LATIN AMERICA pROGRAM: pORTFOLIO REVIEW Effective Latin American Democracies in the 21st Century

Building Shared Agendas for Transforming Democratic Institutions

This document reflects on the Latin America Program’s work within the concept “Effective Latin American Democracies in the 21st Century” since its approval in September 2014. The concept is part of a broader four year strategy (2015-2018) intended to address the crisis originating in the gap between 21st century societies and 19th century democratic institutions. This presidential portfolio review will allow for an in-depth examination of our strategy over the last 18 months, including our work and approach to date. It comes at an opportune time as many of the initial projects supported as part of this concept are underway, helping us evaluate and make adjustments to this concept and its components.

1. **Parameters of the Portfolio**

Our strategy for this concept initially consisted of two interconnected components: 1) diversify and increase the Latin American debate on the evolution of democracy to respond to 21st century societies; and 2) support experimentation that uses technology to engage citizens in policy-making and debating institutional reform. The outcomes of the second component were intended to enrich the debates we stimulated in the first and both used a combination of grant making and convening, as well as some technical assistance to reformers in governments. In 2016 we add two additional components to define our focus: to analyze institutional reforms that deepen citizen engagement in policy-making and to locate the results of Latin American institutional reforms within the larger global conversation.

The portfolio currently contains 17 grantees (70% project support, 30% general support), an investment of $1,173,396 over the last year, as well as grants made via a reserve fund request to take advantage of both the 2015 leadership transition within the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Post-2015 On the Ground Shared Framework.

1. **Our Ambitions: What were our initial hypotheses and assumptions in this area? Why this mix of tools/approaches?**

This concept is built on a premise that a confluence of societal factors in Latin America– the coming of political age of the first generation to grow up under democracy, historical reduction in poverty and the rise of a vibrant middle class, the increase in new forms of participation and activism facilitated by information and communication technologies; and rising expectations of Latin Americans for relevant, responsive and effective governments – provided an encouraging opening for the region to be a testing ground for the future of democracy. There was an opportunity to re-envision state-society relations and develop 21st century democratic practices that could enable meaningful citizen engagement, respect for human rights, and government effectiveness.

In the longer term we assumed that LAP could support new models for democratic participation and citizen engagement that could feed the regional and global debate on the nature of democratic institutions and state-society relations. This concept wagers that we can create conditions for dialogue and new thinking; stimulate collaboration among diverse actors, including an increased focus on building relationships with reformers within government; and build on experimentation with reforms that may make the region’s democracies more effective and open to citizen engagement.

We used a mix of the tools of grant making (70% of our time and resources), convening (25%), and direct assistance to reformers (5%) because we felt that this mix responded best to our strengths and abilities as a grant making program, as well as our desire to concentrate the concept on building shared agendas among multiple actors for the purpose of transforming democratic institutions.

1. **Our Place: What is the state of play, who are the players?**

During the life of this concept, democracies across Latin America have been rocked by major corruption scandals – bringing down or significantly weakening governments across the political spectrum in Guatemala, Honduras, Brazil, Chile and Mexico – and worsening economic conditions. The progress made in strengthening independent oversight institutions has helped expose corruption but, absent changes in democratic practice and culture, such scandals have increased public distrust of democratic institutions and dissatisfaction with governments. Social movements are using technology, the media and culture to question democratic institutions and organize themselves to demand more representation and effectiveness. Although these movements still have little substance on which to base their demands for reforms, organized civil society, academia and the media, are starting to build bridges to transform the demands from protests to proposals for policy change and institutional reform.

Democracy as a model is embraced widely but political actors disagree on how democracy institutions should be reformed or redesigned in Latin America. Center-right parties have been elected across the region, criticizing left-leaning governments for weakening democratic institutions. There is a growing opportunity to work with some of them to address the shortcomings they have highlighted.

Most of the funding for innovation in democracy work comes from international public and private donors. A few local private donors have started supporting democracy work, an exciting development in terms of the availability of funds and as evidence of local backing for these issues. We plan to encourage and engage with local donors, seeking opportunities to collaborate and co-fund initiatives with them.

