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for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security

A National Dialogue on the Quadrennial Homeland Security Review



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The National Dialogue on the Quadrennial Homeland Security Review

PANEL REPORT

PANEL

Franklin S. Reeder, Chair^{*}
Beverly A. Cigler^{*}
Ellis M. Stanley, Sr.^{*}
Darrel W. Stephens^{*}

^{*} *National Academy Fellow*

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Lois Fu, *Senior Advisor*
Bryna Helfer, *Senior Director of Civic Engagement*
Kathleen Harrington, *Project Director*
William P. Shields, Jr., *Editor*
Daniel Honker, *Analyst*
Daniel A. Munz, *Senior Research Associate*
Steven Guagliardo, *Research Associate*
Kate Shinberg, *Research Associate*
Matthew Thomas, *Graduate Associate*

The views expressed in this report are those of the Panel. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Academy as an institution.

National Academy of Public Administration
900 7th Street, N.W.
Suite 600
Washington, DC 20001-3888
www.napawash.org

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Academy Project Number: 2142-000

* *National Academy Fellow*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2003, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) became the nation's fifteenth federal department; it has continued to evolve and today consists of twenty-two components consolidated into one unified organization with homeland security as its primary mission. Now the third largest federal agency, the department has more than 180,000 employees located in every state and many nations abroad.

Six years after its creation, DHS undertook the first Quadrennial Homeland Security Review (QHSR), which will inform the design and implementation of actions to ensure the safety of the United States and its citizens. This review, mandated by the Implementing the 9/11 Commission Recommendations Act of 2007, represents the first "comprehensive examination of the homeland security strategy of the nation. The QHSR includes recommendations addressing the long-term strategy and priorities of the nation for homeland security and guidance on the programs, assets, capabilities, budget, policies, and authorities of the department."¹

Responsibility for securing the United States knows no geographic or sector boundaries. The homeland security mission extends well beyond DHS and includes other federal agencies, state, local and tribal governments, first responders, law enforcement officials, academic institutions, the business community, and individual citizens. As Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano noted:

We are a nation of more than 300 million. More than that, we're a nation of families, communities, organizations, of cities, suburbs, tribes, all of their local governments and organizations. And, within these groupings lies an extraordinary pool of talent, ingenuity and strength.

We face a networked enemy. We must meet it with a networked response. The job of securing our nation against the threat of terrorism is a large one, and it may never be totally completed, but we have a much larger chance at success if we strengthen our own networks by enlisting the talents and energies of Americans.²

Rather than set policy internally and implement it in a top-down fashion, DHS undertook the QHSR in a new and innovative way by engaging tens of thousands of stakeholders and soliciting their ideas and comments at the outset of the process. Through a series of three week-long, web-based discussions, stakeholders reviewed materials developed by DHS study groups, submitted and discussed their own ideas and priorities, and rated or "tagged" others' feedback to surface the most relevant ideas and important themes deserving further consideration.

This National Dialogue on the QHSR had important benefits. By engaging stakeholders at all levels, DHS was able to incorporate ground-level expertise and specialized knowledge into the review. By conducting a process accessible to all interested parties, without regard to their

¹ "Text of H.R. 1 [110th]: Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007." *GovTrack.us: Tracking the U.S. Congress*. 1 Aug. 2007. Web. 23 Dec. 2009. <<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=h110-1>>.

² "Remarks by Secretary Napolitano at the Council on Foreign Relations." Council on Foreign Relations. New York. 29 July 2009. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. 29 July 2009. Web. 23 Dec. 2009. <http://www.dhs.gov/ynews/speeches/sp_1248891649195.shtm>.

position or formal credentials, the Dialogue provided the opportunity to strengthen trust among stakeholders and create potential buy-in for later implementation of policies and priorities they helped to shape. The department, especially the Office of Strategic Planning (OSP) which managed the QHSR, is to be commended for investing in this innovative form of civic engagement.

To be sure, this approach carried significant risks and commitments. Throughout the process, DHS shared draft, pre-decisional materials with thousands of stakeholders and citizens; it had to be prepared to hear and respond to potentially negative feedback. Moreover, conducting a review of this scope and importance so transparently has created the expectation that it is the first of many opportunities for stakeholders to directly shape the nation's homeland security policies.

OSP partnered with the National Academy of Public Administration, a congressionally chartered organization which provides non-partisan advice and trusted counsel to leaders at every level of government. The National Academy is an established leader in hosting large-scale web-based dialogues; recent examples include the National Dialogue on Health Information and Privacy, White House Dialogue on IT Solutions, and White House Dialogue on Open Government. Providing expertise and best practices in online stakeholder engagement, the National Academy worked with DHS and the leading online consultation firm Delib to deploy three Dialogue phases, each with unique content and a customized outreach and platform strategy.

The DHS-National Academy partnership was critical in successfully navigating the logistical and procedural challenges that this engagement presented. A Panel of National Academy Fellows helped to synthesize and report on the feedback gained through the Dialogue. The Panel, whose members were subject matter experts, also identified lessons learned that may apply to future stakeholder consultation. As the primary "owner" of contact with the broader DHS stakeholder community, the National Academy continues to play an important role in exploring ways to sustain the engagement created by this Dialogue.

Recommendations

This report briefly summarizes the feedback gathered during the National Dialogue. Yet its primary focus is to identify lessons learned that can guide future collaborative online processes conducted by both DHS and leaders throughout the field of public consultation. As such, the Panel's recommendations are directed toward improving DHS stakeholder engagement, not implementing specific homeland security policies or operations raised during the QHSR.

Preparation

1. DHS should focus on three questions when beginning online stakeholder engagement:

1. What is the business process, mission element, or challenge that is driving the need for engagement?
2. How can stakeholder engagement and input help address this need?
3. How can we be responsive to stakeholder feedback and incorporate it into the process or element to which it relates?

2. DHS should enhance its capacity for coordinating stakeholder engagement and consultation efforts across its component agencies. A department as large and diverse as DHS will and should engage constituencies through a variety of means. DHS should build its capacity to ensure that duplicative consultations are merged, clearly and explicitly differentiated for stakeholders, or otherwise managed so as to avoid disengaging potentially valuable sources of input.

3. DHS should build sufficient time for internal review and deliberations into its timetable for public engagement, and provide the public an opportunity to see that it is being heard in each phase. This includes placing strong emphasis on gaining internal alignment around the type and extent of transparency chosen for the process. This should be accompanied by a focus on building a timetable that allows ample time for internal deliberations that feed directly into external transparency.

4. DHS should work with key partners from this initial National Dialogue to create and incorporate procedures, requirements, and infrastructure into future reviews. As many stakeholders indicated, this engagement must be part of future Reviews when it will be critical to coordinate efforts with components and stakeholders.

5. Web-based collaborative engagements should begin with creating a common lexicon of terms and including definitions of key metrics. Building a shared language of a dialogue's desired outputs, a platform's functionality, and other concepts will enable those managing the initiative to coordinate efforts more effectively and seamlessly.

6. DHS and other agencies should create special procurement and contracting guidance for acquisitions that involve creating or hosting such web-based engagement platforms as the National Dialogue. Little guidance is provided to agencies on the outcomes and metrics that should be used when working with potential partners. Such guidance would allow for greater shared understanding of project goals without unduly constraining the agency's and partner's ability to react flexibly as the engagement unfolds.

7. DHS should begin future stakeholder engagements by crafting quantitative metrics or indicators to measure such outcomes as transparency, community-building, and capacity. Although these intangible outcomes often lack specific, measurable indicators, clearly defining them will enable DHS to more readily achieve them.

Execution

1. DHS should begin stakeholder engagements by repeatedly convening all teams that have a role in the project/process management and the execution of outreach, content development, and platform design. Reaching out to potential participants, developing content for the platform, and building the technology are interdependent and intertwined streams of work. Making decisions for one stream is not possible without knowing the aims of the others. Frequent all-hands meetings at the outset will help to coordinate efforts among managers.

2. DHS engagements should include significant efforts to involve and gain buy-in from “relationship managers” who maintain close ties with those stakeholders whom the engagement wants to involve. Involving these “nodes” in the network of stakeholders—whether they are located inside the organization or outside—is critical to engaging top-level associations and front-line professionals. It took time for them to become engaged in this process; their involvement earlier would have allowed the initiative to reach deeper into the community.

3. DHS should continue to enhance its capacity for engaging in “secondary conversations” via social media venues. DHS’ efforts to engage prominent bloggers paid dividends by bringing knowledgeable, passionate stakeholders to the Dialogue. To build on this success, resources and staff time should be dedicated to target these groups in the future.

4. Future DHS engagements should provide potential participants with content in advance of the Dialogue’s launch. Given that these types of reviews involve complex, detailed, technical material, providing content to stakeholders beforehand allows them to digest the information and contribute more well-formulated comments. This was not attempted in this Dialogue, but doing so in the future could help start the conversation within communities prior to the official launch.

5. When developing Dialogue content, DHS should consider the desired balance and tradeoffs between the relevance and granularity of user feedback, and the volume and breadth of participation. Given the complex nature of the materials, DHS’ decision to orient the Dialogue toward more relevant feedback, if in smaller volumes, delivered the appropriate balance of both quality of input and volume. Future engagements could benefit from understanding this tradeoff.

6. DHS should present pre-decisional materials to the community for feedback in future engagement efforts. This Dialogue was successful because users received materials that were not final. Although presenting pre-decisional materials subjects DHS to criticism, it is central to effective stakeholder consultation and building trust.

7. DHS should explore ways to allow the stakeholder community to self-moderate in dialogue activities. The Dialogue had its share of off-topic and harshly critical comments, but the community of participants effectively “voted down” those that added the least value with the aid of platform tools. This offered a great example of the stakeholders’ ability to moderate the discussion most effectively.

8. DHS should explore multiple options for designing and hosting a dialogue platform that meets the unique needs of the process. Particular focus should be placed on the following criteria when making platform decisions:

- an understanding of the audience’s levels of expertise and comfort with web-based tools and technology
- alignment of the platform’s functionality with the desired user activity with site content
- timeframe and cost constraints
- the degree of technical support needed
- the need for customized visual display

- the speed, complexity, and format of dialogue data needed to provide an output that will inform the decision making process
- the degree to which data needs may adapt over the course of a dialogue process, particularly an iterative one

Analysis, Iteration, and Continuing Engagement

1. DHS should publish the final QHSR and accompanying reports to engage stakeholders and acknowledge their contributions. Stakeholder engagement is an ongoing process. The end of this initiative marks the beginning of a broader process of collaboration. Following up on this effort, DHS should publish the QHSR and all related reports and ensure that stakeholders have a forum to discuss these documents with each other and DHS.

2. DHS should engage the communities built in this process by exploring permanent ways of communicating with them. Given the success of DHS' blogger roundtables, establishing permanent ones and a social networking site would allow for future engagement and dialogue on issues of importance to homeland security.

Legal Implications

1. DHS should encourage OMB and the White House Counsel's office to issue a legal opinion on the circumstances under which the PRA and similar statutes apply to publicly available collaborative engagement opportunities and such platforms as the National Dialogue on QHSR. This recommendation is especially relevant to agencies that attempt to fulfill more immediate milestones contained in the Open Government Directive.

2. DHS should encourage OMB to work with the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and Office of New Media, U.S. General Services Administration Office of Citizen Services and Communications, and best practices organizations to survey how PRA requirements impact the effective deployment of collaborative stakeholder engagement. The results of this review, which also should identify engagements that have been delayed or blocked, should be continuously displayed on whitehouse.gov and each agency's Open Government webpage, as specified in the Open Government Directive.

SECTION ONE BACKGROUND

In 2003, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) became the nation's fifteenth federal department; it has continued to evolve and today consists of twenty-two components consolidated into one unified organization with homeland security as its mission. Now the third largest federal agency, the department has more than 180,000 employees located in every state and many nations abroad.

The National Dialogue on the QHSR

Six years after its creation, DHS undertook the first Quadrennial Homeland Security Review (QHSR), which will inform the design and implementation of actions to secure the safety of the nation and its citizens. This review, mandated by the Implementing the 9/11 Commission Recommendations Act of 2007, represents the first "comprehensive examination of the homeland security strategy of the nation, including recommendations regarding the long-term strategy and priorities of the nation for homeland security and guidance on the programs, assets, capabilities, budget, policies, and authorities of the department."³

Responsibility for securing the United States has increasingly extended beyond DHS' exclusive jurisdiction. It includes federal partners, state, local and tribal governments, first responders, law enforcement officials, academic institutions, the business community, and individual citizens. In a July 2009 address, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano recognized the critical roles of this diverse set of players:

We are a nation of more than 300 million. More than that, we're a nation of families, communities, organizations, of cities, suburbs, tribes, all of their local governments and organizations. And, within these groupings lies an extraordinary pool of talent, ingenuity and strength.

We face a networked enemy. We must meet it with a networked response. The job of securing our nation against the threat of terrorism is a large one, and it may never be totally completed, but we have a much larger chance at success if we strengthen our own networks by enlisting the talents and energies of Americans.⁴

Rather than set policy internally and implement it in a top-down fashion, DHS engaged tens of thousands of stakeholders at the outset of the process through the National Dialogue on the QHSR. A series of three week-long, web-based discussions, the Dialogue provided users with materials developed by the Quadrennial Review Study Groups, six teams composed of DHS and component leadership, leaders from partner departments and agencies, independent subject matter experts, and additional analysts tasked with performing the review's substantive work.

³ "Text of H.R. 1 [110th]: Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007." *GovTrack.us: Tracking the U.S. Congress*. 1 Aug. 2007. Web. 23 Dec. 2009.
<<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=h110-1>>.

⁴ "Remarks by Secretary Napolitano at the Council on Foreign Relations." Council on Foreign Relations. New York. 29 July 2009. *U.S. Department of Homeland Security*. 29 July 2009. Web. 23 Dec. 2009.
<http://www.dhs.gov/ynews/speeches/sp_1248891649195.shtm>.

The study groups categorized the QHSR materials into six separate study areas⁵:

1. Counterterrorism and Domestic Security Management (“Counterterrorism”)
2. Securing Our Borders (“Borders”)
3. Smart and Tough Enforcement of Immigration Laws (“Immigration”)
4. Preparing for, Responding to, and Recovering from Disasters (“Disasters”)
5. Homeland Security National Risk Assessment (“Risk Assessment”)
6. Homeland Security Planning and Capabilities (“Planning”)

The Dialogue enabled stakeholders to review materials developed by each study group, submit and discuss their own ideas and priorities, and rate or “tag” others’ feedback to surface the most relevant ideas and important themes deserving further consideration. This approach enabled DHS to incorporate ground-level expertise and specialized knowledge into the QHSR. It also provided the opportunity to strengthen trust and create buy-in for later policy implementation.

The DHS Office of Strategic Planning (OSP), tasked with overseeing and conducting the QHSR, partnered with the National Academy of Public Administration to undertake this innovative effort. An independent organization chartered by Congress, the National Academy provides trusted counsel to leaders at every level of government and is an established leader in online stakeholder engagement. It has recently hosted large-scale web-based dialogues for the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB), General Services Administration (GSA), Federal Chief Information Officers Council, White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, and Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board.

Between July and October 2009, the National Academy worked with OSP to deploy a series of three week-long, web-based Dialogue phases, each with unique content and a customized outreach and platform strategy.⁶ To oversee the effort, a Panel of National Academy Fellows helped to synthesize and report on feedback gained through the Dialogue. The Panel, composed of subject matter experts, also identified best practices and lessons learned that may have applicability to future consultation.

Other DHS organizational components joined the National Academy, OSP, and study groups in this effort. They included the Quadrennial Review Advisory Committee, Homeland Security Studies and Analysis Institute, Office of Public Affairs, Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, Office of General Counsel, Privacy Office, and a host of component offices and agencies. The leading online consultation firm Delib assisted in the technical design and deployment of the three phases.

Objectives and Organization of This Report

The National Dialogue on the QHSR is one of the largest, most complex stakeholder consultation efforts that the federal government has undertaken. Thus, it offers many important

⁵ Only six study group topic areas were included in the National Dialogue on the QHSR. A seventh, DHS Strategic Management, was internally focused and not appropriate for broad stakeholder input.

⁶ All three phases of the National Dialogue on the QHSR are archived in their entirety online at <http://homelandsecuritydialogue.org/>.

lessons. This report distinguishes between two outcomes of the Dialogue: (1) substantive feedback received from stakeholders and (2) lessons learned from the process of online stakeholder engagement.

This first section provides a discussion of the substantive feedback received during the three phases of the Dialogue, which OSP incorporated in real-time during development of the QHSR. In the first phase, participants offered ideas on DHS missions, goals, and priorities. In the second, they refined these ideas and proposed approaches to achieve them. The third phase served as a community validation of DHS' proposed materials for inclusion in the QHSR.

As stakeholder comments were considered and integrated during the review process, the Panel does not have specific recommendations on the substance of homeland security policies and operations or the community's feedback on them. However, the Panel reviewed each phase of the Dialogue and made real-time suggestions on ways to improve subsequent phases based on issues raised.

Lessons learned from the Dialogue are the primary focus of this report, particularly how they may be applied to future efforts by DHS and others throughout the field of public consultation. As such, the Panel's recommendations are primarily directed toward improving online stakeholder engagement at DHS. Sections Two, Three, and Four detail the stages, activities, and lessons learned from the Dialogue and arrange them in a life-cycle model of stakeholder engagement. The report concludes with Section Four, in which the Panel calls for attention to be paid to the alignment of online stakeholder engagement and consultation with the myriad laws, policies, and mandates that guide federal government activities.

Interpreting Feedback from the National Dialogue on the QHSR

Overall, the scope and tone of stakeholder feedback related to the materials that DHS provided for review and comment. In the first phase, many stakeholder submissions were "in the weeds"—that is, they dealt with consistency, missing punctuation, and other editorial issues. In the second phase, participants broadened their focus to look at the bigger picture; many still offered discrete and actionable ideas, if narrower in scope than the questions that the QHSR presented. In the third phase, many provided the "sense check" that DHS sought, suggesting both conceptual revisions to the ideas presented and potential areas for future engagement.

