

OpenCongress.org: A Usability Study

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Introduction

In this version of the presentation, you must watch the introduction video posted on YouTube. You can access it at the following location:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjNhtl7V25g>

OpenCongress.org

Objective

“For all of us to live together peacefully and productively, we must embrace the notion that there be a process of discussion and education before an issue is resolved. This is an obligation of citizenship that is even more elemental than the act of voting.”

Lee Hamilton

Director, *Center on Congress*

From “Democracy Relies on Healthy Dialogue”

Research Question

Do the layout and interactive features of OpenCongress.org help politically active and potentially politically active citizens participate in the federal legislative process by providing an opportunity for them to learn what a federal bill proposes, better understand the arguments surrounding that bill, and to take some form of action?

- Definitions: politically active vs. potentially active

Methodology

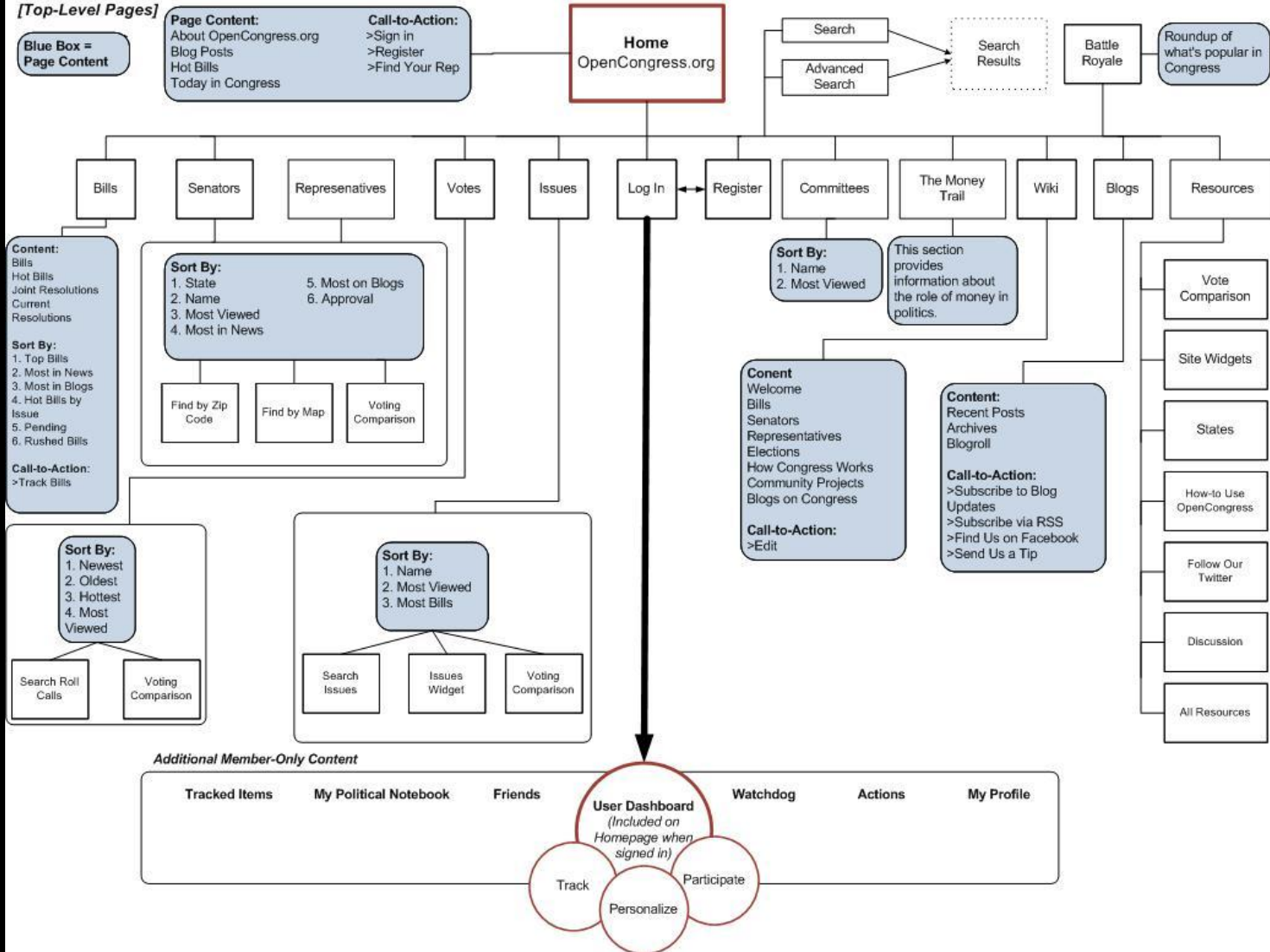
- Create Sitemap
- Identify Target Audiences
- Create Tasks that Address Research Question
- Create Survey to Capture Quantitative Feedback
- Conduct Pilot Test*
- Refine Tasks, Survey and Testing Procedures
- Conduct Final Test
- Compile and Analyze Results
- Provide Recommendations

