

Virtual Public Involvement Initiative

Learn About

Crowdsourcing

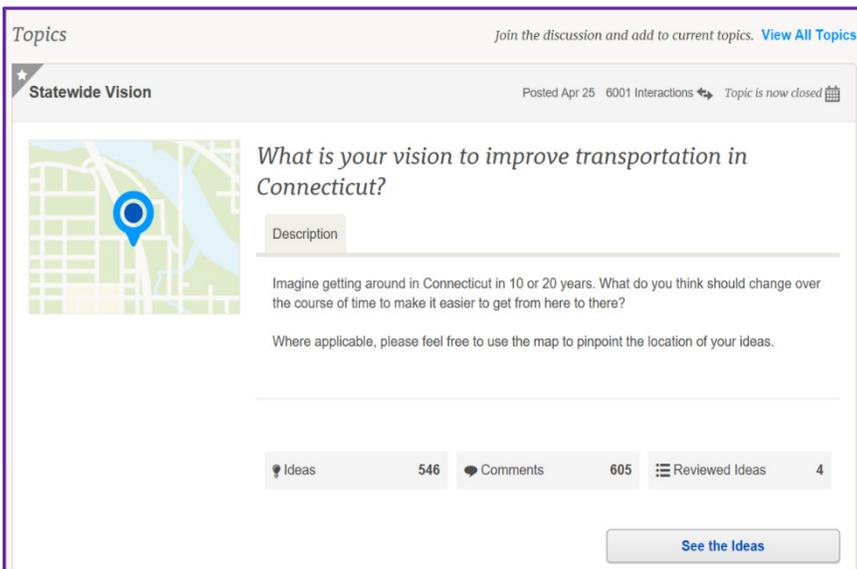


What is Crowdsourcing?

Public meetings and workshops are a traditional method of gathering information from a group of participants and facilitating conversation among those participants. Today, many stakeholders want to share their ideas and weigh in on ideas submitted by others in a digital format.

Crowdsourcing is the use of digital tools (both online and mobile) to assemble ideas, comments, or suggestions, and to provide a forum for others to assess the value of those suggestions by voting for or against them.

Crowdsourcing tools are effective at generating input, and can be paired with photos, videos, maps, and other media in order to stimulate participation. By “voting” or appraising an idea, stakeholders can engage during the early stages of a project in a quick, easy, and “low-stakes” way. Instead of agreeing to attend a public meeting or taking a long online survey, stakeholders can – on their own schedule and at their own pace – read and support different ideas.



VPI in Practice

The Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) created *Let's Go CT*, an interactive social media platform to guide a community conversation about long-range transportation planning in the state. The site uses informal survey questions to prompt creative and thoughtful responses and ideas from participants. The platform also encourages residents to stay engaged after public meetings.

Image courtesy Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT)



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Can Crowdsourcing Help My Agency?

Engaging with stakeholders during the transportation and project development process is not only a requirement, it's the right thing to do for the public good. Community members want to understand how tax dollars are being invested, and residents have unique perspectives and insights about the places they live, work, and visit.

Crowdsourcing offers stakeholders a digital platform to submit their own ideas and input, and to "vote" or evaluate others' ideas. This can help agencies discern trends and priorities for planning and project development. Agencies can reach a larger and potentially more diverse audience by pairing digital platforms with in-person public involvement.



How Can My Agency Start Crowdsourcing?

There are many simple ways to crowdsource ideas and opinions – from straightforward online chat services to more robust platforms that allow user upvoting and downvoting. It's easy to begin using these tools, but it's most important to consider the roles, responsibilities, and staff effort that's needed to manage the information being submitted.

Stakeholders and members of the public who engage with agency plans through crowdsourcing tools may expect or assume that staff will be available online to answer questions or provide more detail. Staff need to be prepared to monitor information generated through crowdsourcing tools to maintain standards of civility and to encourage fruitful dialogue.

As a first step, an agency interested in using online crowdsourcing tools may publish its own plans and ideas and allow the public to use simple upvote/downvote tools. Once staff are comfortable monitoring and managing that type of public engagement, the agency might add more options for the public to submit their own comments, ideas, and opinions.

CONTACT A COLLEAGUE

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TAKE NOTE...

- **Crowdsourcing is a common and familiar activity on the web**
- **Upvoting and downvoting ideas can help staff quickly and easily see trends and priorities**
- **Crowdsourcing is easy for stakeholders to participate in and free options are available**

