

Poderopedia

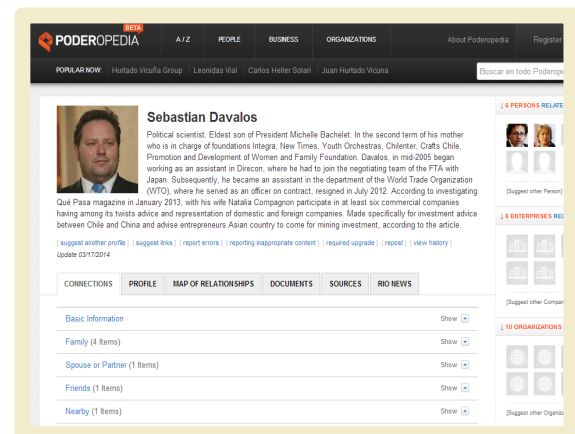
PROJECT	GRANTEE	INNOVATION	GRANT
Poderopedia	Miguel Paz	A crowdsourced database to visualize relationships among the political, civic, and business elite in Chile	\$200,000

In Chile, political and business relationships are often characterized by a lack of transparency. At the same time, the country has a journalistic culture that largely avoids reporting on (or even mentioning) the links among the country's power elite. For the few journalists who have sought to report on powerful relationships in politics and business, gathering information about who is connected to whom has been a time-consuming and difficult endeavor. Poderopedia is a crowdsourced site that challenges Chile's opaque power culture by mapping relationships among prominent Chilean leaders, making it easier for journalists to find and expose potential conflicts of interest.

THE INNOVATION

The Poderopedia site consists of entries for people, businesses, and organizations. Each individual entry has a brief summary or biography, a tab listing connections, and a map of the person or entity's notable relationships. It also contains links to relevant documents (such as a politician's statement of assets) and the sources from which the entry information was taken. Poderopedia's core staff writes many of the entries, but crowdsourced contributions are accepted as well, though all information they receive from outside parties is thoroughly fact-checked before being posted.

Ultimately, the goal of Poderopedia is to transform the way money and power are discussed in Chile by setting an example of holding powerful people accountable.



IMPLEMENTATION

Initially, the Poderopedia team intended to launch the site within three to six months of receiving the Knight News Challenge grant. However, the team quickly realized it had underestimated how ambitious it would be to simultaneously build the technical aspects of a user-friendly website and develop all of the site's initial content. This led to a lengthy extension of the project timeline. Poderopedia finally released its public beta in December of 2012, nearly one year after work on the site had begun. Due to the longer-than-expected development period, Poderopedia also spent significantly more of its Knight Foundation funding in its first year than it had planned.

After Poderopedia's release, the team's second year focused on attracting users and building awareness of the site among journalists—a challenging task, given the project's unforeseen financial resource constraints. When these constraints placed Poderopedia's viability in jeopardy in early 2013, the team was forced to turn to funding sources other than the Knight Foundation, and secured \$40,000 from Start-Up Chile, an accelerator program that aims to

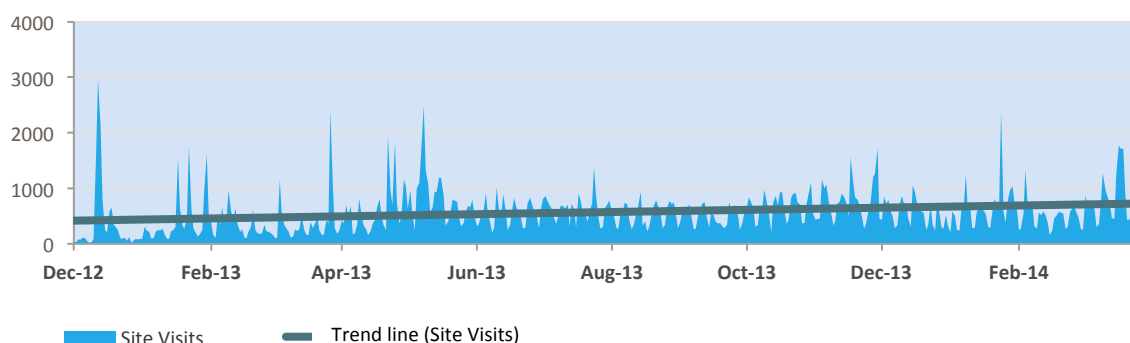
attract innovative, high-potential entrepreneurs to the country. Miguel Paz, Poderopedia's founder, also began a fellowship with the International Center for Journalists and applied some of the stipend money to support the project. Although these strategies kept the project afloat, they also came at a cost, diverting some of the team's energy from working on Poderopedia itself to grant reporting and fellowship project work.