1. **Our Work: What has been our role and how have we played it?**

We have operated on the premise that our role is to stimulate diverse actors in Latin America, including civil society and government, towards strategic reflection, discussion, and experimentation in order to construct a common language for the innovations needed for the region’s democracies to respond to the expectations of their citizens. We have focused on processes that can generate informed citizen engagement, taking care in the grant making decisions and approaches we support to also highlight the risks posed to democratic minorities by illiberal or authoritarian forces, and the use of referendums and other forms of direct democracy.

**Diversify and increase the Latin American debate on the evolution of democracy to respond to 21st century societies**

During the first year of this concept we concentrated significant effort and resources in the first component of the concept. We developed four approaches to stimulate broader knowledge, strategic reflection, and the development of a common language to address the evolution of democracy in the region. First we led a multi-sectoral transformative scenario building process for the future of democracy in Latin America. Second, we supported a nascent network of political activists who were debating and experimenting with the concepts of political innovation and of “hacking” the political system[[1]](#footnote-1). Third, we funded targeted research on innovative practices of non-electoral citizen participation and analyzed lessons learned from experiences of info/cyber activism across Latin America. Finally, we invested in a media platform focused on regional and international audiences to diversify the regional and global discussions on experimentation and innovation Latin America.

Transformative Scenario Building Process for the Future of Democracy

We selected this approach and methodology because it seemed like the best way to engage with a comprehensive subset of actors to broaden the democracy debate beyond the “experts” and the polarized rhetoric of politicians. Reos Partners, an international organization with offices in Brazil, and its founder Adam Kahane, coined the methodology, facilitating complex dialogues and strategic thinking in post-Apartheid South Africa, on the issue of drug policy in Latin America, among others. After mentioning our intention to work with this methodology, representatives of the Ford Foundation and Fundacion AVINA offered to collaborate with us. Together we developed a set of criteria to select and convene a team of 37 Latin American leaders from 13 countries to participate in a transformative scenario building process for the future of democracy in the region.

The team was incredibly diverse and worked together over the span of one year to create [four scenarios for democracy in Latin America](http://alertademocratica.org/en/introduction-to-the-scenarios/) through 2030:

* *Democracy in Transformation:* Widespread reassessment overcomes structural inertia in some countries, with democracy becoming stronger and more representative through institutional innovation.
* *Democracy in Tension:* Democracy in appearance only. Political and economic power are concentrated, disputed, and marked by patronage and authoritarian tendencies.
* *Democracy in Mobilization*: Popular mobilization, pressure, and creativity challenge traditional power structures and renew the democratic model.
* *Democracy in Agony:* A hijacking of democracy by organized crime leaves citizens feeling fearful and defeated. Corruption is a way of life, and the region as a whole is unstable.

To facilitate the intended regional dialogue and strategic thinking about the future, 10 of the 37 members of the scenario team, on their own initiative, transformed the group into the *Alerta Democratica* network, an informal network dedicating to using the scenarios as a platform for broadening the conversation. They launched the scenarios in September 2015 in Brazil, Bolivia, Honduras, and with the OAS in Washington, DC. The network’s [website](http://alertademocratica.org/en/) offers downloadable guidelines and other materials in English, Spanish and Portuguese. The *Alerta Democratica* network is now working independently of OSF and our expectation is that that the exchanges and relationship building that they experienced during the scenario workshops will be replicated across Latin America. Members have become extremely active and write a regular series of articles in the online digital commons, [*Democracia Abierta*](https://opendemocracy.net/democraciaabierta) (a separate media platform supported through this concept). With the participation of the OAS, they also have taken the scenarios to Spain and will launch conversations in Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico and Ecuador.

Strengthen Networks of Political Activists

Other efforts have involved grants to **Asuntos del Sur (ADS)** and **Fundacion Hormigas Argentinas/Democracia en Red** **(DeR)**, two organizations that are collaborating to nurture a nascent community of Latin Americans into a loose online network that is debating possible answers to the crisis of political representation.

Regionally, we have observed that the OAS’s new [Fellowship to Empower Agents of Change for Open Government in the Americas](http://www.oas.org/es/sap/dgpe/OpenGovFellowship/) has attracted an interesting cohort of political activists under the age of 35 years old from the private, civil society/media, and public sectors. The OAS fellows are interacting with initiatives in their home countries on open government and citizen engagement, as well as interacting with others in Latin America who are experimenting with a variety of institutional reforms. We have just started to support this emerging network of fellows.