The examples below are not a comprehensive list of stakeholder comments. Rather, they highlight issues that the Panel believes deserve further consideration based on the substantive discussion surrounding them.

Phase One

The Dialogue's first phase produced many informed, relevant comments from the community of over 1,100 registered users. In this opening phase, DHS requested feedback on the vision statements and goals for each of the four "mission areas"—Counterterrorism, Borders, Immigration, and Disasters—and input on the proposed purposes of the Homeland Security National Risk Assessment and Capabilities and Planning, the two "tool areas." As this phase was

designed to critique the vision statements and goals, not brainstorm them, many ideas focused on semantics, wording, and punctuation. In addition, users often proposed rewrites to the statements that they thought better articulated the missions. This is not necessarily a negative result, though it demonstrates a lack of alignment between what the site asked users to do, and what it enabled them to do. For example, the platform was not ideally suited for line or punctuation edits, which perhaps confused users as to what was expected of them and what they were able to accomplish.

Participation in the first phase revealed several areas of especially rich discussion. In the Panel's estimation, users added value to the study groups' process in the following areas:

- Users identified ambiguous terms in several vision statements and goals which they felt might cause confusion. Examples include “malicious actors” and “man made hazards,” both of which were included in Counterterrorism mission area statements.
- One of the most highly rated ideas was that DHS goals follow the “SMART” method of goal-setting: to ensure that goals are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time based.
- Users identified consistency gaps among mission areas. For example, some goals are naturally shared between the Counterterrorism and Disasters; yet some were listed under one area but not the other.
- Several users suggested that “mitigation” be added as a goal for Disasters.
- Users suggested that some Immigration goals did not seem to fit within the scope of the mission area.

At the conclusion of the first phase, the Panel suggested steps to guide the rest of the Dialogue. It recommended that the study groups select true cross-cutting themes (such as collaboration across agencies, among sectors and civil society; civil liberties and civil rights), incorporate them in vision statements, and develop pragmatic, non-idealistic, and memorable mission and goal statements. Moving forward, the Panel also urged DHS and the study groups to interact in the conversation more, simplify content language, and improve the user experience through tighter alignment between the material and questions provided, and the actual activity enabled on the site. The content and platform development recommendations were largely implemented prior to the second phase.

Phase Two

Driven by site enhancements, content simplification, and expanded, deeper outreach to the stakeholder community, the Dialogue's second phase yielded much richer discussion in each study area as well as a more than two-fold increase in the number of participants.⁷ Upon entering the site, users were able to prioritize objectives in each mission area and submit ideas on how to

⁷ During the second phase of the Dialogue, 1,626 new users registered, a 147% increase over the 1,102 registered users in the first phase. (See Section Four for more detailed analytics.)

achieve them. This intuitive flow of user activity contributed to higher quality feedback. At the same time, the Panel identified several areas where stakeholders did not seem to fully understand an issue or where they voiced their lack of understanding. “Knowledge gaps” existed in the following areas:

- understanding resilience and methods to develop a bottom-up resiliency strategy
- understanding Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT)
- role of stakeholders in “table-top” exercises
- nature of intelligence as a cross-cutting issue across all mission areas
- understanding capabilities-based planning

Despite these gaps, many notable ideas surfaced. They included the following:

- Counterterrorism generated ideas that ranged from broad, strategic suggestions—such as focusing on eliminating causes of terrorism, including finance—to more discrete, practical ones, such as using strapping machines to secure luggage.
- As for Immigration, participants discussed the necessity of including public education as a benefit of immigration to society. Many ideas also referenced worksite enforcement of immigration laws, some of which could have been due to the influx of users from communities that support immigration limits.
- The 287(g) program provided the most salient discussion for Borders.
- Disasters had the most focused group of participants; it had the fewest number of users contributing ideas to other areas and the highest number of users who only prioritized disasters. Given this dynamic, ideas were very detailed and well developed. They included suggestions to align funding with community-wide interoperable communications and institute a “national preparedness mindset” that would inculcate preparedness into American life. Discussion also centered on the need to define “resilience” and incorporate the concept into this mission area.
- Suggestions for Risk Assessment included a proposal to incorporate risk perception analysis into risk analysis, development of a taxonomy of strategic opportunities under the Risk Assessment, and widespread discussion of the need to increase intelligence and information sharing.
- Planning and Capabilities generated comments on ways to expand the exercise and include more stakeholders, improve internal human capital standards, and integrate funding into goals, objectives, and planning discussions.

Based on this experience, the Panel recommended that the Dialogue’s third phase focus on a concise and actionable central proposition that would provide a focal point for meaningful input. The Panel also suggested that the final phase be clearly differentiated from the previous phases, and that the user experience be driven by a vision that emphasizes simplicity, thereby optimizing the experience of participants and the usefulness of their feedback to the study groups.

Phase Three

The third phase of the Dialogue attracted fewer visitors than the first two due to many potential factors. To ensure that participants faced a more gradual learning curve than in the previous phases, outreach was more focused. Another possible factor was broad satisfaction with the mission, goals, and objectives. This is supported by the observation that there was far less concern about the wording of specific items or the relationships between themes than before. Moreover, a relatively large proportion of ideas dealt directly with the outcomes and objective statements provided by the study groups; these documents helped to focus the participants and provide a basis for comment. The considerable commitment required to digest the study groups' comprehensive statements is yet another explanation for the smaller number of users.

Discussion took place for five of the six areas; content was not presented for Planning and Capabilities. Within each one, several notable ideas and discussion themes emerged:

- Within Counterterrorism, discussion continued regarding the ambiguity of “malicious actors” and the need for greater clarity as to which DHS entities would be accountable for specific study group objectives and outcomes. Fusion centers and municipality CBRN response teams were also popular topics of discussion.
- As for Disasters, users discussed the inter-connectedness of mitigation and resiliency, and the degree to which they are mutually exclusive. Participants also identified the desire to continue blogger roundtables, such as those that the Dialogue provided, in the future.
- Immigration featured comments concerning strong enforcement of immigration laws without the hard-edged sentiment expressed in the second dialogue. Several “smart card”-related ideas arose, as did others concerning air travel, such as fingerprinting all passengers arriving at U.S. airports and fine-tuning public relations for Transportation Security Administration (TSA) employees.
- Most Border-related ideas were discrete and practical, suggesting that participants found it challenging to take a system-wide view. Surveillance figured prominently and, to some extent, users believed that common objectives require collaboration across departments. Screening suggestions indicated that people were thinking about ways to problem solve.
- The quality and relevance of Risk Assessment suggestions indicated that this area had the most “explicit expert” observations. As a result, the area could benefit from continued engagement with a discrete, defined group of participants.

The Panel recommended that the study groups collaborate with each other to ensure consistency, avoid overlap, and address cross-cutting concerns for their final statements. The Panel also made several recommendations with regard to continuing stakeholder engagement.

A Life-Cycle Model of Stakeholder Engagement

Incorporating online stakeholder engagement into the QHSR process reflects not only DHS leadership's vision, but also a policy and cultural shift in government decision making. Federal leaders are increasingly embracing the idea that collaboration with employees, direct stakeholders, and the public at large is essential to successful policy development, mission execution, and service delivery. This movement is driven by the rising popularity and ubiquity of collaborative and social tools, and the increasing size and complexity of key public governance challenges. This trend will only grow stronger for the foreseeable future.

Borne of the experience of the National Dialogue on the QHSR, this report presents stages, activities, and lessons learned that can apply to future DHS stakeholder consultation. Presented as a life-cycle model of stakeholder engagement, public and private sector organizations alike should consider how some or all of this model might apply to their individual circumstances.

The life-cycle model, divided into the parts listed below, is detailed in the next three sections.

- **Preparation.** Successful stakeholder engagement represents a long-term commitment, not a discrete event or series of events. To ensure that the commitment is worthwhile, federal departments should follow these key steps when preparing for online stakeholder engagement: create a broad vision of the process; gain organizational alignment around that process; grapple with legal and policy considerations; and begin to generate measures of success.
- **Execution.** Success means constantly aligning outreach, content, and platform (technological) strategies to provide a sensible and productive user experience for those who engage.
- **Analysis, Iteration, and Continuing Engagement.** Measuring the results of civic engagement is a daunting task when using new, interactive, web-based tools to address government challenges, a process referred to as “government 2.0.” Identifying meaningful metrics and substantive ideas and using them to guide future engagement are essential to building a durable loop of feedback and trust with stakeholders.

SECTION TWO PREPARATION

Secretary Napolitano has placed renewed emphasis on “the principle that making ours a ready and resilient nation is a shared responsibility, and it is shared by every single individual in this country.”⁸ For the public, this statement reflects the idea that every citizen is a stakeholder in the homeland security mission. For DHS, it effectively generates a new set of process and capability requirements. Homeland security as a shared responsibility requires a vision of meaningfully engaging stakeholders in the mission, through increased transparency, direct consultation, facilitation of a sense of community among stakeholders, or a combination of these approaches.

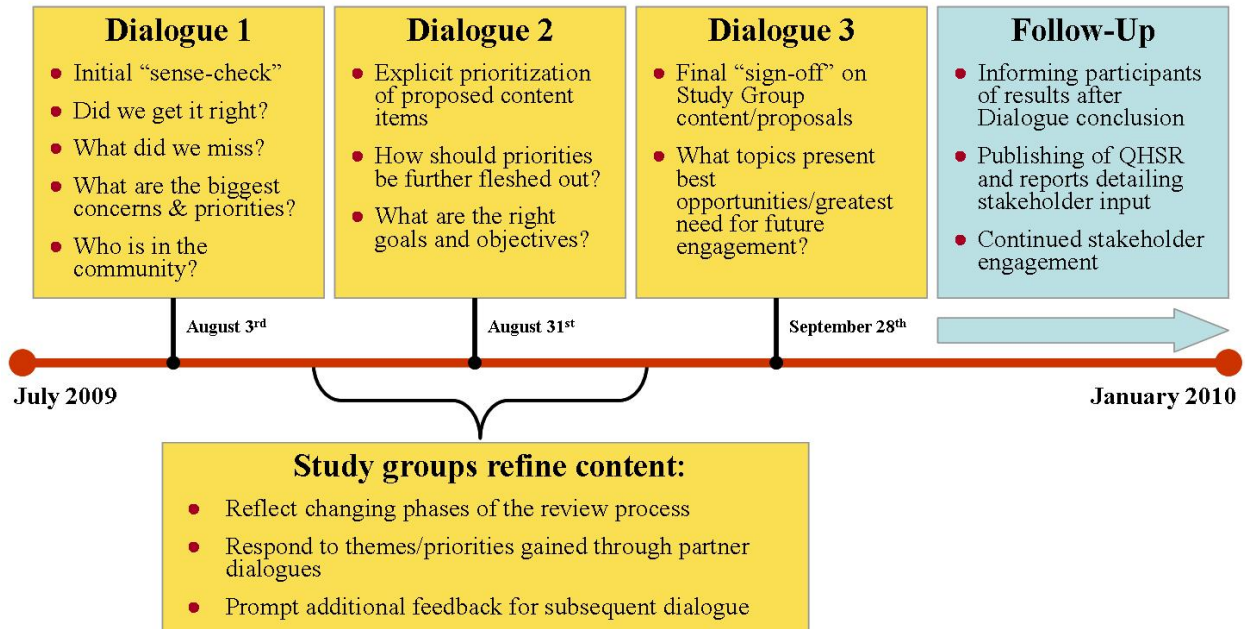
Creating a Sustainable Vision

Mandates often trigger the need for government agencies to seek greater stakeholder input which, in turn, catalyzes an internal commitment to increase engagement; such was the case with the QHSR. However, stakeholders may have a different view of the process as they often are unaware of the events that lead to requirements for transparency and engagement. With a broad enterprise reaching deep into local communities, most homeland security professionals perform their role without interacting with the federal government. For them, infrequent bursts of engagement, absent follow-up or a broader and understood vision, can look disjointed, appear not to value their time, and ultimately erode the trust that is necessary for future collaboration.

This understanding was central to the design of the National Dialogue on the QHSR. Rather than a one-time event, this Dialogue was three week-long phases, each timed to coincide with a stage of the internal work and build on input gained in the previous phase. Each study group worked through several levels of outputs: vision, goals, objectives, and outcomes, shown in Figure 1.

⁸ http://www.dhs.gov/xother/gc_1254339231433.shtm

Figure 1. Overview of the QHSR Dialogue Process



As the Dialogue proceeded through its phases and ideas became more fixed, the design allowed for different kinds of questions. For example, as the study groups fleshed out vision and goals in the first phase, participants were asked to rate proposed vision statements and suggest alternatives. By the beginning of the second phase, consensus had begun to emerge, and the statements produced a set of objectives for each mission. The input could thus focus on assessing stakeholder priorities among the objectives and gaining ideas for how to achieve them. Conducted when the QHSR was nearly complete, the third dialogue provided a final check on the study groups’ work and allowed for issues to emerge that could provide ground for future engagement.

For some participants, answering questions on the Dialogue website was the primary purpose of this effort. For DHS, it was about building an engagement process. Initially, this meant gaining a clear understanding of the challenges it faced: to get stakeholder feedback, build a platform for ongoing engagement in decision making processes, and identify mechanisms for responding to that input. As a result, the Dialogue helped to create momentum for incorporating this model into business processes and mission execution.

Recommendation 2.1. DHS should focus on three key questions when beginning online stakeholder engagement:

- 1. What is the business process, mission element, or challenge that is driving the need for engagement?**
- 2. How can stakeholder engagement and input help address this need?**
- 3. How can we be responsive to stakeholder feedback and incorporate it into the process or element to which it relates?**

The difference in scope between the feedback received and the broader review process presented a challenge. To illustrate this point, it is instructive to contrast this effort with the TSA's internal IdeaFactory, regarded as one of DHS' successful idea generation and implementation systems. Although the IdeaFactory platform is functionally similar to the one that the Dialogue employed, it is designed as a forum to brainstorm discrete, individual ideas that TSA can implement. Indeed, the site has led to the implementation of more than 40 innovative ideas in two years.⁹ DHS, by contrast, undertook the National Dialogue on QHSR with the intention of aggregating suggestions and comments and incorporating them into a broader, global policymaking and strategic review process. This complicates the ability to make responsiveness immediately apparent to those who participate.

To address this, the Dialogue's iterative process allowed participants to review preliminary materials. It also permitted the study groups to incorporate stakeholder feedback into materials presented in succeeding phases. This way, DHS gave visible consideration to ideas and themes that did not emerge in the final review. A prior National Academy Panel had recommended experimenting with a phased process. This Panel concludes that implementing an iterative structure for the Dialogue greatly enhanced the quality of feedback and engagement.

As web-based tools lower barriers to stakeholder consultation, government agencies will likely undertake multiple outreach efforts. This is particularly true for DHS which encompasses components with extraordinarily diverse missions and constituencies. The growth of engagement should be considered positive change, but it also heightens the risk of "dialogue fatigue." As noted earlier, some users may feel that they are being asked for their input in multiple, sometimes duplicative instances—even worse, they may not feel that their input is used in any meaningful way. For example, www.disasterrecoveryworkinggroup.gov, a joint DHS, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and White House website, asks DHS stakeholders for feedback on strengthening disaster recovery. The site is laudable as it seeks input on a critically important topic for purposes different from the QHSR. However, many participants could see it as duplicative of the input provided for the QHSR's Disasters study area. This does not suggest that DHS should impose a single channel policy. Rather, it demonstrates the importance of effectively explaining the relationship among its outreach approaches.

Mission execution increasingly depends on continuous stakeholder engagement, which is powered by the strategic management and coordination of the agencies accountable to the mission. If projects are not tightly coordinated—for example, if outreach is not streamlined, key groups are left out, or efforts are heavily duplicated—stakeholders may not clearly understand how their input is integrated into government processes and policy. This threatens to reduce the credibility and long-term success of such initiatives. To deal with this, comments received by an agency should be routed to others if they "touch" the same constituency. A department of DHS' size and diversity should and will engage various constituencies through a variety of means; it should build the capacity to ensure that duplicative consultations are merged, clearly differentiated, or managed as to avoid disengaging potentially valuable sources of input.

Recommendation 2.2. DHS should enhance its capacity for coordinating stakeholder engagement and consultation efforts across its component agencies.

⁹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/open/innovations/IdeaFactory/>

As with nearly all reviews of this type, the Dialogue took place within the context of a largely political process. The final product will be a document delivered by the Secretary of Homeland Security to the U.S. Congress, the culmination of multiple, extensive reviews by executive agencies on the way to its final form. In such an environment, it is important to manage expectations about stakeholder roles and make clear that the feedback received is one input into a broader policy review and decision making process.

Expectations should be broadly shared regarding the outcomes that stakeholder consultation can produce. It may be common to refer to Dialogue-type engagements as “consensus building” exercises, but they should not be advertised as generating universal agreement around key policy issues. Rather, they may lead toward consensus by enabling discussions that build understanding, distinguishing between real and perceived disagreements, and highlighting commonalities in culture and mission.

Gaining Understanding and Alignment

Engagement is a mission that must be broadly shared across the homeland security enterprise. This insight was one of the most significant factors motivating the conduct of the Dialogue. Just as separate efforts at engagement should be coordinated horizontally among various owners, each individual engagement inevitably brings together various parts of an organization. It is neither possible nor desirable for any single organizational element to fully “own” the mission of stakeholder collaboration.

Understanding the differences between the Dialogue and more traditional methods of consultation, such as surveys or focus groups, was a key step in reinforcing this insight. The differences carry both benefits and risks.