Poderopedia also faced a challenge specific to the media culture in Chile, where proper citation is not a central tenet of journalism and powerful media organizations often make efforts to block news stories that they don't want reported. While several mainstream media organizations have picked up Poderopedia stories, they have rarely credited Poderopedia as a source. This has made it difficult for the Poderopedia brand to extend beyond in-the-know journalists to a general audience, even as Poderopedia's founder has invested substantial time in marketing the site and it has done ultimately impactful work

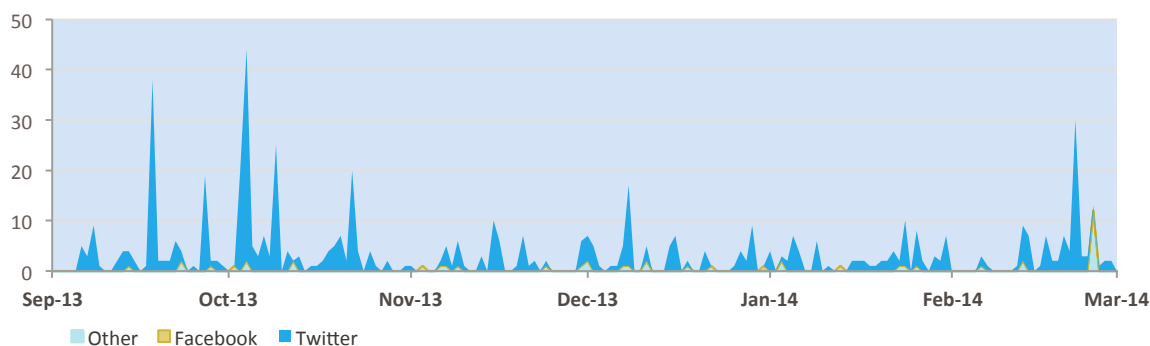
driving transparency in Chile.

As Poderopedia moved into its third year of operation, the project team had two primary goals. The first was to update the site's open source code to make it easier for Poderopedia users to upload data in bulk and to model power relationships in other contexts outside of Chilean politics (such as other countries or industries). Updating the code would also make it easier for developers to modify and adapt the site for use in other countries, which had proven difficult thus far. The Poderopedia team had been aware of the need to update the site's underlying code for some time, but lacked the funds to improve it. The team's second goal was to reduce its financial dependence on grants, as applying for grant funding and approaching donors has continued to be a time-consuming challenge. Paz aimed to have no more than 50 percent of project income come from grants by the end of 2014 and was seeking funding through other revenue sources such as consulting to other organizations and by leading classes and trainings.

Poderopedia Site Visits



Poderopedia Social Media Mentions



REACH AND OUTCOMES

Poderopedia's site averaged about 570 visitors per day by March 2014. Notable traffic spikes tended to occur during major political events, such as a presidential election or a cabinet change, indicating that its mission to provide quickly accessible contextual information to reporters is being fulfilled on some level. Despite its readership, Poderopedia has struggled to attract contributors and is working to make changes to foster larger amounts of crowdsourcing. Poderopedia has received over 450 crowdsourced contributions from users, but the project team estimates that about 85 percent of its content was developed by the project's team of editors.

Beyond helping journalists cover large news events, Poderopedia has managed to break its own news stories. In one instance, Poderopedia first reported on a senator's conflict of interest between his role leading a senate committee overseeing the logging industry and logging land he privately owned. Once Poderopedia published the story, another news outlet picked it up, which eventually led to a senate investigation. In a similar example, a congressman failed to disclose his shares in energy companies that would be affected by his energy committee, and Poderopedia exposed that link as well, which led to public outcry. This suggests that, little by little, Chilean political culture and the media that reports on it are becoming more transparent. Anecdotally, Poderopedia is a major though often silent contributor to that shift.

Poderopedia has also done notable work expanding its mission to encourage media transparency, and not just in Chile. Paz established Poderopedia-branded workshops for teaching journalism throughout Latin America, in the process creating a community around the importance of transparency and using technology to tell stories. Paz also gained individual prominence as a champion of government and media transparency, with over 44,000 Twitter followers who receive his updates on Poderopedia and the broader aims

it supports. International interest in Poderopedia has grown, as well: a Venezuelan Poderopedia was scheduled to launch in April 2014, and groups in Spain, Colombia, Bolivia, and Puerto Rico were weighing the possibility of launching their own versions of the site.