Support Research and the Development of Tools for Reformers and Activists

Smaller efforts in this component of the strategy have included research and the development of tools that can be used by reformers and activists.

In late 2015, we made a grant to the [**LATINNO-Dataset on Democratic Innovations in Latin America**](http://www.latinno.net/)project, coordinated by Dr. [Thamy Pogrebinschi](http://www.wzb.eu/en/persons/thamy-pogrebinschi), Senior Researcher of the Democracy and Democratization Department at the Berlin Social Science Center ([WZB](http://www.wzb.eu/en)), to release a public dataset outlining a variety of characteristics for innovative practices of non-electoral citizen participation in Latin America since 1990. Dr. Pogrebinschi and her team participate in debates on democratization throughout Europe and Latin America and have used their findings to inform these dialogues. We expect that knowledge of participatory innovations can bring about change as governments, donors and organizations use the data to improve, evaluate and design new institutions, strategies and policies.

Also in 2015, we supported the **Fundação Instituto Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Centro Edelstein)** to analyze lessons learned from experiences of info/cyber activism in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela. The research has just been released in May 2016 and is intended to promote a public debate on the opportunities and challenges posed by the increasing role of cyberspace in shaping the public sphere, citizen participation, political institutions, and democratic governance.

In addition, we gave a small planning grant to a loose configuration of Latin American academics, coordinated by professors at American University and the University of Toronto, to explore with the Uruguayan government and FLASCO Uruguay the possibility of creating a commission on democracy to evaluate and discuss new experiments with institutional and political reforms. We provided a similar grant to **Update Politics**, a new organization based in Brazil but working regionally, to better understand and support the ecosystem in Latin America of those actors working to “hack” the political system and transform political culture. It released on May 5, 2016 a map over 700 Latin American examples of civil society and government using technology to engage citizens in policy-making and debate institutional reform.

Finally, we coordinated with **Instituto Arapyaú,** a Brazilian foundation, and **Cause & Gestao de Interesse Publico**, two consultancy groups, to map 21st century democratic practices in Brazil and to convene Brazilian private donors to expand the knowledge of philanthropists and foundations interested in the field of democratic practice and innovation. This work has also recently concluded.

Media Platform

Some of the initiatives described above have elements that connect the work and its results to the larger global conversation on democracy and human rights. Our support, with matching funding from the Open Society Initiative for Europe (OSIFE), to the alternative media platform **Democracia Abierta**, part of the Open Democracy online magazine, was principally to stimulate a democratic debate in English, Spanish and Portuguese among Latin Americans and Europeans.

**Support experimentation that uses technology to engage citizens in policy-making and debate institutional reform**

The investments that we made in the second component of this concept are new and we are just starting to see some of the results of this work. Our grant making has been focused on two different types of actors from civil society –actors who use technology to bring together diverse groups and connect with social movements and those who are committed to opening space for citizen engagement in policy making and experimenting with a variety of tools and methodologies at the sub-national level, such as roundtable dialogues, cultural forums, goals programs, participatory budgeting, public policy observatories, social auditing, among others. In addition, groups have adapted methodologies such as online open innovation challenges, laboratories for innovation and media activism, and have combined digital tools with activism to enable mass mobilization, engagement and oversight of public authorities and public policies.

These Latin American experiments have used our support to maximize the potential of technology, to expand space for citizens to engage in public policy debates, and to advocate for needed institutional reforms. The second set of actors with whom we have just started to engage are those who are members of a new generation of civil society activists who mobilize and interact online and use technology to elevate and expand citizen engagement in policy making and debate democratic reform.

Multi-Sectoral Sub-National Level Activists

We have observed that the willingness on part of the state to open up new channels for citizen engagement often arise first at the sub-national levels closest to citizens’ most immediate reality and where citizen engagement has a more profound effect. These sub-national experiences provide a clear example for those working at the national level that democratic institutions can operate differently. National processes are also fundamental but usually occur with the support of reformers within government, during moments of crisis, or after a political transition. The grantees that we have supported under this part of the strategy share the view that cities and metropolitan areas are geopolitical spaces where changes in democratic culture can occur. Although their work is specific to particular metropolitan areas they are increasingly involved in national, regional and global debates about the connection between citizen participation, democracy, human rights and development.

