

# DEMOS

## Project Proposal

FYI: A People's Inquiry into  
personal information

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## Introduction

Personal information is not an open or shut case. Now we are part of a world so rich in information, the key problem centres on a simple question: are we giving people more or less influence and power over how they are seen by others, and how decisions about them are taken?

Personal information is used to make decisions about us that affect our everyday lives. But so far policy has been driven too narrowly by the perspective of organisations, government departments and business. And we have been too focused on data *security*, and the *accuracy* of the information they hold.

That has left two key gaps. **First**, a failure to focus on and debate the acceptable *legitimate* uses of information. It is these processes and policies that will ultimately determine how information affects our lives. **Second**, there is a failure to understand when, where and why the public accept or otherwise the use of information. We are missing the aspirations of those whose lives decisions based on personal information affect: the public.

Whilst we may argue about who ‘owns’ personal information, there is little doubt about people’s investment in the processes in which it is used. The only route to legitimate, trustworthy information policy is to switch the focus towards these voices.

***This project will be a groundbreaking experiment, through deliberative dialogue, to close these gaps by bringing this public voice to the heart of the debate about personal information.***

The core of this extensive nine month project will be a 'People's Inquiry' – an innovative process, drawing on Demos’ previous work, of deliberative public engagement over five months. Following this, we will run an expert stakeholder group to develop the insights from the People’s Inquiry into practical ideas for government, industry and legal policy alike.

## How the project will work

The project will have three principle phases.

1. Building on our leading expertise in public dialogue, Demos will lead a groundbreaking People’s Inquiry to investigate these opportunities

and uncertainties in more depth. This will use deliberative forums, with the involvement of experts from across the relevant disciplines, to draw out new voices on the ethical, legal and technological challenges of personal information policy.

2. The outcomes of this process will be used to draw concrete practical recommendations through expert stakeholder workshops, covering industry, law and public policy.

3. The production of an agenda-setting pamphlet reporting on the findings and the implications.

### **Next Steps**

The project will begin in early 2009. We are currently looking for interested partners and sponsorship.

A more detailed proposal is available on request. If you would like to discuss this in more detail please contact Peter Bradwell ([peter.bradwell@demos.co.uk](mailto:peter.bradwell@demos.co.uk); 07811 268398).