Convening Large Numbers of Stakeholders

Requiring DHS to gain input from homeland security stakeholders was a primary impetus for the Dialogue. Such platforms enable the convening of stakeholder groups who could not practicably be assembled in person. Over the course of Dialogue’s three phases, there were more than 22,000 unique visitors to the site, and nearly 3,000 users registered to participate.¹⁰

Engaging the Community Collaboratively

In addition to the input gained, DHS identified stakeholder engagement as a necessary output. Rather than simply allow participants to interact and submit feedback vertically via a survey or suggestion box, the Dialogue allowed them to interact horizontally and review each other’s

¹⁰ The measurement of unique visitors is the number of unduplicated visitors to the site over a given timeframe. This is measured by Google Analytics using both persistent and session cookies, which track visitors by computer or workstation. For example, if one visitor comes to the site on five separate occasions but from only one computer, this would count for five visits but only one unique visitor. Unique visitors are distinct from registered users, which denote participants that created accounts on the dialogue site.

ideas, concerns, and feedback. This way, they gained a better global view of DHS' diverse missions and challenges and formed connections that created a more cohesive and solidified stakeholder base. This engagement is also vital to the success of the national homeland security mission. Tara O'Toole, recently confirmed as Undersecretary for Science and Technology at DHS, noted at her nomination hearing before the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee:

I am convinced the skills, expertise and willing cooperation of state, local and tribal governments, first responders, and the private sector are essential to the government's capacity to execute a coordinated functioning homeland security strategy.¹¹

Gaining these skills and leveraging them in a coordinated way require exactly the type of engagement undertaken in the Dialogue.

Gaining Buy-In through Transparency

Given the size and diversity of the stakeholder community, DHS resolved that a highly transparent QHSR process would yield important benefits. Because the strategic vision created by the process will be implemented and refined over the next four years, DHS saw the Dialogue as an opportunity to engage stakeholders at the outset. The website explained this to participants in the following manner:

This is a new approach. The content you will see is not final, vetted product but the actual work product of the QHSR Study Groups. When participating in the dialogues you are in essence taking part in our Study Groups, and your comments will feed directly into the study groups' deliberations as they frame options for homeland security decision makers.¹²

Further, each section included the following disclaimer: "Please Note: The content you will see is the actual work product of the QHSR study groups and participants; it is not final, vetted DHS policy."¹³ DHS hoped that this level of transparency would help create an understanding of the choices and iterations that go into the final QHSR product, and make stakeholders feel more invested in a final product that they had the opportunity to see and shape.

Limited Applicability as a Representative Sample

The Dialogue does not represent the views of the American public as a whole given the small sample size relative to the overall population, the strong potential for self-selection, and the voluntary and unverified nature of the supplied demographic information. Instead, it represents an accurate record of the participation of those who chose to engage. Both the Panel and DHS feel that this does not diminish the Dialogue's value keeping in mind that it is a tool for engaging stakeholders and surfacing new ideas.

Need for Authentic Transparency

¹¹ http://www.semp.us/publications/biot_reader.php?BiotID=627

¹² http://www.homelandsecuritydialogue.org/dialogue1/about_the_dialogue

¹³ <http://homelandsecuritydialogue.org/dialogue2/counterterrorism/rank>

Conducting the QHSR transparently produced many benefits, though doing so authentically required willingness by DHS to make visible some of its most important internal debates. Although a commitment to transparency was articulated and broadly shared among those responsible for the QHSR, fulfilling it presented logistical issues. The abbreviated turnaround time between phases—approximately three weeks on average—resulted in very constrained periods of time for the study groups to fully digest stakeholder feedback, incorporate it fully into the internal review process, and use it to develop content for subsequent phases. Though multiple analysts worked to help digest dialogue feedback and support this effort in these constrained timeframes, this was not optimal. In addition, the Dialogue faced a consistent challenge in how to present complex issues and ideas in a digestible manner, thereby optimizing participant engagement.

Those undertaking collaborative policy consultation should be as transparent as possible, though the Panel feels it is appropriate for them to exclude certain issues when they are not prepared to accept public feedback or do not believe that the feedback could add value to the decision making process.

Balancing the need for full transparency with authentic transparency is important. Those who study this issue have posed the distinction as “fishbowl” and “reasoned” transparency. A recent paper published describes the distinction between the two:

The aim [of “fishbowl transparency”] is to expand the release of information that can document how government officials actually behave, such as by disclosing meetings held between White House staff and outside groups. But there is another type of transparency, reasoned transparency that demands that government officials offer explicit explanations for their actions. Sound explanations will be based on application of normative principles to the facts and evidence accumulated by decision makers—and will show why other alternative courses of action were rejected. Sound policy explanations are not the same as the kind of account that journalists, historians, or social scientists would give if they were trying to explain, as an empirical matter, why a policy was in fact adopted, an account that would clearly be aided by an expansion of fishbowl transparency. Instead, reasoned transparency depends on making a substantive evaluation of the soundness of an official's reasoning, not on knowing whether that official might have met with one interest group or another.¹⁴

When applied to DHS and the QHSR, one should ask, “Does transparency require that every element of the review process be disclosed to the public, or only those for which DHS believes that public consultation would add substantive value?” The Panel believes that the correct answer depends on the situation. However, the distinction underscores the necessity for gaining alignment on the level and type of transparency that will be pursued prior to undertaking such an engagement.

Recommendation 2.3. DHS should build sufficient time for internal review and deliberations into its timetable for public engagement, and provide the public an opportunity to see that it is being heard in each phase.

¹⁴ <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/fulltext/122605391/HTMLSTART?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0>

Focusing early on the need for and ability to execute a transparent engagement is critical to gaining organizational alignment. This is particularly true when the process and substance of engagement are owned separately.

Commitments Created by Transparency

Transparency is important because of the expectations and commitments it creates. To the Panel's knowledge, no quadrennial review of this type has ever been conducted so transparently in the federal government. Looking ahead to subsequent reviews, transparency and an opportunity for collaborative input may now become part of stakeholders' standard expectations. Moreover, to the extent that decisions made in the QHSR must now be implemented, stakeholders may expect to be involved as the implications for policy, budget, resources, and other concrete aspects become clear. For the QHSR specifically and government activities generally, it is critical to treat transparent engagement not as a discrete event, but a continuous process that gradually shifts stakeholders' expectations about their role. All parties must consider opportunities for engagement as setting a standard that cannot be abandoned without eroding trust and the desire to participate in successful mission execution.

Recommendation 2.4. DHS should work with key partners from this initial National Dialogue to create and incorporate procedures, requirements, and infrastructure into future reviews.

DHS' history and structure make gaining internal alignment for collaborative and transparent stakeholder consultation especially critical. Created in 2002 following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the department encompasses 22 component agencies. Recognizing, as her predecessors have, the need to align these diverse components around a shared mission, Secretary Napolitano has placed renewed emphasis on the "One DHS" concept. In her first congressional testimony after being confirmed, she explained this approach:

To achieve its mission more effectively, DHS must not just operate better as one department—it must identify as one department, where many different people contribute in diverse ways to one paramount goal: securing our nation. I am committed to building a unified DHS that is better able to achieve its mission.

The unification of the department is an issue deeply related to DHS' operational capacity. It is important that we develop an identity for DHS that is centered on the department's mission and that we build a "one-DHS" culture among the different components of the department. We also must uphold the morale of DHS workers, an effort that a unified department identity would support. Employees across the many DHS components perform difficult work that, day in and day out, upholds the security of our nation. DHS employees should be proud of the public service they perform, and we should help them in their work by building a strong department to support them. Low morale can lessen the ability of an organization to achieve its goals—something that we cannot let happen in homeland security.¹⁵

Unifying an enterprise as diverse as DHS is a complex endeavor, especially because each component agency has its own longstanding mission, history, values, and culture. Some are traditionally military organizations, others are associated with investigative or enforcement-

¹⁵ http://www.dhs.gov/ynews/testimony/testimony_1235577134817.shtm

oriented missions, and still others provide direct service delivery to citizens or immigrants. Combining these components into a single enterprise, while providing greater opportunity for strategic and operational coordination, mean that visions, missions, and jurisdictions can conflict with each other.

This is relevant because such engagements as the Dialogue may be as important in enhancing internal alignment and understanding as external engagement. As noted above, it is not possible to conclude that this type of dialogue will lead to a high level of consensus or generate agreement where none existed before. It can, however, promote consensus by enabling participants to cross silos and gain greater understanding of the missions and challenges that their colleagues face. This helps to distinguish genuine differences caused by inaccurate or incomplete understandings, and ultimately contributes to creating a common operating picture for all DHS employees.

To some extent, this was borne out in this Dialogue, particularly in the second phase which featured a tool for participants to rank the importance of objectives in each topic area presented on the site. Figure 2 shows the prioritization by topic.

Figure 2. Metrics Illustrating Crossover Participation in Phase 2¹⁶

Prioritization by Topic	Disasters	Immigration	Borders	Counterterrorism
Total number of prioritizations submitted in Dialogue 2	512	557	593	575
Number of participants that prioritized objectives in...				
Only 1 study area	84	47	57	73
Only 2 study areas	33	61	81	51
Only 3 study areas	31	88	94	90
All 4 study areas	361	361	361	361
Percent of those who did the prioritization exercise that did so for 2 or more study areas	84%	92%	90%	87%

In the Panel’s view, online dialogue has the potential to greatly enhance understanding across the DHS enterprise, which will be critical to executing Secretary Napolitano’s “one DHS” vision.

Defining Success and Requirements

Defining success, creating project requirements, and disseminating them—the final stage in preparing for the Dialogue—provide a crucial bridge between preparation and execution. This was the case given the number of internal organizations involved in the effort, as well as two external partners: the National Academy, which had primary responsibility for conducting the dialogue, and Delib, which had primary responsibility for building the online Dialogue platform and providing advice on the interface and user experience.

¹⁶ Two of the six study areas (Risk Assessment and Planning) did not submit goals for users to prioritize in Phase 2. For this reason, Figure 2 only compares participation metrics in the four study areas that submitted goals for users to prioritize.

It is important to be rigorous in defining success and having that definition drive requirements for how a dialogue is built and conducted. At the same time, it is important to be flexible as even the most successful engagement can produce unforeseen outcomes. The very premise of stakeholder consultation—even when its purpose is reviewing a specific product for a specific purpose—is that participants may “surprise you” with what they are able to produce.

When balancing these often conflicting imperatives, DHS recognized that expertise in these areas was a distinct and important skills set. Although DHS partnered with the National Academy due largely to the latter’s prior experience with dialogues, clarifying roles and responsibilities proved to be an early challenge. DHS understandably began the project with expectations and “mental pictures” of what the Dialogue site would ultimately resemble and how it would function. Yet these mental pictures were not always informed by the lessons or best practices that the National Academy was able to provide. For its part, the National Academy should have been more proactive in establishing clear roles early on and illuminating the distinctions between its and DHS’ role in executing the Dialogue.

This misalignment was resolved in some measure by the strong working relationship that the National Academy and DHS project teams quickly forged. Together, they identified points of contact and chains of command, developed approval processes, and collaboratively set deadlines for key project milestones. Later in the Dialogue, they created a common lexicon that allowed all parties involved to “speak the same language” about such concepts as participation, engagement, metrics, and other key concepts. This lexicon, which is comprehensive but by no means exhaustive, is included as Appendix 3.

Recommendation 2.5. Web-based collaborative engagements should begin with creating a common lexicon of terms and including definitions of key metrics.

The success of the Dialogue’s second phase relative to its first, in terms of both the volume and quality of comments, was noteworthy. The changes in outreach, content, and platform strategy suggested by the National Academy were all widely judged to be responsible for this improvement. The experience helped to focus each party on doing what it does best; in turn, this clarity produced a unified project team in which its members “played at the top of their game” to successfully execute all project elements. OSP leadership encouraged the Panel to highlight these experiences as they constitute important lessons for future engagements.

Although it is important to engage partners who contribute skills sets in the areas of collaboration and engagement, it is equally important to ensure that this expertise is incorporated into the project’s execution. To paraphrase one OSP project team member, “Find a partner with expertise, and then trust that expertise.” This is an important lesson, whether the partner is an external organization like the National Academy or an internal organizational element, as will increasingly be the case. The relative newness of web-based collaboration platforms makes it all the more important that area expertise be clearly recognized and delineated.

Defining requirements for dialogues is central to their success because they are fundamentally different from other government procurements. Generally, procurement officials and contracting officers are encouraged to be as specific as possible when defining requirements so as to reduce

the potential for waste, fraud, abuse, cost or schedule overruns, or other adverse factors. With stakeholder dialogues, however, creating the space and flexibility for surprises to surface is critical. As learned from this Dialogue, it is difficult to predict what type of engagement will be most effective with a given community until the engagement begins. Prior to the Dialogue, the national homeland security stakeholder community had never been engaged in a collaboration of this scale or importance. Only following the first phase were DHS and the National Academy able to gain a better sense of the topics around which the stakeholders wanted to engage. The resulting increase in volume of participation, coupled with the heightened quality and depth of engagement, were powerful testaments to the importance of adapting the conversation to fit the community as its characteristics and desires became clearer.

The Panel believes that defining requirements for collaborative platforms should focus more on desired outcomes and success factors, and less on strict specifications. Indeed, this idea has surfaced in other collaborative forums. The Better Buy Project,¹⁷ an initiative designed to improve the openness and efficiency of federal acquisition using social media and collaborative technologies, has among its top-rated ideas a suggestion entitled, “Stop using specification SOWs; use PWS and let private sector provide technical expertise.”

Since before [the Competition in Contracting Act of 1984] was enacted, the government has been telling the contractor community what it wants and how it wants the work to be done (specification [statements of work]), thereby assuming all risk of failure. Presumably[sic] we hire contractors based on their experience and expertise but we don't give them the opportunity to adequately use those bona fides. A Performance Work Statement simply identifies the expected capabilities and capacity of the end product and allows the contractor to use its ingenuity to meet or exceed the outcome expectations. A sequential performance evaluation matrix is created, aligned with the key elements in the WBS, to ensure the contractor stays on course for a successful outcome. In that way, the contractor shares the risk of performance with the government and the government has the opportunity to receive the latest technical expertise and a better product.¹⁸

This suggestion captures well the benefits of adopting a flexible and outcome-focused acquisition and requirements definition strategy.

Recommendation 2.6. DHS and other agencies should create special procurement and contracting guidance for acquisitions that involve creating or hosting such web-based engagement platforms as the National Dialogue.

Outlining the metrics and outputs needed to achieve outcomes would allow for greater shared understanding of goals without overly constraining the ability of an agency or partner to react flexibly as an engagement unfolds. This approach is applicable to nearly every aspect of a stakeholder dialogue, but especially at the beginning. Ultimately, the most important element of preparation may be understanding what constitutes success; that said, the most important successes may be unanticipated ones. The most obvious expected outcomes of dialogues are often the quantity and quality of participation—how many people showed up and how many

¹⁷ This initiative is hosted by the National Academy in partnership with GSA Federal Acquisition Service and the American Council for Technology-Industry Advisory Council.

¹⁸ <http://www.betterbuyproject.com/pages/29690-market-research-and-requirements-definition-phase/suggestions/333993-stop-using-specification-sows-use-pws-and-let-private-sector-provide-technical-expertise-?ref=title>

good ideas surfaced. These certainly are important success indicators, and this Dialogue proved strong in both areas.¹⁹

Achieving these outcomes depends on circumstances that are not always present at the outset of a stakeholder engagement; many were absent prior to this Dialogue. Attracting a significant level of participation requires the following:

- Knowing where stakeholders are and how best to reach them.
- Including a stakeholder base that is sufficiently cohesive and interconnected to spread the word throughout the community.
- Understanding the topics, format, and tools that will prompt stakeholders to participate.
- Knowing the stakeholder base in terms of demographics, discipline area, level of prior engagement, and other factors.
- Understanding what questions to pose and doing so in a way that is consonant with the scope and tone with which stakeholders would be comfortable.

Almost all of these pieces of information can be obtained only through the type of engagement that the Dialogue and similar initiatives are meant to provide. This reveals a key paradox: Successful engagement requires intimate knowledge of the stakeholder community, but gaining that knowledge requires persistent and iterative engagement. The answer is not to refrain from engagement, but to undertake it with a clear understanding that experimental and intermediate outcomes may prove to be the most valuable and visible initial results.

What types of outcomes fall into this middle territory? DHS' internal white paper provides the following summary:

The National Dialogues on the QHSR successfully expanded the ability of stakeholders to engage on these topics and were essentially force multipliers for the Study Groups. Exceeding expectations of the participation goals for the Dialogues is only part of the story. The National Dialogues have provided DHS opportunities for the future by

- Identifying the homeland security stakeholder base;
- Filling a needed void by initiating a conversation among vested parties and creating momentum for future similar events;
- Gaining lessons learned on how to best engage with this stakeholder group; and
- Proving viable new media technology such as Gov 2.0 tools as a future resource to help inform government decision making.²⁰

The Panel has identified broad categories that encompass these outcomes and can generally be expected even in the initial stages of engagement: transparency, community, and capacity.

Conducting the Business of Government Transparently

It may seem unusual to consider transparency as an outcome in its own right as it has traditionally been considered as the simple act of making something publicly visible or available.

¹⁹ A full discussion of the Dialogue's outcomes, both quantitative and qualitative, is available in the final section of this report.

²⁰ DHS white paper.

In this National Dialogue, transparency is deeply important because of the way in which it was implemented. Rather than simply formulate a final product and claim transparency by announcing final decisions, DHS chose to share its internal questions and debates to the public and, most crucially, expose its preliminary work product to public review before it was finalized. This difference distinguishes transparency as an output and as a critical enabler of accountability between government and the public. A prominent homeland security blogger captured the impact that transparency can have when it truly provides stakeholders a chance to shape government:

Making [the QHSR] even more dramatic is the fact that DHS has been able to carve its own path with doing this quadrennial review. Rather than stick to the conventional playbooks of its older Cabinet department siblings (e.g., Departments of State, Defense, etc.) that also have their own quadrennial review processes, DHS is making full-use of the Internet and new media to post questions and issues for public feedback. In a monumental step that I can only compare to Neil Armstrong's first footprint on the Moon, DHS initiated on its own, outreach to fifty or so stakeholder groups seeking their inputs and comments into what the department's vision and mission should be rather than seek their feedback after their work is basically complete. This, ladies and gentlemen, is what we call fastening the horse to the cart rather than the conventional and standard government practice of placing the cart before the horse. It is an extra-ordinary exhibit of common sense where you would least expected it—the government where common sense is not common at all.