**Rede Nossa Sao Paulo (RNSP), Brazil** is a network of 700 organizations and prominent social and business leaders that haveworked to qualify and strengthen participatory spaces in Sao Paulo. They pushed for the approval of an amendment to the Organic Act of the Municipality, which now establishes that the mayor-elect must present a program of goals for the city in the first 90 days in office, including indicators and targets.  Moreover, they have developed an online citizen observatory to monitor 145 indicators, which help to map the problems of inequality, provide information about the standard of living, and evaluate the quality of public policies in Sao Paulo’s 96 districts. Their work has inspired the city government to set-up [Observa Sampa](http://observasampa.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/), which allows the population to visualize progress on a particular indicator or create their own. The experience of RNSP resulted in the Brazilian Network for Just and Sustainable Cities and a broader Latin American network, which involves similar initiatives in 60 Brazilian cities and 20 cities in countries such as Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay and Peru.

A second grantee, **Casa Fluminense (Casa),** was founded in 2013 to bring together citizens, activists and organizations that share a commitment to promote public policies that address inequality, strengthen democratic institutions and provide for sustainable development in the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro.  It has over 120 individual and institutional members that use online and offline techniques to facilitate the development specific policy proposals. In November 2014, the Metropolitan Chamber and the State Undersecretary of Urbanism formally accepted six of these proposals, including drafting a master plan for the entire metropolitan region of Rio; creating a program aimed at reducing homicides in Baixada Fluminense; and developing public targets for the state governments and municipalities. Additionally, Casa’s work has led to greater trust and innovative ideas throughout the metropolis. For example, in the Baixa Fluminense area of the city, Casa’s work led to a successful crowdfunding campaign that covered the cost of a course on citizen security for civil society and public actors, which Casa successfully launched in 2015.

In late 2015 we began funding the **Consejo Civico de Instituciones de Nuevo Leon, A.C.** ,based in Nuevo Leon, Mexico, an umbrella group and platform for continuous dialogue among more than 70 organizations and the municipal and state governments. It facilitates space for organized civil society to help construct better societies, citizens and governments. Consejo Civico is affiliated with the *Como Vamos* (How are we doing?) network throughout Latin America and has two initiatives, *Alcalde, Como vamos?* (Mayor, how are we doing?) in nine municipalities of Nuevo Leon, and the newly developed *Gober, Como vamos?* (Governor, how are we doing?) for the state level.

Build the Capacity of a New Generation of Civil Society Activists

Through this concept we have been able to seed a new generation of civil society activists who are working to channel online activism to penetrate the formal political system, reform institutions and change democratic culture. For example, together with the Information Program, we funded the **Instituto Tecnologia e Sociedade (ITS)** to develop its internet and democracy program and to share its experiences and lessons learned with [crowdsourcing Brazil’s Marco Civil legislation](http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/19/how-brazil-crowdsourced-a-landmark-law/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Democracy%20Lab%20Weekly%20Brief%2C%20January%2025%2C%202016&utm_term=%2ADemocracy%20Lab), which is credited with formalizing online participation in policy development via government websites like the executive branch’s [Dialoga Brasil](http://dialoga.gov.br/) website and congress’s Portal e-Democracia. It is also testing [www.mudamos.org](http://www.mudamos.org), an online forum to engage broader participation on security laws and political reform in Brazil. **Fundacion Hormigas Argentinas/Democracia en Red** **(DeR)** developed the DemocracyOS software, which is being used by political parties and 40 organizations in more than 15 countries to allow citizens to engage in public policy decisions as a way to stimulate better decision making. They also brought together the first collection of open source software in Spanish, [Civic Stack](http://www.civicstack.org/), a resource that is adaptable to the needs of any institution or activist interested in channeling citizen participation into policy making.

Finally, during the short period of this concept we have engaged with Brazilian civil society and donors who are interested in developing a strategy that uses technology to better inform and engage civil society organizations regarding the work of Congress and the policy-making process. We want to help them become more proficient operating in this environment as well as to invite them to become involved in debating important reforms for Congress to be more efficient.

