



The Future of Popular Government

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I am writing to get your reaction to a proposed decision coming out of our strategic planning process—eliminate the print version of *Popular Government* and take a fresh look at the best way to communicate PG-type content with public officials. The DAC is continuing to consider other impact proposals (another update after next week's meeting), but I'm bringing this one forward now because it has been considered by the DAC and by the *PG* Editorial Board. Timing also is critical for this decision because we can save a significant amount of money if we act soon (approximately \$75,000 in annual costs for printing, mailing, and outside editing and design, as well as the ability to redirect associated personnel time). That is not the only consideration, of course, but it is a consideration.

Various suggestions about *Popular Government* emerged in the early DAC brainstorming and through the impact proposals. After naming Chuck Szypszak as the magazine's new editor, I encouraged him to evaluate its role in advancing the School's mission. Chuck has done a careful job of evaluating the magazine, and he recommended to the *PG* Editorial Board that the print publication be terminated because the magazine's content and reach no longer are sufficiently compelling to justify its continued consumption of our resources. According to Chuck, the editorial board members (John Stephens, Bob Joyce, Fleming Bell, Richard Whisnant, Aimee Wall, Karl Smith, Eileen Youens, and Ellen Bradley) "have a variety of views about how to proceed but a majority agree that print publication should be terminated . . ." The board "favors exploring a Web-based portal that would deliver to public officials and engaged citizens the kind of general interest content at which *PG* has been aimed . . ." I shared [Chuck's memo to the editorial board](#) with the DAC, and I shared [his email describing the board's views and their recommendations](#).

At our DAC meeting on July 29 I asked for their advice about the recommendations from Chuck and the editorial board members. Aimee Wall and Ellen Bradley are members of the editorial board and they were able to share their observations about that meeting during the DAC discussion. There was a good and full discussion of the issue within the DAC, which apparently tracked much of the discussion within the editorial board. I asked the DAC members at the end of our discussion if they agreed that we should end the print version and create a committee to consider alternative ways of delivering the kind of content at which *PG* has been aimed. Not everyone agreed during our straw poll, but there was a very strong majority of those present who favored that decision.



I confess to having a strong sentimental attachment to *PG*, especially given its long tenure and direct association with Albert Coates. That is not a good enough reason to keep the magazine, however. The appearance and quality of the magazine have improved over the years, and the editorial board's recommendation is not a criticism of the excellent work done by the past editors, publications staff, and authors. I simply agree with the recommendation that we can develop a more effective way of sharing information with public officials and others. Rather than try to work within the limitations of the current model by modifying *PG*, I believe that we will come up with a more effective way (or ways) of sharing our written information if we begin with a blank slate. I do not believe that we need to conduct a survey before making this decision. We can make this call based on our own judgment about the most effective way of reaching our audience, and my sense is that a survey will only delay the inevitable. Chuck and the board recommend a survey to shape our development of the new delivery model, and that seems like a good way to proceed. If we proceed with eliminating the print version of *PG*, I recognize the need to take great care in explaining the change to public officials.

It may be difficult for you to compare the value of *PG* with undefined, alternative ways of sharing information with public officials. I am confident that we can create a process for identifying what our objectives have been and should be for the kinds of content we have had in *PG*, and then we can identify the best outlets for meeting our interests and the needs of public officials. For example, we might want to link a new "publication" closely with whatever impact proposals go forward. If we decide to move more intentionally into the public policy field, we might develop a bulletin series that is tied to policy issues and reaches many of the same people who received *PG*. We also need to be mindful of the fact that *PG* has been a useful publication vehicle for faculty members on the road to tenure, but my sense is that there are more effective ways of publishing for junior faculty members that will be just as effective with the campus promotions committee. It also is possible that we will decide to continue using the *PG* banner in some ongoing way.

Please take a careful look at Chuck's original memo to the editorial board and his email summarizing their meeting. This post is not a substitute for looking at those documents. After receiving the recommendations from Chuck and the editorial board, and after having them reinforced by the DAC, I am strongly inclined to accept those recommendations. I am interested in hearing your thoughts—pro and con—so that I can weigh all of the possible advantages and disadvantages before making a final decision. I would value hearing your perspective on my proposed decision, and I need to hear no later than August 28.