Rather than just go through the motions of pretending to care what the public thinks or the outmoded and overly cumbersome Federal Register process to get inputs on its future, the Department and its leadership have rather boldly put themselves in the middle of the virtual town square, put up their white board for everyone to see and stated rather loudly, "Tell me how you think I'm doing and what we should be doing better." That takes guts because some of what they hear will not be nice. Some of the feedback they get will be given by the informed as well as the ill-formed citizen or organization. No doubt some of the posted comments they get will look like the raging rants of the angry, 9/11 conspiracy-believing, Michael Vick hating, PETA crowd that fill countless on-line chat rooms. Other inputs though will provide some new insights to the vision, mission, and operation of the country's homeland security activities.²¹

Another blogger who participated in the Dialogue discussed how transparent deliberation can powerfully reinforce trust between the public and government. Regarding the differences between the first and second phases, he wrote:

This goals and objectives [section] in this Dialogue definitely show the effects of comments received during the first iteration. Goals were re-worded to be clearer and more explicit. According to Cohn the department made a specific attempt to tighten up the 'lexicon' used in the various sections so that the same words and phrases mean the same thing across the site. My least favorite weasel-worded phrase 'man made hazards' was removed completely.

There was one area where the lexicon was deliberately not 'tightened-up' was with the term 'resiliency.' DHS would like to see a discussion of what resiliency means to the various communities served by the department. Since it is such a popular political term it is one that does need to [be] discussed.²²

Such impact does not require an overwhelming volume of participation; substantively, it may not reflect anything more than validation of what was already widely believed to be the case.

²¹ <http://securitydebrief.adfero.com/2009/08/04/qhsr-having-the-conversation-we-never-had>

²² http://chemical-facility-security-news.blogspot.com/2009_09_01_archive.html

Nonetheless, the Panel strongly feels, as DHS does, that truly participatory, iterative transparency forms the beginning of an invaluable bond between DHS and its stakeholders.

Assembling a Cohesive Stakeholder Community

The term “community” depends on one’s vantage point; this was one of the early and important lessons of the Dialogue. From the federal government’s perspective, any large group of people who in some way are impacted by mission execution may be called a community. Yet for the police, firefighters, first responders, state, local, and tribal government officials, and regular citizens who execute the homeland security mission daily, do not necessarily think of themselves as homeland security stakeholders. Creating this identification, which Secretary Napolitano has explicitly cited as critical to the success of DHS and the security of the nation, requires bridging this gap. It requires connecting similar individuals in dissimilar locations, recognizing shared problems and developing shared solutions, and strengthening connections across a large and diverse enterprise.

The online Dialogue helped create real and important connections offline. This anecdote, relayed by one prominent blogger, shows how it can strengthen connections within the stakeholder community:

One unexpected outgrowth of the online Dialogue is that it has provoked dialogue offline as participants read each other’s comments. I received an email today from Lee Foster who works with the Citizen Corps in Columbus, Ohio regarding my suggestion that the public be given more opportunities to do emergency drilling. Lee said he had been trying to accomplish that goal in the Columbus area and wanted to know if I had any ideas for doing so.²³

As discussed later, the Dialogue aggressively pursued outreach through such social media networks as Twitter, Facebook, and Ning communities and engaged prominent homeland security bloggers via a series of “Blogger Roundtable” events. The National Academy also helped create and populate a Twitter account dedicated to the Dialogue—<http://www.twitter.com/qhsrdialogue>—to ensure engagement not only with the primary conversation on the site but also with secondary conversations that inevitably developed. These activities served to strengthen the homeland security stakeholder community by creating and solidifying existing social networks. As blogger John Solomon put it:

[T]his process...puts DHS in what I would call a “lead and listen” posture with the public, which I think is optimal for such a new and complex endeavor as homeland security (i.e. ‘here are our initial thoughts but we’d like some help’). In fact, the QHSR comes as the new Administration takes a new look at the concept of homeland security and the agency’s work. **It is an opportunity to rethink and introduce the concept of homeland security and the role and responsibilities of each stakeholder (including the public) in it.** [Emphasis added.]

Enhancing this perception across the stakeholder community is a key outcome and indicator of successful engagement.

Building the Capacity for Continued Engagement

²³ <http://incaseofemergencyblog.com/2009/08/07/reminder-sunday-night-deadline-for-suggesting-initial-round-of-ideas-for-dhs-quadrennial-review-aka-homeland-security-meets-american-idol/>

As stakeholder engagement fulfills an internal need, it also creates an external commitment. Building the capacity for continued engagement should be seen as one of the most important and durable outcomes of this Dialogue specifically and stakeholder consultation generally. Based on its discussions with DHS, the Panel believes that the experience of conducting the Dialogue has greatly improved the department's internal capacity for continued engagement. This has taken several forms. One is the procedural aspect. DHS has gained important and lasting knowledge about achieving internal alignment, crafting effective content, conducting coordinated outreach, developing an effective platform and user experience, and meaningfully analyzing the results. Quoting the DHS internal review, "Through the process of conducting three dialogues, the team learned a great deal about setting participation goals and specifically the impact of the user interface along with the actual content on the site."

The Dialogue has also created internal capacity by forging new connections between and among those responsible for various aspects of its conduct, particularly in the area of outreach. Various DHS elements coalesced to bring their stakeholders into the discussion. A DHS internal white paper lists the various organizations that were most directly enlisted as outreach partners:

DHS Headquarters Offices	DHS Components	Other Partners
Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) Office of Public Affairs (OPA) Office of Intergovernmental Programs (IGP) Office of State and Local Law Enforcement (SLLE) Private Sector Office (PSO)	Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) Transportation Security Administration (TSA) U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) U.S. Coast Guard (USCG)	Homeland Security (HSSAI) National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) ²⁴

Across these organizational elements, the Dialogue helped to create a clearer sense of homeland security stakeholders as a whole, including the type of content that engages them and ways to convene them in the future. Creating new capacity and connections is a meaningful and important outcome. The Panel finds it appropriate that the final idea submitted in the third phase was, in essence, a call for continued dialogue in the form of a "Citizens Advisory Group:"

I believe the Bloggers Roundtable has served an important role during the 3 phases of the QHSR in spreading the message, encouraging citizen involvement and providing valuable feedback to DHS. The current makeup of the roundtable provides valuable insight and brings to the table a voice that represents the thoughts and concerns of a vast public.

I would like to see the roundtable expanded to include additional community leaders, with regularly scheduled meetings in a structured format and open dialogue.

This type of "citizens advisory" group is much needed. It would serve as a valuable link and platform for increased communication between private citizens, volunteer community groups/organizations, and DHS.²⁵

²⁴ DHS white paper.

²⁵ <http://homelandsecuritydialogue.org/dialogue3/disasters/ideas/expanded-bloggers-roundtable-citizens-advisory-group>

These valuable if intangible outcomes may be overlooked given the difficulty in quantifying them. In reviewing this Dialogue, the Panel relied largely on qualitative observations as a basis for reporting.

Recommendation 2.7. DHS should begin future stakeholder engagements by crafting quantitative metrics or indicators to measure such outcomes as transparency, community-building, and capacity.

Collaborative initiatives usually have these intangible goals, though they often lack specific, measurable indicators. Clearly defining each outcome will allow DHS to more readily and clearly achieve them.

SECTION THREE EXECUTION

Executing online stakeholder engagement begins with clearly defining the issue around which efforts must align. As discussed previously, engaging the stakeholder community is not a panacea for all business challenges. Whether an organization needs stakeholder input and what form those comments should take depend on the challenge.

Aligning Outreach, Content, and Platform

Once DHS decided to solicit stakeholder input on the QHSR, the National Academy advised it on the aspects of online engagement: outreach (who can help solve the problem and add value to the discussion, and how to reach them), content (what is the issue at hand and what information will participants use), and the platform (what technology can enable the desired dialogue). These interdependent elements should be closely aligned throughout the dialogue process.

Figure 3. Interdependencies between the Three Streams of Dialogue Execution

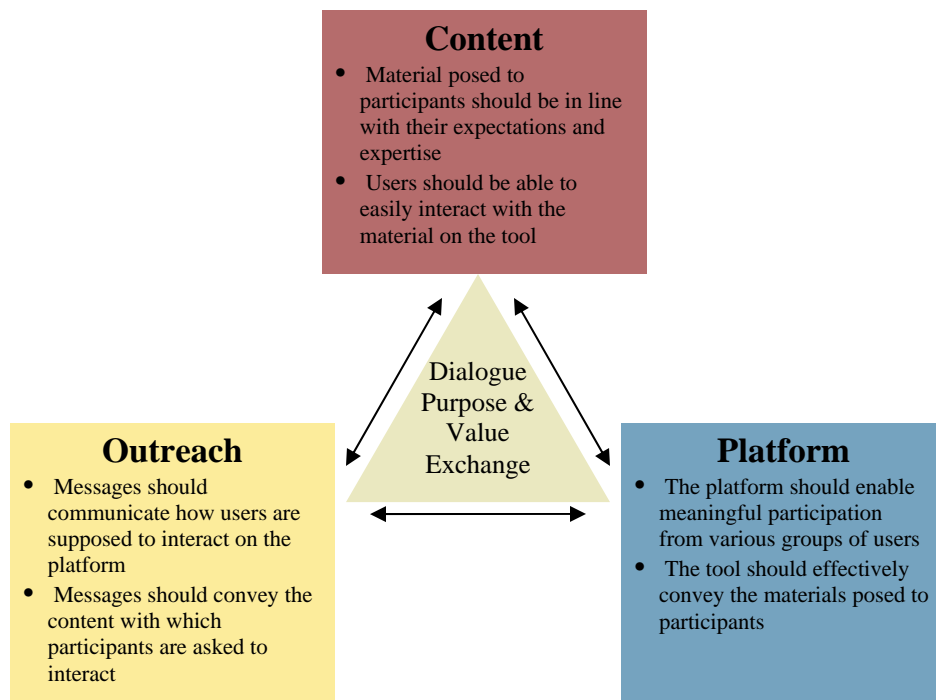


Figure 3 depicts a feedback loop in which decisions made for one element impact decisions and outcomes for the others. For instance, community outreach should include information on the subject matter that participants are asked to consider and the activities they are asked to perform.

Central to planning this Dialogue was aligning these elements around a clear vision of the Dialogue’s purpose and “value exchange,” or what the initiative offered users in exchange for their time and participation. From OSP’s perspective, participant input would deliver value by

informing the study groups' work. From the participants' perspective, their time and input would help to shape and improve federal homeland security strategy and policy, which impact their day-to-day operations. Articulating the Dialogue's purpose was essential to enticing and maintaining involvement so every aspect of the project needed to reflect the value exchange. The use of stakeholder feedback was a central message and the content and platform were designed to enable DHS to obtain meaningful input.

Coordinating Efforts

Interdependencies among concurrent streams of work made it necessary to convene the owners of each function to ensure coordination in planning. Frequent all-hands meetings served to coordinate efforts and inform decisions on the platform and desired user interaction. Project kickoff meetings included representation by OSP and its liaisons to the study groups, which developed content for the site. While OSP knew the target audience and was able to conduct much of the outreach, the decentralized and fragmented nature of relationships was a challenge.

Beginning with the National Academy's and DHS' first project meeting, discussion steered prematurely toward the details and capabilities of the technology. This is understandable given the experimental nature of the project and the fact that many collaborative tools are available. Yet early meetings could have been aided by greater recognition that tools exist for nearly every user activity, and that it is equally critical to identify and reach the appropriate audience and present meaningful content to which it can respond.

Recommendation 3.1. DHS should begin stakeholder engagements by repeatedly convening all teams that have a role in the project/process management and the execution of outreach, content development, and platform design.

Given the tendency to focus on the least familiar element of online stakeholder dialogues—the web tools—it is useful to view online engagement as similar to in-person civic engagement forums, such as a “town hall” meeting. As with a town hall, the decision maker here solicited opinions from stakeholders in a forum that allowed for dynamic, multi-directional interaction between and among participants and decision makers. In contrast, other methods of public comment, such as soliciting papers or opinions, only allow communication to flow between the participant and decision maker.

Similar to a town hall, participation in the Dialogue was voluntary, and users were able to opt out if they felt the process was not intuitive, their voices were not being heard, or the environment was not comfortable. With this in mind, participants' time and experience were respected and the value exchange was articulated so that they were aware what they would receive for their input. This value exchange need not be tangible; participants contributed their ideas for what they hoped would be strengthened homeland security policy and operations.

Conducting Outreach and Recruitment

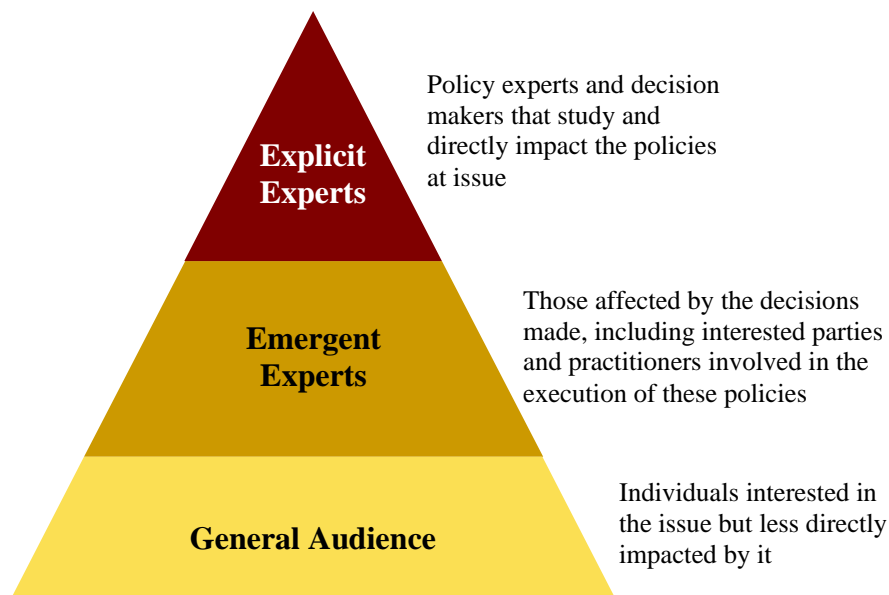
Identifying and recruiting a community of homeland security partners and stakeholders were perhaps the most important element in this Dialogue's execution. From the project's outset, it

sought stakeholder input and feedback on the materials developed by the study groups. The longer term benefit is that these partners are now closely involved at the federal level and can be activated in the future.

Audience Identification

Audience identification is complex. It is important to avoid aiming the effort at everyone, even when the general public is a stakeholder. Rather, an organization should brainstorm who is specifically equipped with the knowledge or ideas needed for the challenge at hand. OSP sought to engage a large, broad community of stakeholders and partners who could contribute its ideas. For this reason, OSP specifically targeted these groups but did not expressly prevent general public engagement in the Dialogue.

Figure 4. “Tiered” Approach to Audience Identification



A tiered approach to audience participation, shown in Figure 4, provides a framework for distinguishing groups based on type and level of expertise. To begin, most organizations can easily identify those with “explicit expertise” in the issue at hand, such as policy experts and decision makers closely familiar with the topic. These communities study the issue and help shape policies; as such, they are typically a small group.

The next step is identifying those further from the center of decision making yet still closely familiar with the issue—those with “emergent expertise.” These stakeholders may not be formally designated experts but are knowledgeable, passionate, engaged, and willing to contribute substantive ideas and feedback, much of which are based on their personal experiences. Emergent experts typically are practitioners with a hand in executing the policy set forth by decision makers. The third category, the general audience, comprises the largest potential participant pool but is least able to contribute readily to the discussion.

For this Dialogue, the stakeholder community numbered in the tens of thousands nationwide at the outset. Explicit experts were ones with whom OSP was already familiar, such as DHS leadership, study group members, and congressional members and staff. Emergent experts included practitioners at every level of government from a wide variety of disciplines, from transportation to public health to immigration. OSP had a general idea of who they were early in the process. Two months prior to the launch of the Dialogue, Secretary Napolitano requested white paper submissions from 118 associations and organizations with homeland security interests. This list provided a starting point and demonstrated the need to understand DHS' relationships with its stakeholders.

Understanding the Stakeholder Base

The distance between DHS and its front line stakeholders raised significant implications. Many organizational and governmental layers lie between OSP and homeland security professionals whose ideas and feedback are in demand but who are far removed from the federal level. As they had longstanding relationships with DHS components, most did not readily identify as DHS stakeholders. To reach them, it was necessary to work with those who had the preexisting relationships in order to build a level of trust.

OSP faced several challenges working through this complexity. First, those with stakeholder relationships are diffuse throughout DHS and other federal agencies; it was difficult to readily convene or consult with them. Some DHS components readily reached out to their stakeholders, but others were hesitant. This makes clear the need to involve relationship managers and gain their buy-in and cooperation early in the process.

Second, the National Academy worked with DHS to build an understanding that outreach must extend beyond the 118 stakeholder associations whose views were solicited for the QHSR. Engaging associations does not necessarily equate to reaching their members. For example, contact with the National Association of Counties did not translate to contact with all, or even any, county governments in the United States. These organizations represent their members and their involvement is essential, but they are not the only avenue for outreach. Federal agencies must also seek homeland security practitioners. With this in mind, the National Academy and OSP assembled a contact list of more than 1,000 contacts in various organizations, governments, and offices that were notified when the first phase went live. This research expanded the outreach pool and identified potential participants.

Recommendation 3.2. DHS engagements should include significant efforts to involve and gain buy-in from “relationship managers” who maintain close ties with those stakeholders whom the engagement wants to involve.

Using New Media and “Viral” Outreach

Many forms of media were used to reach potential participants. These included e-mails to thousands of professionals, invitations delivered at conferences or meetings, links and buttons placed on web pages of DHS and component sites, references in articles and homeland security

journals, and “Dear Colleague” letters passed among congressional offices. That said, the extensive use of social or “new” media provided the richest lessons learned.

The National Academy and DHS integrated such online social networks as Twitter, Facebook, GovLoop, and Ning into the Dialogue. These media enabled project staff to communicate with the outside world on the progress of the Dialogue and generate interest among potential participants. Most important, they provided the opportunity to reach homeland security-related communities in a venue where they had already organized and convened. Project staff reached out to firefighters and other stakeholder groups on Facebook and to six interest-driven online communities assembled via the social networking platform Ning. These communities, such as the Homeland Security Response Network, Police Officer Nation, and TheSecuritySpace, together helped to enable outreach to more than 28,000 people.