Testing the Tool of Direct Assistance to Reformers

This concept is the first time we have tested our ability to facilitate direct assistance, although minimal in nature, to reformers in government. We responded to requests from Chile’s *Unidad de Modernización y Gobierno Digital del Ministerio Secretaría General de la Presidencia*, Mexico’s *Departmento de Innovación Cívica de la Presidencia de la República***,** the *Subsecretaría de Reforma Institucional y Fortalecimiento de la Democracia en el Ministerio del Interior* of Argentina**,** thegovernor of the Brazilian state of Maranhão, and the Brazilian National Development Bank. All of the requests came during political transitions and focused on those in government wanting a better connection to civil society, as well as an improved understanding of the technological tools available and the type of experimentation that is occurring in the areas of citizen participation.

Since starting the concept, **the World Bank’s Governance Process Group** requested help to think about how to support local governments in Brazil to use technology and different methodologies to better interact with citizens. Another request for support came from the **General Secretariat of the OAS**, Luis Almagro, and his advisors, who requested technical assistance to help the OAS rethink how it could contribute to a democratic dialogue that responds to the realities, expectations and needs of 21st century societies. In response, we worked with Almagro’s strategic advisor, to define the terms of the technical assistance and identify possible providers. Dr. Matías Bianchi, of Asuntos del Sur, was selected by the OAS as a consultant to provide advice, analysis and recommendations to the General Secretariat. Dr. Bianchi’s reports on Social and Political Transformations in Latin America, the Formation of Political and Social Leaders, and 21st Century Democracy, while not released to the public, have been broadly discussed among leaders and staff and figure significantly into Almagro’s plans for the School of Governance.

1. **Successes, Surprises, Challenges and Regrets**

During the progression of implementing this concept we have gained knowledge about the state of play, the actors and their capacity, and our own ability to support civil society and political activists to transform democratic institutions. Our work under this concept also benefitted from further discussion with LAP’s Advisory Board in March of 2016. We are using this reflection and the outcomes of the portfolio review to adapt our strategy for 2017-2020.

**Diversify and increase the Latin American debate on the evolution of democracy to respond to 21st century societies**

*Successes*

* We contributed to an increase in knowledge about innovation in citizen participation in the region, as well as supported mappings of the ecosystem of actors, which has resulted in a broader interest in examining democratic institutions.We are seeing new networks, debates and energy to innovative emerging from the work that we have supported. Organizations from the OAS, World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, to regional think tanks, a cooperative of Bolivian weavers, and a collective of trash recyclers are using the tools we have developed under this concept to reflect on strategies to better understand how they can contribute to a more representative and effective democracy.

*Surprises*

* Many political activists are working in a “liquid world”. They are primarily young people working in structures that appear and disappear rapidly. They value horizontal organizations, flexibility and pragmatism and often do not subscribe to a particular ideology. These types of actors have acted as bridges among sectors not traditionally part of the democracy debate.
* We have contributed to attracting the interest of foundations like Omidyar, Hivos, and Porticus, as well as domestic sources of funding like Fundación Corona- the Echavarria Family (Colombia) and Instituto Arapyau (Brazil) to develop similar strategies and programs.
* The community of those most active in these debates is still limited to activists and academics concentrated in the capital cities of Argentina, Chile and Mexico, as well as some cities in Brazil.

*Challenges*

* Defining and communicating effectively about the priorities and nature of this concept with internal and external stakeholders. There is a tendency for this notion of effective democracies in the 21st century and the evolution of democratic practice to become a larger category for actors and initiatives that we would like to work with, but whose focus doesn’t fall strictly within the confines of the concept.
* Increasing the audience for the debates on the significance about democracy in the 21st century. The research we have supported has only recently concluded and has had limited reach. There is a challenge and an opportunity to get this information to audiences throughout Latin America.
* Research and analysis has concentrated mostly on Brazil or been performed by Brazilian actors. We still need to bring this debate and work to the rest of the region, in particular in countries where the debate has not had a high level of discussion, such as Guatemala or Colombia.
* Collaborating with other donors has had its advantages (sharing costs, amplifying LAP’s networks, getting broader buy-in, etc.), but has been time consuming and tedious. For example, the Ford Foundation’s internal transition and decision to delegate the coordination of the transformative scenario building process to an outside consultant almost derailed the whole process.

