses.

The *Ask Parliament* app has now advanced to the stage of closed alpha testing, with a closed community release on both the Google Play Store and the Apple App Store. This significant milestone allows us to gather invaluable feedback from a select group of users under real-world conditions, further guiding us to refine and fine-tune the app. Alpha testing will also be a robust stress test for our app, revealing its performance under various conditions and usage patterns. It's a fantastic opportunity to identify any latent issues that might not have emerged during earlier testing phases.

We were on app release 31 as of the end of June 2023.

User account and cryptographic design

We engaged Castellate Consulting, a cyber security and privacy consultation firm, to provide recommendations on tailoring the *Ask Parliament* app in the following four core areas of software design:

1. Account management and user authentication.
2. Client-side key storage.
3. End-to-end encrypted direct messages.
4. Embedding ElectionGuard or an equivalent library for privacy-preserving voting.

The account and moderation recommendations are available at:
https://github.com/RightToAskOrg/AccountsAndDMs/blob/main/accounts_and_moderation.md

Guided by these recommendations, we've focused on establishing a secure account sign-up process, including safeguards against misuse and strategies for content moderation.

Our ongoing engagement with Castellate Consulting continued to provide invaluable insights into user account management. The latest report delved into various user accounts and addressed their respective requirements. The report further evaluated our user registration process, including local and federated login aspects. It also provided insights on user verification, account recovery, End-to-End Direct Messages (DMs), and the prospective implementation of push notifications.

The recommendations, inclusive of a detailed roadmap for enhancing our user management system to make our platform safer and more user-friendly, are available on GitHub:
https://github.com/RightToAskOrg/AccountsAndDMs/blob/main/UserAccounts_WP1A.md

Key findings and considerations from this report include:

Community-driven moderation: we assign a group of trusted users as moderators who review and manage content, with admins generally stepping in only for exceptional situations. This approach is sustainable and can scale with the size of our community. However, we must ensure a diverse and balanced moderator group to avoid bias.

Limiting breach attempts: accounts found violating our policies will be restricted from posting temporarily or permanently. This step is crucial to maintain the community's integrity. However, challenges arise if an individual creates a new account after being restricted, weakening our moderation efforts. To prevent this, we will consider linking each account to a unique individual effectively.

Identity verification: it is unclear whether we need to confirm each user's identity except to enforce exclusion for violating our code of conduct. We could use several proxies, such as email addresses, phone numbers, device IDs, or third-party logins (like Google, Facebook). Each has its advantages and limitations, but their use would make it harder for individuals to create multiple accounts and violate our rules.

Direct Messages (DMs): the private nature of DMs poses a unique challenge. We will consider a system where inappropriate DMs could be reported and reviewed without violating users' privacy. However, this also opens up potential issues of how to store, retain, and potentially share information used in appeals or complaints while respecting privacy rules.

We are carefully considering these suggestions and the complexities they introduce, and determining the best approach to incorporate them in future app releases.

Moderation

Regrettably, the openness of the internet often results in misuse. If users are given the opportunity to post content, inevitably, a small number will post inappropriate content, be it illegal, offensive or spam. This misuse of platform capabilities by a fraction of users is a common internet dilemma.

Pursuing the recommendations of Castellate Consulting, we've instated a community flagging moderation strategy in the current version of our app. This approach leans on our community members to flag potentially inappropriate content, fostering a safer online environment.

Complementing this, we've developed a robust backend system that swiftly addresses flagged items, allowing us to identify and manage posts that contravene our usage policies promptly.

Policies

To fortify our app's integrity and ensure a secure, respectful user environment, we sought the expertise of Wise Lawyers, a law firm distinguished for its proficiency in cyber law.