Such “viral” outreach requires time to allow news to spread organically among the communities. A central principle is to provide the community with information to pass the word along—via a blog, Facebook message, e-mail, or Twitter update—so that community members can hear about the Dialogue from a trusted, familiar source. Using these social networks, the National Academy and OSP provided information that users could forward to others. As targeted and impactful as direct e-mails were, viral outreach was most valuable because many users did not readily identify as DHS stakeholders and most were unfamiliar with the National Academy.

This range of media also enabled the Dialogue to stimulate secondary conversations related to the QHSR and the process as a whole. Parallel to the Dialogue, the primary conversation, secondary discussions took place on blogs, in comment threads on news articles, and on Twitter, GovLoop, and Facebook. As activity on the Dialogue site centered on specific questions and content, the National Academy and DHS used social networks to gain feedback on questions posed on the site and gauge participants’ satisfaction with the Dialogue. For example, the blog “Social Media Strategy”²⁶ featured a debate among several users over the authenticity of DHS’ outreach effort and next steps the department should take in stakeholder engagement.

OSP made a concerted effort to engage the community in secondary conversations. For example, it hosted a Blogger Roundtable with DHS Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy Alan Cohn prior to the launch of each dialogue. These events, held before the launch of each phase of the Dialogue, reached several of the most influential homeland security bloggers and added to the buzz surrounding each launch. Engaging prominent bloggers paid dividends by bringing knowledgeable, passionate stakeholders to this initiative. For future engagements, DHS should dedicate resources and staff time to reach out to target groups that convene online.

Recommendation 3.3. DHS should continue to enhance its capacity for engaging in “secondary conversations” via social media venues.

Priming the Audience with Advance Content

Describing the subject matter that users will encounter is one way to generate visibility for engagement. Waves of outreach accompanied the launch of each phase of this National

²⁶ <http://steveradick.com/2009/10/01/resilient-and-engaged-dhs-charts-a-path-forward/>

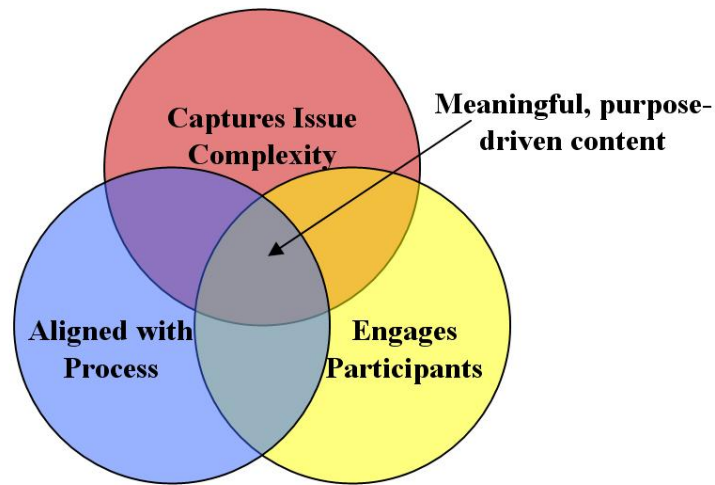
Dialogue; information detailed the materials that users would use (e.g., goals and outcomes, proposition statements), and the activities they could undertake. One promising practice would be to disseminate dialogue content in full or near-full form to the participant pool early. Although this was not attempted here, doing so would allow the community to digest information in advance and begin planning their responses, or even start the conversation within their networks or on social media sites. This would be beneficial when the purpose of engagement is to gain feedback on proposals that have passed the initial brainstorming phase and begun to take shape, as was the case with the QHSR in this Dialogue.

Recommendation 3.4. Future DHS engagements should provide potential participants with content in advance of the Dialogue's launch.

Crafting Content

Inextricably linked with outreach and technology is content development, which expresses the purpose of the stakeholder engagement. It is also the subject matter about which users care most and the central topic of discussion in the press and on social media sites.

As a general principle, meaningful content must meet three criteria, which were used as a general framework for content development in this Dialogue. First, site content must capture the complexity of the issues, not over-simplify them or change their meaning. The latter typically results in participants' vocal rejection of the site's portrayal of the issues. Second, subject matter must be conveyed to participants in an engaging manner. Content should be displayed clearly, in a user-friendly and easily digestible manner that fits the platform, not long-form white papers or confusing statements and questions. Last, meaningful content should align with the purpose of the dialogue and prompt users for information that the host really wants. Questions should be crafted to elicit the level and type of feedback that would best inform the decision making process.

Figure 5. Characteristics of Effective Dialogue Content

Participant interaction with the Dialogue’s posted content yielded several important principles. First, there is a tradeoff between the specificity and nuance of information presented on the one hand, and its accessibility to wide groups on the other. For example, the more intricate and detailed the information posted, the more specialization and knowledge required to interact with it. On the other hand, simpler materials are comprehensible to larger groups of participants.

The purpose of the Dialogue was to inform the study groups with stakeholder feedback on the proposed components of the QHSR. It was important to present participants with very detailed information—each study group’s missions, goals, and objectives—in the simplest, most digestible way possible. At the same time, participants needed to be well informed and relevant given the complexity of homeland security missions. It was preferable to orient the content to a smaller if more informed audience than to a wider audience which would yield a greater volume of participation but also a greater chance of off-topic discussion.

Emphasizing the relevance of feedback over volume of participation was a successful decision. Indeed, there was evident and direct correlation between the granularity of the subject matter presented and the resulting level of discussion. For example, participants were asked in the second phase to prioritize objectives and submit ideas on how best to achieve them. Responses were largely on topic, focused, and specific, including one suggestion to develop a “land, sea and air, all hazards approach focused on improving our national situational and operational awareness.” This submission included clear visions and detailed descriptions of proposed phases for deployment.²⁷ Despite this specificity, the level of participation throughout the dialogues was still impressive.

Recommendation 3.5. When developing Dialogue content, DHS should consider the desired balance and tradeoffs between the relevance and granularity of user feedback, and the volume and breadth of participation.

²⁷ <http://homelandsecuritydialogue.org/dialogue2/risk-assessment/ideas/ny-infragard-three-prong-approach-to-risk-management>

Establishing a Starting Point with the Community

When aligning dialogue content with information needs, it is important for the community to know the stage of the decision/policy making process. For instance, if a decision has passed the initial phase and begun to take form, the dialogue should not start from scratch or ask participants to brainstorm freely. On the other hand, the dialogue should not present content that is too far along in the development process; content must be developed in line with the stakeholders' understanding of the issues.

These principles posed challenges at several points in the Dialogue. First, much of the first phase discussion was more general and theoretical than the content posed. Although the Dialogue sought feedback on each study group's visions and goals, many ideas explored the definitions of key terms and concepts in the homeland security lexicon. This feedback demonstrated that the community had not yet coalesced around foundational issues; these ideas would have been more relevant during a brainstorming phase to level-set the audience. This illustrates another key consideration in online stakeholder engagement: People will more willingly take part in the process if you ask them to build, rather than to critique.

The third phase posed content that was all but finalized. Although opportunities for comment remained open, participants' window to meaningfully impact the QHSR had mostly closed. However, to be fair, the third phase represented DHS's promise to stakeholders to share the draft finished product of the study groups to ensure stakeholders were cognizant of the results of their engagement. Too often, people are asked to comment or submit input but are never informed of the result of their engagement. DHS sought to avoid this by sharing the interim finished study group product with the community that helped to shape the thinking that went into the product.

Working with "The Crowd"

In this era of social media, government must understand and adapt to online interaction. First, it is critical to be pre-decisional by posting content still under development in a venue where it is open to public criticism. Here, the study groups published their working proposals for a large scale policy review in an online forum where the general public could comment and critique for all to see. This does not come naturally for government, which traditionally values a more contained decision making process. It appeared that the study groups sometimes experienced this mindset. In addition, DHS' process for developing and approving content sometimes seemed overly cautious, which was evident by several delays. However, the end result showed that stakeholders understood and appreciated this level of authenticity and transparency and were responsive to government's call for feedback.

Recommendation 3.6. DHS should present pre-decisional materials to the community for feedback in future engagement efforts.

Second, launching this open dialogue required an understanding that one cannot "manage the crowd." As previously discussed, transparency means opening government to potential criticism and off-topic comments. This Dialogue had plenty of them, most notably a suggestion to line the nation's southern border with land mines. In some cases, such a suggestion might result in

strengthened moderation, but this was not the case here. The community tended to self-moderate, reporting posts in violation of the site policy and voting down those not germane to the issue at hand. Moreover, tagclouds (graphical representations of descriptive labels that participants apply to each other's posts) in the second and third phases showed that the community classified and grouped feedback in a way that predetermined categories would not have allowed. Regardless of the kind of information sought, a dialogue is essentially an opening for the crowd to express its views. Government should embrace the community's ability to self-govern.

Recommendation 3.7. DHS should explore ways to allow the stakeholder community to self-moderate in dialogue activities.

Building a Platform Aligned with the Dialogue Process

When executing online collaboration, the platform or tool must align with the initiative's central purpose. Technology exists for nearly any function, so a host must ensure that it provides the right output of data that corresponds with the desired outcome. In launching this Dialogue, DHS needed stakeholder feedback that critiqued proposed material and surfaced new ideas. Given this need, the tool had to offer participants a way of responding to OSP-developed content and the opportunity to offer open-ended ideas for the community to rate. The platform also needed to adapt to the changing needs of the process. For example, the second phase featured a tool that allowed users to prioritize the study groups' proposed objectives; this met DHS' desire to obtain quantitative, survey-like measures of participant views.

The appropriate technology solution varies from initiative to initiative based on the unique needs of the process. If the objective is to generate and surface innovative ideas for implementing a certain policy, the dialogue platform should allow users to freely suggest new ideas in a less structured venue that promotes free-flowing discussion. Here, it was critical to align the platform's functionality with DHS' needs and business challenge. Unfortunately, there is a tendency in many organizations to shortcut this critical stage and move too quickly to design the technology without careful consideration of the necessary user activity. This mistake typically results in outputs that do not meet the original need and time and resources not optimally used.

Remembering the Audience and Anticipating Participation

Also critical to platform development is aligning technology with the types of audience targeted. In this case, National Academy and DHS considered the varied stakeholder expertise to ensure that the tool would accommodate as many types of users as possible. This entailed charting "paths" through the site for different classes of users based on their presumed comfort and familiarity with web tools and the subject matter. For example, the explicit experts in the audience, such as scholars and opinion leaders in homeland security policy, were presumed to have well-formulated positions and ideas in a specific study area; the site enabled them to jump quickly to their areas of interest and contribute their input seamlessly. At the same time, the platform needed to allow more casual users to find other access points into the conversation, such as the tag cloud or the ability to sort ideas by rating and number of comments.

The Build-or-Buy Decision

Many off-the-shelf dialogue platforms exist for little or no cost, but a custom-built tool made the most sense for DHS. This was due primarily to the flexibility in design and functionality needed for a large-scale, iterative process with varied data needs. The benefits and risks of using a custom-built dialogue platform are listed in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Benefits and Risks of Using a Custom-Built Dialogue Platform

Benefits	Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The functionality, data output, and visual display can be custom engineered for the specific needs of the effort. • There is generally a high degree of vendor accountability and technical support available, contrary to off-the-shelf tools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The high upfront costs of custom platforms could prove cost-prohibitive. • Building and revising the platform’s functionality and visual design require ample lead time, which could jeopardize time schedules. • Given the commitment and investment required, the platform must “get it right” the first time, or risk a loss of user commitment to the process.

Flexibility and custom design were critical to the selection of a platform. DHS and the National Academy worked with Delib, a leading United Kingdom-based e-democracy company which built the dialogue platform, to translate DHS’ needs into feasible data outputs. In this way, project staff worked directly with builders of the site to shape and include specific user interactions for each Dialogue, such as the objective prioritization activity added for the second one. This work entailed many hours and dedicated technical support that is typically not possible with low-to-no-cost or open source tools. In addition, off-the-shelf tools offer limited ability to custom design the visual display. In contrast, OSP’s custom platform provided the ability to fully brand the Dialogue as a new and unique initiative. The site’s look and feel were crafted similar to DHS’ website yet distinctly separate to emphasize the Dialogue’s independence.

The “build-or-buy” decision entails some risks. Although the cost of the custom-built site presented no surprises during this project, it may be prohibitive for other agencies. Second, the initial build of the site is a time intensive phase, as are subsequent edits to its functionality and visual design. This is primarily due to quality assurance testing to ensure full functionality and security. Here, delays in clearing content for each phase almost threatened the launch dates. Third, the platform must show almost immediate success or risk a drop in participation. While most open source and off-the-shelf platforms have been repeatedly tested and improved to meet customer needs, a new platform is an experiment with an untested tool; there is greater risk that user commitment will wane if something goes wrong. Some users had difficulty registering and logging on following the first phase’s launch. Regardless of the cause, these users presumably lost some degree of commitment to the process.

Mapping Out the Platform with Data Needs

As previously discussed, the platform must align with data needs. Like all collaborative efforts, building this platform took place at the beginning of the effort when it was difficult to foresee what data would be most useful and what form they should take to allow for robust analysis.

Data needs may change over the duration of a dialogue, which certainly was the case here. New questions were raised at different points, which required data that had not been collected.

It is impossible to predict every data requirement at the outset, but it is important to plan as far ahead as possible and maintain a flexible schedule to ensure that the platform can meet the needs. To this end, speed, complexity, and format should be considered when planning for a platform's data capture and export. First, the speed and frequency with which data are captured and transmitted should be anticipated. Project staff should determine the frequency with which they need data exports. This was critical to this custom-built platform, as several days were required following the close of each dialogue. Second, the complexity of data and the degree to which staff must run complex queries should be considered. Here, OSP and the National Academy did not fully anticipate the analysis later needed. For instance, dialogue registration information and participation data were housed in separate files, which made analyzing participation patterns difficult. Had these data been compiled when collected, running queries would have been easier. Third, the format for data output should be discussed. Deciding on the proper format would enable the correct databases to be built. Of course, these considerations involve tradeoffs due to limited time and resources available.

Recommendation 3.8. DHS should explore multiple options for designing and hosting a dialogue platform that meets the unique needs of the process. Particular focus should be placed on the following criteria when making platform decisions:

- an understanding of the audience's comfort with web-based tools and technology and levels of expertise
- alignment of the platform's functionality with the desired user activity with site content
- timeframe and cost constraints
- the degree of technical support needed
- the need for customized visual display
- the speed, complexity, and format of dialogue data needed to provide an output that will inform the decision making process
- the degree to which data needs may adapt over the course of a dialogue process, particularly an iterative one

SECTION FOUR

ANALYSIS, ITERATION, AND CONTINUING ENGAGEMENT

Responsiveness is critical to sustained, productive engagement, a theme woven throughout this report. Being responsive depends largely on the ability to analyze participant feedback and their group characteristics. A dialogue host can use this information to iterate the engagement so that subsequent phases are aligned with users' ideas and participation patterns, and to inform continuing dialogue independent of any specific initiative. This section looks at key quantitative metrics pertaining to the National Dialogue.

Comparing Similar Initiatives

Two broad categories of metrics were captured in this Dialogue: engagement and participation.

- *Engagement metrics* measure the amount of overall traffic and activity on the site. They include unique visitors, total visits, and page views. The National Academy used the Google Analytics tool to obtain this information. Also captured are measures of visitor engagement with the site, including “bounce rate”—the “percentage of single-page visits or visits in which the person left [the] site from the entrance (landing) page”—average time spent on it, and number of pages viewed by average visitor.²⁸
- *Participation metrics* measure active involvement in the Dialogue. They include registered users,²⁹ ideas, comments, ratings, and tags.

In addition to the Dialogue's three phases, the Panel examined two prior National Academy projects for context and comparison. They were:

- A National Dialogue on Health Information Technology and Privacy. The dialogue was conducted in October-November 2008 in partnership with OMB, GSA, and the Federal CIO Council to answer the question, “How should we expand the use of information technology and protect personal privacy to improve health care?” The site is archived at <http://www.thenationaldialogue.org/healthit>.
- A Recovery Dialogue on IT Solutions. The dialogue was conducted in April-May 2009 in partnership with OMB and the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board to engage vendors, thought leaders, informed consumers, and citizens in finding solutions and priorities for Recovery.gov. The site is archived at <http://www.thenationaldialogue.org>.

Although this Dialogue was unique in many ways, other initiatives detail levels of participation and engagement.

²⁸ “What does Bounce Rate mean?” Google Analytics.

<http://www.google.com/support/analytics/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=81986>> November 19, 2008

²⁹ A registered user is any individual who creates a unique username on the Dialogue site; this step is necessary to submit, rate, or tag an idea, or to explore other users' profiles.

White House “Open for Questions”

The White House Office of New Media launched “Open for Questions” on whitehouse.gov to engage Americans on the economy. The event used the Google Moderator tool, and was heavily promoted in major news outlets. Over a period of less than 48 hours, 92,927 people submitted 104,127 questions and cast 3,606,825 ratings (an average of 38 ratings per participant). There were one million visits and 1.4 million views on the page.³⁰

TSA IdeaFactory

Although the functionality of the sites differs, this TSA-internal facing website is structurally similar to the platform used for the QHSR Dialogue: Participants submit ideas, comment on others’, and vote the best to the top. The audience is every transportation security officer, a potential universe of more than 50,000 participants. Since it was launched in April 2007, IdeaFactory has generated almost 9,000 ideas and attracted 25,000 employees to the site. The initiative “has led to the implementation of more than 40 innovative ideas in two years.”³¹

This is an appropriate comparison given the nearly identical user activity. The key differences:

- IdeaFactory is conducted with an existing, closed, fairly cohesive community—the transportation security officer workforce—while the Dialogue convened a more open and initially less cohesive community of all potential DHS stakeholders.
- IdeaFactory operates on a mostly one-to-one correlation between suggestion and follow-up—i.e., it seeks suggestions for immediate implementation—while DHS sought discrete suggestions for informing a broader policy evaluation process.