* *“Running pilot studies is also very useful...you’ll be able to identify some of the outstanding issues you have yet to address in the larger study.”*

- Tom Tullis and Bill Albert, *Measuring the User Experience*

Sitemap

Primary Navigation [Top-Level Pages]



Methodology – Task Flow

We divided our tasks into 3 sections, each intended to address an aspect of our research question.

Do the layout and interactive features of OpenCongress.org help politically active and potentially active citizens participate in the federal legislative process by **providing an opportunity** for them to learn what a **federal** bill proposes, better understand the arguments surrounding that bill, and to take some form of action?

Section A: Learn what a bill proposes.

- Task 1: Find a bill
- Task 2: Find its summary

Section B: Better understand arguments for and against the bill

- Task 1: Find which legislators support and oppose the bill
- Task 2: Find an article related to the bill
- Task 3: Determine if their legislator supports or opposes
- Task 4: Find a blog entry about the bill.

Section C: Take some form of action on the bill

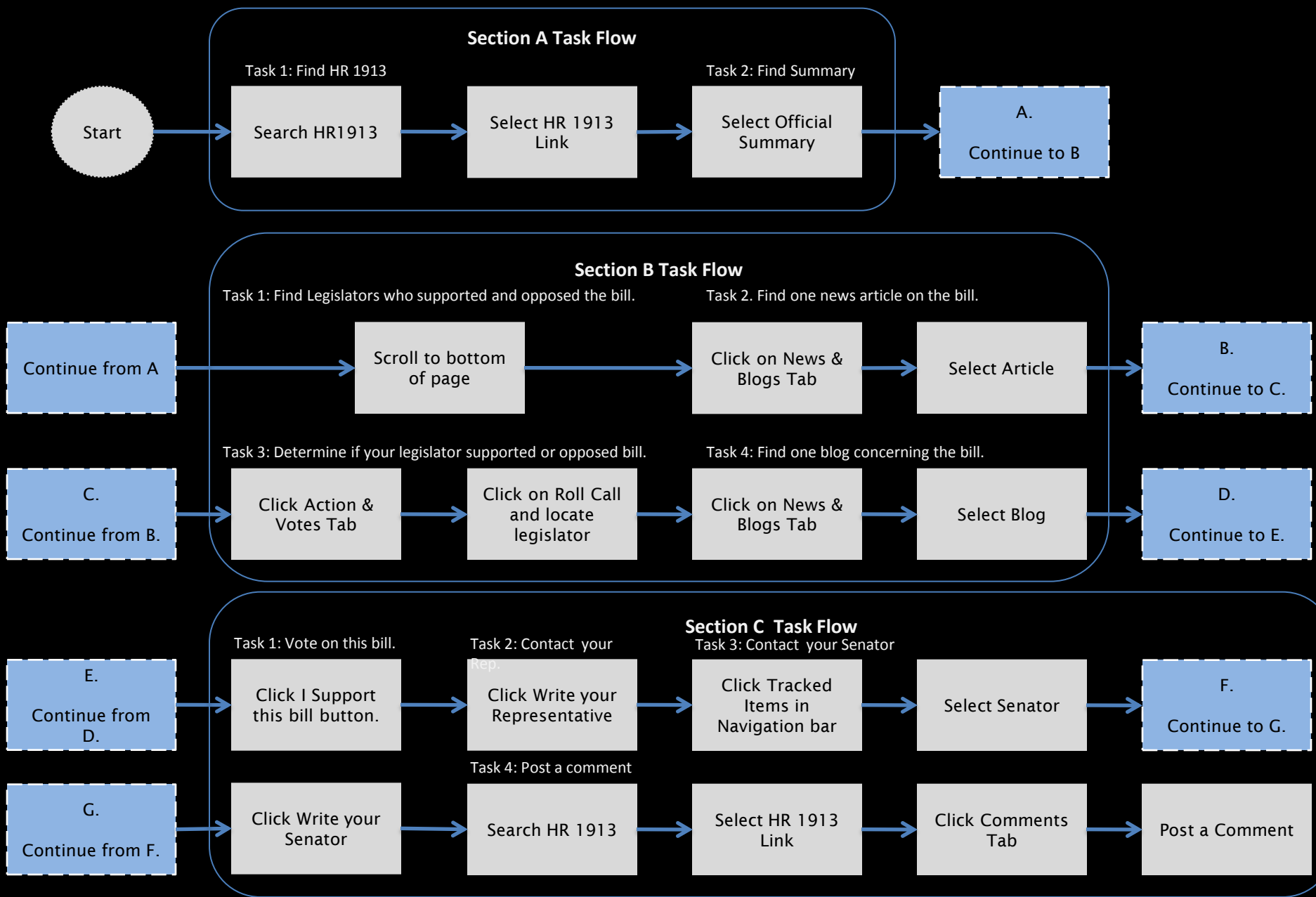
- Task 1: Cast your vote on the bill
- Task 2: Write your Representative
- Task 3: Write your Senator
- Task 4: Post a comment about the bill