*Regrets*

* I regret not having defined a communications strategy beyond the media strategy that was part of the transformative scenario building process and the media platform that is still in a start-up phase. More concerted effort here would have allowed knowledge, research and analysis to reach a wider audience.

**Support experimentation that uses technology to engage citizens in policy-making and debate institutional reform**

*Successes*

* Through this concept we have discovered a set of actors—journalists, politicians, political “hackers”, grassroots social movements, collectives of artists, urbanists, university students, community organizers, and civic entrepreneurs—that use horizontal cooperation and, at times, temporary and spontaneous partnerships with multiple stakeholders to advocate for reforms to democratic institutions. Our engagement with these actors has increased their capacity to work on political reform agendas and their understanding of new forms of participation and activism is starting to enrich other work we are conducting in our various fields and concepts.
* The vision of government reformers to identify experiences that have the most potential to impact public policies has begun to take shape. Local governments (Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Monterrey, Medellin, etc.), and national governments (Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Brazil) have begun to create institutions to promote a deeper interaction between government and citizens in order to stimulate multi-sector collective action.
* Through our grant making to civil society partners a set of tools is emerging for the use of reformers in government. For example, the LATINNO-Dataset on Democratic Innovations in Latin America, Civic Stack and the recent release of Update Politics’ mapping exercise has already received interest from those in government.
* We supported the development and evolution of participation experiments to improve the quality of public policies and institutions in specific contexts. Rede Nossa Sao Paulo, the Consejo Civico de Nuevo Leon, and Casa Fluminense have successfully developed collaboration and monitoring plans that have resulted in the implementation of more effective public policies in their cities. These experiences have resulted in a greater capacity for citizens to influence public decisions.

*Surprises*

* We were surprised to learn that while many actors use technology in favor of democracy, it is difficult to find actors that combine technology and advocacy. Working in alliances is fundamental and we will seek to observe and support some of these efforts.
* There are a number of reformers who come into government wanting to experiment and who seemingly have been unable to identify actors in civil society who can work with them on specific initiatives. These same actors have little or no access to tools or knowledge that can help them innovate.
* The responses that we have gotten from external actors to this concept – the World Bank, academics, established civil society and beyond- demonstrate that LAP is at the vanguard of reflecting upon and stimulating experimentation with tools and new forms of participation and activism.

*Challenges*

* It has been challenging to incentivize established experts in public policies to take advantage of the use of new technologies in their work and to dialogue with emerging activists. Projects such as those led by Rede Nossa Sao Paulo and the Consejo Civico de Nuevo Leon are led by experts and are expanding the use of technology in their initiatives, but their offline push for citizen engagement in public policies and institutional reforms is still their priority. These actors are also just starting to take advantage of media and culture as tools and spaces to move reform debates forward.
* We continue to face the challenge of taking advantage of new technologies while identifying partners that understand that technology is a tool that can contribute to effective democracy, but not a goal in and of itself. We also face challenges promoting inclusive strategies that allow populations that are not online to be included and participate in public decisions.
* LAP continues to debate how to best take advantage of and respond in a timely manner to specific opportunities in volatile political contexts like those of Guatemala and Brazil.
* There continues to be a lack of primary information for decision making, including case studies, measurements and base lines. In addition, there is a need for criteria for evaluating the learning from existing experiences.

*Regrets*

* Not broadened the second component of the strategy sooner to specify the importance of experimentation that is happening at the sub-national level, as well as experiments that combine new forms of participation and activism with pre-existing forms.
* Not planning for more time and resources, as well as a different mix of general support and project support grants, to build the capacity of emerging civil society activists.
* Not designing a specific strategy to identify and develop a more complete set of tools for reformers in government.

**If We Knew Then What We Know Now, What Would We Have Done Differently?**

With hindsight there are a number of things I would have done differently but I will underscore the five that are most pivotal. First, I would have **developed a communications strategy** for this concept that would have stimulated an even broader debate on the evolution of democracy to respond to 21st century societies and connected the regional debate with the global debate. Second, I would **have declined the Ford Foundation’s offer to work with us** on the transformative scenario building process for the future of democracy in Latin America. Third, I would have **broadened the second component of the strategy** sooner to specify the importance of experimentation that is happening not only with the help of technology, but also at the sub-national level with a multitude of innovative tools.Fourth, I would have increased the number of institutional support grants in countries besides Brazil to **build even further the capacity of emerging civil society.** Finally, I would have **developed more** **tools for reformers in government**.