GovLoop

GovLoop, an online “Facebook for Feds” community founded by former Immigration and Customs Enforcement employee Steve Ressler, allows participants to post blogs and discussion topics, join groups, and generally build and engage a durable community. The social networking aspect is very different from the more explicitly “purpose driven” function of the Dialogue, but the level of engagement provides an instructive comparison. The site had its ten thousandth user shortly before its one-year anniversary in May 2009.

Participant Behavior in Online Forums

These comparisons raise the question of how much engagement and participation should be expected for a Dialogue-like initiative. The “90-9-1” principle provides a rough estimate—that is, 90 percent of visitors to social engagement sites merely observe, 9 percent edit content, and 1 percent create original content. Based on research conducted by Jakob Nielsen, this ratio of engagement to participation to creation has been observed in a number of contexts:

³⁰ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/open/innovations/OpenforQuestions/>

³¹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/open/innovations/IdeaFactory/>

- Just a few “top-100” reviewers contributed Amazon’s 167,113 book reviews.
- More than half of all Wikipedia edits are performed by .7 percent of its users.
- In December 2007, 1,866 of 10,851 total edits on the MSDN Community site were made by the top five contributors, three of whom were Microsoft employees.
- Just 0.16% of all visitors to YouTube uploaded videos, and 0.2% of visitors to Flickr uploaded photos.³²

The 90-9-1 ratio is rarely met precisely, but the concept and its implications are meaningful.

Measuring and Analyzing Engagement

In terms of volume of traffic, each Dialogue phase mirrored other dialogues that the National Academy has conducted, as measured by visits, unique visitors, and page views.

Figure 7. Comparing Engagement Metrics across the QHSR Dialogue and Past Dialogues

	Health IT	Recovery & IT	QHSR D1 “SOFT LAUNCH”*	QHSR D1	QHSR D2	QHSR D3
Live Dates	10/27-11/4/08	4/27-5/4/09	7/31-8/2/09	8/2-8/9/09	8/31-9/9/09	9/28-10/4/09
Visits	4,413	21,000	Unavailable	9,894	15,517	5,033
Unique Visitors**	2,835	13,222	Unavailable	7,264	11,541	3,795
Page Views	31,982	150,864	299	68,857	109,166	34,698
Avg. Page Views	7.82	7.18	Unavailable	6.96	7.04	6.89
Bounce Rate (%)	38.55%	40.39	6.54	36.27	35.88	37.85
Avg. Time on Site	7:54	7:19	1:33	6:14	7:22	6:56
Direct Traffic	2,585 (58.58%)	7,230 (34.43)	Unavailable	6,148 (62.14)	7,850 (50.59)	1,945 (38.64)

* Includes only traffic to the landing page of the “beta test” site, www.homelandsecuritydialogue.org/preview, not pages within it or to the site holding page. Traffic statistics (visits, unique visitors, average page views, and direct traffic) are not tracked at the per-page level.

** Unique visitors (or absolute unique visitors) represents the number of unduplicated (counted only once) visitors to the website over the course of a specified time period (Source: Google Analytics website). Although each visitor is identified as unique, it constitutes a unique visit from a computer or workstation, and not necessarily a new or different person. Thus, an individual could have visited the dialogue site from three separate computers, in which case each would be counted as a unique visitor.

- The National Dialogue on Health Information Technology and Privacy concerned a very broad issue for which there was no single, defined stakeholder network in place, and which was not heavily publicized. Moreover, it did not revolve around a single external event or prompt.
- Conversely, the Recovery Dialogue on Information Technology Solutions was heavily publicized and prominently featured on the front of Recovery.gov for the week it was live; this link alone generated nearly 40 percent of all visits to the site. Moreover, the dialogue tapped into stakeholder communities that were largely used to engage directly

³² <http://www.90-9-1.com/>

with government. It revolved around a discrete and immediate prompt: the need to select requirements and a vendor for the new iteration of Recovery.gov.

The QHSR Dialogue fell in the middle. Although it was linked on a number of affiliate websites, DHS.gov, and at least once on Whitehouse.gov, none of these links had the public prominence or duration to drive a large magnitude of traffic (Numbersusa.org, an immigration reform site, was responsible for 14 percent of the site’s total visits, 60 percent of which bounced off the site immediately). Moreover, the “universe of homeland security stakeholders” is conceptually well defined, but it is not used to being engaged collaboratively by federal entities or policy makers.

Measuring and Analyzing Participation

The following section analyzes participation among users who visited the site and read its content, as well as those who actively contributed content.

Regarding participation metrics, higher numbers do not always mean better outcomes. When feedback is relevant to a particular document or proposal, it may be more useful to seek a smaller but more expert pool of participants. This can provide a firmer basis for authentic substantive engagement. In this Dialogue, each phase had different avenues of participation, as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Comparing Participation Metrics across the QHSR Dialogue and Past Dialogues

	Health IT	Recovery & IT	QHSR D1****	QHSR D2	QHSR D3	QHSR Cumulative
	10/27-11/4/08	4/27-5/4/09	7/31-8/9/09	8/31-9/9/09	9/28-10/4/09	7/31-10/4/09*
Registered Users	420	1,806	1,102	1,626**	249**	2,977
As Pct. of Unique Visitors	14.8%	8%	15.0%	14.1%*	6.6%*	11.9%* (avg.)
Unique Ideas	120	542	249	439	168	856
Comments	500	1,330	N/A	2,276	898	3,174
Ratings	Unavailable	2,220	2,770	4,117	1,538	8,425
Tags	Unavailable	559	606	855	320	1,781
Avg. Votes/Idea	Unavailable	Appx. 4:1	Appx. 11:1	Appx. 9:1	Appx. 9:1	Appx. 10:1
Avg. Comments/Idea	Appx. 4:1	Appx. 2.5:1	N/A	Appx. 5:1	Appx. 5:1	Appx. 5:1***

* Does not include unique visitors that visited the site between dialogues (i.e., when the site displayed a holding page).

** Denotes new registered users for phases 2 and 3.

*** Denotes an average across phases 2 and 3, given that users could not submit comments in phase 1.

**** Column includes both “soft launch” period and live dates, as registrations and content generated during the soft launch remained intact and visible to users during the live period.

The conversion rate of each phase, the “browsers to buyers” ratio, measures the percentage of people who visited the site and were compelled to register. Since registration was not required to view ideas or other content, the conversion rate reflects the proportion of visitors who had to

create a user account to submit an original idea, vote on or tag a preexisting idea, or view other members' profiles.

The Dialogue platform did not require users to re-register if they had created a user account in a previous phase. Thus, registration numbers for the second and third phases were lower. This is an accurate measure of a conversion rate, but it likely undercounts the number of users who participated in each phase overall. By the third phase, previous registrations, combined with the decision not to seek new sources of participation, meant that a relatively small pool of users "converted."

The 90-9-1 ratio is relevant when examining how many registered users actually participated.³³ Only 7.6 percent of unique visitors in the first phase created or rated an idea. The percentage increased somewhat in the second phase, where 11 percent posted, rated, or commented on an idea, or used the prioritization tool. Seven percent of all unique visitors used the tool, which was only available in the second phase.³⁴ In the third and final phase, 6.7 percent of unique visitors added, rated, or commented on an idea.

Understanding Differences in Engagement Across Dialogue Phases

Average page views, bounce rate, and average time indicate how deeply visitors engaged with the site, regardless of their level of participation. The three phases were consistent with other National Dialogues, but they varied among themselves.

The design of each phase directly affected participation metrics and content. The first phase sought discrete input on vision, goals, and outcomes proposed by the study groups, the second was more open ended, and the third was again narrowly focused. The first phase's higher ratio of votes per idea was likely due to the inability of users to comment. Nonetheless, the ratio remained higher for all three phases than was the case for the National Dialogue on Health IT and Privacy.

The bounce rate in the first phase was lower than what was experienced in the previous two National Dialogues; thus, a slightly higher percentage of users engaged here. Yet average time on site and page views were lower than the other dialogues, except for average page views in the third phase. This may be due to the absence of a commenting function within ideas, which was provided in the other phases.

In terms of engagement, the second phase significantly exceeded all prior National Dialogues hosted by the National Academy, except for the heavily-promoted Recovery Dialogue on IT Solutions. Strategic choices were made when designing the second phase, including re-orienting the experience and allowing freer participation. In addition, users could comment on others' ideas and use a customized "slider" tool to prioritize mission areas. Providing more avenues for participation might help account for the increased average time on site and page views. Another possible factor: Content was intentionally written to be more accessible to stakeholders.

³³ Tagging was not captured as an activity that was traceable back to individual user.

³⁴ The percentage of participants who prioritized more than one mission area varies by area. The average percentage across the mission areas is approximately 88 percent.

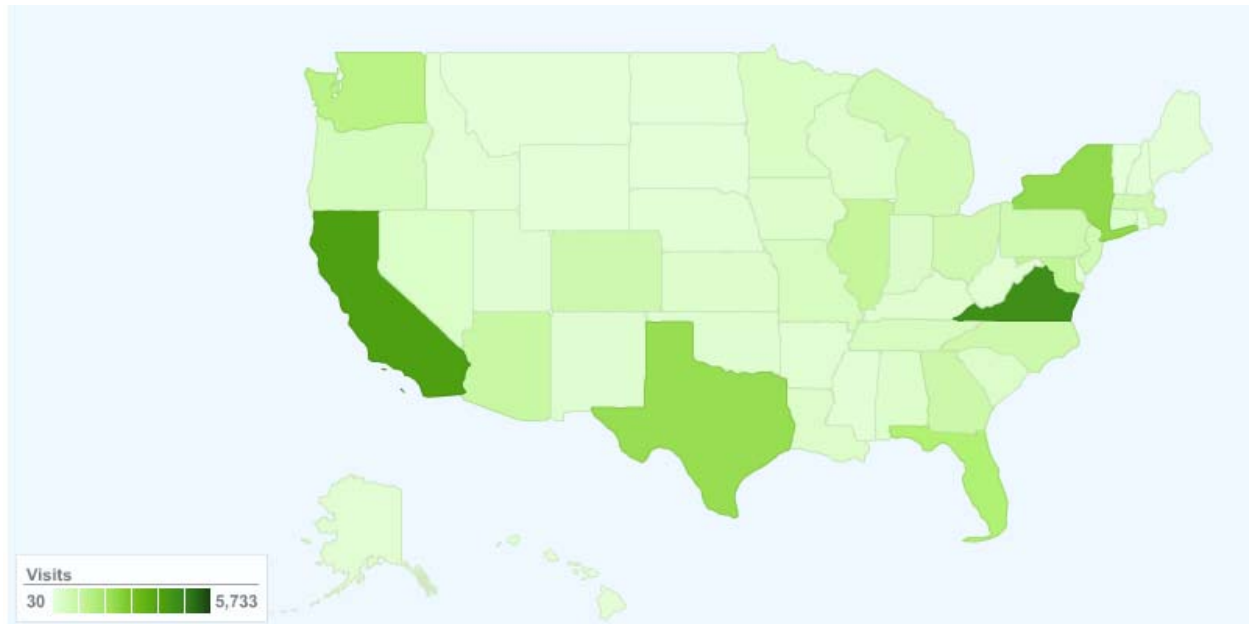
The third phase received the lowest volume of overall traffic, though it exceeded the Health IT Dialogue on several key metrics. Content was intentionally crafted to require more time and engagement. Accordingly, outreach efforts focused on reactivating previous participants who were already familiar with the process and able to engage with the material. The average time on site was higher than in the first phase, implying that users read the materials prior to participating. While a smaller pool was attracted, those who did engaged at levels comparable to previous dialogues.

Measuring and Analyzing Diversity of Community

Did the Dialogue truly reach “outside the beltway” to both inform and gain input from those that execute the nation’s homeland security mission on a daily basis? This was measured through anonymous traffic data collected via Google Analytics, which measure the overall visitor pool, and voluntarily submitted, unverified zip code data, which measure the registrant pool.³⁵ Figures 9-13 show participation by geography, depicted by state, city, ranked number of visits and zip code.

Geographic Diversity

Figure 9. Dialogue Visits by State



³⁵ The geographic traffic data count all site visits throughout the Dialogue, not only when a specific phase was open.

Figure 10. Dialogue Visits by City



The Dialogue had visitors from all 50 states and from 3,727 U.S. cities:

Figure 11. Top U.S. States by Number of Dialogue Visitors

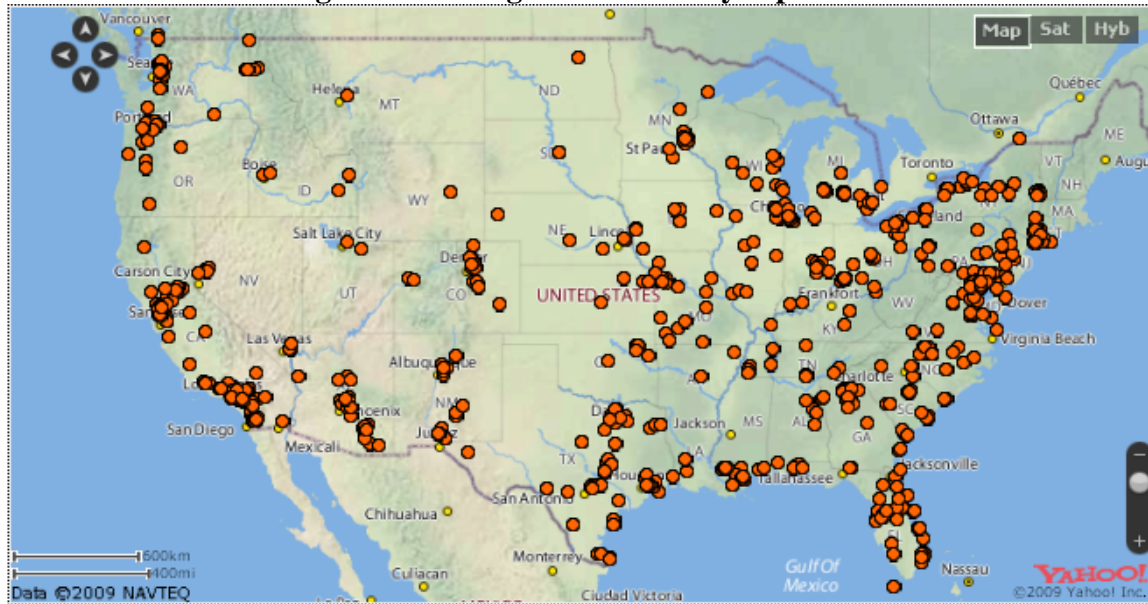
State	Visits	State	Visits
District of Columbia	5733	Pennsylvania	848
Virginia	5291	Massachusetts	814
California	4732	Ohio	799
New York	2719	Michigan	759
Texas	2599	New Jersey	753
Florida	1954	Oregon	585
Washington	1638	Tennessee	555
Maryland	1305	Missouri	535
Illinois	1246	Minnesota	458
Arizona	1072	Indiana	395
Georgia	964	Nevada	386
North Carolina	930	Wisconsin	374
Colorado	869		

Figure 12. Top U.S. Cities by Number of Dialogue Visitors

City	Visits	City	Visits
Washington, D.C.	5733	Portland	295
Ft. Myer	1592	Herndon	282
New York	1479	San Diego	268
Seattle	1110	Dallas	245
Falls Church	820	Tucson	237
Los Angeles	701	Lakewood	214
Arlington	467	Minneapolis	209
Houston	389	Columbus	200
Atlanta	383	Las Vegas	197
Phoenix	346	Colorado Springs	196
San Francisco	334	Philadelphia	186
Chicago	324	San Jose	178
Denver	318		

This traffic pattern is also reflected in voluntarily provided zip code data:

Figure 13. Dialogue Visitation by Zip Code



Diversity of Perspective

Did the Dialogue engage a group of participants that bring different backgrounds and perspectives to the discussion? This was measured through voluntarily submitted, unverified “discipline area” data, which measure the registrant pool only.

A wide range of stakeholders constituted the 2,977 registered users. They included first responders, government officials, public health workers, members of the Armed Forces, private sector employees, small businesses, academics, and the public. No single group dominated.

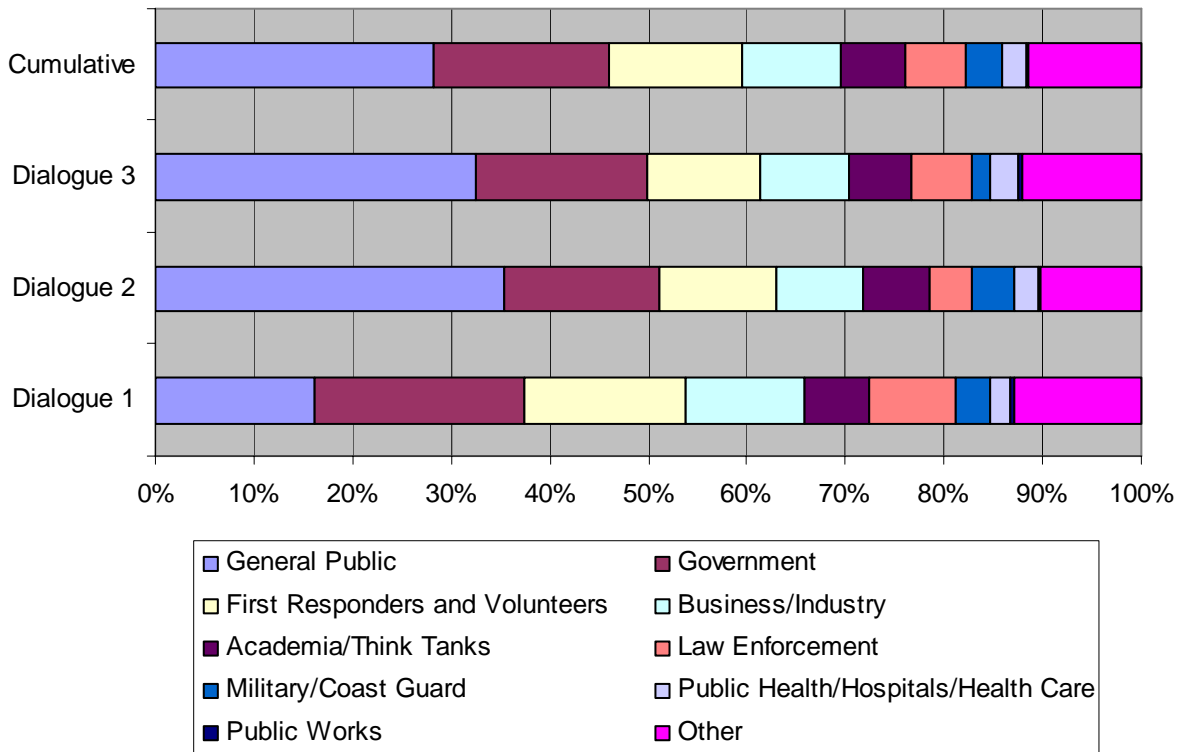
The Dialogue attracted a broad base of users from varied disciplines. Upon registering, they had to select a “discipline type” with which they most closely identified. The available choices were:

- Academia/Think Tank
- Border Agent
- Business/Industry
- Coast Guard
- Coroner/Mortuary Affairs/Forensics
- Customs Agent
- Elected/Appointed Official
- Emergency Managers
- Emergency Medical Service
- Federal Government
- Fire Service
- General Public
- Hazardous Materials
- Hospitals/Health Care
- Local Government
- Military
- Other
- Public Health
- Public Safety Communications
- Public Works
- State Government
- Tribal Government
- Volunteer

Responses indicated that users brought different perspectives to the discussion. Some groups were consistently highly represented, but no single group ever constituted a majority. Those who identified themselves as “general public” comprised 28 percent of all participants, followed by federal government (11 percent), and business/industry (10 percent). There was a “long tail” effect for other groups, including academia/think tanks (6.6 percent), emergency managers (5.14 percent), and law enforcement (5.14 percent).

