Project Name: MoneyPolitics.PCIJ.org, A Citizen’s Guide to Elections, Public Funds, and Governance in the Philippines (A data-journalism project of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism)

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What particular incident prompted you/ the organization to launch a program against corruption?

Collecting and aggregating public records, documents, and information materials is the method of work and constant practice of the researchers, writers, editors, and fellows of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ).

All too often, however, public agencies produce data and documents that are incomplete, uneven, or rendered in hard copies, PDF or HTML versions that are flat ad thus not given to sorting and analysis by journalists and citizens.

Through MoneyPolitics.PCIJ.org, the PCIJ sought to create an online research and resource tool that connects the documents, aggregates time-series information, and allow both journalists in the community media, civil society organizations, civil servants, and all citizens discern the meaning of digits and data.

Through this project, PCIJ hopes to promote numeracy among all Filipinos and support the practice by citizens of accessing information so they may participate in an informed way in achieving good governance. PCIJ believes that the biggest and most strategic problems that the Philippines confronts are all writ large in numbers, hence our effort to promote numeracy among all citizens. Additionally, PCIJ believes that access-to-information practice by all Filipinos is an enabler of good citizenship, even as the Freedom of Information bill remains in legislative limbo.

Describe the program (goals, actions, start of implementation).

MoneyPolitics.PCIJ.org is a citizen’s resource, research, and analysis tool on elections, public funds, and governance in the Philippines. It is a data journalism project of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ), an independent, nonprofit media agency that specializes in investigative reporting, journalism training, and multimedia productions.

Through MoneyPolitics, PCIJ aims to help citizens appreciate the documents, data, and digits behind stories, issues, and events.

PCIJ also offers MoneyPolitics as a reference tool for journalists (particularly those in the community media who do not have or are often denied access to such documents), as well as
students and teachers, civil society advocates, public officials, election regulators, development agencies, and Filipino voters at home and abroad.

MoneyPolitics offers information on how the government spends taxpayer’s money; the asset disclosure records of elective and appointive officials; who finances election campaigns; the political history and profile of provinces, towns, and cities; and in general, how money in politics drives and defines the lives of citizens.

MoneyPolitics features four major content categories or sections:

- Public Profiles
- Campaign Finance
- Public Funds
- Elections and Governance

In addition, MoneyPolitics also features Data A Day or “small data” information packets derived from “big data” databases that PCIJ has developed across the years using public documents by policy pegs.

These “Data a Day” features include Quick Quiz, Trackback, PolSpeak, By the Numbers, Spot On, and Data in Detail.

The development of MoneyPolitics started in earnest in 2008 when PCIJ started to organize its digital library of vertical and horizontal files, image and video materials, books, and hard and soft copies of public records on politics, public policy issues, and governance.

The PCIJ Digital Library formed the backbone of what was to evolve in 2013 as MoneyPolitics Online. The Library currently houses over 57 gigabytes of files that have been scanned, digitized, encoded, and organized in databases for MoneyPolitics.

(The PCIJ’s physical library meanwhile holds over 6,000 unique public records, aside from thousands of books and manuscripts about journalism, governance, history, biographies, among others.)

Since 1998, however, PCIJ has been collecting public records, i.e., Statement of Assets, Liabilities, and Net Worth (SALN), Statement of Election Contributions and Expenditures (SOCE), Certificates of Candidacy (COC), Certificates of Acceptance and Nomination (CONA), Certified Lists of Candidates, personal data sheets, budget documents, corporate records, project documents, among other documents hinged on public policy issues. In 2001, PCIJ featured some of these records on i-site.ph, the precursor website of MoneyPolitics.

In 2011, PCIJ received a three-year grant (2011-2013) from the Open Society Foundations (OSF) to develop and roll out MoneyPolitics.PCIJ.org. The OSF extended a $100,000 grant for PCIJ to
develop MoneyPolitics and to support the acquisition of more documents and related research, editorial, technical, and networking activities.

In 2011, the PCIJ staff started gathering, digitizing, and encoding documents secured from the Office of the Ombudsman, Office of the President, Civil Service Commission, Commission on Elections, Senate, House of Representatives, Sandiganbayan, Commission on Audit, Securities and Exchange Commission, Department of Public Works and Highways, Department of Budget and Management, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Education, National Statistical Coordination Board, and the National Statistics Office, among other public agencies. These documents form the backbone of MoneyPolitics.

