



Let's Talk Tech: Explaining New Tech to Legislators

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce



In Silicon Valley, we don't often consider our important neighbors to the north: the legislators in Sacramento, California who have the power to help promote new technology and rising industries. After all, if tech is focused on building the future, then law is tasked with maintaining the infrastructure. I recently traveled to Sacramento with the [Blockchain Advocacy Coalition](#) to meet with California policymakers, regulators, and legislators.

The goal was simple. Our aim was to educate them about blockchain, smart contracts, and cryptocurrency in the context of two bills that the California legislators are considering this session — Assembly Bill (AB 2658) Electronic Records: Blockchain Technology and Senate Bill 838 (SB 838) Blockchain Share Certificate Exchange.

Specifically, AB 2658 defines "blockchain technology" for the first time in a statute and establishes a working group to study blockchain technology. Similarly, SB 838 authorizes California corporations to issue and transfer stock on a blockchain or distributed electronic network. This will serve as an alternative to traditional share certificates and a shared ledger.

It was a productive process and a great exercise in explaining new tech to legislators. Here are the strategies I learned.

Introduce yourself properly

Along with your name, position, and company or affiliation, it may make sense to mention that your business is located in the policymaker's region. Most policymakers are curious to learn how the business you're in contributes to their region or state in terms of taxes, employment opportunities, or important goods or services, so make sure you have this information ready. It's also helpful to

describe your business, such as its offerings, its customers, and its pains, in detail. Some policymakers may even suggest collaborators — business and public — in their region if they sense a potentially fruitful collaboration.

Gauge the policymaker's interest in and understanding of your substantive area

Be sure to gauge the policymaker's understanding of a substantive area or technology early in the conversation. I found that the question, "How familiar are you with the basics of blockchain technology?" leads to a good conversation. It gives you an opportunity to be helpful and create a baseline set of facts to carry the conversation forward. It also prevents policymakers from feeling embarrassed to ask for more information. You can even offer reassurance that they're not "behind the game" by sharing just how new the developments are

Quickly and simply explain the substantive area and technology

A quick and simple three to five sentence explanation works to set the conversation and build initial trust. For example, at the Blockchain Advocacy Coalition we agreed to the following definitions:

"Blockchain is the distributed ledger technology that underlies digital currencies such as Bitcoin. Conventionally, such records are stored in central locations like banks, headquarters, and PayPal servers. Blockchain revolutionizes ledger technology with a network of distributed ledgers. Instead of one central, authoritative record of all transactions or information, blockchain creates potentially thousands of identical ledgers in computers and servers all over the world."

"Cryptocurrency is the first widely adopted use of this technology, just like email was the most popular early application of the internet, but the technology can do much more. It has many applications for improving record security. Walmart has tested it as a better way of tracking supply-chain contamination, and Denver is working to debut a closed blockchain voting system for overseas service members next year."

At the end I also found it useful to pause and ask, "Do you have any questions about these technologies?" This gave me an opportunity to determine whether the policymaker followed the explanation, wants to learn more, or is ready to move forward with the conversation.

Tell coherent stories and use cases

Specific stories and examples help you to be memorable and explain even complex and abstract technologies and concepts. Does the technology have an interesting application that solves a need? Does it address social causes such as education, homelessness, government transparency, inequalities, lack of opportunities, or others? Does it solve or have a potential to solve known problems that many have failed to effectively solve in decades? Ultimately, even if policymakers don't remember everything you said about the technology itself, they will remember that you offered opportunities to solve issues and fill needs.

Explaining new tech to policymakers is a great chance to advocate for your business and industry. Make sure you interact warmly and strategically. After all, it can take a long time to pass legislation.

You want to make sure that the policymakers don't just remember you, but also remember you positively and want to actively work with you. By following these strategies, you can get your foot in the door and start building positive working relationships with legislators.

Olga V. Mack



Fellow

CodeX

Olga V. Mack is a fellow at CodeX, The Stanford Center for Legal Informatics, and a Generative AI Editor at law.MIT. Mack shares her views in her columns on ACC Docket, Newsweek, Bloomberg, VentureBeat, Above the Law, and many other publications.

Mack is also an award-winning (such as the prestigious ACC 2018 Top 10 30-Somethings and ABA 2022 Women of Legal Tech) general counsel, operations professional, startup advisor, public speaker, adjunct professor, and entrepreneur. She co-founded SunLaw, an organization dedicated to preparing women in-house attorneys to become general counsels and legal leaders, and WISE to help female law firm partners become rainmakers.

She has authored numerous books, including *Get on Board: Earning Your Ticket to a Corporate Board Seat*, *Fundamentals of Smart Contract Security and Blockchain Value: Transforming Business Models, Society, and Communities*. She is working on her next books: *Visual IQ for Lawyers* (ABA 2024), *The Rise of Product Lawyers: An Analytical Framework to Systematically Advise Your Clients Throughout the Product Lifecycle* (Globe Law and Business 2024), and *Legal Operations in the Age of AI and Data* (Globe Law and Business 2024).