Communications Strategy

The development and implementation of a communications strategy would have further diversified and increased the Latin American debate on the evolution of democracy to respond to 21st century societies**.** In this concept I assumed that the communications strategy designed by REOS Partners for the transformative scenario building process for the future of democracy would be sufficient for the purposes of this concept. Unfortunately, they proved to have very limited capacity to develop a region-wide strategy. Considering that what they were able to do was successful given the scale, I am convinced that if we had found a more knowledgeable and capable partner to design and implement a strategy we would have seen an even greater impact. We also invested in the *Democracia Abierta* media platform, which has had some success given the limited time that it has been in operation, but these two investments were still insufficient.

Collaboration with the Ford Foundation

If I could go back in time I would have tried to find a way to decline the Ford Foundation’s offer to support the transformative scenario building process. At the beginning I was thrilled that the Ford Foundation and the Avina Foundation wanted to add their financial and human resources to help carry out the scenario building process. Initially Ford was excited about the partnership and saw it as a way to inform their new strategy for Latin America as they were looking to develop a region-wide initiative for all three of their Latin American offices. As their internal transition evolved and the prospect of developing a regional strategy diminished, so did their excitement. Although they had dedicated close to $400,000 to the initiative, Ford’s staff (except for the Brazil representative) reduced their involvement and outsourced the coordination of the collaboration to a consultant who had originally been hired to help Ford design a regional strategy and who was dubious of the scenario building methodology. We did receive the benefit of Ford’s input in choosing and convening a diverse team of Latin American leaders to participate in the process, however we could have had better overall impact in the process and results if we had not agreed to have Ford join us.

Broadened the Second Component of the Concept

The experimental component of the concept places a high premium on supporting experimentation that uses technology to engage citizens in policy-making and debate institutional reform. The space provided by technology is valuable but there is also much more experimentation going on (as we have seen with the support to sub-national activism) that is producing institutional reforms that are important to capitalize upon. Given this it was a challenge to develop clear, specific criteria for the actors and projects we were seeking to support from the outset of this concept.

Building the Capacity of Emerging Civil Society Activists

We observed an increase in new movements that are questioning, often through the use of technology, media and cultural networks, democratic institutions and practices. These movements do not have the substance of organized civil society, but we aim to build bridges between the two. We overestimated the capacity of most civil society activists and their organizations to interact with reformers in government and provide them with the type of support that they were requesting.

Developing More Tools for Reformers in Government

We discovered that most reformers in government who were willing to experiment were not yet in positions of significant political influence. We overestimated the availability of information to be used by these reformers and their capacity to push for reform from within the system. This was especially the case in Mexico and Chile. Many of the projects under this concept have created tools for reformers that did not exist beforehand and some have just come out in the last few weeks. I will evaluate how these will be used, but regardless I would have preferred to develop a specific strategy and targeted more resources to building tools for reformers.

1. **Conclusions**

We aim to continue to work on this concept over the next two years, contributing to building public trust in democracy by increasing our support to experimentation directed toward making the region’s democracies more responsive and effective, placing the results within the larger global conversation. We will take care to avoid the risks posed to democratic minorities by referendums and other forms of direct democracy and will have an increased focus on building relationships with reformers within government. We anticipate that we will continue to have more success in identifying promising opportunities at the sub-national level and in contexts with more established government and civil society capacity, such as in Brazil, Mexico, Chile and Colombia, and plan to build on these early efforts. However, we have started to have contact with actors in localities which are marked by *caudillismo*, patronage, and authoritarianism, such as in Central America. We will seek to develop a few processes of experimentation where civic space is more closed, adjusting our expectations and tailoring our approaches to these specific contexts. We will also pay special attention to stimulating collaboration and exchange between emerging organizations with the capacity to mobilize for change and more established organizations that have had successes advocating for reforms in the public policy process and within democratic institutions.

1. A *hacker* is a term that comes out of the technology field to describe an individual who understands a system deeply enough to be able to alter it, the term “political hacker” is now being used in Latin America to describe individuals and organizations working to alter the political system to make it more democratic . [↑](#footnote-ref-1)