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## **mySociety's beginnings**

mySociety is a nonprofit social enterprise with a mission to invent and popularise digital tools that enable people to exert power over institutions and decision makers.

The organisation was founded in 2003 when a small group of developers became frustrated by the fact that government (at both a local and national level) was not using the then relatively new opportunities of the internet to their full advantage. They had the foresight to understand that online platforms could change the way that people speak to their governments, demand changes or request information.

Back then, mySociety built and ran sites for UK citizens. While they still run these sites, they now also support partners who deploy their technologies across the globe, in over 50 countries.

[See the mySociety timeline](#)

## **mySociety today**

Almost 15 years later, the organisation is recognised as a pioneer in the use of digital technologies to help citizens to complete key civic and democratic tasks. mySociety sites help people every day, as they discover the identity and voting record of their politicians, submit Freedom of Information requests or get common municipal problems like broken street lights fixed.

Digital platforms increase the prospects for reaching scaled impacts relatively cheaply: mySociety's UK services alone attract over 10 million visitors a year.

An Open Source organisation, with a commitment to freely reusable code, Open Data and open standards, mySociety employs about [25 staff](#), with additional input from a small team of dedicated volunteers.

Funding for projects comes from three main sources: grants from charitable foundations; provision of software and data to customers such as local authorities and other nonprofit organisations; and donations from the public.

[See more on the mySociety website](#)

## How mySociety works with partners

mySociety's initial direction saw them building websites directly for use by the UK public. Several of these sites are still thriving, such as [TheyWorkForYou](#), which people use to find out about their MPs, and [FixMyStreet](#) which people use to report and problems like broken street lights.

The code powering these sites was always designated as Open Source, for anyone to use without cost, and over time, it became clear that groups and individuals around the world were trying to set up similar sites in a variety of countries. This was a desirable outcome, but it was also clear that some coding knowledge and technological skills were required before anyone could hope to redeploy the code for their own purposes.

Consequently mySociety changed as an organisation, becoming primarily concerned with providing software and advice to help partners to run sites and apps. Today mySociety provides software and advice to an ever expanding range of partners in countries from Kenya to Chile, Australia to Malaysia, through an innovative system that includes onsite visits, regular video calls, busy mailing lists and annual conferences.

There are partnerships and collaborations to be formed in the UK too. Projects such as [EveryPolitician](#) and [YourNextRepresentative](#) have underpinned work of groups such as [Democracy Club](#) and [Full Fact](#), while also doing the same for groups worldwide.

All this work is supported through major grants from organisations like the Omidyar Network and the Open Society Foundation, and via profits from a trading arm, mySociety Ltd.

## mySociety tools: examples

### Alaveteli: Freedom of Information

mySociety's most-deployed tool is [Alaveteli](#), a platform that enables people to set up powerful Freedom of Information websites in their own countries.

Spun off from the highly popular UK site [WhatDoTheyKnow](#), Alaveteli enables partners to set up and maintain sites that make it much easier to ask governments questions under Freedom of Information or Right to Information laws.

What makes the service extra powerful is that it automatically publishes both requests and responses online for other people to see, so the site also becomes a public archive of wide interest. WhatDoTheyKnow, for instance, has in excess of 600,000 visitors a month and contains over 400,000 requests with their responses.

Citizens in countries across the world are proving just as hungry for information: for example the [Hungarian Alaveteli install](#) has published more than 9,000 FOI requests to date, and the [Czech Republic's site](#) 6,500 (as of October 2017).

[Read more about Alaveteli.](#)

## FixMyStreet: Better Cities

Traditionally, when a problem is reported to a local government, anywhere in the world, that report and its repair status is de facto secret. [FixMyStreet](#) was the first service to turn this around, encouraging people to send reports to governments that were simultaneously made public.

After succeeding in the UK as [FixMyStreet.com](#), the software was refined to make it easy to set up and customise for use in other contexts and languages. FixMyStreet sites are currently running in many countries: see, for example, [FixMyStreet in Norway](#) and the [city of Zurich](#).

FixMyStreet is also a flexible piece of software that can be adapted for other uses, and has already been pressed into use as an anti-social behaviour reporting tool, an empty homes spotter (tied in with a Channel 4 TV programme) and a cycling accident data collecting platform.

[Read more about FixMyStreet](#)

## EveryPolitician: Free, structured data about the world's politicians

One of the most difficult tasks in creating websites that help people follow their own parliaments and engage more in democracy, is that of keeping the underlying data up to date. It's fairly simple to obtain a list of current politicians and their positions; things become substantially more difficult when those politicians move on, or get replaced.

[EveryPolitician](#) attempts to gather data on every politician in the world, and share it as open, structured data with anyone who needs it. It now underpins many significant projects in the UK and around the world.

[Read more about EveryPolitician](#)

## mySociety's research agenda

As mySociety entered its second decade, it became acutely aware of the need for research — solid evidence that would back up the assumptions that their software actually does good in the world. To this end, they set up a [research department](#) and forged links with researchers across the world.

Annually, mySociety presents [TICTeC](#), the world's only conference on the impact of Civic Technologies, which has fast become the key event for those researching this field.

[Read more about mySociety's research](#)

## Further reading

Learn more about mySociety at [mySociety.org](#), read the [blog](#) or follow [@mySociety](#) on Twitter.

Questions? Drop a line to [press@mysociety.org](mailto:press@mysociety.org).