Wise Lawyers assisted us in formulating several key policy documents that regulate app usage, which are available on our website:

Privacy Policy: as a cornerstone of our commitment to ensuring user trust and safety, our Privacy Policy explains how we handle user data and uphold privacy rights within Ask Parliament and our website.
https://www.democracydevelopers.org.au/privacy-policy

Code of Conduct: our Code of Conduct lays out behavioural guidelines for all app users to foster a respectful and enriching community within Ask Parliament. This serves to facilitate positive interaction and mutual respect among users.
https://www.democracydevelopers.org.au/code-conduct

Terms and Conditions: our Terms and Conditions clearly outline the rules and regulations governing the use of our app, ensuring that all users are aware of their rights and responsibilities when engaging with our platform.
https://www.democracydevelopers.org.au/terms-conditions

The crafting of these foundational policies highlights the ethical framework guiding our platform's operation and our dedication to fostering a secure, user-friendly environment. *Ask Parliament* is anchored in principles of respect, transparency, trust, and privacy. We deeply thank Wise Lawyers for their invaluable assistance in helping to sculpt these pivotal policies.

In summary, throughout 2022/23, we've focused intensely on refining, testing, and debugging *Ask Parliament*, bringing us a significant step closer to creating a robust and user-friendly platform capable of standing up to real-world use. Looking ahead, we remain committed to continuous growth and improvement. We highly value the insights and feedback from our testers, recognising them as indispensable in shaping the app's future. We are eager to align our development strategies with users' evolving needs and expectations, ensuring our platform remains relevant and beneficial to all users.

We thank our stakeholders and partners for their trust and participation in our journey and eagerly look forward to the exciting next stages of the *Ask Parliament* development.

AUSPICING AGREEMENT

Another significant achievement this year was our collaboration with the OpenAustralia Foundation (OAF) in developing the *Ask Parliament* app. As a pioneering non-profit dedicated to enhancing democratic processes, the OAF mirrors our aspiration of bolstering political engagement. This alignment of mission and purpose was instrumental in establishing our productive partnership.

In February 2023, we signed an auspicing agreement enabling the app's continued development and refinement. Both Democracy Developers and the OAF hold steadfast in our belief in the transformative power of technology in engaging citizens in the political process. The *Ask Parliament* app is a tangible embodiment of our shared vision to equip all Australians with the digital tools necessary to effect meaningful change.

This agreement yielded an investment in the app's development, with a substantial allocation of $90,000 devoted to completing app refinements and advancing it towards the Minimum Viable Product status. With the support from the OAF, we have maintained steady progress from December 2022 to May 2023 to ensure this project's success.

Under the agreement, any new features or improvements added to *Ask Parliament* have been licensed under open-source standards and made freely accessible to the public. This ensures universal access to the code, promoting inclusivity and broad-based utilisation of this digital tool for civic engagement.

We appreciate the partnership with the OAF and look forward to continuing this collaboration. Through the power of digital technology, we aspire to cultivate a democracy that is increasingly vibrant, representative, and inclusive - a vision shared by both our organisations. We sincerely thank Matthew Landauer and Katherine Szuminska for their unwavering support and contributions throughout this project.

CONSULTANCIES

Research partnership with the ANU

Democracy Developers is pleased to announce the recent signing of a comprehensive Research Services Agreement with the Australian National University (ANU) in June 2023. The agreement involves collaborating with ANU's College of Engineering, Computing and Cybernetics on the innovative project, "Advanced paper-based auditing techniques in deployed military settings."

The project, led by VotingWorks, will be undertaken over an 18-month period.

Vanessa Teague is the lead ANU researcher for the project and an authority with extensive consultation experience in security, privacy, and election verification. Vanessa's expertise will be vital to advancing the application of cryptographic protocols in designing and implementing transparent, verifiable voting systems tailored for controlled polling stations overseas. The project also aims to establish secure, efficient, and robust auditing systems in deployed military settings, thereby augmenting data integrity and security in these critical areas.

Democracy Developers is committed to this project, which aligns seamlessly with our goals of enhancing election integrity and strengthening democratic participation through open-source software. We are confident that this research project will herald advancements in the field, paving the way for more secure, transparent, and reliable voting systems globally.

Advancing Electoral Transparency: Upgrading Colorado's Risk Limiting Audit system

In June 2023, we secured a two-year contract to upgrade an open-source election auditing system for the US State of Colorado. The centrepiece of this project is the enhancement of the Risk-Limiting Audit (RLA) software – a technological tool deployed to validate election results by inspecting a random selection of votes. The project's primary goal is to broaden the software's scope to accommodate Instant-Runoff Voting (IRV) contests, where voters rank candidates based on preference.