Methodology – Survey Q's

Possible Responses: *Strongly Agree; Agree; Somewhat Agree; Disagree; Strongly Disagree*

- Q1: I felt comfortable navigating OpenCongress.Org
- Q2: It was easy to determine how to share my views with the OpenCongress.Org
- Q3: OpenCongress.Org did not provide easy access to the arguments surrounding the specified
- Q4: OpenCongress.Org helped me determine the status of the specified bill
- Q5: It was difficult to determine my legislator's positions on the specified bill using OpenCongress.Org
- Q6: OpenCongress.Org strengthened my interest in the federal legislative process.
- Q7: OpenCongress.Org increased my desire to share my political views with my federal representatives.
- Q8: The process required to share my views with the OpenCongress.Org community was not intuitive.
- Q9: The layout of OpenCongress.Org was simple to navigate.
- Q10: I will use OpenCongress.Org again in the future.
- Q11: OpenCongress.Org helped me better understand the specified bill.
- Q12: I found OpenCongress.Org difficult to navigate.
- Q13: It was hard to determine the status of the specified bill using OpenCongress.Org
- Q14: OpenCongress.Org made it easy for me to share my opinions on the specified bill with my federal representatives.
- Q15: OpenCongress.Org helped me identify my legislators' positions on the specified bill.