Figure 14 shows the percentage of new registrants for each phase, sorted by discipline type. The cumulative line indicates the total registrant pool across all three phases. Some of the discipline types were grouped together—for example, “Government” includes federal, state, local, and tribal governments as well as elected/appointed officials. A more detailed breakdown of individual discipline types is provided in Appendix 2.

**Figure 14. Breakdown of Participant Discipline Areas, By Dialogue
(Based on Percentage)**



The diversity of practice areas reflects a conscious effort to attract new voices to the conversation.

Measuring and Analyzing Outreach and Recruitment

From this Dialogue emerged a community that can be engaged on future homeland security issues. To inform future efforts, the following discussion addresses outreach strategies that were conducted during the Dialogue, including metrics that assessed their effectiveness.

Tracking Outreach

E-mail was the predominant method for outreach in each phase. E-mail lists were assembled using two primary techniques:

- **Holding Pages.** Two weeks prior to the Dialogue’s launch, an informational page was available for visitors to read about the QHSR and Dialogue, and provide their e-mail addresses for future contact. This URL was then included in preliminary outreach to identified groups, associations, and communities. Over the course of the two weeks, the site yielded 8,579 visits from all 50 states, resulting in over 2,500 early signups. This list formed a critical foundation for “spreading the word” once the Dialogue went live.
- **Research-Based List-Building.** The National Academy compiled a list of stakeholders based on publicly available information on specific homeland security groups, particularly state- and local-level elected officials.

In addition, OSP conducted e-mail outreach within and across DHS components. Figure 15 details the dates of e-mail outreach, and recipients’ open and click-through rates.

Figure 15. E-mail Outreach Metrics

Campaign	Timeframe	Total E-Mails Sent	Opens	Opens%	Clicks	Clicks%
Pre-Phase 1	July 24-30	3,679	1,018	27.67%	391	38.41%
Phase 1 Live	August 3	3,259	1,310	40.20%	1,129	86.18%
Pre-Phase 2	August 25-27	1,157	213	18.41%	78	36.62%
Phase 2 Live	August 31 - September 1	9,334	2,890	30.96%	1,148	39.72%
Pre-Phase 3	September 23	6,925	1,793	25.89%	521	29.06%
Phase 3 Live	September 28	10,857	2,658	24.48%	769	28.93%
TOTALS		35,211	9,882	28.07% (avg.)	4,036	40.84% (avg.)

Pre-Dialogue e-mails reminded recipients that a phase would soon begin, and asked them to visit the holding page to sign up for more information. The “live” announcements encouraged people to participate in each phase. These e-mails were designed to prompt people to participate and to spread the word.

The phase one live e-mail had the highest open rate, 40.2 percent, and an impressive click-through rate of 86.18 percent. The pre-phase 2 e-mail had the lowest, 18.41 percent, but 36.62 percent still clicked through to the site. Each announcement for the first two phases enjoyed a high rate among those who opened it. The third was not as high, perhaps because the network had been informed of the Dialogue and did not need to rely on a link. This is supported by the correspondingly low click rate for the pre-phase 3 live announcement.

Measuring Engagement on Social Networks

Social networks were integral to the Dialogue's outreach plan. Blogs and such media as Twitter, Facebook, and Ning networks helped reach those who might not have otherwise participated. It also helped encourage viral outreach through trusted information sources or peer networks.

- Facebook. The project team created a Facebook page, which generated little traction due largely to the difficulty in quickly identifying homeland security-oriented affinity groups using this medium. To a certain extent, Facebook duplicated the functionality inherent in the holding page created for the Dialogue. The page did not get more than 100 fans, which meant it could not have a unique URL; this hamstrung efforts to notify people of the page. From August to October 2009, 325 visits to the site came from links on Facebook.
- Twitter. Outreach via Twitter was far more successful. A unique Twitter account, @qhsrdialogue, was created for the Dialogue and constantly updated and maintained by National Academy staff. The account ultimately gained 459 followers and generated conversations with and "retweets" (Twitter reply messages) by a wide array of users, from FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate,³⁶ to state and local Red Cross chapters, to interested members of the public. Tweets were sent when the first phase went live, efforts were made to track people tweeting about national security, and followers were generated. TweetDeck, a popular "Twitter dashboard" tool, was used to monitor a number of topical searches, such as "quadrennial homeland," "DHS priorities," and the #qhsr hashtag. This made it easy to identify rough affinity groups related to homeland security and build a community as the phases progressed. Twitter also proved useful for providing fast, responsive customer service; several times, users who encountered technical problems sent replies or direct messages. Overall, Twitter contributed 332 visits to the site.
- Blogs. Blogs represented at least 690 visits to the site. As detailed earlier, DHS hosted Blogger Roundtable events, where it engaged bloggers by phone about the Dialogue and its importance. One blog, nationalterroralert.com, contributed 376 visits and its author, Martin Jones, participated in the roundtables. This positive reinforcement underscored the importance of reaching out through non-traditional avenues.
- Ning Communities. Ning allows users to quickly create Facebook-like social networks on certain topics or shared concerns. Using its search function, the National Academy identified at least five large-scale networks dedicated to federal management or homeland security, including GovLoop (<http://www.govloop.com>), Homeland Security Response Network (<http://www.homelandsecurityresponse.com/>), and Police Officer Nation (<http://policeofficernation.ning.com/>). These networks, with total membership of 28,000 individuals, contributed several hundred visits to the site itself and provided valuable avenues for future engagement. Recognizing this potential, DHS recently made experts

³⁶ <http://twitter.com/CraigatFEMA/status/3842496910>

available to answer users' questions on the "Our Border" Ning community (<http://ourborder.ning.com/forum/topics/ask-a-question-here>).

Tracking Traffic Sources

How users reached the Dialogue site is another way to examine engagement by social networks. Overall, traffic is divided into three categories, as defined by Google Analytics:

- Direct Traffic—visitors who accessed the site by typing the URL directly into their browser. "Direct" can also refer to visitors who clicked on links from their bookmarks/favorites, untagged links within e-mails, or links from documents that do not include tracking variables (such as PDFs or Word documents).
- Site Referrals—visitors referred by links on other websites
- Search—visitors referred by an unpaid search engine listing, such as a Google search

The percentage of visits stemming from each type changed over the course of the Dialogue, as Figure 16 shows.

Figure 16. Sources of Dialogue Site Traffic

	QHSR D1	QHSR D2	QHSR D3	Overall
Live Dates	8/3-8/10/09	8/31-9/9/09	9/28-10/4/09	8/3-10/4/09
Direct Traffic	6,148 (62.14%)	7,850 (50.59)	1,945 (38.64)	21,018 (46.15)
Referring Sites	3,555 (35.93%)	7,034 (45.33)	2,310 (45.90)	20,675 (45.40)
Search Engines	191 (1.93%)	633 (4.08)	778 (15.46)	3,848 (8.45)

These trends reveal three patterns: First, as a share of total visits, direct referrals consistently declined, ultimately by one-third. Second, site referrals initially increased and then hit a plateau, staying within a range of ten percentage points. Third, search referrals increased dramatically in the final phase. The implications and causes of this pattern are not fully clear, and it is unknown whether they would be reproduced in another dialogue with different content and outreach. Nonetheless, it is an interesting indication of how the balance of awareness across a stakeholder community can shift during online engagement.

The consistency of site referrals is important. Over the course of the entire Dialogue—including the live dates and holding periods between phases—340 different sites³⁷ referred 17,704 visits, accounting for nearly 40 percent of all traffic. This is a striking indication that the message of the Dialogue reached many people "where they live"—that is, through the networks and information sources they visit and trust.

³⁷ This excludes sites with the phrase "mail" in the URL, which are likely to be web-based e-mail sites and not truly "referrals." Generally, Google Analytics has trouble correctly apportioning link clicks from web-based mailboxes between the direct referral and site referral categories.

Search-based referral is another interesting data point. The third phase produced the lowest overall traffic but the highest level of search referrals in both percentage and absolute terms. Across the three phases, then, the target community became more aware of this opportunity independent of direct outreach, and increasingly sought the opportunity to participate.

Figure 17. Top Websites Referring Traffic to the National Dialogue on the QHSR

Dialogue Phase 1		Dialogue Phase 2		Dialogue Phase 3	
<i>Site</i>	<i># of visits</i>	<i>Site</i>	<i># of visits</i>	<i>Site</i>	<i># of visits</i>
Direct Traffic	6148	Direct Traffic	7850	Direct Traffic	1945
dhs.gov	553	numbersusa.com	1986	Google	722
tsa.gov	487	dhs.gov	758	tsa.gov	612
Google	175	tsa.gov	671	dhs.gov	514
trackitt.com	160	Google	600	alipac.us	95
nationalterroralert.com	143	jamesfallows.theatlantic.com	185	mail.google.com	60
online.fema.net	137	links.govdelivery.com	166	nextgov.com	60
fcw.com	93	facebook.com	139	numbersusa.com	58
twitter.com	88	flyertalk.com	138	nationalterroralert.com	53
whitehouse.gov	69	mail.google.com	128	twitter.com	49

DHS and TSA websites featured prominently among the top ten referring sites across all phases, indicating the sustained engagement of those communities. Additionally, their showing in the third phase indicates a strong level of interaction between those charged with shaping and executing homeland security policy, and those affected by it.

Tracking Content Paths

Using Google Analytics, one can examine the paths that users took through the site, albeit at the aggregate level. As one might expect, the structure of each phase demonstrably affected the paths chosen. In each, the homepage was the predominant landing page. This is easily explained as its URL was featured prominently in outreach materials and links disseminated throughout the site. Yet it was not the only entry point. Many users accessed the first phase through individual mission area pages, the second through the main “Rank” and “Discussion” pages, and the third via redirection from prior phases’ pages. The rate of homepage landings was much higher among “new visits” than returning ones, suggesting that returning users sought specific topics in which they were interested.

In the first phase, the home page received 8,091 entrances, or 79.6 percent of the total; of that number, 2,859 visitors left right away. Many who remained went onto the mission areas: 1,283 chose Counterterrorism located on the top left of the webpage, 880 chose Disasters, 571 chose Borders, and 495 chose Immigration. For 345 visits, users chose Planning and 337 users chose Risk Assessment. Counterterrorism clearly had the most visitors, and Disasters, located directly below it on the page, had 880 visitors. The others declined across the board; it is difficult to tell how much of this is due to site layout as opposed to interest.

The second phase tells a similar story. The homepage accounted for 10,208 entrances, or 65.7 percent of the total; of those, 3,060 visitors left without visiting another page. For those who stayed, 4,023 users chose the “Rank” page, and 1,797 users clicked the “Discussion” page.

Navigation in the third phase was similar to the first as it dealt with topic areas, not activities. Then, 3,477 entrances—69 percent of the total—came through the homepage, and 1,024 of them left immediately. Others were automatically directed to review DHS content prior to submitting feedback. Content paths reflect this; only 6.15 percent of clicks went directly to pages featuring discussion across all mission areas. This suggests that people wanted to engage with materials prior to joining the conversation.

Building Infrastructure for Lasting Engagement

Across all study areas and phases, participants wanted DHS to place higher priority on empowering citizens and communities to be involved with the homeland security mission, particularly disaster preparedness and response. This desire aligns with the underlying implication that all citizens and residents are “DHS stakeholders.” It was suggested that “social sensors” identify citizens who are willing to be active if given the opportunity. It is clear that citizens do not see study group divisions as relevant to where citizen/community preparedness is most appropriately placed.

Participants discussed the need for transparency, accountability, and ownership for the missions discussed in this review. From the standpoint of engaging stakeholders, it is important to clarify which entities, internal or external to DHS, have responsibility for “owning” the objectives. Awareness ties in to this theme. As DHS increases transparency by soliciting feedback on the QHSR, there is the potential for future engagement.

Participant and social media feedback was positive about DHS’ collaborative experiment. This engagement must continue into the future. A quote from one blogger aptly captures the Panel’s sentiment:

Kudos are certainly in order for the DHS for engaging with the public on this effort to-date, but the conversation cannot stop here. Through this process, a community has been developed and needs to be cultivated. Whether participants submitted an idea, rated an idea, or simply read the comments presented, they have formed an informal network of interested parties that should not be ignored once the QHSR is complete.³⁸

To support lasting engagement among the stakeholder community, DHS should post the final QHSR and accompanying reports on the Dialogue site so that participants can see the fruits of their contributions. The Dialogue was based on a premise of transparency; the process should ensure that the output is not only open, but readily accessible. Although it may be difficult to correlate Dialogue suggestions to final homeland security policy, this step would be an important bookend to the process.

³⁸ <http://steveradick.com/2009/10/01/resilient-and-engaged-dhs-charts-a-path-forward/>

Recommendation 4.1. DHS should publish the final QHSR and accompanying reports to engage stakeholders and acknowledge their contributions.

This is a good first step toward continued involvement, but it cannot be the final one. DHS should engage the community it has created in the next steps of the QHSR. The U.S. Department of Defense has had success in continuing blogger roundtables. DHS should do the same. This would serve to leverage informed external voices and connect the department to the wider community. DHS may also consider creating a permanent social networking site for conducting less formal dialogue on selected issues.

Recommendation 4.2. DHS should engage the communities built in this process by exploring permanent ways of communicating with them.

SECTION FIVE LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The impetus for this National Dialogue stemmed partly from a congressional mandate to gain stakeholder input. Section 2401 of the Implementing the 9/11 Commission Recommendations Act of 2007 provided for the following:

Amends HSA to direct the Secretary, in FY2009 and every four years thereafter, to conduct a review of the homeland security of the nation. Requires each quadrennial review to:

- (1) delineate and update the national homeland security strategy, including the National Strategy for Homeland Security, the National Response Plan, and the Department Security Strategic Plan;
- (2) outline and prioritize the full range of critical homeland security mission areas;
- (3) describe the interagency cooperation, preparedness of Federal response assets, infrastructure, budget plan, and other elements of the homeland security program and policies associated with the strategy required to execute successfully the full range of missions called for;
- (4) identify the budget plan required to provide sufficient resources to successfully execute the full range of missions;
- (5) include an assessment of the organizational alignment of DHS with the strategy and mission areas; and
- (6) assess the effectiveness of DHS mechanisms for executing the process of turning the requirements developed in the quadrennial review into an acquisition strategy and expenditure plan within DHS.³⁹

The need to conduct a transparent and participatory review process was layered on top of existing laws, policies, and mandates that guide government activities. The Federal Records Act, Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972, Privacy Act of 1974, and Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980 (PRA), coupled with OMB Circular A-130 and other policy directives, have important implications for the use of web-based collaborative tools and online engagement. They not only impose requirements, but demonstrate that their creators did not anticipate how collaborative technologies would revolutionize government-public interaction.

The PRA's goal is to reduce the total amount of paperwork imposed by the federal government, and to prevent the government from using its authority to collect information not directly related to some authorized function. In service of these aims, the PRA imposes requirements upon federal entities that can themselves be burdensome and delay timely public engagement.

Collaborative platforms fundamentally alter “information collection” within the context of the PRA; they engage users in a manner that is far less burdensome than paper-based or in-person initiatives. The statute “defines ‘collection of information’ broadly...[and] covers any identical questions posed to 10 or more members of the public—whether voluntary or mandatory, whether written, electronic, or oral.”⁴⁰ Traditional surveys may indeed pose a substantial burden on agencies when administered to ten or more individuals, but the ability to dynamically aggregate feedback reduces the burden.

³⁹ <http://www.opencongress.org/bill/110-h1/show>

⁴⁰ <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/npr/library/misc/pr-a-qa.html>

The PRA calculates the paperwork burden placed on agencies in the following way:

Multiplying the amount of time per respondent by the number of respondents and the number of times the information is submitted each year produces the total annual burden hours imposed by a given collection.⁴¹

This does not clearly apply to a venue where respondents can group feedback to make it more manageable for agencies. Collaborative platforms are built on the principle of “radical scalability:” the more feedback received, the more clearly sorted the participants’ preferences and priorities. Or, the more people to whom the “questions” are posed, the better able they are to discover truly important priorities or novel ideas.

Examples from TSA, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. Patent and Trademark Office show that tapping stakeholders’ intelligence and emergent expertise is an indispensable tool of governance. Moreover, collaborative engagement raises the expectation for surprise; participants will contribute solutions, raise concerns, and indicate priorities that would not have surfaced otherwise. This contradicts the PRA’s direction to agencies that collecting information must serve a clear and predetermined purpose. Often, the most effective instances of online collaboration result from ideas and information that are not anticipated.