Instant-Runoff Voting (IRV), also known as preferential voting in Australia, is a method that allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference. It is the primary system used for elections in Australia, with voters ranking candidates: '1' for their first choice, '2' for their second choice, and so on. A candidate who receives more than half of the first preferences is declared the winner. Suppose no candidate achieves an absolute majority of first-preference votes. In that case, the candidates with the least votes are eliminated, and their votes are redistributed according to the second preference indicated on those ballots. This process continues until a candidate receives more than 50% of the vote, achieving an absolute majority.

With the introduction of a 2017 law in Colorado, every significant election now undergoes an RLA to ensure the integrity of the voting process. As the system evolves, enhancements have been made to support audits across multiple jurisdictions and improvements to the user interface. Notably, CDOS is among the few electoral authorities globally that own and administer their open-source risk-limiting auditing system, emphasising the high standard of software development, transparency, and public accountability required for this project.

The contract we secured with the Colorado Department of State (CDOS) intends to take these enhancements further. Our two-year roadmap involves educating CDOS staff on IRV auditing, integrating IRV audit functions into the current software, developing intuitive interfaces, conducting thorough software testing pre-deployment, and providing ongoing support during the 2026 USA General Election. The collaboration also includes

working with CDOS's UI developers and Subject Matter Experts to create a seamless user experience and public reports that maintain transparency and trust.

The agreement paves the way for hiring two staff members. Dr Michelle Blom, an expert in Computer Science from The University of Melbourne and a veteran consultant on complex election audits, will serve as the project's Risk-Limiting Audits for IRV Elections Lead Researcher. An experienced Java software developer will also be recruited to translate our research on efficient risk-limiting audits for preferential elections into a reliable software system under the supervision of Michelle and company Chairperson and Technical Lead, A/Prof Vanessa Teague. Our General Manager, Mark Pinoli, will be responsible for nontechnical aspects of project planning and organisation.

This expansion in our team underscores our commitment to fostering open, trustworthy audit processes for preferential elections and contributing significantly to a more robust democratic process.

Stay up-to-date with our project on GitHub:

https://github.com/DemocracyDevelopers

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Humanitech Summit 2023: Harnessing Technology for Humanitarian Change

The third annual Humanitech Summit 2023, held on 17 May 2023, was a memorable event hosted by the Australian Red Cross. As Australia's premier summit of its kind, the event featured an impressive array of presentations and discussions on how technology's power can be harnessed to address some of the world's most pressing humanitarian challenges.

One of the summit's highlights was the fireside chat titled "From intrusion to inclusion: Reimagining digital tools and platforms for better connections." A/Prof Vanessa Teague, Chair of Democracy Developers, joined Peter

Lewis, Co-Founder of Civility, and Chris Vanstone, Chief Innovation Officer at The Australian Centre for Social Innovation, to explore how community and civil society could shape a better future through digital tools and platforms designed with the public interest in mind.

Vanessa discussed how the design of digital tools, when infused with a humanity-first approach, can empower communities and foster improved social outcomes. She candidly spoke about her work on the app, *Ask Parliament*, highlighting how technology could strengthen democratic processes and greater citizen participation.

The fireside chat highlighted the potential for a future where technology functions as a bridge rather than a barrier to the public interest, fostering community connections and empowering individuals. The speakers crystallised a vision for harnessing technology to foster heightened civic participation and inclusion whilst carefully balancing the principles of transparency, privacy, and civic integrity.

Humanitech 2023 was a poignant reminder of our collective potential when we merge our humanitarian ambitions with technological advancements. Through such a fusion, we can address global challenges and pave the way for a more inclusive, equitable future for all.

Interview on ABC's BTN

Our Chairperson, A/Prof Vanessa Teague, is interviewed on Behind the News's examination of the dark web and why hackers use it to share stolen personal data.

Initially developed by the US Navy to protect political dissidents in authoritarian countries, the dark web now offers a high degree of privacy, making it a valuable tool for whistleblowers and those wishing to avoid surveillance. Companies such as Facebook, BBC News, The New York Times, and even the CIA have a presence on the dark web.

However, the recent Medibank data breach underscores the dark web's potential misuse, as hackers dumped stolen data on a dark web forum.

