From Campus to City Hall: Leveraging Student Expertise for Local Ethical Technology Governance with the Paragon Model

Author(s): Sofia Rodriguez, Carolyn Wang*, Kaitlyn Cui*, Jennifer Wang, Kayla Huang, Quinn Wilson*

Problem Definition:
As private-sector technologies rapidly evolve, legislators require increasingly sophisticated insights for responsible technological governance. At the local level, budget constraints, understaffing, precedent, and legacy systems limit the capabilities of technological integration. Having grown up in the digital age, the newest generation of college students is more tech-savvy than any other demographic. Coupled with an increasing belief in the social responsibility of institutions, many students have developed an increased awareness of the societal implications of public-interest technology. Because digital governance is a relatively new field and teams within government are still emerging, there are limited opportunities for students to engage with these pressing issues. As rising professionals, future-oriented citizens, and major consumers of technology, students are major stakeholders in the development of robust, ethical, and socially-informed technology standards, but they currently lack a voice in this policy sector. To address this gap, we propose the paragon policy fellowship model to effectively engage the newest generation of policymakers in the discourse on governance structure and procurement standards in local governments. the paragon policy fellowship model demonstrates that governments can create more robust standards that prioritize limiting societal harms when students are put at the forefront.

The Paragon Model:
The Paragon Policy Fellowship provides students the opportunity to engage with technology policy firsthand. The Paragon Model operates on the following pillars of support:

(1) **Empowering Local Government Through a Community-Driven Approach**: The Paragon team matches students from diverse academic backgrounds with local/regional governments for four months to conduct in-depth research on an AI/tech policy issue specific to their region and to produce a policy brief – enabling governments to address AI issues they lack capacity to address on their own.
(2) **Increasing and Maintaining Diversity Within the AI Governance Space**: Paragon's outreach targets students who lack opportunities to contribute to technology policy development. Fellows have access to policy and project directors with extensive government work experience, speaker events featuring policy experts, and mentorship office hours. This gives students from the communities most impacted by the social harms of rising technologies a voice in how that technology should be governed.
(3) **Building a Grassroots-First Network For Digital Cooperation, Literacy, and Advancement With Potential For Scalability**: To foster cross-cultural communication, Paragon has created an

online community to empower discourse, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing across diverse projects and AI governance issues as fellows strive for more experienced public-interest roles to create sustained impact.

Project Scope:
This paper highlights two regional teams from Paragon's Spring 2024 cohort — Boston, MA and Lebanon, NH — and how the Paragon model enabled these students to effectively create community-centered change. These teams engaged with local governments in developing frameworks for ethical, effective technology procurement, with a focus on creating accountability standards and processes to combat digital harms. The two projects were scoped by the Paragon team to support students in developing socially responsible governance models by creating a forum for discussion of the ethical standards for technology governance.

Over four months, fellows engaged with stakeholders and city government officials to understand the fundamentals of technology governance and the feasibility of implementation at the city level. The Lebanon, NH team sought to develop an auditing framework to evaluate AI use cases and procurement opportunities in Lebanon, balancing accountability with the city's capacity by establishing a documentation process for reviewed software to enhance transparency. The Boston, MA team focused on designing and shepherding city-wide governance processes that identify shared technology priorities and needs across all agencies and departments to support the development of a user-centric IT service management plan across the city.

Outcomes:
The Lebanon team aimed to chart a responsible course for AI adoption, balancing innovation with integrity and setting a standard for ethical AI use in public administration. The team produced an outline of principles guiding the AI auditing and technology review process, underscoring the city's commitment to using AI as a force for public good and enhancing services while safeguarding the community's rights and freedoms. Based on the findings of theory case study research, the team developed an AI Auditing Framework that prioritizes privacy, security, equity, transparency, reliability, and sustainability. The team then generated an AI Assessment Worksheet that serves as the tool for implementing the AI Auditing Framework. The framework represents a significant step forward in ensuring that the deployment and use of artificial intelligence within city operations is ethical, transparent, and aligned with community values. These standards set a benchmark for responsible AI usage, emphasizing the importance of ensuring individual privacy, equity, and robust oversight.

The Boston team conducted a literature review on the technology procurement landscape, outlining standards for data interoperability and integration. By conducting 1:1 interviews with city employees, fellows were able to expand upon the limitations of Boston's procurement standards and scope out a framework for ensuring equity by including "social responsibility" as one of the "Pillars of Effective and Ethical Technology Procurement." The Boston team developed a procurement guideline for city employees navigating the technology procurement process – outlining the current procurement process, application areas the City of Boston seeks to accelerate, and which procurement standards to prioritize. With technology procurement being a critical part of DoIt's government processes, this deliverable

provided clarity for the city's technology procurement process, established a more formal procurement management function, and created benchmarks for social responsibility in procurement standards.

Next Steps:
The Paragon Policy Fellowship demonstrates the sustainable, community-centric governance necessary to address the most pressing questions of emerging technology at the local level. By working with city governments, students get to see the individual impacts of the policy they create, further mobilizing student communities to engage with technology governance and civic institutions. Our two case studies illuminate how the Paragon Model effectively enables student stakeholders to work at the forefront of designing **socially-responsible AI governance**, **design**, **risk mitigation**, and **procurement standards** for their communities. The Paragon Model shares a scalable framework that cities and counties across the country can replicate to engage the newest generation of changemakers.

**Primary Authors*