Project development entailed scraping, mining, and organizing big data, and rendering these in open-data format to assist investigative reporting and public policy analysis.

By 2016, PCIJ aims to complete each content category of MoneyPolitics with comprehensive and updated datasets on elective and appointive public officials in all the towns, cities, and provinces of the Philippines. PCIJ aspires to allow citizens to access and track various sets of data from 1998 to the present.

Discuss how it involves others in the fight against corruption.

PCIJ believes that good recordkeeping is a pillar of good governance, and access to information, a pivot of an empowered citizenry.

Through MoneyPolitics, PCIJ hopes to help promote transparency and accountability in government, and the citizen’s right to know and to participate in governance.

What have been the results so far, and how have the results been assessed?

MoneyPolitics.PCIJ.org was officially launched on April 26, 2013. Yet it is still a work in progress. PCIJ continues to expand and deepen the content features of MoneyPolitics with a steady harvest of new public documents and more datasets.

From April to July 2013, PCIJ has conducted various public events to share the website’s content and seek suggestions and comments from data users. Journalists, researchers, government officials, civil society advocates, and members of the academe were invited to the events.

These include the public launch of MoneyPolitics with participants from government agencies, donor agencies, civil society groups, and journalists.

PCIJ has also conducted discussions on how to navigate and use MoneyPolitics for reporting, research, and policy analysis with community journalists (at three PCIJ training seminars), civil society advocates (governance project partners of the United Nations Development Programme-Manila and participants in focus-group workshops on the Philippines’ Open
Government Partnership Action Plan), academics researching on political clans, politics, and elections, and students of journalism visiting with PCIJ.

At the launch of MoneyPolitics in April 2013, PCIJ distributed feedback forms to solicit comments on the content, organization of data, and the overall design and structure of the website. The forms also served as an assessment to identify the types of data and documents that the attendees deem most useful and important in their work.

In summary, the attendees found MoneyPolitics.PCIJ.org useful, relevant, and interesting. They said that the website is a bold and promising civil society initiative that will hopefully help widen access to information.

According to a CSO representative, MoneyPolitics.PCIJ.org will be very useful for other CSOs in their efforts to track good governance. One said it will be useful in the study of politics in the Philippines. A participant from the Senate said that MoneyPolitics would be useful even to lawmakers.

A director from a national government agency said that with its vast content features and time-series data, MoneyPolitics has all the potentials of developing into a virtual national archive of public documents.

PCIJ also received suggestions for improvement of the website such as the use of more interactive buttons and use of infographics and visuals. Some attendees also suggested that PCIJ translate the website into Filipino and other native languages.

The attendees also said they are keen to see these types of information on MoneyPolitics: road network and road quality; performance of universities in board exams; more provincial/local data; income-class of local government units, expenditures on social services, wealth, education; statistics on the Millennium Development Goals; transfer of funds and special purpose funds to executive departments and vice versa; and expenditures/disbursements of government savings, Philippine national accounts, vis-a-vis elections and public funds data.

How can the program be replicated by other groups or individuals?

MoneyPolitics.PCIJ.org has so far covered national and some local data (provincial level). PCIJ has started to develop and plans to feature town-level or hyper local data in the next two to three years.

MoneyPolitics is a project that PCIJ wants to see replicated by researchers, CSOs, or people’s organizations that have their own collection of unique datasets and documents on various policy fields, advocacies, and about various communities.

For instance, a local CSO can gather many of the similar types of information uploaded on MoneyPolitics from government offices: i.e, SALN, PDS, SOCE, budget information, and education and health statistics -- but with focus on a particular municipality or city. The project
may be replicated in such a way that it would be centered on the specific needs for information of a particular town, city, or community.

Already three groups have offered to turn over to PCIJ their agency/CSO databases so these could be uploaded on MoneyPolitics. Some of these data and documents cover the years before 1998.

By accounts, among the developing nations of the world, MoneyPolitics is a pioneering multi-point, big-data research and resource tool of citizens that an independent media organization: and not the government: has developed.

Through MoneyPolitics, PCIJ wants to share with all citizens the data and digits that define the story of governance, public funds, and elections in data, digits, and documents.

Yet even more important, PCIJ wants to share its experience and practice in developing MoneyPolitics with all Filipinos to enable more MoneyPolitics-type websites to flourish across the nation. Through this practice, PCIJ hopes that as better-informed and more empowered citizens, we may all help write our story as a nation of good governance together.