As cybersecurity experts emphasised, the reality of our data potentially ending up on the dark web necessitates an individual responsibility to safeguard personal information. Thus, while the dark web is not entirely nefarious, ensuring our data does not land there is crucial.

Unveiling the future of digital rights

As the year came to a close, the Centre for Responsible Technology held its final Burning Platforms event of 2022, providing an opportunity to reflect on the impacts of advancements and challenges in the digital landscape. This event served as a vibrant forum for in-depth discussions and thoughtful analyses on crucial topics, including digital rights and the responsible use of technology.

Founded as an initiative of The Australia Institute, a leading Australian public policy think tank, the Centre for Responsible Technology advocates for designing and implementing digital platforms that resonate with core Australian values - fairness, egalitarianism, and democracy. Aligning with the values upheld by Democracy Developers, the Centre promotes responsible technology practices, emphasising public education and enabling individuals to control their digital lives effectively.

Our Chairperson, A/Prof Vanessa Teague, joined an impressive lineup of fellow panellists including Lizzie O'Shea, Chair of Digital Rights Watch, Dan Stinton, Managing Director of Guardian Australia, and Peter Lewis, Director of The Australia Institute's Centre for Responsible Technology. This panel provided insights and forward-looking perspectives on the digital landscape, from advocating for democratic digital platform reform to championing workers' rights and privacy.

Vanessa brought insightful contributions to the event, reflecting on the lessons learned in 2022 and the need for a balanced relationship between individuals, communities, and technology. The discussions, which emphasised transparency and honesty in collecting and using personal data, highlighted the critical role that events like Burning Platforms play in maintaining an open dialogue about digital rights.

"The event reminds us of the need to work towards a future where technology not only enhances our lives but also respects our rights and values", says Vanessa. "Above all, let's never lose sight of the human element at the heart of the digital lives and ensuring our digital future aligns with our democratic values."

VALUE OF VOLUNTEER SERVICES

The hundreds of hours of combined value of volunteer services is not included in the accounts. Our work would not have been possible without an exceptional team of volunteers who freely gave their time and talent towards realising our mission.

DONATIONS

In accordance with our donation policy and our commitment to transparency, we publicly disclose donations that exceed $10,000 in our Annual Report.

We sincerely appreciate the generous contributions of our donors. Their support is vital in advancing our charity's mission:

A/Prof Vanessa Teague (Vic) - $17,503

For details, visit:
https://www.democracydevelopers.org.au/donation-policy

Reports

FINANCES

The summary of the income and expenses outlined below gives a true and fair view of our financial position for the financial year ending 30 June 2023. Democracy Developers Ltd has been in operation for the full financial year and recorded an operational surplus of $28,996. We project that the consultancy contracts signed in this financial year will generate approximately $750,000 by the end of 2025.

REVENUE	
Donations	$15,000
In-kind donation	$2,503
Auspicing agreement	$90,000
Interest	0
TOTAL INCOME	$107,503
EXPENDITURE	
PROJECTS	
Ask Parliament	$31,732
OPERATIONS	
Cost of fundraising	0
Bank fees	$3.00
Wages	$28,900
Digital services	$2,926
Legal fees	$6,000

Insurance	$7,074
Administration & registration	$1,872
TOTAL EXPENSES	$78,507
NET INCOME	$28,996
ASSETS & EQUIPMENT	
Cash & cash equivalents	$79,667
In-kind donations	0
Property & equipment	0
TOTAL	$79,667
LIABILITIES	
Payables	0
Provisions	0
Accrued liabilities	$6,825
TOTAL	$6,825

Responsible persons' declaration

The responsible persons declare that in the responsible persons' opinion: (1). there are reasonable grounds to believe that the company is able to pay all of its debts, as and when they become due and payable; and (2). the financial statements and notes satisfy the requirements of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012. Signed in accordance with subsection 60.15(2) of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission Regulation 2013.

V. Teague

A/Prof Vanessa Teague
Company Board Chairperson

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the land and
pays respect to their Elders, past and present.

WE ARE POLITICAL PARTY NEUTRAL
We support improved democratic communication between
ordinary people and all parliamentary representatives.