Optimal Task Flow for Usability Test



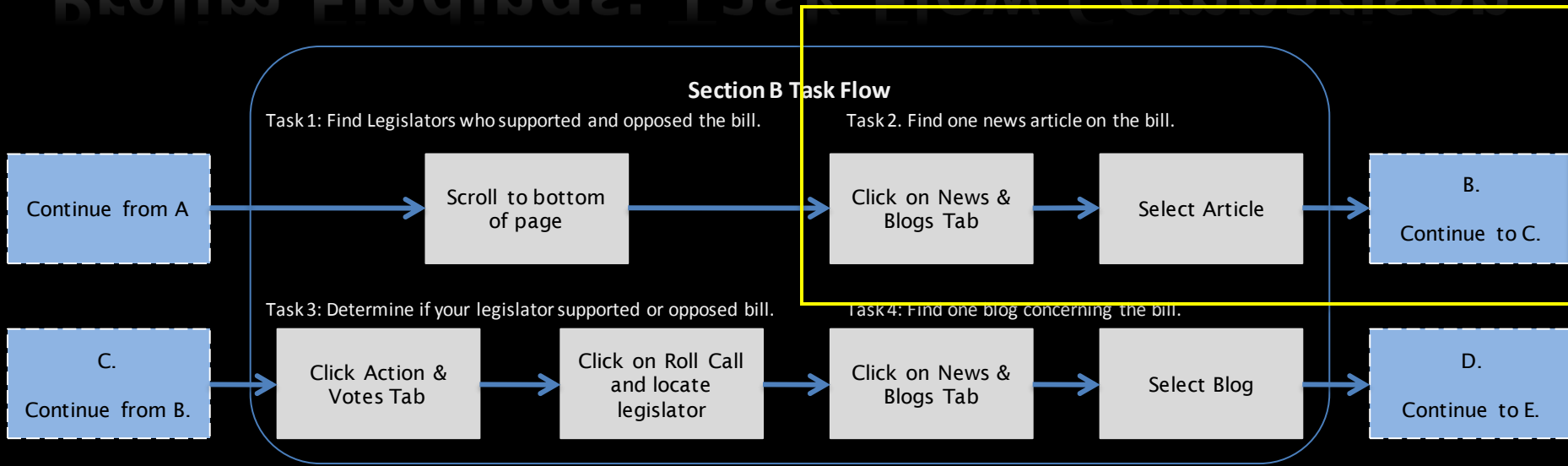
Test Participant Profiles

Participant	Age	Profession	Level of Activity	Political Affiliation	# Days/Week on Computer	# Days/Week on Internet
Craig	56	Accounting	Moderate	Independent	7	7
Travis	21	Student	Moderate	Independent	7	7
Brian	39	Marketing	Moderate	Republican	7	7
Jessie	28	Therapist	Very	Democrat	7	7
Brad	34	Teacher	Moderate	Independent	7	7
Max	25	Product Support Technician	Very	Democrat / Socialist	7	7

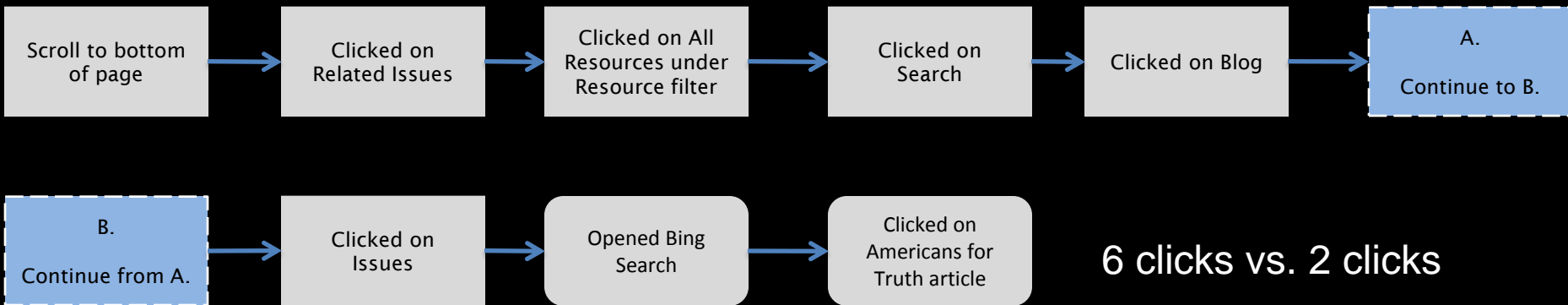
Preliminary Findings

- Task Flow Comparison
- Task Time to Completion Insights
- Survey Response Insights
- What we've learned/observed through the pilot

Prelim Findings: Task Flow Comparison



Example User Path



Prelim Findings - Task Completion

Participants	Craig		Travis		Brian		Jessie		Brad		Max	
Tasks	P/F	T	P/F	T	P/F	T	P/F	T	P/F	T	P/F	T
1A	P	3:20	P	4:34	P	:19	P	:14	P	:30	P	:28
2A	P	1:07	P	1:29	P	:15	P	1:58	P	:19	P	:11
1B	P	4:08	P	1:19	P	:27	P	1:08	P	:45	P	:23
2B	P	2:17	P	1:20	P	3:01	P	:17	P	2:39	P	:23
3B	P	3:18	P	1:10	F	5:00	P	1:09	F	5:00	P	:13
4B	P	:09	P	1:08	P	1:10	P	:47	P	:33	P	:11
1C	P	:05	P	1:04	P	:09	P	:05	P	1:38	P	:02
2C	P	:05	P	1:04	P	:02	P	:03	P	:06	P	:03
3C	P	2:30	P	2:47	P	1:01	P	4:47	P	1:58	F	5:00
4C	F	5:00	P	2:31	P	2:18	P	:16	P	4:55	P	:42

Prelim Findings – Survey Responses

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q1		100%			
Q2	17%	33%	33%	17%	
Q3			33%	50%	17%
Q4	33%	67%			
Q5	17%	17%		33%	33%
Q6		67%	33%		
Q7		33%	50%	17%	
Q8	17%		17%	67%	
Q9	17%	67%		17%	
Q10	17%	50%	33%		
Q11	33%	50%	17%		
Q12		17%	17%	67%	
Q13				83%	17%
Q14	17%	67%	17%		
Q15	17%	50%	17%	17%	

What We Have Learned

- Gathering a Diverse Test Group is Essential
- Task Order Matters
- Straightforward Language Essential in Surveys
- Iterations of Questions is Essential in Surveys
- Pilot Testing is Beneficial to Identify Test Flaws
- Delivery and Test Conditions Can Influence Results
- Using a Combination of Methodologies is Important

What Next?

Test 10 Additional Individuals

Compile Findings

Provide Recommendations