How hackers can send feedback directly to policymakers
[DEF CON 31 Workshop](#)
Aug. 11, 2023

The workshop will show hackers how to go through the process of submitting official comments to regulations and legislation.

Meeting with policymakers is only one way to make your voice heard. There are also formal channels for submitting written feedback on policy proposals that become a critical part of the record for regulations. These channels are open to the public, but non-policy professionals don't always know how to access or make the most effective use of them.

This workshop will walk security researchers through the process of using regulations.gov and congress.gov to find open opportunities to influence regulations, and actually submit official comments via those channels from the workshop. The workshop will also talk through how to form an advocacy strategy to amplify the impact of the comments - for example, how to find the right policymakers and staff to follow up with.

I.   Overview

This handout will go over some basics on sending feedback to policymakers. The workshop will go into more depth.

The US has three branches of government: 1) Executive - White House, agencies; 2) Legislative - House and Senate; and 3) Judicial - Courts.

This workshop deals with the first two branches. Specifically, finding and commenting on 1) Proposed agency regulations; and 2) Proposed legislation in Congress.

Here is a good summary of the agency rulemaking process: https://www.regulations.gov/learn

Here is a good summary of the legislative process: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZ8psP4S6BQ

Here is a good tip sheet for engaging policymakers:
https://www.rapid7.com/globalassets/_pdfs/policy/an-unofficial-guide-to-meeting-with-congressional-offices---jan.-14-2020.pdf

II.   Commenting on proposed regulations

How do you hear about regulations when they are proposed? One way is to subscribe at
https://www.federalregister.gov/ Use keywords.

Two key resources: https://regulations.gov and https://federalregister.gov Both can be used to review
proposed regulations and associated documents. Comments are submitted electronically via
regulations.gov, but the source document for the proposed rule lives on federalregister.gov.

Both regulations.gov and federalregister.gov provide access to more than just proposed regulations.
They will also provide access to established regulations, as well as notices, white papers, and
guidelines. Often the government will solicit public comments to notices, papers, and guidelines as
well.

Try a search for a keyword, and filter by when comments are due. Select the document you wish to
comment on. The document will provide instructions for commenting, including the deadline and
document identifying information. Comments are public, and filed comments are available for review,
so do not submit sensitive information.

Some tips for submitting effective comments:
- Understand what the proposal is and the context for the proposal.
- Be concise, but back up your claims with evidence, reasoning, and examples.
- Form letters are easily detected and have less impact.
- Comments are not votes - quantity does not determine an outcome.
- If a proposed rule asks specific questions, answer them if possible.
- If a proposed rule asks multiple questions, there is no obligation to comment on them all.
- Follow the submission instructions.
- Consider following up with the agency, but don't expect the agency to share new information
during an open rulemaking.

III.   Tracking legislation

A key resource for tracking legislative developments is https://Congress.gov. The site enables you to
obtain the text of current and previous bills, see where bills are in the legislative process, find contact
information of policymakers, and more. You can sign up for email alerts and updates here.

The easiest way to find a specific bill is to enter the bill number, title, or keywords into the search bar.
Once you select the bill of interest, you'll be directed to a comprehensive page with detailed information
of the bill, including its current status, the text of the bill, summary, cosponsors, committee actions, and
related legislative activities.

To get in touch with a specific Member of Congress, click on the tab on the upper right hand corner
labeled "Members." Here, you will type the name of the specific member of Congress you are looking

for. After entering the member's name, the website will display a list of search results, detailing the member's full name, title, state/district they represent, office phone number and a link to their contact page where you can email them.

Some additional tips for providing effective feedback on legislation:
- Understand the bill and the context for it.
- Find the right office and staffer. The sponsor and co-sponsor of a bill are among the most important, but so are your own Senators or Representative.
- Early engagement is better. Once a bill is introduced, there are limited opportunities to change its text.
- Suggest solutions for problems you identify.
- Consider a post-meeting email with the staffer or legislator with any follow-up items.

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About the Hacking Policy Council

The Hacking Policy Council is a group of companies that aim to make technology safer and more transparent by facilitating best practices for vulnerability disclosure and management, as well as empowering good faith security research, penetration testing, and independent repair for security. Key goals of the Council include
- Create a more favorable legal environment for vulnerability disclosure and management, bug bounties, independent repair for security, good faith security research, and pentesting;
- Grow collaboration between the security, business, and policymaking communities;
- Prevent new legal restrictions on security research, pentesting, or vulnerability disclosure and management; and
- Strengthen organizations' resilience through effective adoption of vulnerability disclosure and handling processes, bug bounties, and security researcher engagement.

For more information, visit https://HackingPolicyCouncil.org/