At the time, the PRA addressed a legitimate concern about burdens that government reporting imposed on the public. In cases where the law has been an impediment, this may be due as much to the experimental nature of these platforms as to the requirements themselves. Yet emerging platforms confound many of the assumptions that the PRA made. The result has been ambiguity in legal interpretation that, in the view of the Panel, invites unnecessary bias against action on the part of those charged with enforcing the PRA and similar statutes. Many agencies have not yet obtained clear guidance on whether and how the PRA applies to open-ended questions, platforms that rely only tangentially on paper, or voluntary submissions of personal information.

The PRA and other laws nearly made it impossible for DHS to conduct the Dialogue with enough time to truly engage stakeholders in a way that could meaningfully inform the QHSR. To have eliminated the chance for tens of thousands to learn about and directly shape mission execution would have been a disservice to them and to the nation’s homeland security.

Since the conclusion of the Dialogue, the DHS Office of General Counsel has opined that the PRA makes it impossible for DHS or the National Academy to conduct a follow-on survey of participants regarding their experiences. The information collected from such a survey—which would have been administered only to those who voluntarily submitted their e-mail addresses—would yield important findings. Failure to solicit this feedback will undercut DHS’ genuine desire to engage stakeholders and discourage the stakeholders themselves. One participant offered the following comment about the QHSR on a private blog:

I participated in the first phase, so I guess DHS is not interested in what I thought about their experiment in online public engagement (and why I decided NOT to participate in the rest of the process)?

⁴¹ PRA RFC

And doesn't the President's Memo on "open government" say that he wants agencies to ask for public feedback ABOUT their public engagement process?

Umm, yes it does.

So, unless I get an email from DHS asking me for feedback about my experience with the QHSR process, then DHS is not curious and, also, not compliant with what the President says that he wants DHS to do regarding public engagement.⁴²

Complying with certain laws and regulations that ultimately block engagement can impede the ability to achieve the broader vision that the President, leaders at every level of government, and citizens themselves have come to support and expect. Given the encouragement from other quarters of government for agencies to deploy collaborative tools quickly, the obstacles are out of step with the direction in which governance is clearly headed. This tension must be resolved.

The Panel is pleased that the Administration has turned its attention to the PRA and similar statutes, whose unintended consequences and unclear applicability are a barrier to "establish(ing) a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration" which President Obama laid out on his first full day in office.⁴³ OMB's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, which has responsibility for administering the PRA, recently posted in the Federal Register a request for comments entitled, "Improving Implementation of the Paperwork Reduction Act." OMB invited comments on multiple topic areas, including the following:

What practices could OMB implement under the PRA to facilitate the use of new technologies, such as social media, as well as future technologies, while supporting the Federal Government's responsibilities for Information Resource Management?

This emphasis was reaffirmed recently with the Open Government Directive, new guidance that instructs agencies and departments on how to fulfill the President's transparency, collaboration, and participation agenda. It instructs, in part:

Within 120 days, the Administrator of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA), in consultation with the Federal Chief Information Officer and the Federal Chief Technology Officer, will review existing OMB policies, such as Paperwork Reduction Act guidance and privacy guidance, to identify impediments to open government and to the use of new technologies and, where necessary, issue clarifying guidance and/or propose revisions to such policies, to promote greater openness in government.⁴⁴

The Panel hopes that the Administration will work with agencies to implement the PRA in a way that facilitates frequent and easy collaboration between the public and the federal government.

Recommendation 5.1. DHS should encourage OMB and the White House Counsel's office to issue a legal opinion on the circumstances under which the PRA and similar statutes apply to publicly available collaborative engagement opportunities and such platforms as the National Dialogue on the QHSR.

⁴² <http://steveradick.com/2009/10/01/resilient-and-engaged-dhs-charts-a-path-forward/>

⁴³ http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/TransparencyandOpenGovernment/

⁴⁴ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/asset.aspx?AssetId=2150>

This recommendation may be especially relevant to agencies that attempt to fulfill more immediate milestones contained in the Open Government Directive.

Recommendation 5.2. DHS should encourage OMB to work with the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and Office of New Media, GSA's Office of Citizen Services and Communications, and other best practices organizations to survey how PRA requirements impact the effective deployment of collaborative stakeholder engagement.

The results of this review, which also should identify engagements that have been delayed or blocked, should be continuously displayed on whitehouse.gov and each agency's Open Government webpage, as specified in the Open Government Directive.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The National Dialogue on the Quadrennial Homeland Security Review was a groundbreaking effort in stakeholder engagement and unprecedented in size and scope. Through the series of three public phases held from July to October 2009, DHS tapped into the wisdom of stakeholder expertise and experience to inform the goals, priorities, and objectives of homeland security policy for the next four years.

DHS partnered with the National Academy to assist in this complex task, yet the Dialogue's success has been based entirely on DHS' ability—and *willingness*—to experiment with a new, innovative approach to doing the work of government. Transcending the traditional model of creating policy behind closed doors, DHS brought stakeholders and partners into the decision making process, presented pre-decisional materials, and obtained feedback that yielded a better Quadrennial Review informed by many of those who will carry it out. By conducting a process open and accessible to all interested parties, the Dialogue created real benefits in strengthening trust among stakeholders, activating a community dedicated to the continuous improvement of homeland security policy, and potentially creating buy-in for later implementation of policies and priorities that they helped to shape.

This new approach to policy making must become “hardwired” within DHS to ensure that it continues in the future. Many remaining challenges must be addressed, both inside and outside DHS. This includes taking a fresh look at statutes set prior to the advent of these new technologies. And, though cultural apprehension generally presents a challenge to this innovative approach, the gains and success shown here will do the most to address it. The rest of government should see DHS' experience as a model of transparent stakeholder engagement, community building, and organizational learning.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Screenshots of the National Dialogue on the QHSR

Appendix Figure 1. Screenshot of the First Phase of the Dialogue

[HOME](#) [ABOUT THE DIALOGUE](#) [SEARCH](#)



A National Dialogue on the
QUADRENNIAL HOMELAND SECURITY REVIEW

Hosted by the National Academy of Public Administration

Guide and inform the work of the QHSR Study Groups – participate in the National Dialogue

- As a nation, we face a number of common threats, and homeland security is a shared responsibility. The QHSR is a critical part of DHS's efforts to review and refine the nation's approach to homeland security
- DHS views the QHSR as an opportunity for unprecedented collaboration and partnership across the homeland security stakeholder community. The National Dialogue is an extension of the QHSR study groups.
- The content you will see is the actual work product of the QHSR study groups. Please note, this is not final, vetted DHS policy.
- This is an iterative process. Your comments will feed directly into the study groups' deliberations as they frame options for homeland security decision makers.



Watch a closed captioned version of the video.

To get started, click into one of the 6 topics below

COUNTERTERRORISM
AND DOMESTIC
SECURITY
MANAGEMENT

SECURING OUR
BORDERS

SMART AND TOUGH
ENFORCEMENT OF
IMMIGRATION LAWS

PREPARING FOR,
RESPONDING TO,
AND RECOVERING
FROM DISASTERS

HOMELAND
SECURITY NATIONAL
RISK ASSESSMENT

HOMELAND
SECURITY PLANNING
AND CAPABILITIES

Appendix Figure 2. Screenshot of the Second Phase of the Dialogue

Preparing for, Responding to, and Recovering from Disasters - Ideas

Please review this mission's objectives and make specific recommendations as to how the objectives for Disasters should be achieved. We also invite you to **rate** and **comment** on other participants' ideas as we broaden the discussion on homeland security.

[Learn More & View Mission Objectives](#)

Want to participate in the Dialogue but not sure where to get started? Check out our real-time tag cloud to see what discussion topics are bubbling to the surface right now!

Submit an Idea

See All Ideas

Discussion tags

[All topic tags](#) [View all tags](#)

cert collaboration communities community preparedness disaster education empowerment environment fema mitigation nims not idea planning preparedness resilience resilience response technology training volunteer

All ideas

Latest Highest rated Most comments Needs tagging Needs rating

Identification Cards for Volunteers

by [CaliforniaVolunteers](#) from [CaliforniaVolunteers](#) on September 09, 2009 at 11:24PM

1 comment so far
Votes so far
5.0
(2 votes - averaged)

[Read and Review](#)

Standardizing volunteers by typing

by [CaliforniaVolunteers](#) from [CaliforniaVolunteers](#) on September 09, 2009 at 11:30PM

0 comments so far
Votes so far
5.0
(1 vote - averaged)

[Read and Review](#)

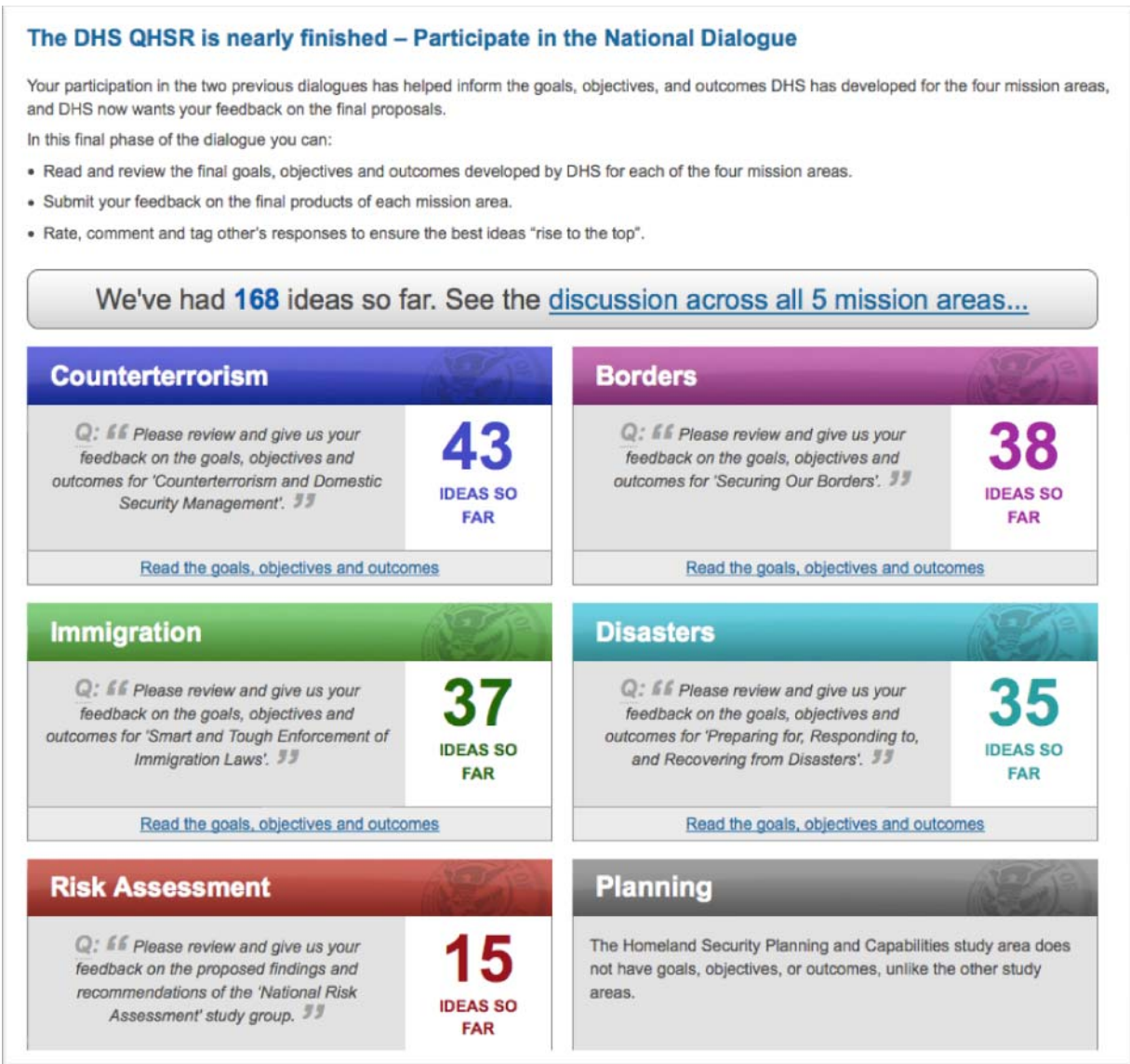
FEMA Liability Coverage for Volunteers

by [CaliforniaVolunteers](#) from [CaliforniaVolunteers](#) on September 09, 2009 at 11:29PM

0 comments so far
Votes so far
5.0
(1 vote - averaged)

[Read and Review](#)

Appendix Figure 3. Screenshot of the Third Phase of the Dialogue



Appendix 2: Breakdown of Registered Participants by Discipline Type

Sector	Dialogue 1		Dialogue 2		Dialogue 3		Cumulative	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Academia/Think Tank	70	6.39%	109	6.67%	16	6.43%	195	6.55%
Border Agent	5	0.46%	4	0.24%	1	0.40%	10	0.34%
Business/Industry	132	12.05%	144	8.82%	22	8.84%	298	10.01%
Coast Guard	10	0.91%	30	1.84%	2	0.80%	42	1.41%
Coroner/Mortuary Affairs/Forensics	0	0.00%	1	0.06%	0	0.00%	1	0.03%
Customs Agent	9	0.82%	11	0.67%	0	0.00%	20	0.67%
Elected/Appointed Official	0	0.00%	11	0.67%	1	0.40%	12	0.40%
Emergency Managers	74	6.76%	74	4.53%	5	2.01%	153	5.14%
Emergency Medical Service	11	1.00%	17	1.04%	1	0.40%	29	0.97%
Federal Government	141	12.88%	165	10.10%	20	8.03%	326	10.95%
Fire Service	31	2.83%	23	1.41%	2	0.80%	56	1.88%
General Public	178	16.26%	578	35.39%	81	32.53%	837	28.12%
Hazardous Materials	2	0.18%	3	0.18%	1	0.40%	6	0.20%
Hospitals/Health Care	12	1.10%	31	1.90%	4	1.61%	47	1.58%
Law Enforcement	82	7.49%	57	3.49%	14	5.62%	153	5.14%
Local Government	37	3.38%	35	2.14%	6	2.41%	78	2.62%
Military	28	2.56%	39	2.39%	3	1.20%	70	2.35%
Other (please specify)	142	12.97%	166	10.17%	30	12.05%	338	11.35%
Public Health	12	1.10%	9	0.55%	3	1.20%	24	0.81%
Public Safety Communications	11	1.00%	6	0.37%	1	0.40%	18	0.60%
Public Works	3	0.27%	4	0.24%	1	0.40%	8	0.27%
State Government	51	4.66%	43	2.63%	16	6.43%	110	3.69%
Tribal Government	3	0.27%	1	0.06%	0	0.00%	4	0.13%
Volunteer	51	4.66%	72	4.41%	19	7.63%	142	4.77%

Appendix 3: Lexicon of National Dialogue Terminology

Average Comments/Idea: The ratio of the total number of comments to the total number of ideas within a dialogue.

Average Page Views/Unique Visitor: This is the ratio of the total number of page views to the total number of unique visitors to a dialogue.

Average Ratings/Idea: This is the ratio of total number of ratings to the total number of ideas within a dialogue.

Average Time on Site/Unique Visitor: This is the ratio of the total time spent to the total number of unique visitors to a dialogue.

Bounce Rate: Bounce rate is the percentage of single-page visits or visits in which the person left the site from the first page.

Comments: Comments are short-form, user-generated feedback attached to previously posted ideas. They are intended to continue the discussion begun within an idea and cannot be rated. The number of comments counted is the total number of comments posted by all users during the given date range.

Conversion Rate: The conversion rate is the ratio of registered users to unique visitors, and is expressed as a percentage. This metric indicates the number of visitors that came to the site and found it valuable enough to register and join the conversation.

Direct Traffic: This is the number of visits that came from people typing a web address (e.g., www.homelandsecuritydialogue.org) directly into their browser, rather than clicking a link from elsewhere.

Engagement Metrics: These are measurements of how visitors interacted with the site. The National Dialogue measured: site traffic; time spent on the site; which pages attracted the most visitors; and other indicators of visitor behavior. Measuring engagement is distinct from measuring *participation* in the Dialogue, which deals more with how users contribute to the conversation.

Google Moderator: This is a free tool from Google that allows users to submit questions, and vote the best questions to the top of the list.

Ideas: Ideas are long-form, user-generated feedback. They can be up to 10,000 characters in length and are typically in response to the overall prompt question or material. The number of ideas counted is the total number of ideas submitted by all users over the given date range. Unique ideas can have their own tags, comments, and ratings associated with them.

Page Views: This is the number of times pages are viewed over a given date range. A visitor can see multiple pages on a single visit. Each page they view in the site is counted separately.

Participation Metrics: Participation metrics measure how users contributed to the conversation. These include ideas and comments submitted, the number and types of tags created, the average number of votes per idea, and other indicators of visitors' participation. One key metric of participation is the *conversion rate*.

Ratings: This is the total number of ratings submitted across all ideas in the dialogue. The platform used in this dialogue allowed each user to rate each idea once on a 5-star scale. Half-ratings cannot be assigned. Users can rate as many ideas as they want, and can revise ratings of an idea, but cannot rate any idea twice and no user can rate his/her own idea. For each idea, an average of all ratings, as well as the overall number of ratings, is reported on the site.

Registered Users: The number of registered users denotes the number of users who came to the site and created an account. Registration was required for most forms of participation (i.e., idea submission, comment submission, rating, tagging) on this platform.

Tags: The Dialogue allows users to apply topic tags to their own submissions and the submissions of others. Tags are usually one- or two-word phrases describing the themes of an idea. Tags are generally displayed in a "tag cloud," which allows users to more easily navigate user-generated activity.

Unique Visitors: (or Absolute Unique Visitors): The number of unduplicated visitors to the site over a given timeframe. This is measured by Google Analytics using both persistent and session cookies, which track visitors by computer or workstation. For example, if one visitor comes to the site on five separate occasions but from only one computer, this would count for five visits but only one unique visitor.

Visits: Number of times the site was visited, including multiple visits by the same *unique visitor*.